

Intro to Proverbs

Please open your Bible to the book of Proverbs. If you open your Bible in the middle, it's probably nearby – after the book of Psalms.

Our normal practice is to work through books of the Bible. And we're starting a series looking at selections from the book of Proverbs this summer.

We looked some portions of the book of Proverbs three years ago in a short series on wisdom for the family from this book. And you can find those messages online if you're interested. But we certainly did not exhaust all that this book has to say for us, and so we're going to return to it this summer and try to pull out some of its teaching that has practical guidance for our daily lives.

But before we get there, we need to remind ourselves what this book aims to do and how it aims to do it. That's what we find in these opening verses...

Read Proverbs 1:1-7

Let's pray...

Intro

Life is full of proverbial statements if you are looking for them...

- Never trust a skinny cook
- Fish and visitors stink after three days
- What doesn't kill you makes you stronger
- He who dies with the most toys is still dead
- If at first you don't succeed, you're about average
- If you're going to be dumb, you gotta be tough
- It is better to be thought of as a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt (Mark Twain – restating an idea from Proverbs)
- Life isn't like a box of chocolates, it's more like a jar of jalapeños...what you do today might burn your behind tomorrow (sowing and reaping)

Sometimes, there's wisdom found in the world, and it sticks with us when it's said in a memorable way. And we can learn from creation around us.

But the book of Proverbs is more than just memorable statements. It's more than just life lessons or moral principles. It's more than just a statement from a fortune cookie or 'Dear Abby' advice. It's not pop psychology or life hacks from an influencer online.

Proverbs is different. We look to the book of Proverbs because it is wisdom that comes from God. It's inspired Scripture that reveals the wisdom of God to us.

And it's more than just moral principles. It points us to Jesus, who the New Testament says is God's wisdom. Jesus shows us exactly what wisdom looks like, walking around and talking with people, and perfectly embodying the wisdom of God for us. And more than that, Jesus invites us and enables us to walk in wisdom ourselves by laying down His life on the Cross, rising again on the third day, and ascending to the right hand of the Father so that He now rules as king Jesus over all Creation.

So for us to walk in wisdom is to follow the path of Jesus and live in obedience to Him as the wise and just King over us. It is about being in the right relationship with King Jesus. That's what living in the fear of the Lord is talking about – to live in the fear of the Lord is to be in the right relationship with God as your King and Savior.

So the book of Proverbs is not just about doing the right *things*, it's about knowing the right *person*. And as we see God's wisdom in this book – how God has designed and planned for the created order to work – we'll see more of the beauty and wonder of Jesus as we go.

Structure

The first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs discusses the contrast between following God's wisdom and man's foolishness. And Solomon, the author, talks about it in terms of a contrast between two women – lady wisdom and lady folly. He's trying to help us see that we as the readers need to make a choice. Whose voice are we going to listen to – the voice of wisdom or the voice of foolishness? Which path are we going to take?

And then, beginning in chapter 10 through the rest of the book, we get a collection of these short, pithy statements which describe how the world works and give instructions to us about what it means to live wisely or foolishly in the world.

Our plan for studying this book will be to look this morning at a sort of overview about this choice that Solomon presents to us about wisdom or foolishness. And then in the weeks to come, we'll look at some particular topics from the book and pull together different proverbs that address that topic. So today's message will serve as a sort of foundation for these other topics that we'll address going forward.

I recognize that lots of people travel and will miss some weeks of this study for one reason or another. So my hope is that this message will help ground our studies going forward, even if you come in and out of our services.

This morning, we will look at how the book of Proverbs is God's Wisdom *for* you and then how this book is God's Wisdom *to* you.

God's Wisdom for you

If you look down at chapter one, we see the purpose of the book given in these first seven verses. And we learn about who these proverbs are designed to help and how we should approach them.

So right up front, notice that verse one tells us a bit about the author of these proverbs.

Proverbs 1:1

The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:

These proverbs were written by King Solomon, the son of David. So they have a royal origin. Now, he's probably not the only author. So we read about King Lemuel at the end of the book, a guy named Aegur (possibly another name for Solomon, we don't know for sure), and then there are thirty sayings of the wise – which may be a reference to another group of saying, possibly collected by Solomon. And King Hezekiah gathered up some of these sayings, the book tells us.

