

Dr. Fred Putnam, Proverbs, Lecture 4

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This is the fourth and final lecture by Dr. Fred Putnam on the book of Proverbs.

Last time in our third lecture, I mentioned the stories that Proverbs compress. One of the ways that the Proverbs do this in the biblical book and just in Proverbs in general is by using pictures or images.

Images are a great way to save space, which is one reason they're so popular in Proverbs, because a picture is worth a thousand words after all, which is a proverb of its own. But interpreting an image is what helps us understand what the author is getting at and actually helps us understand the world, his view of the world, and how he's understanding some aspect of life or even life itself. For example, if we look at chapter 19, verse one says, better a poor man who walks in his integrity or uprightness than one who is perverse in his lips and is a fool.

So, as we looked at last time, there's a contrast between the two. And this is a specific kind of proverb that some people have called better than Proverbs. Sayings, you find them in a couple in the book of Psalms, a whole bunch in Proverbs, a few in Ecclesiastes, and actually Jesus uses this form a fair amount in his teaching in the Gospels.

In a better than proverb, two things are compared that seem, one thing is said to be better than another, and it seems like it's backward to us. So, what this actually says is it's better to be poor. And we think, well, poverty is better than riches.

Or if we were to go back a few chapters, better is a meal of herbs with love than a fattened ox and hatred with it. Well, so vegetables are better than meat. Is this saying, is Solomon advocating a vegetarian diet? No, not exactly.

But there in the previous verse, this is in 1516, better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and turmoil with it. And say, so it's better to be poor. Is Solomon actually advocating poverty? Well, remember one of the benefits of achieving wisdom in chapters one through nine is that you get rich, that you become a leader, that you become powerful.

He's not against wealth at all, as we can tell from his life in the book of Kings. No, the point is not that poverty is better than wealth. But in the better than Proverbs, it's always that the thing that is better is both things are qualified.

So, in this case, it's better to be poor, but to have integrity than it is to be a fool. And in this case, this is again, like the example we looked at very briefly, asymmetrical

parallelism because the two things don't really go, they're not really opposite each other. So instead of saying better is a poor man who walks as an integrity than a rich man who is perverse in his speech or a rich man who is a fool, it substitutes perverse in speech or fool for rich man and expects us to know that he's talking about a rich man who's both perverse or crooked and a fool versus a poor man who has integrity.

So, in this case, the point really isn't poverty or wealth. The point really is integrity versus deceitfulness or crookedness. And again, remember, when we try to think about a proverb, we're thinking about, okay, well, what's really the point? Why is he telling us this information? Well, think about this.

If you were a leader in ancient Israel, wealth and power tend to accrue to those who have wealth and power. So, at some point, it's pretty likely that you're going to be faced with a choice. Do you choose to become wealthy, even though you have to bend, break, or violate the law to do it? Or do you choose to stay in the circumstance you find yourself in, even though it means you probably are going to stay there, you're going to be stuck in poverty, at least as far as you can see.

And Solomon is saying to these youths who are going to be reading his book that, no, you're better off choosing integrity every time. And that's because there are lots of other verses that talk about integrity and talk about its value and its benefit. And actually, a few say that you're safe if you have integrity.

But in this verse, he says something very interesting. He doesn't just say, better is a poor man who has integrity. He says, who walks in his integrity.

And there is the image in this book. Now, in fact, there's another image in the second line, which says, who is crooked in his lips. So, does that mean he has a bent-up mouth? Well, no, because lip stands for the words that come out of his mouth.

And so, we could talk about that for a long time. But I would like to look at the first line, the image in the first line because this is such a fundamental image to the whole book of Proverbs. And that is, this says, a poor man who walks in his integrity.

When we read an image, well, we know that we're reading an image, again, kind of like we know it's a proverb because we just know it is. We know it when we see it. But we can also say, is it possible to actually walk in integrity? That is, is integrity a thing, a physical thing like mud that you can walk in or sand or dirt or something else? The answer, of course, is no, you can't walk in integrity like you can walk in Pennsylvania.

But what if walk stands for life? And what if integrity is being used as walk is a metaphor, and integrity is another metaphor. And in this case, we have lying

underneath these two metaphors, these two really pretty cool ideas. The first one is that integrity is physical stuff.

