

PROVERBS: ETERNAL WISDOM FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

Growing in the Fear of the Lord and Godly Character for Life in a Fallen World

The Way of Wisdom — The Fear of the Lord

Key Idea:

True wisdom begins and grows from the fear of the Lord and leads to a life growing in godly character, enabling us to survive and thrive in our fallen world.

Key Text:

The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: ² to know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, ³ to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; ⁴ to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth — ⁵ 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. ⁷ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 1:1–7 ESV

Key Points:

- **We Need Wisdom, Not Just Information** — The Information Age promised that access to more knowledge would solve our problems and improve our lives. But knowledge without character usually leads to curse, not blessing — a thief with knowledge is just a better thief. What our age actually produces is not wisdom but “factoids and infobits”: disconnected pieces of information that have no power to form character or change lives. What we desperately need is not more information but wisdom — and Proverbs exists precisely to give it to us.
- **Proverbs Is Written to Make Us Wise** — The prologue of Proverbs ([1:1–7](#)) is structured as an inclusio — “wisdom” appears in verse 2 and the summary verse 7, bracketing everything in between. The book’s stated purpose is to know wisdom, to receive instruction in wise dealing, and to give prudence to the simple and the young. Wisdom in Proverbs is comprehensive: nine different terms are used in these seven verses, showing that wisdom touches every area of life — not just “spiritual” matters but relationships, business, speech, character, and daily conduct.
- **Wisdom Is Ethical, Available, and a Lifelong Quest** — True wisdom is inherently ethical: it trains us in “righteousness, justice, and equity” ([v3](#)) because it flows from God and reflects His unchanging character. Wisdom is not the product of IQ or age — it is available to the simple and the young, while a person with a high IQ who willfully rejects God can remain a fool. And wisdom is never finished: even “the wise” are called to “hear and increase in learning” ([v5](#)). The way of wisdom is a lifelong journey, not a destination.

- **Wisdom Teaches Us to Read and Listen Well** — Verse 6 ([Prov 1:6](#)) tells us that wisdom enables a person “to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles.” A wise person learns to read and listen correctly — to discern what is actually being communicated, to sort truth from error, and to cut through the emotionally manipulative doublespeak that characterizes so much of our cultural moment. Crucially, proverbs often come in riddles that require slow thought and meditation. True wisdom cannot be downloaded or generated by an AI chatbot — it requires patient, unhurried reflection.
- **The Fear of the Lord Is the Beginning — and the Soil — of Wisdom** — [Proverbs 1:7](#) and [9:10](#) both anchor wisdom in the fear of the Lord — and this is a consistent theme across Scripture ([Job 28:28](#); [Ps 111:10](#); [Prov 15:33](#)). The fear of the Lord is not a cowering terror: in Christ, God is our Father, and perfect love drives out that kind of fear ([1 Jn 4:17–18](#)). Rather, the fear of the Lord is a proper recognition of God’s holy glory, power, and sovereignty — the awe that is appropriate before a consuming fire ([Heb 12:28–29](#)). It is to love and obey God, knowing that His commands are for our good ([Dt 10:12–13](#)), and to hate evil as God hates it ([Prov 8:13](#)). This fear is not the “advanced” level of wisdom — it is its very beginning and foundation.
- **Christ Is the Wisdom of God** — At the Table, we are reminded that Jesus Christ “became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” ([1 Cor 1:30](#)). All true wisdom finds its source and summit in Him. We do not come to the study of Proverbs merely to improve ourselves — we come to be conformed to Christ, the one in whom are hidden “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” ([Col 2:3](#)). The way of wisdom is the way of blessing ([Ps 112:1](#); [128:1](#)) — and that way runs through the fear of the Lord and trust in His Son.

