

Fearing the Lord: *The Foundation of True Wisdom* Proverbs 1:1-7

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

Introduction: Where someone gets information will largely define *how they think* and thus *what they do*. Unashamedly dating myself, I still have memories of shelves in our house and school with the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and *World Book Encyclopedia's*, tomes that could build muscle just in transporting them as well as the mind of the student. If you were assigned a project or paper on an animal, part of the world, or a historical event, this was to be attained, read, and noted. The information was vetted but static, changing only when an updated version came out (fun fact: the last paper version of *Britannica* came out in 2010 ---- yep, that's how old YOU are). The advantage was that most everyone used the same sources, which were trusted, having been reviewed, dissected, and edited to bring truthful and trusted information.

Fast forward to our day, and we are beginning to move past the *Wikipedia* days to *AI*, where information is spit out at a rate of mere seconds and whole research papers and projects can be compiled for us in the same amount of time. There are aspects of this technological leap that are beneficial to those seeking and sharing information, since we no longer need shelf space to keep up with a changing world, and we have access to seemingly infinite information instantly. But there is certainly a downside as well. For those ages 13-29, they spend the most time looking at screens and accessing AI tools than any other generation. However, it is *extremely difficult* to determine the veracity of information as AI's non-determinism leads to incorrect or misleading information. It also means those who lean heavily on these tools spend less time **thinking** and processing, allowing something else to do that for them (this is the long term downside of self-driving cars ---- people will not actually learn how to drive). The obvious downside of this last one is the lack of **discernment** that is being exercised and the high level of influence we are willing to give a faceless source of information.

Now, the point of this is NOT to pound the table AGAINST technology, but rather to bring caution to **sources of information**. *Where and how we get information matters*. Where do we go to learn, seek truth, gain knowledge and ultimately, **live wisely**? My fatherly and pastoral concern is the fact that we have access to massive information sources, but that is NOT translating to convictional or wise living among people (like the *burdened and weak* women of Ephesus who were "*always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth* – 2 Tim. 3:7). The right information gives us opportunity to understand the truth and live it out, while continuing to grow. The definition of **discipleship itself** is encapsulated in the word "*learner*", but where do we go to actually do that? When we gain most of our information from *YouTube, or Reels, or AI Generated videos, or Podcasts, or whatever else*, we must remember that those are coming at us with **intention**, and are posing as experts, whether they are or not. We can easily be lead astray merely because we are naïve to what we are watching, reading, and listening to.

The premise, then, of this morning and our entire study this summer is to **Seek After Wisdom**, which means we must define wisdom itself. The Bible is abundantly clear as to the **source or foundation of wisdom: THE FEAR OF THE LORD** (Prov. 1:3; 9:10; 15:33; 31:30), which become anchor points for the entire book of Proverbs. Biblical, Godly wisdom and the Fear of the Lord are beautifully intertwined, and without proper fear, what we **think or call wisdom** is actually something else, designed to take us down a path away from God.

Before looking at Proverbs 1, let me try to show you how this not only is true Biblically, but how a **lack of the Fear of the Lord** is the source of FOOLISH and UNWISE living:

James 3:13-18 *“Who is **wise and understanding** among you? By his **good conduct** let him show his works in the **meekness of wisdom**. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 **This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic**. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. 17 But the **wisdom from above** is first **pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere**. 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace”*

Notice the question is asked about wisdom and understanding, and who it is that actually attains those things. Let’s make a few observations together.

- 1) **Wisdom and understanding have to do with BOTH conduct/ethical living AND proper judgment/thinking** – The idea of ‘meekness’ here is *power under control, gentleness, and humility*. Wisdom takes understanding and plays it out in real life. Jerry Bridges notes:

*“Knowledge and wisdom are not the same, though they are closely related. We might describe wisdom as **the best application and use of the knowledge we have. So we need to consider the beginning of knowledge before we look at the beginning of wisdom...**Wisdom is commonly defined as good judgment or the ability to develop the best course of action in response to a given situation. Biblical wisdom has a **strong ethical content.**”¹*

