

## “Wisdom & Warnings” (The Quest for Wisdom)

Proverbs 1:1-7 on June 14, 2020



Please read Proverbs 1:1-7 before going further in this transcript.

Last week Pastor Albin kicked off our Summer Sermon Series on the book of Proverbs. He brought us a good sermon on “Trusting God Even When It’s Difficult.” If you missed it last week, it’s available on our website. Today, we’re going to look at Proverbs 1:1-7. And as we do that, we’ll also do a little bit of an overview of WHO wrote the book of Proverbs and HOW we can make the most of the wisdom it contains. Raise your hand if you agree that our world is in desperate need of wisdom today? COVID-19 has caused us to need wisdom. The racial tensions that surround us have caused us to need lots of wisdom. Even our plans to reopen our church building have shown us our incredibly great need for wisdom. As we journey along on this quest for wisdom, there is something that we should make clear: our quest is not just for intellectual knowledge that we can learn and come to master. Not even close! Our quest is for wisdom, wisdom that must be hard-won, over a lifetime of seeking. To be sure, wisdom is a quality of right thinking, BUT it is also a quality of right behavior and obedience to God’s will. To put it another way, “Wisdom is for disciples only!”<sup>1</sup> It’s not for mere curiosity seekers or passersby who just want to dip their toes in the water. “Becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus together” involves a lifelong quest for God’s wisdom.

How well would you say that you know the book of Proverbs? If you have been reading the Bible for a while, odds are that you have read through the book of Proverbs more than once, perhaps MANY times. So, if I were to read off a list of wise sayings, some from the book of Proverbs, and others from say... Benjamin Franklin, do you think you could tell them apart? Well just for fun, let’s find out just how well we know the book of Proverbs, by playing a little game called: “Bible or Benjamin’s.” As you read through each of these wise sayings, I want you to vote. If you think the wise saying is from the Bible, I want you to raise your right hand, as though you were swearing on the Bible. If you think the wise saying was written by Benjamin Franklin, I want you to “dole out the Benjamin’s.” (slide the fingers from your right hand across the top of the palm of your left hand) DON’T CHEAT and look at the answers in the footnote until AFTER you’ve voted on all 8.



- 1) A gentle tongue can break a bone.
- 2) An oz. of prevention is worth a lb. of cure.<sup>2</sup>
- 3) Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, & wise.
- 4) Better a neighbor nearby than a relative far away.
- 5) Diligence is the mother of good luck.
- 6) Like vinegar poured on a wound, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.<sup>3</sup>
- 7) The leech has 2 daughters. “Give! Give!” they cry.
- 8) He that lies down with dogs, shall rise up with fleas.<sup>4</sup>



I wanted us to play this game for two reasons. For one, to whet our appetite for our summer in Proverbs. Proverbs 22:18 reminds us, “for it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart and have all of them ready on your lips.” It’s good for us to have these proverbs from God’s Word committed to memory. Not so that we can show off, but so that we can have them ready as “words to live by.” The second reason I wanted us to play this game was to illustrate that few, if any of us, know the proverbs perfectly. Now, I realize that some of you probably got all 8 of these correct. But if we had had more time, and went through 20-30 of these, I’m guessing that none of us, would have gotten all of them right. Regardless, we all have something that we can learn from the Proverbs. Proverbs 1:4-5 reminds us that the Proverbs are, “for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young—let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get

<sup>1</sup> Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1964 (2008 format), p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> By the way, we tend to think of this related to our health, but Franklin was likely referring to fire prevention.

<sup>3</sup> What a timely reminder when so many people around us are mourning and grieving hard things.

<sup>4</sup> Remember, DON’T look at these answers until AFTER you have voted on all 8. (The answers are in the very last footnote, at the end of this transcript.)

guidance.”<sup>5</sup> So whether we are simple, or young, or wise, or discerning, each one of us should humbly admit, that we have something more that we can learn from the book of Proverbs. In fact,

