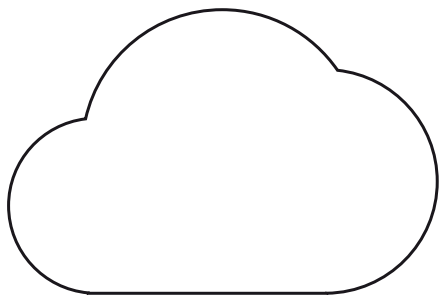


62 DAYS OF DEVOTIONS BASED ON THE BOOK OF PROVERBS



wisdom
for
living

SELWYN HUGHES

CWR

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Cover image: CWR

Printed in China by 1010 Printing

ISBN: 978-1-85345-558-2

A word of introduction

Who doesn't want to live well? The vast majority of us hope to experience life to the full and make the best of each opportunity that arises in our hoped for three score years and ten. This drive has, in recent years, spawned the bestselling category of self-help books, DVDs and audio resources. I recently searched the internet for 'rules for living', and found nearly 13 million results, including over 50 book titles published in the UK alone. All seek to answer this question: 'What are the rules for living?'

There is, it seems, an abundance of philosophies and lifestyle advice out there on how to live life well. The difficulty, however, is that much of the advice offered is, at times, contradictory, and we can find ourselves drifting through a pluralist world, uncertain of our direction.

Selwyn leads us through the book of Proverbs, introducing us to God's wisdom for living. Over the years, I have noticed that many Christians have one thing in common. Whatever their circumstances – whether they are young, old, running from one thing to the next or frail, maybe even housebound – each has a vitality about them that shapes a playful twinkle in their eye. They exude a sense of energy and a love of life. These things, however, don't come from following a set of rules, or even a set of principles, but from following a Person – following Jesus. He's the One who has gone before us, who has lived life to the full and even conquered death. What better way is there to live than to follow Him?

These wise words first appeared as an issue of the daily Bible-reading notes *Every Day with Jesus* written by Selwyn Hughes. It was my privilege to take on the role of Consulting Editor of *Every Day with Jesus*

following Selwyn's death in 2006. We received so many encouraging comments, responses and requests to re-publish this material that we have chosen to make it available in book form.

We have included the full relevant Bible text for each day, with the key verse for the day highlighted in bold for clarity, and also included the entire text of Proverbs for reading/reference.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mick Brooks". The letters are cursive and slightly slanted to the right.

Mick Brooks
CWR

Wisdom is our
rock to build on –
truth to live by –
outstretched hand –
worthy goal –
word of hope –
united hearts –
path to purity.

Wisdom
leads to eternity
with God.

Eternity begins now.

Susan Lenzkes © 2007
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DAY 01

Wise up and live

FOR READING & MEDITATION – PROVERBS 1:1–19

¹ The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

² **For gaining wisdom and being instructed;
for understanding insightful sayings;**

³ for receiving wise instruction

[in] righteousness, justice, and integrity;

⁴ for teaching shrewdness to the inexperienced,
knowledge and discretion to a young man—

⁵ a wise man will listen and increase his learning,
and a discerning man will obtain guidance—

⁶ for understanding a proverb or a parable,
the words of the wise, and their riddles.

⁷ The fear of the LORD

is the beginning of knowledge;

fools despise wisdom and instruction.

⁸ Listen, my son, to your father's instruction,
and don't reject your mother's teaching,

⁹ for they will be a garland of grace on your head
and a [gold] chain around your neck.

¹⁰ My son, if sinners entice you,
don't be persuaded.

¹¹ If they say—"Come with us!

Let's set an ambush and kill someone.

Let's attack some innocent person just for fun!

¹² Let's swallow them alive, like Sheol,
still healthy as they go down to the Pit.

¹³ We'll find all kinds of valuable property
and fill our houses with plunder.

¹⁴ Throw in your lot with us,
and we'll all share our money"—

¹⁵ my son, don't travel that road with them
or set foot on their path,

¹⁶ because their feet run toward trouble
and they hurry to commit murder.

