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HOUR OF THE OWL: Living Life with Wisdom

by Rusty A. Lang

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Rusty A. Lang

Living Life with Wisdom

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This work is based on the author's development of wisdom over 70 years. Anecdotal illustrations as well as the main fictional characters and their names, though true to life, are composite characters and any resemblance to people living or dead is coincidental.

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Dedication

Dedicated to all those who supported me through the
publication and distribution of my autobiography

Good Things Take Time:

Metamorphosis of a Damaged Soul

To all those who encouraged me to continue writing to
produce

Timeless Treasures: Digging for Gold Daily.

Now I bring you

Hour of the Owl: Living Life with Wisdom.

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Chapter One 1989

Wisdom

I remember the night I learned the teacher appears when the student is ready.

Hi, my name is Pol. I was Paul at birth. My grandfather's name was Solomon but we all called him Sol. So I became Pol.

I never knew my father. Mum didn't talk about him. Though everyone called her Mrs, I never saw her wear a ring. I guess today this wouldn't start any gossip mills running. But this was 1989, there were lots of whispering in the neighbourhood of our small community. I wasn't sure what the fuss was about. Oh, I did get teased at school as most kids had two parents.

We got along okay and Sol did any man type stuff Mum needed done. He lived in a cabin type structure at the foot of an easy mountain within walking distance from my Mum and me. Mum called it a granny flat which confused me at the time because there was no granny.

We lived on the edge of a town in rural New South Wales. A small land holding but enough space for us. Visitors from the coast and overseas called it the outback. Anything west of the Nandewar ranges was the outback to them. But it was simply a small rural town, not any different from hundreds of other towns in country Australia.

My teacher told us about some survey report of a thousand people across Australia in that year. She said, big city dwellers were fifty per cent more likely to become victims of crime than us. Because we lived in a town under ten thousand people. From her we learned that Australia is one of the most urbanised nations of the world.

The local copper, policeman to adults, visited the school. He talked about behaviour on the streets. I was more interested in cars and bikes so I asked. 'Do thieves break into cars much here?'

'Yes, the most serious crime in our town often involves the stealing of a car or motorcycle. That is why we tell all adults to lock their vehicles.'

I did not understand all my teacher and the copper said, but I felt safe living where I did and it was home to me.

Anyway, I suppose I should get along with my story before you go to do something else.

Grandfather stood tall and regal. He had a uniform garb of overalls and open necked shirt. Mum said he was in his 60's. That seemed ancient to me.

He stepped out on the back porch on this particular night where my story begins and lit the barbeque. As I came wandering down the back path from our house, Sol greeted me with his customary twinkling eyes and ready smile.

I had already come to believe Sol knew everything about everything. He was Superman, Batman and Spiderman all rolled into one. Though only seven at the

time, I was already full of worldly curiosity. ‘Grandfather, how did you get to be so smart?’

The older man sighed with contentment as we sat down to eat. There was nothing like Sol’s home-made sausages between two slabs of bread. I always piled cooked onion on top of the meat and laced the lot with mustard, tomato and barbecue sauce. Sol called it “the works”.

Sol was a practical man. He cleared away the dishes.

We had been too busy eating and cleaning to think about talking for a spell. But Sol never forgot any question I asked, and picked up right where we left off. And there beneath a Southern Cross sky my lifetime training on God’s wisdom began.

‘Pol, being smart is using your head. Using the brain God has given you to the best of your ability but wisdom is something else altogether’.

There was a lot of adult talk about smart phones coming onto the market soon. Now, I knew about mobile phones and all the fun and clever things they could do. I guessed he might have been speaking about texting, movies and video games.

I sat on the edge of the wooden veranda steps and swatted at an aggressive mosquito. Not satisfied with Sol’s comment, I pressed him. ‘But, what is the real difference between being smart and wise?’

‘My journey with wisdom began a long, long time ago. She did not come in a neat package like a smart phone of the future will, but crept up on me over time. As I came to accept that all knowledge is in the mind of God.

God's wisdom is knowledge that leads to understanding. As my knowledge grew, I came to understand that true wisdom comes from a personal relationship. A relationship with our creator God.'

Grandfather reached for his worn, torn and well-read Book beside his rocking chair. He opened it and read, '*Wisdom rests in the heart of one who has understanding.*'¹

That right there felt like when I faced Billy Creed at the backyard cricket crease, watching a curve ball coming my way. But Sol always knew when he was ahead of me and my boy like thinking.

'Pol, true godly wisdom is active and alive. '*Wisdom shouts in the streets, she lifts her voice in the square.*'²

'But Sol, why did God call wisdom she?'

