

## Seven Life Hacks From Proverbs

The word *hack* used to be used to mean to cut with heavy blows. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century it became a term used by computer programmers for an effective but rather ugly solution to a problem. It also was used to refer to breaking in to other computers or networks.

In the last few years, the word is now being used to mean any kind of solution or technique that helps you or saves money, from waterproofing your shoes to reusing coathangers to reusing items in different ways, to financial tips.

In some ways, the book of Proverbs functions like a vastly superior and infallible set of life-hacks. Except Proverbs is not interested in simply saving you time and money. Proverbs is interested in giving you God's perspective on life, so that you don't ruin or waste your life.

Proverbs is the book of two ways: God's way, or sin's way. All through the book, on a myriad of topics, the Bible is offering you the way of wisdom versus the way of foolishness, the way of humility and the way of pride, the way of righteousness and the way of wickedness, the diligent and the lazy, the truth-teller and the liar, the faithful and the adulterer, the teachable and the stubborn. Why should you be interested in taking Proverbs' advice?

First, because it is God-breathed Scripture, from our Creator. When you get a new appliance, it's good to read the manufacturer's manual. Human beings come with a manufacturer's manual too. It's called the Bible. Proverbs is our Creator and Designer telling us what will work and what will cause malfunction or even destruction. Proverbs tells us that the six basic human desires are only met through following God's instructions: happiness, approval, success, prosperity, security, and healthful long life.

Proverbs doesn't attempt to explain every contingency in life, or every exception to the rule. To see those, you need to read the two other wisdom books, Job, and Ecclesiastes, alongside Proverbs. But Proverbs does give you general truths about life, general truths from the Creator.

While I'm not a fan of list-messages "Five Things To Boost Your Prayer Life" or "Ten Ways to Re-invigorate Your Marriage", sometimes there is a place to have a list. And because Proverbs is not a book written with long paragraphs of extended argument, it lends itself to simply giving us bite-sized, practical truth, some, for lack of a better term, life-hacks.

So as we begin this year, let me walk you through Proverbs and suggest seven life-hacks that Proverbs gives you. Seven truths and methods that, if applied will save you from much grief, will make the year a year of growth, and will help you to make sense of what is going on in your life.

### 1. Revere God to Make Sense of Life

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Prov. 1:7)*  
*"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. (Prov. 9:10)*

*The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom, And before honor is humility. (Prov. 15:33)*

The fear of Yahveh means a relationship with God of loving, humble trust and obedience. The fear of the Lord is where God occupies first place in your life, and the sense of His importance and glory takes priority. You live before Him in gratitude, in childlike dependence, and in submissiveness. This is a state of reverence, of humility, of submissive faith.

The fear of the LORD is an OT way of referring to getting a new heart from God, being declared righteous, and living before Him in love.

Now the Bible tells us that this posture of life before God is actually the beginning of understanding anything else. This is the beginning of knowledge the beginning of wisdom, the instruction of wisdom.

Before you can read, you need to learn the alphabet. Before you can do maths, you need to learn numbers. A reverent relationship with God is the ABCs of understanding the world. If you don't get this right, you may get bits and pieces correct, but your whole map of reality is going to be skewed.

Ever wonder how some people can be so intelligent and yet get it so wrong about almost everything. It's because the beginning of knowledge is not I.Q., or a university degree, or a photographic memory. The beginning of making sense of life is when a creature gets into a worshipful posture before his Creator. The foundation of understanding the three big questions, who am I, why am I here, where am I going won't come from Googling those questions, which sadly, many people do. It won't come from going to a lecture series on comparative religion.

It begins when you take your place before a sovereign, omnipotent God, bow the knee, give Him control, accept His verdict on You, receive His provision for you, and begin an other-centred life of living for His glory.

Take God out of the picture and life is very confusing. Seek God first, and life begins to make sense.

*Evil men do not understand justice, But those who seek the LORD understand all. (Prov. 28:5)*

**Psa 25:14** *The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him, And He will make them know His covenant.*

## **2. Seek God As Much As You Want to Find Him**

*My son, if you receive my words, And treasure my commands within you, 2 So that you incline your ear to wisdom, And apply your heart to understanding; 3 Yes, if you cry out for discernment, And lift up your voice for understanding, 4 If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; 5 Then you will understand the fear of the LORD, And find the knowledge of God. (Prov. 2:1)*

To put it another way, you will find God as much as you seek Him. You will experience God to the degree that you pursue Him. Yes, we get a full union with Christ the day we are saved, but we enter progressively into the experience of that union by faith and obedience. Proverbs here tells us that seeking God and His wisdom like silver, like hidden treasures, with diligence, will lead to the fear of the LORD and the knowledge of the holy. Proverbs tells us to do this with diligence.

