



## **Proverbs 1:1-9**

### **The Beginning of Wisdom**

**6/18/2023**

Today we are starting our summer in the book of Proverbs. We'll introduce it by reading today's text:

## **Proverbs 1:1-9**

[1] The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:

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

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

[4] to give prudence to the simple,  
knowledge and discretion to the youth—

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

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

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

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

[9] for they are a graceful garland for your head  
and pendants for your neck.

—

**Proverbs 1:1 [1] The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:**

### **Authors:**

The Proverbs were written by a number of authors, probably at least five different people. (You'll see some attributed to Agur and Lemuel and there are some unknown authors.) This book actually has 7 major collections of proverbs in it, it wouldn't be crazy if it had been called the "books of Proverbs."

But this first book starts by announcing that these are Proverbs of Solomon, and he wrote the vast majority of all of the Proverbs. Solomon was the great and wise and wealthy king of Israel, the king that God told he could have anything he wanted and he asked for wisdom, so God gave it to him (and everything else, too.) And these wise sayings were compiled mainly by him, so we get from him the wisdom God gave him.

### **Originality:**

And scholars essentially agree that the Proverbs aren't all original to the Bible. Most are, but there were some similar proverbs spoken and written outside of Israel, in Egypt and Mesopotamia,<sup>1</sup> and some of them may very well have been there before they were in the Bible.

So that might be a little alarming to hear, and it might bring up some questions about what the Bible even is - is it reliable, is it God's word? If some small parts of it were written in Mesopotamia first by non-Jewish authors, then what is the Bible? Is it just the latest compilation of sayings from the ancient near east, or is it more?

### **Inspiration:**

The key is to always go to Jesus - He rose from the dead, so what He has to say about the Bible (or anything else) is definitive and true.

**Matthew 5:17-18** “**17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”**

Every little stroke of the pen (a tiny dot and iota - parts of a letter) was all put there by God and all of it matters. That's according to Jesus.

The apostle Paul said the same:

**2 Timothy 3:16** “**16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”**

---

<sup>1</sup> Bruce Waltke, Proverbs 1-15, part of the New International Commentary on the Old Testament published by Eerdmans. Page 32.

So every proverb, even the ones that were first spoken in Egypt, were inspired by God. The Proverbs are God's word - they don't just contain the word of God, but they are the very words of God.

But God used people and processes to inspire the Bible. He didn't inspire the bible by emailing us a pdf from heaven, He used people:

**2 Peter 1:21 “but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”**

So the end product is a book that is 100% God's word, but also 100% human authored. (We'll often hear, if we quote the bible, “The bible was written by people.” Christians don't deny that it was written by people, but because we believe they were carried along by God as they wrote it, we believe it is 100% the word of God and without error. No serious Christian denies the human authorship of the Bible, we just affirm that it was a God-driven process and every word in the original manuscripts is God's word and true.

There are no errors or lies or omissions or anything that God doesn't want in there, but there are also human personalities and figures of speech and cultural artifacts that all contribute to make this also a very human (though infallible) book.

And the fact that there were human authors doesn't make it less valid - it just shows how gracious God is. He came down to our level, he spoke to humans as we need to be spoken to, in human ways. He's high above us, but condescended, and spoke through human authors.

And those human authors wrote the Bible in the normal ways we write things. They didn't just go into a trance and write. Sometimes the human authors interviewed people (like Luke did for his gospel,) they sometimes recorded things that had been passed down verbally for years first, and in the case of the Proverbs, they wrote down wisdom - some of which they learned from other writings, like in Egypt, and much of which they learned just by observing the world.

So God uses all of those means in the process of inspiration.

### **Observing the World:**

You'll see as we go through a lot of Proverbs this summer that the wisdom in them often came from Solomon observing the world:

### **Proverbs 24:30–34**

[30] I passed by the field of a sluggard,  
by the vineyard of a man lacking sense,  
[31] and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns;  
the ground was covered with nettles,  
and its stone wall was broken down.  
[32] Then I saw and considered it;  
I looked and received instruction.  
[33] A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest,  
[34] and poverty will come upon you like a robber,  
and want like an armed man. (ESV)

So he observes the lazy man's field, and takes from that observation some truths about life.