I know that's kind of weak, but I don't know what better word to use. It's because it's something you can walk in. Now, that sounds pretty strange.

But what it actually suggests is that we have a choice of where we walk. Because you can choose to walk in the mud, or you can walk on the road, or you can walk on the stones, or you can walk in the gravel. And in this case, integrity is a ground surface, or even perhaps a road.

So, it's a path that you choose. And so his use of walk is actually the thing that makes integrity into a metaphor. If he said, better a poor man who lives a life of integrity, see the metaphor is gone.

I guess we could still say, that if we really want to extend it, you can always dig deeper when you're talking about metaphors. So, we could say, well, that is a person whose life is characterized by choices that we would characterize as having integrity, and we could begin to back it up and push it back farther and farther. But what's actually going on, though, you see, he's using a foundational or conceptual metaphor that underlies this, that is found throughout the book of Proverbs, which is that life is a journey.

Remember we talked in, or I mentioned in the first lecture that said that Proverbs says, here's the road, and this is the right road, and whether you turn aside to the right or to the left doesn't matter, you're off the road. It's not really a choice of having a road that's wise and a road that's foolish with nothing in between, although there's some validity to that because there are a few Proverbs that talk that way. But the overall picture is one road, and if you're off the road, you're lost.

It doesn't matter how you got off the road or where you are, where you're going. Well, this picture of life as a journey, the reason for foundational metaphors is that they give us a way of understanding and organizing our thinking about some aspect of reality that we have no way of experiencing directly. Now you say, wait a second, I'm alive, I'm experiencing my life.

Yes, you're experiencing your life. Well, not really. What you're actually experiencing, what I'm actually experiencing is this moment, this little piece.

I can recall former moments, former pieces, some of them, and as I get older, not as many, I can anticipate some moments or pieces that may be coming up, but I can't really envision or understand my whole life, even if I could watch at a very high speed, obviously, a videotape of my whole life from the time I was born up to this moment. And my brain, let's say my brain could take all that information in at the

rate that it would have to be played in order for me not to have to sit here for another half of my life. What would be half of my life at that point? This is beginning to sound like a Ray Bradbury short story.

Sorry, I'll back off that. But even if I were to do that, I still couldn't comprehend everything that had happened as though it were happening to me. And so instead of trying to talk about life simply as life as an abstract thing, human beings have developed a metaphor that says life is a journey.

And that's possible because life begins when we're born, a journey begins in a place. Life ends when we die. And there comes a time when every journey ends.

I'm not talking about life as a journey. Okay, I'm talking about a specific journey to the store or to visit grandparents or to go on vacation or something like that. And Along the way, all the things that happen to us in our lives, well, maybe not all, but most of them have analogs with the kinds of things that happen on journeys, we get into accidents, you can have an accident or your car can break down.

And in the same way, we can run into problems in our lives. So that we even say things about people like his life took a real detour, didn't it? Or her job hit a speed bump, or they're going through a rocky patch right now. Or things are kind of rough and tumble in my life.

And we don't even realize that these come out of or grow out of maybe a better word, this root metaphor, they grow out of this root metaphor that life is a journey. And so, we can use all these little metaphors, without even realizing that the big metaphor is there under the ground. Just like looking at a tree, it's very hard to conceive of the root structure that underlies it.

But it's the root structure that makes the tree possible. No roots, no tree, no root metaphor, no foundation. No root metaphor, no, no little metaphors, no foundational metaphor, you can't build anything on it, you have to have a foundation to have a building.

And when we start to think that way, we realize that all the Proverbs that talk about a man's steps being ordained by the Lord, demand of man plans his way, a journey, a path, the path, the highway, it's a pretty bad translation, don't think of an interstate, okay, or anything like that. We're not quite even sure exactly what kind of a road it was. But some sort of road of the wicked is a path of thorn, is a path of thorn, is a path of thorn.

A thicket of thorns. Well, all those metaphors, and many more, are built around this idea that life is a journey. They're built on the foundational metaphor.