It was many years before I understood why wisdom is personified. This was the first question Sol told me to save "for later".

'Wisdom is the proper application of knowledge and being able to think on your feet. The danger you will face in the 21st century is to drown in information while starving for true wisdom.'

'But grandfather, how does this affect me now?' Sometimes I still called him grandfather although he preferred Sol.

'Pol, do you remember last year when you ran out on the road after your ball? And Mr. D from next door came around the corner in his utility and almost hit you?'

'Sure, that was scary.'

'If you had stopped to think about where you were running. If you had remembered all the lessons you heard

from your mother, you would not have been in any danger. That is thinking on your feet. That would have been applying the knowledge you knew.'

Grandfather never treated me like a little kid. He still allowed me to be a child but he spoke in terms that would stand the test of time.

'Wisdom is demonstrated in what you say, what you do and how you live. Wisdom is in the decisions you make and in your relationship with others. It is when and how you use knowledge that has been seasoned with understanding. Another way to describe godly wisdom is the ability to make good choices' (Fee & Douglas 1993).³

That last part began to make some sense to me. The part about seasoning knowledge with understanding was what Mum would call, double dutch. My mind went down a salt and pepper track.

'Sol, is it like when I am playing tennis? My coach says unless I put an easy forehand away with a winning shot, I might find myself in a marathon rally?' I felt quite grown up to have thought to say that. As if I understood where this chat was leading.

'Yes, in a way it is like that. But Pol, wisdom is not something gained like a certificate put on the wall. It is not a mark of achievement or a gold cup for winning at sport. It is more like a hot-line, open to information gathered daily from the source.'

'What source are you talking about?' The only sauce I knew was mustard, tomato and barbeque.

Sol had this way of pausing before he spoke. He seemed to be mulling over what he wanted to say. Later when I was a teenager, this irritated me. As a kid, I

accepted it as part of Sol's habits. In a funny kind of way it made me feel special. As if I mattered enough for him to think about what I might need to hear.

He chuckled as though he knew what I was thinking. How does he do that?

'Pol, the English language has the same sounding word for many different meanings. The source I was referring to is this Book.' He patted it with affection, like a precious possession.

Sun was setting over the land in brilliant reds, blues and purples. Birds began to settle for the night in the branches of the trees above us. My head was starting to droop. Sol touched me on the shoulder and told me it was time to head off to bed. I often stayed with Sol in my earlier days. Much to my Mum's annoyance, I always did what he told me. She said I was deaf in the ear on her side. I wondered what she meant.

The next morning when I wandered out to the kitchen, I could see Sol on the porch, gazing off into the sunrise. The Book open on his lap. I did not know if I should disturb him but he turned and beckoned me to come.

Sitting with feet dangling off the veranda railing, I too stared off into the fast colouring sky.

Sharing these silent moments taught me to appreciate God's presence. To be aware of his creation in years to come. Sitting, breathing in crisp fresh morning air, listening to the world around waking up. In this way I learned also that wisdom could be found in developing the art of quietness.

But being a young kid whose favourite word was “why”, I broke into the quiet. ‘Sol, where does the sun sleep?’

‘It doesn’t sleep. Everything in the sky, the whole solar system, revolves around the centre of the Milky Way Galaxy. Yet it appears to us on earth to stay still. It is the earth that is moving around the sun that gives us day and night.’

‘But Sol, why is every sunrise and sunset different?’

‘Over hundreds of years, no sunrise or sunset has been the same. Such is the nature of our creator God. He is magnificent, all powerful, all knowing and creative.’

My stomach began to growl, so we moved inside. Sol never ate the same food for breakfast. This day he produced bananas on muesli. As we sat down to munch I asked him. ‘Sol where do bananas come from?’

He surprised me with the words. ‘There are over five hundred different types of bananas.’ I could only count to a hundred so this seemed a huge number.

‘The banana fruit is a berry and grows on the world’s largest herb that looks like a palm tree. Sometimes’, he continued, ‘we wander through life making assumptions on what we see. And assumptions are often negative. When we don’t know the truth we can make some foolish mistakes.’

I was having difficulty picturing a banana tree as an herb. I was thinking of the parsley and mint my Mum grew in pots but I don’t think that was the purpose of what he said. Sol never gave information to appear smart but had a way of using whatever was in front of us for a life lesson.

For instance, Sol knew I liked chocolate ice cream and often gave me a bowlful after we shared an evening meal. One night he stated. 'Life can be like a scoop of chocolate ice cream. It's delicious, but you have to remember to enjoy each mouthful. Otherwise before you know it, it's gone.'



