

Dr. Fred Putnam, Proverbs, Lecture 3

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This is lecture number three of Dr. Fred Putnam on the book of Proverbs. Dr. Putnam.

Welcome back to our third lecture on the book of Proverbs. I'm going to speak very briefly about a couple of verses from the four word, that is the first nine chapters, and then spend most of our time in this third lecture talking about the different aspects of an individual proverb and how we look at it in order to understand it and to then eventually use it. Last time we looked at verses two through six of the first chapter.

I'd like to look briefly at verse seven and then at a couple of other verses later in the chapter, later in the foreword. Verse seven says The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Fools despise wisdom and instruction. What does that mean exactly? What does it mean, the fear of the Lord? Does it mean to be afraid? Well, there are many places in the Bible where people are afraid.

They meet the Lord, they fall down in their faces, and they seem to faint or pass out. The people of Israel were terrified to hear God speak from Mount Sinai. But in interpreting poetry, one of the things that we pay most attention to is the line that is next to or that accompanies the line we're trying to understand.

So, we could try to understand the fear of the Lord in two ways, two primary ways. One is to just type it into our computer, whatever program we have, and look up fear of the Lord everywhere and then add all those things up and come up with some sort of definition. But in poetry, the much more valid way is to look at the line next to it, which in this case is, fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Now, this verse is an example of what we call antithetical parallelism, where the two lines say opposite things or they contrast. And so the question then is, what is the contrast with the fear of the Lord? Well, we have the word fools. So it seems that if the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, well, we know that fools in Proverbs don't have knowledge or wisdom or understanding.

So, fools must be people who don't fear the Lord. What do they do instead? That's where it becomes more interesting because instead of saying, fools fear other people or fools dishonor the Lord or something like that, it says, fools despise wisdom and instruction. And the point of that is that wisdom and instruction have their source in the Lord.

Now, it's very common to speak of the book of Proverbs as secular wisdom, as I mentioned earlier. But when we read, if we were to turn to chapter two, I invite you to look at the first six verses there. Again, I'm not going to read them all because of time.

I'm just going to read the first and the sixth. My son, if you receive my sayings and treasure my commandments within you, and then you will do these other things, then verse five, you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God. For the Lord, Yahweh gives wisdom from his mouth, our knowledge and understanding.

So, fools, if they despise wisdom and instruction, are actually despising this. This is what we call a metonymy. One thing is being named instead of the other.

The Lord is the source of wisdom and instruction. Do fools despise the Lord? Well, yes. Whether they despise him directly or knowingly is not really the point.

The point is that they despise the wisdom and instruction that only come from him. By the way, those verses in chapter two, verses one through six, show us that Solomon himself recognized that any wisdom that's displayed in the book of Proverbs does not come from him. It's divine wisdom.

This book is actually divine revelation. It comes from God. Because to seek out wisdom, to search for her and find her, when you find her, what you find is the fear of the Lord, who is, after all, the source of all wisdom.

So, it's as though Solomon is making sure, upfront, that we understand that this book doesn't rest on his authority alone, but it also rests on the authority of God. So here, when we look at fools despising wisdom and instruction, that is, despising the wisdom and instruction that come from God, that's the contrast with the fear of the Lord. So, then we ask ourselves, instead of asking ourselves, what's the opposite of fearing, we could ask ourselves, if we want to understand the fear of the Lord, what's kind of the contrast with despising the Lord? So, fear, you see, is put in contrast with despising, to look down on, to discount, to think of no regard, or to belittle even.

And how is that the beginning of knowledge? Well, the opposite of looking down on someone is to respect, honor, or at least pay attention to, or heed, maybe even as strongly as to obey them. And obedience, of course, you can even despise someone and obey them. So, we're not talking about that kind of obedience, begrudging obedience, but cheerful, willing acquiescence.

And that is, Solomon says, the attitude that we're to have toward the Lord if we want to grow in wisdom. That's the beginning. That's where wisdom begins.

There was a great teacher, Alan McRae, who used to say, that Christians always talk about wanting to know God's will for their lives. He said that's not the first step. The first step is to determine to do God's will, and then ask what God's will might be.

And that's, in essence, what Solomon is saying. He's saying, you first have to say, am I willing to fear the Lord, that is, to honor what he says, in this book. Remember, this is part of the first nine chapters.