- 2) **There is a type of ‘wisdom’ that falls short of God’s glory** – There is of course a kind of knowledge and understanding that does not care about God nor His Word. This is defined as being **sourced** as *earthly, unspiritual, and DEMONIC*, which means it is all a product of the Prince of the power of the air, NOT Biblical truth (Eph. 2:2). *How do we know the difference? It is evident in what it PRODUCES:* comes out of bitterness, selfish ambition, jealousy, vile practice, boasting, and false truth. This kind of wisdom is PREVALENT and deceptive, since it *looks and feels like wisdom, but is far from it.*
- 3) **True Godly wisdom is categorically different, as it should be** – True wisdom is **sourced from ABOVE** ----- where Christ is seated (Col. 3:1) ----- and produces purity, peace, gentleness, reasonableness, mercy, good fruit, impartiality, and sincerity. The stark difference between the two is the **lens by which knowledge and understanding are acquired. A lens tuned to the Person and Attributes of God will see the world clearly, while ones that have a selfish prescription will move to foolishness.** The FEAR of the Lord is THE differentiator. But the problem is glaring:

Psalm 36:1 (cf. Rom. 3:18) *“Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; **there is no fear of God before his eyes.**”*

Psalm 14:1 *“The fool says in his heart, **“There is no God.”** They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good.”*

¹ Jerry Bridges, *“The Joy of Fearing God”*, p. 2, 6 – This is quintessential Bridges and one of his best!

Romans 3:10-12 *“None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹²All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”*

The inherent problem is clear: *we need wisdom, but only when we can come to grips with the Fear of the Lord can we gain it, and NO ONE naturally seeks after God.* Keep that in your mind as we walk through Proverbs 1, and we will draw some conclusions at the end.

Presenter of Wisdom in Proverbs (1)

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

It can feel a bit audacious to write a book of wisdom that would be read by not only sons (and he had a LOT), but also in perpetuity for generations after. It's a little like writing a book on *humility*, one of those that none of us dare touch. But **King Solomon** had a unique place in history and exemplary gifts from the Lord to write a book of wisdom that is as relevant today as it was thousands of years ago.

Solomon was the son of King David through **Bathsheba**, the woman by whom David committed adultery and later married (after he had her husband killed). Solomon was promised the throne, but it was almost usurped by **Adonijah** (see 1 Kings 1), until a team of Bathsheba, Nathan the Prophet, Zadok the priest and David's mighty men stepped in to foil the plot. After the coup was quelled, David had Solomon clean house (in a very *Godfather* kind of way), telling him what to do without telling him what to do with Joab and his bunch:

1 Kings 2:9 – *“Now therefore do not hold him guiltless, **for you are a wise man. You will know what you ought to do to him, and you shall bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol.**”*

David already recognized Solomon's wisdom at an early age, and knew that BECAUSE of that wisdom, he could entrust the governance of the kingdom with **just action and loving leadership**. Solomon demonstrated that he loved the LORD (1 Kings 3:3), and knew that true wisdom came out of following the statutes of God based on a healthy **fear of the LORD his God** (Deut. 17:19). When God gave him the option of asking anything of God, he wisely asked for **understanding and discernment** in order to govern God's people (1 Kings 3:9). This allowed him to exercise **righteous judgment**, like the case of the two prostitutes who argued over whose baby died (1 Kings 3:16-27), leaving the people in awe. His wisdom led to *prosperity, happiness* (1 Kings 4:20), and *notoriety among the nations*, with his wisdom and understanding **beyond measure**, so that he surpassed all from around the world, including Ethan and Heman (1 Kings 4:29-31).

Solomon demonstrated that when he had a healthy fear of the Lord, a desire to understand His statutes and mind, God gave him wisdom in order to *know what to do in every situation*. Wisdom is what God gives us so that we can all walk freely, able to glorify and worship Him in any and every situation without someone having to **prescribe** exactly what to do. This keeps us out of a legalistic form of life and allows us to walk by **faith in the Spirit**. It is also instructive that all of God's blessings to Solomon were conditional, meaning as long as he continued in the fearfully walked in God's commands (1 Kings 3:14), he would find success. But we know that when Solomon turned his **mind and heart** away from God through one subtle compromise with women after another, his heart was turned away to other gods, and *“his heart was NOT wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.”* (1 Kings 11:2-4). True wisdom and understanding demand a continual growth and dependency on God.