**Pro 23:23** *Buy truth, and do not sell it, Get wisdom and instruction and understanding.*

*Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding. (Prov. 4:7)*

Right now, you are as Christlike as you have chosen to be. You are as spiritual as you have desired to be. No more and no less. No Christian has some godliness DNA that others don't get. We're all different physical shapes and sizes, but when it comes to closeness to God, we all start at exactly the same place.

We sometimes forget that the Proverbs that deal with laziness are not only speaking of laziness in work, but of spiritual laziness.

*The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; But the soul of the diligent shall be made rich. (Prov. 13:4)*

*The desire of the lazy man kills him, For his hands refuse to labor. (Prov. 21:25)*

*The lazy man will not plow because of winter; He will beg during harvest and have nothing. (Prov. 20:4)*

The spiritually lazy man wants a closer walk with God, but his desire just kills him, because he won't put in the effort. He wishes to have more of God, but he will not embrace the discipline, so wishing is all it is.

The way of the lazy *man* is like a hedge of thorns, But the way of the upright is a highway. (Prov. 15:19)  
His life is always impeded by some obstacle. He always has a reason why he is spiritually lazy.

16 The lazy *man* is wiser in his own eyes Than seven men who can answer sensibly. 26:16

13 The lazy *man* says, "There is a lion in the road! A fierce lion is in the streets!" 1 26:13

Solomon tell us that the ant, without an overseer or ruler, gathers food for the winter that is coming. So many Christians do nothing to gather for the trials that are coming their way. And when the trials come, it's perfectly obvious how much seeking of God went on before. Laziness has a price tag, and it always costs more in the end, than the original price of diligence and discipline.

During the Spanish Inquisition, a Dutch schoolmaster named Geleyn de Muler was arrested by an Inquisitor named Peter Titelmann for being "addicted to reading the Bible". As the Inquisitor questioned him, he was satisfied that he indeed had a guilty heretic before him, and demanded an immediate recantation. De Muler refused.

Titelmann then asked him, "Do you not love your wife and children?"

"God knows that if the whole world were of gold, and I owned it all, I would give it all to have them with me, even if I had to live on bread and water and in bondage."

The Inquisitor then said to him, "You have, then, only to renounce the error of your ways, and you shall have those you love with you."

De Muler responded, "Neither for wife, children, nor all the world, can I renounce my God and religious truth." He was then sentenced to the stake, strangled and thrown to the flames.

### **3. Do Not Trust Your Own Heart**

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil. (Prov. 3:5-7)*

*There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death. (Prov. 14:12)*

*He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But whoever walks wisely will be delivered. (Prov. 28:26)*

This is the polar opposite of what the world teaches. The songs say, "Listen to your heart", "Follow your feelings". And the movies paint it as romantic to be a wild heart that goes where the wind of its feelings are blowing. But the only One who loves us purely, with no gain to Himself, is God, and God says, "Don't listen to your heart." Your heart left to itself is not a reliable guide.

The Bible is very clear: our hearts do not have an innately good sense of moral direction. Though it seems to make sense to you, though it seems to be what you feel is right, though it appears obviously the way to do things, it may very well be wrong.

The Bible does not describe us as homing pigeons, who always find their way. It describes us as sheep, who have a habit of following each other off cliffs, of plunging into ditches, and of straying into danger.

But the Bible alerts us to the problem: it seems right to us. Its rightness becomes a self-confirming thing, and we plunge deeper in. It seems right to pursue this relationship with an unbeliever. It

seems right to threaten your spouse with divorce. It seems right to explode in outbursts of wrath on someone who has angered you. It seems right to turn to pornography, or to an affair when the marriage is struggling. It seems right to plunge into deeper debt to pay off something else. It seems right to not discipline your child when he or she is acting up.

The human heart is a bottomless well of excuses and justifications and reasons for our own actions.

Now the only way to break out of this self-destructive way of life is to add a second voice to your life, where you check your decisions against God's Word. A Christian is one who gets used to correction, and frequent correction. Now the person who wants to listen to his own heart is also the person who hates correction, because correction is going to disagree with his own heart.

