

FPFWC Christian Development



Wisdom In Proverbs
June 2020

Spring Quarter

June 6, 2020

Lesson #1 – Listen to God’s Wisdom

Scripture Focus – Proverbs 1:1-4, 7,8,10,20-22,32,33

ICE BREAKERS –

- 1. Why is Godly wisdom important and what does it teach us?**
- 2. Why do people reject Godly wisdom?**
- 3. What is one thing you can do this week to seek wisdom?**

Key Verse: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Proverbs 1:7

LESSON BACKGROUND

The book of Proverbs is the third of the five books in the Old Testament that are often called “wisdom literature.” (The group also includes Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.) When most people think of proverbs in general (not just the biblical ones), they probably call to mind pithy statements of truth that are good, general advice for navigating life. “Haste makes waste” and “He who hesitates is lost” are generally true statements, but one can see how these statements might contradict each other.

The wisdom of each saying is situational. Biblical proverbs are as well, though they are more than just good advice. They are godly advice, based on the crucial premise that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10).

Keeping that premise in mind helps the wise person discern when a certain course of conventional wisdom might not be best for obeying God's laws. Knowing God yields the wisdom to decide well.

The book of Proverbs divides itself into three major sections: (1) a long introduction to the collections of proverbs (chap. 1-9), (2) the collections of the proverbs themselves (10:1-31:9), and (3) an acrostic conclusion (31:10-31). There are six collections: (a) proverbs of Solomon (10:1-22:16), (b) words of the wise (22:17-24:22), (c) more words of the wise (24:23-34), (d) more proverbs of Solomon (25:1-29:27), (e) words of Agur (chap. 30), and (f) words of King Lemuel (31:1-9).

The four lessons in this unit are drawn from the nine opening chapters of Proverbs (1-9) that exhort the audience to choose to live by God's wisdom. In these chapters, we find more association between individual proverbs than the more randomized sayings that appear from chapter 10 forward. Most scholars see 10 fatherly appeals or lectures in chapters 1-9. These are 1:8-19; 2:1-22; 3:1-12; 3:21-35; 4:1-9; 4:10-19; 4:20-27; 5:1-23; 6:20-35; and 7:1-27. Our text today includes part of the first appeal.

LESSON COMMENTARY

1:1. Although this verse serves structurally as the superscription of Solomon's collection, it is a fit title for the book as a whole given that **Solomon the son of David, king of Israel** had the dominant influence in Proverbs. For further discussion of the nature of proverbs and of the book's authorship, see Introduction.

2. Purpose (1:2:4)

These verses lay out the purpose of the book, demonstrating the benefits that heeding its teachings will bring. It is probably best to see these benefits addressed to three audiences: readers in general (vv. 2-3), the simple (v. 4), and the wise (vv. 5-6) (Longman, *Proverbs*, 95). Generally, this section shows that Proverbs was written to impart wisdom in its various aspects both to those devoid of it and to those who can continue to grow in it. Furthermore, it was written to spur its readers to carefully ponder and grow in understanding and applying the profound words of the wise, for by doing so comes wisdom.

1:2-3. Proverbs is written with three purposes for the general reader. First, it helps the reader **know wisdom and instruction** (v. 2a). *Knowing* here is more than acquiring information; it is a personal, internalized knowledge in which a person possesses wisdom and heeds instruction and makes them one's own. Here the term **wisdom** (*hokmah*) is used in its broadest sense, the umbrella term for the various facets of wisdom discussed below (Kidner, *Proverbs*, 36). But **instruction** (*musar*) is more specific, "a chastening lesson" that invokes the character and discipline necessary to take correction to heart (Waltke, *Book of Proverbs 1-15*, 175).

Second, Proverbs is written to help its readers **discern the sayings of understanding** (v. 2b). The verb **discern** (*habin*) involves the capacity to truly understand something beyond the superficial level, and in that sense to gain genuine perceptiveness. The language here is repetitive for emphasis (lit., "to understand sayings of understanding"). Proverbs thus encourages its readers to gain *insight* into its *insightful* sayings about life, to truly *perceive* the *perceptive* sayings of the wise. They will, in turn, become insightful about life themselves.

Third, Proverbs is written to general readers so that they would **receive instruction**, accepting in their hearts the kind of correction that produces **wise behavior** (v. 3a). Wisdom produces a change in action, not just an accumulation of knowledge. But truly wise behavior is neither self-centered nor unscrupulous. Proverbs thus also instructs its readers in **righteousness, justice and equity** (v. 3b). These terms remind us that true wisdom entails both personal moral integrity and social consciousness.

Taken together, these three purposes show that Proverbs will shape the thinking, attitude, moral character, and behavior of the general reader.

1:4. Beyond the general reader, Proverbs is written more specifically to the **naive**. Their naiveté, associated especially with **youth**, is "inexperienced, easily seduced, but needing instruction and capable of learning" (Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, Johann Stamm, *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, CD-ROM-Edition, trans. M. Richardson [Leiden: Brill, 2000], 989). Such people at least are teachable, unlike

fools and mockers. To these, Proverbs is able **to give prudence** (that is, good judgment), **knowledge and discretion**. Proverbs imparts truth and skill for living that they did not previously know, so that they can act with wise deliberation and foresight when facing life's challenges and temptations.