Nuts and bolts of Wisdom

'The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple' (Proverbs 119:130).

God's wisdom is infinite. It is the perfect comprehension of all that is and might be (Romans 11:33-36). God is the source of wisdom as of power. His wisdom comes to his people through the fear of the Lord (Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10).

In man, God's wisdom is a practical attribute. This includes technical skill (Exodus 28:3), military might and ability (Isaiah 10:13) and shrewdness for personal ends (1 Kings 2:6).

Overview

Wisdom may be found throughout the Word of God. Though Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs and the Song of Solomon are the main sources.

In general terms, Proverbs are short stories, not stand alone separate truths. Ecclesiastes can be compared relatively to the book of James. Job is primarily concerned with his foolish friends, the case for suffering

and the sovereignty of God. Song of Solomon emphasises the romantic love in lifetime marriages. It wipes away any case for same sex marriage. Psalms are songs of praise for God's work in creation or in history.

There is two main forms of wisdom. One is the practical aspect. The conventional lower level as seen in Psalms, Proverbs and Song of Solomon. The other is the speculative or higher level as seen in Job and Ecclesiastes.

According to Bradshaw (1995)⁴ specific wisdom sayings, are also found in narratives and prophecy (1 Samuel 24:12-14; 1 Kings 20:10-12; Jeremiah 31:27-30; Ezekiel 18:1-4). In the New Testament wisdom sayings are found in Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 13; Galatians 5:19-23; Ephesians 5:22: 6-9; Colossians 3:6-17; Hebrews 3:12-19; 4:11-13; 6:1-12; James 1-3; 1 Peter 2:11-17.

Wisdom literature tension

The uniqueness of wisdom literature is that it moves from the rational (law of nature or common sense) to revelation (insight or godly wisdom). This keeps a tension between man (human) and the divine (God).

For example, there is tension in the background of much of Isaiah wisdom literature. During 587 BC the authority was the king's priests. At the same time, prophets were often imprisoned due to their ecstasy tendencies. The priests carried out the law in strict legal terms, resulting in legalism. In this way, the priests held the authority. The scribes were interpreters of authority and the prophets represented God.

What is wisdom?

The basic aim of God's wisdom is practical application. It supplies the information needed to make right choices. It is not only having knowledge but knowing how and when to use it.

Wisdom rests in the heart of the one who has understanding. For God's wisdom is knowledge that leads to understanding. Said another way, wisdom is the proper application of knowledge. The Word confirms this. It states wisdom is the ability to use the knowledge we have.

'Make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding'. 'For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding'. 'Acquire wisdom. Acquire understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth' (Proverbs 2:2, 6; 4:5).

Knowledge is born out of learning and exercising common sense. Examining the consequences of actions and choices will lead us towards understanding and God's wisdom. 'Learning comes from experience and wisdom comes from the mistakes we make while learning' (Chan 1994).⁵

Hugh Lasgarn in the TV series *Vet in Practice* was heard to say,⁶ 'Wisdom is the experience of the changes and trials of life, events or a course of events by which one is affected.'

In this sense, wisdom then is the result of experience and knowledge together with practical insight and judgement. 'A person with experience is never at the mercy of a person with an argument' (Hinn (1990). ⁷ 'Yet it is not wise to shape our theology by experience but by the Word of God'⁸ (Boddy n.d).

To sum up - to be wise is to have, show and demonstrate sound judgement resulting from experience and knowledge. It is being prudent, sensible, alert and smart, aware.

Bell (2002) ⁹ simply says ‘wisdom in knowing God through a relationship with Jesus and the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit.’

Applying Wisdom

Word from the Lord (Morphew 2015)¹⁰ – ‘Before speaking a direction or idea, pause and ask me. Then the fullness of my plan will come to you at once.’

Matthew 7:7, ‘Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.’

‘Wisdom and might must operate together. But to get wisdom and might will cost us our pride and independence. It requires being dependent on God’ (Dollar 1992).¹¹

Applying wisdom is bound up with doing God’s will (Deuteronomy 4:6). For to forsake his Word is to lose one’s wisdom (Jeremiah 8:8-9).



Study options for digging deeper

Q. Sol said:

- Wisdom is demonstrated in what you say, what you do, how you live, the decisions you make and in our relationship with others.

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- It is when and how you use knowledge that has been seasoned with understanding.
- Another way to describe godly wisdom is the ability to make good choices.

How do these three statements apply to your life personally?

