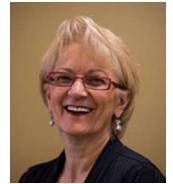


*Hélène Dallaire, PhD*

*Experience: Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages at  
Denver Seminary in Littleton, Colorado*



### The Importance of Proverbs

The book of Proverbs invites you to pursue . . .

- Wisdom
- Knowledge
- Discipline
- Understanding
- Judgment
- Discretion
- Uprightness

### Proverbs 1:2-4 KJV

To know **wisdom** and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;

To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;

To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

**hok'mah**

*Wisdom*

Well, so far we've talked about the book as a whole, the various styles of proverbs that we have in the book of Proverbs. We talked about the authors who contributed to the book of Proverbs. We looked at the similarity between or similarities between the collection of proverbs that we have in the Bible and proverbs that were written in the ancient Near East before biblical times and during biblical times, and even proverbs that last to today.

We could look at other cultures also and see that they probably have collections of proverbs that are very similar to everything we've looked at. And there are so many more topics that are covered in the book of Proverbs. And what's interesting is when you begin reading the book of Proverbs, you realize the reason why the book of Proverbs is important, because it invites you to pursue wisdom, pursue knowledge, pursue discipline, pursue understanding, judgment, discretion, uprightness, walking in a way that pleases God, that is ordained by God.

And so we have to be intentional in living our lives in the fear of the Lord. It doesn't just happen that we just kind of cruise along life and we do things the right way. We really learn early on how to do things the right way. If we are taught, hopefully by our parents, if we are taught in the ways of the Lord. And we are taught not only what to do right, but we're taught how to avoid the temptations and the pitfalls of life that are very costly.

Some of the key words that appear at the beginning of the book of Proverbs in chapter 1 are key to understanding the purpose of the entire book. And one of the words that is used, the word, the Hebrew word *hok'mah* meaning "wisdom." Wisdom, what is wisdom? What does it mean? Wisdom, as we mentioned earlier, is the ability to apply divine knowledge to our lives. The ability to live in a way that is pleasing to God. Wisdom seeks opportunities to please God. So living in a way that is intentional in walking in the ways of the Lord.

- Applying divine knowledge to our lives

### Proverbs 1:2–4 KJV

To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;

To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;

To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man **knowledge** and discretion.

**da'at**

*Knowledge, perception, skill*

- Skillfully recognizing right and wrong

### Proverbs 1:2–4 KJV

To know wisdom and **instruction**; to perceive the words of understanding;

To receive the **instruction** of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;

To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

**musar**

*Instruction, discipline, correction*

- Receiving correction and learning from it

So we read the book of Proverbs as we pursue . . . in our pursuit to be sanctified, in our pursuit to learn how to really walk before God. We won't do it perfectly, but at least we can be convicted of our ways, and we can learn how to apply these simple ways. And what's very interesting in the book of Proverbs is that most of the proverbs are very simple. Scripture is not that complicated. God is not trying to confuse us. The words of the wise and the words of Solomon, the instructions and the words of the sayings, the wise sayings that are given to us, the *hok'mah* that is given to us through Solomon is really quite simple. And so it deals with our heart, deals with our willingness to apply what we learn to our lives.

Now, the next key word is *da'at* in Hebrew, which is the word for "knowledge." And knowledge, what is knowledge? Knowledge is more than a cognitive element. Knowledge is skill. If I don't have knowledge on how to read, I don't have the skill . . . on grasping what is available for us. And so knowledge is getting the right perception of what is available to me. And so knowledge also is the ability to recognize what is right and what is wrong. If I don't have knowledge, sometimes we do things . . . we do the wrong thing because we don't know. And so the more knowledge we have, knowledge is a gift that is given to us. Our pursuit after knowledge, after *da'at* is very important for us to continue to learn, be lifelong learners of God and of His ways. And then we can walk without making a lot of mistakes that are based on the lack of knowledge.

