

Wisdom P2

Proverbs

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Jon: We are talking through the books in the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job. Today, we're going to dive into the book of Proverbs.

Tim: Let the wise listen and add to their learning, let the discerning get more guidance. This book's for understanding proverbs and parables and riddles of the wise.

Jon: This book claims that there's a powerful mysterious force in the universe called the chokmah. We translate that Hebrew word into wisdom.

Tim: Wisdom is described as this universal principle according to which the whole universe is ordered, and in which it coheres.

Jon: Proverbs begins with nine chapters of speeches, encouraging us the reader to seek chokmah. Then the rest of the book is the Proverbs themselves.

Tim: It's hundreds and hundreds of these things that just take every topic in life you could possibly imagine, and then running them through the grid of the law of chokmah that runs the universe.

Jon: Learning about how chokmah is not some intellectual exercise with an impersonal force.

Tim: Wisdom is an attribute of God, but it's also something that we're going to see is accessible to humans. You can have wisdom too.

Jon: I hope you enjoy this conversation as much as I did in the book of Proverbs. Here we go.

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Jon: The Book of Proverbs, it's one of the three books in the wisdom literature.

Tim: What we're going to frame all of these books as is addressing the question, what kind of world am I living in and what does it mean to live well in God's world? These books all take for granted that the God of Israel is the creator and God of the world.

Jon: This would be a book that would make it to the New York Times bestseller list in nonfiction. It'd be like "how to make friends and influence people" kind of book.

Tim: But for religious people.

Jon: For religious people.

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Tim: There's good evil, right and wrong, so what does it mean to live well and live the good life here? What's interesting about the book of Proverbs is that chapters 1 to 9 begins with all these speeches. Not Proverbs, but speeches. There's the set of common themes that unite all the speeches.

The first is that wisdom is described as this universal principle according to which the whole universe is ordered, and in which it coheres. The most famous example of this is in Proverbs chapter 8, where wisdom is something God uses to actually build and architect the whole universe.

It says in Proverbs 8 that the Lord acquired wisdom as the first of all that He did and that He formed wisdom, and then used wisdom to architect the watery depths, and the mountains and the hills and how He marked out the heavens. It's all this architectural imagery of God making a big building, but wisdom is the blueprint. It's really interesting.

There are lots of metaphors you could use. Think of a rug. So the weave and pattern of the fabric is woven in order with wisdom. Or the universe and existence has a grain like wood, and you can live with the grain or you can go against the grain. There's an order - a cause-effect pattern.

In the book of Proverbs, there is all set of laws, so to speak, for how life tends to work.

Jon: What's the scripture that talks about it like a blueprint?

Tim: Oh, that's in Proverbs 8. It starts in verse 22. But it's wisdom speaking, and saying, "The Lord acquired me, and then started using me when He was architecting and building the universe."

Jon: So wisdom is the blueprint and this metaphor. So, when God was designing the universe, He would then go, and He would look at wisdom and go, "Okay, that's how I going to do it."

Tim: Yes, yeah. Wisdom is an attribute of God, but it's also something that we're going to see is accessible to humans. You can have wisdom too. And when you do that, you're actually tapping into something outside of yourself that is the attribute of God Himself. And that's a principle woven into how the world work.

Jon: It's the same attribute that gave the blueprints for the world.

Tim: Correct. Actually, there's an important difference but it's very similar to the view of the force in the Star Wars universe. That there's a force, a set of cause and effect

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patterns and you can get in touch with them and work along with them. You can live along with the force, the light or you can...The difference is that there's no dark side of the force; there's just foolishness.

Jon: There's either using the force or not using the force?

Tim: There's either using the force. There's only the light side in Proverbs. There's no dark side. The dark side is just being a fool and living against the grain of the universe, in which case, you'll get punished. That's the first thing is that attribute of God it's a principle according to which the world works and the universe is ordered.

Jon: And it's called chokmah.

Tim: Yeah. The Hebrew word for "wisdom" is the word "chokmah." You have to clear your throat a little bit in that second syllable "chok."