- Q. Wisdom is personified in Proverbs 8 in terms related to the concept of the Word in John 1:1-18. Wisdom became one of the names of God. The Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit being the Spirit of wisdom. Study Proverbs 1:20-33 and 9:1-6 then answer for yourself why God calls wisdom “she”.
- Q. Meditate on these scriptures that point to Jesus Christ: Proverbs 1:23-24; 2:7; 3:19-20; 8:30; 20:21; 21:20-21.
- Q. The greatest privilege of all is to have access to the Most High God. Intimacy with the Lord should be the highest goal. With this in mind what does fear of the Lord mean to you? Study Proverbs 2:1-5; 14:26-27; 16:6 and Psalm 25:14; 34:7-10, 60:4-5; 111:10; 145:19. Then look at Malachi 4:2-3.

Chapter Five 1993 to 1994

Proverbs and Seers

As I grew my train track explorations became as exciting as watching a tap drip.

One of the highlights of my younger days had been going to the train yards. I had enjoyed watching the shunting and hissing, grinding and groaning of shifting tracks, gears and connecting carriages.

It was now 1993 and I was eleven. I only had one more year of primary school. This change in my attitude bothered me so I asked Sol about it.

‘Pol you are growing up inside and out’.

Then he told me what I thought was his first far-fetched story from the Book. It was about a young boy who used to play music to sheep in the hills and killed a lion and a bear to protect them. Then one day, his father sent him down to a war zone with a message for his army brothers. But the story got really interesting as Sol opened the Book and asked me to read 1 Samuel chapter 17, verses 41 to 50. It was about how this young sheep farmer, David, killed a giant, an enemy soldier.

This did not seem to answer my question until he said. ‘This is a time in your life when you are facing a giant. There are decisions you will make soon that will bring you to the same place as this young fellow.’

That gave me something to think about, especially when he told me the story was true. For I had been wondering why God would tell a whopper in his Book.

I had been thinking it was like the time my mate Billy told me he had killed this giant of a snake with a marble. Or how he knocked a pigeon off the roof just by whistling at it. As always Sol seemed to know what I was thinking.

‘Pol, remember God can not lie’. He didn’t say would not but said, cannot. Wisps of a previous discussion about God always telling the truth floated by my thoughts. Yet, I questioned Sol because he had told me God was a person, alive and could talk with us and I knew all people could lie.

‘That is one of the differences between God and us Pol’.

‘But Jesus came as a man and you told me he could not lie or tell fibs either.’

‘Jesus, along with the Holy Spirit and Father God, is God. He is at the end of our search for truth’.

First I found three Gods together in heaven. Now I find out they are all One God. Though I did not understand, this knowledge fell straight into my mind like a refreshing drink of cool water on a hot day.

It was the era of video movies. Every town had its well-stocked rental shop. The most popular movies watched by teenagers were ‘The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle’ and ‘Arcade’. The first was about four fictional characters trained in the art of Ninjutsu, a take-off of

Jujutsu. Arcade was a virtual reality game that begins to take over the minds of teenagers.

The other two favourite movies were 'Dazed and Confused'. The title said it all. This was about the adventures of High Schoolers last day of school. The other was 'The Crush'. This involved a teenage babysitter being the focus of two boys and a man's separate obsession.

None of my mates cared about the Book and I had started to want to do all the same things as them. I had saved enough to buy an old bike and this transport took me into town where we hung out on the streets.

My efforts to put away in my bank account some of my pocket money each week began to dwindle until they did not exist. I was using it on the penny arcade machines. I had stopped going to church as I wanted to sleep in then spend the rest of the day hanging out with my mates.

Conflict started to confuse my thinking. Worldly desires filtered into my attitude and actions.

Mum must have told Sol about her concerns for me. My time with him had taken a backseat until one day he came up to the house. He asked if I would like to go to the video store and pick out some movies to watch in an overnight visit.

I would have rather watch them with my mates but Sol's offer was too juicy to turn down. I had mixed feelings about his possible reaction to my choices. He did not flinch but allowed me to take my time and gave me the money to pay for the rentals. I chose the four I mentioned.

I still marvel at his wisdom. I think he hoped I would overdose on junk brain food and have nightmares for weeks after.

Sol watched them all with me. His quiet accepting silence actually cured me of wanting foolish, worthless entertainment.

Talking to Sol and Mum about this weekend years later I learned something. Mum and a couple of her church buddies got together that weekend and held a marathon prayer meeting for my life. Sol too, was actually in prayer the whole time as well.

It was a gamble because some of my mates got hooked on junk food movies but it had the opposite effect on me. This is when I learned God answered the prayers of righteous people.