### **Proverbs 7:6–9**

[6] For at the window of my house  
I have looked out through my lattice,  
[7] and I have seen among the simple,  
I have perceived among the youths,  
a young man lacking sense,  
[8] passing along the street near her corner,  
taking the road to her house  
[9] in the twilight, in the evening,  
at the time of night and darkness.

So he looks out his window and observes - notice all the language of observation "I have looked," "I have see," "I have perceived" - he observed the world and saw how things go. And by noticing, by paying attention, he derived important wisdom.

There's a lot of wisdom to be gained in observing people and things.

So if you take:

**Proverbs 16:18 "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."**

That's a proverb whose wisdom you could learn just by observing the world. Proud people who think they are unstoppable nearly always fall. Proud ships that are said to be unsinkable hit icebergs. And you wouldn't necessarily need to know any bible at all to observe that pattern and write it down.

All truth is God's truth, and it's consistent with what the Bible teaches that we can learn a lot of truth just by observing the world, no matter what our background is.

### **Secular Learning:**

And the fact that God saw fit to include some of what we might call secular knowledge in the Bible actually tells us that God is in favor of all kinds of study and learning, particularly the study of the world that He made.

We can learn from knowledge and wisdom that isn't in the Bible. We didn't learn our alphabets from the Bible, the Bible didn't teach people how to make cell phones, the bible doesn't give us a diet plan (though some people have tried to force one out of it,) the bible doesn't give us direct commands about medicines and vaccines (there are principles to derive for sure.) But God has given us a whole world to learn from and study and derive truth from. And God baptizes the practice of learning from the world around us by putting some of those truths in scripture.

God has made a great big world with all kinds of treasures of knowledge hidden in it, and it's good for God's people to use the eyes and ears and brains He has given us to learn things everywhere we can.

Now the canon is closed, there is no more Bible to be written (Rev. 22:18). So we aren't learning things that will go into the next testament of the Bible or anything, but we are called to learn from the world around us.

And the fact that these are called proverbs in verse 1 means that the reader knows what a proverb is. And the form of our writing matters - When you say something differently, you say something different. So how you say things affects what you're saying, and the truths here are spoken in Proverbs.

### **The Form - Proverbs**

Proverbs are a type of poetry that describe in short and punchy ways how the world works, and how God works in it.

They are short statements of truth about the world that help us navigate through it.

But because the form of Proverbs is short, they don't say everything there is to be said about that topic, and they need to be interpreted in light of all of the rest of the truth about it.

In Proverbs, we learn truths about how the world usually works, but we need the rest of the wisdom literature, books like Job and Ecclesiastes, and even other Proverbs, to see the exceptions and the variety of ways things could go.

Proverbs are truisms that tell us how the world usually works, but the usually\* is important.

*"The real trouble with this world of ours is not that it is an unreasonable world, nor even that it is a reasonable one. The commonest kind of trouble is that it is nearly reasonable, but not quite."* – G.K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy

So these Proverbs teach us how the world works usually, but not quite always.

Now God always keeps his promises - so if God says He will do something, He does it. But it isn't always how we want, it isn't always in this life. And so Proverbs acknowledges that at times, even when we live according to the wisdom in these proverbs, things don't go how we expect and we need to trust God to be working things out:

**Proverbs 3:5-6 "[5] Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. [6] In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.**

So the Proverbs tell us how the world works usually, and tell us that one of the ways the world works is that we have to trust God when the world isn't working right.

So read the proverbs understanding their form.

Read them with all of their "counter-proverbs:"<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 108

**Proverbs 26:4–5 [4] Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. [5] Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.**

Notice how one Proverb says don't answer a fool according to his folly, and the next says "answer a fool according to his folly." So obviously there is a time to answer a fool and a time not to, and it takes wisdom to discern what to do. But either of these Proverbs taken by itself doesn't tell the whole story.

Read them in light of the fact that there are setbacks in the way things should go, but setbacks are not permanent for the righteous.<sup>3</sup>

**Proverbs 24:16 "For the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity."**

So the righteous can fall. Things can go badly for them. But those are setbacks for the righteous, they get up again.

