

Chasing Wisdom: What Are We Aiming For?

Proverbs 1:1-7

When I was in high school there was an English teacher that we all loved, but part of the reason we loved her was it was quite easy to get a good reaction out of her. On a regular basis I would walk into her 10th grade English class with my hands full of books and say, “Good morning, Mrs. Wooldridge” and then I would trip and fall, and the books would go everywhere. She gasped every time.

I went to a Christian school and so many of the teachers would take prayer requests before class on certain days of the week. Mrs. Wooldridge was a sweet Christian lady and so she would regularly take prayer requests. One of my friends would raise his hand every time she would take prayer requests and say, “Pray that I make it to the NBA.”

Most high school students have some goals for life, even if they aren’t as high and lofty as my friends to make it to the NBA. Quick update: he did not make it to the NBA. He was 5’11’ and could not touch the rim.

But goals are good. God likes goals, purposes, and mission. When he originally created human beings, he gave us a mission to pursue right off the bat. God isn’t a God who sort of stumbles into things. He plans, pursues, and sets goals for His people and He’s certainly done that in writing the book of Proverbs. And what’s helpful about Proverbs is that we get the goals up front. The human author, Solomon, lays them out for us in the first few verses. And I think it’s valuable for us to consider what we are aiming for as we read and study this book. So, this morning in Proverbs 1:1-7 let’s look at **3 Goals for Us as We Chase Wisdom.**

1. Forward Momentum

The entire book focuses on growth, change, and development. The author is identified as Solomon and he’s writing to his son to see his son move from naivety to wisdom. Look at verse 1.

Solomon is the perfect guy to dispense wisdom because he received wisdom as a gift from God and his wisdom was internationally known. Listen to 1 Kings 4:29-

34. To dispense this wisdom his primary tool will be “proverbs” as it says in verse 1. What is a proverb? I thought this explanation was pretty helpful.

What then is a Biblical proverb? The Hebrew noun “proverb” is related to a verb that means “to represent, to be like.” So a proverb is a little model of reality, a little verbal representation of some aspect of our daily lives. And by picking a proverb up and turning it over and over and looking at it from all angles, we can see something about our lives before we step out into the actual reality. The world says, Live and learn. God is saying, Learn and live. – Ray Ortland

A proverb is meant to be explored, thought about, and considered. I love the language of turning it over and over and looking at it from all angles. This shapes our vision before we make decisions and live our lives.

These proverbs are given to see us move forward in a particular direction. Notice in verses 2-6 how many times Solomon uses the word “to” to lay out a purpose for the book. Let’s read these verses.

You can also see in these verses that there’s growth and change from being simple and young to putting on wisdom and maturity. Look at verse 4. Beginners need knowledge and wisdom. They need to change and learn how to live skillfully. I mean, how many of you look back to what you did and said in your teens and twenties and think, I wish I knew then what I know now! Proverbs is trying to tell those of you in your teens and twenties what you need to know!

But it’s not only those who are young and simple who need growth and change toward wisdom. Look at verse 5. As you age you start to think, I know some things. As you are successful in life you start to believe that you know how life works. You may start to even believe that your role is not so much to learn wisdom, but to dispense it to the young. Solomon gives a reminder here that forward momentum is for everyone, both the simple and wise.

Let’s be realistic about ourselves—as we age, it can be harder to stay fresh and expectant and moving forward on an upward trajectory of growth. It is easy to stall, it is easy to coast. We can get lazy. But let’s not die before we die! Fight for

open-mindedness and honesty and discovery and newness of life. Stay humble and keep learning. – Ray Ortlund

What does this forward momentum look like? Notice the verbs in verses 2-6. I'll list them for you: Know, understand, receive, give, hear, increase, obtain, understand.

You only have two options, either you are growing, grasping, and moving toward wisdom or you are sliding back into foolishness. But wisdom doesn't lie on the surface. Notice verse 6. Forward movement toward wisdom takes time and sustained effort in understanding and growth. It's not for the fainthearted or for the lazy. This forward momentum is aimed at obtaining certain characteristics and that is our second goal.

2. Fully Developed Character

It's not just movement that matters. The knowing, hearing, receiving, and understanding is oriented toward a goal of fully developed character. Look at verse 2. What does Solomon want us to know? Wisdom and instruction. What does he want us to understand? Words of insight. Notice the rest of the character qualities in verses 2-6 that we are to put on as we read Proverbs. Wise dealing, righteousness, justice, equity. Prudence, knowledge, and discretion. Learning, and guidance.

When you put all of these characteristics together, you get fully developed character, or wisdom. They are like facets of a beautiful diamond that all sparkle from different angles and together showcase a wise person.

It's a little overwhelming to think of developing all these qualities, so let's break them into 3 categories of virtues and these are taken from an author I've quoted before, Christopher Ansberry. First, intellectual virtues. Wisdom and instruction, prudence, knowledge, and discretion.

As much as we want to avoid equating wisdom with smarts, to be wise requires you to use your mind. It doesn't require a PhD or that you know Calculus, but it does mean you are opening up your brain and depositing something worthwhile into it. I know people are busy today. When you are in the prime of your career

and working a lot with young kids at home and faithfully attending church on Sundays, it's very difficult to carve out time to read a bunch of books. Having acknowledged the challenges and busyness of modern life that doesn't change the necessary pursuit of wisdom. Start with 15 minutes a day set aside to read, think, and pursue knowledge toward wisdom.

