

Dr. Fred Putnam, Proverbs, Lecture 2

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Welcome back for our second talk. I'm going to talk a bit right now about what are we actually reading when we read a proverb, that is, what is a proverb, and then look at the first few verses of the book to ask why this book was written. And because that helps us again, as we saw with knowing who wrote it, helps us understand how we should read what we find in it.

So, the question is, what is a proverb? Well, that's a question to which there is no agreed-upon answer. If you read the dictionary, you'll find something like a brief, pithy saying of folk wisdom that passes along traditional advice, or something like that. And in fact, if you Google proverb and look on the Internet, you will find many definitions by many scholars.

But all of them seem to have certain, maybe if not keywords, at least key ideas. Proverbs are short. There is something that makes them memorable, that is, easy to remember.

They're fairly simple, that is, easy to grasp. That doesn't mean they're easy necessarily to figure out what to do with them, but it means they're easy to know, we know what they're talking about. They're widely used.

That is, a proverb is not something that just one person uses. That becomes more of what we call an aphorism, perhaps, or even just a saying. And they're often also usually image-based or have it built around some sort of picture or image.

In a lot of modern definitions, we find terms like they're socially accepted, and experientially based, and there is even modern psycholinguistic research that goes into how listening to a proverb or hearing a proverb actually affects certain portions of the brain, so that the structure of the proverb itself, the nature of the proverb, affects both halves of the brain at the same time, which is a pretty unusual way of communicating. Usually, we talk to somebody's right side or their left side, or we use our right side or our left side, kind of independently, but proverbs seem to go for both at the same time. Now, you see, part of the problem is we can define a proverb in terms of what it looks like or sounds like, or we can define it in terms of its effect on the person who hears it, or the uses to which we can put it.

And so, some people just end up saying, I know it when I see it, which really doesn't seem very fair. But unfortunately, that's kind of what we come down to, is because there really isn't an internationally agreed-upon definition. Although, again, if you look at the dictionaries, three or four dictionaries, they'll all say basically the same thing.

But those definitions are not written by a paremiologist, that is, people who study proverbs professionally. What is a biblical proverb? Well, they have some of the same aspects. They're short.

They don't look that way in English. But I did an interesting experiment one time. I counted all the words in each proverb in chapters 10 through 16, and then all the words in Hebrew, and then all the words, I used a very literal translation of the English translation.

I counted all the words. The average number of words in Hebrew per verse is 7.6. The average number of words in English is over 18. So, you're right, they don't sound like English proverbs, which are things like, a stitch in time saves nine, money talks, or something like that.

And even a proverb of 10 words in English would feel very long to us. But the proverbs in Hebrew are very compact, because Hebrew just allows, Hebrew allows the same kind of compression that takes place in English, but when you translate that very compressed form in Hebrew into English, it has to expand. There's no way to translate it in the same tight format, or at least not in a way that would make any sense to any of us.

But in the Bible, the big difference probably is that in the Bible a lot of proverbs seem to say the same thing a couple of different ways. A feature that we call parallelism, and I'll talk about it just a little later in this lecture. And that doesn't sound like English at all.

Most English proverbs may have two parts, like out of sight, out of mind. That's kind of cute. But they're not, that's one statement.

It's not two different sentences that are put together. But a lot of biblical proverbs are that way. I mention that because very often when people quote from the book of Proverbs, they only quote half of the verse.

And that's a little bit like quoting the first half, or reading the first half of a novel, and leaving the second half untouched, or reading the second half without reading the first half. That's not the way they were meant to be understood. It's a single saying made up of a couple of statements.

The two statements function together, and it's not that they lie side by side. They actually are woven together, and they're meant to be read in light of each other because together they say something that neither of them can say independently of the other. So, we recognize them because we see them, or usually in our culture, we hear them.

So, somebody says, a stitch in time saves nine. And even if we're standing out, I grew up on a farm, so I can use this illustration, I saw this. Even if we're standing out in the back pasture, and there's a fence post that's rotted off at the ground, and we're standing around looking at it, somebody says, well, a stitch in time saves nine, because the debate is, do we take the time now to fix it, or can we just kind of prop it up and hope it'll make it through the winter? Well, nobody's talking about sewing the fence post back together.

