

# Proverbs:

## *God's Answer Sheet*

January 25, 2004

Q: What is the hardest class you have ever taken?

Greek was my hardest. I carried flash card everywhere. I fell asleep reciting verb endings. If I was sick, I'd skip all my classes except Greek, so I didn't fall behind.

- If you missed even one day, you were gone.

Q: Did you ever take a test that you weren't ready for?

Q: What if the teacher gave everyone the answer sheet for 10 minutes?

You know that the test is coming, that you're ill prepared, but here are all the answers. Would you talk to your friends, doodle on the sheet, or furiously try to memorize it?

### REAL LIFE TESTS

Tests don't end with school; life is full of tests. I wake up knowing that I may argue with my wife, be tempted to ignore my responsibilities, or respond to criticism from my boss.

Instead of a good or bad report card, we get good or bad memories, depending how well we do on these tests.

Instead of an "A," we get a healthy relationship, a clear conscience, a secure future, a good name and reputation.

Instead of an "F," we get frustrated relationships, a flawed conscience, financial poverty, a failing name and reputation.

- These are the tests we need that answer sheet for.
- And God has given us one ... the book of Proverbs.
- Proverbs is God's answer sheet for life's tests.

We will be tested when we argue with our spouse or coworker.

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. *Proverbs 15:1*  
NIV

We will be tested when we want to ignore our responsibilities.

Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth. *Proverbs 10:4 NIV*

We will be tested when we receive criticism or advice.

The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice. *Proverbs 12:15 NIV*

Life is filled with “cause and effect” exams. We cause things to happen through our words, attitudes, action, or lack of action. We then enjoy, or suffer the effects.

- There are calculable consequences to our actions.
- Proverbs’ purpose is to reveal those calculable consequences.

A few years ago, when Paul Carter was our Administrator, he gave me the job of sweeping the parking lot. With every stroke, the wind would catch the dust and blow it into my face.

- I was thinking, “Stupid wind. Stupid dust. Stupid Paul Carter.”
- Paul was watching me sweeping into the wind, not with it, thinking, “Stupid Josh.”
- And, “There’s something wrong with that boy”

The Proverbs teaches us cause and effect.

## KNOW AND OBEY THE AUTHOR

We can choose to believe that our world is random, without clear cause and effect; that we are victims of what happens to us. Or we can realize our world was created by God, and reflects His order.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom... *Proverbs 9:10 NIV*

To fear the Lord is to obey Him, to obey Him is to live in harmony with His created order.

- When we ignore His created order, we will bear the calculable consequences.

This does not mean that non-Christians can never be wise. We all know some non-Christians who are wiser than some Christians. All truth is God’s truth.

- Tony Robbins has made a very good living off of God wisdom!

The ancient Greeks earnestly sought the under-laying order, the meaning of creation, calling it The Logos. This is why John wrote:

In the beginning was the Word [Logos], and the Word [Logos] was with God, and the Word [Logos] was God....The Word [Logos] became flesh and made his dwelling among us. *John 1:1, 14 NIV*

In Jesus Christ the wisdom and order of the universe became flesh and lived with us.

- In other words, to know Him is to know wisdom.
- And we must know Him, because wisdom is all about finding God's perspective.

### THREE GUIDELINES TO READING PROVERBS

Proverbs is a road map; it can show us how to get to somewhere, but it won't drive us there. I could have an expensive leather-bound, gold-embossed, collector's-edition map.

- As long as it sits on my coffee table, it won't get me any closer to Dallas.
- I knew I should've taken that left turn in Alba-koy-key.

Here are three guidelines to help you read Proverbs:

- 1) Proverbs give reliable principles, not absolute promises.

Proverbs gives the likely outcome of various actions and attitudes. They are trustworthy and reliable to live by, but we will get in trouble if we view them as divine guarantees.

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it. *Proverbs 22:6 NIV*

If we train raise our children in the ways of God, they will probably remain in them. If we do not, they will probably follow the ways of the world.

- This is principle, not a guarantee.
- Our children have free will.

- 2) Proverbs are worded to be memorable and concise, not exhaustive and thorough.

Highly nuanced, long, detailed statements may be more accurate, but they are hard to follow and even harder to remember.

We could say: Men and women who are deficient in understanding and insight are disinclined to learn from their miscalculations and errors in judgment.

- Rather they're inclined to suffer the painful consequences, yet repeat the same error, continuing in a dysfunctional cycle.

Or simply:

As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly. *Proverbs 26:11 NIV*

**Q:** Which version will you remember in an hour?

- God wanted Proverbs to be memorable, and usable.

3) Proverbs must be interpreted in the light of Scripture.

A bribe is a charm to the one who gives it; wherever he turns, he succeeds.  
*Proverbs 17:8 NIV*

The Bible isn't condoning bribery! Sometime Proverbs makes observations on human behavior without comment. Other Proverbs expressly condemn bribery.

Because Proverbs was written in another culture, some of them can be a little difficult for us to follow. Don't worry about them – skip them for now. The majority are straightforward.

- Mark the tough ones, save them for later study.
- When you're ready, check out a study Bible or talk to me.

## READING PLAN

By this point, I hope you are interested in reading Proverbs, so I want to give you a simple, manageable reading plan.

**Q:** How many chapters are in Proverbs? [31]

**Q:** How many days are in most months? [31]

That's a useful coincidence! On any day of the month you read the chapter that coincides with that day.

**Q:** What chapter would you read today? [25th]

That's simple, but I want to make it more manageable. One chapter is too much to absorb in one sitting, so I suggest breaking each chapter in half.

- On odd numbered months, read the first half of the chapter.
- On even numbered months, read the second half of the chapter.

Q: What chapter would you read on October 19th?

Q: Which half of the chapter?

If that went by too fast, or you would like something to use as a reminder, I have copies of this reading plan in the back.

### ADDRESSING THE CAUSE

So many people live as continual victims of their own foolishness because they do not understand cause and effect. They miss the calculable consequences of own their actions.

A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD. *Proverbs 19:3 NIV*

Q: How much pain in your life is simply the calculable consequence of ignoring God's wisdom?

- Proverbs invites us to address the causes.