

# The Wise One Who Feels the LORD

여호와를 경외하는 지혜자

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Proverbs 3:5-8; 4:1-4

Series: Reading Jesus

Korean Hope Presbyterian Church

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## — INTRODUCTION —

Hallelujah!

Following the order of our Reading Jesus series, this week we simply read straight through the book of Proverbs.

The Korean word for “Proverbs” (잠언) is written with characters meaning “to admonish, a needle” and “word” — so we understand it as “a word of warning,” or “an admonishing word that pierces straight to the point like a needle.” In English too it is translated *Proverbs* — sayings or maxims.

But the Hebrew Bible calls Proverbs *mashal*, and this word *mashal*, besides “saying,” actually carries two more major meanings.

### **Proverbs (mashal)**

1. Parable (a word given in parable)

“I will incline my ear to a proverb (mashal); I will solve my riddle to the music of the lyre.” (Psalm 49:4, ESV)

“...To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’” (Luke 8:10, ESV)

*=> The word given in parable, by which God lets His children come to grasp grace, repentance, and gratitude!*

2. Compare (a word of contrast)

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge — vs. — fools despise wisdom and instruction!” (Proverbs 1:7)

*=> Never wander between good and evil — walk always toward the Lord, the foundation of all things!*

(1) First, then, it carries the meaning of **Parable**. Psalm 49:4 uses this very same word *mashal* in just this way. Shall we read Psalm 49 together? Begin!

Here “parable” and “my riddle” are used in almost the same sense. In this way, Proverbs is in fact a profound word given in parable.

A parable, you see, is not something whose meaning lies plainly open to everyone! It is not a word that all people will simply agree with and receive. A parable, in a word, means: “Only those who are meant to know, will know!”

The Lord Jesus speaks of this very thing concerning “parables” in the New Testament. Let us read Luke 8:10. Begin! This is the portion where our Lord Jesus directly quotes Isaiah 6:9 as He teaches.

Concerning the profound word of God delivered in parable: for “you” — those who stand for the children of God — there is a grace that, however hidden it may be, in the end is gradually grasped; within that word a breaking repentance surely appears; and out of that great grace there rises, in you, thanksgiving!

There are the saints, to whom it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God. But on the other hand, to those others who have not been given this, no matter how much they look at the word of parable they cannot truly see it, and though they hear it they understand nothing — to them it remains nothing more than a saying or a maxim. That is what a parable, what Proverbs, is.

So in fact the people of the world understand Proverbs as merely a book of wisdom literature for living. At a glance it does look just like worldly sayings, full of good thoughts and fine words. Because in the eyes of the world Proverbs keeps speaking of wisdom, stressing insight, commending good deeds, the world sees it only as a moral concept — just good writing, or at most a collection of wisdom and maxims packed with life experience.

But! Proverbs is, just like (1) Parable, surely the word given in parable, by which God lets His children come to grasp grace, repentance, and gratitude.

In this sense, every word of Scripture has this dimension. It is not a word granted to just anyone; it is the word of God, graciously given so that only His children, as they come to grasp the true meaning held within it, may confess grace and repentance and gratitude ever more deeply. Hallelujah!

So when we Christians approach this word of Proverbs, we must not approach it merely as some general wisdom for life or as a worldly moral concept of goodness — though of course that dimension is largely included as well. Yet the word of Proverbs is, above all, “the wisdom of God,” “the goodness of Christ” — that “God saw that it was good,” the concept of *tov* — and the saint must meditate on it with God at the center.

(2) And then one more thing: the *mashal* of Proverbs also has the grain of (2) **compare** — drawing comparisons and contrasts. As you read through Proverbs, again and again words appear that contrast utter opposites — good and evil, the righteous and the wicked, the wise and the fool — pole against pole. And in showing what the difference between the two is, and where each finally ends up, Proverbs often expresses this in very extreme terms.

