

# Warning Signs and Directions for Living

Proverbs – Various Texts

## **B.I: Navigating life in a sinful world is a dangerous adventure, but God's training manual was written to guide us safely home.**

Periodically, in a rare moment when I have nothing better to do, I like to sit down with my boys, hop on the internet and watch a program called *Man vs. Wild*. If you're not familiar with this show, let me explain. The point of it revolves around taking a man (Bear Grylls) into one of the most remote and dangerous locations in the world, dropping him by parachute out of a plane or helicopter in the center of that place and watching how he successfully find's his way back to civilization without getting himself killed.

The thrill of the program is seeing how Grylls escapes death by drowning, falling, freezing, starving, mauling, poisoning, or any number of other dangers...without anything but his bear hands and a pocket knife.

As I was studying this week it occurred to me that life is a lot like *Man vs. Wild*. Being born into a sinful world is a lot like being dropped in the middle of a jungle full of deadly dangers. The challenge is to navigate though those dangers without being killed along the way. And the reality is, everyone born into this world has to make that journey. For some, the trek is longer than for others, but everyone must find his way.

Now this would be a terrifying prospect if we had to figure out how to survive on our own; and many people in the world hopelessly believe that. Such a person believes that he lives in a "dog-eat-dog," survival of the fittest kind of world and the only person he can trust is himself. And so stumbles stumble forward in life, hoping for the best, fearing the worst convinced he has to take his chances on his own.

The book of Proverbs, however, offers a far better worldview. Proverbs acknowledges that all of us are born into a dangerous world, but then it immediately informs us that we are not alone. God has not abandoned us to navigate our own way through the deadly dangers of life by our own wits. To the contrary, He Himself has given us everything necessary to guide us safely home. He is given us His Spirit, His Son, His people, and as we will see in our study together today, He has given us instructions that we can actually hold in our hands; namely, God's sufficient and infallible word.

Today I want to begin a short series on the book of Proverbs. If you are like me, the book of Proverbs has always been somewhat of an enigma in Scripture. There are so many seemingly disconnect truths presented in this book its just hard to get your head around it. But by the time we are done I want you to love this book so much that you will spend the rest of your life reading, studying, learning, and applying its truth to your own life and teaching them to your family, coworkers and friends.

Lets begin with a bit of an overview. The book of Proverbs stands alone as the most comprehensive and exhaustive library of God’s wisdom to be found anywhere in the Bible. It truly is a unique book and one to be treasured and studied by both young and old alike for its practical insight into how to live wisely in this world. *Turn with me to chapter 1 of the book of Proverbs.* Here, Solomon, the dominant author of Proverbs, tells us from the beginning the purpose of this collection of wise sayings.

Read 1:1-7

Now you might read that and wonder, “What in the world is Solomon talking about?” Well you see, Solomon understands what we discussed a moment ago. He understands that every person born into this sinful world has to walk a dangerous road full of hazards, pitfalls, snares, and difficulties. But Solomon is convinced that it can be done successfully - even joyfully. But here’s the thing: no one can do it alone. We all need help. The book of Proverbs, then, was written to provide what we need. What does the book of Proverbs offer us?

## **I. Practical Training:**

1. For King Solomon, compiling this catalogue of wise sayings was not just an academic exercise. It was intensely personal. He wrote it in order to instruct his own sons (and us) in something called “wisdom.” According to verse 2, the first purpose of the book of Proverbs is “To know wisdom.” So the first question we need to answer is: What is wisdom?
2. Now, its important to pay attention here because “wisdom” may not be exactly what you think. What I mean is, “wisdom” is not some kind of deep theoretical or philosophical knowledge of the world. Rather, it is best understood as practical skill for living.
3. We can see an example of “wisdom” spoken of in this way back the book of Exodus.
  - A. Turn with me to Exodus 28. I’m sure you are familiar with the context here. God has just rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt but leading them through the Red Sea. They are now at Mt. Sinai and God is equipping the people of Israel to live as an organized nation. So God said to Moses (28:3): “You shall speak to all the skillful (i.e. “wise”) persons whom I have endowed with the spirit of wisdom, that they make Aaron’s garments to consecrate him, that he may minister as priest to Me” So the word wisdom is synonymous with the word “skillful.”
  - B. Again, turn with me to Exo. 31:6. God said to Moses: “And behold, I Myself have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the hearts of all who are skillful (i.e. “wise of heart”) I have put skill (Lit. “wisdom”), that they may *make* all that I have commanded you. (Exo. 31:6).

5. According to these verses, then, wisdom is practical skill and expertise. In fact, a good Hebrew dictionary will reveal that the word “wisdom” can also mean “dexterity,” “technical skill,” “aptitude,” “good sense,” “shrewdness,” and “experience.” So, a man of wisdom is one who has mastered something. He is a person who has developed superior skill in a particular field. In the case of the book of Proverbs, the skill to be mastered is how to live in a sinful world for the glory of God and your own wellbeing. Another way of saying it is that the Book of Proverbs is a training manual for godly living.

6. Do you see why this was important to Solomon? He wasn’t just raising his sons to survive in a sinful world. No, he was raising them to be kings. One of His son’s was to be king in his place and all the others would be ruling princes. But again, here’s the important point: No one learns how to be that kind of person intuitively. Skillful living must be learned.

- A. You know why Bear Grylls is able to make his way out of a dangerous jungle or desert with nothing but a pocketknife? It is because he went through extensive training for years beforehand.
- B. If you go online and look up Bear Grylls you will find the following short Bio.

