

In Need of Wisdom

Proverbs 1:1-7

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Good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met, my name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here. And friends, it's great to be with you. If you are a guest or a visitor, welcome. We're glad that you're joining us and glad that we can gather and come to God's Word. And this morning, we're starting a new sermon series for the summer. So if you've been with us for the last number of years, really for the last decade, every summer or almost every summer, we've spent our summers in the Psalms. And we've just kind of picked and chosen various Psalms to preach through during the summer. And we've got about 50 left. So we're almost to the end. I counted the other day. We're close.

But this summer, we're not going to move towards the end because this is one of the summers where we're going to take a little break from the Psalms. And instead of looking at the Psalms, we're going to look at the Proverbs. And so, if you have a Bible, you can turn to Proverbs chapter 1. Proverbs is in the middle of your Bible, middle of the Old Testament, comes right after the Psalms, right before the Prophets. So it should be fairly easy to find. But we're going to look at the Proverbs this summer. And I imagine that as we do so, many of you are probably very familiar with the Proverbs. Maybe you've read through them all. Maybe you've done that reading program, like the monthly or the daily reading program of Proverbs every day, you know, because there's 31 Proverbs. So it works out for most of the months of the year, right? You can do chapter 1 on day 1, chapter 2, etc. And that's a great way to do it. Maybe you've just kind of picked and chosen various Proverbs, right? And you've meditated on them. You've thought of them. They've been a comfort to you, maybe in times of difficulty or struggle. But I imagine that as you've gone through the Proverbs, if you've read through them, especially from beginning to end, they can feel kind of like a scattershot, right? Not a lot of continuity from one verse to the next. Because one verse, you could be talking about money. And then the next verse is talking about our words. And then the next verse is talking about family and then envy and then all sorts of things, right? And it feels like there's not really any cohesion within a chapter.

If you felt that, it's not just you. Okay? That's actually how Proverbs is structured. They're Proverbs. They kind of just get thrown out there, right? There are various phrases, various ideas, various words of wisdom. And so, because of that, this summer as we go through Proverbs, we're not going to be taking it chapter by chapter. We're going to be taking up various themes and topics that appear in Proverbs. And so, that means we're going to be grabbing from all over the book. And this morning, what we're going to do to begin with, before we dive into the various topics like friendship or family or envy or pride, those various things, before we do that, we're going to look at the overarching theme of Proverbs, which is the theme of wisdom. And so, this morning, our sermon is really almost like an introduction to the entirety of our sermon series. We're going to deal with financial dealings. We're going to deal with our words, all those sorts of things. But this morning, we're going to talk about wisdom. And wisdom is the overarching theme because in every topic that we see in the book of Proverbs, we need wisdom to know how to address that topic properly. So, we'll talk about wisdom by looking at the first seven verses of chapter one, and this is probably the only time we're going to be reading seven verses consecutively from a particular chapter, because after chapter 1, we start getting that scattershot. So, Proverbs 1, beginning in verse 1:

“The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:
To know wisdom and instruction,
to understand words of insight,
to receive instruction in wise dealing,
in righteousness, justice, and equity;
to give prudence to the simple,
knowledge and discretion to the youth—
Let the wise hear and increase in learning,
and the one who understands obtain guidance,
to understand a proverb and a saying,
the words of the wise and their riddles.
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (ESV)

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, as we come to your word, we ask that you would give us wisdom, for we are in need of it. We need your truth. We need your guidance. Apart from your work, Father, we would be blind to your ways. And so, we ask that you would open our eyes, and that you would meet with us, and that everything that is said and done here will give you glory. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

The Purpose of Wisdom

So, why is wisdom so important? I mean, Proverbs chapter 3, verses 13-15, tell us that wisdom is greater profit than gold, that it's better than silver, that it's more precious than jewels, that nothing compares to it. You see, the perspective of Proverbs is that there is a premium put on wisdom. And it actually makes sense, right? Because we need wisdom every single day. Think about all the choices, all the demands, all the things that bombard us in our daily life. We need wisdom to sort through them. Now, often, of course, in our day-to-day life, we've experienced the mundane, right? The insignificant, things that don't really take a lot of thought or any wisdom at all, right? What time to get up in the morning, what to eat for breakfast, whether I have an omelet or pancakes, right? The route that I take to work. We're making hundreds of amoral decisions every single day. There is no right or wrong, right? Whether I want avocado toast or an omelet, that's not right or wrong. It's just, of course, avocado toast is better, right? So, right? But there's no right or wrong there. They're amoral. But the truth is that we do have decisions that we have to make that have significant moral consequences. And oftentimes, when we're confronted by those things, we're not sure what we're supposed to do. We don't know what is right or wrong. We don't know what is true or false. We don't know what the impact could have on ourselves or our families or our friends.

