

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR STUDY IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

PART TWO – CHAPTERS 1-4 - WHAT SHOULD FATHERS TEACH THEIR CHILDREN?

The problem most parents face before they start to think about what they should teach their children is how to get their attention in the first place. Solomon compares the potential reward of parents' teaching to clothes or ornaments, the world young people understand. He recognises immediately that in attempting to teach our children we will have to compete with peer pressure. He starts with the extreme example of a street gang whose actions not only damage their victims but are also self destructive to those who join them.(1:8-19)

Still maintaining the example of the street, he pictures wisdom as a woman, perhaps a mother, standing in the town square calling on her young people to listen. She addresses two groups, the simple – the untaught but open, and the fool who simply refuses to listen. She urges them to let the Spirit be their teacher and warns them of the trouble they will find themselves in if they ignore her. Their real mistake she says is to reject the fear of the Lord. If they continue to listen their rebellion will kill them. If on the other hand they do listen, life can be great. Which will they choose?(1:20-33)

For those willing to listen to their father's teaching, Solomon explains what will be their part in developing wisdom. He is happy to teach but they will need to search for understanding like a miner digging for precious metals. They will need to ask God for wisdom.(James 1:5) He is always ready to make the truth clear.(Jn.16:13-15; 14:6) The truth will be about Him.(2:1-6)

There is a second requirement for those who want to become wise. They must also be willing for what they discover to determine their whole walk, the way they live all of life. It will not only be morally right but also absolutely fair to others. It cannot just be theory in their heads. On this basis their whole person will be changed and what is more the way they now live will be thoroughly enjoyable not a drag. They will be protected from those who would pull them down, who have made the opposite choice. They will be safe from the street gang or the immoral woman whose path is only destruction. Walking God's path will mean enjoying our inheritance from Him, all He has given us in Christ. Those who refuse will miss out entirely.(2:7-22)

Wisdom, Solomon continues, is not just about all of life now but is for the whole span of our lives. She brings fulfillment and peace right to the end of life on earth. She changes the way we are to those around us providing we have fixed her firmly in our hearts. God will be pleased and people will be impressed. Again we are urged to look to God only and always, not ourselves. Every step, every decision is to be His. Our hurts will be healed and we will have a sparkle about us even as we get older. One of the first places to be affected will be in our attitude to our possessions. First they are His and then we can be confident He will care for us. God's wisdom will include a process of discipline which we do not need to fight against because we know He loves us as His sons.(3:1-12)

Wisdom has a value beyond any earthly possessions although trusting her may lead to earthly success and will definitely produce a far more fulfilling, enjoyable and inwardly peaceful life. She will take us back to the tree of life in the Garden of Eden. Creation itself is a powerful demonstration of God's wisdom. With wisdom comes discretion, which is wisdom applied to life's challenges. The combination of the two makes us beautiful in God's sense, confident of the path in life we follow, and able to sleep soundly because fear has gone.(3:13-26)

This new God-given wisdom will change life for our neighbour too. We will pay back what we owe him without excuse or delay. He will feel safe living next to us, not threatened. We will not pick fights for nothing or want to be like those who do. Daily we face a sharp contrast. If we trust God we will experience intimacy with Him, our homes will be blessed, we will have grace in hard times and we will be respected by others. And if we do not trust Him the consequence will be the opposite.(3:27-35)

To gain his son's attention and commitment to seeking wisdom, Solomon does what many fathers do. He reminisces on his own childhood when David, his father, taught him. David seems to have struggled with relating effectively with his older sons, Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah.(II Sam.13-18; I Kings 1) When Solomon arrived after the most disastrous period of his life it appears David learned that being a father began with loving and teaching his son. He and Bathsheba began urging him into a love affair with wisdom as if with a wife. If Solomon were truly to embrace wisdom, she would guard him, watch over him, exalt him, honour him, and make him an attractive person.(4:1-9)

God's wisdom includes His plan for our lives from birth to death. Solomon tells his son that if he has a love marriage with wisdom his life will be long, upright, unimpeded and without tripping up. If he guards wisdom, she will guard him. He will be able to walk past the alternative path for life which those without the Lord will take which is only about wickedness, harming others and violence. His life will be like the sunrise from first light to full strength. He will be the light of the world.(Matt.5:14-16) The alternative is to stumble around in the dark.(4:10-19)

Once more Solomon pleads with his son to keep wisdom in the centre of his being, always in his focus, leading to not only a healthy life for him but a source of life for others. Wisdom will keep his speech honest, his gaze straightforward and his path solid without sidetracking.(4:20-27)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What three kinds of people do we try to teach? What is the outcome with each group? What pressures are young people under which can hinder them listening to God? How does a mother go about teaching her children? What can we learn from her example?(chapter 1)
2. What two responsibilities are on us if we really want to receive and benefit from God's wisdom? What is the choice if we refuse?(chapter 2)
3. How does wisdom change the whole span of our lives? How does it affect our attitude to possessions and our neighbour? In what way could the tree of life in the Garden of Eden be regarded as the wisdom of God for us?(chapter 3)
4. What had Solomon learned from his own father? How does he try to pass this experience on to his son? How is loving wisdom like a good marriage? What does this chapter teach us about Christian parenting and marriage?(chapter 4)