Jon: Chok.

Tim: Chokmah.

Jon: Chokmah.

Tim: Chokmah. So wisdom is a standard English translation. It has another nuance to it that we don't have in the English word wisdom, which we'll talk about in a second, but that's the basic idea of chokmah.

Jon: Rather than calling it the force because I keep thinking of Star Wars, you just call it chokmah.

Tim: Oh, yeah, we just call it chokmah.

Jon: Chokmah.

Tim: Chokmah. But it's not just like the law of gravity or something. It's like the law of gravity in that you see it at work everywhere, but you can't see it.

Jon: You don't see itself.

Tim: But it's also a moral law. So every time you see somebody cheats and then get caught and pay the consequences, that's chokmah at work. Because chokmah says, "Always have integrity." So it's not just impersonal, it's about decisions and moral behavior too.

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Jon: So that is a very different worldview then, and just atheistic worldview that, you know, there is no moral guiding, so you just kind of do what you need to do to survive. This is saying, actually, when creation was ordered, there was this moral work put into it.

Tim: It's a moral universe. That's right. The famous quote of Martin Luther King Jr, "The arc of history is long, but it bends towards justice." That's the worldview of Proverbs that.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That justice will win eventually.

Jon: And goodness and peace.

Tim: And that people who recognize that will cooperate and participate in justice themselves.

Jon: Because within the fabric of creation there was built the DNA of justice, and so it's going to realize that.

Tim: It's going to realize and reward integrity and honesty and generosity and justice. And not just in nature, in personally, but there's the law of human nature and how humans operate that goodness will become its own reward over time.

Jon: So chokmah, if you were to characterize Proverbs as this wise teacher and you got into our head, you would see that she was very acutely aware of chokmah. She sees it everywhere.

Tim: She sees it. and it's a pattern to how the world works, not just gravity and the stars and atomic forces, but like relationships and everyday life decisions also work according to a pattern. And if you can figure that out, you can live longer.

Jon: And that's why she's so smart. When you bring a dilemma to her, she's so quick to be like, "Oh, here's what's going on." It's because she sees the underlying patterns and the underlying way things work.

Tim: She looks for patterns in the cause and effect of people's decisions.

Jon: And she believes in the pattern.

Tim: Yeah. And they are part of how God wired the universe. So chokmah isn't just—

Jon: Does she have a tattoo? A chokmah tattoo?

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Tim: In Hebrew, in her wrist. Yeah, right, on her forearm. That's why chokmah as skill, not just knowledge, but skill is really important, because it's not just that you know about the pattern, it's that you use it, and then you craft your life the same way a stonemason can chisel a statue out of a big boulder.

So you take this raw material that is your life, and you can design it by chiseling your life out according to the pattern of chokmah, according to wisdom and justice and integrity and hard work and diligence and patient and so on.

[00:10:24]

Jon: You know, it's not just goodness and morality, it's also just street-smarts.

Tim: That's exactly right. That gets into the second nuance of chokmah in Hebrew that we don't have in our English word "wisdom." "Wisdom" is primarily a head knowledge. It's something you know - primarily intellectual reference.

In Hebrew, it's an active meaning. Solomon employs a bunch of artists like stone workers and woodworkers to work in the temple. He hires them because they have chokmah.

Jon: It's not that they're a bunch of philosophers.

Tim: Yeah, they're not philosophers. They're just really skilled woodworkers. So it's applied knowledge. It's that you know you've the raw materials you're working with and how they work and you know how to make them beautiful and design it well. So it's a skill.

Jon: We've said a lot of this point and I just want to make sure it's clear because in my head something is getting a little fuzzy. "Chokmah" is translated "wisdom" and there's a moral component to it because it rewards justice and integrity and those kinds of things. So built into the fabric of the universe itself is this moral component which is a part of chokmah. God used it as a blueprint when He designed the world.

Another thing about chokmah though you were just describing is just the applied ability to take that wisdom and then do something with it.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: So it's not just head knowledge, it's this very practical skill.

