

Proverbs 1 • Introduction to Wisdom

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Proverbs chapter one right now, Proverbs chapter one. When my youngest son was little, he would refer to this as the "book of problems." And actually probably closer to the truth is the book of "solution to problems," maybe. So let's pray.

Thank you, Father, for giving us time tonight to be in Your Word. And we pray that You would minister grace to us, wisdom and insight. We ask it in Jesus name, amen.

A little introduction here to the book of Proverbs, if I could. The Hebrew Bible has the very same name for this book. It's taken after the first couple of words, "the Proverbs." And that's usually the way the Hebrew Bible named their books, after the first word or two that is actually in the text.

The Hebrew term "Proverbs" literally means a comparison. And we find that throughout the book of Proverbs where it'll actually compare. It'll contrast the righteous and the wicked or something like that. And you're going to see that a lot during the book. Of course, the term Proverbs more broadly, came to mean any really, any piece of wisdom. Anything that might come from a basic rule of conduct or from an observation from life or something of that nature.

Solomon is believed to have written the Proverbs. It says so at the very beginning, except for three sections in this book, which are referred to as "the sayings of the wise." We'll mention them when we get to them in Proverbs 22 chapter 24, and then also 30 and 31. Those are the sayings of the wise. And it's possible Solomon compiled those writings. But it is fairly generally agreed that he did not write them.

Just a little bit on the author, Solomon, just so you kind of know how old this book is. Solomon reigned as king over Israel from 971 BC to 931 BC. And, of course, most scholars believe that he wrote the majority of the Proverbs early on in his reign before his heart had been drawn away from the Lord.

It appears the book of Proverbs was then actually compiled about 250 years later. These writings existed but they were compiled... In fact, when we get to the 25th chapter of Proverbs, it's actually going to say, "these also are the

Proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied. And it would appear that it was at that time that they kind of made the final compilation of the book.

And as you well know, the book of Proverbs is really all about wisdom. Presents statements of life, all, covering all facets of life. And then the book of Proverbs basically kind of lays them out there and then asks the simple question, is this wisdom or is this folly? That's the basic essence.

And yet wisdom is always the focus; it's always the goal. And the reason it's the goal it's because in Jewish thought, wisdom means "skillful living." So it was obviously something the Jews sought after. It was something they wanted to attain to. Skillful living. Are you a skillful liver? Is your life skillful?

Well, we have a different term for it today. We usually refer to it in the negative sense. We say, he or she is making poor choices. That's another way of saying they're not very skillful in their living. So, rather than us talking about poor choices, they talked about good choices, skillful living, wisdom. That's what the book of Proverbs is all about.

And of course, the perspective is God's. It's His perspective. It's not skillful living from man's perspective, from the standpoint of I'm going to work hard, make money, and then relax for the rest of my life. That might be a worldly way of living skillfully, but not necessarily in the kingdom of God.

A couple of last little points here. You have to be careful when you're reading through the book of Proverbs to, in your interpretation of this book. Because it's not all to be interpreted literally. For example, there's a verse in Proverbs 22 that says that if a man is skillful... In fact, the proverb actually says, "*Do you see a skill this skillful man,*" or "*this man skilled in what he does?*" It says, "*he will serve before kings.*" (Proverbs 22:29) Well, obviously that's not a literal promise from the standpoint of you and I being skillful and then serving before kings. It's simply a saying that tells us that skillful work, or excellent work is going to be recognized and rewarded for what it is.

And we should understand that kind of thing because we have our own Proverbs that we understand aren't to be taken literally. You've probably, well, no doubt you've heard "an apple a day keeps the doctor away." Well, obviously it's not true. But it is, the essence of it is that if you eat healthfully... Is healthfully a word? If it isn't I just made it up. If you eat that way (an apple a day) you're going to have positive benefits. And that's what that proverb is literally saying.

Rather than there's a guarantee being there if you eat an apple a day and so forth.

We understand that a proverb is something that conveys and reinforces a truth. Whether it's taken literally or not, isn't the issue. It reinforces a basic fundamental principle of truth.