So there is a royal backdrop to this book. Some of the chapters deal with appropriate behavior in the royal court (16, 31). Solomon wants us to know how to behave in the presence of the king and how kings should behave themselves.

And this makes sense, because Solomon needed wisdom as king. We know that God had asked Solomon early in His life (1 Kings 3:9) – what do you want? An incredible thing, by

the way. And Solomon asked God to give him two things – understanding and discernment. Another way to say that would be to say that Solomon asked God for wisdom.

And God in His grace, grants Solomon's request such that he became the wisest man to have lived. And so the book of Kings tells us that Solomon wrote over 3,000 proverbs in his lifetime – many of them about nature and wildlife (1 Kings 4:32-34).

Who was Solomon writing to in this book?

There's a few ways to answer this question. In one sense, Solomon writes this book as a sort of instruction manual of advice and counsel for his sons from he and their mother. They were going to be future kings, so he taught them in order that they would rule with wisdom and justice.

Proverbs 1:8

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

These are the instructions that we want to pass on to the next generation. That's why the book of Proverbs can be so helpful for young people. It has a lot of wisdom for our lives.

Just before I graduated from high school, I remember my Mom sort of panicked because she was worried that she hadn't told me all that I needed to know to go live out in the world on my own. So she would make notes to herself whenever thoughts occurred to her – Nathan, make sure that you put money into savings. Nathan, don't apologize over and over for the same thing or you'll make the other person feel awkward. Nathan, make sure that you treat servers at restaurants with particular kindness. Nathan, wash your car before you go to a wedding or a funeral.

Solomon is aiming at his son, particularly in these first several chapters. Listen to how often he makes that clear for us...

Proverbs 2:1

My son, if you receive my words
and treasure up my commandments with you,

Proverbs 3:1

My son, do not forget my teaching,
but let your heart keep my commandments,

Proverbs 4:1

Hear, **O sons**, a father's instruction,

Proverbs 4:10

Hear, **my son**, and accept my words,

Proverbs 4:20

My son, be attentive to my words;

Proverbs 5:1

My son, be attentive to my wisdom

Proverbs 6:1

My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor,

Proverbs 7:1

My son, keep my words

So do we get who Solomon is aiming at with these Proverbs? It's a father and mother giving counsel and direction to their kids. This isn't just for sons, by the way, as though daughters are off the hook. No, this is just the royal language of 'sonship' being used here. As we'll see in a minute, this book is not just aimed at this particular sons, but to everyone.

But Solomon calls out his sons specifically and tells them – this is the way you should go. This is how you rule well, how you rule wisely in the fear of the Lord. But as we've discussed in our study of the minor prophets – the sons of Solomon failed to do that. They turned away from God and ignored the counsel of their parents and the Lord. In some ways, the message of the whole OT is that we need another king – we need someone who will rule in righteousness.

And that's what we have in Jesus Christ, David's greater son – the one who called himself greater than Solomon. Jesus is God's own son – truly God and truly man in one person. He lived a life of perfect wisdom. Even as a young boy, he astonished the teachers of the day with his questions and insight. Scripture says that He grew in stature and wisdom. He confounded the religious leaders of the day with His questions and perfect answers to their traps.

He lived a life of perfect righteousness. He was crucified though He had done no wrong, but He rose from the grave on the third day. He ascended to the right hand of the Father, and now He rules from heaven in perfect wisdom. And one day, He will return to establish His wise and just rule in all of its fullness here on earth.

So against this royal backdrop that's in the book of Proverbs, we look back to the wisdom of Solomon, but we also look forward to the King of Kings. Proverbs encourages us to go from Solomon to Jesus. The wisdom that's in seed form here, grows into the person of Christ.

The prophet Isaiah gives a prophetic word about the coming Messiah in chapter 11 of his book. He writes,

Isaiah 11:1-2

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

2 And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

Isaiah tells us that the Messiah will have the Spirit of wisdom and understanding. He will have the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And so the New Testament shows us that all of this is true about Jesus. Jesus doesn't do away with the wisdom that's found in the book of Proverbs, He fulfills it. He reveals it. He shows us in living color what it looks like – just as Isaiah prophesied. So as we read and study this book, listen for the whispers about how the coming kingdom fulfills its message and how King Jesus magnifies its truth.