No, we all know that they're saying, is it that you fix something right now before it gets a whole lot worse, because if that fence post falls over, then maybe the cows will get into the corn, or maybe the horses will run away, or something else really bad will happen. So, we hear the proverb, we kind of recognize it, and then we apply it. And how we do that is really a mystery.

We don't actually know how we recognize them. And that's why we say the definition is sort of, I know it when I see it, rather than coming up with a strict definition. A lot of them like that one, a stitch in time saves nine.

I mean, it's very poetic, isn't it? We have stitch time saves, and if you notice the sounds there, it actually goes S-T-T-S. Isn't that kind of cute? A stitch, S-T, in time, T, saves S-9. So, we have a little reversal of sound consonant order.

We also have the rhyme of time and nine. And if you listen to the meter, it's a stitch in time saves nine. It's very metrical, it's iambic.

So, it just kind of, all of those things together, plus the picture, make it easy for us to remember. And also, somehow make it easy for us to understand that we're not talking about sewing up a fence post, and nobody thinks the person is being silly. We all understand that they're advising us because that's what proverbs are.

They're really kind of counselors or advisors. Somebody's advising us to fix it now before things get a lot worse. Now, they're not always that poetic, so we have proverbs in English like absence makes the heart grow fonder.

Well, there's rhythm there, absence makes the heart grow fonder. But there's no rhyme, there's no nice consonant selection going on. Or love is blind, that's pretty prosaic.

Or money talks, or something like that. But by and large, proverbs have something about them that is memorable and recognizable. And we even find that when we use them in our own society, which, by the way, doesn't happen a whole lot, because people who use proverbs are generally thought to be kind of fuddy-duddy-ish and old-fashioned.

But there are lots of societies in the world, as I mentioned in my first lecture, where proverbs are extremely important. And, in fact, are the common circulation of life. That's the way conversation is even carried on.

But when we think about the way that we use them, we realize we don't think of proverbs as laws, promises, or guarantees. But we actually use a proverb like we would use a piece of advice. Or maybe even like we would use a counselor or an advisor.

You know, some people think when you go to the doctor and the doctor says, take three pills and call me in the morning, that we have to do what the doctor says. But, in fact, what is a doctor? A medical doctor is somebody who has specialized in medicine. There's no legal requirement that forces us to do what the doctor says.

In fact, we can go to three different doctors, get three different pieces of advice, and choose the one we like the best because that's what it is. It's counsel. And that's actually what a proverb is.

A proverb is like a medical doctor, or like a lawyer, from whom we get advice. Lawyers are called counselors of law. From whom we get advice that we then have to decide what to do with.

And that maybe helps us understand why we can have what are called dueling proverbs. So, we say, for example, he who hesitates is lost, and look before you leap. Both those things can't be true, because you have to hesitate to look.

And if you spend all your time hesitating or looking, you'll never leap. So the two proverbs seem to be contradictory. They are contradictory.

Well, not really. They're actually complementary. Because part of the point of proverbial wisdom, and part of the reason for the length of the Book of Proverbs, among other things, is that no one proverb ever tries to do justice to the whole of a situation, or to every situation.

Now, in any individual proverb, the thing that makes a proverb function, or functional, is that it can be extended to apply to all sorts of situations. So, we say, in English, we say, like father, like son, which actually is a takeoff on Jeremiah's statement, like mother, like daughter, as Ezekiel says about Israel and Judah. But we can also say, like a teacher, so the student.

Like teacher, like student. And we could actually apply that to a whole range of settings, which we don't actually use. I mean, we don't use them.

But we could say, like a pastor, so the church. So, if you want to know what a pastor is like, go to his church sometime, or her church sometime, when the pastor is not there, and see what the people are like. Because once a pastor has been in position for a long enough time, that congregation will become like the pastor.

You can actually find out more about the pastor from the congregation by talking to the pastor. Or if you want to know what kind of a teacher someone is, get to know their students. Especially students who have been out of their classes for a year or two and talk to them about the kinds of things that they study.

Don't talk to them about the teacher. That's not the kind of information you need. But you want to find out about the teacher.