Tim: That's right. Which gets applied to all kinds of things. Like, I'm not particularly financially savvy myself and so I probably could do a way better job thinking long term and saving or whatever. But is that a moral issue? Is that right or wrong? Maybe

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some people would say that it is. But it's just some people lack chokmah, some people have chokmah when it comes to skill with what they do with their money over the long haul.

Jon: So when I'm good at finance, I have chokmah. When I'm good at making chairs out of wood, I have chokmah. When I'm good at brewing beer in my basement, I have chokmah.

Tim: Yeah, it's chokmah. And when you're good at having integrity and honesty with how you deal with your coworkers, that too is chokmah.

Jon: Now, what if I'm good at finances, but I do it in unjust way?

Tim: Then you're an idiot.

Jon: Then I don't have chokmah.

Tim: Then you don't have chokmah.

Jon: So you can't separate the moral component from the practical skill.

Tim: Correct. Yeah, that's correct. That's true. Yeah.

Jon: So a woodworker who makes these beautiful monuments for Solomon but he's just like a scam artist, he wouldn't be considered having chokmah?

Tim: Well, he has chokmah in his trade but he's an e'veel with his life.

Jon: An e'veel, a fool?

Tim: E'veel, yeah.

Jon: Is that fool?

Tim: Yeah, you transliterated E-V-I-L.

Jon: Really?

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Wow.

Tim: Evil, e'veel in Hebrew means for fool. Yeah, correct. So the moral components like a layer that goes underneath all of...

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[crosstalk 00:13:58]

Jon: So you can have chokmah without morality as it pertains to things that aren't in the bounds of needing to be moral.

Tim: Yeah. Typically, those are in the realm of relationships.

Jon: So if it's in the realm of relationships, you need morality?

Tim: If it affects people, yeah, essentially.

Jon: But doesn't everything affect people?

Tim: I suppose it does. If I chop down a tree, is that immoral? The tree falls in somebody's house, and then I run away, that's immoral. And if I chopped down too many trees—

Jon: Or you chop down a tree that's not yours.

Tim: Yeah. Or you chop down too many trees so that squirrels don't have a home anymore.

Jon: So you can do all these things in a way that it doesn't actually have chokmah?

Tim: Yes.

Jon: But you can still make a beautiful table with that tree.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And so you have chokmah as it relates to a table, but you didn't use chokmah. I don't know. Am I being too picky here?

Tim: No. The way that you like to drill down precision and clear categories I think runs into difficulty in the set of concepts.

Jon: Because this is just a word that they used. And languages mess sometimes.

Tim: Language is messy. Yeah, that's right. I mean, we're talking about fear of the Lord. We haven't talked about it yet, but this is where the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Jon: A lot of the Proverbs have nothing to do with being moral or not, right? A lot of them are just like, "Here's a smart way to live. Here's another smart way to live."

Tim: The moral component is dominant.

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Jon: But it is dominant.

Tim: Yeah. That's why in the same chapter of Proverbs, the good guys are called the wise, the righteous, the hard-working, and the bad guys are called the evil, the wicked, the unrighteous, the lazy. So these categories are overlapped with each other. The moral and just the wise are stupid. And that's part of worldview of Proverbs. That's true.

Jon: But when it comes to certain business things that aren't...I mean, there's some lot of ethical stuff but then there are proverbs that are just like, "Here's how to handle..." I don't know. I don't have an example.

Tim: No. Proverbs 14:4, "Where there's no oxygen, the manger is empty but the strength of an ox produces abundant harvest." So life's a lot more complicated if you don't own an ox.

Jon: A lot harder.

Tim: No, no. Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty. You don't have to scoop up poop, you don't have to take out food every single day. It's a nice, clean manger. You don't have to deal with the mess. No, ox. But you don't have an ox, you're not going to produce an abundant harvest.

So that's just a proverb about if you want to be productive, you have to be willing to put in the labor. Isn't that great?

Jon: It's really great.

Tim: To do the things you want to do, most often you have to do things that you don't want to do also along with them. And that's just the nature.

Jon: And that has nothing to do with being a good person or a bad person?