It's part of the book of Proverbs, which at one time was not part of a big Bible. It was just a scroll by itself that traveled around and people would read it as an independent document without Psalms in front of it, and Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Isaiah after it. He's not talking about generic obedience, although again, because the book of Proverbs is in the Bible, we can understand it that way today.

But when he wrote it, he wasn't talking about it. He was talking about, how are you going to respond to what is written in this book, in what has come to be these 31 chapters. A great illustration of what he means by that is actually two very famous verses, probably two of the four most famous verses in the book of Proverbs. First, chapter three, verses five and six.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and don't lean on your own understanding and all your ways know him and he will make your paths straight. Well, that actually comes in the middle of a poem. The poem goes from verse one to verse 12.

If you read through those, you'll find that all the odd-numbered verses in those first 12 verses tell you either to do something or not to do something. And sometimes they say both. So, verse one, don't forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandment.

That's negative and positive. Verse five, trust, that's positive. Do not lean, that's negative.

In all your ways know him, that's positive. And then in the even-numbered verses in one through 12, there's a result in each case or an outcome. Again, these aren't laws and promises.

We're not saying that, but these are counselors. If you do this, this is the way things generally tend to work out. This is the way that this is the advice upon which you should base your life.

And so, when we read verses five and six, I should back up a second. Verse 12 doesn't end that way, but that's the end of the poem. Very commonly in Hebrew poetry, a pattern that's established is the end of a section or of a whole poem is signaled by breaking the pattern.

That's pretty standard. Actually, it's a lot like an English sonnet where you have sets of three sets of four lines. And then in the Shakespearean format, the last two lines have a separate rhyme pattern.

Not that there's any relationship there. But in verses five and six, what is he really saying? What does it mean to trust in the Lord with all your heart? Well, we say, I trust the Lord with all my heart. But remember, he's writing about the, in the context of a book of wisdom, a book of Proverbs, or we might better call it a book of instruction like the other books are called across the ancient Near East.

And don't lean on your own understanding. Well, you're about to embark on a study of the book of Proverbs. You're a young Israelite, probably in your late teens, part of this class of young men who are on their way to take paths of leadership.

So, this is your curriculum, maybe for the, maybe even a whole year. And you're going to read things in Proverbs that you don't agree with because you're going to think that you know better. So, you're going to say, well, yes, I know he says that if you're a companion of prostitutes, you're going to squander your father's wealth, but I can control myself and I won't, I won't squander my father's wealth.

I'll just use a little bit of it for that. And so, you say to yourself, oh, I can, I can make my own decisions. And well, isn't that what he means by not trusting, not leaning on your own understanding? You see here, it's a question of attitude.

Are you going to trust the Lord who gives you the book to actually know what he's talking about first and to have your good in mind, not only your good but your best. So, when he says in Proverbs, when one of these advisors comes along, these counselors that are in writing and say, the mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. Are you going to say, well, I think I'm captain of my own fate.

I have a soul to keep and I'm going to do it. Or are you going to say, you know, maybe I need to think more about the choices that I make and recognize that I don't act autonomously, that I'm under the direction and control of the Lord. Is he calling, is the verse then saying, you need to be humble in your ways?

You need to recognize that if you have success, it's not your success ultimately, but the Lord, you need to recognize that if troubles come your way, they're not troubles that are random, but they're from God himself for your good. So that when we read what we read in the book actually becomes then, well, the book of Proverbs becomes a standard for us. And that's why he says, he will make your paths straight.

Well, one of the funny things here is it could actually be an, it will make your paths straight, but you know, the Hebrew is a little more ambiguous there, than English.

That is the trust or your heart or something like that. If you're actually trusting, but making your paths straight, your paths will be in line with the way that they should be.

They will be in order. You'll be on this path, not on the right, not on, not on the left. So the attitude that he's talking about, when we come to study it, the attitude has to be one that I'm determined to do.

I'm determined to obey as best as I can understand. That, in this case, at least, obedience leads to understanding and our ability to work with and use Proverbs grows according to our disposition to embody them. And to show by our behavior that we are in fact, to go back to verse seven of chapter one, that we are in fact, fearing the Lord because that's where wisdom starts.

This attitude, I think, is, is at least partially a way of protecting us against thinking either on the one hand, that I can outsmart God or Solomon even, but it's also the necessary precondition to any kind of learning. I've been a teacher for almost a quarter of a century, and I can tell you that students who don't want to learn, won't learn. Because ultimately I can't teach anyone anything.