You talk to them, and you begin to find out, how does this teacher actually think and teach? Because his students, or her students, if they've had the teacher enough, now not one course probably won't do it. But if they've had that teacher often enough, they will begin to absorb that teacher's way of thinking. So, is the teacher the father? Well, no, but we can say like father, like son, because that relationship can be extended to describe all sorts, and explain actually, all sorts of relationships between human beings.

So, when we use Proverbs in our own lives, we recognize, you know, this proverb is making an observation, or it's telling me to do something, or suggesting that I do something, and it's advice, it's counsel. So, like father, like son actually says, here's, if I remember that, I can understand the son by knowing what the father's like, or vice versa. Or we say something like money talks, well, that's a pretty cool proverb, because it's so compressed, and actually contains two of what are called metonymies, where one thing stands for something else.

So, it's not the money that's talking, but it's the person who has the money, and the person who has the money doesn't even have to talk, they just have to be present. And, you know, if you've ever been in a room, in a meeting, with one person who's very wealthy, and they're part of the committee, the things that they say the committee should do carry a lot more weight than anybody else in the room, all of the things being equal. Well, that's kind of the advice that proverbs give us.

Remember Solomon asked for wisdom to understand the heart. Part of the purpose of the book is to give us the ability to look at a situation and understand what's really going on. Now, some people have recently said, even very recently in books on the Old Testament, that Proverbs 26, 4, and 5, answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes, don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you become like him, is a case of dueling proverbs.

Well, that's possible. I prefer to think of it as a single proverb, just a long one. I mean, there are lots of long proverbs that consist, and remember the verse divisions are not necessarily original.

And so, I think we can say, that the book of Proverbs doesn't have cases of verses that duel with each other. So, we don't have to judge between them like we do in English. So, if we say in a meeting, someone says, look, you know, this is an important decision, we have to look before we leap.

And someone else says, well, he hesitates his loss. They're giving us two different sets of advice. And at some point, you have to make a decision.

So, at some point, the hesitating has to stop, and the leaping has to take place. The wisdom comes, you see, in knowing which proverb to apply to which situation. That's wisdom.

Goethe said, he was a German poet, said, the man of only one language knows none. What we could also say is that a fool knows only one proverb. So, the book of Proverbs, for example, has many verses that deal with our money, or the way we use money.

It has many verses that deal with speech and the way we use our mouths. It has many verses that deal with companionship and friendship or justice or marriage or lots of topics. Why does it have so many verses on each topic? Because no one saying can do justice to the whole, to every situation.

And so, in order to properly use the book of Proverbs, we can't simply know one verse and say, well, this takes care of it. If I know this verse about child discipline, I know all I need to, I'm just going to use this verse in every situation. No, you can't do that.

Because that's not all that the book of Proverbs says. In fact, it's not all the Bible says. We don't want to just limit our child-rearing habits, for example, to what Proverbs says.

But we want especially to be careful that we don't absolutize one proverb and make that the true statement and the other is just sort of subsidiary to it. We want to make sure that we have a handle on, as much as we can, everything that the book of Proverbs says about leadership, marital faithfulness, or whatever else, the topic, whatever other topic may be. So, when we read the book of Proverbs and we study an individual proverb and we say to ourselves, it says, this is the way things are.

Well, we have to remember that it's giving us advice. It's giving us counsel. This probably makes some of you nervous because you're going to say, wait a second,

aren't you saying it's inspired? And if it's inspired, doesn't that mean if it says, if I do this, this will happen?

Isn't that a promise from God? Well, many people read the book of Proverbs that way. But that's reading the book of Proverbs as though it were a different kind of literature. And different kinds of literature have their own rules for how we read them.

So, this is a silly example. If you pick up a book, no matter how heavy and authoritative and expensively bound it is, and the first four words are Once upon a time, you don't expect to find advice for living, right? Instead, you know you're going to be reading a fairy tale and you read it as a fairy tale. You don't think there really is a witch waiting in a house made out of candy in the woods with an oven to cook children in.

We don't even pretend to think that that's real. And Proverbs are the same way. That is, paremiologists have discovered that Proverbs are apparently present in every human society.