Purpose of the Proverbs (2-4)

To **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—

Every educator is aware of both process and outcome, and the point is never to merely impart knowledge or facts into the mind but to help people **think** so they know how to **act** in life. This is Solomon's purpose for his own children and all who would read.

1. **A Progression of Comprehension** – There is a progression of action verbs that Solomon uses to train people in wisdom. **First**, there must be knowing, which implies *hearing and learning*, a cognizance or apprehension of facts and information, **followed** by *understanding*, a careful and thoughtful consideration of those facts, not just regurgitation. **Then** there will be a *receiving*, or grasping of or taking possession of those realities, so they can **finally** be *given* or handed down, ready to be implemented.

We see this progression not only in our schools but our homes and church. This is why there are opportunities to **learn as a disciple** in hearing preaching, smaller classes, discussions in shepherding group, one on one interaction, and personal study. All of this learning starts with a knowledge of God from His Word and works outward, with the goal that a learner will have the tools necessary to gain answers on their own and be able to **teach others also**.

2. **A Toolbox of Resources** – Solomon uses unique and overlapping words to describe **what** is taught. The goal or outcomes of teaching are not simply a knowledge dump, but active learning that results in comprehension and implementation. **Insight** is needed to move from concepts to active understanding in real life situations. **Instruction in wise dealing** allow for interpersonal and relational discernment, to weigh all the facts and come to conclusions of what is righteous, just, and equitable ----- or what is right and truly fair ----- which means a willingness to do what is right even when it is hard or unpopular. **Prudence** is a form of *common sense or shrewdness*, knowing how to act in a particular situation. **Discretion** is a series of steps to be carried out so that goals can be accomplished.

Again, discipleship and parenting seek to impart wisdom in the mind AND an example to follow. The outcome is for followers of Jesus to **think and act** consistently with who God has called them to be, and we all learn by what is **both taught AND caught**, and though we cannot teach for EVERY situation, we give the principles and parameters of decision making. We experienced this last August as we dropped Morgan off at college for the first time, knowing that she was 'on her own' in triaging decisions on her own, every day. Our hope was that she had enough knowledge and understanding to make decisions consistent with the truth and reasonableness.

3. **A Targeted Audience** – *Who needs this kind of training?* The simple (naïve) and the young need to be taught and shown what wise living means. Simple is NOT a derogatory term, but means one that has yet to be taught. None of us start out wise but must grow as we learn and be taught by others who have gone before. This is the Biblical model of discipleship AND parenting, to impart wisdom so that those who follow will be equipped and ready. This speaks to both our **young and more mature today**. Both work together. For our older saints, the question is this: *who are you imparting the lessons of life and knowledge you've gained to?* To the younger, *who are you seeking out to learn from?*

Perpetual Pursuit of the Wise (5-6)

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

"Once you stop learning, you start dying." — *Albert Einstein*

What is a mark of wisdom? Not only the ability to know how to act in given situations that will honor and glorify the Lord, but a wise person knows that wisdom is not a destination to be reached and then stop, but a continual growth in knowledge and understanding. That is why we all have people to learn from, both young and old, and do not reach a stage of perfection where we are impervious to foolish decisions or actions (i.e. David, Solomon, Peter, etc.). **Proverbs 4:7** says the beginning of wisdom is this: **Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.** In other words, *get after it, pursue it, be proactive to obtain it.* The wise know there is more to learn. The fool thinks he has it all figured out ---- thus the plight of the young. This leads to the ultimate point of gaining wisdom, found in the next verse.

Ultimate Premise of Wisdom (7)

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

The fear of the Lord, at first glance, seems a bit counter-intuitive. Are we supposed to be afraid of God, or are we supposed to love God? And how does being afraid of God lead to knowledge and wisdom (Prov. 9:10).