Discussion Questions:

- Bret opened by observing that the Information Age promised that more access to knowledge would make our lives better — but that what we are actually awash in is “factoids and infobits” rather than wisdom. Do you agree with that diagnosis? Where do you see the most evidence of it in our culture? In your own life?
- Bret said that “knowledge without character usually leads to curse, not blessing — a thief with knowledge is just a better thief.” What is the difference between information and wisdom? Can you think of examples — from history, current events, or personal experience — where knowledge without character proved destructive rather than beneficial?
- [Proverbs 1:2–6](#) uses nine different terms to describe wisdom, showing that it encompasses every area of life — not just “spiritual” matters. What does it mean practically that wisdom is comprehensive? How should that change the way we approach everyday decisions about money, relationships, work, speech, and time?
- Proverbs says wisdom is available to “the simple” and “the youth” ([v4](#)) — meaning it is not determined by IQ or age. The only person closed off from wisdom is the fool who willfully rejects God. What is the difference between being simple (inexperienced, naïve) and being a fool? Have you seen examples of young people who were genuinely wise, or older people who remained foolish? What made the difference?

- Verse 5 ([Prov 1:5](#)) says that even “the wise” should “hear and increase in learning.” Bret noted that wisdom is a lifelong journey. What does that mean for the way we should approach our remaining years? What habits or practices most help you grow in wisdom over time? What most hinders that growth?
- Bret observed that proverbs often come as riddles that require slow, patient thought — and that no AI chatbot can acquire or give true wisdom, because wisdom requires careful meditation. We live in an age that trains us to expect instant answers. Where do you feel the tension between that expectation and the patient, unhurried reflection that wisdom actually requires? What would it look like to resist that pressure?
- [Proverbs 1:7](#) says “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” — not the advanced level, but the very starting point. What does it say about our culture’s approach to wisdom that the fear of God is typically the first thing excluded? What does it say about churches where practical wisdom is often taught as if it were separable from theology and the knowledge of God?
- Bret distinguished between a cowering, slave-like fear of God (which [1 John 4:17–18](#) says perfect love drives out) and the proper fear of the Lord — awe at His holy power and glory, love and obedience toward Him, and hatred of evil. How would you describe the difference in your own words? Which of these do you think is more present in your own relationship with God right now?
- [Deuteronomy 10:12–13](#) says that fearing the Lord means loving Him, walking in His ways, and keeping His commandments — “for your good.” Bret emphasized that wisdom is knowing the commands of God are for our blessing, not our constraint. Where do you find it hardest to believe that God’s ways are genuinely for your good? What would it look like to bring the fear of the Lord to bear on that specific area?
- Bret noted that we are tempted to fear man and disobey God — to go along with the crowd rather than walk in wisdom. Where do you feel that pressure most acutely in your own context? What does [Psalm 112:1](#) and [128:1](#) — “Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD” — have to say to that temptation?
- If the fear of the Lord is the beginning or the gate to the way of wisdom, how can you make sure that the remaining teachings on various wise practices for life do not become techniques, but are always linked to walking with Christ?

For Further Study:

- Read [Proverbs 1:1–7](#) slowly and repeatedly this week, noting each of the nine terms used to describe wisdom (wisdom, instruction, insight, understanding, prudence, knowledge, discretion, learning, guidance). Look up each one in a Bible dictionary or commentary. What does each term add to your understanding of what wisdom is and what it covers?
- Watch [After Hours](#) (available Tuesday) to discover ways to read, study, and meditate on Proverbs fruitfully.

- Study the “fear of the Lord” theme across the wisdom literature: [Job 28:28](#), [Psalm 111:10](#), [Proverbs 1:7](#), [9:10](#), [15:33](#). What is consistent across all five texts? What does each passage add? Then read [1 John 4:17–18](#) and [Hebrews 12:28–29](#) alongside them. How do these New Testament texts help you hold together the love of God and the fear of God without collapsing one into the other?
- Meditate on [1 Corinthians 1:18–31](#) — Paul’s great passage on the wisdom of God versus the wisdom of the world. How does the cross expose the bankruptcy of worldly wisdom? In what sense is Christ crucified “the wisdom of God” (v24)? How does verse 30 — “Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God” — reframe the entire Proverbs project as ultimately pointing to Him?
- This week, choose one area of your life where you have been relying on your own instincts, cultural assumptions, or conventional wisdom rather than seeking God’s wisdom. Bring it before God in prayer, asking Him to give you the fear of the Lord and the wisdom that flows from it. Consider asking a trusted brother or sister in Christ to speak into that area as well.
- Visit the church website to explore teachings organized by [series](#), by [Scripture](#), or by [topic](#) for deeper study of [wisdom and knowledge](#), [character](#), and [godliness](#).