



## Proverbs Wisdom vs Foolishness

Summary: God wants to provide us with wisdom for life; the foolish reject it because they reject Him.

You need wisdom. Not just information, that's easy, anybody with an Internet connection can get information. No, you need wisdom. You need to know what to do with the information you have. You need to know how to apply the data, how to interpret the data. You need to know how to make good choices from all the possibilities in front of you, whether big or small, whether petty or profound. God knows that, and He wants to help, He wants to give you wisdom. You have problems. You have questions. He has answers. Are you in?

We're studying the book of Proverbs, a book full of practical guidance for daily life. The book of Psalms may guide us in prayer and worship; its poetry helps us find ways to say, sing, and pray the things we're feeling. But the book of Proverbs gives us guidelines for making decisions. It says things like – the wise man does this, but the fool does that. A righteous woman is like this, but other women are like that. It's all very short, punchy, and direct. As a result, we've been taking a look at the book thematically instead of verse by verse as we normally do.

We've seen what Proverbs has to say to men, and women, and then we saw what it has to say about marriage, and about the relationship between parents and children. Soon we will see what it says about work, the money we earn, and the friends we keep. But for now, we're going back to the beginning to look at where all of this advice and guidance came from, what it's good for, who can benefit from it, and how whether we accept it or reject it, will ultimately be decided by whether we accept or reject God as the Lord of our lives.

We start with the opening line where we discover the author, or compiler of the collection:

**Proverbs 1:1** [The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:](#)

Now in order to understand more about Solomon we need to take an immediate detour over to another passage of Scripture. We need to jump over to 1 Kings 3 because Kings is a history book describing the time Solomon became king and took over the empire his father had led.

When we jump in here in Chapter Three, he's still early in his reign. He hasn't built the famous Jewish Temple in Jerusalem yet, so he goes to worship God on a hilltop in a town called Gibeon. And here's what we find:

**1 Kings 3:5** [At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God](#)

said, “Ask! What shall I give you?”

Now, that’s an incredibly powerful offer isn’t it? We play little games like – what if you won the lottery what would you do with the money? Or, what would you do if you inherited \$1M dollars? Well, here God is asking Solomon – what do you want Me to do for you? There is so much potential here, so much opportunity. What would you do with it? Ask for more wishes right? Well, watch what Solomon asks for:

6 And Solomon said: “You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as *it is* this day. 7 Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I *am* a little child; I do not know *how* to go out or come in.

Solomon is not actually a child, he’s a grown man, but speaking with humility here.

8 And Your servant *is* in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. 9 Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?”

In other words, God, You have given me tremendous responsibility. Make me sufficient for this task, give me the wisdom that I’m going to need to make the right choices so that these people benefit instead of suffer under my leadership. He could have asked for anything, and he asks for something that will help him help others.

10 The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. 11 Then God said to him: “Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, 12 behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. 13 And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days. 14 So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.”

15 Then Solomon awoke; and indeed it had been a dream. And he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, offered up burnt offerings, offered peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants.

And then, the chapter goes on to tell the famous story of how two women came to him claiming both to be the mother of a child and asking him to determine whose it’s was. Since they both insisted on having the child, He said he would tell his soldiers to take a sword, cut the child in half and give a half to each woman. One woman said fine, and the other said no,

don't hurt the child, and Solomon knew – that was the real mother, the one who would rather let the child go than see it harmed.

Over time, Solomon developed a reputation for wisdom that drew visitors from surrounding empires. The Bible, and the Koran, tell of the Queen of Ethiopia and others coming up to meet him and hear him speak because God gave him wisdom – the ability to choose between competing options, the ability to make good decisions, the ability to discover and display justice and equity.

Isn't that what you want in a leader? The ability to make good decisions. A knack for knowing the right thing to do, and the courage and character to actually do it, or to say what needs to be said. And isn't that what you want to be? Don't you want to be seen as wise? Don't you want to have the answer, to know what needs to be done? Don't you want to be a good leader in your life, your home, on your team?

Well, that's why you have Proverbs – to help you become that man or woman who leads a disciplined life that is glorifying to God and beneficial to others. King Solomon received wisdom from God and then collected that wisdom and wrote it down. So that, according to his introduction in Proverbs 1, we might

**Proverbs 1:2** To know wisdom and instruction,  
To perceive the words of understanding,  
3 To receive the instruction of wisdom,  
Justice, judgment (righteousness), and equity;

God is trying to give you wisdom, instruction, and understanding for life just as He gave Solomon. He's trying to help you develop the skill of perceiving what is good and right, and sensitizing you to recognize justice, righteousness, and equity.

That all sounds really good. Doesn't it? That sounds like the kind of thing we could use more of personally, and as a nation. And here God is trying to give it to you.

And by you, I mean you, and me, all of us. Look at:

**Proverbs 1:4** To give prudence to the simple,  
To the young man knowledge and discretion—  
5 A wise *man* will hear and increase learning,  
And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel,  
6 To understand a proverb and an enigma,  
The words of the wise and their riddles.

