

The Book of Proverbs

Lesson 1: The Fear of the Lord, the Beginning of Wisdom -- Proverbs 1:1–

33

Picture a father pulling a chair close to his son, the lamp burning low, the day's work finished, and the boy old enough now to make his own choices but young enough to still be shaped. The father does not begin with a list of rules. He begins with a longing. He wants this child, more than anything, to live well, to walk through a world full of glittering wrong turns and somehow choose the path of life. So he opens his mouth and the words come out as poetry, short and sharp and memorable, the kind of sayings a person can carry in his pocket for a lifetime. That is the scene behind the Book of Proverbs, and the moment you open it, you are invited to take the empty chair.

Most of us have wanted wisdom at some point, usually right after we needed it. We have stood at the wreckage of a decision and thought, if only I had known, if only someone had told me. Proverbs is God's gracious answer to that ache. It is not a book of secrets reserved for the brilliant or the lucky. It is a book for the simple, for the young, for anyone humble enough to admit they do not have it all figured out. And here is the surprising news of the very first chapter: wisdom is not first a matter of intelligence. It is a matter of the heart, and of where that heart bows.

But before we get swept up, the chapter slows us down with an honest word about what a proverb actually is. These are not magic spells or guaranteed contracts with God. They are observations of how life generally goes under the good order of the God who made it. The diligent usually prosper; the lazy usually want. The truthful are usually trusted; the deceiver is usually found out. Usually. The book of Job and the cross of Christ both stand as solemn witnesses that the righteous can still suffer. So we come to Proverbs not to extract promises God owes us, but to gain skill for living wisely in the world He governs.

And the doorway to all of it, the single hinge on which the whole book swings, is stated plainly in verse seven: the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge. Not the fear that makes you run and hide, but the reverent, trusting awe that finally takes God seriously, that bows the knee and bends the will and says, You are God and I am not. Everything wise grows from that root. Everything foolish grows from forgetting it. In this lesson we are going to stand at that doorway together and ask what it would mean, today, to truly fear the Lord and so begin to be wise.

Group Discussion: What is the difference between being merely smart and being genuinely wise, and can you think of a person whose life shows that the two are not the same?

Personal Reflection: Where in your own life right now are you most tempted to lean on your own understanding instead of beginning with a reverent trust in God, and what would change if the fear of the Lord shaped that area?

Read Proverbs 1:1–33

Study Questions

1. According to Proverbs 1:1–6, what are the stated purposes of these proverbs, and what do these aims tell us about what wisdom is meant to do in a person's actual daily life?
2. Verses 1:1–6 say even the wise can grow wiser. Where have you been tempted to think you have already learned enough, and what would it look like for you to stay teachable?
3. What does it mean that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge in 1:7, and how is this reverent awe different from mere terror or from simply being afraid of God?
4. Think honestly about your own heart in 1:7. In what specific decision this past week did the fear of the Lord shape what you did, and where was it missing?
5. In 1:8–9, why does the father compare a parent's instruction to a graceful garland and a chain about the neck, and what does this teach about how God intends wisdom to be passed down?

6. Reflecting on 1:8–9, who has been a faithful voice of instruction in your life, and how have you been honoring or neglecting the wisdom they offered you?
7. In 1:10–19, how does the father describe the enticement of sinners and the end of those who are greedy for gain, and what makes their invitation so dangerous to the simple?
8. Looking at 1:10–19, what is one ‘come with us’ invitation pulling at you right now, and how does seeing where that road ends help you say no?
9. In 1:20–33, wisdom herself cries aloud in the streets and warns those who refuse her. What does this passage teach about God’s genuine, universal call, about real human responsibility to respond or refuse, and about why the fear of the Lord is the foundation that holds a whole life together?
10. Looking back across all of Proverbs 1, name one specific way Jesus, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom, is forming you through this passage, and what is the first step of obedience you will take this week?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: James 1:5, asking God for wisdom; Psalm 111:10, the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom; Matthew 7:24–27, the wise and foolish builders; Colossians 2:3, in

Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom; Romans 15:4, the Old Testament written for our instruction

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