All I can do is talk or try to get students to talk and hope that the things that are important will become important enough to them, that they will want to learn them, and that they will go seek them out. Writing down notes and memorizing them and spitting them back on a test or on an exam or in a paper, that's not learning. It's an accumulation of fact, perhaps, or opinion.

But learning is making something part of ourselves, part of who we are, becoming the person that we, that the teacher, in this case, wants us to be. So, most of the time, my goals in teaching, for example, have not been that students will know XYZ, although there's always some of that because academic deans like to see lists like that. But it's really that students will recognize that this is the case, or they will see or understand or really that they'll desire because that's where learning comes from.

And that's really what Solomon is saying here. So, we can't just treat the Proverbs as things to be analyzed, dissected, and studied, even though we're going to talk about that. But rather as things to be obeyed, rather as counselors to be listened to, to be taken account of, as people who are standing by our side at our shoulders, sitting around the table with us, giving us good, sound advice, that it's then our responsibility to weigh and evaluate and do our best to follow.

That's why I think, unlike in Proverbs in the wider culture, where we can have Proverbs that actually do contradict each other or certainly sound like they contradict each other, we don't really get that form of Proverb in the book, because the counselors are all speaking with one voice, not with many. Now, let me turn to a

different topic. And that is, when we look at individual Proverbs, what do we look for? Again, I'm not talking about the Proverbs or the verses in chapters one through nine, although there are some collections of Proverbs in there.

For example, in chapter four, verses 27 through 35, we have a number of things that sound just like they came from chapters 10 through 29, for example. And there are quite a number of those. So, the things that I'm saying about chapters 10 and the following applies to those verses as well.

But most of those chapters, one through nine, are these larger poems that we can read as poems, just as we would read a psalm. Well, biblical Proverbs, as you recognize when you come to chapter 10, tend to use two lines, or some of them three lines. And in our English Bibles, which more and more tend to be printed in two columns, they're presented in two lines, even if they really only consist of a single sentence.

There are some types of Proverbs as a whole that really don't have any of this what we call parallelism in them. So, Proverbs that consist of a command, do this because, or do this so that, that's really a single sentence. There's no parallelism there.

There's a cause and effect, perhaps we could say, or a result and a cause. Sometimes they're put in the opposite direction, in the opposite order. But there's really, they're really not parallel.

So, we have to be careful not to be misled by the layout in our English Bibles. Okay, that's into thinking that we have to find some kind of parallelism in every verse. As I said earlier, though, first, since lines are parallel, and since Proverbs were apparently created this way, there's some debate about this.

Some people say that Proverbs were originally a single statement like in English, you know, the old look before you leap thing. And then somebody added a second line that says, those who don't look fall to their death or something like that. Well, that sounds more like a biblical proverb, not really an English one.

And some people say that's how all biblical Proverbs started. Then a second proverb was attached to it, and the two of them were put together. But there's, that's just a theory.

There's no evidence for that. It's just somebody's, just somebody's theory. But what we do want to ask ourselves is, are the two lines actually parallel? So here's a very obvious example.

Proverbs 10:1, a wise son makes a father glad, a foolish son is his mother's grief. Well, we have a wise son in one line, a foolish son in the other, a father, a mother, gladness and grief. That all sounds pretty parallel to me.

And then we ask ourselves, okay, what about the next line? Does that have another thing about wise and foolish son or father and mother or gladness and grief? Well, the next line says, because remember the verses, we don't know if they're original. The next line says, treasures of wickedness do not profit. Well, that's quite a bit different.

So, let's just assume from that, without going into a lot of detail, that we're onto a new thing there. So, we can just talk about verse 10, these two lines in verse 10. So, we ask ourselves, what are the pieces of the two lines that correspond to each other? Well, as I said, the two sons, the parents, and the outcome of the son's behavior.

And so, we look at this. Well, since those are contrasting terms, notice the son part is not contrasting, but the wise and foolish is, the gladness and grief is, and the father and mother, they're not contrasting, but they're different. Furthermore, it actually says, depending on your translation, it may say a father and his mother, which is actually the way it reads.

And so, we might ask ourselves, why? Is there some truth to that? Is a mother more likely to be grieved by her son's folly? Is there a reason for the proverb saying it the way it does? Well, let's say right up front, there's always a reason that things are said the way they are. Whether or not we can figure out the reason may not be quite as easy, but there's always a reason. Is it possible that mothers are more likely to be grieved by their son's waywardness, let's say? And how do fathers respond? Do they grieve? Well, maybe fathers tend to become more angry.

