

God –Centered Teaching in a Child- Centered World: Lessons from Proverbs.

Introduction.

Defining Terms:

A. Education.

1. Developing as a learner towards ethical and spiritual maturity. In other words it's about the formation of the individual as a follower of God.
2. Teaching resting primarily on the shoulders of parents.
3. The community of God's people assisting parents in this calling.

B. Learning.

1. Learning involved acquiring information about God's world and God's ways.
2. That information was to be used for transformation of the heart and life.
3. Learning was an act of humility rather than proud self-aggrandisement.

The great goal of education is that people, “**put heart, feet, hands, & tongue to the conviction that God, the Creator- Redeemer- Lawgiver- King, was indeed Lord of everyone & everything.**”¹

A Conviction: 2 Tim. 3:15-16.

An Awareness: The Setting of Proverbs.

Daniel Estes notes that in any education there are 7 things involved.

1. Worldview.
 2. Values.
 3. Goals.
 4. Curriculum.
 5. Instruction.
 6. Teacher.
 7. Learner.
- The Worldview of Proverbs.
 - The Values Admired in Proverbs.
 - The Goals of Learning in Proverbs.
 - The Process of Instruction in Proverbs.
 - The Role of the Teacher in Proverbs.

Worldview.

James Sire summarises worldview thus:

1. What is the really real?
2. What is the world around us?
3. What is a human being?
4. What happens when you die?
5. How can we know anything at all?
6. How do we know what is right & wrong?
7. What is the meaning of human history?

¹ R. Hubbard quoted in Daniel Estes, *Hear, My Son: Teaching and Learning in Proverbs 1-9* (Leicester: Apollos, 1997), 64

1. THE WORLDVIEW OF PROVERBS.

1. The universe is created by God.

Pr.3:19 –20

“The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew.”

Pr. 8:22- 26.

"The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world."

2. The World has Order.

Pr. 6:6

“Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.”

Pr. 5:21- 22. “For a man’s ways are before the eyes of the LORD, and he ponders all his paths. The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin.”

3. God the First and Last: So Fear Him.

Pr.1 –9

See 1:7 & 9:10.

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”

“The one who fears God admits that He alone possesses total knowledge & control in the universe He has made.” ²

“It is impossible to obtain an understanding of man’s place in the design & purpose of living without a humble approach to Him.” ³

The fear of God in the life of an individual will produce a life which, **“sees each moment as the Lord’s time, each relationship as the Lord’s opportunity, each duty as the Lord’s command, & each blessing as the Lord’s gift.”** ⁴

SUMMARY.

The Worldview of Proverbs is of the Lord as the Creator of all things. Life therefore has purpose when we live under His rule. God is the centre of this universe.

² Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 37

³ A. Cohen quoted in Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 32.

⁴ D. Hubbard quoted in Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 38.

B. THE VALUES ADMIRED IN PROVERBS.

“Just as a person’s real values in life can be measured by how they use time & money, so the implicit values of Biblical wisdom can be discerned by observing what is praised & what is condemned.” ⁵

Value 1. Teachability.

“ The student who accepts what we say without criticism and without thinking of his own is no doubt very unsatisfactory; but equally unsatisfactory is the student who undertakes to criticise what he knows nothing whatever about.” ⁶

- **The Simple.**
- **The Mockers/Scoffers.**
- **The Fools.**

Pr. 1:7b

“...fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

Pr.9:7 –8a

“Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproveth a wicked man incurs injury. Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you.”

Pr. 1:7a “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge”

Pr. 3:11 “My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”

Pr. 9:9 “Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.”

“Rather than demanding the right to learn solely from personal experience, an approach fraught with risk, he acquires wise counsel from those who have preceded him.” ⁷

Value 2 Righteousness.

Right = conforming to a standard.

Pr. 2:6 –9 “the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path;

Pr.8: 5- 9 “O simple ones, learn prudence; O fools, learn sense. Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right, for my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are righteous; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them. They are all straight to him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge.”

⁵ Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 41.