At a glance one might wonder, isn't this too extreme? Too black-and-white? But there is surely a reason for contrasting these two with such stark examples. That reason, most likely, is that to the believer now reading Proverbs and living out their faith, it is saying exactly this:

“For you there is no vague middle ground! Which of the two are you now heading toward?” — it means to drive that question home all the more starkly. Of course no one lives an absolutely good life, and neither can we judge anyone's life as absolutely evil. But a true saint is surely not someone who just keeps drifting along, half-heartedly camped somewhere in the middle between good and evil!

For every life, every human being, inevitably leans toward one of the two and gradually flows in that direction. Is yours a life flowing toward what is good in the Lord's sight? Or toward what is evil in His sight? Just as that core verse, Proverbs 1:7, says:

“Have you grasped that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, the foundation of wisdom and of all things, and are you flowing toward the Lord?” Or, “Are you despising the LORD's wisdom and instruction, just going your own way, doing what seems right in your own eyes, flowing down your own foolish path?”

You are by no means somewhere in the middle! Wander no longer between good and evil; set your direction rightly toward the Lord, the foundation of all things — and though, being weak, you too will have your ups and downs, in the end, exactly as the Lord Himself leads you, walk the good path of life, the path of *tov*,

day by day, looking to the Lord! This, I am convinced, is the whole message of Proverbs.

So then, let us meditate on what, more specifically, chapters 3 and 4 are saying to us Christians today. My prayer is that, like (1), through this word granted to us we would come to grasp grace, repentance, and gratitude; and that, like (2), we would all become the wise who fear the LORD, walking always toward the Lord. Today we will look at two main things.

— BODY —

## 1. “Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD!” (The Wisdom of God)

First, the one who fears the LORD is a saint who flows along according to the word “Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD!” Here too, contrasting these two things, the word says: no longer my own wisdom, but the one who follows the wisdom of God and fears the LORD, the one who comes to know the Lord — that is the wise one! Shall we read Proverbs 3:5-8? Begin!

### “Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD!” (The Wisdom of God)

3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. [bînāh — your own understanding]

3:6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. [yāšar — He will make your path straight!]

3:7 Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. [my own wisdom => evil]

3:8 It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones. [rāpā’ — “Yahweh Rapha”; refresh / restoration]

*=> Not my own wisdom, but the one who follows the wisdom of God and comes to know the Lord — the wise one who fears the LORD!*

This is a very important word we have often looked at when studying Job and the other wisdom books as well. I have deliberately marked it in two colors — one for “my own wisdom,” another for “the wisdom of God” — so that the two stand clearly distinguished.

From the very start of verse 5 it contrasts them sharply: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding!” The Hebrew word

here for “your understanding” is *bînāh* — “your own understanding.” So: your own grasp of things, do not lean on it! Do not treat only what your own head can comprehend as the truth! That is not your wisdom! “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, with all your strength! Commit yourself to Him and follow the wisdom of God!”

Then verse 6: in all things, in your whole life, acknowledge God! And He will make your path straight! The Hebrew here for “make straight” is *yāšar* — straight, upright — meaning that He, the wisdom of God, will in the end personally lead your path to be straight, to be *yāšar*. Hallelujah!

And then in verse 7 the two are very clearly distinguished: “Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.” Look here — being wise in your own eyes, living by leaning on my own wisdom — what does it finally connect to? “My own wisdom,” it says, ends up flowing into “evil,” into “pride” — so be not wise in your own eyes, but fear the LORD and turn away from evil! That is how far this word goes.

If we keep leaning on our own understanding, following our own comprehension, our own discernment, our own judgment, then in the end we — full of sinful nature — are bound to think, “I myself am wise,” and that finally leads to pride, and rather than fearing the LORD, we end up turning down the stubborn path of evil. What a chilling reality.