And so, when we're confronted by those issues, what do we do? Well, I think if you're like me, which I imagine many of you are, you start to gather information, right? And you try to increase your knowledge and you get more and more data in the hopes that more information will lead you to knowing what to do and what is right. So, we Google something or we ask Claude a question and he tells us what we're supposed to do and we move forward, right? That's how we move forward with these difficult decisions. We just gather more and more and more information. And we have information. We have knowledge. Researchers tell us that the average American takes in 74 gigabytes of data every 24 hours. Now, that's roughly the equivalent of 100,000 words or like listening to 16 movies every day. That's how much

data we're taking in in a 24-hour period. We're bombarded with information, with data. We have access to knowledge at our literal fingertips that previous generations could have never comprehended.

And yet, for all that data, for all that knowledge, for all that information, we still often don't know what to do with it, do we? We still need wisdom. Because we are lacking in wisdom. Because wisdom isn't simply knowledge. The British pastor Charles Spurgeon once said that "wisdom is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. But to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom." And he's right, right? I mean, did you hear what he said? There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. And we've experienced this, right? We've seen this before. That expert in a particular field, that person who knows a lot about a lot, but doesn't know how to use that knowledge. The intelligent fool, we've experienced that. We know what that is. Wisdom is not simply knowledge.

So if wisdom isn't knowledge, then what is it? What is the purpose of wisdom? Where will it come from? What is the picture of it? That's what we're going to talk about this morning. So the purpose of wisdom, Kevin Van Hooser, a theologian, said this: "Wisdom means knowing what to do in a particular situation in order to glorify God and follow Jesus in ways that befit faithful disciples." So what it means to be wise is to make a decision to live in a particular way so that it gives glory to God and befits what it means to be a follower of God. It's a pretty good definition. Or to put it more succinctly, the way that the Old Testament theologian Jack Collins, one of my seminary professors, put it, he said, "wisdom is the art of godly living." Wisdom is the art of godly living. That wisdom is living in a particular way so that in this moment, in a situation, we would glorify God. And really, that's what we're after, isn't it? I mean, every time that we ask, "what should I do? What is God's will for my life?" We ask these questions all the time, right? Graduates. You just graduated high school or college and you're wondering, "what is God's will for my life?" And it's not just graduates, right? It's people who are entering into the workforce. It's people who have been in the workforce. It's retirees. "What is God's will for my life?" And when we are asking these questions, what we are asking for is God's wisdom.

The Picture of Wisdom

Now, listen, wisdom is situationally oriented. There's not an owner's manual for every decision, for every situation. Now, I'm not saying there aren't directives. There are, right? God says, "do not murder", "do not covet", "love your neighbor as yourself." There are directives, but often we're confronted with situations where we're not sure how that directive should be appropriated, right? "What does it look like to love my neighbor in this moment?" "Does it mean that I help them? Does it mean that I'd not help them?" "Who are the relationships I'm supposed to have?" These are the questions that we ask that are situationally oriented. I mean, let me give you an example straight out of Proverbs, a proverb we're going to talk about later in the summer. In Proverbs 26, verses 4 and 5, the writer says this, "answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself." That's verse 4. Then verse 5 says, "answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes." Verse 4, verse 5, what did we hear? Don't answer a fool, answer a fool. So, which is it, right? And that's the point. It depends. It depends. Sometimes answer the fool. Sometimes keep your mouth closed. And we need wisdom to know when. We need wisdom to know how to glorify God in our lives. That's the purpose of wisdom, to glorify God.

But we're also given a picture of what this wisdom is going to look like. As we embrace that wisdom is for the glory of God, we see what it looks like in verse 2. It's instruction and insight. Verse 3, it's righteousness, justice, equity. Verse 4, it's prudence, knowledge, and discretion. So, these are the characteristics of wisdom playing out in our lives. I just want to take a couple of them. We're not going to look at every one, but just two of them. Instruction. So, that means training. You see, wisdom doesn't arrive out of the blue. We don't just wake up in the morning and we get into some sort of, like, you know, yoga pose and we, you know, meditate and we're struck by lightning and poof, now we're wise, right? Like, that doesn't happen. No, wisdom is trained. It's developed. It's learned. We actually grow in wisdom. It takes training and understanding. It takes instruction. God's instruction. But wisdom also is knowledge, right? We saw that. That's what he says. Information is needed. Now, this doesn't contradict what I said earlier. Knowledge alone doesn't equate to wisdom, but wisdom needs knowledge for it to be wisdom. Knowledge about who God is. Knowledge about his instructions. Knowledge about his world. Wisdom uses knowledge for the glory of God and so that we would embody righteousness and justice and equity. That's the picture we have of wisdom.