And if we start reading an individual proverb, and come to a metaphor like walks in integrity, we say, what's the foundation? What's lying underneath that? What's the root? Now I can look at all the metaphors that talk about life as a journey, seeing that they're actually talking about the same thing. Whatever the English word may be, whether it is runs, walks, falls, trips, stumbles, path, road, or anything, it doesn't matter. They're all, they all grow out of this common understanding, which, to switch metaphors, uses another, gives us a framework within which to understand them.

Well, let me use another, let me show you another example of a picture. And, well, to back up just to 1901, we can think of that, again, we can take a story, we can make up a story about it, we can make, perhaps you even know somebody to whom that's happened. People who have lost a job because they refused to lie, I know someone to whom that happened, and yet would say today that they're happier and better off for it.

They're not richer, they're actually making less money, and things are a little tighter, but they would say they're happier for it. They would agree with that right away, and I could go into a lot of detail about their story, which I won't. And in the same way, somebody who becomes wealthy through wickedness, whether it's fraud or some other form, I can think of examples of people in that situation as well.

Well, I don't know if they would say they wouldn't do it again, but they are certainly not as happy as the others. So, we can take the picture, and we can unpack the picture into a story, and we can ask ourselves, what is the proverb encouraging us to do? How is it encouraging us to think about life, to think about the choices that we face, and what is it encouraging us toward? If you just turn over a page to chapter 20, there are two very interesting proverbs in chapter 20. Well, actually, every proverb is interesting.

I've never found one that wasn't fascinating once I started to really study it. But there are two that I find fascinating in this chapter, especially as I was getting ready for this lecture. Verse 8 says, that a king who sits on the throne of justice actually winnows all evil with his eyes.

And then the next page is verse 26, a wise king winnows the wicked and turns the wheel over them. Well, there is a lot in there. The two of them have a couple of things in common.

You notice they both talk about kings, they both talk about the wicked or perhaps the guilty, I think is probably a better translation in this case, and they both talk about winnowing. Verse 8 says that he winnows all the guilty with his eyes. Verse 26 simply says that he winnows the guilty and rolls the wheel over them.

What is being portrayed? Well, Solomon uses a pretty nice foundational image metaphor that says that judgment is winnowing. Now, just as we can look at life as a journey and ask, how is it that life is a journey? We can look at judgment as winnowing and say, well, how is it that judgment is winnowing? Think about that. Well, first of all, what is winnowing? That's the first question.

That's why we like that Bible dictionary or even a regular dictionary will give you this information. Winnowing is a process where in the ancient Near East, they would gather all the grain after they'd cut it and they'd beat it with sticks called threshing, we call threshing, actually the word thrash, right, to hit something. Or maybe they'd walked animals over it or done something else because that breaks apart the kernel that's in the middle from the hull, the dried hull that's around the grain.

And then they take it to a place, well, they usually do this all-in-one place so they don't have to carry it far, but to a place where there's a nice breeze, a steady breeze, and they get a bunch of it in a basket or even in a piece of cloth and fling it up in the air. And then the chaff, the light outer stuff, blows away in the wind and the heavy grain drops down. And when they do that long enough and after a while, they'll just have grain, all the chaff will be gone.

Well, I doubt they ever got to 100%, but you know the idea. So, this says that the king winnows the wicked or winnows the guilty. Both verses say that.

Well, when a court of law opens, the judge faces at least two people, one of whom presumably is guilty and the other one presumably is innocent. At the beginning, the judge doesn't know which is which. He doesn't know where the truth lies.

He has no real basis even for making that decision, at least the first time that he encounters these people. So, what is the process of justice? It is the same as the process of throwing the wheat and the chaff mixed up in the air so that the chaff can blow away. Now, the metaphor works if we know what winnowing is.

Because we can see that separating the innocent from the guilty is like separating wheat from chaff. And in fact, this metaphor runs throughout Scripture. I mean, you read it in the prophets, you read it in the teachings of Jesus.

It's in the Psalter, Psalm 1 right away, right? The wicked are like chaff, which the wind drives away. It's all over the place. And it's actually related to another metaphor that is people are plants.

Because chaff and wheat or grain are plant parts. So people are plants and one of the things the king does, switching the metaphor, is he winnows the plant products, the wheat, and the chaff. And so that justice, which is the act of the king in the long run, is the process of separating innocence and guilt.

