



Many of us have grown up playing board games or card games with our families or with friends. Maybe your favourite game was Risk, Monopoly, Chess, Yatzee, Rook (Baptist Poker), Rummy or one of the million video games on the market today. Some of you grew up playing a game called the Game of Life. The clip you just saw was a commercial from 1960 to promote the upgraded version of the board game. You need to know that the game was invented in 1860s and marketed by Milton Bradley. The idea is that by spinning a small spinner the player determines the number of spaces they can advance around the game board at each turn. During the game you have to choose your career ... buy a car ... get married ... have kids ... buy property ... sell stocks and decide what kind of insurance you think you will need. All the time, you are trying to build your fortune. Throughout the game you need to make choices... do you jump right into a career which allows you to start earning a pay check sooner... or do you choose to go to university where you will end up with a student loan ... but be able to make a larger salary when you graduate? You have to make other choices concerning the kind of house you will buy... will it be a double wide RV or will it be a mansion worth \$800,000? Your choices and how lucky you are at spinning the wheel will help you reach your Goal ...which in the game of life is to amass the largest amount of money you can by the end of the game ... and end up living in Millionaire Mansion.

While the game may be fun to play ... it leaves us with 2 - not so subtle hints about life:.. i) The goal of life is ... *he who has the most toys and stuff not only wins ..but is the happiest* ... ii) while it is necessary to make good choices in life ... much of what happens is determined by luck, the role of the dice or the spin of the wheel and there isn't much we can do about it.

The problem is ... that we don't believe like the Hindus that if you mess up your life this time ... it is no big deal ...because you will get another chance at doing it right the next time. We believe that we only have one chance at playing this game called life... so we had better get it right the first time.

Another problem is that as we face the different challenges of life, in most cases we are forced to do things which we have never done before. When we get married and have great dreams about what it will be like ... we often stumble around making

mistakes because this is a brand new experience. When the kids arrive ... it is wonderful ... but to be honest (don't tell them) we are flying by the seat of our pants trying to figure things out as we go along. If we are truthful we often wish we could push the re-do button ... or like in the show *I want to be a Millionaire* ... could poll the TV audience or could call a friend who had the answers we need. Complicating things even more is that ... some times the advice we have grown up with hasn't always been that helpful; ... For example people have told us ...

- i) *Look out for #1*; try it ... it won't get you very far in marriage or sports,
- ii) I had someone tell me that if I licked the monkey bars in the middle of winter it would be an *experience I would never forget* ...they were right about that one,
- iii) My mom said if *I ate my vegetables* I would grow big and tall .. well that didn't work very well

... she also said if you burn your finger/hand ... just putting butter on the burn it will make it better ... my wife not only says that doesn't work ... it is the opposite of what I should do. Then sometimes, when you hear a wise statement from someone .. you still don't get it just right. Like the kid I grew up with heard who his mom say "*Look both ways for cars before crossing the street*". So he would sit there for hours at the side of the road – looking both ways for cars and then when he saw a car coming would run across the street (honest this is true). Finally, I need to add that what we see may not be actually what we think it is ... I learned that when someone gave me this bit of brilliance ... *remember that while the grass may be greener on the other side of the fence ... it could be because it is above a septic tank ... or it could mean their water bill is higher than yours*. Then someone reminded me that you have to be careful who you take advice from because *the same people who will tell you that God is dead will tell you that Elvis is still alive*. So, here is the problem .. we are all on this journey called life .. having to walk through things which we have never done before ... not sure what advice we should take ... but still needing to get it right because we only get one shot at it ... which leaves us needing to ask an important question ... *where do we turn for good advice*.