That includes biblical Proverbs in ancient Israel, which suggests that God has built us in a certain way, that we are prone to understand Proverbs and use them, and has even included some of them in Scripture, this small book of Proverbs because that is a better way of understanding some aspects of what He expects of us and what He is doing in us. So, when we read them, we don't make them into laws or promises, because just like Proverbs in English, they are meant to function as our advisors and our counselors. Now I said earlier that Proverbs is a book that's organized and we should read it like a book.

And I'm just going to pass over chapters 1 through 9 by saying that if you're interested in more information on reading those poems, you could listen to the lectures on the book of Psalms because the same rules apply. As I said, we look for parallelism in imagery and we see how the poem is structured because they're poems, they're biblical poems, and they follow the same rules of composition. Now they don't say hallelujah and things like that, but poetry is poetry and one can learn, one can study one kind of poem much as another, given some slight differences in the content, but that really doesn't matter.

So, I'm just going to go directly to reading the Proverbs in chapters 10 and following. When we read them, we need to read the book, the Proverbs, in light of the purposes for which Solomon wrote. And you know, in the Gospel of John, John tells us at the end of chapter 20 why he wrote his Gospel, so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

He tells us why he wrote his first epistle, the same thing. Jude tells us why he wrote his epistle, to earnestly contend for the faith, once delivered once for all of the saints. In the book of Revelation, we're told why that's written, which God gave to his son to reveal to his servants the things that are about to come.

Well, we have the same thing here at the beginning of Proverbs in verses 2 through 6, so that we might know wisdom and understanding, instruction to discern sayings of understanding, to receive instruction in wise behavior and righteousness, justice, and equity, to give prudence to the naive or the simple, the inexperienced, to give knowledge and discretion to the youth. So why do we have this book, and it goes on for a couple more verses. Well, without going into a great deal of detail, there are two purposes here.

One is that the book of Proverbs has a moral purpose. One of the great debates, starting in probably the 5th century BC, in ancient Greece, was a debate begun in large part by people called Sophists, from which we get the word sophisticated, sophistry. Both Sophists were known for developing arguments that could be used to prove anything.

That was the accusation used against them. It's actually where the word sophomore comes from, somebody who's foolish enough to think that they know arguments that can prove anything. But the reason the Sophists started having these discussions was they wanted to know what is the right way to live life.

And how do we figure out what is good? And that's actually the question that then engaged a great deal of Socrates' and Plato's and Aristotle's attention, and even was picked up by Aquinas thousands of years later in his *Summa Theologica*. Well, the question of what is a good life, and how do we know it? Well, one of the things that the Greeks came up with that I think is strikingly foreshadowed in the Book of Proverbs is the idea of prudence. Prudence in Greek philosophy, and later in Aquinas, and even later in the 20th century in the writings of Joseph Pieper, is the ability to, as Pieper says, be quiet so that we can actually understand what we're seeing.

One of the things that Proverbs wants to give us is insight. We cannot have insight if we are so busy coming up with our answer, if we're so busy thinking about what we want to say, or thinking about our hurt feelings, we can't have real insight into a situation without being still. So, different translations do this differently, but in verse 4, to give prudence to the naive.

Prudence is this ability to stop, to think, to understand before acting. Because in the understanding of the Greeks, which I believe is Solomon's also, although he never says it this way, being the situation, what really exists, precedes understanding. We understand, we have to understand what's there, not what we wish were there, not

what we think is there, not just what we feel is there, we have to try to understand what's really there.

This is not a very popular notion these days, by the way, but understand that, and then our actions or our words are based on that understanding. To the extent that we fail to try to understand, our actions or our words are going to not be right or wise. So, one of Solomon's goals is to help these young men, about whom I'll speak in a minute more, help these young men develop prudence.

And one of the ways that he does that in the book is by giving them things to read that are hard to understand. You can't just buzz through Proverbs. I mean, you can, I guess, but it's pretty difficult to sit down and read five chapters of Proverbs as compared to, let's say, reading five chapters of Matthew or even Isaiah.

It's not meant to be buzzed through. It's meant to be pondered and thought about. And so how do young people, how do they get wisdom? How do they get understanding? Well, by learning to slow down, by recognizing that life doesn't have to be breakneck, and by taking time to think about what they're seeing and what they're hearing.