And as we get into chapter one of the book of Proverbs, you're going to notice here, there might be some headings in your Bible. It's essentially laid out in two parts. What you have is the first six verses, which are kind of an introduction to the entire book of Proverbs. So, let's go ahead and read that. The first six verses, and we'll kind of see how it, it lays out an introduction. It says, verse one,

"1 The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:" (So it begins by naming the author. Verse two,)

2 To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight,

3 to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity, (which of course is fairness. And then it goes on to say,)

4 to give prudence to the simple," And prudence by the way, is the ability to make good choices. Okay. Prudence, if you define it literally means-ability to soundly judge and to make determinations on that judgment. That's a prudent person. It kind of speaks of someone who has common sense. Which by the way is gravely lacking in our culture today. *"...knowledge and discretion to the youth-"* That's obviously where prudence is needed the most.

Verse five,

"5 Let the wise hear and increase (Notice it's not just the simple and the youthful. He says, let also the wise hear) *and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance,* (as it meaning further guidance)

6 to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles."

So you can see here that our target audience just got enlarged. Not just simple, not just youthful, but also wise, even the wise can read the Proverbs. Study the Proverbs and learn and grow in their wisdom. So it's a reminder here to "never stop growing in wisdom."

And then verse seven lays down kind of a launching point really for all of the book of Proverbs. It says,

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;" Later on, we're going to find out that the fear of the Lord is the beginning also of wisdom. In other words, it's the starting point for obtaining knowledge, wisdom, whatever. It is the, it's the fear of the Lord.

What is the fear of the Lord? Yeah, I think there's still some confusion in some hearts and minds about this. Because the fear of the Lord doesn't mean being frightened of God. There are people who are frightened of God. But that's not what the fear of the Lord is. The fear of the Lord... If you're going to look it up in like a dictionary, it's going to say "to have reverence for God." But I don't know about you, but that definition is woefully unsatisfactory to me.

It just doesn't satisfy me, because it doesn't go deep enough. Yeah, it does mean that, but I think it means so much more. I mean, to acknowledge God, to honor God, to respect God, to obey God. All those are descriptions of "to fear the Lord," what it is to fear the Lord. So it's a very far reaching sort of an idea.

But notice he says that this "fear of the Lord," this acknowledgement, this honoring, this respect and obedience to the Lord, it's the very beginning. It's the very starting point of all knowledge. And this is where we begin. It is how we proceed, and you can't jump over it and be wise.

And then this verse ends with a contrast, which is very typical of the Proverbs as we said before, or a comparison. It says, *"fools despise wisdom and instruction."* And by the way, the word fool, as it's translated in the Hebrew, or from the Hebrew, describes someone who is stubborn. And that means they're unwilling to listen to instruction. That's what stubbornness means, they're not teachable.

When we refer to someone as teachable that would be the opposite. It talks about somebody who lacks understanding. Who refuses to take in knowledge. Who's filled with their own personal pride. And because of their pride they are belligerently quarrelsome. I don't know if you've ever met anybody who's like that. But that's the Biblical fool. And it says they despise wisdom. They despise instruction. So, this is the antithesis of what it means "to fear the Lord." Right?

Now, as we move on here, Solomon is going to be in these next verses, kind of preparing us for the actual Proverbs. The Proverbs, these first nine chapters of Proverbs, are like preparatory. I mean, they give us great information. But

they're fairly preparatory to bring us to the place of launching into the actual Proverbs that started like chapter 10. This is all to get our hearts in the right place.

And these next chapters, and we're not going to get that far tonight, but they're going to include a lot of warnings very practical in nature. And all kinds of exhortations that are laid out for us so that we might ready our hearts to understand the proverbial wisdom. And so he begins with some of that preparatory information here in verse 8 when he says,

"8 Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching,

9 for (they are graceful) they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck." Now, so the first group of people that Solomon speaks to- to prepare for the Proverbs to come, are those who are of a youthful age. But who are still under the direct supervision and instruction of their parents. By the way, these verses are not saying that this is kind of an ongoing thing. There's an assumption in the Word of God that there's a point where you are really kind of on an equal plane with your parents, depending on how you and they, how long you and they live. But this is speaking to those who are still under the supervision of their parents. And the word here is, listen to their instruction. Be guided, in fact, by their teaching because this is going to be good for you.

