

## Understanding Wisdom

Proverbs 1:1-7

Hopefully all of the children in our service this morning grabbed a clipboard on their way in.

If you didn't feel free to come up to the front by the door over here and get one.

If you have one you should see a sheet with the word 'Proverbs' at the top.

We want to encourage you to fill it out so that you will get a picture in your minds of what Proverbs is all about.

The first question we want to answer this morning is, 'What is a proverb?'

If you like you could jot this down under *Fun Fact #1*.

*A proverb is a short saying that points us in the right direction.*

The second question that we want to answer is, "Who wrote the book of proverbs?"

Chapter one verse one gives us the answer.

What this verse means is that Solomon either wrote or approved of what is written in this book.

That brings us to another really important question, "Why should we listen to Solomon? Why should we think that these short sayings of his are going to point us in the right direction?"

We find the answer to that question when Solomon first became king of Israel.

When he was very new to the throne he made a very big offering to God and the bible says in 1Kings 3:5 that "*The LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream...and said, 'Ask what I shall give you.'*"

Can you imagine that? The all-powerful creator of everything says, "Ask me for anything you want."

What would you ask for? Do you know what Solomon asked for? He asked for, "...an understanding mind [to] discern between good and evil."

The bible says that God was pleased with his request and granted it and gave Solomon a mind to know what is right beyond any other human being who has ever lived, except Jesus.

So when we are reading these proverbs, these short sayings that point us in the right direction, we can be sure that they are pointing us in the right direction because these sayings are coming from God through Solomon to us.

[The purpose of this book is to call the people of God to wisdom. Over the course of the next few weeks we are going to look at few passages from this amazing book and my prayer is that we will learn what true wisdom is and that we will desire it for our lives. This morning we are

beginning in **chapter one and we are looking at the first seven verses.** In these verses Solomon tells us what true wisdom is, who wisdom is for, and where wisdom begins. What is set before us in these verses is absolutely critical to the Christian life. If there is any desire in our hearts to live a Godly life for the glory of Jesus then we need to pay attention. Let's first answer the question of what wisdom is? What Solomon shows us here is that...]

**Point #1 – Wisdom is the proper application of truth. (Verses 1-3)**

When people order their lives according to what God commands they both display and benefit from that good judgement.

With verse one having told us that Solomon, the king of Israel, is the one God primarily used to give us the book of Proverbs, **verse two** tells why he wrote them.

The word 'know' here conveys something more than information contained in our brains.

This is something more than the ability to retain facts and figures in our heads.

This word has the sense of closeness, connection, and experience.

[It is like me asking you, "Do you know what spaghetti is?" versus asking you, "Do you know what spaghetti tastes like?"]

Those are two different kinds of knowledge.

God's purpose in giving us these proverbs through Solomon is for us to actually experience the goodness of them in our lives.

This kind of experiential knowledge depends to a degree on our ability to have information in our heads and make proper sense of it.

That is why he adds the word 'understanding' to the word 'know' in verse 2.

That goal helps us to see why proverbs is written the way it is.

These short sayings are written to be understood and to be remembered.

Using plain language to communicate profound truth is what proverbs and I believe the Bible generally speaking is all about.

The LORD wants us to have truth in our minds and more than that He wants us to have a right understanding of it.

One of the traps people can fall into these days is equating wisdom with sounding smart.

I have listened to many people over the years who use fine sounding words to say something that is almost completely without meaning.

I like to call it word salad.

It is, I believe, and increasing problem in the Church.

We need to see that bringing confusion rather than clarity is the opposite of wisdom and the LORD wants us to avoid that trap.

He wants us to understand so that we will be able to do what **verse 3** says.

The desire for us to understand is all about taking the instructions the LORD gives and applying it to our day to day lives.

Commentator Allen Ross points out that the word “righteousness” here means ‘conformity to a standard’.

The word itself is relates to weights and measures.

Some people in the ancient world would try and cheat by saying things weighed a certain amount when they actually weighed more or less than they were supposed to.

The lie, however, can be found out when a weight is compared to a standard weight.