That is why we wanted to do this series ... if you look at the Game of Life you will see that there are common themes and issues which we all share as we walk through life. We picked 8 of those human experiences, which we all share to some degree ... to

Speak to them during this series. We want to look at what God says concerning our Work life {Glen N – Pastor/Businessman}... our Social Life/Friendships {Dave} ... our Private Life {Ken}... our Family Life {Family Pastor –David F} ... our Married Life {Kathy and I}... our Financial life {Phil Yntema/Financial expert}... our Spiritual life {Dave} and finally just like at the end of every game we want to talk about what really counts as we ‘cash in our chips’ {Dave}. Our hope is that as we share the preaching load ... and speak to areas we are each passionate about ... that what we say will not only help each of us on this journey of life ... but I want to encourage you to invite a friend who may also benefit from what God has to say on these topics. So check your Game of Life card ... and pass one on to a friend.

I. Our Key Source Material .. will be the Book of Proverbs

In order to help us make our moves during the game of life we thought it would be a good idea to use the book of Proverbs as the key source of wisdom. The Bible’s book of Proverbs represents the collective wisdom of ancient Israel. Because as Christians we believe the whole Bible is inspired by God, the collective wisdom of Proverbs represents God’s angle on wisdom. Most of the proverbs come from King Solomon, who was the king of Israel during her golden reign. Proverbs includes wise sayings from other people as well.

It’s likely that the book of Proverbs started as a book to help parents instruct their kids in life skills. In fact, the first nine chapters of Proverbs are a father instructing his son in how to live wisely in the world. Proverbs was originally a parenting strategy as moms and dads tried to equip their children to live God centered, successful lives according to the grain of God’s creation.

It’s also likely that Proverbs later became a textbook in ancient Israel to prepare people to serve as leaders.

Now it’s important to understand how to apply the wise sayings from Proverbs to our lives. The sayings we find in the book of Proverbs are generalizations about what’s true most of the time. They’re guidelines for wise living, but we should resist turning them into rigid, absolute promises. This is very important to understand, especially when it comes to verses about parenting and marriage. Proverbs are wise sayings that are relevant to many different situations. But don’t work in every single circumstance.

What exactly are 'proverbs'? Proverbs are *short, memorable sayings whose meanings are relevant to many different situations*. If you remember the movie Forrest Gump, the "gumpisms" in that movie were proverbs. The saying, "Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're going to get" is a proverb. "Stupid is as stupid does" is a proverb. Every society has its own set of proverbs that represent the collective wisdom of that society. Let me give you some other examples that come from our culture.

"Look before you leap."

"Easy come, easy go."

"A penny saved is a penny earned."

"Live one day at a time."

So the book of Proverbs is book which is full of short memorable saying that have relevance to many of the common issues we face as we walk through the seasons and situations of life. These are statements to be read and mulled over in your mind until you see how they mesh with your life experience. Let me read you a few...

16:16 *Pride goes before a fall*

11:22 *Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful women who shows no discretion' ... it is a waste ... colourful ... to the point*

11:25 *A generous man will prosper ... he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed"*

14:13 *Even in laughter the heart may ache*

17:5 *He who mocks the poor shows contempt for their maker*

Proverbs is full of statements that will make us think.

But before we jump further into Proverbs we need to grasp the *literary style* in which they are written. I don't want to give you any *false expectations*. Each proverb is designed to give practical advice ... not iron clad promises. For example Prov. 22:6 says "*Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it*". The author here is saying that *if you* as a parent concentrate on raising your kids in a caring, godly and biblical way ... keeping in mind the need to keep in step with the gifts, patterns and personality of how God has made them ... *the result will be that they will live a godly, wise and meaningful life*. I believe that when we do that ... the chance of this happening is huge. I also know some very godly, wise and caring parents who

have done everything they can to raise their kid(s) in the right way and the kid decided to walk away from their care, guidance and God. Proverbs are not written as iron clad guarantees... because people have free will. Instead we need to understand that ... by following the advice found in Proverbs we will greatly increase our chances of succeeding in the game of life ... they are practical words of advice which have been proven to work time and time again. So Proverbs is a manual for life that is full of short concepts of advice which has been proven over time and experience to help us succeed in life.