Actually, the perfect illustration of that in Scripture is what Solomon did with the two women, the thing we talked about in our first lecture. So, the two women come, Solomon doesn't know which woman the baby belongs to, the living baby belongs to. He has no, he's never, as far as we know, he's never met either of them.

Doesn't know anything about it. So, he gets his sword or sends for a sword so that the baby can be cut in half. And that separates the wheat from the chaff right there, just immediately.

Well, what's most interesting about Proverbs 20, 20, verse six is that Solomon says, a wise king, I'm sorry, a king who sits on the throne of justice winnows all guilty with his eyes. Well, I guess, I guess you might be able to put a few grains of wheat on your eyelids and flutter them real hard. And maybe the chaff would blow away if it was a very windy day.

But I don't think you can really winnow anything very effectively with your eyes. Maybe this is another metaphor. What is going on? Well, the eyes are also part of the body that we use for seeing and understanding.

Another foundational metaphor is sight. Think of the difference. Think of the difference between these two statements.

Somebody is telling you the story of how they've been ill-treated at work, let's say. And you say, I see what you mean. Or you say, I hear you.

There's a difference there, isn't there? There's a difference between seeing and hearing that is actually pretty broad. Now, the Bible talks more about hearing than about seeing because that's related to its role as an instructor, not simply someone who's eliciting a response. There's a difference there, too.

So, what's here is that the king is given the ability to discern what is just, and what is right. And that ability to discern what is right is captured by simply saying, with his eyes. Or Solomon's prayer back in 1 Kings 3, when he asked for the gift of being able to judge, that is for the ability to understand.

He actually says, give your servant a hearing heart, a listening heart to judge your people, to discern between good and evil or between innocence and guilt. The same image that is listening versus seeing. Okay, I understand that.

But he's taken the same idea of a sensation, of a sense, there we go, of seeing and said, this is what it means to judge correctly means to see rightly. Or to see rightly enables one to judge correctly, which goes back, remember, to our discussion of

prudence that we had a couple of lectures ago. That is the ability to see and understand the situation accurately.

And Solomon says, so this ability to winnow, to winnow out the guilty is actually an ability that comes from the kind of insight that the book of Proverbs is itself designed to give to its readers. Sort of a self-commending verse, if you will. But it also says implicitly, and this is the kind of judge you should want to be.

Now, in the second reference in verse 26, a wise king winnows the wicked and rolls the wheel over them. There's a little difference. This time the king is called wise.

He winnows the wicked, we're not told how, it doesn't say with his eyes or with anything else. And again, we assume that he doesn't throw them up in the air and see which one blows away and which one drops straight back down. That would be perhaps closer to some of Hammurabi's laws where someone accused of a crime gets thrown into the river.

And if the god wants them, the river being the god, if the god wants them, he takes them. Sort of like some of the trials for being a witch. If you drown, then you're innocent.

And if you're guilty, you can swim. So, you come back and so you can be punished or purged actually. Well, here the wise king winnows the wicked and rolls the wheel over them.

Well, nobody, again, there's some debate about what that means. Is this the threshing wheel? Some translations are put in the threshing wheel. We don't know if they actually threshed with a wheel.

The pictures, the drawings that we have, there are some drawings from Egypt, from some of the tombs in Egypt, that show cattle tied to a turnstile walking around in a circle. And it's just the weight of their hooves. The turnstile isn't doing anything except keeping the cows in place.

So, they're walking around in a circle and just the weight of their feet is crushing them, separating the chaff from the grain. And this, and that could be what we're talking about here. So, it's that the word wheel is actually a metonymy for the wheel in the middle.

So, he drives the wheel, meaning he drives the cows that are turning the wheel or that are controlled by the wheel over them or the oxen or whatever else they might be. Or it could be that he's actually rolling some sort of wheel. We know that from Iron Age olive presses, for example, in an olive press, they would carve a groove, a

round groove in a flat, relatively flat stone and apparently fill the groove with olives and roll another stone that was round around on top.

So, it would roll around the groove and then the olive oil would run out through a hole in the bottom. Perhaps that's what he means. So, he's really mixing up his metaphor.

