

# Wisdom For Life And Ministry

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.  
(Proverbs 1:7 ESV)*

*Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof leads others astray.  
(Proverbs 10:17 ESV)*

*‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.’  
(Job 28:28 ESV)*

*The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.  
(Matthew 12:42 ESV)*

## **Wisdom 101**

**April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

**Proverbs 1:1-7**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning church. I'd like to invite you to open your Bibles to Proverbs 1:1; that's on page 527 in your pew Bibles. We are starting something new today – we are beginning a walk through the wisdom section of Holy Scripture. Wisdom in the Bible has to do with how we live.

Tremper Longman III in his fantastic commentary on Job puts it this way. He says:

“The wise are those who know how to navigate life. They avoid pitfalls and maximize success. If an obstacle comes their way, they know the quickest way out of the mess. Thus they are in a position to give advice to others who are not as intelligent in life skills as they are. They can help those who falter.”<sup>1</sup>

So wise people understand how the universe is put together. They understand what's going on. They know where we are in the story. They know who God is, who we are and how God is rescuing us and restoring us through the person and work of Jesus Christ – and knowing THAT they are able to help and support other people.

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<sup>1</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Job* in Baker Commentary On The Old Testament Wisdom And Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 115.

And that is the GOAL for this series.

You heard me talking just a few minutes ago with Dr. Diane and Clarence Haak about the need for us to create a helping and supporting culture in our church. We've been blessed with great resources in this church in terms of helping and supporting – but a big piece of our resource pie in that department is moving to South Africa in just a few months. Dr. Craig and Rene Brannan are stepping out in faith and on mission and we as a church need to prepare for that. So we've been training a number of people that we hope will begin to serve as “skilled helpers” and “lay counsellors”. They aren't going to be doctors. They won't write prescriptions. But they will be trained in the WORKINGS and WISDOM of the COSMOS and therefore they will know how to NAVIGATE LIFE.

But of course it needs to be BIGGER even than 15-20 skilled helpers – ideally this is something that ALL OF US are going to be involved in. Jesus said that we – his disciples - are the SALT and LIGHT of the world – well SALT has to do with preserving people from life's corrupting influences. It has to do with avoiding pitfalls and snares. LIGHT has to do with guidance, truth and direction. Light helps you LOCATE the quickest way out of a mess doesn't it? So that's what we're talking about here and that's what this series is intending to accomplish. This is GENERAL TRAINING in the wisdom of God – and today we are going to begin at the beginning. Today we are going to be talking about WISDOM 101 – the foundation and starting place of all true wisdom in this world.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1 of Proverbs 1 and reading through verse 7.

This is God's Word to us:

1 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)

This is the word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

I won't spend a great deal of time introducing the Book of Proverbs because this isn't really a walk through the Book of Proverbs – it is a walk through the WISDOM teachings of the Bible – and the wisdom teachings are far broader than the Book of Proverbs. Proverbs is certainly a big part of it but it isn't the sum and total of what the Bible has to say. To really understand Biblical wisdom you would probably want to begin by reading Proverbs, Psalms and Song of Solomon – that would give you the basic outline and thrust. But then you would want to read Job and Ecclesiastes in order to deal with all of the common exceptions to everything you will have just learned about. And then you would want to read Jesus who brings resolution to all of those tensions and seeming contradictions. So that's why I said that we are going to be reading WIDER than just the Book of Proverbs in this series. Our TEXT is the wisdom literature as a whole but as I mentioned, it is important for us to begin at the beginning.

Our goal in this series is to become WISE PEOPLE. We want to learn how to navigate life in this world that we are living in and we want to help other people do the same. So what do we need to KNOW in order to do that? What do we need to UNDERSTAND in order to be WISE PEOPLE and HELPFUL GUIDES? That's the question we are working on today and the first thing comes directly out of the passage we just read.

### **To Be A “Wise” Person You Need To Understand This:**

#### **1. That God is the Master of the universe**

To be a wise person involves understanding FIRST OF ALL that GOD is the Master of the universe – that's what it means in the Bible to FEAR THE LORD.

All the wisdom books in the Bible make this point in one way or another. We just read it from Proverbs 1:7 but you can see the same thing in the Book of Job. Job 28:28 says:

“Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.” (Job 28:28 ESV)

Psalms 111:10 says:

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. (Psalm 111:10 ESV)

And the wise preacher in Ecclesiastes says:

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 ESV)

So that's the beginning of the matter – and that's the end of the matter. That's the sum and foundation of the whole:

FEAR GOD.

Turn away from evil. Keep his commandments. That's the first and biggest thing right there.

Now, people in our culture tend to have a hard time understanding what it means to “fear the Lord”. “Fear” is usually a bad thing for us so we need a little help from our friends here. Bruce Waltke says that wise people:

“believe his promises and love him; they believe his threats and fear him.”<sup>2</sup>

So just like a wise child believes that mom and dad will REWARD good behavior so too the wise child believes that mom and dad will punish bad behavior. Because they want the cookie they do what is right and because they don't want time out they avoid what is bad. That isn't the HIGHEST level of obedience and good behavior – but it is the beginning. It is the foundation.

Charles Bridges says that “The fear of the Lord is that affectionate reverence, by which the child of God bends himself humbly and carefully to his Father's law.”<sup>3</sup>

So – the fear of the Lord – is that basic understanding that there is a PARENT in the universe. The universe is like a house that has a MASTER. God is the Master. He RULES THE HOUSE.