Tim: Yeah. Proverbs 14:4 is just saying, "Anything meaningful in life is going to have its upside and its downside." There you go.

Jon: And it made it into the Bible.

Tim: Yeah, exactly. But I love how it puts it. You don't have an ox, your manger is nice, and empty, and clean, but the strength of the ox produces abundant harvest.

Jon: You don't have employees, your HR department is really easy going.

Tim: That's right. No office dispute, no silos, people aren't ticking each other.

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Jon: But you're doing all the work yourself.

Tim: But you're doing all the work by yourself.

Jon: Some of the Proverbs are kind of prescriptive, but that one that we just talked about with ox in the manger isn't prescriptive.

Tim: Actually, it's kind of like a little riddle.

Jon: It's like you get to decide, do you want a clean manger or do you want some help in the field? You can't have both. Which one do you want to choose?

Tim: The one-liners that are in Proverbs 10 through the end of the book, they have a whole wonderful creative diversity it forms. So some of them are like, "Be like this, don't be like that." But a lot of them are like little riddles.

A lot of them just say, "Here's how life is; the soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit." Is just saying, people who speak kindly are like this, people who are speak badly are like this.

Jon: But what's interesting is that proverb isn't telling you how to speak. It's just kind of telling you how it is. But kind of embedded in that proverb, you get the idea that you should speak kindly.

Tim: Yes. Oh, yeah. It's pointing out the pattern.

Jon: But it's pointing out the pattern.

Tim: People who speak kindly and gently, well, as the law by the chokmah of the universe, be a source of life to others. That's just the nature of relationships.

Jon: So it's not prescriptive, but it definitely is kind of hinting towards the pattern that you should follow.

Tim: It's telling you what kind of world you're living in — a world where kind words are source of life to others.

Jon: What's really interesting about the ox and manger though is, arguably, you can go either way.

Tim: Oh, I see.

Jon: Or is it saying that no, you need the ox. Deal with the ox?

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Tim: The values in the abundant harvest. Abundant harvests are good for you and for others.

Jon: So it isn't saying like, "You know, sometime you might just want a simple manger?" I don't know. It's just to me because I think about this sometimes and I'm like, "How complicated do I want to make my life?" And this is saying, "Well, you want an abundant harvest." I just want an adequate hardest. I just don't want to starve."

Tim: This has nothing to do with the...But Enneagram Retreat that Jessica went on, The Type Five, one of our highest values is the uncomplicated life.

Jon: Yes, exactly. Yeah, I'm a fan. I read that proverb and I'm like, "Yeah, I'm going to limit the amount of ox poop I'm going to deal with in my life. That sounds great."

Tim: Yeah, totally.

Jon: And so I read that proverb and I think like, "That's smart." But it's getting at an underlying principle. I don't know. Is it telling you, "No, the right thing to do is to have ox and deal with the poop, deal with complications so you could have a big harvest?" Is that what that proverb is trying to tell us?

Tim: I think so. If you want an abundant harvest, you have to deal with complications.

Jon: What if you don't want abundant harvest? No one back then was like, "I don't want abundant harvest."

Tim: Exactly. That's exactly right. Because we can just go to the grocery store and get milk and sausage anytime we want. For them it's if you don't put up with life's complications, you don't eat. So you want an abundant harvest.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: Which means you're going to have to do some stuff you don't want to do to get the greatest good.

Jon: And that's always the case.

Tim: The greatest goods in life always require the sacrifices and compromises and dealing with difficult times.

Jon: Dirty mangers. The things that are worth chasing after and having in life are going to take a lot of work. So all the Proverbs even if they're not directly telling you what to do, they're pretty much telling you—

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Tim: They're probably trying to persuade you.

Jon: They are trying to persuade you. Because there are persuasive elements to all the problems.

Tim: Absolutely, yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah.

[00:22:17]

Tim: The opening paragraph of the book of Proverbs tells you...it's like a publisher's blurb on the back of the book. It's proverbs of Solomon, son of David, King of Israel. And then there's a little blurb. It says, "It's for gaining chokmah and instruction, it's for understanding the words of insight, for receiving instruction in prudent or like shrewd behavior, for doing what is right and justice fair.