**The book of Proverbs was compiled...**

**1 ...for those who are teachable.** So Brother or Sister in Christ, let's get ready for the book of Proverbs to teach us. This is an upper-level class on Wisdom, Wisdom 401! Let's pay close attention and dig in deep, so that we can receive the maximum benefit of these wise teachings that have been compiled for us in God's Word. The Purpose of Proverbs is spelled out for us, at the very beginning of the book. Proverbs 1:2 says, “for gaining wisdom and instruction...” This word “wisdom” shows up over 40 times in the book of Proverbs.<sup>6</sup> The treasure hidden within the book of Proverbs is wisdom!<sup>7</sup> Proverbs is filled with practical insight for godly living. Not just intellectual data or clever soundbites, but wisdom which “includes skill in living – following God's design and...avoiding...pitfalls.”<sup>8</sup> **Proverbs is a collection of wisdom & warnings!** (This is the title of this summer's sermon series.) Imagine the skill of a talented woodworker or a craftsman. This is the kind of skill that Proverbs offers us, skill for good, godly living. Brother or Sister in Christ, as we are “becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus together,” we need the wisdom of Proverbs to help us succeed.<sup>9</sup> The book of Proverbs was compiled for those who are teachable.

Proverbs 1:1 begins, “The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel.” Solomon is a fascinating man; he lived an incredibly interesting life. He was a king.<sup>10</sup> He was not only the son of David, but also the son of Bathsheba. Solomon is the one that God choose to build His temple in Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup> Solomon also happened to be one of the wisest people ever to walk on the face of this planet. In 1 Kings 4:29-32 we learn that, “God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt...He spoke three thousand proverbs....”<sup>12</sup> Now, interestingly enough, the Holy Spirit did not preserve all 3,000 of these proverbs in the Bible for us.<sup>13</sup> But we do have a good chunk of them, and we can assume that God preserved, protected, and passed along the ones that He wanted us to have access to. The fact is, Solomon was not the only contributor to the book of Proverbs. **The book of Proverbs was compiled...**

**2 ...under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.** The reason I'm using this word “compiled” is that the book of Proverbs actually has multiple AUTHORS. This is similar to what we learned last summer during our series on the Psalms. Much like David did not write all 150 of the Psalms<sup>14</sup>, so also Solomon did not write all 31 chapters of Proverbs. Proverbs is actually a huge collection of wise sayings that was compiled over time. So, even though Psalm 1:1 begins by saying, “The proverbs of Solomon,” only about half of them were written directly by him. Even a quick skimming over of the 31 chapters makes it clear that Solomon partnered with other wise people like Agur and King Lemuel<sup>15</sup>, and so on. In other words, many of the proverbs in the book of Proverbs, are wise sayings that were

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<sup>5</sup> One of the most helpful assets to any disciple is a teachable spirit. The fact is, becoming old does not necessarily mean that we have yet become wise. Furthermore, being young does not necessarily mean that we lack wisdom. Consider 1 Timothy 4:12.

<sup>6</sup> *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1031 footnote on Proverbs 1:2.

<sup>7</sup> See Proverbs 1:2a. And still further wisdom (1:5). Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1964 (2008 format), p. 55. Proverbs 1:7 book-ends the opening preamble with the same phrase, “wisdom and instruction.”

<sup>8</sup> See Exodus 31:1-5. *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1031 footnote on Proverbs 1:2.

<sup>9</sup> See James 1:5, 3:13, 17.

<sup>10</sup> The King of Judah.

<sup>11</sup> To be clear, Jesus is greater than Solomon. See Luke 11:31, 1 Corinthians 1:30, and Colossians 2:3. Therefore, as much as we seek to learn from Solomon's wisdom recorded in God's Holy Word, we do so in the broader context of Jesus' greatness.

<sup>12</sup> See also 2 Chronicles 1 and 1 Kings 3:1-15, especially verses 5, 9, 11-12. Arguably, Solomon may have also authored Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes, as well as Psalm 72 and 127.

<sup>13</sup> I say this just due to the simple math. The 31 chapters of Proverbs would each need to be almost 100 verses each in order to multiply anywhere close to the number 3,000, which clearly, they don't. Even if we add in the 12 chapters of Ecclesiastes and the 8 chapters of Song of Solomon, which were arguably written by Solomon, we would still fall well short of 3,000.

<sup>14</sup> Many were written by David and some many were written for him, but many others were simply written by other authors and included in the Psalter.