And this then gives rise to what Solomon calls in chapter three a straight life or an upright life sometimes. It's translated. You see, in Proverbs, I said in the first lecture that Proverbs envisages us as either going in the way of wisdom or the way of folly.

But that's not really quite true. If we look at the way that the book of Proverbs reflects the language of the book of Deuteronomy, for example, Moses' great covenant renewal with Israel, we find that the image is more that there is a road or a path and to turn aside to the right or to the left is to turn aside. And that's really the picture that Solomon uses.

There's a path, and it's only that path. To get off that path in any direction is to be lost, is to be off the path, is to be heading for death. That's the result of folly.

So that this moral purpose is to give us the prudence to recognize the right or straight path in any circumstance so that we can act in accord with what is straight or what is upright. Now remember, we can only learn in one way. We can only really learn things by experience.

I know there's intuition and intuitive leaps, but intuition is actually, I think, the accumulation of lots of experience, and we're not conscious that we're accumulating this until all of a sudden something coalesces, and we have an idea that kind of bursts through. But really, we learn things because we do them ourselves. Our mother says, don't touch the stove, you'll burn yourself.

We don't know what the word burn means when we're only two years old, so when we touch the stove, we burn ourselves. Now I know what it means to burn myself, and I know why I shouldn't touch the stove. Or we learn because someone else tells us.

So, our mother could say, don't touch the stove, you'll burn yourself, and we don't touch the stove. Now what have we learned? We haven't learned that the stove is hot. We don't even know why we shouldn't.

We don't really know why we shouldn't touch the stove, but we've learned obedience. The result of both may be the same in the long run. We won't burn ourselves anymore.

Much more painful to learn many things by personal experience than it is to learn them from someone else. What Solomon is doing is giving us the opportunity of learning from the accumulated experience of the wise men of the ancient Near East taking their sayings and saying, these things are worth pondering and thinking about. Therefore, take the time to do it.

So, we have this moral purpose. And underlying that is this word here at the end of verse five. He says a wise man will hear an increase in learning.

A man of understanding will increase wise counsel. Now the word counsel there is very interesting. It's not the usual word used for counselors or advisors.

So, when a king has an advisor, for example. It's only used once in Job and about five or six times in the book of Proverbs. Most of the time it's used for when a king is going to go out to war.

About half of its occurrences refer to a king going out to war. It says, how do you wage battle? You wage battle by getting lots of counsel. Where do you get counsel from? You get it from counselors.

The person who studies the book of Proverbs, who studies it, by studying it, gets, as it were, a bunch of verbal counselors. The Proverbs themselves will become a circle or a part of your advice. They'll become part of the counsel that you have and on which you can base a decision.

And they will become moral guides. Now that's one big purpose. And that's probably the purpose that we all associate.

Why do you read the book of Proverbs? To be a better person. Okay, well, really to be an upright person. And to be an upright person means, as I said in the last lecture, to live in accord with the way that God has made the world.

Because that is to live in accord with the nature of God himself. But there's a second purpose here. If we look at verses 5 and 6, we find this.

A wise man will hear an increase in learning. A man of understanding will acquire wise counsel to understand a proverb and a figure. There's that word *melitsa*, a dark saying.

The words of the wise and their riddles. That suggests a couple of things. First of all, it's not just the naive who need to learn.

And that's, as we said before, you can't be stagnant. You're always working toward either folly or wisdom. So, you can't just say, okay, I'm wise now.

I can stop learning. That doesn't work. Solomon says no.

You have to keep on learning. In fact, later on in the book, one of the Proverbs specifically says, to cease listening to discipline, my son, is to stray from the words of knowledge. As soon as we stop learning, as soon as we stop growing, as soon as we stop seeking wisdom, we begin drifting toward folly.

And some people actually don't just drift. Some people stop seeking for wisdom and run headlong for it. That's easier to recognize.

But there is a moral purpose, not just for the naive, but for those who are already mature, for those who are experienced, for those who may be considered wise or may even, although the danger here is you may probably be a fool, consider themselves wise. Even the wise can and must become more wise. But this is really, in verses five and six, he suggests there's not just a moral purpose, but there's a mental purpose here.