There's a tendency for dads to get mad when their sons act foolishly and mothers to be sad. And are we reading too much into it? Maybe we are. I don't know.

Are fathers happy when their sons are wise, turn out to be wise, and mothers aren't happy? Or are fathers happy in a way that's different than mothers are? You know, I've often wondered if fathers are happy about their children's wise behavior in ways that we could describe as proud, not in a negative way, but just, you know, they're proud. And mothers, at least a lot of my observation, tend to be more satisfied with the way that their children and it's more of a quiet contentment, not quite the same. Am I reading too much? Again, am I reading too much into it? Maybe I am.

I do think that there's a lot more compressed in here than we often give them credit for. And that maybe even very obvious verses like this are given to us so that we can spend time thinking about them, pondering them, trying to figure out not only what

does it say, but why does it say it the way that it says it? And since Proverbs are poetic, Biblical Proverbs at least are poetic, the characteristic of poetry, one of the characteristics of reading poetry is that we slow down and we read it more carefully. We pay a lot more attention to words than we do when we're reading just a paragraph, even if it's a paragraph, whether it's in the newspaper or a novel or a book of history or theology or philosophy or anything else.

That is, we pay to the individual words. Every choice of word becomes significant because remember the poet and in wisdom material even greater because of the enormous compression that goes on in a proverb. In fact, think of this, a proverb is not just a bit of compressed wisdom.

What a proverb really is, is a compressed story. It's a whole story smashed into six or seven or eight words in Hebrew, and 18 or 19 or 20 words in English. But it's a whole story.

It's pushed in. Now I've actually written some short stories, what I call very short stories, and my daughter told me there's a name for them on the internet called Sniglets or something like that. A Sniglet is a piece of something that you've written that's less than 50 words.

Well, I've deliberately written stories that are a few or 50 words or less where the whole story is there. That's really hard. I've only written a couple of them because it's so hard to do.

A proverb takes a story and compresses it into a fraction of that length. And so, what we're doing in reading the proverb, we want to pay attention to how it's written because that helps us see what's been compressed and helps us then unfold it. Or like one of those sponges that you get at Christmas, you know, that's smashed flat and you add water and it puffs up.

That's kind of what a proverb is like, only a proverb puffs up a lot bigger than any sponge ever will. Because one of the things that's so exciting about proverbs is that, you know, people talk about, what I talked in the last lecture, I didn't use this word, but what is the authority of a proverb? Is a proverb a promise? No. Is it, what is it? Is it just kind of hopeful advice? If you do this, maybe it'll work out.

Well, no, it's a counselor. Remember, an advisor. One of the things that makes a proverb so powerful that is not true of other short ways of saying things like mottos or aphorisms or something like that, or slogans even, is that, and I should say the dividing lines between those are kind of fuzzy.

Okay. People argue about that all the time. But is that a proverb, you can take the same proverb and apply it to lots and lots of different situations.

In a sense, it's almost as though the greater the range of situations to which a proverb can be applied, the greater its authority. So, the more, I'm going to use the, I'm nervous about using this word, the more true in quotes, the proverb becomes. Because the more global it is in its application, the more universally we can use it, the more useful it becomes, and the more likely we are to use it, it gains authority from its usefulness.

Now, all proverbs can be extended way beyond their original reference. So this one talks about fathers and mothers and sons. Is it only talking about family relationships? No, not at all.

It's certainly talking about those. I mean, we can think back immediately to the Ten Commandments, right? Honor your father and mother that it may go well with you and you may extend your days upon the earth or in the land. But the range of its application is to any relationship where one person is responsible for the well-being of another.

So that we could talk about camp counselors and their counselees. You know, the foolish counselor who's always sneaking off at night to go swimming in, you know, in moonlight or canoeing down the river in the dark or doing whatever else it might be or lighting fires in the woods with magnifying glasses. And I hope I'm not giving any of your ideas.

Do not try this at home. That camper is going to cause all sorts of grief to the counselor and the whole camp, probably. Whereas the camper whose intent is to please the counselor, to learn from him or her, to do what's right, to be wise in a word, is going to make them happy.

And we could say, well, that's a power play. Oh, it doesn't have to be a power play at all. It could just be that you know, one of my great delights in being a teacher was when a student got it.