<sup>15</sup> Agur = “AY ger”, Lemuel = “LEM you uhl” Severance, W. M., & Eddinger, T. (1997). In *That's easy for you to say: your quick guide to pronouncing Bible names* (p. 19). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

collected over the years. Then they were sifted/assimilated into a master collection in the book of Proverbs.<sup>16</sup> ALL of this happened under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the 31 chapters of Proverbs, are actually a grand compilation of 7 different collections<sup>18</sup>, all brought together under the canon of Scripture.<sup>19</sup>

Even as we consider this idea of multiple contributors to the book of Proverbs, it may cause us to ask the question: So what's the difference between the wise sayings collected INSIDE the Bible and other wise sayings OUTSIDE the Bible? Throughout human history, many wise teachers and elders have been blessed by God with common grace wisdom. Many of their wise sayings have been written down and recorded. And frankly, much of that wisdom has been very beneficial to mankind and civilization as we know it. This resonates with the sermon from 2 weeks ago on "Submitting to Authorities." We talked about how God provides common grace wisdom to the governing officials in our world, even those who do not follow Him. Their ability to govern is one of God's good gifts to mankind.

**So what makes the wisdom in the book of Proverbs unique or special?** Two things.

**1. The wisdom in Proverbs is authoritative.** This is due to its distinct nature of being recorded in the canon of Scripture. Every wise saying contained within the book of Proverbs is inspired by the Holy Spirit. They are a matter of decree and command, not simply good advice to be evaluated or considered as one possible option.<sup>20</sup> This is what Proverbs 1:3 is driving at. The book of Proverbs is "for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair." Therefore, in contrast to the wise sayings of Benjamin Franklin or whoever else it may be, the wise sayings from the book of Proverbs speak on God's authority. God is the one who determines what is ultimately "right and just and fair."<sup>21</sup> We live in a day and age where many have deemed truth to be relative, to change based on each person's frame of reference. Put another way, one thing might be true for you, but that doesn't necessarily make it true for me. But God's Word speaks with the authority of absolute truth; the frame of reference is the LORD. The book of Proverbs is God's divine revelation. Certain things are absolutely, always wrong and certain things are absolutely always right. Why? Because the LORD says so. Secondly...

**2. The wisdom in Proverbs guides us toward godly living.** These are not just wise sayings with the pragmatic benefit of making our lives better and contributing to our personal health/happiness. The wisdom in Proverbs is directly related to the glory and goodness of God. In other words, God is glorified when we live according to the specific wisdom that He has revealed in the book of Proverbs. One Bible commentator, named Derek Kidner, says it this way: "the one Lord makes known his will, and thereby a single standard of what is wise and right... So a sense of purpose and calling lifts the teaching of Proverbs above the pursuit of success or tranquility, clear of the confines of a... dry moralism, into the realm of knowing the living God in all one's ways."<sup>22</sup> The book of Proverbs was compiled under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This leads us right into our final point for today. It's vital that we recognize an assumption that the book of Proverbs makes. **The book of Proverbs was compiled...**

**3 ...with a prerequisite: the fear of the LORD.** Proverbs 1:7 makes it clear, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge...." The "fear of the LORD" can be defined as: "A loving reverence for God that includes submission to his lordship and to the commands of His Word."<sup>23</sup> Reverence means RESPECT but it also means FEAR, it means trembling before the Almighty God. Reverence for God, fearing the LORD, is the prerequisite for this 400-level course on wisdom, in the book of Proverbs. (If you don't have this prerequisite, then you shouldn't take this course.) Let's not misunderstand the

<sup>16</sup> See Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1964 (2008 format), pp. 17, 22, and 24.

<sup>17</sup> See 2 Timothy 3:16-17 but also consider 4:13 as well as 1 Kings 11:41, 2 Chronicles 16:11, and Luke 1:1-4.

<sup>18</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *NICOT, The Book of Proverbs: chapters 1-15*, Eerdman's, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004, pp. vii-viii.

<sup>19</sup> Learn more from the book by Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1964 (2008 format), pp. 22 and 24.

<sup>20</sup> Consider Proverbs 2:6 and 30:5-6.

<sup>21</sup> In fact, Proverbs 30:5 reminds us that, "Every word of God is flawless...."

