

Palma Ceia Presbyterian Church  
Adult Faith Formation  
Proverbs – Wisdom Literature and Faithful Living  
Sunday, May 22, 2022  
Bill Hull

[All biblical quotations, are from the *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition* NRSVUE]

“I will show you still a more excellent way.”

1 Corinthians 12:31

<sup>12</sup>“Blessed are you, O Lord;  
teach me your statutes.

<sup>13</sup>With my lips I declare  
all the ordinances of your mouth.

<sup>14</sup>I delight in the way of your decrees  
as much as in all riches.

<sup>15</sup>I will meditate on your precepts,  
and fix my eyes on your ways.

<sup>16</sup>I will delight in your statutes;  
I will not forget your word.”

Psalm 119:12-16

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom.”

Colossians 3:16a

“Proverbs becomes not stepping stones to legalism, but signposts to grace.”

(*The Communicator’s Commentary – Proverbs*, David A. Hubbard, Word Books Publisher, 1989, p. 12)

## INTRODUCTION

The use of proverbs as a means of communicating is common in all times and cultures.

- How would you define a “proverb”?
- What are some common, non-biblical, proverbial statements that are influential in your life?
- What is the value and effect of composing and using proverbs in our lives?

## Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian book of Proverbs

Our journey in this class, as in any study of the Bible, is to encounter the challenge of “then” and “now” – what was the context and content of the original ancient writers, and how may we legitimately understand our context and apply the messages to our lives today?

The original compilers of the book of Proverbs seem to make their purpose apparent from the beginning:

**Proverbs 1:2-6** (underlinings added)

<sup>2</sup>For learning about wisdom and instruction,  
for understanding words of insight,

<sup>3</sup>for gaining instruction in wise dealing,  
righteousness, justice, and equity;

<sup>4</sup>to teach shrewdness to the simple,  
knowledge and prudence to the young —

<sup>5</sup>let the wise also hear and gain in learning  
and the discerning acquire skill,

<sup>6</sup>to understand a proverb and a figure,  
the words of the wise and their riddles.

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## Author

"The "authors" of Proverbs are, in essence, the community of Israel — countless unnamed and unknown persons who passed these proverbs from generation to generation.... Its authority springs from its deep roots in the whole community." (*Proverbs*, Christine R. Yoder, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries, 2009, p. xxiv)

## Date

"Notably, the very factors that confound our efforts to pin the book down conclusively to a time and place contribute to a sense that Proverbs is timeless and universal. It reads as wisdom for everyone because it appears particular to no one." (Yoder, p. xxiii)

## Style

"Proverbs are artistic. The sages teach with vivid metaphors and similes, wordplay, rhythm, alliteration (repetition of the same or similar consonant[s] in a line or group of lines), assonance (repetition of the same vowel), ambiguity, irony, humor, and so on." (Yoder, p. xxvii)

"Their search for knowledge is international and ecumenical in scope — so much so that they include in the book two sections that are arguably attributed to foreigners (Agur, 30:1-33; Lemuel, 31:1-9). Perhaps this esteem for the wisdom of others and the sages' strategies for adapting that wisdom for use in their context may encourage our efforts today to engage in cross-cultural and interfaith public moral discourse." (Yoder, p. xxix)

"Israel's teachers were persistently passionate in their concern to lead their students in the right path. They argued, badgered, reasoned, illustrated, pleaded, warned, and commanded in order to make their points. In short, they cared. And they voiced that care with every technique in the repertoire that had been in the making among the wise of the ancient world for two thousand years before Solomon mounted Israel's throne." (Hubbard, p. 43)

## Proverbs 8:1-31

Various scholars highlight Proverbs 8 as significant, which one scholar says is "the full-colour portrait" of the book of Proverbs (*The Message of Proverbs*, David Atkinson, Inter-Varsity Press, 1996, p. 43), and another describes it as "the summit of Old Testament discipleship" (*Man and the Natural World, Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800*, Keith Thomas, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 22).

[The Gifts of Wisdom]

1 Does not wisdom call and understanding raise her voice? 2 On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; 3 beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out:

4 "To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all who live. 5 O simple ones, learn prudence; acquire intelligence, you who lack it. 6 Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right, 7 for my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips.

8 All the words of my mouth are righteous; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them. 9 They are all straight to one who understands and right to those who find knowledge.

10 Take my instruction instead of silver and knowledge rather than choice gold, 11 for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.

12 I, wisdom, live with prudence, and I attain knowledge and discretion. 13 The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.

14 I have good advice and sound wisdom; I have insight; I have strength. 15 By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; 16 by me rulers rule, and nobles, all who govern rightly.

17 I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me. 18 Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and prosperity. 19 My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield

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than choice silver. 20 I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice, 21 endowing with wealth those who love me and filling their treasuries.”

[Wisdom’s Part in Creation]

22 “The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. 23 Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. 24 When there were no depths I was brought forth when there were no springs abounding with water. 25 Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, 26 when he had not yet made earth and fields or the world’s first bits of soil.

27 When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, 28 when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, 29 when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, 30 then I was beside him, like a master worker, and I was daily his delight, playing before him always, 31 playing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.”