There's a point in time when we begin to flirt with adulthood. I'm not sure exactly when that is. I'm still waiting to get there. But I like to say I'm an adult, but not really an adult. We kind of begin to recognize that our parents are human beings. And at that point, we realize their fallibilities, their weaknesses, and their challenges in life. And that usually begins probably in our pre-teen to teenage, early teenage years.

We, before that your parents are they can kind of do no wrong from the standpoint of they're who they are. But then our eyes are opened as we get older and we begin to question. And then we go through what people refer to as those "rebellious years." Well, the rebellious years, which aren't necessarily mandated for a teenager, are common for a teenager, because we recognize, we're beginning to recognize that our parents are human beings. And they're fallible. They're not always right. We thought they were, but we realized they're not.

We consider ourselves free at that point to begin to reject their counsel. In fact, if our peer group is influencing us enough, we actually begin to believe that their counsel is not just unnecessary, it's stupid. We believe that, right? I

remember believing that as a teenager. My parents don't know a thing. Not a single thing. Man, if they only knew as much as I did when I was 13 then they'd be really smart.

And that is just kind of a natural progression for a teenager. To begin to kind of, as they grow up, recognizing, wow, you're just like me. You really don't know what you're doing half the time, do you? And so, we find ourselves free to reject their counsel, reject their information. The word that's given here initially to young people is "do not forsake those things from your parents. Don't forsake them."

Because you see, it's pride in a teenager that leads them to believe they've got life dialed in and they know what's going on. And they're smart, their parents are dumb, and they don't need to listen to them. That's pride. The opposite of that is humility. Yes, your parents, for anyone who's young, yes, they are human beings, yes, they are fallible, and yeah, they don't have life dialed in. But neither do you. And so, respect and humility would suggest very strongly that it would be wise of you to consider and be guided by their counsel.

He goes on in verse 10 to say,

"¹⁰ My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.

¹¹ If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason; (That term without reason: you and I would say it this way- just for the fun of it. Let's go do this just for the fun of it. They go on speaking,)

¹² like Sheol (or the grave) let us swallow them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit;

¹³ we shall find all (kinds of) precious goods, and we'll (correction-we shall) fill our houses with plunder;

¹⁴ throw in your lot among us; (and) we will all have one (common) purse"-
That's what they say and that's the enticement.

Solomon says,

¹⁵ my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths,

16 for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood.

17 For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird,

18 but these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives." In other words, as foolish as it is to set a trap for a bird in the view of the bird, it is as just as foolish for these men to plan what they're planning. Because they are fools. And the fact of the matter is, they're ambushing their own lives. And this is a warning, basically aimed at the seductive comments of worldly thinking that promise excitement and wealth if we'll just come along and do it. Even though it's done at the expense of others.

But we also hear the voice of the father. The persuasion of the father, urging the young person to understand the danger of those worldly voices that would draw us away from the protection of our parents. And into the ways of the world.

And then the voice of wisdom in verse 19 lays out this universal principle for his exhortation by saying in verse 19,

"19 Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; (In fact, he says "it actually ends up taking away the life of those who run after it or possess it" or whatever. (correction - "it takes away the life of its possessor") And this is the idea: those who seek the life and the livelihood of others are actually forfeiting their own life and livelihood. That's the bottom line.

And then the last section of chapter one kind of personifies wisdom, as one crying out for people to listen and respond. Listen to the voice of wisdom as it cries out. It says,

"20 Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice;

21 at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:"

First of all, you'll notice that wisdom is personified here in a female term. And wisdom is not only personified, but wisdom is crying. And the word in the Hebrew that is translated "cries out," literally means "a ringing cry." And that suggests an excited and passionate kind of insistence to listen. In other words, wisdom is constantly trying to get our attention saying, listen up, listen; won't you stop being dumb and foolish and listen to my voice. And here's what she says. Verse 22,

"22 "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?"