He's talking about crushing olives with one and talking about winnowing grain with the other and talking about justice, using the whole thing to talk about justice. Perhaps that's what it means. But you see, what underlies it is this idea that justice entails or justice is winnowing, which really is a way of saying justice involves separating what is right from what is wrong.

Justice is not, and there are many other verses that discuss this, justice is not a matter of making sure that the poor always get their way or that the rich always get theirs. Justice is not a matter of looking out for the king's best interest or looking out for the best interest of any one person. It's the attempt to be, well, as the classics, you know, as Greeks and Romans would have had it, is the attempt for justice to be blind, to have the evidence for both sides put in the scales and justice is not distorting the scales because she can't see.

She's just standing there holding them whichever way they go. That determines who's right and who's wrong. And that really is the picture here in the book of Proverbs.

This also shows us, suggests, looking at two verses suggests, another thing that is very helpful when we're thinking about individual verses in Proverbs and that is, since there are many verses on each, or on many, not every topic has a lot of verses that refer to it, but there are quite a few. There may be a few hundred verses that talk about the way we use our words and our mouths. And there are a few verses that talk about things like winnowing.

Actually, these may be the only two. But in reading through the book of Proverbs, like you read through it, I strongly encourage you to have a notebook or today use a computer and just keep track of all the verses that relate to a particular topic and read through the book maybe, I don't know, a few hundred times or, you know, 10 or 20 times and each time look for a different topic. And that way you'll create your own concordance of topics.

And you'll find that some verses refer to, can fit in two or three places. Both these verses could fit under kinship. They could fit under justice.

I guess they could fit under winnowing, although that's really just an image. It's not the point. They're not about farming.

They assume the world of farming. And so that when you read the next verse that has to do with justice, we're not reading that verse in a vacuum. So, what I mean, I guess what I'm trying to say is that when we read Proverbs 10, beginning with chapter 10, it's very tempting to see them as having no context at all and just being free-floating individuals little amoeba in this proverbial soup.

But instead, we can think of it, perhaps we can think that the context of an individual proverb is all the other proverbs that are related to it, to the same topic. So when we read this proverb, it may be very clear. This may be a very clear proverb about justice.

There may be some others that aren't quite so clear. Or we may find that there are 15 verses that deal with justice, actually about 45 that deal with justice. And some of them talk about the nature of the judge.

Some of them talk about taking bribes. Some of them talk about the character of the witness. Some of them talk about the need for justice without really talking about how it comes about.

So, we find there's like a constellation of sub-subjects, the big subject being justice. And there's a whole constellation of other verses that have to do with that topic. We can see how those verses all play off the same idea and play off each other to give us a complete picture of what the book of Proverbs says about justice.

It goes back to what I said earlier about not absolutizing any individual verse. So the person who only ever says, look before you leap, will never do anything because he will spend his or her whole life looking. He needs to understand, no, he who hesitates is lost.

Or some other proverb that says, there are some words that do and some that don't. That's an old Latin proverb, which I can't remember the Latin for. But basically, some people say things and things happen.

Other people just talk, and never do anything. Well, here we find out that there are some verses on, looking at verses on justice, we find these two verses emphasize the need for the king as the Supreme Court, a kind of court of final appeal, to use his discernment and decide where right and wrong lie. And if you're perhaps thinking, well, I'm not going to be a leader or a judge or a senator or a president or a king or anything else, well, that may be true.

Most of us probably aren't. In fact, most Israelites weren't either. But every person makes decisions.

Every parent of more than one child, or even one child, is faced at times with discerning, is this the truth or not? Who's at fault? Everyone in a position of authority has to make judgments. That's part of what it means to have responsibility. And so, the proverb applies by saying to you, to me, be careful.

Because what you're separating is wheat and chaff, and once the chaff blows away, it's gone. So be sure that it's the chaff that blows away and the wheat that drops down. Because these decisions that you're making will affect the lives of the people that you're dealing with.

Another aspect of context, to return to that very briefly, is that when you're making your topical index, remember that it doesn't have to be the same word to be talking about the same idea. What you're really looking for are proverbs that talk about a concept, such as justice or marriage or speech or something else or parenting. And so, they don't have to have the word discipline in them to be talking about discipline.