*Harsh discipline is for him who forsakes the way, And he who hates correction will die. (Prov. 15:10)*

*He who disdains instruction despises his own soul, But he who heeds rebuke gets understanding. (Prov. 15:32)*

*The foolishness of a man twists his way, And his heart frets against the LORD. (Prov. 19:3)*

*He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, Will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. (Prov. 29:1)*

*And you mourn at last, When your flesh and your body are consumed, 12 And say: "How I have hated instruction, And my heart despised correction! 13 I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, Nor inclined my ear to those who instructed me! (Prov. 5:11-13)*

We are blind to our own pride. A lady once came to Charles Spurgeon and said, "I pray for you, that you might not become proud." Spurgeon responded, "You remind me of my own neglect, for I have never prayed that prayer for you and must begin." "Oh no, said the lady, "there is no need for that. I am in no danger of becoming proud." "Then," said Spurgeon, "I must begin praying that at once, for you are proud already."

#### **4. Gather Up As Much Counsel and Teaching As You Can**

Proverbs does not only give us wisdom, it is also filled with commands to submit to wisdom.

*My son, hear the instruction of your father, And do not forsake the law of your mother; (Prov. 1:8)*

*My son, do not forget my law, But let your heart keep my commands; (Prov. 3:1)*

*Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, And give attention to know understanding; (Prov. 4:1)*

*My son, keep your father's command, And do not forsake the law of your mother. (Prov. 6:20)*

*My son, keep my words, And treasure my commands within you. (Prov. 7:1)*

Why are these verses present? Because foolishness is bound up in the human heart, and ordinarily, we do not like to ask for counsel, to learn, to study, to read, to listen. We would like to think of ourselves as fairly knowledgeable, self-sufficient, together.

But look at what Proverbs describes as the attitude of a wise and godly person:

*Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. (Prov. 9:9)*

*Wise people store up knowledge, But the mouth of the foolish is near destruction. (Prov. 10:14)*

*The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge. (Prov. 18:15)*

*The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, But the mouth of fools feeds on foolishness.*

*(Prov. 15:14)*

You see here a cycle. It is a cycle that works in two directions. Going in the wrong direction, a person becomes stubborn and unteachable. As he does that, he becomes more resistant to God's Word, finds more and more fault with it, and gets harder and harder. If he stays on that cycle, he will go from being ignorant, to being foolish, to being an enemy of truth.

But the opposite cycle is this: the teachable person allows the truth to correct him. That correction actually makes him softer and more open to more correction and more truth, so that he is now hungrier for wisdom and knowledge, becoming more sensitive to God's Word.

All of us face perplexity at some point. How do I parent my child? What is it to be a wife or a husband? How do I respond to a weakening body? How do I manage people in a God-glorifying way? What approach to my finances will be wise and upright? How do I know God's will for my future? When faced with these questions, where and to whom do you turn? Magazines? Facebook? Old unsaved friends from school? Modern psychology?

The wise Christians show their devotion to God by gathering knowledge in the form of sermons, Christian books, counsel from other Christians. And may I overturn a saying? God Does Not Help Those Who Help Themselves, for they are not looking to Him for help. And it's probably true to say that no one helps those who help themselves, because they give off the appearance of having it all together and needing no help. If you want to receive counsel and wisdom from others, then stop acting like you are without need, and infinitely knowledgeable.

## **5. Sow the Kinds of Deeds You Wish to Reap**

*The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, But the unfaithful will be caught by their lust. (Prov. 11:6)*

*A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth, And the recompense of a man's hands will be rendered to him. (Prov. 12:14)*

*The backslider in heart will be filled with his own ways, But a good man will be satisfied from above. (Prov. 14:14)*

Proverbs is clear that there is a link between what you sow and what you reap. Now again, I remind you that to get the big picture, you need to read Proverbs alongside Job and Ecclesiastes. Job and Ecclesiastes provide us with harsh realities to help us to see the general truths of Proverbs in perspective.

But even so, the general truth is this: there will be a correlation between what you do, and what results. The kinds of words, thoughts and deeds you sow, will bring a harvest similar in nature.

In other words, if you are lazy, you can expect a lazy man's harvest. If you are a proud and angry man, expect a proud and angry man's harvest. If you are humble and generous, expect the harvest of the humble and generous.

It is one of the flaws of fallen nature, that we always expect a lot more than we give. We are sparing in our praise, but we expect adulation from others. We give very little service, but we expect much from others. We give very little time, but we expect much time given to us. Paul said, "He who sows sparingly, will reap sparingly."