### **Applications to our lives today**

- The title I chose for this class is, “Proverbs – Wisdom Literature and Faithful Living.” I also resonate with Derek Kidner’s characterization of Proverbs as, “Godliness in working clothes.” (*Proverbs*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Intervarsity Press, p. 35)
- How do Proverbs inform and shape your lives today?

### **Conclusion**

“The contents of Proverbs speak volumes to our modern age as they have to every generation. Modulating power with wisdom and compassion is the basic message of Proverbs. Can such a lesson ever be irrelevant, ever obsolete, ever misdirected? Not so long as the sons and daughters of Eve and Adam seek to make sense of human life in a world where folly is in large supply, arrogance knows no shortage, and fickleness is a way of life.” (Hubbard, p. 12)

### **Prayer**

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;  
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art;  
Thou my best thought, by day or by night;  
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, and Thou my true Word;  
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;  
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all. Amen.

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**Some New Testament quotes that are in the form of a proverb:**

**Matthew 7:6a** "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine."

**Matthew 7:7-8** "Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened."

**Matthew 12:25** "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand."

**2 Corinthians 9:6** "The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

**Galatians 6:7** "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow."

**Matthew 16:23, Mark 8:33** "Get behind me, Satan!"

**Luke 23:34a** "Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

**Acts 20:35** "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

**John 8:7** "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

**Ephesians 4:26** "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,

**1 Timothy 6:10** "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."

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### New Testament allusions to and quotes from Proverbs

Proverbs	New Testament
3:1, 11-12 – “My child, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments... My child, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves the one he loves....”	Hebrews 12:5-6 “And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children — ‘My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when you are punished by him; for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts.’”
3:34 “Toward the scorners he is scornful, but to the humble he shows favor.”	James 4:6 “But God gives all the more grace; therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”  1 Peter 5:5 “In the same way, you who are younger must be subject to the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”
10:12 “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.”	James 5:20 “You should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner’s soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”  1 Peter 4:8 “Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for over a multitude of sins.”
11:31 “If the righteous are repaid on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner!”	1 Peter 4:18 “And, ‘if it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?’”
24:12 “...if you say, ‘Look, we did not know this’ — does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it? And will he not repay all according to their deeds?’”	Matthew 16:27 “‘For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done.’”  Romans 2:6 “He will repay according to each one’s deeds.”
25:21 “If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat, and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink...”	Romans 12:20 “...Instead, ‘if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink, for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.’”
26:11 (if you are not squeamish before having lunch, look up these references)	2 Peter 2:22

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## GOLDEN RULE ACROSS THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

### Baha'i Faith

Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself.... Blessed is he who preferreth his brother to himself.

*Baha'u'llah, Gleanings*



### Buddhism

Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.

*The Buddha, Udana-Varga 5.18*



### Christianity

In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

*Jesus, Matthew 7:12*



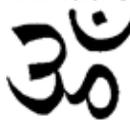
### Confucianism

One word which sums up the basis of all good conduct others what you do not want done to yourself.

*Confucius, Analects 15.23*

loving-kindness. Do not do to

### Hinduism



This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you.

*Mahabharata 5:1517*

### Islam

Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself.

*The Prophet Muhammad, Hadith*



### Jainism

One should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated.

*Mahavira, Sutrakritanga 1.11.33*

### Judaism

What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary. Go and learn it.

*Hillel, Talmud, Shabbath 31*



### Sikhism

I am a stranger to no one; and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed, I am a friend to all.

*Guru Granth Sahib, p.1299*



### Taoism

Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain and your neighbor's loss as your own loss. *Lao Tzu, T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien, 213-218*



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## Unitarianism

We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

## Zoroastrianism

Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself.

### **Shayast-na-Shayast 13.29**



(Source: Scarborough Missions, [http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Golden\\_rule/](http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Golden_rule/))

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[This article by Frederick Buechner is included because of his focus of the importance of questions, and my sense that the questions listed are themselves of the nature of proverbs.]

### Questions — Frederick Buechner

On her deathbed, Gertrude Stein is said to have asked, "What is the answer?" Then, after a long silence, "What is the question?"

Don't start looking in the Bible for the answers it gives. Start by listening for the questions it asks.

We are much involved, all of us, with questions about things that matter a good deal today but will be forgotten by this time tomorrow — the immediate wheres and whens and hows that face us daily at home and at work — but at the same time we tend to lose track of the questions about things that matter always, life-and-death questions about meaning, purpose, and value. To lose track of such deep questions as these is to risk losing track of who we really are in our own depths and where we are really going. There is perhaps no stronger reason for reading the Bible than that somewhere among all those India-paper pages there awaits each one of us, whoever we are, the one question that (though for years we may have been pretending not to hear it) is the central question of our individual lives. Here are a few of them:

- For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? (Matthew 16:26)
- Am I my brother's keeper? (Genesis 4:9)
- If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)
- What is truth? (John 18:38)
- How can anyone be born after having grown old? (John 3:4)
- What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun? (Ecclesiastes 1:3)
- Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? (Psalm 139:7)
- Who is my neighbor? (Luke 10:29)
- What shall I do to inherit eternal life? (Luke 10:25)

When you hear the question that is your question, then you have already begun to hear much. Whether you can accept the Bible's answer or not, you have reached the point where at least you can begin to hear it too.

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