II. Lessons for us as we Begin Prov. 1:1-7

Prov. 1:1-5a – I wanted to read that all in one breath ... Solomon has given you his own introduction. He tells us what the book is about in the first couple words of vs. 2. He says these proverbs were put together so we would gain wisdom. What exactly is "wisdom"? The dictionary defines "wisdom" as the ability to discern what is true or right. The Hebrew word distinguishes wisdom from knowledge, because a person can have a mind full of facts, yet lack authentic wisdom. The Hebrew word translated "wisdom" in the Bible is a bit more colourful than our English word. The Hebrew word translated "wisdom" is hochma, and usually refers to some kind of skill or ability. Often the authors of the Bible use this word hochma to describe people who are skilled in a trade or a craft, like wood working, metal working, embroidery, or weaving (New International Dictionary of Old Testament Exegesis and Theology, Vol. 2, p.133). This same word is used for people who are particularly skilful in tasks like trading, leadership, and even sailing.

Hochma was originally used to described the work of weavers who wove the elaborate garments of Aaron, the high priest (Exodus 28:3) The weavers' ability to follow God's design for manufacturing the garments was labelled "wisdom."

From that point on, the Israelites equated wisdom with a skill for living, and wisdom has since been defined as "the skill to live life according to God's plan." Thus a wise person is one who patterns his finances, his goals, his relationships, and every aspect of his life according to the specifications revealed in God's Word.

When we were in Turkey we toured a place where they made very beautiful and expensive carpets. We saw them peel the silk off the silk worm cocoon ... then watched as they read the pattern in front of them ... and then with skill and amazing

concentration they were able to make that same pattern appear on the loom in front of them as they pulled together the many different coloured strands of silk.

So the Hebrew word distinguishes wisdom from knowledge, because a person can have a mind full of facts, yet lack authentic wisdom.

Now with that background to the word *hochma*, look at Proverbs 3:19-20

Being wise ... is being able to read and understand the advice God wants to give us ... and then applying it so it affects the way we live out our lives.

E.G. Prov. 22:6 *Train up a child in the way they should go ...* Literally in the Hebrew is translates 'train up a child in their own way' ... It has the idea that when God tinkered in your mother's womb His goal was to make you exactly who you are today ... as Ps. 139:13 says ... he made each of us as unique individuals. That means that for a father to expect; if he has two boys that they will act the same way, love the same things and that they will want to carry on the family business or farm, just because he likes that business or farming doesn't make sense. Both of my sons are very athletic ... both love music ... for one all the way through high school soccer was his passion ... while the other's passion is music, drums and more music. Solomon's idea, as I read Proverbs 22, is that I will become a wiser father because I have read/learned that: i) God made both of my boys different: ii) that as a father my job is to read the different patterns which describe my sons ... and help put in place the right coloured stands that allow them to live life to the fullest ... so they can live in that place where their individual gifts and the opportunities of life come together. As John 10:10 says... so they will experience the abundant life (life to the full/ super-sized life) that God wants for them. Prov. 1:5 *So let the wise listen and add to their learning ... and let the discerning get guidance"*

So if we really want to be wise ... with our kids ... or marriage ... or our private life ... it will mean that we need to be reading the proverbs; which will help us understand the patterns God has in mind for how we should live ... so we can walk in them wisely. In order for that to happen ... two things must happen first:

1. We need to be open to LISTEN to God

Often life is like the Game of Life .. life moves fast .. at times it is confusing .. and seems to demand that we make quick decisions. Listen to Prov. 1:5 Before God's wisdom can become a part of my life I need to be open to listen to it. Isn't it interesting

that the very first requests that Solomon makes is that we listen to what is being said - Not really. Often we are so convinced that our way of thinking is right, that we don't need anyone else .. or because we seem to always want to get busy fixing things .. we so rarely stop to listen to God. Solomon says ... why don't you try and experiment .. for the next while why don't you read these proverbs .. think about them .. let them roll around in your mind ... and you will find that some of the things in this book of Proverbs (and I would add – that we will talk about through this series) .. will have a profound impact on your life/ marriage/ your family ... your eternity. Try to slow down enough to listen to what He is saying to you.