This book is for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young. Let the wise listen and add to their learning; let the discerning get more guidance. This book is for understanding proverbs and parables and riddles of the wise."

In chapter 30, there's a whole collection of four to six line riddles. Do you want to hear one, a riddle?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Here's a riddle from chapter 30:15-16. There are three things that are never satisfied, four that never say, 'Enough!': the grave, the barren womb, land which is never sated by water, and fire, which never says, 'Enough.'

Jon: That's it.

Tim: That's the riddle. So, the riddle is to say, there are four things—

Jon: That consume.

Tim: That consume, but they're different. Like the grave is this inevitable thing; it consumes all humans.

Jon: Yeah, we are all heading there.

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Tim: But the barren womb, it's like the opposite of the grave. It's the beginning place of life but that also does not produce. And then there's land, land—

Jon: That has no water.

Tim: Like, not all the rainwater in the world will ever make it productive. And then fire.

Jon: Which is like the grave more, just destroying everything.

Tim: That's the riddle. There are three things that are amazing for me, four that I don't understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of the ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a young woman.

Jon: I don't get it.

Tim: Yeah, exactly. Aren't these wonderful? You have to stop and think about them.

Jon: I mean.

Tim: So like an eagle crossing the sky is all about motion.

Jon: Okay, yeah.

Tim: Eagle in the sky, it never flaps its wings, how does it up there...? The snake on a rock, how does—

Jon: How's it slithering?

Tim: How does it get there? A ship on the high seas, how does that little thing move across those huge waves? And then how on earth does a brute stinky man ever find favor with the elegant, beautiful woman?

Jon: Is that what he's talking about?

Tim: I think that's it. Isn't that odd that a woman would ever want to be with a man? There's an element of Proverbs that's playful too - of like using your mind to think about strange things in life.

Jon: And so that's useful for wisdom in that it's just helping you understand the world more and think about it differently.

Tim: Yeah, think about things differently. There's always more complexity than I ever realized. There are always new things to ponder.

Jon: There's more connections to things.

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Tim: Yes, that's right.

Jon: There are vantage points that are going to help you understand things better, make better decisions. So those are the riddles. But then there's just straight up, "Don't do this. That's a foolish thing to do. Don't lie to people, that's foolish. Tell the truth, that's great. You'll do well."

Tim: But that's not how they do it. That's like the Ten Commandments. Proverbs are saying—

Jon: Or they'll do it.

Tim: Yeah, they'll just say, "An evil person ends up like this, but the wise person will be like this." Again, they're painting a picture of how the world works. And then you read the proverb and you go, "I want to be like the wise man not like the fool, so I'm going to get to work and deal with ox poop and be diligent and not be lazy and tell the truth."

Jon: So all of these riddles and proverbs and - what else is he calling them? Poems is in there. He has a list of things. They all taking chokmah and putting it into these sayings, these ideas, wrapping them up, these memes and then giving them to you.

Tim: Yeah. The book of Proverbs it's hundreds and hundreds of these sayings that just take every topic in life you could possibly imagine and then running them through the grid of the law of chokmah that runs the universe.

Jon: What was helpful for me is it's not about knowing every single proverb and making sure you're always checking off a list of proverbs as you're going through life. As much as it is respecting chokmah...think about this way. What makes this woman so wise? Yeah, she knows all these proverbs, but what really makes her wise is she knows she's always looking for chokmah. And she sees the chokmah in the proverbs and she knows why that proverb because she knows the underlying chokmah and so she can apply it to the right situation and know when you need to use it.

So it's not so much about like, "Hey, read all these Proverbs and just do them." It's about understand and interact with the chokmah underneath of it.

Tim: There's the famous pair of Proverbs right next to each other that offer the exact opposite advice. That's really interesting. It's in chapter 26. Verse 4 of chapter 26 says, "Don't answer a fool according to his folly or you'll become just like him." That makes sense. There are some people who actually aren't looking—

Jon: Someone's foolish enough is not worth getting in a conversation with.