Bear Grylls has become known around the world as one of the most recognized faces of survival and outdoor adventure. His journey to this acclaim started in the UK on the Isle of Wight, where his late father taught him to climb and sail. Trained from a young age in martial arts, Bear went on to spend three years as a soldier in the British Special Forces, serving with 21SAS. It was here that he perfected many of the skills that his fans all over the world enjoy watching him pit against mother-nature. (<http://www.beargrylls.com/index.php/short-bio/>)

7. My point, beloved, is that no one is born with the skills necessary to make it out alive. Such wisdom requires training.. And that’s what Solomon is doing in the Book of Proverbs. He’s training his sons in practical skills for life that will keep them safe and enhance their joy on the journey.

8. What kind of skills will Solomon teach his sons? Here is just a sample list:

- A. How to manage wealth.
- B. How to respond to injustice.
- C. Direction in curbing one’s appetite.
- D. The need for humility and personal integrity.
- E. The danger of alcohol.
- F. How to respond to the appeal of easy sex and easy money.
- G. The imperative of controlling one’s emotions.

- H. The foolishness of not seeking counsel.
- I. How to think about tragedy, loss, and disappointment.
- J. The “do’s and don’ts” of persuasive (godly) speech.
- K. Respecting people with gray hair (I’m especially fond of that one).
- L. How to respond well to correction.
- L. How to build lasting friendships.
- M. How to train your children and love your wife.
- N. Many more topics besides...

9. You see, Solomon’s sons were at the trailhead of a potentially dangerous and wonderful adventure. He was determined to do all he could to train them to in the skills they would need to bring them safely and successfully through. That is what the “wisdom” of Proverbs is all about. But there’s more. Turn back to Prov. 1:2

10. Solomon said the purpose of his book was to know “wisdom,” or *skills for living*. But that is not the only thing his sons needed. Notice that the full phrase here is “wisdom *and* instruction.” You see, in order to navigate life in a sinful world we need something more than Practical Skill. We also need...

## II. Personal Discipline:

1. The kind of wisdom Solomon is speaking of is not something that comes to one simply by going to school and assimilating knowledge. Rather, it comes through discipline. The word for “instruction” here (2) means, “to discipline,” “chasten,” or “admonish.”<sup>1</sup> In the book of Proverbs, Solomon trains parents to use physical discipline on their children when necessary, but mostly his focus is on training with verbal discipline. And usually that comes in the form of strong warnings about what will happen if you fail to apply biblical wisdom to the specific circumstances and temptations of your life.

2. This past weekend on my flight home from Chicago I read an article in the current United Airlines, Hemisphere Magazine (Oct. 2013). It was written by a woman who is a professor at a university in California. In the article she talks about her long-time love for hiking and how over the years she has collected photographs of various warning signs she has encountered on the trail. For example, one of them announced this ominous warning: “If you lose your footing, powerful currents will carry you away over the falls.” Another one describes what the hapless hiker will experience if they’re not careful: “You will be battered to death against the rocks.” She goes on to say that the signs were accompanied

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Phillips, *God’s Wisdom in Proverbs* (2011) Cress Biblical Publications (40).

by drawings of figures enacting various impending catastrophes: the slip, the plunge, the subsequent battering.

3. Later in the article she explains why she collects pictures of warning signs. She writes: “Nature has no particular interest in my personal safety, or yours. I think this is partly why I find warning signs so reassuring. They demonstrate that somebody, somewhere, is looking out for us.”

4. As you read the book of Proverbs it becomes obvious that someone is indeed looking out for us because there are warning signs everywhere we look. Let me show you just a few of Solomon’s “Warning Signs.”

A. Here in chapter 1 he warns youth not to pursue easy money by joining a gang. (1:10-19).

B. In 5:8-14 he erects a warning sign about the appeal of easy sex with solicitous woman. Listen to these ominous words:(Read 5:8-14).

C. In chapter 6 there is a warning sign about the danger of being lazy. It reads (Read 6:9-11)

D. One of his many financial warning signs reads (11:15) “He who is a guarantor for a stranger will surely suffer for it.” In recent years many churches have fallen for financial scams out of Africa that promise big financial gains in exchange for a kind of “surety” agreement. I know of well-meaning but naïve pastors who have gone to jail because they did not heed this warning.

E. Regarding your choice of friends the warning is (13:20) “A companion of fools will suffer harm.”

F. To the Proud, the warning sign reads (15:25) “The Lord will tear down the house of the proud.” There are many other warning signs like these in the book of Proverbs. Why? Because Solomon wants us to know how to successfully navigate life in a sinful world for the glory of God and our own wellbeing. That’s why he seeks not only to teach us Practical Skills but Personal Discipline as well.

5. And by the way, the Lord himself is committed to training us in personal discipline as well. Do you remember that passage in Hebrews 12 that says the Lord disciplines us because he loves us? Do you know where the author of Hebrews got that thought? He got it from Solomon. Turn to 3:11-12 (Read 3:11-12).

6. My friend, ultimately, it’s not Solomon who is looking out for your wellbeing. It is God Himself. He is the one who teaches us wisdom. He is the one who has erected these ominous warning signs. And He did it because He loves us! And yet there is more.

7. The book of Proverbs offers us training in Practical Skills and Personal Discipline, but there is a very important truth that we need understand before we embark on seeking this wisdom and discipline. You see, the only people this wisdom and discipline works for are

those who possess the spiritual life and power that flows exclusively out of a relationship with God. So the person who desires to learn the Practical Skill and Personal Discipline needed to successfully navigate through this dangerous life also needs...

### **III. Powerful Motivation:**

1. We don't have to time to look at this today, so let me just tell you that the powerful motivation we will look at next time is what Solomon calls the "Fear of the Lord." Have you ever wondered what the Old Testament concept of the "fear of the Lord"? Next week I am going to show you that the "Fear of the Lord" in the O.T. is essentially (though not exactly) the same as the N.T. concept of salvation. We will also spend some time looking at the gospel as it is presented in Proverbs.

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