

Chasing Wisdom: Introducing Proverbs

Good morning, mornings have sunrises. What time does the sun rise? How big is the sun? What about other planets? There are 9 planets in the solar system. Apparently, there was a controversy over the 9th planet, Pluto. Pluto is a beloved Disney character. How much does it cost to go to a Disney theme park these days? The biggest theme park closest to Detroit is Cedar Point. What is the tallest roller coaster in the world? It's called Falcons Flight and its located in Saudi Arabia. How much is a flight to Saudi Arabia? The longest commercial flight you can take is from New York City to China and lasts over 19 hours.

I assume that by this point some of you are starting to believe I have lost my mind. But, this is exactly how you and I receive information nearly every moment of every day. If you are scrolling on social media, you get snippets of info that move from one topic to another quickly with very little to no connection. Watching TV is often as bad or worse. Topics move from the weighty and significant to the flippant. We get tons of information, but it often has no context and very little meaning. This shapes and forms us into shallow people with lots of disconnected knowledge and no wisdom.

Most of you probably have heard at least some form of what I just explained. And yet, we just keep scrolling, swiping, watching, and avoiding the slow and patient acquisition of wisdom. Why? Well, it's like junk food and it takes strong motivation to change your habits and lifestyle to eat healthy. The pursuit of wisdom is more like walking uphill than downhill and it takes a change in motivation to get there.

Thankfully, we have a God who knows our frame as humans and provides a large amount of clear motivation for us to pursue wisdom. In fact, Proverbs 1-9, which are the passages we will study for this entire series, are all attempting to encourage, challenge, and persuade us to see the value in a life of wisdom. That's why I've called this study Chasing Wisdom.

Today I want to introduce the book of Proverbs to you and then next week we will dive into the first chapter. Today let's ask **3 Questions about Proverbs to Prepare us to Chase Wisdom.**

1. How is Proverbs Formatted?

I like to encourage people that when you first go to read or study a book of the Bible, try to get a grasp of the whole before you start to try to understand the parts. Proverbs has a straightforward structure in some ways, but breaking it down will be helpful to us, even as we limit our study to chapters 1-9.

Proverbs 1-9 – Introduction: Why You Should Chase Wisdom

We will obviously dive deeper into these chapters in the coming weeks, but they break down into 12 poems, ten of those poems are lectures from a Father to a Son. For example, look at 1:8, 2:1, and 3:1. There are also two addresses in these chapters from “Lady Wisdom” calling out to the young and simple to listen to her. Look at 1:20-22 and 8:1-5.

After this introduction, the rest of the book is made up of several collections of proverbs or aphorisms, pithy and memorable wisdom sayings. These sayings don’t often have a specific order to them. One doesn’t seem to follow the one before it, and yet, there are groupings.

Proverbs 10:1-22:16 – The Wisdom of Solomon

Proverbs 22:17-24:22 – Thirty Sayings of the Wise

Proverbs 24:23-34 – More Sayings of the Wise: Justice and Diligence

Proverbs 25:1-29:27 – Solomon’s Proverbs Copied by Hezekiah’s Men

Proverbs 30 – The Words of Agur: Humble Descriptions of the World

Proverbs 31 – The Words of King Lemuel: Wisdom Personified

Now admittedly, these proverbs do seem random, but if you zoom out there seems to be a movement beginning in Proverbs 10 from elementary wisdom to more advanced wisdom throughout the rest of the collection.

So, this is the structure of Proverbs itself, but it’s important that we zoom out and ask how Proverbs fit’s into the rest of Scripture.

2. How does Proverbs Fit?

The Bible is a collection of 66 different “books” or pieces of literature and these “books” come in a variety of styles and genres. We have stories or narrative. Letters. Poems and laws. But every component of this collection tells a single story that goes from the creation of the world to the arrival of the new creation and God’s rule and reign with humans on earth. It all tells one story, but there are pieces of the story that sometimes don’t seem to fit. Proverbs is one of those pieces.

The OT begins with the law of Moses in the first five books. The law includes both the story of God’s covenant with His people, and the specific laws God gave to guide the nation of Israel as they represented God and lived before Him. The law provided the framework for life before God, but the details of day-to-day living could get lost in that framework. So much of life is spent in gray areas trying to figure out how to best manage a difficult work situation, how to parent children, and how to steward financial resources. God made us to live in the day to day and so He has provided wisdom books to guide us.

But these wisdom books, and Proverbs in particular, do fit within the OT storyline. They teach Israel how to live faithfully in the land with one another and in covenant relationship with God. Compare Deuteronomy 8:1-2 and Proverbs 3:1-2.

But these books don’t only benefit Israel in the land. They look forward to God’s ultimate expression of wisdom, Jesus Christ. Listen to how Jesus put this in Matthew 12:38-42, a passage we just read when we studied Jonah. We read Proverbs now through the lens of Jesus Christ as the true wisdom of God. Colossians 2:3. In other words, don’t read Proverbs as a collection of moralistic teachings. If you do this, this will happen. Read them through the lens of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

3. How is Wisdom Found?

Let’s begin to answer this question by defining wisdom a bit. Of course, it’s rather difficult to give a full and comprehensive definition of wisdom, but let’s at least start to understand what it is. We tend to think of wisdom primarily as an intellectual thing. But knowing information is not wisdom. The word translated

wisdom in Proverbs 1:2 and throughout the book is used in a variety of contexts in Scripture. The word is Hokema. Those with “hokema” are able to skilfully make the garments of the high priest. You can have “hokema” in government, in diplomacy, and in making war. A group of women are said to have “hokema” in spinning goat’s hair. Biblical wisdom means skill and mastery or expertise.