- ¹⁷ It is foolish to spread a net
where any bird can see it,
¹⁸ but they set an ambush to kill themselves;
they attack their own lives.
¹⁹ Such are the paths of all who pursue gain dishonestly;
it takes the lives of those who profit from it.

WE ARE GOING to set out to explore some of the great and thrilling themes of the book of Proverbs. I was introduced to it within weeks of becoming a Christian, and I have no hesitation in saying that, as far as practical matters are concerned, it has influenced my thinking and coloured my judgments more than any other book of the Bible.

I shall never forget my pastor taking me aside just after I had been converted and telling me, 'I am going to teach you to steal, to drink, to lie and to swear.' Looking at my expression, and seeing my astonishment, he quickly went on to say, 'I want to teach you how to steal time out of every day to read something from the book of Proverbs. And then I want to teach you how to drink from its clear, refreshing waters, to lie on your bed at night and meditate on its great themes, and to swear that by the grace of God you will put into practice its wonderful teaching.' My pastor's rather novel approach laid deep in my mind the importance of this powerful book, and the truths I have learned from it I now long to share with you.

We begin with the question: What is the purpose of Proverbs? Our text for today gives us the clue. Listen to how the Living Bible paraphrases it: 'He [Solomon] wrote them to teach his people how to live – how to act in every circumstance ...' This, then, is what Proverbs is all about – wisdom for living. Millions of people know how to make a living but do not know

how to live. They know everything about life except how to live it. I tell you, the more you understand the book of Proverbs, and the more you put its truths and principles into practice, the more effective will be your living. I guarantee it.

PRAYER

O FATHER, help me come to grips with the wisdom that enables me not just to live, but to live abundantly. I long to know what I need to do to get on in life. Through the ancient but inspired words of Proverbs please teach me how. Amen.

Wisdom personified

FOR READING & MEDITATION – PROVERBS 1:20–33

- ²⁰ Wisdom calls out in the street;
she raises her voice in the public squares.
- ²¹ She cries out above the commotion;
she speaks at the entrance of the city gates:
- ²² “How long, foolish ones, will you love ignorance?
[How long] will [you] mockers enjoy mocking
and [you] fools hate knowledge?”
- ²³ If you turn to my discipline,
then I will pour out my spirit on you
and teach you my words.
- ²⁴ Since I called out and you refused,
extended my hand and no one paid attention,
- ²⁵ since you neglected all my counsel
and did not accept my correction,
- ²⁶ I, in turn, will laugh at your calamity.
I will mock when terror strikes you,
- ²⁷ when terror strikes you like a storm
and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
when trouble and stress overcome you.
- ²⁸ Then they will call me, but I won’t answer;
they will search for me, but won’t find me.
- ²⁹ Because they hated knowledge,
didn’t choose to fear the LORD,
- ³⁰ were not interested in my counsel,
and rejected all my correction,
- ³¹ they will eat the fruit of their way
and be gluttoned with their own schemes.
- ³² For the waywardness of the inexperienced will kill them,
and the complacency of fools will destroy them.
- ³³ **But whoever listens to me will live securely
and be free from the fear of danger.”**

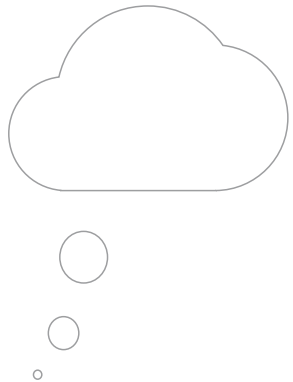
BEFORE SETTLING DOWN to focus on our theme, which is Wisdom for Living, it will be helpful if we acquaint ourselves with some background information concerning the book – hence these opening days will be more of an introduction to the book than an exposition of it.

You will not get far when reading Proverbs before you begin to notice that both wisdom and its opposite, foolishness, are personified as women – Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly – each of whom attempts to persuade people to follow her ways. This personification of wisdom and of folly is a literary device that the writer uses to add punch and power to his points, particularly in the first nine chapters. We use a similar form of expression when we personify natural laws and refer to them as ‘Mother Nature’. For example, we may hear people comment, ‘Mother Nature is bringing out the spring flowers early’, or, ‘Mother Nature is doing her thing’. This is a poetic and colourful way of referring to the principles and laws that govern the universe in which we live.