Now, notice this picture differs with the fool. So, in verse 7, we're told that the fool despised wisdom and instruction. Now, in our day, I think when we think about fools or foolishness, we often think about the foolish as being those things that are silly or ridiculous, right? The absurd or the ill-advised, right? Things that have really little consequence. That's how we often think about that word, or at least that's how I have. But when the Bible or Proverbs speaks about the fool or the foolish, it's speaking about things that have eternal significance, that have serious consequences. Because we're told that the fool or the foolish hates the Lord's wisdom and turns from his instruction. And that's in contrast to the wise. The wise loves God's leading. The wise receives his direction. The wise embraces his guidance. That's the picture of wisdom. It's the person who not only is seeking to glorify God in all of their life decisions, in their choices, in their days, but it's also the person who is seeking to embody that, who's embracing the Lord's guidance, his direction, his leading. That's the picture of wisdom.

The Pursuit of Wisdom

So we have the picture of wisdom. We have the purpose of wisdom. But then how do we gain this? Like, how do we pursue it? Well, the pursuit of wisdom begins in verse 7 with the fear of the Lord. That's what we're told. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." And in context, knowledge here is tied to wisdom. But even more explicit in chapter 9, verse 10, we're told the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. So what we're being told is that to pursue true wisdom, it begins with our relationship with God. Now, that language of beginning doesn't simply mean a starting point. It's more than that. It is that, but it's actually more than that because this word actually can mean foundation or source. And so the foundation of all wisdom, the source of true wisdom, comes from our relationship with the Lord. And so that means wisdom is radically relational. That apart from our relationship with the Lord, we will not gain this true wisdom. Now, as we realize that wisdom comes from God in our relationship with Him, that actually helps us. It helps us because it helps us to weed through the competing voices and forces that encourage us to a particular manner of life.

So think about all the sorts of decisions we have to make and all the sorts of the things that when we're trying to make a decision that are pulling at our minds and tugging at our hearts

and trying to hold to our affections, right? Like, “is this a relationship I want to enter into?” Think about all the competing forces. “Is this a decision that I need to make regarding my finances?” “Is this a decision I need to make regarding my family? Regarding my career?” All those sorts of things. There are so many things competing for our hearts and our attention and our affections and our minds and are trying to pull us in different ways. And so how do we know? How do we know what is the wise decision in that moment? Well, this is where our relationship with the Lord helps us because we can ask ourselves a diagnostic question. “Will this act, will this decision, will this thought or word, will it glorify God or not?” We just start right there. “Will this bring glory to the Lord?” If the answer is no, then we've got our decision. But then we can go farther. Is this flowing out of my relationship with him? Or is this simply me depending upon myself? Is this me exalting myself? Is this me indulging my flesh? Now, of course, what makes this difficult, what makes this difficult is that it's hard to discern when that pull is from the world or when it's from the flesh or when it's from the Lord, right? I mean, that's why we need wisdom. That's what makes it so difficult.

But here's where the picture of wisdom helps us because when we consider whether this is wise or foolish, whether it's from the Lord or from the world, we simply look at how God has instructed us, how he has guided us, what he's revealed to us in his word. So very simply, if this contradicts God's word, then it is not wise. It is by definition foolish. And so that's where we lean because God's word is the word of truth. It is the word of justice. It is the word of wisdom. And so whatever we're doing, whatever we're trying to decide upon, we look to God's word first. And as we look to God's word, it will instruct us and guide us and direct us. Now, it might not guide us and instruct us in ways that are easy or that are maybe enjoyable in the moment, but they are wise. That is where we lead. That is what we follow. His word is the word of wisdom.