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Tim: Yeah. They're not looking to learn, they're not open-minded. You're just going to get drawn into a stupid debate. So don't even bring it up.

Then the very next time is, 'answer a fool according to his folly, or else he'll become wise in his own eyes. It tells you to do the opposite thing. Answer the fool, tell him that he's wrong and that he shouldn't do or say that or else he's going to go on thinking that that's an okay thing to do or say. So what do you do? Are you supposed to answer a fool according to his folly, or not answer a fool according to his folly?

One of my Hebrew professors, Michael Fox, who actually wrote a majestic two volume commentary on Proverbs in the Anchor Bible series, I spent all semester, all year reading the wisdom books with him in class. It was an absolute privilege. He always liked this example.

For him, he developed a metaphor that the Proverbs are like a pocket full of change. We don't really use change that much anymore - dimes and nickels, and so on. But it's like a change and you just need to pull and apply each one depending on what the situation requires.

Jon: Right. So there's underlying chokmah that you need to understand?

Tim: Yeah. So you also have chokmah to know which proverb is relevant to what situation in life. Because sometimes it might mean the exact opposite response.

Jon: Because it's easy to go to Proverbs and say, "This is how I should do it, I'm going to do it - and just treat it as a rule book of sorts."

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: I just love when we talk about chokmah, we talk about understanding it and seeing it. It just gets me really excited versus like memorize all these Proverbs, which to me is like the life hack thing. It's like if I just do these things, my life will go better and I don't know exactly why. And I set to trust them and I'll check them off and all this apply them, versus no, these things are interesting because they all come from chokmah and this is something that the fabric of the universe was blueprinted on, it's an attribute of God and you connect when we interact with it.

Tim: It requires you to become responsible and wise yourself to know what the right course effect it is in any given moment.

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Jon: We've talked about chokmah, we've talked about lady wisdom, we've talked about how it's this force and you need to interact with it to design a life that's good for yourself and for others. At that point, you just go, "That sounds great. Let's go. Let's do this. I want a good life. I'm excited about this force, I'm excited about chokmah, I want to start looking for it. I'm going to start designing my life. I'm going to start writing books about how to live a good life with chokmah, and I'm going to just jump in headfirst. But I need to be careful because I could actually get in trouble with this eagerness for wisdom."

Tim: The Book of Proverbs is also aware of the fact that humans can become what they would call wise in their own eyes. That we can somehow end up thinking we're using chokmah and think we're making the right decision, but actually, we've deceived ourselves and we've become the fool. This is where the moral component especially comes in. This is where the concept of the fear of the Lord comes in.

There's the opening line in Proverbs that says, "Actually the beginning of chokmah is to fear the Lord." It's a very interesting line. So the way chokmah is described in Proverbs isn't simply life hacking. It's being aware that when you're doing chokmah you are honoring and humbling yourself before not a force but a person, God, who has a vision of good and evil that might be inconvenient for me sometimes.

But chokmah is to recognize I don't get to determine good evil for myself, I need to fall in line with how the universe works, which is according to God's definition of good and evil.

Jon: So the danger is, when you're seeking after chokmah aggressively, just idealistically, like, "I'm going to get it," is that it's human nature, is a human condition to if something is convenient for me, I'm going to figure out a way for it to feel like wisdom or to be perceived as wisdom. I will fool myself quite easily and not even realize I'm doing it.

I could be chasing hard after wisdom, it could even start to like work out for me, and like, "Look, I'm being wise and then all the sudden the curtain pulls away and I realize that's not wisdom and I'm getting smacked around.

Tim: And so, what's happened there is that you've violated the fear of the Lord. Or as it says in chapter 3, to fear the Lord is to shun evil. So something wise is to be a productive human and accumulate resources so that you can take care of yourself and other people. So let's say you're a business owner. It's wise to make good business decisions to increase profits so you can take care, pay a good salary, whatever, to your employees. And then you realize, like, "Oh, you know, there's this

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tax loophole and if I just kind of work this angle, we can totally cut corners on all of this."