The next word that is mentioned in this chapter is *musar*, "instruction" or "discipline." Now we don't really like discipline. Discipline usually doesn't feel good. Being chastened and being rebuked, being corrected, doesn't always feel very good. And what's interesting about the way this statement is, this word is used, it indicates that we take in discipline to receive, we "receive," *laqahath* [from *laqah*], to receive discipline, to internalize discipline, the things that we learn when we are corrected. So we are not to resist the right kind of discipline. We are to take it in. We are to learn from it. And in Hebrews 12:5–6, and 8, we read, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the LORD, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the LORD disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. . . . If you are left without discipline, . . . then you are illegitimate children and not sons" (ESV).

**Proverbs 1:2-4 KJV**

To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of **understanding**;

To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;

To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

**binah**

*Understanding, discernment*

- Using acquired knowledge to decipher the difficult things in life

**Proverbs 1:2-4 KJV**

To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;

To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and **judgment**, and equity;

To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

**mish'pat**

*Judgment, justice*

- Using accurate information to make correct decisions

**Proverbs 1:2-4 KJV**

To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;

To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;

To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and **discretion**.

**m'zimmah**

*Discretion, purpose, plot*

- Knowing when to do the right thing
- Discerning the truth of a matter

So it is a part of life that we all grow from being children. And we are children of God. So we need to have the Lord discipline us, correct us, rebuke us for the things that we do wrong, which really often comes in terms of conviction. We are convicted, and God convicts us with His rebuke and expects us to learn from that. So discipline is good for us. It is needed for us to grow in our walk with the Lord.

Another word is *binah*, “understanding.” And to understand is the object of knowledge, really. You acquire knowledge, not just for the sake of having knowledge, but for the sake of understanding and knowing the reason why you should do certain things and not do other things. Understanding is using the knowledge that we have and using that in order to decipher the riddles of life, the difficult things of life, the puzzles of life. And so if we acquire knowledge, we gain understanding, and then we’re able to recognize what . . . and decipher and put the pieces of the puzzle together in life. So we pursue these things in Proverbs. We pursue wisdom and knowledge in order to be able to understand what’s going on and live in a manner that is pleasing to God.

Another word that is important in this passage is *mish'pat*, “judgment,” which talks about . . . *shafat* is “to judge,” a *shofet* fact in Scripture is a “judge.” So it is important for us to be able to build our case as if we were a judge, to have the right information, to be able to have accurate information, to be able to process life as if it were a case, a court case, to bring the evidence together, to bring all the pieces together and to present them . . . so in righteous judgment, in the right kind of judgment. So we need to judge situations. We need to be able to discern, to make the correct decision in cases of life, in situations of life. So this is called judgment. So judgment is not only you judge your brother or your . . . it’s not the negative thing. Judgment is really to be able to process life. The cases that life brings our way, and to process them in a way that is pleasing to God. And to bring it to a good outcome, an outcome that pleases God.

Then we have the word *m'zimmah*, which is translated often as “discretion.” And so discretion to be discreet, to know how to discern, when to do the right thing and avoid the wrong thing, knowing how to hone in on the truth of a matter. And really discretion is related to *discern* . . . discerning of situations. And also to not put our foot in our mouth, to be discrete about things, is one way that we understand this discretion today. But we pursue the sayings of the wise. We’re after the wisdom that has

been left to us through these wisdom statements and sayings in the book of Proverbs in order to teach us how to recognize what is true and in line with that, and really walk in the truth that is provided for us.

And the last word is *mesar*, “uprightness,” which comes from the root *yashar*, “to be upright,” to be standing upright, to be like an upright piano . . . and so where we have no shame, and we are living with the right ethics of life. We are being fair in judgment. We are levelheaded. We are upright in what we do, in what we say. And we should be walking in this way. We should be walking in a way that . . . where we can hold our head high and really in a way where what we say, what we do is fair, just, truthful, ethical, and contributes to society, contributes to family, contributes to culture in a very positive way.

And so this book helps do this to believers, helps encourage believers to do the right thing and walk in a way that is upright and steady before God, one day at a time, listening to the instructions that were provided for us, and pleasing God and walking in the fear of the Lord.