So Solomon is speaking to the royal household in this book. But he's also speaking beyond just his sons to all who would seek to grow in wisdom. It's not just limited to his sons. Anyone who wants to be wise can learn from Solomon's words here in this book. He wants all of God's people to live wisely, and he wants the king to show the way. Again, that's why we look to Jesus as the one who shows us the way.

So this book is written to give wisdom to almost everyone. But there is one person who will not gain anything from this book.

Proverbs 26:12

Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes?
There is more hope for a fool than for him

There's one person who will not learn from the book of Proverbs, and Solomon says that person is the fool. The fool will not receive the wisdom and correction and teaching that God offers in this book.

So who is this book aimed at? Look at verse 4...

Proverbs 1:4

to give prudence to the simple,
knowledge and discretion to the youth

Solomon is writing for the simple or the immature. This is a great book for young people. If you're looking for a book to study and read this summer – why not study the book of Proverbs?

Proverbs has thirty-one chapters, one for every day of the month. You've read some of chapter one already today, so you can be on track with just a little work this afternoon.

It's also aimed at those who are already on the path toward wisdom.

Proverbs 1:5

Let the wise hear and increase in learning,
and the one who understands obtain guidance,

The wise will get even wiser. The person who is putting these things into practice will grow all the more. There is a cumulative effect that wisdom has – it's like compound interest. It grows exponentially in a person's life. The wise person will continue to learn and grow and learn and grow all throughout his or her life.

The only person who doesn't experience this growth in wisdom is the fool. It's only the person who says, "I don't need it." That's the only one who will not be helped. Otherwise, this book and the wisdom from God it has, is for everyone. All that means that we should listen to these Proverbs because they reveal God's wisdom for us. God

gave Solomon wisdom, we see this wisdom fulfilled in Christ, and so today, through Solomon's words, God has wisdom for each one of us.

So first, what is wisdom? What does he mean in verse two?

Here's a definition that I found by Dan Philipps, who has an excellent book on Proverbs.

He defines wisdom this way: *Wisdom is skillful living in the fear of the Lord*

Look again at verse 2... **Proverbs 1:2**

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

What is this wisdom that God has for us? We see in these opening verses that wisdom is four things: practical, insightful, ethical, relational.

First, to be wise, we must be skillful. Think about the people who were tasked to build the tabernacle and the curtains in Exodus 28, 31. The text says, they were chosen and blessed by God with the spirit of wisdom and skill to do a good job. They were skillful. They were experienced and trained and had put in the preparation in order to be able to do the job with excellence.

Proverbs 22:29

Do you see a man skillful in his work?
He will stand before kings;
he will not stand before obscure men.

Wisdom is practical

Wisdom has a very practical dimension. Proverbs is not just about having a high IQ – it's about how to live practically in your daily life. You can have a high IQ and be a fool, if you don't live with wisdom.

So we need skillfulness with our words and in our relationships and with our finances and in our jobs. And Proverbs has wisdom for those areas because God designed the world in particular ways.

My mother-in-law made this little blanket for my son when he was born – actually this is probably version three or four of that blanket. And to do that she had to weave (crochet?) these strands together into a single piece.

Proverbs 8 tells us that Lady Wisdom created the world according to a wise pattern – she wove it together if you will. A wise and skillful person will seek to live in accordance with this wise pattern. For instance, don't try to take shortcuts or get rich quick, or it will hurt you later. Work hard and prepare for the future, and under normal circumstances, you will build wealth over time. You reap what you sow.

So this type of wisdom involves an understanding of how the world works. That's why there are numerous illustrations in the book of Proverbs from creation that come from observing how things work – why things are the way they are. Look at the bird, go to the ant, rivers and rain – there are all of these lessons drawn from the created world. A wise person gains skill from careful observation about how the world works (which is why we study science and math and literature, etc.). The wise person is curious so that he or she learns how to grow in skillfulness.

