

Proverbs: How to NOT Ruin Your Life **Proverbs 1:1-7, *The Fear of the Lord***

On July 4, 1776 delegates from the 13 colonies convened in Philadelphia to officially declare their independence from Great Britain. Probably the most well-known section in the Declaration of Independence reads- *"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."* America was largely founded on this idea: A God-given right to pursue the good life. A few centuries later, I would argue that this is still a fundamental value and motivation for most Americans. People from all over the world desire to come to our country because of this value.

But the Good Life has become in many ways, unhinged from its origin, our Creator. Instead, many pursue the Good Life on their own terms. Just perusing the magazine section or checkout line, one might conclude that the good life, happiness comes in the form of the latest workout gear, a low carb diet and rock-hard abs. For many the good life consists in what we can own and consume. A house, a car, tech gadgets...Or others, the good life comes in the form of human achievement- self-made millionaire, a dream job or having the perfect family. What is marketed to our youth is that the good life is becoming famous, having lots of social media followers, youtube hits, and constant entertainment. When we look at self-help books and blogs we might be led to believe that the good life is looking within for fulfillment, self-actualization or freedom from any source of negativity or authority of what is right for you. In each one of these magazines, books and blogs, describing the Good Life, there is something genuinely human being communicated. If we listen we can hear the human heart confessing its lack of fulfillment, its lack of true freedom and happiness, its desire for something more...its desire for the good life, and our modern American culture is not unique, we are doing the same thing that has been done since the garden of Eden- when Eve was convince that the good life could be found on her own terms.

Long before the Declaration of Independence was written, there was another document written that rightly defined and described the Good Life: **The Book of Proverbs**. Turn there with me. Proverbs defines the Good Life very differently than what we see in our culture...not with SELF as the source of the **Good Life, but rather as a life lived in harmony with God's Wisdom**. The Good Life is only found in alignment with the way God has created life to flourish according to his character, ways and purposes. When we live in harmony with God's wisdom it leads to true life, true liberty and true happiness...our unalienable rights. It helps us avoid self-destruction.

Now many of you are Christians and so by definition we have signed ourselves up to live this good life defined in Scripture, but some of you aren't, and so you may disagree with my premise off the bat...but let me give you three quick reasons not to tune out, and to follow us on this study of Proverbs and even read them for yourself.

1) Its Author: Humanly speaking- It was written by one of the wisest, most powerful, influential, wealthy, successful people that ever lived- King Solomon. Listen: Dale Carnegie, “How to Win Friends and Influence People”, or Steven Covey’s “7 Habits of Highly Effective People” got most of their material from Solomon.

2) Its Purpose: **To teach wisdom to all** (Not just Christians). Quick poll, how many of you make it your goal to be a fool? How many of you really desire to train wreck your life? That’s what I thought- the purpose of this book-

Proverbs 1:2-5

for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight; for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young— let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance.

For all humanity, the young, for the old, wise already and not so wise, for the rich and poor, men and women.

3) Its Relevance- I love proverbs because it speaks into every area of our lives. It is so practical. This summer we are going to study many of the various themes of proverbs, I wonder if these sound relevant to you: The power of the tongue- both in its destructive force and how life giving it can be..., how to make decisions when things aren’t black and white, combating laziness and the importance of work ethic, combating sexual temptation and establishing boundaries, how to be a good friend make friends, and several others. You are dealing with something? There is a proverb for it.

We will be traveling, vacations...don’t forget to listen to the podcast, go on our website or Facebook to watch the video. Now for the sake of time, I’m not going to go into more of an overview of the book and breakdown the sections. On our facebook page we have posted an excellent video from thebibleproject.com that does that. I’d encourage you to watch it, 8min.

Today for the time we have remaining I want to make one crucial point. And it comes from one verse in the introduction to this amazing book.

Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Here is this pivotal opening statement of Proverbs, King Solomon sets out **Two Ways to Live: The Good Life vs. The Foolish Life** that marks the rest of the Proverbs. And at the very foundation of what contrasts the wise person and the fool is the fear of the Lord. So here’s the one crucial point- **The Fear of the Lord is the Key to the Good Life.** This theme flows throughout the book as the key to living the good life. 12x in 31 chapters, 300x in Scripture.

