



THE FEAR OF
THE LORD IS THE
BEGINNING OF
KNOWLEDGE;
FOOLS DESPISE
WISDOM AND
INSTRUCTION.

PROVERBS 1:7

PURPOSE

OF WISDOM

DATE

June 6 & 7

WEEK

1 of 10

OVERVIEW

Proverbs 1

KEY VERSE

Proverbs 1:7

SETTING THE STAGE

The book of Proverbs was written largely by King Solomon, considered the wisest man to have ever lived. The fame of his wisdom extended well beyond the territory of Israel. And, since the printing press, the Internet and podcasts did not exist back then, many kings and queens from nations across the world came to Jerusalem to hear his other-worldly wisdom.

Why is it important to possess wisdom? And why does it seem so elusive to find and difficult to acquire, even for the most powerful and connected? While there are many definitions for wisdom, it is generally viewed as the 'X factor' allowing one 'to win' at life.¹ People want to know the best decision to make and the best course to take in any given situation. If they only possessed wise foresight, knowledge, and discretion, surely it would transform the course of their lives and positively affect their destinations.

The book of Proverbs speaks specifically to the topic of wisdom; namely, what it is, where it comes from, and how to get it. As we will see, wisdom is not deliberately elusive or purposefully problematic like it might appear. To the child of God, true wisdom is available and accessible through Jesus Christ. Wisdom is learned and utilized throughout a lifetime. To this topic, we now turn to Proverbs 1.

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LESSON OUTLINE

1. How We Perceive Wisdom
2. How We Receive Wisdom
3. How God Gives Wisdom

THINGS TO KNOW

- Wisdom is not just a matter of the head (intuition, intellect, or experience), but also a matter of the heart (authority, love, and affection).
- Wisdom is accessible to all people.

PURPOSE OF WISDOM

Setting the Stage, continued >

PROVERBS 1:1-7 *The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: ²To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, ³to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; ⁴to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth—⁵Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, ⁶to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. ⁷The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

Introduction

How can a person gain wisdom and grow wise? Before we can know how to gain wisdom, we must first know what wisdom is, so that we can discern between true wisdom and false wisdom.

When considering wisdom today, people might think of television talk show segments or news platforms, such as “Oprah” or “Dr. Phil” or “Washington Post” or “Fox News” or “Judge Judy” or “Harvard Review.”

Or, they might think of the great philosophers in human history: Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle. You know, the famous Greek virtuosos who now have their marble busts in every public library, looking up into the sky with a wincing look in their eyes, pensively pondering the complexities of life.

Or, maybe when thinking of wisdom, you think of those ‘one-liners’ that your grandpa would say in a warm voice from his big, leather, comfy chair that would always endearingly hit you and gently challenge you to think in a way you would not have considered on your own.

Biblical commentators and scholars believe that the simplest definition of ‘wisdom’ is “the ability to see things from God’s perspective,”² and “competence in seeing the realities of life.”³

Generally speaking, most people might perceive ‘wisdom’ as being really smart and having a high IQ; and not just smart in the sense of being ‘book smart.’ Rather, the type of smart that bears upon real-life situations in meaningful ways.

That seems like a fair definition of ‘wisdom.’ It is certainly not less than that; but there is more to it, as well. What does this passage communicate about the nature of true wisdom, and more importantly, how we can gain true wisdom?

1. HOW WE PERCEIVE WISDOM

Biblical commentators and scholars believe that the simplest definition of ‘wisdom’ is “the ability to see things from God’s perspective,”² and “competence in seeing the realities of life.”³

¹ Daniel L. Akin, and Jonathan Akin, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in Proverbs* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2017). iBooks p. 21.

² Chuck Swindoll, *Solomon*.

³ Timothy Keller, *Pointers to Christ – Directional Signs in History*. “A King’s Wisdom – Solomon.” October 5th, 1997.



Those two definitions might sound dissimilar at first, but they are virtually synonymous. For instance, if you can see things from God’s perspective, then you will have competence in seeing the realities of life as they truly are.

Biblical scholars arrived at this definition for wisdom in Proverbs, as relayed by King Solomon, by mainly pivoting back to the original place Solomon first gained wisdom from God, which takes place in 1 Kings 3. This chapter recounts a scene where God approaches Solomon as a young boy, as he becomes king, and promises to grant him whatever he might wish. And Solomon, humbly and admirably, asks that God would give him wisdom of all things so that he could steward well his leadership of God’s people.

1 KINGS 3:9 Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people? (ESV)

This passage shines a light on the otherwise blurry contours of ‘wisdom’ and what it looks like. Scholars argue that the phrase, *give your servant an understanding mind* should more appropriately be rendered as, “give your servant a **hearing** or **perceiving** heart.” In other words, he is asking, “God, help me to perceive things like you perceive them.”

That sounds nice, but how do you do that? How can that happen, practically?