So in the end this word means: the wisdom of the saint — however righteous one may be, however long one has believed, however outstanding my wisdom and knowledge and understanding may be — this “my own wisdom,” this “my own understanding,” is, before God, truly nothing more than a frog in a well, and under the wisdom of God it amounts to nothing at all. As we come to grasp this ever more, just as it says at the bottom: not my own wisdom, but to follow the wisdom of God and come to know the Lord! This, I am convinced, is the beautiful portrait of the one who truly fears the LORD!

And the striving to live exactly like this finally arrives, as verse 8 says, at: “It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones!” The Hebrew word for “healing” is rooted in *rāpā’* — “to heal.” It is the very *rāpā’* in “Yahweh Rapha,” “The LORD who heals.” In this way our God Himself heals you and makes your whole being flourish! This is “refresh” — He mends all that is yours, ever fresh and renewed, and in the end the wisdom of God truly restores you. Hallelujah!

So then, what exactly is this “wisdom of God”? What is it, and ultimately who is it? The New Testament, in 1 Corinthians 1, says it ever so clearly. Shall we read the arranged verses together? Begin!

**Christ — the power of God and the wisdom of God! (1 Corinthians 1:18-24)**

“For the word of the cross [logos — the Word of the Cross] is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God...

Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,

but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (ESV)

=> *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23, ESV)*

=> *Not my own wisdom, but the one who follows the wisdom of God — the wise one who fears the LORD!*

Here too, two contrasting groups of people are very clearly distinguished. And the very place where they are starkly set apart is precisely “before the word of the cross.” In Korean it is translated “the way (do) of the cross,” and this “way” is precisely *logos* — word, message. When the Word of the Cross, the gospel of the cross, is proclaimed, people are divided into two: on one side, those who are perishing; on the other, we who are being saved, those who alone have been called!

The mark of those who are perishing is that they regard the word of the cross as folly. “Come on, isn’t the cross just foolish? Why would Jesus hang there and die? He’s supposed to be the Son of God! So why suffer and actually die? They said he worked all those miracles — yet he couldn’t even save himself? What kind of God is that? The cross is absurd! No use for daily life! That’s not wisdom!”

In this way, never grasping how precious the cross of Christ is — that without truly beholding that cross, what becomes of me forever — they regard the word of the cross as folly and keep turning away from the Lord’s cross. And in the end, how are they described? “Those who are perishing”! Perishing — and an eternal perishing at that. That is their real folly.

Another mark of those who are perishing: “Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom.” The Jews of that day demanded only signs — visible proof, miracles,

astonishing wonders — and so “Christ crucified” was of no use to them. A Jesus who simply hung on a cross and died, who seems to show no more signs in my life — to such a Jesus they now say, “No, thank you!” Once they chased after every place of miracle, from the feeding of the five thousand onward; yet when Christ crucified is preached, now the Lord becomes a stumbling block to them.

The Jews who demanded visible signs were a problem; but the fact that “Greeks seek wisdom” was likewise a problem. A most representative trait of the Greeks of that day was the pursuit and longing for wisdom. The very beginning of “philo-sophy” — philosophy, born from the meaning “to love wisdom” — simply cannot be explained apart from Greek philosophy.

They were as earnest as anyone in seeking wisdom! But the problem is that the wisdom they pursued was the pursuit of “my own wisdom,” the piling up of “my own wisdom” — which flows in an utterly different direction from the faith of us Christians! So to the Greek who pursues his own wisdom as well, “the dead Christ crucified” remains nothing but folly all the way through.

Philosophy is the attempt to find everything by my own human wisdom; it even tries to grasp God Himself by my own wisdom. Whereas our faith, the wisdom of the saints, is finally this: because the day when each of us will stand before the Judge draws nearer day by day, my own wisdom is broken down more and more, and I am shattered all the more, while I entrust myself to the wisdom of God alone, flowing along exactly as Luke 9:23 says. Shall we read it together? Begin!