They don't have to have the word king in them to be talking about leadership. They don't have to have the word wife to be talking about marriage. So, you can see probably pretty quickly that even beginning to compile an index like this is to begin to think about what the proverbs mean.

It's not just an automatic thing. I mean, you could do it this way. You could just ask yourself if you have a computer program, just say, look for all the proverbs with the word I in them, and I want to put them in one place.

They have to do with the I. Well, you need to understand that that's a metaphor for seeing. And then the question becomes, what are you seeing? Are all the proverbs with the word money? But what if a proverb has the word gold but not money? Or wealth but not money? Or something else? So, you need to read through it. It's sort of like the difference between using an electronic card catalog in a library, which will take you to exactly what you want and being able to browse the shelves where you can see the books next to it, and you say, oh, I never knew that book was here.

That looks pretty interesting. And then you find out that that's really the book you wanted, but you couldn't have found it using the computer because the computer didn't really know what you were interested in. Well, the same way in proverbs.

But there's one other aspect of context that may sound a little funny, and that is the proverbs around the verse that you're reading. When we read through, we find that there are many cases where the verses right adjacent to, or maybe two verses away, or three verses away, or three or four verses in a row, all deal with the same or the related topic, even though they may not sound too much like it. So, we read something like this at the beginning of chapter 16.

The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. All a man's ways are clean in his own sight, but the Lord weighs the motives or thoughts. Commit your works to the Lord, so that your plans will be established.

And then it says, the Lord has made everything for his own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil. Wait a second. Does that third one, wait, but what's the point of all those verses? I know I went through them very quickly.

You can look them up on your own. And it goes on to verse five. Everyone who is proud in heart and abomination to the Lord assuredly will not be unpunished.

Wait a second. Verse six, by loving-kindness. We start to read chapter 16 and think through what each verse means.

And suddenly we realize, you know, almost this whole chapter has to do with authority. Sometimes it's the Lord's authority. Sometimes it's the King's authority.

Sometimes it's our responsibility, which is actually our authority for our own lives. And so, we see that there's a collection here of verses that are all linked to each other, sometimes very subtly, so that one might talk about judgment, but who has the right to judge? You have to have the authority to judge. Not everyone has the right to simply call into judgment.

So, when we read a verse in Proverbs, and I think I said the same thing when we talked about the book of Psalms, we can't just read a psalm by it. We need to read the psalm before it and the psalm after it. Because sometimes, I think very most of the time actually, there's a good reason that those three psalms come in a row, in the order that they do and that they're next to each other.

And the same thing is often true, very often true, in the book of Proverbs. So, we look at, for context, we look at the verses around it. And sometimes we will say, I don't see any connection.

And sometimes there may be no connection. Sometimes it may be simply that the connection is one that would have been transparent 3,000 years ago, but because of the difference in our cultures and our way of understanding things, or frankly, even in our translations, the connection just isn't obvious at all to us. But sometimes it will be very clear.

And it's always worth pondering and thinking about. So it is better to assume that there is a connection until you have to conclude that there isn't one, than to just say, well, this proverb stands on its own. I can ignore everything else around it.

So, we talk about context as part of understanding, as part of our trying to understand. We don't just look at the parallelism or the imagery or unpack the story, but we look at the other verses around it to see if they give us any help. And we look at all the other verses on the same topic to see how they might help us.

Let me mention that I want to look at a proverb in particular I said at the end of this talk. But before I do that, there is one other question. All this conversation has probably sounded pretty a-theological.

Like we really are just reading secular wisdom, and all we have to do is run it through the right process, interpretive process, and we'll come out with the right answer. We do have to do that, as we said, as chapter 1, verse 7 says, and as reiterated at the end of chapter 9, in the fear of the Lord, or else we may come away with some intellectual understanding of the proverb's meaning, but our ability to actually use it and appropriate it for it to become part of our lives will be very seriously hampered, if not eliminated unless we have an attitude of obedience and submission and really of trust. But there's another question, I think, that relates to reading proverbs, and that is, if proverbs are part of Scripture, which they are, then what is the role of the book of Proverbs in the role of Scripture, in the function of Scripture? That is, if Scripture is a revelation of God, what is the revelatory role of the book of Proverbs as a whole, and of an individual proverb? Sometimes that's pretty obvious.