Notice how wisdom is personified in these words taken from the passage we have read today: ‘Wisdom calls out in the street; she raises her voice in the public squares. She cries out above the commotion; she speaks at the entrance of the city gates’ (vv.20–21). Later on in the book of Proverbs you will see how similar language is used of Lady Folly. The purpose of this personification is to make the reader vividly aware that over and against the fatal attraction of folly, wisdom brings security and contentment. Wisdom is the soul’s true bride and true counsellor. Wisdom is good for us; it is what our personalities were designed for by God Himself.

PRAYER

O Father, help me to grasp the truth that I am made for a certain way of living – Your way – and when I try to live against that way then I am nothing but a fool. Make me wise, dear Lord, with the wisdom that comes from You. Amen.



DAY 03

The source of all wisdom

FOR READING & MEDITATION – PROVERBS 2:12–22

- 12 rescuing you from the way of evil—
from the one who says perverse things,**
- 13 [from] those who abandon the right paths
to walk in ways of darkness,**
- 14 [from] those who enjoy doing evil
and celebrate perversity,**
- 15 whose paths are crooked,
and whose ways are devious.**
- 16 It will rescue you from a forbidden woman,
from a stranger with her flattering talk,**
- 17 who abandons the companion of her youth
and forgets the covenant of her God;**
- 18 for her house sinks down to death
and her ways to the land of the departed spirits.**
- 19 None return who go to her;
none reach the paths of life.**
- 20 So follow the way of good people,
and keep to the paths of the righteous.**
- 21 For the upright will inhabit the land,
and those of integrity will remain in it;**
- 22 but the wicked will be cut off from the land,
and the treacherous uprooted from it.**

YESTERDAY WE TOUCHED on the thought that in the book of Proverbs, particularly in the first nine chapters, wisdom and foolishness are seen as persons. Jesus was also using the device of personification when He concluded His address to the crowds on the significance of John the Baptist with the words, 'Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds' (Matt. 11:19). Some have expressed the view that the personification of wisdom in the Scriptures indicates that wisdom is

to be seen as a person, perhaps a member of the angelic hierarchy, who visits men and women and imparts divine wisdom to them. But this, in my opinion, is taking things too far. The writer is simply using a literary device to make a point.

Having said that, however, most evangelical commentators are agreed that the device of personification when used in connection with wisdom is to prepare the way for the apostle Paul's great statement in 1 Corinthians 1:24, namely that Christ is 'God's power and God's wisdom'. If this is so then it suggests that the divine purpose underlying the personification of wisdom in the book of Proverbs is not simply to acquaint us with an absorbing set of guidelines or helpful suggestions by which to run our lives, but to hint that true wisdom lies in a Person – that Person being none other than Jesus Christ.

The Christian message moves beyond the wise proverbs of Solomon, which, by the way, commend themselves to non-Christians as well as Christians, and points to the fact that the highest wisdom comes from a relationship with the One who is the fount of all wisdom – Jesus. Knowing the principles of wisdom is one thing; knowing the Person in whom all wisdom resides is another.

PRAYER

O Father, how can I sufficiently thank You that by faith I am linked to the source of all wisdom – the Lord Jesus Christ? Let the wonder of this relationship – that I am in Him and He is in me – sink deep into my soul today. Amen.

DAY 04

Sophomores – ‘wise fools’

FOR READING & MEDITATION – PROVERBS 4:1–9

- ¹ Listen, [my] sons, to a father’s discipline,
and pay attention so that you may gain understanding,
² for I am giving you good instruction.
Don’t abandon my teaching.
³ When I was a son with my father,
tender and precious to my mother,
⁴ he taught me and said:
“Your heart must hold on to my words.
Keep my commands and live.
⁵ Get wisdom, get understanding;
don’t forget or turn away from the words of my mouth.
**⁶ Don’t abandon wisdom, and she will watch over you;
love her, and she will guard you.**
⁷ Wisdom is supreme—so get wisdom.
And whatever else you get, get understanding.
⁸ Cherish her, and she will exalt you;
if you embrace her, she will honor you.
⁹ She will place a garland of grace on your head;
she will give you a crown of beauty.”