⁶ J. Gresham Machen, *Education, Christianity & the State* (Jefferson: The Trinity Foundation, 1987), 7

⁷ Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 48.

Pr. 6:12 –15 “A worthless person, a wicked man, goes about with crooked speech, with perverted heart devises evil, continually sowing discord; therefore calamity will come upon him suddenly; in a moment he will be broken beyond healing.”

6:16 –19 “There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.”

Value 3. Wisdom: God Himself.

Pr. 4:5- 7 “Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.”

Pr. 9:10 “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”

Pr. 7:4

“Say to wisdom, “You are my sister,” and call insight your intimate friend.”

Pr.8:11 “for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.”

SUMMARY.

Three of the Values of Proverbs are a teachable spirit, the treasuring of righteousness and acquiring wisdom. All rely upon a work of God and ultimately mean acquiring God Himself.

3. THE GOALS OF LEARNING IN PROVERBS.

Modern educational theory describes the goals for the child as:

- Knowledge [cognitive skills].
- Attitudes [affective skills].
- Skills [psycho -motor skills].

Goal 1. Commitment.

Pr.2:1- 4. “My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures.”

Pr.3:3b “Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart.”

Pr.6:21 “Bind them on your heart always; tie them around your neck.”

Pr.4:6+ 8. “Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you.”
“Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her.”

Goal 2. Character.

Pr. 9:9

“Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.”

“The focus of instruction is on the inner person.”⁸

Wisdom means not only knowing but also *wanting* to do what is right.”⁹

Goal 3. Competence.

A] Prudence. Pr. 1:4; 8:5 + 12.

B] Discretion. Pr. 1:4; 2:11; 3:21; 5:2; 8:12.

C] Guidance. Pr. 1:5.

D] Sound judgement. Pr. 2:7; 3:21; 8:14.

**E] Wise Dealing. Pr. 1:3; 3:4.
1 Sam. 25:3ff.**

**F] Competence in understanding. Pr. 3:19; 7:4- 5; 8: 14- 16; 9:10.
Pr. 3:5.**

Goal 4. Protection.

➤ Their own wickedness and weakness.

The Simple.

Pr. 7:7

“and I have seen among the simple, I have perceived among the youths, a young man lacking sense”

The Scoffer. Pr. 13:1 “A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.”

Pr.14: 6 “A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain, but knowledge is easy for a man of understanding.”

The Fool.

Pr.10:23 “Doing wrong is like a joke to a fool, but wisdom is pleasure to a man of understanding.”

Pr. 1:7.

➤ B. The wickedness and weaknesses of Others.

Peers. Pr. 1:11 -19

“My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, “Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason; like Sheol let us swallow them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; we shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with plunder; throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse”- my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths, for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood. For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird, but these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives. Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors.”

⁸ Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 68

⁹ M. Fox in Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 68

Evil women. In **Pr.9:13 –18**

"The woman Folly is loud; she is seductive and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house; she takes a seat on the highest places of the town, calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way, "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" And to him who lacks sense she says, "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol."

9: 1- 6

"Wisdom, then, has as a defensive goal the protection of the learner from...disaster."

¹⁰

Goal 5. The Knowledge of God.

Pr.9:10.

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight."

"Education should produce in the learner more than just a sense of achievement; it should also cultivate reverence for God & an intimate personal fellowship with Him."

¹¹

SUMMARY.

Teaching must have a goal. In Proverbs it is to produce children who know God and learn not by their mistakes but by listening to warnings and so having the ability to live wisely in God's world.

4. THE PROCESS OF INSTRUCTION IN PROVERBS.

A. Direct Speeches.

- **Speech. Pr.1:20 –33**

- **Description. Pr.6:12 –19**

- **Commands.**

...with Reasons. Pr.3:1 –12

"In the final analysis, the teacher gives instructions & warnings together with reasons to justify the admonitions, but the learner has the freedom to make the decision, & he bears the major responsibility for the decision that he makes." ¹²

¹⁰ Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 79

¹¹ Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 84

...with Reasons + Illustrations.

Pr.1: 10- 19

...with Consequences.