Do you notice in this one single verse that there are three different groups that are mentioned here? We have the simple, and that's the naive person. The simpleton who doesn't know and doesn't care, don't know, don't care.

And then we have the scoffer, who's the defiant and cynical person, who loves to hear the sound of their own voice and loves to scoff. This is the same thing essentially as "the mocker."

And then finally we have the fool. And the Biblical term for fool always refers to somebody who is morally deficient. In other words, they are constantly rejecting that which is moral propriety and laughing at it; rejecting it. "I don't need that stuff."

And you'll notice that all of these three descriptions have something in common. Did you notice that in verse 22 he says, "How long will you love; how long will you delight?" Did you notice that they are satisfied with their ways. And they refuse to listen to the voice of wisdom and reason because they're satisfied. They're satisfied with the way things are going.

Which is one of the reasons why when people tell me that they're praying for somebody in their family, like a child or family member or friend or whatever, who is living just a foolish worldly life, I always tell them, hey, if you really want to God to get their attention, pray that He'd make them miserable. Pray that they would no longer be satisfied. Pray that they would no longer love being simple or delight in scoffing. Pray that it would come back to them as something that is very distasteful, very dissatisfying. It's probably about the only way in some cases that their attention is going to be gained.

Okay, wisdom goes on to say, verse 23,

"23 If you turn at my reproof, (and a reproof is an expression of disapproval. Okay? So wisdom is saying, "if you turn around at my expression of disapproval, if you listen to me and hear what I'm saying and you turn,") "behold, (here's the promise from wisdom) I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you." So wisdom promises that insight and understanding will be given if an individual would simply respond to the warnings, the expressions of disapproval.

"24 Because (verse 24) I have called (you) and you refused to listen, (I) have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded,

25 because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof,

26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you,

27 when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you."

Pause there. Wisdom is saying, "because you've spurned my counsel, my insight, again and again and again, I will mock or laugh at your calamity." The idea here isn't that God is finding any kind of delight or joy in the tragedies that happen in people's life. This is a figurative expression. And it basically is wisdom's way of saying that, when you come to the end and things fall apart in your life, I'm not going to be there. I'm not going to be around. You won't find me. And that's wisdom's way of mocking the foolish. And in fact, wisdom goes on to say that very thing in verse 28. Look with me there.

"28 Then you (correction-they) will call upon me, but I will not answer; (See this is that figurative mocking that wisdom responds to the fool with.) they will seek me diligently but will not find me. (Why?)

29 Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord," (They would not choose to acknowledge God, to respect God, to honor God.)

30 (They) would have none of my counsel and despised all of my reproof,

31 therefore (What are you going to do?) they shall eat the fruit of their way, and (they) have their fill of their own devices."

And this might sound cruel to you, but it's not. We even have a saying, hey, you made your bed, now you got to sleep in it. You ever heard that little proverb? That sounds maybe a little cruel too. But what we're kind of saying, is you created these circumstances that you're now in, so now you're forced to live in it. Did you think that you were going to create these circumstances and then not have to be subject to them?

We're recognizing that what a man sows, he also reaps. And that's what wisdom is saying in these verses. "You're going to have to eat the fruit of your way. Because this is what you sought. This is what you wanted. This is what you ran after."

Now, that doesn't preclude the idea of forgiveness and restoration. Because there's always that. There's not one of us in this room who has received everything that our sins deserve. Not one. God does not treat us as our sins deserve. The Bible flat out comes out and says that. What that means is we have not reaped everything that we've sown. That doesn't deny the principle of sowing and reaping. It just simply says that where sin abounds, grace much more abounds. And there is mercy in God's kingdom.

And I can specifically think about things in my life that, where I denied the Lord and went contrary to the will and the Word of the Lord. And the Lord rescued me out of my foolishness without allowing me, without causing me, to walk out the full brunt of what I should have reaped from that situation. I'm aware of those situations. Painfully aware. And I've seen it in the lives of other people. I look at what they've done and the decisions they've made. And I think this should go a whole lot worse for you than it really has. But God is merciful. He delights to show mercy. Right?