I also learned I would rather see a good movie twice than watch a bad movie once.

We had started the movie marathon on Saturday afternoon and continued into the night. I collapsed into my bed at Sol's. When I woke Sunday morning, Sol was already gone to service. I was surprised he did not wake me but then he never coerced me into going.

As I staggered out to the kitchen I was curious to see his Book on the table. Sol had left a small note on an open page. It simply said,

'Pol, it is hard to comprehend but Father God loves us as much as he loves his Son, Jesus.' I still have this note today, twenty years later.

I sat down to eat my cereal. My eyes fell on the open Book. I started to read. I figured I didn't have anything else to do.

*'These things Jesus spoke; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come, glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as you gave Him authority over all mankind, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. And this is eternal life that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.'*²³

Jesus was talking with his Father God as though they were in the same room together. A lump came to my throat and tears welled at the back of my eyes. It was a pivotal moment in my life.

I had been neglecting Piper. A wave of guilt and regret swept over me. When I motioned to take her for a walk her response and expression displayed so much pleasure. We wandered down through the trees to the creek. Sitting on the bank watching Piper try to catch butterflies, I suddenly wished I had brought my Book with me. Then I sensed a quiet about me I had never known before.

It was as though the Book was sitting there on the bank of the creek next to me. I was too awed to open my mouth so I just drank in the atmosphere.

When I first acquired Piper, Sol had said. 'True moral fibre demands accepting responsibility and being honest in all circumstances. This will need separating ourselves from bad influences'. Somehow this came to the forefront of my mind as I continued to sit and think on my life so far.

It was there that I decided to seek out a buddy at school, Henry. Henry was a loner but very smart, quite pleasant to everyone. I knew he was a Christian and in his own way, a friend to all. I wasn't sure how my mates would see this move because they thought Henry a bit of a loser. Then I remembered what Sol said about pleasing people.

It was only a few days later I told Sol about my decision. His response was to give me 1 Corinthians 15:33 and 16:13 to read.

'Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals"'. 'Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong'.



Book of Proverbs

'The fear of the Lord leads to life, so that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil' (Proverbs 19:23).

In Proverbs, wisdom is not simply intellectual but involves the whole person.

The book of Proverbs is a collection of sayings related to a pattern of life. It is one example of the biblical wisdom tradition and raises questions of values, moral behaviour, the meaning of human life and right conduct. It deals specifically with sin and holiness, being a book of practical ethics concerning these issues.

A biblical proverb is a highly concentrated statement expressing a truth; a definitive statement. It may be a short saying expressing a general truth for

practical godly living or a comparison or question on moral matters which may expand into a short parable. It may be a snatch of poetry, as in Proverbs 31, extoling the wife of noble character, or a brief story.

An adage is simply another form of general proverb and is a short statement expressing a general truth. It does not always entail comparison but holds to biblical truth when applied to faith e.g.

The Old covenant feeds from without,
The New covenant feeds from within.

And another example –

When we look to the storm there is unrest, but
when we look to the Lord, there is peace.

Other words for a proverb or adage might be: maxim, axiom, aphorism, dictum, precept, epigram, epigraph, motto, truism, platitude, common place saying and a pearl of wisdom, expression, phrase, formula, slogan, quotation and byword. These may apply to secular or biblical sayings.

Common mistakes regarding Proverbs

Hyperbole is a common element in biblical Proverbs and this explains why so many are misinterpreted. A hyperbole is a deliberate exaggeration used to make a point (Bradshaw 1995).²⁴

Proverbs are not legally binding promises from God. He won't underwrite whatever foolish thing we decide to do (16:3), nor are Christian parents guaranteed that their children will become believers (22:6).

To be understood today, Proverbs need to be transported forward, contextualised e.g. royalty occupies

a far different role to that which is held in ancient Israel. A modern application might be that the Lord grants the righteous favour with those in position of favour.

It is also a mistake to read an individual statement taken as a whole truth on any subject. It is wiser to collate the various themes. For instance, when this is done with the subject of riches a more balanced picture is given when we read 10:15; 11:4; 11:18; 17:5 and 23:4-5.

Why was Proverbs written?

Chapter 1:1-6 tells us specifically why Proverbs was written. For attaining and understanding wisdom, to learn discipline and prudence, to teach us what is right, fair and just, to guide youth and the naïve, add to adult wisdom and guide the discerning.