Likewise, it's foolish to expect a different harvest to the kind you have sowed. If you sow little to no praying, you cannot expect answers. If you sow little to no Bible study, you cannot expect the Word to be transforming you. If you are sowing proud and unkind words, don't expect a harvest of the kindest most diplomatic words spoken to us. If you sow a critical eye and cutting judgement with

others, don't expect a tolerant and forgiving attitude to you.

*For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. (Matt. 7:2)*

In other words, step back and evaluate your life. Are you sowing thoughts, words and deeds that are Christlike in motive and in method? If you do so, you can expect to reap some of that fruit. If you are sowing selfish thought, selfish words, selfish deeds, you can expect a harvest of experiencing other people's selfishness.

*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.*

*8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. (Gal. 6:7-8)*

Don't expect a quality of life different to the kind you are shaping every day.

## **6. Choose Friends Based Upon What You Want To Be**

*He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed. (Prov. 13:20)*

*Make no friendship with an angry man, And with a furious man do not go, Lest you learn his ways And set a snare for your soul. (Prov. 22:24-25)*

*Do not mix with winebibbers, Or with gluttonous eaters of meat; For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, And drowsiness will clothe a man with rags. (Prov. 23:20-21)*

Here Proverbs gives us the laws of attraction. Whoever we befriend, we become like. When the old saying said, "A man is known by the company he keeps" it was representing this truth. Birds of a feather stick together.

Whomever you are attracted to represent something you want to be like. The corollary of that is, whomever is drawn to you is drawn to you because of what you are.

So Proverbs tells us that if you are drawn to drunkards and partiers, it is in some sense because you wish to be like them, and indeed, the only way they's keep you around is if you act like one of them. And even if you are not one now, spend enough time with them, and you will be.

*3 Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." (1 Cor. 15:33)*

The people you want to be with on Saturdays, on Friday nights, on holiday, what are they like? The people you want to Whatsapp and call, and follow on Facebook, who are they, and what kind of life are they pursuing? What is the most important thing in their lives? What's the most important thing in your life?

The reason some professing Christians don't seek friendships with other Christians, is that they haven't fully surrendered to the idea of really living like a Christian. They look on the world with nostalgia and warmth, and look on other Christians with disdain. Well, whoever you want to be with is really who you want to be.

Now Jesus wants to be with His people. So much so, that He sent His Spirit to actually indwell them. So do you want to be with people who love what God loves? Or with those who hate what God loves?

Let me throw in some bonus advice from Proverbs.

*A man who has friends must himself be friendly, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. (Prov.*

18:24)

If you Want fellowship, then fellowship. If you want the joys of spiritual friendships with others, then invest time, and money, and hospitality, and all the things that go into building a friendship. If you stand around waiting for fellowship to find you and envelop you, you'll wait a long time. Go and make the spiritual friendships you wish to have.

## **7. Be Generous if You Expect a Blessing**

*Honor the LORD with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; 10 So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine. (Prov. 3:9-10)*

*There is one who scatters, yet increases more; And there is one who withholds more than is right, But it leads to poverty. The generous soul will be made rich, And he who waters will also be watered himself. The people will curse him who withholds grain, But blessing will be on the head of him who sells it. (Prov. 11:24-26)*

No one doubts we are in some difficult financial times. Jobs are hard to come by, less people are being employed to do the work of many. Prices keep going up, inflation seems to outpace income. In the middle of this, God exhorts His people to give to Him first, and to be generous. God says, you will never lack yourself, if you are a channel of blessing to others. On the other hand, Proverbs tells us that there are those who withhold, supposedly to protect their financial resources, and it only gets worse.

John Wesley was once preaching, and a farmer, who was not a believer, went to hear him. Wesley's sermon was on money, and his first point was "Get All You Can!" The farmer liked that. He nudged his neighbour, "Now this is preaching the like of which I've ne'er heard before! This is very good; it is admirable preaching." Wesley spoke about diligence, activity, hard work. Wesley's second point was "Save all you can!" The farmer was even more excited. He nudged his neighbour "Was there ever preaching like this preaching?" Wesley preached on thrift, waste, the love of luxury. The farmer thought to himself, "All this I have done from my youth up!" But then Wesley came to his third point "Give All You Can" "Ay, ay dear," said the farmer, "he has gone and spoilt it all."

Don't ask me to explain how God does it. Just try it, and see how God keeps His Word. And don't only be generous with your money. Be generous with your time. Give of yourself. Spend and be spent for Christ, and you will find God pours into you faster than you can give it out.

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