Are you growing in skillfulness? Sometimes, I talk to young people, and they think that everyone else just naturally knows what to do. But that's not true, is it? No one knows what they're doing all the time. But there is a sense in which wise people have learned how to live with practical skillfulness, and they live with the pattern of creation.

Wisdom is relational

Secondly, verse two tells us wisdom involves instruction. This word could also be translated 'correction' or 'discipline.' Wise people receive correction and discipline well. It's the fool who doesn't receive instruction. The fool is the person who can never be corrected, who says, "I know!" whenever you tell them something.

That happens first and primarily through the Scriptures. We gain instruction from the Bible. We get wisdom as we pursue learning about what God has revealed in His Word.

There's a wonderful promise in the book of James that says if anyone lacks wisdom, He should ask God who gives generously, and it will be given Him. But is it that God will just zap you with wisdom? I think that if you read Scripture with Scripture, you'll see in the book of Proverbs that wisdom comes from the mouth of God. If you lack wisdom, seek God in prayer and in the truth that He has revealed for you.

A wise person also recognizes that he needs to be disciplined. We need people from whom we invite accountability. We ask for the input of other believers who can help us

see where we might be straying or pursuing things that may be unwise for us. A wise person acknowledges that she needs others who know her and have the permission to give correction and feedback on her choices.

The book of Proverbs will have a lot to say about choosing friends and how to pick a spouse and receiving counsel from others. A wise person will receive instruction and pursue godly counsel from others. Are you pursuing wise relationships?

Wisdom is insightful

Verse two also tells us that Solomon writes this book to help us understand words of insight. Insight has to do with sizing up a situation and knowing when to speak and what to say. This is related to the idea of discernment – being able to filter out what is right and wrong about what is being said or how to navigate difficult conversations to get to the truth.

Jesus was so insightful. He was able to hear what was really being said by those who opposed Him, and at times did not answer because He knew what was in their hearts. He was able to discern when to speak and when to keep quiet. He was insightful.

Proverbs teaches us to be insightful so that we cultivate instincts that are insightful – that we will recognize and respond in a way that matches whatever situation we're in.

Are you able growing in discernment? Do you have reflexes that can smell when something is contrary to God's Word or will lead you to foolishness?

Wisdom is ethical

Next look at verse 3...

Proverbs 1:3

to receive instruction in wise dealing,
in righteousness, justice, and equity;

Solomon goes on to give us some particular characteristics that he aims to instruct his readers about – righteousness, justice, and equity.

These are three words that describe God's character. Solomon intends to teach us through the book of Proverbs how to live with godliness so that our lives imitate the

character of God. Our actions should be characterized by these traits – righteousness (think ‘doing what’s right’), by justice (living in conformity with God’s law), and by equity (treating others with fairness and integrity).

In other words, there is an ethical dimension to wisdom that this book aims to help us with. We aren’t just to know what to do – we are to do it. We are to become increasingly people who live with righteousness, justice, and equity. Wise people take God’s Law and apply it to the entirety of their lives – in every area.

So wisdom is practical, relational, insightful, and also ethical.

So where do we get wisdom? Do you want to be wise? Here’s where to look:

- **The Scriptures** – so read and re-read your Bible
- **Prayer** – asking God for insight and discretion
- **Careful Observation** of the world – being curious and attentive to God’s design
- **Godly Counsel** – inviting feedback in humility from godly people

That’s where the Christian looks for wisdom. These are the places we go when seeking to make a wise decision. So let me ask you – where does the world look for wisdom? What does it offer as advice?

The world says, “Look to yourself! You just need to listen to your heart.”
Or you just need to listen to those who support and reinforce what you already believe.

So, for example, the world says, “If you want to be rich, be greedy and stingy. Don’t worry about others, you need to take care of yourself.

Proverbs 11:24

One gives freely, yet grows all the richer;
another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.

Worldly wisdom says money will make you happy so get as much as you can. But godly wisdom says, **Proverbs 11:28**

Whoever trusts in his riches will fall,
but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.

Worldly wisdom says, if you want to get ahead, you need to promote yourself. You need to make sure that everyone knows about all that you've done. But godly wisdom says,

Proverbs 27:2

Let another praise you, and not your own mouth;
a stranger, and not your own lips.