Pr.1:8 -9

...with Rhetorical questions.

Pr.6:27- 28 “Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? 28 Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?”

- **Incentive.**

Pr. 3:13a

“Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding.”

- **Invitation.**

Pr.9

SUMMARY.

The power of words to paint pictures, stir the imagination and communicate truth are at the heart of the learning and teaching process. The God who speaks expects us to do the same.

5. THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN PROVERBS.

A. The Teacher as Expert Authority.

“...the teacher endeavours to speed up the learning process & to prevent unnecessary, and perhaps painful detours by the learner. Despite all of its benefits, self-directed learning can be inefficient at best, and it is often most dangerous for the uninitiated student. As a knowledgeable and reliable authority, the teacher is in the position to make learning more efficient & less risky for those who are novices.”

¹³

B. The Teacher in the Background (a biblical Facilitator).

Pr. 9:1 -6 + 13 -18

9:7- 12.

C. The Teacher as Guide.

Pr. 1:5

¹² Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 115

¹³ Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 127

“Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance.”

Pr. 4:11

“I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness.”

Pr. 6:22

“When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you.”

SUMMARY.

The role of the teacher is rich and varied but is never less than authoritative. That authority rests on what he is teaching and is bent to assist children to neither make mistakes whilst allowing them to actively respond to what they are being taught.

ENGAGING WITH LEARNING STYLES.

1. The Learning Styles Approach to Teaching and Learning.

“1. Imaginative Learners, [who] easily share from their past experience, providing a context for learning.

2. Analytic Learners, [who] need something new in the lesson.

3. Common Sense Learners, [who] need to see if what they learned makes sense now.

4. Dynamic Learners, [who] find creative ways to use what they have learned.”¹⁴

“as unique as a personal signature”¹⁵

2. Response to the Learning Styles Approach.

A. It Recognises the holistic nature of the learner.

Pr. 6: 6- 8

Ex. 12: 21- 27; Deut. 6: 4- 9

B. It is in danger of negating Words.

CONCLUSION.

I. Have Confidence to Teach.

II. Have Confidence in the Power of God’s Word and words.

III. Use creativity to Release God’s Word.

¹⁴ LeFever, *Learning Styles*, 16

¹⁵ LeFever, *Learning Styles*, 17

IV. Pray, pray, pray.

“Is it true that intentional, regular, disciplined, earnest, Christ- dependent, God- glorifying, joyful prayer is a duty? . . . Is it a discipline?

You can call it that.

- **It’s a duty the way it’s the duty of a scuba diver to put on his air tank before he goes underwater.**
- **It’s a duty the way pilots listen to air traffic controllers.**
- **It’s a duty the way soldiers in combat clean their rifles and load their guns.**
- **It’s a duty the way hungry people eat food.**
- **It’s a duty the way thirsty people drink water.**
- **It’s a duty the way a deaf man puts in his hearing aid.**
- **It’s a duty the way a diabetic takes his insulin.**
- **It’s a duty the way Pooh Bear looks for honey.**
- **It’s a duty the way pirates look for gold.**

God has given us means of grace. If we do not use them to their fullest advantage, our complaints against him will not stick. If we don’t eat, we starve. If we don’t drink, we get dehydrated. If we don’t exercise a muscle, it atrophies. If we don’t breathe, we suffocate. And just as there are physical means of life, there spiritual are means of grace. Resist the lies of the devil in 2009, and get a bigger breakthrough in prayer than you’ve ever had.”¹⁶

Helpful Books.

On Learning.

- J. Gresham Machen, *Education, Christianity & the State*. Jefferson: The Trinity Foundation, 1987. Especially Essays 1&3.
- Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*. Wapwallopen: Shepherd Press, 2005.

On Proverbs.

- Daniel Estes, *Hear, My Son*. Leicester: Apollos, 1997.
- Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*. (The Tyndale Old Testament Commentary). Downers Grove: IVP, 2008.
- Tremper Longman, *How to Read Proverbs*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2002.
- Tremper Longman, *Proverbs*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009.

¹⁶ John Piper. DG website.