3. Theme (1:7)

1:7. Even more importantly, no truly wise human being can abandon God in his pursuit of wisdom because **the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge** (v. 7a). **Knowledge** here is closely associated with "wisdom" (cf. 1:4). The **fear of the LORD** is a reverential awe toward Him. It involves taking Him seriously, both fearing His just judgment and holding Him in the highest respect and love. The term likely has both rational and relational aspects. Rationally, it refers to knowledge of the Lord's special revelation (cf. Pss 34:11ff.; 19:7-9). Relationally, it involves the wise man's worship of the Lord, a worship that entails reverent fear, love, and trust (cf. Dt 5:29 and Dt 6:2; Dt 6:5 and Jos 24:14) (Waltke, *Book of Proverbs 1-15*, 100-101). **Beginning** (*re'shit*) indicates that the fear of the Lord is the foundation, the first principle, the presupposition of all wisdom. Here, then, Solomon indicates that a person can only be truly wise when he acknowledges that wisdom ultimately comes from the Lord Himself, and when he roots his pursuit of wisdom in worship of the Lord. "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" (Waltke, *Book of Proverbs 1-15*, 181). It is little wonder, then, that only great **fools** would **despise wisdom and instruction** (v. 7b). For in showing contempt for biblical wisdom, the fool is rejecting the Lord Himself. And in denying the Lord, the fool is arrogantly denying reality itself—a fool's errand indeed.

This verse thus makes a sweeping statement about the very nature of true wisdom. As such, it functions as the motto for the whole book of Proverbs, and for good reason. "It stands in front of the rest of the collection as the quintessential expression of the basic spiritual grammar for understanding the book" (Waltke, *Book of Proverbs 1-15*, 180).

B. Extended Discourses on Wisdom (1:8-9:18)

This section is made up of a series of fifteen poems. Most of them are in the form of a father's instruction to his son. Typical elements in these instructions include the presentation of a lesson, an admonition to listen to the lesson, and motivations for heeding the lesson. Other poems in this section acclaim wisdom's value by presenting it as a lady who calls naïve young men to follow her ways. This section as a whole serves as an interpretive key for the rest of the book.

1. Lesson 1: Beware of Violent Companions (1:8-19)

1:8-9. This lesson begins with the urgent appeal to listen: **Hear, my son, your father's instruction**. It follows the typical pattern in Proverbs with an admonition to the one lacking wisdom to obey the instruction in the lesson. Also typical is the parental imagery: the father addressing his young and naïve **son**. He is exhorted to heed rather than reject what *both* his parents have taught him (v. 8). The motivation for doing so is that their teachings bring to the obedient son honor like an appealing garland (**a graceful wreath to your head**) and prosperity like an expensive necklace (**ornaments about your neck**) (v. 9).

1:10. The lesson is summarized: **Do not consent** when **sinner**s entice you. A "sinner" is one who offends against God and, by extension, the community (Waltke, *Book of Proverbs 1-15*, 189). Here the term refers specifically to violent criminals as is evident by the enticements they offer in the following verses. Not in our day only has the young man been tempted by the lures of the gang. He therefore faces a choice: either listen to the wise advice of his parents or the destructive enticements of the gang.

Wisdom's First Call (1:20-33)

This section has three parts: the setting of wisdom's address (vv. 20-21), her second-person address to the foolish (vv. 22-27), and her first-person reflection on that address (vv. 28-33) (Waltke, *Book of Proverbs 1-15*, 201-13).

1:20-21. These verses introduce a central character in the first part of Proverbs, the personification of wisdom, who is addressed as **she**, and often identified by commentators as Lady Wisdom. Sharing the same worldview as the wise father, she is "the personification of the Lord's wisdom," reminding us that one cannot be wise apart from a real relationship with wisdom, and ultimately, with God Himself (Longman, *Proverbs*, 111; cf. 1:7). Like a street preacher, she **shouts, lifts her voice, and cries out** her message in public so it can be heard above the din of city life. And she does so in the most prominent places of the city where all can hear—**the street, the square, and the entrance of the gates in the city**. Her message, therefore, is accessible to all, even if there is much in the **noisy streets** to distract people from it. All need the Lord's readily available wisdom, whether they recognize it or not.

1:22-25. Addressed directly to fools, the message of Wisdom contains three elements. First, she begins with a rebuke of three kinds of people most in need of her message (v. 22). All of them share the complacency of ignorance, though they differ in the degree of their complacency. The worst of these are **scoffers** (*letsim*) who **delight themselves in scoffing** because they are so arrogant and jaded that they mock wisdom. The broadest category, **fools** (*kesilim*) who **hate knowledge**, are not much better, though their rejection of wisdom is due less to cynicism than to their being smug, thick-headed dolts (Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 98). The **naive ones** (*petayim*) who **love being simple-minded**, like the young, are gullible in their ignorance, but unlike the scoffer and fool, are teachable. They are probably a special object of Wisdom's address because they are less committed to folly than the other two, though their danger is no less if they persist in their ignorance.

1:32-33. Lady Wisdom brings her reflection to a close with a general principle that compares the wise and the fools. There are two kinds of turning and two kinds of ease. Fools of all stripes turn away from God's wisdom in their **waywardness** and are comfortable in their **complacency**, little realizing that their path will **kill and destroy** them (v. 32). In contrast, the godly wise turn away from folly and listen to wisdom. As a result, they **live securely** and are **at ease from the dread of evil**, for they never have to face the inevitable consequences of folly. In the end, Lady Wisdom confronts the reader with a choice between wisdom/life and folly/death, a choice far too urgent to postpone

Lesson Nugget – Wisdom is like a lovely woman inviting hungry people to a great feast. Folly is like an evil woman seducing the ignorant into sin. Accept wisdom's call and you will be blessed; accept folly's call and you will be destroyed.

Sources: Moody Bible Commentary; Wiersbe Bible Commentary; and Standard Sunday School lesson.