And that is we gain the ability to understand. There's something about studying Proverbs that makes us smarter and makes us better able to understand Proverbs, even ones that we haven't studied yet. There's something about studying Proverbs that gives us insight the act of studying can increase our capacity for understanding.

We grow in our intellectual ability. I mean, he says the wise and the understanding will acquire, will increase, will be able to better understand Proverbs and riddles. We probably don't think much about that because that's not really, you know, that's not what Proverbs are for, they give advice.

But in a sense, if we give ourselves over to studying things that are wise, as Solomon says later, on the lips of the wise, wisdom is found, right? Well, if we give ourselves over to studying things that are wise, then since insight and understanding are

parallel aspects, right along with wisdom, then we ourselves will become more wise. And, you know, I should have said this earlier. This is just an aside.

But one of the things that we use is the word wise, words wise, and wisdom a lot. But in the Bible, the words that are translated that way, really refer to skill. If you go back to, I mean, when I say really, they could be equally translated that way.

If you go back to the book of Exodus and read the stories of Aholiab and Bezalel, the craftsmen whom the Lord said he had given special wisdom or skill in working with wood and stone and metal and cloth, or not stone in the tabernacle, wood and metal and cloth, that's the same word. Chokmah, wisdom, is really a kind of skill in living or skill in doing anything in particular. In the book of Proverbs, it seems to be a skill in understanding.

The understanding is both the understanding of the Proverbs themselves as well as the ability to understand life and to understand the circumstances that we face. And that's why there are many Proverbs, I believe, I believe that's why many Proverbs subliminally or covertly maybe, a better way to say it, advise us to pay attention to the situation before we do anything. It's not just the king who should go out and get counselors.

So, for example, a Proverb that says, apples of gold and settings of silver is a wise reprove to a listening ear, chapter 25. The important verse, the important word in that verse is not wise or skilled, it's that the ear has to be listening. So, I can have great advice to give, I can have, in fact, I could even know exactly what to tell you for the circumstance that you face.

But if you're not listening, if you're not ready to hear it, it gains nothing. I'm better off not saying it because he says, it's when the ear, you have the wise word and the listening ear, that's when the apples of gold, which is probably a piece of jewelry or something like that, are in the silver setting. Now there's one other thing I, well, actually a lot of other things, but one other thing in this that I feel I need to say about verses 2 through 6. There's a moral purpose here, there's a mental purpose.

I think we need to be very careful that we don't use the Proverbs as what I'd call biblical bullets. You know, Solomon says, don't do this, bang, you're guilty. Solomon says, do this, bang, you better do it.

And so, then the Proverbs simply become another law, another subset of the rules and regulations in Leviticus or Exodus or Deuteronomy. I think, actually, I think there's a better way to understand all those laws as well, and I think you'll see my point in just a minute. If we think about what God is doing in giving Scripture to us, then we find that part of the purpose of Scripture is God revealing Himself.

Now we might say, how does a Proverb about how I use my money tell me anything about God? Or how does a Proverb that tells me about how to choose a wife tell me anything about the Lord? Well, that's part of what it means to study a Proverb and think about it. But it also, even when we have Proverbs, maybe especially when we have Proverbs that command us, be wise, then maybe we need to understand that the Lord is showing us what He wants us to be, not because He's a bully, but because He knows that that is how we will be most happy, what will be best for us. Which, by the way, goes back to that early Greek discussion.

How can we be happy? Not in the sense of feeling good, but living a life that is good. So, Solomon is saying, or through the book of Proverbs, the Lord Himself is saying, this is what people who are becoming what I want them to be will look like. Now you see, we could, again, we could react to that and say, Oh my goodness, I don't measure up, I'm condemned.

Sure, that's true. That's what everybody is. But we could also say if God, and I'm speaking specifically to people who are Christians now if God has promised to finish the work that He's begun, that is, He says, I've begun a work in you by bringing you to Christ, and I'm going to keep on doing that work until I'm finished.

Then the Proverbs show us part of the work, some aspects of the work that God is doing in us. That we are honest, that we are faithful, that we are good friends, that we speak in ways that are helpful, that bring life and encouragement, and lots of other things. But you see then, the point is, far from condemning us, although they always do that, but far beyond condemning us, maybe is a better way to say it, God is showing us the work that He is already doing in us.