[I can get my bathroom scale to say whatever I want but when I go to the doctor the truth is revealed.]

Wisdom deals in righteousness.

It operates according to God’s standard.

Justice means that the standard is applied in a fitting and proper way.

Wisdom means seeking to apply God’s word the way He intends it to be applied rather than whatever I think.

When we come to the bible we must come as listeners rather than editors.

We must come asking what did the author intend and be faithful to that.

Equity means that the same set of circumstances produces the same result regardless of who a person is.

The clarity of the Word of God remains the same whether we are applying it to our children or to a stranger, whether a rich man, or a poor widow, whether you are red, yellow, black, brown, or white.

Simply put, to “know wisdom” is to apply the truth of God’s Word to our lives and circumstances correctly regardless of audience or consequence.

[Having the information of God’s word in our heads is important, but if that is all we have we are no different than Satan himself. In fact, I imagine the Devil has more bible facts in his head than most of us. He has the information, but has no interest in doing what it says. Wisdom is more than information it is the proper application of truth. That brings us to the question of, “Who is wisdom for?” The answer is...]

## **Point #2 – Wisdom is for everyone. (Verses 4-6)**

Whether you have been applying the bible to your life for many years or you have yet to start doing so, the call to grow in doing what is right is for you and it is for your good.

Verse 4 gives us another reason why 'the proverbs of Solomon' have been collected in this book for God's people.

To have prudence is to have to ability/discipline to make good decisions for your life.

The application of these proverbs is intended to give that ability to the simple.

When we hear the word 'simple' we may think about someone's intellectual capacity or their ability to learn.

While that may be a factor in being simple, something else is intended here.

The simple person here is someone who is easily persuaded, someone who moves easily from one way of thinking to another.

Franz Delitzsch describes the simple as "*those whose hearts stand open to every influence.*"

John MacArthur says they are "An open door, they don't know what to keep in or out of their mind."

The wisdom of proverbs has been written for such people so that they might develop the ability to think critically and make well thought out decisions rather than simply accepting whatever is said to them.

Besides the simple, the proverbs are written to give 'knowledge and discretion to the youth.'

Most children by their nature are impressionable. Every child needs to be taught and the things that they are taught when they are young impact them significantly throughout their lives.

Listen brothers and sisters, our children desperately need the wisdom of the Word of God in their lives.

They need to see the goodness of the Scriptures being lived out by their parents.

If you are making the Christian faith look like a nightmare in your home not only are you a fool, but you are encouraging your children towards a foolish life as well.

Children need to be taught how to think and act from a Christian Worldview.

The world is very much interested in teaching them what to think and if they never learn how to think they will be easily lead down the path of destruction.

Wisdom is for the simple and the young and it is also for those mentioned in verse 5-6.

If you are already wise, that is you are applying truth properly to your life, you can still grow in wisdom.

In fact, it seems to me that one of the marks of a truly wise person is that he/she understands their continued need to grow in the application of God's word.

A good deal of life is pretty straightforward, but there are also a number of circumstances that arise where answers seem unclear.

Growing in wisdom means increasing in our ability to navigate through difficult choices that need to be made.

I particularly like the word 'guidance' at the end of verse 5.

Allen Ross points out that the word most literally means the skill to steer a ship.

When you are out in calm open water it's pretty easy, but when you have to navigate in rough seas, narrow paths, or around treacherous rocks you really need to know what you are doing.

The fact is no matter how skillful we may become we can always improve.

[Has anyone here this morning taken first aid training? I'm grateful for that. Now let's imagine for a moment that one person took first aid one time twenty years ago and another person keeps up their certification every year. Who is more likely to do the most good in an emergency situation? Of course the person who keeps up their training. You know first aid training is good for someone who has never taken it and it is good for doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals.]

The same thing is true with the wisdom of God's word.

If you have never learned or applied the bible to your life, you can start today and it will be good for you and those around you.

If you are reading God's word every day and praying for the Holy Spirit to direct your words, thoughts, your feelings and your actions according to what the LORD says, it will be good for you and those around you.