R.C Sproul is helpful here, in that he explains two different kinds of fear. The first is **servile**, which is the kind of fear of the **slave of an unjust master**, one who would beat the slave for disobedience and reward for compliance. The master is seen through a lens of terror and consequence, and the relationship is one of self-preservation. This is the kind of fear that caused Adam and Eve to **hide and flee** from God in the Garden, since they sinned and believed they would now be punished. **Filial fear** is rooted in the relationship of a cherished parent and loving child. There is a healthy respect of the parent, a welcoming of correction, and desire for true relationship. This comes closer to the meaning of Fear of God in Proverbs 1:7.

I am a bit out of the Disney cartoon stage of life, but we used to watch one called "*The Lion King*", where the undisputed ruler of the Pride Land was **Mufasa**, the strongest and wisest of all animals. When the hyenas heard his name, they would shudder in fear, and thus would willingly comply with his rule. But when young **Simba** grew up, though his dad was the biggest and baddest, he knew he could wrestle, play with, and be in the presence of his dad without fear of consequence. For any person that has had a loving dad or desires to be one, that is what relationship we want with our kids. There are lines not to be crossed and correction/discipline to hand out, but though we are stronger, we WANT an open, loving, kind, and gentle relationship with our kids.

The Bible says that God is a **consuming fire**, one that should be worshipped with **reverence and awe** (Heb. 12:28-29). Looking at God is like looking out over Half-Dome, gazing at the wondrous beauty of creation from the height and perspective gained on top of the stone mountain, but fully aware of the danger of getting too close to the ledge. Fools see God on their level, losing a sense of His power and mistaking His graciousness to be known as weakness. When we gain a **proper view of God**, who has the ability to kill the body and soul to hell (Matt. 10:28), but who offers us relationship as a loving and gentle

Father, we begin to see what **fearing the Lord truly means**. It means He sets the rules, He demands obedience, and He gives us the ability to do so in Christ. Fearing the Lord means **submitting ourselves to Him in worshipful reverence, placing ourselves under His mighty rule and loving care**. This is why any kind of 'wisdom' that does not acknowledge Him as the ultimate Sovereign ruler is by definition **foolishness**.

What does this mean for us in terms of gaining wisdom? This is what we will look at all summer, unpacking different aspects of wisdom throughout Proverbs, like different facets of the same diamond. But for now, let's close with these truths:

- 1) **Fools despise wisdom and knowledge BECAUSE they live like there is no God** (see Psalm 14:1) – The reality of every aspect of life is to see it through the lens of God's sovereign goodness, holiness, and glory. The only way to see God this way is NOT from outside sources but to understand Him as He presents Himself in Scripture. Once we see His character and attributes clearly, we can see all things ---- beauty, providence, situations, grace, relationships, etc. ---- through that lens and gain wisdom and understanding in all it.
- 2) **True wisdom points to the GOSPEL** – The only way to move from foolishness to wisdom is to **humbly acknowledge our sin**, that we have fallen short of God's glory, and that we need forgiveness from a Savior. This requires a turning from our selfish direction of rebellion and turning TO Christ, submitting and yielding ourselves to Him. Without the gospel, NO ONE can comprehend the **fear of the Lord, and thus cannot live in true wisdom and understanding**.
- 3) **For believers, wisdom is abundant and available** – How do we navigate a life full of trials and be able to grow in light of them? Like Solomon, we ASK FOR WISDOM!

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"*

And what is the source of this wisdom? It is Christ Himself! It is Christ that unlocks the mystery of life and gives us understanding to live, obey, function, decide, and act to the glory of God: *Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* (Col. 2:3), *Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God* (1 Cor. 1:24). It is Christ who we pursue, seek, and treasure to gain wisdom.

In C.S Lewis's book *"The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe"*, one of the children asks Mr. and Mrs. Beaver about Aslan the Lion (a personification of Jesus):

"Is he—quite safe?" I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion – Susan
"If there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly." – Mrs. Beaver
"Then he isn't safe?" – Lucy
"Safe? . . . Who said anything about safe? Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King I tell you." – Mr. Beaver

God is not safe, but He is good, He is the King, and He is the source of all wisdom.