<sup>22</sup> Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1964 (2008 format), p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, IL, 2011, p. 1031 footnote on Proverbs 1:7.

word “beginning” here. “Beginning” does NOT refer to an initial first step that we take, and then leave behind us. “Beginning” with the “fear of the LORD” is “the 1<sup>st</sup> controlling principle”; it is a long-lasting, awe-struck reverence for God.<sup>24</sup> In other words, knowing God’s wisdom, begins and then continues forward, with an ongoing reverence for God.

But not everyone fears the LORD. Proverbs 1:7 goes on to describe our other choice: “...but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”<sup>25</sup> Without a healthy dose of the “fear of the LORD,” we will never gain the wisdom and instruction that we need in this life. In fact, we can’t even BEGIN to have the knowledge that we’ll need. So if you don’t fear the LORD, if you don’t tremble before His awesome power and might, then don’t bother with the Proverbs. Don’t waste your time; the wisdom of Proverbs is not for mere curiosity seekers. And don’t waste God’s time; He is looking for devoted followers.

As we wrap up this opening text on wisdom, let’s conclude with an important question:

**How do we get wisdom?**<sup>26</sup> My prayer is that anyone who is listening to this message from Proverbs today, will decide that they want God’s wisdom. But how do we actually get wisdom? How do we attain it? Here’s some GOOD NEWS: Wisdom is available for ANYONE who wants it. Rather frankly, the opening 7 verses of Proverbs make it clear that even fools, even simpletons are invited. As we ask the question: “How do we get wisdom?” let’s consider an answer that we find in Proverbs 2. Proverbs 2 says that we get wisdom in 2 ways. First of all,

**1) Wisdom comes from God alone.** Proverbs 2:6 says, “For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.” So if we sincerely want to get wisdom, then we should ask God to for it. He alone is the source of true wisdom. We can’t drum it up on our own effort; and we can’t develop our own intellect to become smart enough.<sup>27</sup> James 1:5-6 says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.” In other words, in order to get wisdom, we need to get faith first. We need to believe in God. Proverbs 2 also suggests a second way to get wisdom.

**2) Wisdom comes by diligently seeking.** Proverbs 2:4-5 says, “and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.”<sup>28</sup> If we sincerely want to get wisdom, then we should diligently seek after it. God wants to reveal His wisdom to us today, that’s why it was recorded for us in the book of Proverbs, but are we genuinely seeking it? If we truly desire to attain God’s wisdom, then it begins with the fear of the LORD.<sup>29</sup> Without the fear of God in us, these Proverbs won’t really help. They won’t really penetrate and guide you as they were intended to.<sup>30</sup>

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:7) So, what do you say? Will you despise God’s wisdom and instruction? Or, will you fear the LORD and get the wisdom that you need for this life? The way of wisdom, the beginning of knowledge, is the fear of the LORD.<sup>31</sup>

*This sermon was preached via livestream at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji  
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<sup>24</sup> Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1964 (2008 format), p. 56.

<sup>25</sup> Proverbs 1:29-32 says it this way, “since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD. Since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes. For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them.”

<sup>26</sup> See Proverbs 4:5-9.

<sup>27</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:14 teaches us that, “The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God... and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.” The same Holy Spirit who inspired the book of Proverbs, is the very same Holy Spirit who we need to dwell within us. We need God’s Spirit to guide us into wisdom because He alone is the source of wisdom.

<sup>28</sup> Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1964 (2008 format), p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> Consider the story of God-fearing Cornelius in acts 10:1-2 and following.

<sup>30</sup> In fact, here’s what the book of Proverbs says about its impact on someone who doesn’t know God: “Like a thornbush in a drunkard’s hand is a proverb in the mouth of a fool.” (Proverbs 26:9) In other words, a drunkard grabs onto a thornbush but doesn’t have the sense to let go and it cuts his hand all to shreds. It’s the same way with the Proverbs, if we just grab onto them and don’t have any respect for them, don’t have any reverence for the power of God behind them, then they won’t help us at all. The Proverbs will only serve to reveal our foolishness. They’ll do more damage than good.

<sup>31</sup> Here are the answers to the “Bible or Benjamin’s quiz.” 1) Proverbs 25:15 2) Benjamin’s 3) Benjamin’s 4) Proverbs 27:10 5) Benjamin’s 6) Proverbs 25:20 7) Proverbs 30:15 8) Benjamin’s