Jon: Or, "if I lie about this."

Tim: "If I lie and kind of bend these numbers, nobody will ever know."

Jon: "Or I could accumulate more, and it's going to hurt these people indirectly or directly, but I'm supposed to be productive so I'm going to do it."

Tim: You can end up feeling one thing that you think is a good but you end up compromising and doing evil in some other area to accomplish the good. In Proverbs, that's foolishness because you're lacking integrity, you're acting without honesty. And so, you actually, played the fool in your effort to become wise.

Jon: So if someone came and said, "I am wise. Look at how well I'm doing in life or look at these decisions, but I'm doing those things while compromising a lot of morals," then Proverbs would say, "No, actually you're not being wise. You're a fool and it's because has you did not begin with fear of the Lord."

Tim: Yeah. I mean, a classic example in the American work culture is just the culture of overwork. So you have high achieving people whose personal lives are a disaster. They've built a great company, or they've really put their department into good order, but they don't spend any time with their kids.

Actually, they are acting foolishly because they haven't achieved balance between work and life and relationships. You seem wise at work, and then you go home, and you realize that that person's a fool.

Jon: And it's so easy to do that. It's so easy for anyone to miss, just to completely miss. It's like we have this incredible ability to - when I say, "We," I mean me, everyone - to justify thing.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. It comes when we elevate some goal as the ultimate good, and therefore other things can get compromised to accomplish that thing. It's kind of the biblical vision of idolatry. Once you make something an ultimate thing, then you'll be willing to dehumanize yourself and others in the effort to accomplish that.

Jon: And you'll convince yourself it's not—

Tim: And you'll convince yourself that it's good and wise and noble.

Jon: And this is connected then to this whole idea of the knowledge of good and evil.

Proverbs

Tim: Yes, yeah. The fear of the Lord is to shun evil.

Jon: Not just that, but to kind of relinquish your definition of good and evil.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Yeah.

Jon: If you go back to the tree of good and evil, there is this idea of God defines what's good and evil or do we define what's good and evil? And when we define good and evil, we will make evil things good. It just will happen. We aren't capable of holding that line and knowing how to do that. We'll deceive ourselves. We'll make other idols more important and we'll cut corners. Sometimes purposefully and oftentimes unconsciously.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. That's the depiction of like Pharaoh in the Exodus story, where it has become good to kill babies of immigrant people to protect his people.

As the human inclination to maximize pleasure and minimize pain for me and my and if that's the expense of you and yours, but at least I increased good for me and mine.

Jon: It's not just one political part of the political spectrum that's doing this and it's not just one type of personality is doing this. We all do this.

Tim: That's right, yeah.

Jon: And so, in order to truly be wise and not screw it up, I have to respect and fear that at the end of the day, God's perspective is what I am looking for and want to uphold. And that's fear of the Lord.

Tim: One of the most well-known lines from the earlier chapters of Proverbs are from the Father to the son saying, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and don't lean on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Don't be wise in your own eyes, fear of the Lord and shun evil."

The whole thing is, you're going to have a way that seems right to you, there will be decisions that make sense to you but you should just always be suspicious of your motive.

Jon: And always check yourself against what God has told us is right and wrong. Now, God hasn't given us instructions about everything. There's a lot of ambiguity in life.

Tim: So this is another chokmah thing. If you have internalized what the fear of the Lord is in the very clear scenarios, that begins to give you a true north in others. And that's suspicion. There's a great proverb, 16:2. "All a person's ways seem pure to

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themselves, but motives are weighed by the Lord." Such a good one. So just by nature, we are like, "Yes, surely I'm making the right decision and for the right reasons." So there's a skill to be developed in discerning being suspicious of myself and turning to the wisdom of others to know what the right way forward is.

So the fear the Lord is what I call the moral logic of chokmah. It's recognizing there might be all kinds of skill choices that I could make. But if they are violating my moral compass, then they become stupid and foolish.