I never saw myself as somebody who was out to get students or to prove that I knew more than they did or to kind of put them down. But instead, I wanted every student that I had to go beyond me. I've learned this much.

They should be able to go this far. That's the goal. Well, that's what a parent's goal is, too.

That's what a counselor's goal is. And anybody who's an authority, and especially an authority of responsibility, that is maybe not just the president of a corporation, for example, but a guidance counselor or a teacher. There are lots of examples, ranges, a mentor and a, I can't be a mentee, but a disciple.

Here we go. But in all those relationships, they want to see the person under them succeed. They want to see them grow.

They want to see them mature and become wise, as Solomon says here. So, this proverb applies to any relationship like that. And when we start thinking about the different kinds of relationships there are, maybe we begin even to say, and in fact, some responses, the responses are going to be different depending on not just the behavior of the son, but on the nature of the person who has responsibility.

Just like fathers may respond differently to their children's success than mothers do or their children's failure. Well, some counselees or counselors, mentors, or pastors will respond differently. So even if we were to go through this verse and say, well, what's the opposite of making your father glad? Well, a foolish son makes his mother sad.

Okay, that's pretty close, I don't see any difference between that and grief. Is our grief and gladness exactly opposite each other? Well, we'd have to play with that a bit, not by looking it up in the English dictionary, but by going through the book of Proverbs and seeing how Proverbs uses the idea of gladness and grief. What else are they contrasted with? What else are they compared with? And how are they used in the book? Because remember, this book was kind of its own little world for a while, existing within an ancient Near East where this kind of instruction would have been understood.

Everybody would have known, yes, this is Solomon's instruction for his sons, for his students, for those who would follow him, for his disciples. Brilliant. So, we read the verse and say, okay, we have two lines, they're contrasting to each other, and paying attention to the nature of the contrast in the terms helps us understand what the proverb itself is saying.

In fact, most of the Proverbs in chapters 10 through 15, as I mentioned, or many of them are that kind of proverb, what we call antithetical or contrasting. So, the point is, what is the nub of the contrast? Is it the behavior? Is it the outcome? Is it the relationship between behavior and outcome? And we also notice here that it's not simply the story that we could imagine. That is, we could even imagine a pair of parents with a set of parents with two children, one of whom turns out to be wise, the other who turns out to be foolish.

We could write a novel about that. In fact, novels have been written about that. And in a sense, the effect of the child's behavior on the parent is really the point of the proverb.

The effect of the learner on the teacher, the effect of the disciple on the mentor, that's really what Solomon is getting at. What's most striking is he assumes that the effect that our decisions and actions will have on those who are responsible for us, who watch out for our well-being, he assumes that the effect of the proverb, like the whole book, assumes a relational world, a relational life where we're not existing as isolated individuals, but in fact, we're connected to each other in a way that twanging one string of the cobweb makes the whole cobweb vibrate. The parts farthest off vibrate the least, and those that are the closest vibrate the most.

Some of them will even break. So that Solomon's world and the world that he envisions, and this is not because it's a 10th century BC world, it's not because he's writing 3000 years ago, it's not because he's writing to a kinder, gentler, simpler society. But instead, because this is the way that things are meant to be.

Relationships ought to guide us in our decision-making. The consequences, and the outcome of our behavior ought to make us either pause or make us go ahead. The consideration of the outcome of that behavior should always make us pause.

So, we say, how will this affect those people or that person? And we look at that verse and say, yes, there are some verses where we have the contrast. And by asking ourselves, what's the nub of the contrast, the rubbing point, the sticking point, we can begin to extrapolate out from these few words, even in English, this is a short proverb, to what Solomon is getting at. This proverb actually has an image in it that might be invisible in your translation.

It's very interesting that the second line says, a foolish son is his mother's grief. The first line is pretty literal, wise son makes his father happy or causes his father to rejoice. But a son himself is not grief.

Do you see that? It's kind of a funny thing. Almost every proverb has an image like that where one thing is used and we can say, well, I know what he means, but he's not using the words in exactly their literal sense. He's playing with a metaphor.

I talked about that a fair bit in one of the lectures on the book of Psalms. And if you want to look at that, I think it was the second or third one. That might be helpful.

I'm not going to go into as much into all that detail here. In this case, a son is not grief. A son is not even the source of grief.