So, dishonest weights and dishonest measures, the Lord detests them both. Okay, so the Lord likes honesty. I mean, we don't need the book of Proverbs to tell us that, we don't even need that proverb to tell us that.

We have lots of other places where we find the same thing, but it's said in a pretty memorable way there. And some proverbs are very clear as to how they're related to who God is. So, we have verses that talk about, the rich and the poor meet together, the Lord is the maker of them both.

Well, the whole function of the proverb hangs on the Lord's role as our creator, as the creator of all human beings, regardless of their station in life. So, we have verses that we could say are explicitly theological. The hand of the king is like channels of water, is like a channel of water, and the heart of the king is like a channel of water.

In the hand of the Lord, he turns it wherever he wishes. So, just like an irrigation ditch, which is the image being used there, the farmer can make the water go wherever he wants it to, well, the Lord can do the same thing with the king's heart. He can just turn the king, so the king, which, you know, raises, there's an image there that people are water, not very, and there's not much ice in Israel, so, natural ice, that is.

So, we're talking about liquid water. People are just changeable, they can be steered wherever you want them to go. Well, that's how the Lord views the king.

And there's another image there, by the way, a metaphor underneath that, which is that the Lord is a farmer. He's a farmer who practices irrigation, digs ditches, and steers the water where he wants it to go. Well, that's pretty clear.

I think that's a verse that says the Lord is sovereign, he controls, and there's not a whole lot that any human being can do about it. But there are other verses that are not nearly as clear. And for this, I want to go back, because of time, to a verse we've already talked about, and that's chapter 10, verse 1. And ask this question, does the verse that says, a wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is his mother's grief, does that actually add anything to our understanding of who God is? If we think about the picture of a web that I suggested, and that we are, that human beings are related, so that what happens to one affects others, and the closer they are, the more deeply they're affected.

That suggests something else, I think. And I want to say, right up front, I don't think this comes just out of the proverb itself, okay? It's the kind of conclusion that comes from probably reading as widely as we can, rather than as narrowly as we can get away with. But here's an idea.

What if the verse is talking about the importance of relationships, and using this image of a wise and foolish son, and the effect on appearance, to cause us to stop and think about how our actions affect those around us, especially those near to us. We could say, well, God is our heavenly father, and our actions grieve him or please him. Okay, there are places in scripture that suggest that.

I'm not sure that's what this verse is really talking about. Maybe it's more looking at giving us a new way to think about the nature of our existence. You know, we quote 2 Timothy about all scripture being God-breathed and given for these purposes, you know, for correcting us and reproofing us, training us in righteousness, etc.

But perhaps we could think about that not just in terms of moral correction. Maybe part of the purpose of scripture is to correct the way we think, and the way we understand reality. So that a verse like Proverbs 10:1, then, is saying to us that none of us exists of and unto ourselves, that we have responsibilities to other people, that whether or not we can understand or appreciate or want those responsibilities, or whether we appreciate the relationship that gives us that responsibility, that is, in this case, whether we appreciate the fact that I'm the son of a certain father and a certain mother, is immaterial.

That in thinking through this verse and its implications, not just for our behavior, but for our way of thinking, our manner of thinking, what God is showing us is that the

universe is actually a relational universe. And then that ought, in turn, to suggest to us that we think, well, if the universe is created by God, and we have all that great statement in Proverbs 8, talks about not just the creation of the universe by God, but by wisdom as well, then the creation that takes on the character of its creator is itself showing us that God is relational. I'm not saying that this verse reveals that God is a trinity.

I'm not trying to smuggle that into a proverb. I'm raising this because I think that we can think far more broadly about Proverbs than simply their behavioral issues. And that a proverb is a compressed story.

No, it's not even a compressed novel. It's more like a compressed epic like the Hobbit in the Lord of the Rings and the Silmarillion all rolled into eight words. That then is like, to use another metaphor, like a door that invites us to step into a world, a world in which we will live a certain way because we understand and see in a new way.

I hope that you enjoy reading the book of Proverbs as much as I do, studying them, and being blessed by them. Thanks for listening.

This was the fourth and final lecture by Dr. Fred Putnam on the book of Proverbs.