Interestingly, the most common word that Solomon uses for wisdom throughout all the books he wrote in the Bible is a Hebrew word that communicates the concept of “coming under the authority of.”⁴ It is the Hebrew word, ‘Chokmah.’

Whenever Solomon is referring to wisdom, he is not primarily invoking the idea of knowledge. He is primarily invoking the notion of authority instead.

Solomon is saying that wisdom is, at its very root, not an issue of intellectual capacity, but personal authority. He is saying, “Whatever your authority is, whatever your king is, that will be the source of your wisdom.” Types of wisdom come from types of authority. And your wisdom will always flow from the source of your authority.

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Therefore, before we even get into a conversation of ‘what wisdom is’ and ‘where we can find it,’ we must consider the following question first: **who / what is your king?**

Who is the main authority in your life? Who makes the decisions about ultimate questions? What voice is your standard? What do you value as a premium and ultimate? To what are you yoked? What do you feel like you cannot live without? Whatever that is—that is the real authority in your life, and it will guide you and give you wisdom about what you should or should not do.⁵

Solomon, wisely, is saying that there are many types of wisdom out there, precisely because you can give yourself to many different types of authority. From where do you perceive wisdom? The kind of wisdom you receive will come from the authority you crown king.

Let us make this practical. Is romance your king? If so, then all the decisions and actions you take in life will ultimately be done in the best interest of romance. Are money and financial security your king? If so, then your guiding principles will ultimately lead every decision to your financial

⁴ J.D. Greear, *Solomon: The Man Who Had It All*, “Ask Me Anything.” 2017.

⁵ Timothy Keller, *Pointers to Christ – Directional Signs in History* “A King’s Wisdom – Solomon.” October 5th, 1997.

bottom line. Is approval your king? If so, then that authority will, like a current, influence the direction of every decision toward perceived status and approval.

Ultimately, Solomon is saying that wisdom and authority are inextricably connected. And, he is saying if you want true wisdom about perceiving reality as God sees it, and competency in seeing the realities of life, that can only come through knowing the true King.

2. HOW WE RECEIVE WISDOM

If we have determined that wisdom is ultimately a function of ‘coming under the authority of’ and perceiving life through the lens of that authority, then how can we access the true wisdom of God? How can we practically bring ourselves under the authority of God, the true King, and therefore, receive true wisdom?

We see this in Proverbs 1:7.

PROVERBS 1:7 *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

We receive wisdom by making the LORD our King, which is expressed by a fear of Him. What does the Bible mean by ‘fear’? It does not mean our relationship with God should be characterized by a constant state of ‘spiritual fright.’ The ‘fear of God’ communicates a reverence regarding His great power and holiness and appropriate awe towards His abundant mercy and goodness.

When we begin to see God rightly, then we will begin to see ourselves in light of who God is, and it will begin to produce a godly fear—reverential awe—inside of us. And when God is our King, *the fear of the Lord [will be] the beginning of knowledge.*

This framework fits how we defined wisdom — ‘the ability to see things like God sees them’ and ‘competently seeing the realities of life.’ If we are going to start seeing rightly, we must start with seeing God for who He is, and then, seeing ourselves rightly in light of God. If we do not get that straight first, then it will be impossible to find true wisdom apart from the only source of true wisdom.

Wisdom is received, therefore, by humbling yourself before the Lord. Humility finally makes wisdom accessible because you are starting to see things as they really are.⁶

In the latter half of Proverbs 1, God offers wisdom to all people. He is not partial at all, but only some will receive it. To whom is it given? To kings? To smart people? To teachers? To leaders? No, it is to those who know they need it, i.e., the humble of heart.

This is why the Pharisees and religious leaders in the Bible never got wisdom—even though they were literally the smartest of all! They had the best education and training. They knew the laws and the prophets of the Old Testament. Their self-righteousness and their self-sufficiency made them dull and blind. They were not humble of heart. They did not need God.

And yet, as Jesus says in the Gospels, the Kingdom of God is revealed to ‘little children’ which is part of receiving wisdom.

Wisdom is received, therefore, by humbling yourself before the Lord. Humility finally makes wisdom accessible because you are starting to see things as they really are.⁶

⁶ Jason Fritz, Illuminate Community Church, Solomon – Finding The Source of Wisdom. October 17, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rJoEF5v-bk>.

MATTHEW 18:3 *“Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (ESV)*

Jesus is simply communicating that wisdom ultimately comes by approaching God humbly—like a child who depends entirely on the Father—desperately relying upon the power and goodness of God.

Note the many references in Proverbs 1 where Solomon frames the conversation of gaining wisdom in a relational context, namely, that of spiritually posturing ourselves in a position like that of a child:

PROVERBS 1:8 *Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s teaching.*

PROVERBS 1:10 *My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.*

PROVERBS 1:15 *My son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths.*

Why does Solomon refer to the reader as a child? Perhaps it is because he knew one overarching truth: namely, if our posture was not with a childlike heart first, then nothing else we heard after that would stick. Even the most valuable nuggets of wisdom would fall to the wayside without a second consideration.