So that the Proverbs then become really a basis for us saying, Oh God, I'm failing at this. Forgive me. That's the repentance part.

That's the part where we feel guilt. But, you've promised by commanding me to do this, you're showing me what you are in fact already desiring to do and see accomplished. So, then the requirements of the Proverbs, whether they're positive or negative, prohibitions or commands, the requirements become things that become bases upon which we can pray.

We can say, well God, I know my words are not as kind as they could be. Work in me to that end. And I can thank the Lord then, that He has promised that whatever He requires, He will fulfill.

So, they're not bullets. They really become a foundation or maybe building blocks for our prayers. Now, I think that though we talk about this moral purpose and this mental purpose, I think there's another larger purpose to the Book of Proverbs.

Solomon was king. Solomon was king of Israel, which was not a real big country. It was a decent size, but not real big.

He had a gigantic, in his day, crumbling empire to both the south and the north and the northeast. But Solomon had a problem. The problem was how to ensure the continuity of his kingdom.

And his problem is exacerbated by this. He knows what he has to do to ensure the continuity of his kingdom. The kingdom of Israel will endure as long as Israel fulfills the conditions of the covenant.

That's the promise of God in Leviticus 26 and in Deuteronomy 28. So, the Book of Proverbs is addressed to what we might call, what I thought of growing up, because there was a school like this nearby, a prep school. It's addressed to the prep school guys.

The guys who are going to go to the Ivy League colleges and universities. The guys who are going to become leaders. They're going to become judges and military rulers and governors, and maybe some of them, one of them, will become king.

They'll become the king's advisors and counselors. If you read through the book, that explains immediately why so many proverbs, especially in some of the later chapters, deal with how you act in front of a king. Do you think the farmers living in Bethlehem had ready access to meals sitting with the king? No.

That's why verses deal with, there are verses that specifically warn against rebelling against the king. Who's going to rebel against the king? The farmers out in Jabesh Gilead? No. It's not going to be the farmers who rebel.

It's going to be the rulers. It's going to be the king's son like Absalom. Why do so many verses talk about wealth and how we use it? Why do they warn against unjust gain? Remember, we're talking here about a world that is agrarian and what, when I was growing up, we'd call scratch farming.

You learn enough, you earn enough from your farming to survive and that's all. It's a fairly simple world in that sense. And so the book of Proverbs is addressed not to the populace at large.

It's addressed to the people who are going to step into positions of leadership in the nation because the biblical, as the Bible shows clearly again and again and again, as the leaders go, so goes the country. That's why if you read the prophets, it's always the kings and the prophets and the priests and the wise who are being condemned because they mislead the nation. Read Ezekiel 22.

That's why he runs down that list. They're the ones who are guilty and the nation's guilty because they're guilty. And that's why the book of Kings constantly says this king was wicked or this king was good because the nation's fate rides on the behavior, the life, and the choices of the king.

These people are going to become the rulers, which is incidentally why so many verses talk about justice. Do you think there were that many lawsuits in Israel? No, 70% of the lawyers in the world live in the United States. In fact, in many verses in Proverbs, in many, many verses, the words translated innocent and righteous are better translated, I'm translated righteous and wicked are better translated innocent and guilty.

So, 18:5 says to show partiality to the guilty is not good, nor to thrust aside the innocent in justice. Why? Because the guys this book is written to are going to become the judges. So, they're going to be responsible for establishing what is right.

They're going to set the standard and the standard is going to determine the fate of the nation. So, you see the purpose of the book is not just personal, it's communal or covenantal or communitarian, if I can use that word. The book of Proverbs is designed and very deliberately written for these young men so that their obedience will fulfill the requirements of the covenant in their own lives.

Yes, in their own lives, but also by their example in the lives of their countrymen and enable Israel then to continue in the land as a nation. Again, Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28, by avoiding the curses of the covenant and by obtaining its blessings. One last thing and I'm almost out of time.

Because it's in the Bible, that is it's canonical, it's no longer limited to young men. I don't think I need to say anything more on that. But that's why it's such a masculine book because it's addressed to these men.

But ladies, young and old, it's for all of us. So next time we'll look at what we do with an individual proverb, and what we look for when we're reading it.