It's the decisions that the son makes and the effect of those decisions on the son's life and well-being that are the source of grief. Do you see that? And Solomon, so what Solomon has done, see that's the compression of a proverb. Solomon has taken all those ideas and just put them into so few words that we could spend the next two hours, which we don't have, talking about this verse and what it means.

And then we've only done the first proverb and we haven't really unpacked it all. I'm giving you the fruits of hours of thinking about it. If we went back and reconstructed all the thoughts, we'd be here for much of the rest of the day.

It's thinking through why is it what's being said and why is it being said this way. There are a bunch of these proverbs, quite a number of them, especially later on that I mentioned earlier called emblematic parallelisms and or proverbs and even proverbs that are what are called synonymous where the two lines say more or less, more or less the same thing. There are a lot of those in chapters one through nine because that's in poems, you tend to get extended poems, you tend to get more synonymous poetry, just like most of the book of Psalms is synonymous. But here in Proverbs, we turn over to 11:10, we find when it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices.

When the wicked perish, there's glad shouting. You say, wait a second, that's not synonymous. We have righteous and wicked.

Yes, but you notice what he did. It's a very clever thing. In saying something, since we can say things negatively and positively, it's a really cool feature of language that we can say things in lots of different ways.

In this case, if it goes well with the righteous, but the wicked perish, you see those who are saying the same thing. It's like saying, he who is wise is this, and he who is not a fool is this. Well, to be not a fool is to be wise, to be a fool.

So, by negating it, even though we're using a synonymous term, by using the negative, or in this case, a negative consequence, we actually say the same thing. We make a synonymous statement. So here we have two lines that seem to say basically the same thing.

When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices. When the wicked perish, there's glad shouting. Like a lot of proverbs, this one sounds sort of tautological, that is self-evident, like saying two is two, or a hat is a hat.

You might be tempted to think to yourself, did Solomon really have to be the wisest man in the world to dream up stuff like this? Remember, he didn't dream it all up. He's adapting things, and borrowing, and putting them together, approving them. But really, when we have a verse, whether it's antithetical, synonymous, or emblematic, it doesn't really matter, that sounds like it's simply an observation.

We need to remember this, proverbs are counselors. They are giving us advice, even if it just sounds like an observation. So even in English, to say, go back to our example, a stitch in time saves nine.

There's no advice there, it's just an observation. This is the way it is. If you take the stitch in time, you'll save nine stitches later on.

But there's still implicit advice there. Even here in 1110, when it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices, when the wicked perish, there's glad shouting. There's implicit advice there, isn't there? What kind of a city would you rather live in? What kind of a land would you rather live in? One that is full of mourning and sadness, or one that is full of rejoicing and gladness? And if we think about this, what if we said it this way, when it goes well with the innocent, but when the guilty perish, so now suddenly maybe we're talking not about some abstract moral category, but now we're talking about a system of justice.

We're talking to future judges. And Solomon is saying, remember, you can tell a lot about the system of justice in a place by the general life of that place. Look at the city.

Are people happy, truly happy? Then probably there's a much greater chance then that the justice system is working, that bribes are not being taken, that judges are not twisting their decisions, but that the guilty are being convicted and the innocent are being acquitted. So, the verse then becomes a warning to judges and really to every citizen to look around and make sure that you are establishing the kind of city that you would even want to live in. The two lines say the same thing, and they say something that sounds kind of obvious to us.

And yet they contain implicit counsel or implicit advice. I'm not going to look at any of the emblematic parallelisms because I think that they're much more obvious, but I will point out something about them. And that is there are a number of emblematic parallelisms that use images from nature.

And here's a case where we can kind of get ourselves into trouble unless we actually live or have lived in the Middle East. For example, in clouds and winds without rain, a man boasts of, actually it's boasts of, a gift of falsehood, a lying gift, a false gift. That's a 25:14.

And we think, oh, we have clouds and wind all the time without rain. That's, that's nothing special. Ah, but you see, in a land where Solomon is living, almost always when there are clouds, there's rain.

It's very, very rare. If you have a combination of clouds and wind, there will be rain. So, to have clouds and wind without rain is almost like a curse, especially because it tends to only be cloudy at certain times of year.

And that's the time of year when it's supposed to rain. And if it doesn't rain, your crops will fail. And if your crops fail, you die because there's no supermarket down the street.