In this way, we are by no means those who are perishing — who before the word of the cross say, “Folly! Useless! That’s not wisdom!” For we are surely children of God who have been saved! And because I now exist in this very place solely by the calling of God! To us the word of the cross is the power of God! We preach Christ crucified! Christ our Lord Jesus alone is the power of God and the wisdom of God!

With this confession and proclamation, gripping firmly the rugged cross and bearing well the cross He has laid on me — not my own wisdom, but following the wisdom of God and coming to know rightly who our crucified Lord Jesus Christ is — the wise one who fears the LORD! May you and I all become such. This is my earnest prayer and blessing!

## 2. “I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching!” (The Inheritance of Faith)

Second, the one who fears the LORD is, in the end, a wise one who knows how to pass on well the inheritance of faith they have received — just as the word says, “I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching!” Why? Because the wisdom of fearing the LORD is fundamentally a **covenant wisdom**: received from God above, and faithfully passed down to the generations below. First, shall we read Proverbs 4:1-4?

### “I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching!” (The Inheritance of Faith)

4:1 Hear, O sons, a father’s instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight,

4:2 for I give you good precepts [the teaching of *tov*]; do not forsake my teaching.

4:3 When I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in the sight of my mother,

4:4 he taught me and said to me, “Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live.”

Ultimately, Proverbs is the word of God’s instruction handed down through a parent — whether father or mother. So this is not merely, “Son, you just follow my own understanding and wisdom rightly too!” It is rather, as verse 4 shows: my father taught me God’s instruction, His word, His wisdom and goodness, and now I too pass on to you “good precepts,” “the teaching of *tov*,” the good precepts that are good in God’s sight. It means handing down to the next generation, so that the inheritance of faith flows on like a watered garden.

And then verse 3 confesses: “I was tender, the only one in the sight of my mother!” “Tender” — in English, “tender, or weak.” Right now I stand before you as a father, discussing God’s wisdom, His insight, His goodness; but I too, in my mother’s eyes — and no doubt my father’s as well — was nothing more than a tender, weak, only son. He is speaking this very honestly.

There are no sons, no daughters, who get it right from the very start! At first all are merely tender and weak, so that in a mother’s eyes she may think, “Oh dear! Will this child ever amount to anything?” and in a father’s eyes too, with a sigh, “How will he ever keep the faith and live well?” — always the parents’ worry!

But in the end, looking back: even a son as tender and weak as I was has, by the grace of God, grown up like this, and now I am passing on God’s word and

wisdom even before my own children! This is a confession of faith that is almost like a testimony.

Looking back over my own past, it seems very much the same. “A tender, only son!” — this word feels like it was spoken about me! Now I stand before you as a pastor, preaching God’s word and explaining His wisdom; but truly, in my mother and father’s eyes, I heard words just like that often as I grew up. Always drawing out my parents’ sighs — “Oh dear, how will our son ever get by, carrying on like this?” — always causing them worry and grief: that tender only son was me. Of course I am still tender now; but solely by the grace of God, now, even amid the ups and downs, somehow I am passing on God’s word and wisdom to the children entrusted to me and to the saints entrusted to me. Seeing how astonishingly changed I am, I can only praise the one God, our Father, who shapes me this way and that — “Bless the LORD, O my soul!” Hallelujah!

Hold this firmly in mind: “My children too are all tender; I may, my whole life, see only the tender side of my children!” Bearing this clearly in mind, may you quietly let the inheritance of your faith flow on. This is my earnest prayer.

After all, the only One who can truly mend them is Another. No matter how hard I try, I can neither keep nor mend. The One who mends and uses me like this is not my mother or my father either. So I too merely plant the seed with care; another may water it; but the One who gives the growth, I am convinced, is God alone!

“The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore!” — that is all a parent can do! So even if only the tender side of my child shows, even if no improvement appears my whole life long, in the end it is God who keeps and God who must mend. We can only quietly plant, in home and church and society, the one apple tree entrusted to us today.