Right here in Proverbs, God is giving away a free education for the simple, the man or woman who might be described as inexperienced, naïve, or gullible. It doesn't matter why they're that way, here is a chance for them to receive wisdom if they will listen to God and follow His paths.

God has a history of using people from simple backgrounds to do great things. Think of prophets like Amos and kings like David who started life as shepherds – they didn't attend fancy schools, didn't have a lot of opportunities or connections, but God called them and used them and they learned a lot in the process. Or think of all the fishermen He used in Jesus' day.

I have always loved this line from the book of Acts describing how shocked the ruling elite who lived in the bustling capital city were when they interacted with the disciples Jesus had recruited from the rural areas in the north.

**Acts 4:13** Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.

These guys of rank, and reputation, and petition couldn't believe what God was doing with simple fishermen. But it turns out, spending time with God in prayer and in His Word will give you guidance, direction, conviction, clarity and wisdom that cannot be found anywhere else.

The Psalmist says it beautifully in

**Ps 119:97** Oh, how I love Your law!  
It is my meditation all the day.  
98 You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies;  
For they *are* ever with me.  
99 I have more understanding than all my teachers,  
For Your testimonies *are* my meditation.  
100 I understand more than the ancients,  
Because I keep Your precepts.

You don't have to go to an Ivy League school to have wisdom, knowledge, and understanding for life. God will teach you the core concepts of righteousness, justice, and equity. He will show you things that are more important than degrees and titles, the things that degrees and titles need to be built on if they're going to have ultimate value. God can make even the simple wise.

And, teens, He wants to do it for you too. Notice **Proverbs 1:4** says this wisdom is also for giving **To the young man knowledge and discretion.**

God sees, knows, and cares about the youth. He wants to invest into you because He knows what you've got coming up, what you're already capable of, and what you're facing right now. God has plans for you and they're already beginning to unfold.

You don't have to hang around a Christian youth group very long before someone reminds

you of Paul's admonition to Timothy:

**1 Timothy 4:12** Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

Now, Timothy was more than a teenager when these words were addressed to Him, but the point is still relevant: God wants to train you young men and women and use you as an example to others. You are the next generation of leaders in the world. You may bump heads with your parents and teachers on occasion, and you might still have a hard time getting up in the morning or remembering where you left the shoes you need to wear right now, but it's inevitable – you *are* growing up, you *are* maturing, and some of you are starting to discover the ideas and convictions that are going to guide you through life. You're learning who you are.

But do you have wisdom?

You have your own ideas, your own opinions, your own preferences, but do you have wisdom? Do you make good choices? Hard choices? Are you worth following? You can be! Don't let anyone despise you just because you're "too young." Be an example, be a role model, be inspiring even to the adults around you.

Now, in order to do that, you're going to need to receive **knowledge and discretion** from the Lord according to **Proverbs 1:4** and you'll find them in His Word, in prayer, and by receiving the instruction, guidance, and counsel of mature Christians.

Fortunately, there is no shortage of any of those things. But if you're having a hard time finding what you need, ask Pastor Stephen or one of the youth leaders, or come see me directly. But know this: you are on God's agenda, and the rest of us are going to be amazed at what He does through you.

So what about the rest of us? What about those who wouldn't identify as the simple or as the young? Well, notice:

**Proverbs 1:5** A wise *man* will hear and increase learning,  
And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel,  
6 To understand a proverb and an enigma,  
The words of the wise and their riddles.

We have a tremendously educated population here in Northern Virginia. According to the census bureau, 60% of those over the age of 25 living in Fairfax County have a bachelor's degree, and half of them have a graduate or professional degree – a Masters or Doctorate. That's more than twice the national average for advanced degrees: it's 30% of adults in

Fairfax County vs 12% nationally.<sup>1</sup> Take a look at Arlington County and you find that 82% of people between the age of 25 and 34 have a bachelor's degree or higher. This is why Amazon is coming; they want access to an educated workforce.

So, if you are in this room, chances are, you have letters or titles before or after your name. Or, you're working toward putting them there. And because of that, you may be tempted to think you've got some things figured out. You know, you understand, you've learned, you're educated.

Of course, you don't need titles and letters to feel that way. There are plenty of men and women who never took a single college course who have still done quite well for themselves. They've figured things out on their own, worked hard, and they're proud of it.

Regardless of which category you fit in – we all face a similar temptation and that is, to be self-sufficient. To think we have life figured out, or we know how to handle ourselves. And if we're not careful, we can fall into a rut because we stop learning. In fact, some professions and certifications require you to take Continuing Education Units, or CEUs to stay fresh in your field so that you don't stop learning.

Well, Solomon says Proverbs offers CEUs for those who are already wise – this isn't just for the simple or the young, it's for anyone who is willing to learn, and for everyone who wants to stay sharp. For anyone who is humble enough to still receive instruction.

In fact, humility is essential to education. You cannot learn what you think you already know. As Proverbs 11:2 puts it:

**Pro 11:2** When pride comes, then comes shame;  
But with the humble is wisdom.

When you think you know it all, you can't go any farther up; the only way is down. But for those who will humble themselves, no matter how much education or experience they have, no matter how much they think they have figure things out – you can grow and continue to increase in wisdom.