HAVING SEEN WHY the writer of Proverbs uses the device of personification in connection with wisdom, and having understood that the main message of the book is to provide us with wisdom for living, it is time now to ask ourselves: What exactly is wisdom? How is it to be defined?

Some say wisdom is synonymous with knowledge and use the two words interchangeably. There is, however, a world of difference between knowledge and wisdom, as writers and philosophers down the ages have pointed out. Knowledge is the capacity to comprehend and retain what we are taught; wisdom is the ability to put that knowledge to best effect. If knowledge is

the same thing as wisdom then, as Paul Larsen points out, 'There are many "wise" men who are fools.' Schools and universities cram information into the minds of the students who attend them, and so they graduate knowing a good deal about such matters as the solar system, microbiology, history, psychology, the laws of physics, art, and so on. However, knowledge by itself does not stop them from making a mess of their lives. In the United States a second-year university or high school student is called a 'sophomore', a term derived from the Greek words for 'wise' and 'foolish' – in other words, a 'wise fool'. How revealing! When we reach the higher stages of education we think that we know it all, but if this attitude is not changed then we will soon demonstrate what it means to be a fool.

A 'fool' in Proverbs is not someone who can't pass a simple literacy or numeracy test; it is someone who thinks they know what life is all about but does not. Those whom the world recognises as 'wise' may, from heaven's standpoint, be the biggest fools.

PRAYER

Father, I begin to understand what Paul meant when he said 'we are fools for Christ'. My lifestyle may appear foolish to those around me, but help me never to forget that if I am following Your principles it is the highest wisdom. Amen.

DAY 05

The ‘wisdom literature’

FOR READING & MEDITATION – PROVERBS 5:15–23

- ¹⁵ Drink water from your own cistern,
water flowing from your own well.
- ¹⁶ Should your springs flow in the streets,
streams of water in the public squares?
- ¹⁷ They should be for you alone
and not for you [to share] with strangers.
- ¹⁸ Let your fountain be blessed,
and take pleasure in the wife of your youth.
- ¹⁹ A loving doe, a graceful fawn—
let her breasts always satisfy you;
be lost in her love forever.
- ²⁰ Why, my son, would you be infatuated
with a forbidden woman
or embrace the breast of a stranger?
- ²¹ For a man’s ways are before the LORD’s eyes,
and He considers all his paths.**
- ²² A wicked man’s iniquities entrap him;
he is entangled in the ropes of his own sin.
- ²³ He will die because there is no instruction,
and be lost because of his great stupidity.

THERE ARE JUST a few more important general points to make concerning Proverbs before we start to focus on our theme – Wisdom for Living. Proverbs is a book considered to be part of the ‘wisdom literature’ of the Old Testament. These books are associated with a class of people called ‘wise men’ or ‘sages’. Wise men were highly regarded both in Israel and in the surrounding nations, as 1 Kings 4:34 reveals.

The Old Testament consists of three sections: first, the Law, second, the Prophets, and third, the Writings – answering to the three groups of leaders outlined in Jeremiah 18:18: ‘... for the law will never be lost from the *priest*, or counsel from the *wise*, or an oracle from the *prophet*.’ Included within the category of the Writings are the wisdom books – Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. While the prophets and the priests dealt with the religious life of Israel, the wise men were called upon to give advice about more philosophical matters. They were the ones who made the point that the world was designed for wisdom, and those who followed wisdom would find that the world was made for them.

The book of Proverbs, which was largely written by Solomon, whose wisdom was legendary, is crammed with the best advice it is possible to get, and it is a tragedy that it is not part of our educational system. But perhaps a greater tragedy is the fact that in some parts of the Christian community (though not all) Proverbs is an unexplored book. I do not hesitate to say that any church that does not encourage its people, especially its young people, to delve into the book of Proverbs is doing them a major disservice.

PRAYER

Gracious Father, help me develop a love for Your wisdom literature. Grant that these days of searching and exploring may result in a new understanding of wisdom, and that new evidences of Your wisdom may be seen in my life. Amen.