Read them based on the fact that they we have a future that outlasts death,<sup>4</sup> so while we may not see things go how they are supposed to in this world, in the end, God will tie up all loose ends and make everything work exactly as it is supposed to.

Chapter 1 goes on to describe the purpose of Proverbs.

### **The Purpose of Proverbs:**

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

So Proverbs are here to teach us to know wisdom.

And wisdom is the application of knowledge. It's understanding how the world works, how people work, and applying that understanding to real life.

Wisdom knows that God made the world, and he made it to work a certain way. Which means there is a way things work that we can figure out and conform ourselves to so our

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

lives work better. Wisdom is when we learn the way things work, and change ourselves to fit it.

**This is as opposed to magic which says I'm going to change my reality to fit me.**

This is how Proverbs are different than self-help mantras and daily affirmations.

The self-help world is full of mantra-speaking and affirmation speaking that is often aimed at changing reality with words. But that's not wisdom, those are spells. We don't speak things into existence, that's witch-craft. We learn about God and his world and live according to reality.

Now we pray, and often as we do God does change reality. But that isn't me changing it with my words, that is God being gracious when we pray.

Wise thinking seeks to understand God and the world and people and live according to that reality. Magical thinking denies reality or tries to change reality to fit it to me.

So the Proverbs exist to teach us to know wisdom.

And because that wisdom is enduring for today, not just for Old Testament times, in about 60 places, the apostles use the proverbs to teach the New Testament Church church how to live godly lives.<sup>5</sup>

**[3] to receive instruction in wise dealing,  
in righteousness, justice, and equity;**

One of the purposes of wisdom is to know how to deal wisely, and act with justice and equity. Justice is public righteousness - doing what is right in society, and equity is fairness. We will talk more about those concepts this summer, but for now, this shows us that one of the reasons for writing Proverbs was to instruct someone who could have influence on society, it was for the community, not just for their own living.

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 126.



Proverbs in other nations would be written to one son of a king - they would name the one recipient. (Proverbs of Summerian kings, for example, were written to teach one son how to rule the nation.)<sup>6</sup>

In Proverbs in the Bible, the recipient is not named, so this is not just to Solomon's son, but to the nation as a whole.<sup>7</sup> A people who believe and put into practice the proverbs make for a more just society.

**[4] to give prudence to the simple,  
knowledge and discretion to the youth—**

So these proverbs make simple people prudent.

And a simple person in Proverbs is not mentally unable to learn things, but just hasn't learned them yet. He or she hasn't rejected wisdom, but just hasn't been informed yet. And that person could go either way, because both wisdom and folly are calling out to him (Proverbs 9:4-16).

And these proverbs are some of the wisdom that is crying out.

So the Proverbs were often used in Jewish synagogue schools later on to teach youth how the world works. Which means if you are here and you are young and want to grow in wisdom, the proverbs were written for you.

And they were also used by parents to instruct their children.

**[8] Hear, my son, your father's instruction,  
and forsake not your mother's teaching,  
[9] for they are a graceful garland for your head  
and pendants for your neck.**

On father's day, we don't want to neglect this observation in proverbs that fathers and mothers instruct their children in the wisdom of God.

---

<sup>6</sup><https://www.ancient-origins.net/artifacts-ancient-writings/instructions-shuruppak-4600-years-ago-sumerian-king-instructed-his-son-021155>

<sup>7</sup> Bruce Waltke, Proverbs 1-15, part of the New International Commentary on the Old Testament published by Eerdmans. Page 32.

Now sometimes we hear that and think, “That means we need a white board and some curriculum.” And you can use those things. But most of the instruction from parents to children comes from knowing and applying wisdom ourselves and then passing it to our kids by example and in conversations as we go.

Deuteronomy 6 talks about instructing as we walk along the road, which means we need to absorb enough wisdom to be able to pass it on to our kids as we go.

There is a high calling on parents to pass the faith on to our kids. Now, not all of them take it and run with it, and that isn’t always our fault. But it is our responsibility - more than the Sunday school teachers or youth group leaders or teachers or pastors. Those others all have an important role to play, but moms and dads have this calling to teach our kids wisdom, which finds its ultimate expression in Jesus.

