

PROVERBS AND EVANGELISM

The style of Proverbs gives us some great pointers on how we should present truth to the people God brings into our lives. This is not to suggest a "cookie-cutter" approach to evangelism. Rather, it is to suggest some things that make information compelling and memorable. Here are eight observations on Proverbs and the wisdom they might give us on our presentation of the Gospel.

1. The message is personal, so is our mission: The dialogues in Proverbs are not impersonal, detached, and distant, but close, intimate and warm. It's one person to another person, first person singular to second person singular, it's an "I" addressing a "you," not a "we" addressing a "they." The personal dimension is further enhanced by the frequent addressing of the reader as "my son," especially in the first nine chapters. Even if the person we're evangelizing is not our literal son, that's the way we should view them and speak with them. It's not about winning an argument, but about building a relationship.
2. The proverbs are are persuasive: Solomon is not a lecturer, he's a pleader. Solomon is not simply reciting facts, he's persuading souls. He marshals multiple arguments, varied illustrations, pithy sayings, and memorable narratives to convince and persuade his reader to turn from folly to wisdom. He's calling, alluring, beseeching, appealing, and imploring. This great king is not ashamed to beg for attention and for change. He's a passionate and compassionate orator.
3. The language is vivid: Whereas the Apostle Paul's main evangelistic weapon was his systematic and logical reasoning, Solomon's was vivid word pictures. He personifies Lady Wisdom and Madam Folly. He then paints each of these contrasting ladies in graphic and striking colors: folly in all its lurid ugliness; wisdom in all its compelling beauty. He scours the world for unforgettable images and metaphors to bring home the truth to the conscience.
4. The message is convicting: Every Proverb is traceable to one of God's moral laws, summarized in the Ten Commandments. We, therefore, should not be surprised if the Proverbs often leave us feeling guilty and condemned. We read one after another of these incisive little epigrams and sometimes feel as if our souls are getting strafed with a machine gun. The cumulative impact is humbling and heart-breaking. As we read the early parables in the book, often portraying a young man choosing foolish paths, we shake our heads until we realize that we are reading our own biography.
5. The message is attractive: Solomon doesn't just show us how ugly sin is to scare us off. He also shows us how winsome wisdom is. Wisdom captivates, fascinates, intrigues, attracts, allures, and enthralls until we are drawn, not just willingly but irresistibly, to her magnetic charms. Yes, we need to dissuade from sin, but the biggest dissuader is the beauty of divine wisdom.
6. The message is clear: Solomon never used light gray when he could use luminous highlighters. There's no middle ground in Proverbs, no confusing fog, no fudgy compromises. There are two ways, two choices, two destinations, and only two. There is the way of wisdom and the end everlasting life. There is the way of folly and the end everlasting death. The choice could not be made any clearer, not in the lengthy dialogues of Proverbs 1-9 and especially not in the multiple Proverbs that present the choice repeatedly from chapter 10 onwards. We are left in no doubt that we are on one of two ways, heading to one of two terminals.

7. The message is Christ-centered: Proverbs is not just a choice between two philosophies but a choice between two people. It's a choice between a person who is folly (the devil) and a person who is wise (the Son of God). Proverbs 8 hints at a person in the Godhead who especially embodies the Wisdom of God. But it's the New Testament that finally confirms Jesus as the Wisdom of God (Matthew 11:19; 1 Corinthians 1:24; Colossians 2:3), as the One who perfectly embodied all that Wisdom was in Proverbs. Reading the book of Proverbs through that New Testament lens puts a whole different light on the book.
8. The approach is practical: Once we come to Christ, the Wisdom of God, and see Him as the One who alone kept this book, and who gives us His Proverbs-Righteousness, we can see the Proverbs not so much as a condemning weapon, but as a detailed manual to help us figure out how to live in multiple areas of life. How merciful of God to give us not just incarnate Wisdom, but such practical every day wisdom to help us live in grateful obedience to the God who made us wise unto salvation.

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