So then, what is the inheritance of faith we are to plant? What is that apple tree we must plant to the end? Let’s take a look. At the very end of Proverbs, in chapter 31, this time a mother appears and speaks like this. Let’s read together. Begin!

### **“I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching!” (The Inheritance of Faith)**

“The words of King Lemuel. An oracle that his mother taught him: What are you doing, my son? What are you doing, son of my womb? What are you doing, son of my vows? (What are you doing, son?)

(1) Do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings...

(2) Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.” (Proverbs 31:1-9, ESV)

=> (1) *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength!*

=> (2) *Love your neighbor as yourself! (Mark 12:29-31, ESV)*

Who King “Lemuel” was — whether Solomon or not — is much debated. The one thing we can know for certain is the meaning of the Hebrew name. “Lemo” means “belonging to, or for the sake of,” and “El” is God — so it means “Belonging to God,” “one who belongs to God,” or “one who lives for God.” So although we don’t know exactly which king he was, at any rate this is the inheritance of faith that a mother — who herself bore and named her son a king belonging to God, for God’s glory — is leaving behind to instruct her son!

But! This Lemuel, now reigning as king, seems, in the eyes of his believing mother, to be doing something terribly wrong. From the very start she repeats three times: “What are you doing, my son? What are you doing, son of my womb? What are you doing, son of my vows?” In English this is exactly, “What are you doing, son?” — a scene of a mother pressing him, rebuking him. She rebukes and instructs him about two main things that have gone wrong.

(1) First: “Do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings!” “Women” — not one, but plural, many. And “do not give your strength” means: whether that strength is virility, physical vigor, wealth, or effort — whatever it is — do not waste it loving many women, loving wrongful things. That is the very thing that destroys kings! Translated literally, that is walking the road that destroys kings! Don’t do that! — the mother’s rebuke!

This scene connects directly to the latter years of King Solomon. Loving a thousand foreign women, in the end what happened? It did not stop at loving women; it led straight to no longer loving the LORD God, no longer following Him, and then to following after foreign gods — truly walking the road that destroys kings, the old age of Solomon, which we know well. “What are you

doing, my son?" Do not waste your strength loving women; do not walk the road to destruction loving wrongful things!

If you are one who belongs to God, whom must you love first of all, with all your strength? Shall we read (1) below together? Begin! This, I am convinced, is the top priority for us believers — for us "Lemuels," those who belong to God in this age — the very first thing we must give ourselves to! We too must keep this first, and leave it behind as the inheritance of faith!

(2) And then second: with what must the life of the saint who belongs to the Lord — which begins with the love of God — also necessarily continue? With love of neighbor. (2) Love your neighbor as yourself! Though we did not read it, just before this the mother tells King Lemuel, "Do not drink wine! I fear lest by drinking you pervert the cause of the afflicted!" and then she says:

"Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy!" So, as a king, as a leader, the point is not simply that I abstain from wine.

(1) For the sake of those entrusted to me, I myself first cut off what must be cut off, keep my wits about me, and take God's law as my standard! (2) And especially for the weak, the struggling, the lonely, I open my mouth — and my hand as well — and actually do justice! This, I am convinced, is the beautiful portrait of "the saints who belong to God" — what we ourselves must live out, and pass on as the inheritance of faith, according to the word, "Love your neighbor as yourself!"

### **— CONCLUSION —**

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today, from Proverbs, we have looked at "The Wise One Who Fears the LORD."  
To sum up in two points:

### **The Wise One Who Feels the LORD**

1. "Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD!" (The Wisdom of God)  
: Not my own wisdom, but following the wisdom of God and coming to know the Lord — the wise one who fears the LORD!
2. "I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching!" (The Inheritance of Faith)  
: The wise one who rightly passes on the inheritance of faith — "loving God" and "loving those entrusted to me"!

May this journey of the saint's life be yours and mine, all of us. This is my earnest prayer.

*Hymn of Decision: "Those Who Long for the Love of God"*