And because wisdom is applied knowledge, a big part of how we teach it is by demonstrating it.

If I teach my kids about marriage but I’m not kind to their mom, I haven’t passed on wisdom.

I can teach my son that he will lead his home one day, but he will see how that gets lived out in me and he will observe and watch. And if that gets applied by my lovingly laying down my life for his mom and for the kids, he’ll learn from that. If that gets applied by my being a domineering jerk who doesn’t listen to her, who is overbearing, who is rude, who is unkind, he’ll learn that too.

If my daughters see us wanting to do what’s right because of what scriptures say, they will learn wisdom. But if they see us live selfishly, they’ll learn from that. They’ll learn to look for loopholes in wisdom, not to embrace it as the good that it is.

So the proverbs are for the young and the unformed, the simple.

But these Proverbs aren’t just for the young and unformed, they are also for the already wise:

**[5] Let the wise hear and increase in learning,  
and the one who understands obtain guidance,  
[6] to understand a proverb and a saying,**

## **the words of the wise and their riddles.**

We go to the proverbs to learn more and get guidance and increase our understanding. And you'll find if you regularly read the Proverbs that there is always more wisdom to gain here.

A couple of weeks ago, I read:

**Proverbs 30:28 “the lizard you can take in your hands, yet it is in kings’ palaces.”**

And I swear I'd never seen that proverb before. But what a great proverb! It says if you are wise, though you are small in power, you could go to big places. It says to be wise so you're like a lizard, that can go anywhere. It can be chased down every sidewalk in Florida by children, and it makes its way into the finest palaces. Wisdom makes you versatile and valuable, usually. I never saw that before! There's still a lot to learn and observe, and I might still be simple, but I'm not a youth - it's for all of us.

**But the key to this whole passage and to all of the book of Proverbs and all of the wisdom literature is verse 7.**

**Proverbs 1:7 “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”**

We'll look more at the fool in future weeks: the kind of person who just can't hear any instruction, who won't listen to correction, who closes his mind to understanding, and who despises wisdom.

But today, this phrase, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,” is vital. This phrase is used all over scripture.

\*\*

A phrase like “fear of the Lord” is used about 15 times in Proverbs, and then the end of Proverbs personifies wisdom in this virtuous woman and it says

**Proverbs 31:30 “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.”**

So true wisdom fears the Lord. There is no true wisdom, no true understanding of how the world works without the fear of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord is all over the wisdom books - remember Job was described as one who “fears God” (1:8, 2:3,) Ecclesiastes ends by saying:

**Ecclesiastes 12:13 “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”**

So in all of those books it’s clear that the key to wisdom is not just observation of the world and learning facts, but a fear of the Lord.

That’s the cornerstone of all wisdom.

And living in the fear of the Lord is living with a sense of awe at the reality of how great and holy God is. If God is who He claims to be in His word, then He is everywhere present, perfectly holy, searching us, knowing us, watching us, giving us his grace and love - and living in the fear of the Lord is living like that is true everywhere we go.

And the wisdom literature in the Bible is clear that you can’t be truly wise without a fear of the world.

If God created the world, and God created us, then it is impossible to have a full understanding of what the world is for and what our place is in it without a fear, or high, trembling regard for the Creator.

You can certainly gain knowledge without knowing the Lord. You can certainly be brilliant without knowing the Lord. You can invent things and improve things.

But you will always lack a unifying principle - why does all of this stuff that you know about exist, what is it for, what unifies it all?

And what meaning should we take when we observe the physical world?

In Proverbs 6, Solomon observes an ant colony and takes from it some wisdom about hard work. But sometimes Queen Ants eat members of the ant colony to stay alive - so

you could take some wrong lessons from that. You need the fear of the Lord to set bounds on what messages we take from the natural world.

**And the fear of the Lord, having God up over it all, also can help you do good science.**

Sometimes we hear stories of people doing experiments, trying to create medicine, and they realize part way through the trials that the drugs aren't working. But their whole life was centered around that drug working. Their career depends on the success of this drug. This drug is ultimate. So they fudge the numbers, because this has to work - everything is at stake - their provision, their identity, their hopes and dreams.