And so, what makes the difference in those people's lives? Well, usually it's because they've repented. They've cried out to God for forgiveness. And God has relented. And He has shown such incredible mercy and tenderness toward His people, that He didn't bring upon them the full brunt of what they should have reaped based on what they had sown. God is good, right?

So, we want to put this thing into perspective here. But wisdom is simply saying, "because you have turned your back and sought your own way, then your own way is what you're going to get." Right? It's kind of like wisdom saying when all this stuff is falling apart around you, I'll be standing nearby saying I was here all along. And I could have saved you from all this trouble, all this heartache, all this loss, had you just listened to Me. Had you just opened your heart to Me.

And then the chapter ends with these words, verse 32,

*"32 For the simple are killed by their turning away, (Look at that statement.)
"and (What is it that destroys fools? It's their complacency. So) "the
complacency of fools (actually) destroys them;"*

But here's the comparison:

*"33 but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease without dread
of disaster."*

Those last two verses again are the meaning of the word "proverb." Because they show a comparison. The simple are killed by their turning away; the complacent, the complacency of fools is what destroys them; but those who listen, who respond to wisdom, will find that their lives are secure, and the dread of disaster is nowhere to be found.

If this sounds very similar to what Jesus promised for those who hear His word and obey, you're right, it is. As Jesus said, and we've repeated several times, "the man who hears my word and does what it says is like a man who built his house on a foundation. And even though the wind and the waves crashed against it, it stood. But the man who refused to listen, who refused to put into practice what came from God's Word, is that man whose house was destroyed. Completely destroyed because it was built on nothing more than the ground, the sand, the dirt." (Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20 and Luke 8:4-15) So these strong exhortations "to listen"... And we're going to hear this over and over again in the book of Proverbs, listening.

As we get into chapter two, which we're not going to tonight, he's going to say, incline your ear. That's a poetic, Biblical way of saying, "turn to listen to the voice of the Lord."

You ever stop to think about your life before you really were walking with the Lord? You ever stop to think about the ways that you could have saved yourself so much difficulty and heartache had you just been willing to listen, to respond? Had you just been willing to humble yourself, not be prideful? Not to think you knew it all but instead to learn. That's so important, isn't it?

The book of Proverbs is going to remind us to do this. And I think that this is really a very appropriate study for this day and age. I have to be honest with you. I have to be careful how I say this because we have as a nation, rejected God, and rejected His Word, we have, of course, rejected the wisdom of God's Word.

It was not an overnight rejection. When I was born, and in those years not that long after, I grew up in a world where the Word of God was largely embraced, even though people may not have been born again or really truly had faith in God. I grew up in a world that embraced Biblical values, even though it wasn't embracing the God of the Bible largely. But people still lived by Biblical values. When people got married, they got married with the intention of staying married for life. There was no such thing as a prenup, which is a plan to fail. It was a different world even just when I was a young boy because the wisdom of God's Word was still somewhat embraced and followed.

Well, now we're not only living in a post-Christian America, or as some people like to say, we're living in a pre-Christian America, which is the positive spin on that particular thing, but we're living in a time when it has been now generations since we've truly embraced the wisdom of God's Word. And foolishness abounds. Moral depravity abounds. Scoffing, it's everywhere. It's everywhere, you don't have to go very far at all. And all the other things that the book of Proverbs tells you and I to steer clear of, they're all very prevalent in our society today.

As we go through and study the book of Proverbs, this is something that we really need to open our hearts to. Get back to say, Lord, just fill me with wisdom. And for those of you that have small kids at home, what a privilege you have to teach your kids the wisdom of God.

And by the way, teaching your kids the wisdom of God is not going to happen by you just bringing them to church. You got to teach them. You got to sit them down and teach them. Teach them the wisdom of God. That means teach them right and wrong. Teach them prudence. Teach them understanding from God's perspective. Teach them what is right, what is good, what is true, what is holy. Don't rely on other people to teach them.

And then parents, remember this too. You are teaching by the way you live. Even when you don't open your mouth, you're teaching your children. What are you teaching them about marriage? What are you teaching them about church? What are you teaching them about the Bible? Just by how you live. But what are you teaching them? What are you saying to them? How are you instructing them? It happens probably even more so from the way we live.