

SLIDE 1. Life Hacks. Part One

A Study of the Book of Proverbs

Sunday July 2, 2023

My dad's a wise guy.

Meaning: He's one of the funniest guys I know AND he also shares periodic bits of wisdom.

Proverbs like...

"Talk about ideas – not people or things."

"Beware - the law of diminishing return: the more you do anything the less inherently enjoyable it becomes. So – keep trying new things!"

"Don't buy what everyone else is buying. Know what things are worth and buy what is valuable." My dad was a stockbroker – investment dealer – financial advisor.

"Do what you love. Love what you do."

"It's not how you start. It's how you finish."

"Nothing good ever happens after midnight."

We are beginning a month-long teaching series – this morning – on the BOOK OF PROVERBS – suitably named – LIFE HACKS – which I'll explain in a moment.

For now – let's begin by getting an overall sense together of what the BOOK OF PROVERBS is all about – like a drone shot of the BOOK to give us some context...

1. The BOOK OF PROVERBS is loaded with – you will not be surprised to learn - *proverbs* – which are short sayings that offer wisdom.
2. Most of these sayings are found in the middle of the BOOK – chps. 10-29.
3. Most of these sayings are shared by King Solomon – the wisest of all of Israel's kings – the "fountainhead" of ancient Jewish wisdom literature.
4. It is said that we can become wise by reading this book.
5. Where wisdom is the Hebrew word – *Khokamah* – which isn't just "mental activity" but "applied knowledge." What I am calling in this series – LIFE HACKS.
6. So – the purpose of this BOOK is to learn "practical skills for living well in God's world" (*The Bible Project*). To "grow up" – as we said in our study of the BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS – to mature.
7. Which is predicated upon a healthy sense of God and our place in the world.
Meaning: that we ought to humble ourselves before God - because we are not God.

8. Chps. 1-9 are 10 speeches from a father to a son – about listening to wisdom which leads to successful living - and avoiding folly which leads to ruin. Which is a kind of nod to my dad – this morning :)

9. Where wisdom is the accumulated knowledge of how to live in ways that honor God and each other.

10. We are invited by a figure known as “Lady Wisdom” to learn from previous generations – what God has made His Word here in the BOOK OF PROVERBS – what are known as the moral laws that govern the universe – much like we have physical laws which govern the universe.

I’ll let you make up your own punchlines about wisdom being personified as a woman – here - as opposed to it being personified as a man! :)

11. These proverbs (such as we find them in chps. 10-29) are general in nature. They are not prophetic – nor are they promises to bank on. They are probabilities.

For instance, Proverbs 10:27 says that the years of the wicked are cut short, while the righteous live long and prosperous lives. The righteous have abundant food (10:3), but the wicked will go hungry (13:25). Is this always true? No!

And how ‘bout this one: Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it (22:6). Happens all the time? No!

But – in general – the righteous tend to live longer and more prosperous lives AND it is better to train a child in a loving home than not.

In general – it is wise to humble ourselves before God = so that our lives would go well / it is unwise to not humble ourselves before God = because our lives would go poorly.

12. This book of general wisdom is supplemented by 2 other O.T. books of wisdom literature: ECCLESIASTES + THE BOOK OF JOB. Whereas the BOOK OF PROVERBS deals in generalities – ECCLESIASTES + THEBOOK OF JOB deal with exceptions – because life is too complex for formulas.

13. Chps. 30 and 31 close with poems by 2 men: Agur and Lemuel.

14. Agur models for us how to read the PROVERBS – with humility – and with hope – because we can learn too can learn God’s wisdom by reading God’s word.

14. Lemuel is a non-Israelite king. He passes on wisdom as given to him by his mother – on how to lead justly and with sobriety.

15. Lemuel ends the BOOK OF PROVERBS with an acrostic – an alphabet poem about a wise woman – who takes God’s word and applies it to the everyday situations of life – at work, at home, in her family, and in her community.

So – the book opens with words from a *father* to a son about listening to wisdom – and closes with words from a *mother* to a son about listening to wisdom.

The BOOK OF PROVERBS – then - is for everyone – or at least anyone who wants to live wisely and well in God’s big world.

The BOOK OF PROVERBS – then – is full of real – LIFE HACKS – ways to live better, maybe even more efficient lives.