The main themes focus on wisdom, humanity and the wise person (Galen 2010).²⁵ The most important topic is God. He created wisdom (8:22-23) and used wisdom to create the world and all it contains (8:24-31). He is the source of wisdom (2:6-7; 30:5-6). The beginning of wisdom is the *'fear of the Lord'* (1:7; 2:5; 9:10; 10:27; 14:27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:54; 23:17) and wisdom needs to be desired above anything else (4:7-9; 8:10-11).

The purpose of the themes and topics in Proverbs is for practical advice for living as mentioned in chapter 1 of this book and answers to life's choices. These abound as questions arise concerning evil and good, righteous and unrighteous, foolish and wise, wealth and poverty, for example.

It is important to learn God does not so much give us the choice between one or the other but rather gives

us the choice of both. (Now read that sentence again). He always maintains and respects the free will he has given to man.

Method of presentation

The use of comparisons and contrasts is prevalent in Proverbs.

Comparisons: *'The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver (10:20). (15:16) 'Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and turmoil with it.'* (16:24) *'Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.'*

Contrasts: (12:18) *'There is one who speaks rashly like the thrust of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healings.'* (15:29) *'The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.'* (28:18) *'He who walks blamelessly will be delivered, but he who is crooked will fall all at once.'*

Sometimes devoting a whole chapter to a theme e.g. Proverbs 11 focuses on the contrast between the wicked and the righteous.

Authorship and wrestling with Proverbs

This manuscript will not be dealing with the facts and figures behind the authorship but to help you grasp a minute historical perspective.

The bulk of Proverbs is attributed to the authorship of Solomon and would have been written during Israel's united kingdom period.

Solomon, third king of Israel after Saul and David, reigned between 930 and 973 years before Jesus was born. God asked Solomon what he wanted most and Solomon chose wisdom. God granted his desire and later we read, *'Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore. And Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt'* (1 Kings 4:29-30).

Chapters 1-29 are attributed to Solomon. Chapter 1, focuses on the usefulness of proverbs and explains in chapter 2 that wisdom brings security, culminating in rewards in chapter 3, then jumping over to chapters 8-9 he gives recommendation of wisdom and wisdom's invitation to readers.

Chapters 4-7 Solomon takes a parental role and provides sound instructions to his son, although he has cleverly whet his appetite in 3:1, 11 and 21 previously, extolling him to listen to good advice.

In chapters 10-18 we experience the great chasm between righteous or the upright in God's eyes and the wicked in God's eyes. These are commentaries on various contrasts.

Then chapter 19-23 are concerning life and general conduct for God's people. Chapter 24, 27-29 switch to precept warnings and instructions. Chapters 25-26 carry many instructions for right living, what this author calls sensible simples.

Solomon became the fount head of Israel and proved to be more prolific than inspired or inspirational. Solomon's wisdom consisted of judgement; his justifying ability (1 Kings 10:1). For Solomon attainment of wisdom was based on his attitude towards God; because he feared God. It was not based on his moral code of behaviour.

The simplest way to tackle the book of Proverbs is by chapter headings and groupings adopting a formal approach to break down Solomon's section:

- 1:1-7 book's title, purpose and motto,
- 1:8 – 9:18 thirteen lessons on wisdom,
- 10:1-22:16 first book of Solomon,
- 22:17-24:22 the book of the wise,
- 24:23-24 contains sayings of the wise and
- 25:1-29:27 second book of Solomon).²⁶

Chapter 30 was written by Agar, son of Jakeh, the oracle who was attributed as being wise, though a mysterious advisor. It is of some interest that Agar or Agur was not an Israelite and came from Massa (V1). An area of Northern Arabia. He has remarkable awareness of the majesty of God and his own wretchedness. He shows gender equality, respect for slaves, a high level of understanding of the greed of the world and a poetical view of things too lofty for his understanding. He highlights the snare of the fear of man and the danger of pride.

Chapters 31:1-9 was penned by king Lemuel. In these verses he teaches on good government, sexual relations and wine. All influenced by his mother.

Chapters 31:10-31, the description of a worthy woman in an appendix or epilogue to the rest of Proverbs. If we accept that this passage was written by Solomon and he had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:1-3), I do not think it amiss if we say these verses are a composite based on his experience.

Another productive approach to the Proverbs is to examine snippets of stories on various topics or themes.

For a comprehensive list of themes go to www.strongfaith.org/proverbs.

For topics look at www.letgodbettrue.com/Proverbs.

Another study method might be to examine the do's and don'ts. There is over one hundred and fifty of each. On the do side, the word listen is repeated and repeated. You might also discover more don'ts than do's. God knows us to the core.