Prov. 14:26-27

In the fear of the Lord one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.

Proverbs 19:23

The fear of the Lord leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm.

Proverbs 28:4

Blessed is the one who fears the Lord always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

So whatever this is, what we do know from just a few verses- is that it leads to life, confidence, satisfaction, blessing and makes us wise, it protects us from death and destruction and harm.

So what does it mean? It doesn't sound like a good thing does it? When we think of fear, we almost always associate it with something bad. Something to be avoided. We associated it with being afraid. With a phobia (the greek word for fear). My dad is Claustrophobic, I remember when I was little and we were at Morey's Pier, Wildwood. My dad and my brother got on a rollercoaster, and it harness came down over my dad's head and shoulders and he started panicking and was yelling, "Sir! Sir! I'm claustrophobic Sir!" And then my brother, Jon, started getting freaked out and crying...a big scene and they had to do the walk of shame. We to this day bust his chops. This kind of fear doesn't sound positive, does it? Nate, are you saying we should be "Godophobic"?

Martin Luther provides biblical insight on this. He distinguished between what he called a *servile* fear and a *filial* fear. The **servile fear** is a kind of fear that a prisoner in a torture chamber has for his tormentor, **dreadful anxiety under a malevolent authority**. Luther distinguished between that and what he called filial fear, drawing from the Latin concept from which we get the idea of family. Much like the fear that a child has for a good father. Luther said, "A young child has a fear or an anxiety of offending the one he loves, not because he's afraid of torture or even of punishment, but rather because he's afraid of displeasing the one who is, in that child's world, the source of power, security and love." See for the young child, at least those with good parents, they represent ultimate authority and power and simultaneously love and security. Where did Luther make that distinction? One text-

Romans 8:15

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear (phobos), but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

This Filial Fear of the LORD comes from increasing head and heart comprehension of both the bigness of God and the goodness of God.

C.S. Lewis- Lion, the witch and the wardrobe-

Mr. Beaver- "Aslan is a lion- the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he- quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion"... "Safe?" said Mr Beaver ... "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

Honestly, I don't think we struggle as much in evangelical, American Christianity getting the goodness of God. Gospel...But I think we fail to understand the Bigness of God, and our relative smallness- God isn't safe, he's not a lion we can tame. He is completely free from need of anyone or anything, self-sustaining, everlasting, speaks things into creative existence (example)

Isaiah 40:22

He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

Have you taken in the Bigness of God? How would you know? Imagine an elephant moved into your house. The elephant is going to begin to disrupt things, walls go down, he's going to call the shots. Why? Because he's huge and powerful! When the bigness of God moves into your life you will know because he disrupts things, walls go down, he begins to have his way in your life. God's wisdom begins to show up right in the middle of your life. Your workplace, relationships, it begins to show up in the cracks and hidden areas of your life that you have had yourself on the throne. When the bigness of God started to show up in my life- I began to increasingly realize that I was on the throne of my sex life. I was calling the shots....

Have you taken into your heart and mind the bigness of God? Until you do, you will not fear the Lord, you will not embrace his wisdom when it contradicts your own, you will be the fool, who despises wisdom, who creates their own version of the Good Life, with self at the center. True knowledge has the fear of the Lord as its center. To know everything else and miss this is tragic. Don't be intimidated with knowledge of one who has no fear of the Lord. Who do you think knows the most, the Atheist scientist at the National Institutes of Health or the Christian with a 10th grade education who takes the trash out at night? One knows the amazing intricacies of sub-atomic particles, the other knows the one who made and governs them all. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of true knowledge and wisdom.

C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

"In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that- and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison- you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something or someone that is above you."

So there are two ways to live says proverbs- The Good Life (with bigness and goodness of God at the center) or the Foolish Life (with self at the center). You want the Good Life? Here's where it starts.

Communion- Lion and the Lamb- Our God is a Lion, the Lion of Judah...roaring with power and fighting our battles, every knee will bow before him. Our God is the Lamb, the lamb that was slain for the sins of the world, his blood takes our shame. **Jesus is the embodiment of the Bigness and Goodness of God.**