[00:41:36]

Tim: I have a friend who recently changed...they're in real estate, so they change companies because dishonesty in how they posted listings of houses and the information given about houses, the basic practice was always to just misrepresent the reality of the property. She just couldn't take it anymore and so she switched companies to at least a company where that was tolerated—

Jon: And that's fear of the Lord.

Tim: Yeah, that's fear of the Lord. That was a wise decision. Even though the company she left was extremely profitable, her conscious couldn't hang with it. So the book of Proverbs would say, even if it involved a pay cut, that's still the wise decision.

Jon: The book Proverbs would go as far to say, "And you will prosper for that."

Tim: The book of Proverbs will go on to say - allow me to quote - "My son - Proverbs 3 - "don't forget my teaching. Keep my wisdom in your heart, they will prolong your life many years, bring you peace and prosperity." Later on, "Don't be wise in your own eyes, fear of the Lord and shun evil." Like my friend did. "This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones." Yeah, who needs vitamin D? It's like, fear the Lord and shun evil.

Jon: You'll get a lot of resources, you have a very healthy body, you're going to live a long time.

Tim: That's core to the book of Proverbs is that wise choices over the long haul will produce a good life, you'll acquire financial resources: healthy, wealthy and wise.

Jon: Yeah, healthy, wealthy and wise. If you go with the grain of the universe, you're going to end up in a good spot. We talked about this. Because, obviously, we can step out of this for a second and say, "Well, not always. Like Job or Ecclesiastes," right?

Tim: Sure.

Proverbs

Jon: But let's stay in it for a second.

Tim: The person who works really hard and earns a reputation for honesty and integrity will more likely produce resources by those decades of hard work than the person who scams and cheats their way into wealth. I'm not an old man, but my hunch is that that's how things tend to work. Or at least they ought to work.

Jon: There is definitely a feeling that it ought to work that way. We celebrate when things turn out that way.

Tim: That's right. But Proverbs doesn't just say "Ought to work that way." It says, "This is how things will work out."

Jon: And that's why for us, the character is kind of a young idealistic person because when you're young you realize this is how it should work. I'm going to go fix things because I know in the fabric of the universe this is how it's supposed to happen.

Tim: And you can pay attention and point to people and stories and relatives or whoever, that that's how it worked for them. They worked hard, they produced wealth, they were able to—

Jon: Now, another way to think about this is just odds. More likely than not things will work out for you. So if you do these things over the long haul over and over, it'll work out for you. You're playing the odds, you're playing statistics. You're in for the long game.

In the short run, who knows what will happen? But in the long run, you do it enough, this is going to be a success.

Tim: Part of my shorthand way of talking about this is just to say, "This is, after all, the Book of Proverbs, not the book of promises."

Jon: But it says it's a promise.

Tim: But they are framed as very strong claims. They are.

Jon: Health and wealth.

Tim: Yes. But by nature, a proverb is accumulated wisdom about how life tends to go. So, I'm not trying to water down the powerful persuasiveness of this.

Jon: I think we need to end with this real excitement for the persuasive...

[crosstalk 00:45:58]

Proverbs

Tim: Yeah. It's like you just discovered a secret key.

Jon: Yeah, right.

Tim: Well, chokmah.

Jon: Because it is true chokmah exists and it will make your life rad when you design your life with it. And then we could stop there, and we could celebrate and actually benefit a lot but that's not where the story ends when it comes to our journey with wisdom.

Tim: That's right. The wisdom literature doesn't only say that to other voices speak up. Ecclesiastes speaks up and he'll say, "Excuse me, Proverbs. It does sometimes work like that but can I point out exhibit A, B, C, D, E, F, G, where it just the opposite?" And then Job says, "Yeah, actually, that was me, that happened to me. Didn't work out for me and here's what I've learned from that."

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Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast. I'm Jon Collins, and that was a conversation with Tim Mackie on the book of Proverbs. We're co-founders of The Bible Project. We create a lot of free videos and put them up on YouTube for people to watch so that you can learn the big picture of Scripture and see how it's a unified story that leads to Jesus and as profound wisdom for this modern world.

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