A booklet by Rose Publishers²⁷, simply titled Proverbs, is colourful, comprehensive and easy to follow, yet profound in its treatment of Proverbs. Here is a statement from the booklet.

'Should we read Proverbs today? Yes! And not only should we read them but we need the beauty and desirability of wisdom to captivate our imaginations and

wills. The consequences of our efforts will be evident in life, health, riches, fulfilment and satisfaction, relationships, joy, peace, hope, knowledge of and love for the world and a greater appreciation of God's wisdom in our lives.'

May I add that we will also be able to know and relate better to Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God, (1 Corinthians 1:30). In Jesus, God reveals the extent, depth and power of his wisdom.

Jesus in Proverbs

Although there are no specific prophetic references to Jesus Christ in Proverbs, the way of life and freedom they expound is an image of the coming Messiah and many verses point towards Jesus.

In verse 23 of chapter 1, wisdom, who is Jesus, is speaking, '*Turn to my reproof, behold I will pour out my Spirit on you; I will make my words known to you*' (Acts 2:17).

In chapter 2, verse 7, *He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity*' (Ephesians 6:16).

Verses 19-20 in chapter 3, declares that the lord by wisdom founded the earth, by understanding he established the heavens (John 1:1) and in Chapter 8, verses 22-31 wisdom reveals Jesus at creation.

Chapter 20 verse 21 speaks of an inheritance gained hurriedly at the beginning, will not be blessed in the end, refers to our inheritance in the family of God through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Finally, verse 21 of chapter 21, *'He who pursues righteousness and loyalty finds life, righteousness and honour.'*

I realise some biblical scholars may refute these claims. However it is important not only to know the Word of God but to be able to embrace the spirit of the Word through the Holy Spirit. This too is wisdom.

Other scriptures pointing to Jesus Christ can be found all the way through the Old Testament. For a comprehensive list www.jesus.org or www.biblestudysite.

Conclusion

Although Proverbs is a practical book dealing with life processes, it bases wisdom squarely on the fear of the Lord. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction'* (Proverbs 1:7) and *'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding'* (Proverbs 9:10).



Seers

Prophets are the eyes; they see through a spiritual eye. Seers see with the entire head: eyes, smell, taste and feelings (Isaiah 29:10). The prophet can predict the future, but a seer can see what people need to let go of, tell them what the Lord is saying to them today and declare what the Lord is offering them tomorrow. They

often see some type of picture, which they then release. A seer might be a person who is endowed with profound moral and spiritual insight or knowledge; a wise person or sage who possesses intuitive powers. Prophetic seers are seen throughout scripture.

When applied to the occult the term seer is reputed to have special powers of divination, as a crystal gazer or palmist.

According to Lake (2016)²⁸, there are three main varieties of the God given seer gifting. Visual images or impressions, dreams and visions. Impressions may come as a scripture or a word. These, especially dreams, enrich life through encouragement, direction, insight for intercession and illumination.

'In a dream, a vision of the night, when sound sleep falls on men, while they slumber in their beds, then he opens the ears of men, and seals their instruction, that he may turn man aside from his conduct, and keep man from pride' (Job 33:15-17).

Visions (Lake 2016)²⁹ may be open visions, audible messages, angelic encounters, open heavens, trances, being caught up in the Spirit, and heavenly visitations.

It is important to remember the gift of prophecy is to edify, encourage and comfort (1 Corinthians 14:3). Words of a corrective nature are better spoken by someone with the office of prophet between them and someone with whom they have relationship. Also weigh up what you hear with the truth of the Word, seek wisdom in discernment and timing is crucial.

Several books in the New Testament warn against false prophets. 1 Timothy, 2 Peter and Jude all highlight

the danger and the need to be aware and alert especially in these end times.

It is also important to be able to discern between a false prophet and a prophet who simply got it wrong. To label every prophet who got it wrong as false is a great injustice to the furtherance of the prophetic in our time.

If you would like to see in the spirit more clearly yourself, consider 1 Corinthians 13:2 first, *'And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.'*

21st century prophetic seers

Modern day prophetic seers are being raised up in this hour. Unfortunately, they are sometimes, incorrectly, referred to as Christian mystics.

Mysticism is not to be the experience of a Christian. Mysticism is the spiritual apprehension of knowledge inaccessible to the intellect. It is obtained through contemplation and is a belief associated with the occult. See chapter ten of this book on Worldly Wisdom.

Prophetic seers operate through the gift of discernment. Every born again believer has a certain amount of discernment, which increases as the believer matures in the Spirit. However there are certain believers who have the God given ability to distinguish between demonic and godly influencers. A seer can feel the strongholds of a town or region for example. A seer can smell sin, corruption and holiness (2 Corinthians 2:14). The spiritually discerning are so familiar with the Word

and Spirit of God they instantly recognise anything contrary.