2. We need to be open to listen to what God SAYS

Prov. 1:7 21 times in the book of Proverbs the term the 'Fear of the Lord is used' ... and it is always connected with the fact that Wisdom finds its roots in the fear of the Lord. As I think about how people use the name of Jesus in profanity ... how so often God the Creator and Sustainers of our universe has been shoved off to the sideline in our society ... and when I think of how Christians claim to be followers of Jesus ... and yet do things, say things and treat others the way they do ... I think that a little fear of God would go a long way into making our world/ our relationships and our churches better. For if we ever got our minds around how much God is beyond us ... and how powerful He is ... it would scare us into living very differently. But if you do a little study you will find that the Hebrew word for fear is very different from our word today. In the Hebrew setting ... it meant reverence ... and respect not only for who God is ... but what he does and knows. One of our problems when it comes to following the guidelines of scripture concerning living our lives is that we keep thinking we know better and are smarter than God is. It is like Mark Twain said about his father ...

“When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished by how much he'd learned in seven years.”

I think what we need is a new view of who God is ... so we can get things back into their proper perspective. Prov. 3:19-23 He is the architect of the universe ... He is the designer of the world... He is the one who was there and involved when you were conceived ...and He is the one who sustains our lives. So it only makes sense that we need to listen to His wisdom. It is amazing how every new generation thinks they know

more than the generation before them ... and every generation is convinced that mankind has gotten smarter than those who lived centuries before us. We forget that God has been watching ... taking notes ... and we have much to learn from Him. Why: #1 Because God knows more than we do; #2 Because God knows us – not only was He there when we were born ... but He knows our most intimate thoughts and actions ... #3 Because He loves us ... every time the term FEAR GOD is used in Proverbs it uses the term Yahweh to describe God. Yahweh is the most personal and enduring name they used for God ... They are saying *reverence/listen to/ respect the words of the God who loves you*. When I know someone loves me ... and has my best interest at heart then I will listen to what they say ... because of that we need to choose to listen to God through the book of Proverbs and this series.

3. We need to understand that this is not just a GAME of Life we are playing.. it is a Gift of life

To live wisely, we need to redefine what we mean by success. We need to abandon our quest for self-fulfillment, and abandon ourselves to Christ fulfillment. We need to find out how God has uniquely wired us and how this uniqueness can be used by God to help other people. We need to break out of our consumer mentality that we bring to church with us, and begin viewing ourselves as followers of Jesus, men and women who passionately pursue Jesus and God's purposes in our lives.

We need to build a life plan that's consistent with God's plan.

Prov. 4:18-19 ... it is amazing how often in Proverbs you will see descriptions that almost sound like instruction for the game of life ... where you have to make decisions which road to take and that simple decisions can have a profound impact on our lives for years to come. Prov. 4:13 says *'what we are talking about here is ... your life'*. This is serious stuff. Who you date ... will affect who you will marry ... which will affect how you will live... and in turn have an impact on your children's and even grand children's lives. When we are young especially, we can act like life is a game without consequences. The reverse is true ... the better choices we at each step along the way ... the more of the abundant life we will experience and the more profound will be the impact we leave with those with whom our life touches. Also don't miss what God has done to you... He has placed in your hands... your life ... it is like no one else's – no one

else on this entire globe can make the impact or live the life or touch your world/others lives like you. What an awesome opportunity... what a huge responsibility... what a wonderful gift is ours. Because of that listen again to Prov. 4:13

App: So... can I ask that you

1. Read a chapter a day in the book of Proverbs ... (31 chapters)
2. Give God permission to speak to you through what you read and what you hear throughout this series. Come and enjoy the Game of Life series with us.
3. Ask God who you can invite... and for which sermon topic.
4. Remember ... as in the Game of Life ... *It is now your move ... will you listen... will you listen to God's wisdom ... will you decide to follow what tells you to do?*

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