Worldly wisdom says, be buddies with your kids – don't correct them or discipline them. You don't want them to be mal-adjusted, do you? But God says,

Proverbs 13:24

Whoever spares the rod hates his son,
but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.

Worldly wisdom says – don't jeopardize friendships by having difficult or awkward conversations. It's not your business anyway! But again, God tells us...

Proverbs 27:5

Better is open rebuke than hidden love.

So there is this choice that Solomon sets before us – will we follow the path of wisdom? Or will we pursue the foolishness of the world around us?

Proverbs cuts against the grain of modern wisdom. It's practical, relational, insightful, and ethical. And it's for anyone who wants to learn from it. The book of Proverbs is God's wisdom for you. Secondly, the book of Proverbs is God's Wisdom to you.

God's Wisdom to you

In this book, Solomon presents the wisdom of God for us. But as we've hinted at already, this book also foreshadows the good news that wisdom comes to you as well. Look at verse 7 of chapter 1.

Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

If you are to have the knowledge and wisdom that this book offers, you must begin by fearing the Lord. You must not be like the fool who despises wisdom and instruction.

God desires that you would know wisdom and insight and walk in the fear of the Lord. But we also know that all of us fail at this. We know that we fall short. We are so often like the fools in this book – the ignorant and stubborn and proud.

We are to fear the Lord, and to fear the Lord is to be rightly related to Him as our King and Deliverer, the one whom we obey and believe in. Then how do we do that? How can we find hope for our foolishness and sin?

Well, the book of Proverbs also has hope for us. There are several places we could go. Let me turn our attention to one of them.

Proverbs 28:13

Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper,
but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

Solomon teaches us here that when we seek to hide our sin, when we live like the fool who despises wisdom and instruction, then we will not prosper. This book makes it very clear that fools who try to conceal their transgressions are headed on the path toward death and the judgment of God. And apart from God's intervention, that's where we are all headed. The default mode of the human heart – of your heart – is to try to conceal your sin.

But if we confess our sin – if we agree with God that we have broken His good and righteous standard. And we forsake our sin – we turn away from it and walk in the opposite direction, then...we will obtain mercy. God will give mercy to those who recognize their sin, confess it, and forsake it.

This one verse doesn't contain the totality of the gospel message, but it does get to the heart of what happens when a person looks to God for mercy. This verse is a promise that mercy comes to those who call out to God in their time of need. This verse describes what happens when a person puts their faith in Jesus. This is the good news or the gospel to you through the book of Proverbs.

Listen to what the apostle Paul says in **1 Corinthians 1:30**

And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption

Jesus Christ, became to us the wisdom of God. Jesus has come to you so that you would obtain mercy when you confess and forsake your sins before God. The gospel is the good news that Jesus pays the penalty for our sins and that He gives us His righteousness and wisdom.

And this good news is available to all who would confess their sins and turn to God in faith. But like wisdom, it is not for those who don't think they need it. For those who would rather conceal their sin, either by just denying that they have done wrong or by seeking to justify themselves by blaming others or the circumstances around them – for those who would conceal their sin, they will not prosper. They will find themselves on the path toward death and judgment.

But if you confess your sins and forsake them, looking to Jesus as the only way you can be forgiven, then you will find mercy. You will find Jesus to be the Savior and King that your heart desperately needs.

So if you find yourself in that situation this morning, you can pray – even right now in your chair – acknowledging your sin before God and committing to turn away from it. And you can ask God for forgiveness for your sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus on your behalf.

I'm going to pray here in just a moment, and I'll leave some space for each of us to simply talk to God this morning. And if you need to get right with God, then I invite you to do that. If you have questions, and you want to talk to someone about them, we'd love to do that. You can find me or one of the Christians around you, and we'd love to try to help in whatever way we can.

For the Christians in the room this morning, I'm going to ask you to pray as well – check in with God. Have you concealed sin in your heart? Confess it and forsake it and you will find mercy.

And let's ask God for wisdom as we study Proverbs this summer. Maybe you can commit to read through this book this summer. So let's ask God to teach us and instruct us and help us to be doers of His Word in the coming days.
Let's pray...