And of course, the most important humility you can have is to recognize and acknowledge your status relative to God. Look at what Solomon says next:

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<sup>1</sup> Fairfax County data:

<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>

Nation wide data:

<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/p20-578.pdf>

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**Proverbs 1:7** The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,  
*But fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

Now, the word here for fear has a wide semantic range, or a wide range of meaning – it's everything from respect and awe to dread and utter terror. It's reverential submission that says there are things about life that I don't fully understand, things I can't figure out, and decisions I'm not sure about. It's a confession that God is God and I am not.

Contrast that with the fool who **despise[s] wisdom and instruction**. They have their own ideas. They have their own way of doing things.

We've seen this verse several times already in our previous studies, because it's something of a motto for the whole book showing us there are two ways to live – aware of and connected to God or self-absorbed and isolated from Him.

Everything in Proverbs depends on a theocentric universe. The advice, the counsel, the wisdom offered here, only works if there is a personal, creator God in Heaven that will hold us accountable or reward us for the decisions we make and whether or not we fear Him.

And Proverbs helps us to see that wisdom is relational, not mechanical. Solomon received wisdom from God and then taught his son and later compiled this wisdom for the simple, the young and the wise. So too, and I need other godly men and women in my life to teach me, help me, counsel and guide me through life.

But most of all, I need the God who led Solomon to tell me how to live in this world He's made and how to survive the mess we have made of it. I find all of that in His Word, through the writings of Solomon and others. You see, you need to know that Proverbs, and the rest of the Bible, was written to give you wisdom for life. It is a gift to you, from God who has made His gift even more apparent and accessible through Jesus. We are told in

**Col 2:3** in [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

If you have deep philosophical questions about the meaning of life and the universe and your place in it, all the answers trace back to Jesus. To know Him, to love Him, to fear Him is the beginning of knowledge. The Bible also talks about Christ as the foundation of our lives, that which everything else is built on. If you get this wrong, everything else is going to be wobbly, cracked, or leaning.

There is a tremendous difference between the life that begins with God and the life that begins with self. These two options have different goals, different agendas, and ultimately different endings. One hears instruction from God and rejoices; the other hears the same words and scoffs.

And so the pastor and apostle Paul told the Christians living in Colossae, that part of the way he cared for them was by praying that they would know and apply the things God

wanted them to know and apply. He wrote:

**Col 1:9** For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding

Christian, are you being – present tense, right now, not just at some point in the past, but right now – are you being filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding? Have you taken your needs, your decisions, your questions, to God? Do you want to know His will? Have you asked Him to make it plain?

My friends, we forget how much God wants to give us, we forget at times how good He is, how generous. We forget how much He offers to us, free for the taking, and how much He patiently works to encourage us to receive things that will do us good. Last week we saw the call in

**Proverbs 3:5** Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
And lean not on your own understanding;  
6 In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
And He shall direct your paths.

In other words, bring Him your questions, seek His guidance and counsel, ask Him for wisdom and knowledge and understanding, **and He shall direct your paths.**

We live in confusing and confounding times, but the message of the Bible is clear from Proverbs to Colossians, and everywhere in between: God wants to give us wisdom and understanding. He does not want us wallowing in ignorance or foolishness.

You could have been born at any other time in human history. You could live any other place in the world. But God has put you here and now. These are the problems *you* face. These are the relationships *you* have. This is the life *you’ve* been given. What are you supposed to do? Turn to God, tell Him how much you need Him to guide you and help you.

Listen to James, the brother of Jesus who said:

**James 1:5** If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

Now, here is what I love of this – it says God gives liberally. He’s not stingy. And He gives without reproach, now that’s an English word that we don’t use very much any more, but it means He won’t reprimand you for asking, He won’t rebuke you or begrudge you. He knows you need it.

Have you ever run in an organized race? It could be a 5k or 10k, maybe a Ten Miler or even a marathon?



Along the way they have refreshment stations – people passing out water or Gatorade or bananas to the runners. Those people are volunteers. They volunteer to fill the cups and hand them out as people go by.



Now let me ask you – do you think they give that water out grudgingly? Do you think they reprimand the runners for not being properly hydrated? Of course not. They know, if you're running this race, you need help to stay hydrated, and they volunteer their time to do it. Friends, that's a picture of God's offer of wisdom to you – you're running the race of life – you need wisdom, God is volunteering to give it to you, but you have to put your hand out and receive it. There's only so far you can make it on your own.

So here's my encouragement to you this morning: like Solomon, seek wisdom from God for yourself and for the sake of others – for the sake of the decisions you will make and the affects they will have. Be a source of blessing to the people around you. We started off by reading as Solomon told God – You've given me too much to handle on my own, make me wise, help me make good choices. Is that a prayer you can pray? Of course it is. We all need God's guidance, direction, His counsel and encouragement, and correction. And we find it is given to us freely, if we simply humble ourselves and receive.

Let's pray.