Unlike so many of the life hacks we see populating social media today.

There is a Bengalese-Italian social media personality named Khaby Lame. He is the most viewed content creator on Tiktok with a following of more than 114 million people.

His schtick: non-verbal react videos to silly life hacks.

SLIDE 2. For the sake of levity and a mental hook, and to make the point – here’s a sampler:

https://www.google.com/search?q=kahby+lame+life+hack+videos&rlz=1C1AVUC_enCA841CA842&oq=kahby+lame+life+hack+videos&aqs=chrome..69i57j0i13i395i512j0i390i395i650l4.8918j1j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:de1c554e,vid:NhUZiGiouyc

Unlike these “life hacks” – the BOOK OF PROVERBS offers us real wisdom!

And who doesn’t want some of that?!

So – let’s get to it...

SLIDE 3. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline* (Prov. 1:7).

This is the theme verse for the BOOK.

I have already unpacked this word – “fear” – a little bit - by describing it as “a healthy sense of God” – which begins with the acknowledgement that He is God - and I am not.

Let’s go deeper...

God is God and I am not.

Or – we might say – God is holy, and I am not (at least not until I am made holy by my belief and confession that God makes me holy through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross for my sake, Heb. 10:10).

Even still – I think we tend to forget or minimize the holiness gap between us and God.

Remember these stories?

Moses was tending sheep in the desert when he turned to behold a burning bush – out of which Moses heard God say, “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” Ex. 3:5

We are too used to saying, “The whole earth is full of God’s glory. There’s nowhere I can be where He isn’t. Everywhere is holy ground.”

But we can miss the reverence – the awe!

Isaiah has a vision of God seated on his throne – surrounded by angels. Isaiah cried out, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” Isa. 6:5

“Woe is me.” Isaiah was humbled by the holiness gap between him and God.

This sense of God’s holiness is what’s underneath this opening phrase here in the BOOK OF PROVERBS – *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.*

This phrase is repeated 14 X in the BOOK OF PROVERBS – making it the motto for the BOOK.

I suspect that many of us have heard it said that “fearing God” is more about reverence and awe than it is about terror. Indeed, I have said it just now. But I think that might miss something.

Listen to these other scenes from the bible...

*When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, **they trembled with fear.** They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die” (Ex. 20:18-19).*

They trembled with fear. Not an ignorant, primitive, superstitious fear but an experience-informed, adult-shaped, legitimate knee-knocking fear.

Jesus had just calmed the storm as recorded in Mk. 4. *He said to his disciples, “Why are you so **afraid?** Do you still have no faith? **They were terrified** and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” (Mk. 4:40-41).*

The disciples were terrified. They were afraid – having just witnessed the word and work of Jesus.

And then we remember what Paul says in Philippians: *Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation (the word and work of Jesus) **with fear and trembling,** for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (Phil. 2:12-13).*

So, there seems to be a mixture of reverence and awe – AND – a bit of fear and trembling – when it comes to OLD and NEW TESTAMENT encounters of God.

Look – I’m not advocating for a religion characterized by being terrified of God.

I am, however, wondering, if there’s a paradox here – that combines – as Ryan Patrick O’Dowd puts it - an “adoring fascination of God with trembling before his holiness and power.” (crossway.org/articles/what does proverbs 1:7 mean)

Indeed – there is an O.T. verse that actually commands us to fear AND to love God:
*And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to **fear** the Lord our God, walk in all his ways, to **love** him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul...* (Deut. 10:12).

SLIDE 4. I think Ryan Patrick has the right idea when he says, “In short, biblical fear is... a fear that combines love and obedience.”

“Wisdom,” the bible goes on to say, “starts there.”

This fear – is the beginning of “knowledge” – or as it is translated in 9:10 – “wisdom.”

This “beginning” – the *resit* – in Hebrew – is the first and best thing – the way to start something and the way to keep going.

This is not about being smart or saavy or skillful. This is about how we live our lives before God – with awe and reverence and trembling – so that we would (wisely) obey and submit to his lordship and to the commands of His word.

All His Word. Not just what we find agreeable.