So, we, we need to know a bit about meteorology, climate, all sorts of things. And you say, well, I don't have time to, or I don't have a research library. Well, you know, the truth is even a good one-volume Bible dictionary will give you a lot of the kind of information that you need, talk about animals and cattle and climate and all sorts of things that, that can really help you understand the book of Proverbs.

In fact, in many ways, um, I think a good couple of reference tools are, are often as helpful, if not more helpful than a commentary, because they'll serve you for reading lots of things, not just the book of Proverbs, but almost any part of scripture. And especially in Proverbs, though, where so much of it is cultural, we need to be careful too, to read things, to read things culturally. I, um, once got a paper from a student, uh, it was an assignment in class.

And he read this, uh, he, he wrote on this verse 2014 bad, bad says the buyer, but when he goes his way, then he boasts. And his paper was, I will kindly describe it as a five-page. That was the limit five-page rant about, about, merchants who would order things and not pay for them from the suppliers.

And I invited him to come to my office and I said, um, you know, tell me what's going on. And it turned out that he was a pipe fitter who had his own business in his basement. And many times he had made, he had fitted pipes.

And I don't know what that means. I just know that he fitted them. Um, and in, in response to an order and not being paid.

And he was so frustrated. And he said, here's finally a Bible verse that, you know, I can use them, and I said, well, have you ever been to an, a Middle Eastern church? And he said, no. I said, have you ever heard of haggling? He said, no.

He said, well, you know, when you're in a Middle Eastern market, you never pay the price. The person tells you what it costs. And they assume that you're going to argue for sometimes for maybe an hour, depending on the price, an hour or so to get them until you finally agree to a price.

And that's actually part of the bargain. It's not like a U S supermarket where you walk in and the price is stamped onto it and you have no choice, I guess, if that's what you're going to do, you're going to have to pay the price. And if it's a bruised tomato, you could hold it up and say, will you give me 5 cents off? But you have no choice.

And even then, they'll probably say no, pick another one. And they'll take the bruised one away. Well, put it back later.

Well, here, the point is, if you don't know that this is a haggling culture, you misread the verse and think that this guy is lying. Well, yes, he is lying in a sense. I mean, if he's going to boast about it, he's not, he's not saying it's really bad, but, but it's not lying.

If everybody agrees that that's part of the rule of a game in football, is it a lie? If a team lines up and then changes their formation just before the snap, is it an onside kick or a fake punt? Is that, is that a lie? Well, of course, it's a lie, but it's within the rules of the game, and in the same way this works, but if you don't know that there's a game going on, you might think, wait a second, they just cheated. That's not right. You can't do that.

Well, yes, you can. But a big part of reading Proverbs and, and benefiting from them is getting back into that world and beginning to, of course, sort of immersing ourselves in it. I really like Bible Archaeology Review and Bible Review magazines for that purpose.

A lot of their articles can be kind of irritating, but reading things about archaeology and reading about documents that have been discovered and reading marriage contracts, for example, or almost anything helps us begin to understand the kind of world that Proverbs, well, not just Proverbs, the whole Old Testament assumes. And so, the authors never explain anything because they know all about it. They don't have to explain it.

We have to somehow try to figure out what's going on. We have to, we can't reinvent ourselves, but we need to try to step back and at least get a little closer to that world. And so, especially in Proverbs, where we have stories from a different culture, which means a different, very different way of looking at a lot of things, smashed into a few words, and we're trying to unpack them.

We're most prone to unpack them with water. Remember the sponge? We're going to pour water from our sink. We're not going to go to the country where the sponge was manufactured to get their water to put on the sponge to make it bigger.

Well, the same thing happens with the story. And if we live in the middle, upper middle class, suburban America or on the East Coast or wherever it might be, although I hope these lectures go around the world, wherever we live, we're going to import our experience and our form of the story into their world. So, there's some legitimacy to that because after all, Proverbs can apply to situations in any kind of life.

I mean, that's the whole point of a proverb. But learning to see the world that they saw is a big part of learning to read the Proverbs. So, we want to look at the parallelism, pay attention to that, and really what we're forcing ourselves to do is to pay attention.

That's really what we're doing. Pay attention. I don't care, and no good teacher will care whether you get the right label on it.

The label's not the point. The point is, can I explain how these lines are related, what it's saying, and why it's saying it the way it is. And then what is the story that underlies this? We'll come back in our fourth lecture and we'll talk a bit about images and then look specifically at one or two Proverbs.