Biblical wisdom has very little to do with abstract, propositional knowledge. This is because biblical wisdom is an embodied skill or a skilled practice. According to Proverbs, wisdom is holistic; it compasses one’s intellect, desires, emotions, taste, sight, touch, and actions. If one is ‘wise’ or if one ‘knows’ something, then one acts out that wisdom and knowledge in concrete, embodied, interpersonal actions. If the proof of the pudding is in the eating, then the proof of wisdom is manifest in one’s being and doing, in one’s moral nature and virtuous actions. – Christopher Ansberry

So, if this is what wisdom is, how do we find it? It doesn’t come from inside of us. Let me give you three pairs that will guide you in your search for wisdom.

Creation & Creator

When you hear me read about how wisdom is embodied and a skill and Scripture uses it to speak of those who have mastered a craft like weaving goat’s hair, it’s because wisdom is rooted in God’s creational design. Listen to Proverbs 8:22-31 and Proverbs 3:19-20. What this means is that creation demonstrates God’s wisdom by its design and therefore we can learn to be wise from observing creation. There are things that work and things that don’t work because God has structured the universe in a particular way. Wisdom goes with the grain of the universe.

Now, it’s important to note here that our interpretation of the universe is not always correct. We observe but our minds and hearts have been bent by sin, and so we need a plum line to keep our observations straight and that plum line is the Creator in His Word. But wisdom comes from both creation and Creator and God has set it up that way. We need God’s Words to see how the parts fit into the whole.

God & Others

We just talked about how wisdom comes from God and His Word, but it also comes through others. Obtaining wisdom is not a solitary exercise. It's not something you do in your office alone and you cannot only trust your own voice and ideas. Proverbs 12:15. Wisdom is always mediated to you from other people. You first learned from your parents, but you've also had teachers, instructors, master tradesman, bosses, professors, and friends.

One author called these others "authorized guides" and that's right. *Yet the acquisition of wisdom is dependent on the authority to whom one submits, the voice one trusts.* – Christopher Ansberry

Which authorized guides are you allowing into your heart and mind? Some of you give shocking amounts of time to talking heads online and TV who aren't conveying any form of wisdom to you, but they have become your authorized guide. You have no choice but to listen to others. Who are you listening to and is it leading you toward wisdom or away from it?

Gift & Search

Wisdom cannot be obtained apart from the Lord and He is the one who gives it. Listen to Proverbs 2:6-8. Wisdom is a gift from God. We are human beings. We are limited and temporary and we don't have all the knowledge in the universe at our disposal. And even if we did, we wouldn't know how to rightly use it. So, wisdom is a gracious gift from God

And yet, nothing about the acquisition of wisdom is passive. Look up to Proverbs 2:1-5. There's a reason that Solomon spends the first 9 chapters of this book trying to motivate you to pursue wisdom. Don't sit on your hands. Don't waste your time. Don't listen to the wrong authorized guides. Don't be lazy. Get after it. Go. Listen to Proverbs 3:13-18.

And so, wisdom is found through the Creator and creation, through God and others, and as a gift that must be searched for. But there's one more key part of finding wisdom. Look at the introduction to the book in Proverbs 1:7.

What does it mean that the Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom? Which comes first? Once you fear God you can start to acquire wisdom? Well, we just read in Proverbs 2 that once you search for wisdom then you will understand the fear of the Lord.

It's hard to nail down which comes first and I don't think we are supposed to. It's a cyclical relationship that grows more. As you know the Fear of the Lord, you grow in wisdom and as you grow in wisdom, you fear the Lord more. This is why Proverbs begins this way in 1:7 and ends this way in Proverbs 31:30.

So, what is the Fear of the Lord? Come back next week when we discuss Proverbs 1:1-7. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 9/13/26

- The sermon opened with a chain of random facts, sunrises to Pluto to Saudi Arabia, to describe how we consume information. Does that feel accurate to your own life? Where do you most notice the difference between accumulating knowledge and actually growing in wisdom?"
- Can you share a major change that has happened in your life (health, fitness, job, hobby, etc) and the specific motivation that led you to make that change?
- The sermon walked through how Proverbs is organized before diving into the content. Have you ever found that understanding the 'shape' of something — a book, a course, a project — helped you engage with it better? How do you think understanding Proverbs' structure might help as we go through it together?
- The sermon described the law of Moses as the framework for Israel's life before God, and Proverbs as the guide for the gray areas that framework doesn't cover. What's an example of a 'gray area' in your own life that the Ten Commandments don't directly address, but where you still need guidance?
- The sermon warned against reading Proverbs as a collection of moral tips, 'do this, get that.' How does reading it through the lens of Christ change how you'd approach a proverb that seems to promise something that doesn't always come true in real life?

- In what specific gray areas in your life do you feel the need for wisdom at the moment?
- Give an example of a way that wisdom is rooted in creation. What is the relationship between God's wisdom found in creation and in God's Word?
- Explain what it means to have an "authorized guide" to wisdom. How do you know when someone or something has become an authorized guide in your life?
- What is one way you can more actively pursue wisdom this week? And what's one thing you're hoping to get out of this series, or out of this group over the coming weeks?