But if there's a Lord over you you can say, "This is important, but not ultimate. I'll be devastated if my life work is for nothing, but it still won't define me." So you can learn far more truth because you have a God who is greater than anything else.

**Proverbs also speak a lot about relationships, and relationships can work far better if you have the Lord up over them.**

Maybe you've known people who don't navigate according to the truth, but who navigate life according to a series of loyalties. Which friends are loyal, and who are they loyal to? And then they conform their beliefs to the friends. They lie to their friends to paint themselves in the best light with each of them. They gossip to weaken loyalties to others. And eventually those webs of lies and pretending collapse.

But if the Lord cares about what you say, you speak truth, and you will certainly lose some friends because of it. But you're not pretending, you're honest, you refuse to pass on lies about people even if you don't like them, you don't gossip, you aren't getting your security from loyalties. Life is cleaner when there's the fear of the Lord as ultimate.

**And also, wisdom demands a fear of the Lord because everything in the universe is dependent upon God for its existence and sustenance.** So we shouldn't interpret anything independently of God, because nothing is independent of God.

So because everything is God's and for God, wisdom calls us to a life before God and a life where everything we do is a response to Him.

We live like God exists all the time. We live like God has authority over our lives in every moment and in every sphere of life.

He knows and weighs our hearts. He knows our thoughts, our motives, our plans, our intentions, all even better than we do. He knows us better than we know ourselves, and nothing is hidden from Him.

And ultimately, that fear of the Lord should drive us to the Savior.

Sometimes we look at the ways we haven't been wise, and we read wisdom literature like Proverbs and think, "If I could just master some of these techniques I'd be OK."

But that isn't a wise response. Because the fear of the Lord says He sees everything, all the way to the bottom of us. He is perfectly holy and really knows us. And our short-comings are more than momentary lapses in wisdom, but sin against a holy God.

And if we are wise, we know that our sin stains and corrupts us so deeply that no amount of wise living from here on our can wash it away.

And the answer for that is not just to start doing the right thing. We need more than wisdom to rescue us from our lack of wisdom.

Jesus said this:

**Matthew 12:42** "The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here."

Speaking of Himself, Jesus said, "I am greater than Solomon." Solomon was wise, but Jesus is wisdom. Solomon observed the world and said wise things about it, but Jesus made it and knows all about it. Solomon can point us in the way of wisdom.

But only Jesus can rescue us from our sin. True wisdom makes us recognize we need a Savior.

**Colossians 2:1-3** "For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

God's wisdom is not wrapped up mainly in techniques or ultimately in observations of the world, but in Jesus. And in Jesus God showed Himself to be exceedingly wise by going to the cross to defeat sin and rising from the grave to defeat death.

And it's only by being in Him that we are wise, that we are forgiven, that we can live with a fear of the Lord but also with a sense of the love and acceptance from the Lord. So trust in Him.

Lord's supper: here we have a physical demonstration of the gospel.

Prayer of Confession:

Father we confess that often we have not lived in fear of the Lord. We have lived like we are independent, autonomous, away from your sight. We have compartmentalized our lives, thinking we can live for ourselves in some categories and for you in others and still be ok. It's foolish.

Jesus we thank you that you always lived Coram Deo, before the face of God. Thank you that, though you looked small and foolish, you embodied the treasures of the wisdom of God. And as you went to the cross, despised and mocked as a fool, you defeated death and showed your superior wisdom that put all of our earthly wisdom to shame. Thank you for your faithfulness to us.

Spirit, thank you for inspiring your word so we could have wisdom and be led to the wise one. Give us the fear of the Lord so we always live before your face.

Assurance:

**Psalm 32:5**

**[5] I acknowledged my sin to you,  
and I did not cover my iniquity;  
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"  
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah (ESV)**

### **Sermon Discussion Questions:**

- 1) What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge?
- 2) Discuss why there are Proverbs and “Counter-Proverbs” like Proverbs 24:4-5.
- 3) How do we interpret Proverbs differently knowing they are all essentially short poems?
- 4) How do our English proverbs differ in nature from biblical proverbs?
- 5) Why is the fear of the Lord so essential for true wisdom?