Now, listen, as we pursue this wisdom from God, it's going to mean at least two things. It'll mean many things, but it's going to mean at least two. I'm just going to share two right now for you. It's going to require, if we're going to pursue wisdom, it's going to require us to be humble, specifically humble before the Lord, right? Because if we say that this biblical wisdom is not found in ourselves, it's not found in our own insight or our own knowledge or our own intelligence, but it's only found in our relationship with the Lord, then that means that we have to humble ourselves before the Lord. Even that language, the fear of the Lord, it's indicating that, right? Because the fear of the Lord, it doesn't mean terror, though, you know, if we were in His presence, we would certainly be terrified. His glory would be immense and beautiful, right? But what it's really getting at is more of an awe and a reverence. And when we're in the presence of someone or something that we have awe or reverence for, right, we aren't prideful in that moment. We're humble. I mean, think about who's a hero in your life? Who's someone that you respect and maybe that you've respected from a distance, and you would love to one day meet them and talk to them, and maybe they've been a mentor from a distance, and they don't even know you. You've never met them, but you got to spend time with them, right? Like, I was thinking about, like, if I got to spend 30 minutes with Wendell Berry, right, my favorite author, you know what I wouldn't do if I had 30 minutes with Wendell Berry? I wouldn't go, “hey, Wendell Berry, you're a beautiful author, an incredible poet, an amazing ethicist. You should take a look at my writing.” I would never do that, right? As though I have something to teach Wendell Berry.

Or maybe you're an athlete, right? You love soccer, and you get 20 minutes with Messi. You know the first thing you're not going to do? You're not going to talk about how you put in the upper 90 when you're 9, right? Because when you're in the presence of greatness, it humbles

you. And if this is true of, like, our heroes of this world, of writers, of athletes, of celebrities, how much more true of the God of the universe? That when we are in awe and reverence of him, we are going to be humbled by him. And so as we pursue wisdom, it's going to require humility. But second, the other thing about wisdom is that at times it's going to look like foolishness. That at times as we pursue wisdom to the world, we will look like fools. Because think about how true wisdom, God's wisdom, differs from the wisdom of the world, right? I mean, think about, like, what we heard in the Sermon on the Mount a couple series ago. Or what we heard in the book of Daniel, right? How the wisdom of God differed with the wisdom of the world. Money. Let's take money. The world tells us money is yours. And you have been given this money. You've worked hard. You've earned it. And you're to use this money for your own purposes, for any desire that you want, to buy up all the things that you want, your bank account, your 401k, your brokerage account, all the things in your house. They are yours to be enjoyed for the sake of yourself. But what does the Lord say? That actually none of it belongs to us. That it's all his. And that we are but stewards of these things. And yes, we have been given these things to provide for our families and provide for ourselves and those sorts of things. But also we have been given these things to be a blessing to others. And so give it away. To the world, that looks like foolishness, doesn't it? Or think about our relationships. Relationships, right? The world would say that we need to consider what we hold dear the most. What we long for. Our desires. That is what the world would say that we should be pursuing in a relationship. But what does the Lord say? Consider others' needs as more important than yourselves. Or think about love. It's not about self-pleasure. It's about sacrifice. Or how we even view one another. How we view women and men. That they are valued not because of what they produce, but simply because they are made in the image of God. In all the ways that the world would say, this is wise, the Lord says it's foolish. And in all the ways that the Lord says, this is wise, the world says it is foolish.

The wisdom of God is very, very different from the world. And we have to be ready for that. We need to acknowledge that because it would be way easier and more convenient and probably at times more pleasurable to embrace the wisdom of the world. But the Lord tells us that is foolish. The wisdom of God is very different from the world. And we see this most poignantly in the wisdom of the cross. Tobias prayed in his prayer this morning about how the wisdom of the cross looks like foolishness to the world, right? And the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1, "the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing. It's foolishness to the world. But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God." We preach Christ crucified. Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. If we want to know what wisdom looks like, we look at Jesus and wisdom is a dying Savior. That's what God tells us. That is wisdom. That what the world calls foolish, the cross and crucifixion and the death of one for the sake of those not deserving of that death, of that sacrifice. The Lord declares that is wisdom. And y'all, that is the very thing we need. That is the very thing we need.

We need the wisdom of God personified in Jesus. Because in the cross, Jesus did everything that we heard this morning. He glorified God. That he glorified God. This one that he was in perfect relationship with. He glorified God by going to the cross. He embraced what the world would call foolish and he followed God's plan for salvation. And that's what we're called to. Of course, we're not called to give ourselves for the redemption of others. We can't do that. And yet we are still called to live lives that begin in a relationship with God. That pursue wisdom that comes only from God. And we do it all for the glory of God. Friends, that is the wisdom of the Lord. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you. Thank you that you have revealed to us what is wise and foolish. What is true and good. And so we pray, Father, that you would help us. That we would hear your instruction. That we would see the ways that you lead. And that we would follow you. That we would follow after the wisdom of God and not the foolishness of this world or of our flesh. But instead, we would embrace you. The relationship we have with you that leads us in truth and wisdom. And so we pray, Father, lead us. Guide us. Show us again the wisdom of the cross. The wisdom that is Jesus. And we pray all this in Christ's name and God's people said together, Amen.