[Wisdom, the ability to apply truth to our lives is good for everyone. At the end of the day there are really only two kinds of people in the world, those growing in wisdom and those growing in foolishness. If you are living like a fool today there is good news for you in this passage, the good news is you can make another choice, you can start pursuing wisdom. You may ask, "Where do I start?" That is the question verse seven answers for us and the answer is...]

### **Point #3 – Wisdom begins with knowing the LORD. (Verse 7)**

When you are disconnected from God everything you are striving for and doing is bringing you towards eternal ruin and therefore is foolishness. The only way to change that is to turn to God.

One of the ways we could think of the book of Proverbs is a comparison.

In fact, the Hebrew word that we translate as proverb means to make a comparison. One of the most common comparisons in the book is between those that are wise and those that are foolish.

That comparison is made here in **verse 7**.

The word translated ‘knowledge’ has the sense of understanding, wisdom, perception, discernment, or skill.

It is the capacity to rightly assess something.

The absolute beginning point for that it says here is “*The fear of the LORD.*”

*It is interesting that fear of the LORD rather than ‘awareness’ or ‘belief in’ is said to be the beginning of wisdom.*

Why fear? Because fear means that a person has made some very important connections in their mind between who we are as fallen human beings and Who God is as the infinite and eternal Creator and Sustainer of all things.

Fear was Adam’s response when the LORD made His presence visible in the Garden of Eden after the man had broken God’s command.

Time and again in the Bible when God causes His glory to appear men and women tremble in fear on account of it.

Why? Because when we begin to have the slightest appreciation for Who God is and understand that His holiness and justice demand that He holds us accountable for all the ways in which we have broken His laws we can’t help but be afraid.

There is more here though than a trembling kind of fear, there is also, as Allen Ross puts it, “A reverential submission to the LORD’s will.”

It is the understanding that God gets to decide how we live and the desire to willfully come under His authority.

*Without knowing that, we can’t really know anything worth knowing.*

I know full well that many unbelievers would object to that statement. They would point to science, reason, and logic and say that there are many people who know many things without any fear of the LORD whatsoever.

I would be the first to agree that there are many highly intelligent unbelievers who have many facts stored away in their brains.

But we must ask, “Why are the laws in the universe that science can explain? Why is reason reasonable? Why does logic make sense?”

The only reason any of that works is because the God of the Bible brought the universe and everything in it into existence.

So while unbelievers can be highly intelligent their dismissal of the LORD means that have rejected the very reason why anything and everything works.

Which is why the second half of verse 7 says, “...fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

If wisdom is applying what is true to your life and you reject the very source of truth the only thing left is foolishness.

[One of the jobs I did when I was a kid was mixing mortar for my dad. Mortar is the stuff that goes in between bricks and stones to hold them together. It is made up of sand, some masonry powder, and water in the right proportion. If you just mix sand and water together and lay bricks or stone into a wall, the wall will fall down because you don't really have mortar.]

That is a good illustration of what it is like to live your life without acknowledging God. You can think you are smart, you can even know lots of things, but at the end of the day you are setting yourself up for disaster.

On the other hand when you start to truly understand Who God is and who we are as sinful human beings who will see that we have a major problem.

If you can see the greatness of the LORD and the goodness of His laws you will realize the seriousness of having broken those laws and tremble at the thought.

That is the beginning of true understanding.

When that happens you will see your need of a Saviour and be most happy to discover that the LORD has provided a Saviour, Jesus Christ who lived a perfect life so that He could die in your place.

He conquered the grave so that we might live for Him in this life and live with Him forever in the next.

*That brothers and sisters is the beginning of wisdom.*

Why live a foolish life that ends in despair and destruction?

Why not instead acknowledge Who God is, look to the cross and empty tomb of His Son, be forgiven, and transformed by His grace.

The way of wisdom is open to you.

You may have been a fool for your entire life, but today you can begin to pursue wisdom instead.

Perhaps you have been growing in wisdom for years, there is still more to be gained.

Let us all then choose to chase after wisdom according to God's grace in Christ, for the glory of His name, and for our highest good.