Generally speaking a prophetic seer is one who is not concerned with knowing the letter of the Word, or religious dogmas, but more with knowing the Spirit of the Word. Living from within the experience of God's Word. A lover of God who pursues God from a deep knowing that life as a Christian is evolving with sanctification of the Holy Spirit and is moving towards a fullness and destiny in relationship with God.

Jones (n.d) ³⁰said. 'A prophet can only prophecy as the faith arise but a seer can have all five senses at work within.'

A true Christian prophetic seer will discard ego, pride and spiritual materialism to adopt Christ's humility.

There are many pitfalls into spiritual materialism and must be faithfully avoided by those who would aspire to move in the prophetic.

These include narcissism, superficiality (adopting sunny answers to life's complex problems and pain), instant transformation, grandiosity and inability to accept God's "no" to prayers.

The danger of an appetite for power, recognition and glory and flitting from one teaching to another looking for ears to be tickled will never lead to serving the Lord with the prophetic. As someone once said, like flitting from one flower to another like a drunken honey bee.

This is why accountability and truth alignments are needed to fulfil any calling within the prophetic realm in these days. But unfortunately seers are often not welcome

in churches today because it is the least understood of all the gifts. It is the time for seers to come forth. The ecclesia needs you. It is time for the seer to mature and be used.

Wise People – general

People who were considered wise in a general term in the Word applied to people of understanding and skill in ordinary affairs. We see this in Job 15:2; Psalm 49:10; Proverbs 1:5; Ecclesiastes 2:14; 1 Corinthians 1:26; 10:15-29; James 3:13.

It applied strongly to Solomon in 1 Kings 2:9; 5:7; 2 Chronicles 2:12. Also to the ladies of Sisera's mother (Judges 5:28-29) and to court women (2 Samuel 14:2-3; 20:16-22). In a more specialised sense in Israel, the builders of the tabernacle (Exodus 28:3; 35:30-35) and the leaders of the tribes (Deuteronomy 1:13-15). Wise, understanding, experienced older men came to be recognised as a distinct class, widely esteemed by the discerning.

In pagan nations the wise men were grouped with and identified as magicians, sorcerers, enchanters, astrologers and Chaldeans, appear in Egypt (Genesis 41:8; Exodus 7:11), Babylon (Daniel 2:12-5:15) and Persia (Esther 1:13-14) (Commentary 1989).³¹



Study options for digging deeper

- Q. What was God's part in the movie marathon section? What was Sol's part? What part did Pol's mother play in the outcome? How important was joint cooperation?
- Q. Consider these hyperboles in Proverbs. In 10:30, does the Lord deport unbelievers? And in 12:10 are the wicked incapable of any good deed? Do wise men go around attacking cities (21:22)? Will looking at the crown jewels make them vanish (23:5)?
- Q. Locate another adage in Proverbs and meditate on the wise substance found within.
- Q. In Proverbs chapter 1:1-6, what are the reasons why Proverbs was written?
- Q. Proverbs 24:23 starts out with '*These also are the sayings of the wise*'. What is the word "also" referring to? Read verses 24-29. What sayings are written after?
- Q. There is confusion whether some Proverbs are promises from God or not. Proverbs are not promises; they are not absolutes. They are general, not universal sayings. With this in mind examine 22:6; 1:23; 2:105; 8:35-36. How might this affect the common interpretation of these verses and

others in Proverbs? How would we accept them as truth, yet not rely on them as promises?

- Q. People who have understanding and skill in ordinary affairs are often known as wise people. Examine Job 15:2-3; Psalm 49:10; Proverbs 1:5; Ecclesiastes 2:4-9, 14 and consider your findings.
- Q. Why is the Wisdom of Solomon far reaching in statesmanship (1 Kings 10:23-24), in understanding of human nature (1 Kings 3:16-28) and in natural history, literature and popular proverbs (1 Kings 4:29-34)?
- Q. What are some of the differences between operating in the gift of prophecy, a recognised prophet and a person called and gifted to be a seer or prophetic seer?
- Q. How would you structure a six week small group series on the book of Proverbs? What approach would you take, what method would you use and how would you motivate the group to delve into Proverbs for themselves?

OR

How would you structure a six week lecture/discussion series for discipleship training on the book of proverbs? Pay attention to themes, problems and practical aids. Set out a series outline, show how each area would be approached, emphasised and taught.



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