Humility, seeing God rightly and ourselves rightly teaches us to depend on God like a child upon a loving father. Apart from that posture, true wisdom will be impossible. But with a posture of humility, godly wisdom will surely come.

How, then, does God give wisdom to those who are humbled and ready to receive it?

3. HOW GOD GIVES WISDOM

To understand how God grants wisdom to His people, it is important to note two truths that we must hold in tension with one another. The first is that God desires to make us wise. And the second is that God makes us wise by putting us into situations where we are forced to exercise the muscle of dependency upon His wisdom and counsel.

A. God desires to make us wise.

God desires to make us wise because He desires for all of us to be conformed increasingly into the likeness of His Son, who Himself is the wisdom of God (*Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 1:24*). And while many texts speak to this truth, *Proverbs 1* is particularly clear:

PROVERBS 1:20-23 *Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; ²¹at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: ²²“How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? ²³If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you.”*

From what we can see, God is not playing hide-and-seek with us, as we might otherwise think or imagine when it comes to wisdom.

From what we can see, God is not playing hide-and-seek with us, as we might otherwise think or imagine when it comes to wisdom. God desperately desires us to be wise in His Word and wise in His world. The following verses show that God does not make wisdom available to us in a secretive, enigmatic manner where only the smartest will discover it or the most moral will receive it. No, rather, He is announcing wisdom to all of us in a loud, unabashed way. If only we would humbly depend upon Him and simply ask!

JAMES 1:5 *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” (ESV)*

It seems simple, right? To be sure, the act of ‘simply’ giving ourselves to God might appear easy initially, but we can all attest that this is undoubtedly the most difficult activity of the human condition. Only when we reflect on the Gospel will our hearts be softened and turn to Him in repentance (*Romans 2:4*). And once we humble ourselves before God, we finally position ourselves so that we might be able to receive His wisdom.

B. God will make us wise through dependence.

Whenever we ask or pray for God to give us something, I think we are all guilty of thinking that the process is similar to how we would ask for anything else in life. Especially in our Western culture—we ask for it, and it is given to us. For example, we ask for an ice cream cone at an ice cream parlor, and we are given an ice cream cone. Easy as that. Likewise, it is easy to think that by asking God for wisdom, God will simply drop ‘wisdom’ into our brain much like He would drop a ‘Wisdom PDF file’ into the ‘Dropbox’ of our head. Bam! That was easy!

To be sure, we do know that we are supposed to pray for wisdom. And the good news is that God will answer this prayer. God promises that when we ask anything according to His will, He will hear us and answer us (*1 John 5:14*). And since it is His will to make us more like Jesus, we can therefore conclude that God will always answer that prayer (*Romans 8:29*).

However, this does not mean God will always answer that prayer in the way we think He should or will. In fact, God usually answers much differently than we expect. Oftentimes, God’s answers to prayer are wrapped differently than we imagine, given on terms we did not think we agreed to, and delivered on a timetable we might not prefer.

And this is certainly the case with wisdom. In the Bible, God gives wisdom not through an easy, instantaneous process, but through the mechanism of trial, suffering, and sacrifice. The verses immediately before James 1:5 make this point:

JAMES 1:2-4 *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (ESV)*

In other words, God will often make us wise through difficulties that force us to think deeply, critically, and holistically in a way that otherwise would have been impossible without the trial.

In other words, God will often make us wise through difficulties that force us to think deeply, critically, and holistically in a way that otherwise would have been impossible without the trial. And as such, the rest of Proverbs teems with sayings related to conflict and resolution—with friends, with money, with leadership, with family, with governance, with work, with sleep, with speech, with purity, and with virtually everything in life.

God makes us wise, sanctifying us more into the likeness of His Son, not through an easy life without trial, but through the sufferings that make us stout in the things of God, ‘lacking in nothing’ (*James 1:4*).

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

The book of Proverbs concerns true wisdom, which is the fear of the Lord, allowing His ultimate authority to inform and transform every aspect of our life. Wisdom is not merely intellectual knowledge; it is a conviction of God's Truth that bears upon all of our thinking, living, and doing.

Only Christianity suggests that wisdom is a beautiful gift of grace through faith. It is not earned by merits or smarts so that no one may boast. It is a gift of God. The Gospel makes true wisdom from the true King accessible to all, precisely because God's mercy in Jesus Christ is available to all. And this true wisdom will make us more like the King from which we behold:

JAMES 3:17-18 *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

Notice that true wisdom, from the true King, bears meaningfully upon real life. It leads to a life of flourishing that creates flourishing for many others as well. May we perceive of true wisdom correctly, ready ourselves to receive it appropriately, and humbly ask the true King to give it. But let us not be surprised if God answers this prayer by giving us difficulty and trial. In some cases, the path of wisdom might be the only way, as was salvation through the cross. But by His grace, He will give us everything we need for life and godliness along the way (2 Peter 1:3).