Let us not be like Thomas Jefferson who really liked Jesus, but, as a man of science, did not believe in miracles. Unfortunately for Jefferson, right next to Jesus’ ethical teachings are stories about miracles – feeding 5000 people with a sack lunch, walking on water, curing blindness.

Jefferson resolved this conflict in a very pragmatic way. He took a pair of scissors and cut out the miracle stories. He was left with the teachings of Jesus. He also snipped some of those teachings that were a bit incredible.

In the end he had just the Jesus he wanted.

The first and best way to be wise is to combine love of God and obedience to His word.

Doing so – in general – will lead to our lives going well.

Not doing so – in general – will lead to our lives going poorly.

SLIDE 5. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, **but fools despise wisdom and discipline*** (Prov. 1:7).

By contrast – then - we see that the opposite of the fear of the Lord is self-pride which leads to the rejection of wise instruction. This is seen in those who think that nobody has anything good or helpful to say unless they themselves are talking.

Fools hate knowledge (v. 22) and correction of any kind (12:1). They are quick to quarrel (20:3) and give full vent to their anger (29:11). They are complacent (v. 23) and trust themselves instead of God (Ps. 14:1).

And so - the life of a fool – in general – goes poorly. How – then - can we avoid it?

SLIDE 6. How can we live wisely and well in God's big world?

1. Approach God with reverence and awe – and a little bit of trembling.

*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with **reverence and awe**, for our "God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28-29).*

How do we approach God with reverence and awe? How do we show our Lord deep respect and slack-jaw wonder?

I asked our staff this question at our staff meeting this past Wednesday.

We talked about bygone times when preachers were serious and never laughed, and never told jokes from the pulpit; we talked about small foyers in church buildings intended to keep people from congregating after the service because they needed to go home and give their Christian lives some undistracted, sober thought; we talked about dress code: when men had to check their hats but women could wear them in the service.

Are - not laughing, being serious, and dressing a certain way – ways we might approach God with reverence and awe?

Maybe.

It seemed to us (as staff) that we show deep respect for God when we choose His ways over ours (what we might otherwise call "worship"). And it seemed to us (as staff) that we demonstrate wonder when we slow down and consider who it is we are talking to and listening to when we talk to and listen to God.

"The trick," we concluded, "was to balance our approach to God as a 'friend of sinners' with the God who is the 'God Almighty' – creator of heaven and earth."

Maybe then – we might approach God with reverence and awe by being serious and making space for laughter, by meeting with our friends in Christ – before, during, and after a church service – to challenge and encourage one another, and by wearing a hat or not – in the service – because – either way – God looks at the heart, not outward appearances (1 Sam. 16:7).

2. Be like Agur.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (1 Tim. 3:16).

So – we should pay attention to it – as Christians!

We should read all of the bible – not just the BOOK OF PROVERBS – with humility – and with hope – because we too can learn from the wisdom of God by reading God's word.

Like we can do – during this teaching series. More on that in a second...

3. Act like Lemuel's mom.

*Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it – not forgetting what they have heard, but **doing it** – they will be blessed in what they do (Jas. 1:23-25).*

Lemuel's mom put shoe-leather (or sandal-leather?) to her learning. So should we.

We talked about this as well at our staff meeting this week: the difference between knowledge and wisdom.

For our Hebrew ancestors - there was no distinction. Even in this teaching we have already seen how the terms are interchangeable from 1:7 to 9:10.

But for our sake – and maybe for some clarity – we landed on knowledge as being stuff we know – and – wisdom – as the correct application of the stuff we know.

I can live with that. But not matter how we think on bible reading – it's by "doing it" that we become wise.

HOMEWORK. As mentioned in our newsletter - STAYING CONNECTED – I am inviting the church to read the BOOK OF PROVERBS with me through the month of July. I'll be using the *YouVersion* bible app to do my reading. I'd invite you to do the same.

It provides a short devotional and the corresponding chapter for reading. It takes roughly ten minutes. It's a great way to start your day!

We can read through the BOOK OF PROVERBS in July - one chapter a day in synch. with the days of the month. If you did not see this invitation in the newsletter – then – sadly – you are at least one day behind – because this is July 2 :)

So, let's be like Agur. Let's read every day for 31 days.

And let me know what's impacting you as you read – either through the week or on Sunday morning.