Second, moral virtues. Look at the second part of verse 3. Righteousness, justice, and equity. Righteousness speaks of God's established moral order to the universe. You must know what this order is and live according to it. Justice is the recognition that this moral order has been transgressed in some way and justice works to restore it. This is why these two often go together in Scripture. Equity refers to fairness. A level path or straightness that accords with truth and order. Wisdom means growth in all of these moral virtues.

Let's just make sure we are clear that these aren't only dealing with political issues or voting issues. You and I must be people of righteousness, justice, and equity in our daily lives and relationships if we are to be wise. In fact, wisdom demands these qualities and the book of Proverbs will help us to cultivate them.

Third, practical virtues. Notice in verse 3 "wise dealing" and in verse 4 prudence and discretion. The Hebrew word translated "prudence" could be translated craftiness or cunning and it's not always a positive thing. But it's clearly positive here and it speaks to a practical know how that perceives the circumstances rightly and then knows the best course of action. You can be crafty in a way that tricks others and uses others for your own ends, or you can be prudent and wise in a way that serves others and God. Finally, let's look at our last goal.

3. Fear of the Lord

Verse 7 doesn't read like the rest of Solomon's introduction and verse 8 clearly starts the first poem of the book. Verse 7 sort of stands alone as the ultimate summary of the book and the final goal of studying Proverbs. It's the starting point and the ending point. In fact, the first nine chapters, which motivate us to pursue wisdom, begin this way and conclude this way. Listen to Proverbs 9:10.

One author put the importance of the fear of the Lord this way: *What the alphabet is to reading, notes to reading music, and numerals to mathematics, the fear of the LORD is to attaining the revealed knowledge of this book.* – Bruce Waltke

There won't be forward momentum or fully-developed character without this goal. So, what does it mean to fear the Lord and why is it the beginning of or foundation of wisdom?

I think it can be tempting to pull this phrase, "the fear of the Lord" out of context here and try to define it by each word individually. But verse 7 works like many of the Proverbs do where you've got two parts of the Proverb with the second part showing you the opposite of the first and helping you interpret the first. So, let's look at the second part. "Fools despise wisdom and instruction." Listen to Proverbs 3:7. Fearing the Lord is being in awe of Him yes. It's respecting and reverencing Him for sure. But what does respect and awe toward a person cause you to do when that person speaks something to you? You listen. You pay attention. You act on what he or she says.

So, whatever the Fear of the Lord is, it culminates in us listening to God's Words. Look back up to verse 3. Receive. This is the posture and it's one of humility. The first step in growing in wisdom is to recognize that you don't have wisdom and to look to the one who does.

Now here's the thing about this posture. It's impossible for any of us on our own. We all come hardwired to believe we know best. This is exactly the mentality that led Adam and Eve to get us into this whole mess in the first place. I know best. I don't need to listen to God's Words. We are prideful, self-centered, and egotistical.

What can possibly overturn this pride in our hearts and introduce the fear of God there so that we grow in wisdom? Where does it start? Listen to Philippians 2:5-8. To truly see humility go to the cross where the God of the universe came and died for fools like us. He gave His life for our pride so that we could be rescued from our pride and sin and come to fear the Lord.

These are our goals for the series, given to us by Solomon. Always growing and moving forward in wisdom. Fully developed character and ultimately the fear of the Lord, which comes from seeing my sin and God's grace. Start there for wisdom, be humbled, and trust God's Words and not your own. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 9/20/26

- What goals did you have in high school? Which of them have you seen realized?
- The sermon pointed out that Solomon lays out his goals for the book right in the first six verses. Why is that helpful to us as readers? Does knowing the goal of a book change how you read it?
- The sermon quoted Ray Ortlund describing a proverb as 'a little model of reality' meant to be turned over and examined from all angles before you step into real life. Pick a proverb you know and try doing that right now as a group. What do you see when you look at it from different angles?
- The sermon described 'simple' in verse 4 as naïve and inexperienced, not stupid, just unformed. Looking back, what's an area of your life where you were 'simple' at one stage but have since grown? What changed?
- The sermon said as we get older it's easy to shift from learner to dispenser, thinking our role is now to teach rather than be taught. Have you felt that pull in yourself? What's an area where you know you've stopped growing and need to start again?
- The sermon mentioned that 15 minutes a day of reading and thinking is a realistic starting place for most people to pursue wisdom intellectually. Does that feel achievable to you right now or does even that feel out of reach? What gets in the way?

- The sermon connected righteousness and justice, knowing God's moral order and then working to restore it when it's been broken. What does that look like in the ordinary relationships and situations you'll actually be in this week?
- What's the difference between "craftiness" in a negative sense and "prudence" in a positive sense? How do you know if you are using skill or craftiness in a sinful way?
- The sermon used the second half of verse 7, 'fools despise wisdom and instruction', to define what the fear of the Lord is by its opposite. In your own words, what does that contrast tell us about what it means to fear the Lord?
- The sermon ended with Philippians 2, the cross as the place where pride is broken and the fear of God begins. How does actually looking at what Christ did change your posture toward God's words, not just intellectually but in how you actually live?