

## Ancient Wisdom for Today: Reliable Advice

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were two very popular newspaper advice columns. *Ask Ann Landers* lasted the longest. Using the fictional pen name of Ann Landers, Ruth Crowley started writing the column in 1943. It was picked up by Eppie Lederer in 1955 and lasted until 2002. Eppie's twin sister, Pauline Phillips, introduced *Dear Abby* in 1955. That column ran until 1995.

Readers of these columns were so loyal they continued to ask newspapers to run the columns even after the writers had retired. The archives of these advice columnists can be found online. Query quotes from these columnists and you will find many.

These ladies may have done considerable research in order to respond to the letters they received, but in the end, the advice they gave was personal opinion. Some of the advice resulted in controversy and an occasional loss of a sponsoring newspaper. The clamor for continued columns, however, reveals that people are looking for answers to life's issues and a credible source for those answers.

The only reliable source of guidance lies in the one place where advice is totally trustworthy – God's word. An online search of the word proverb will reveal excerpts from the Bible accredited as a societal proverb. Some people are not even aware they are quoting from scripture. Although all of scripture has relevancy to how a person lives, perhaps the most quoted portion of the Bible is Proverbs.

Perhaps this is true because most societies have their own proverbs – short sayings that contain some traditionally held belief. The Touchpoint Bible notes that a biblical proverb is

*not a law of God (which must be followed) or a promise of God (which guarantees a certain result). A proverb is a general principle that, if followed, applies to most people in most situations. While the desired result may not always occur in your life, the course of action suggested in the proverb is always the right thing to do.*

The key to understanding the difference between a proverb of a people and the proverbs of the Bible are “traditionally held” beliefs. Noted above, a biblical proverb suggests a course of action that is always the right thing to do. In a societal proverb, the principles are traditional, but not necessarily correct - such as a watched pot never boils; all's fair in love and war and children should be seen and not heard. Some people even believe they are quoting scripture when they are actually quoting a traditional saying, such as God helps those who help themselves.

*And God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding...He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five (1 Kings 4:29, 32).*

Known as the wisest man that ever lived, King Solomon wrote most of the book of Proverbs – around eight hundred of them. Before he became king, God told him He would grant any wish he had. Solomon asked for wisdom to rule God's people. Not only was he known for his wisdom and his more than three thousand proverbs, there was also total peace during his reign.

Solomon did not always take his own advice. He did not stay true to his own promise to be wholly devoted to the Lord (he allowed his many wives to lead him into idolatry) and his reign ended the golden days of Israel. After his death, the kingdom was divided and the glory days were over.

Nevertheless, Solomon's proverbs were inspired by God. His proverbs and those of the others who contributed to the biblical book of Proverbs still lead us to contrast the differences between wise people and foolish people. The principles contained in the proverbs apply to every area of life – political, ethical, business, familial and personal. God centered wisdom is the best source for advice.

Although Proverbs is not a book of manners, it has a great deal to say about how to be gracious in your speech and your actions dealing with all relationships: strangers, neighbors, friends and family.

Proverbs deals with aspects of a person's relationship to God and others. Many themes are scattered throughout the book. In a detailed search of my own, eight common themes were discovered. Four themes relate to our vertical relationship to God and four others pertain to our horizontal relationships with others.

- The Wise Person Fears God
- The Wise Person Strives to Understand
- The Wise Person Obeys the Commandments
- The Wise Person Accepts Discipline
- The Wise Person Stands Upright
- The Wise Person Watches His Words
- The Wise Person Cares for Others
- The Wise Person Works but Leaves the Results to God

Answers to life's questions are found in God's word. A reliable source for advice can be found in Proverbs.

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