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<sup>2</sup> Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 1-15* in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 101.

<sup>3</sup> As cited in Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 1-15* in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 101.

Every coherent worldview begins at precisely this point – not maybe with this conclusion – but with this basic deliberation. Every coherent worldview has to decide WHO IS THE HIGHEST REFERENCE POINT IN THE UNIVERSE. Biblical Christianity – and of course Biblical Judaism – says GOD! God is the highest reference point in the universe. He is the Centre. He is the Parent. He is the Master.

Secular humanism says – MAN. MAN is the Master of the Universe. Man is the Measure of all things. Of course to get there you have to demote or depose God – which has been the great academic ambition in this culture for the last 200 years. Secular humanism wants to say: there is no God – God is a projection – God is a delusion - the universe is an accident and therefore we are the highest point of reference in the universe and therefore we can do whatever we please.

That is the FIRST STEP into moral and spiritual oblivion. The Apostle Paul says that in Romans 1:18-21; he says:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Romans 1:18–21 ESV)

So the first step to moral and spiritual oblivion is suppressing what you know to be true about GOD so that you can be LIKE GOD deciding right and wrong for yourself. That is STEP ONE on the road to hell.

But if you turn the other way – if you acknowledge that there is a God in the universe – there is a PARENT IN THE HOUSE – there are rules – there are blessings – there are consequences – if you acknowledge THAT – then you have just made STEP ONE on the road to life.

Bruce Waltke says here:

“The temporally first step in this case is not on a horizontal axis that can be left behind but on a vertical axis on which

all else rests”.<sup>4</sup>

So the Bible says that the journey BEGINS here but that isn't to imply that this is something we leave behind – that we PROGRESS to the point where we don't need to fear God – NO! This is not a step to leave behind this is a step to build your life on.

So we are BUILDING UP without LEAVING BEHIND – does that makes sense? Well then let's do that. Let's BUILD UP – let's ADD some STEPS along the path of wisdom.

If you want to be a wise person the FIRST thing you need to understand is that God is the Master of the universe. The second thing you need to understand is:

## **2. That things are not now the way they were originally intended to be**

There is a DESIGN and there is also A CURSE resisting that design. We learn both of those things very early on in the Bible. In Genesis 1:31 we read:

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. (Genesis 1:31 ESV)

So the world is GOOD. It's governing principles are GOOD. Everything about it is VERY GOOD.

But.

That isn't the end of the story.

As we keep reading we discover that human beings broke the only rule in God's creation. God said they could eat from any tree in the garden except one – the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil.

It was a test – obviously.

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 1-15* in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 181.

God basically said: “Trust me, obey me and you can live forever in the paradise I have designed for you. Or you can disobey me. You can make your own rules, you can be king of the universe and then die.”

And the Bible says that the man and the woman chose poorly and all creation fell under the curse. We read about that in Genesis 3; God said to Adam:

“cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life” (Genesis 3:17 ESV)

So there is a VIRUS now at work in the world – a curse that resists the blessing of God.

To be WISE, brothers and sisters, is to understand that. The world is GOOD – it is governed by WISE and RIGHTEOUS PRINCIPLES – BUT THOSE PRINCIPLES ARE RESISTED! The design hasn’t been obliterated but it is obscured and it is resisted and therefore there is frustration and a sense of futility at present in this fallen world. The Apostle Paul talks about that in Romans 8:20-21; he says:

For the creation was subjected to **futility**, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (Romans 8:20–21 ESV)

So Paul says that the creation isn’t working correctly right now – not because of anything it did, but because of what we did and because of how God is using the brokenness of the world to drive us towards the means of our redemption. The creation is temporarily malfunctioning, Paul says, though it will be fixed later at a time of God’s own choosing.

We’ll get to that in just a minute.

Notice for now that the creation has been subjected to FUTILITY. That Greek word in Romans 8:20 is the SAME WORD used in the Greek translation of Ecclesiastes. It is the word translated as “vanity” or “meaninglessness”. The teacher in Ecclesiastes is always saying:

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? (Ecclesiastes 1:2–3 ESV)

The teacher is saying – “The world isn’t working!! Those who SOW DO NOT ALWAYS REAP!! Good is not always rewarded!! Evil is not always punished!! Creation is broken and human life is confusing and HARD!!!

Ecclesiastes is a depressing book – but it’s a necessary book. Tremper Longman III in his commentary on Ecclesiastes says that the hopelessness of the teacher: “is the result of the curse of the fall without recourse to God’s redemption.”<sup>5</sup>

Are you hearing that?

The preacher in Ecclesiastes is depressed because he lives AFTER the fall and BEFORE the redemption that is ours in Christ. He sees that the world is broken! He understands that the system has a VIRUS! Things aren’t working properly. Sometimes you do good and you aren’t rewarded! Sometimes you raise up children in the way they should go and they DEPART FROM THAT WAY when they are older.

It’s not supposed to be like that – but it is like that sometimes in this broken and fallen world.

Wisdom understands that and wisdom also understands:

### **3. That God’s Word is ultimately the only way that human beings can know anything**

You see the Bible says that the world is under a curse – so not everything out there is happening the way it should – but the Bible also says that WE are under a curse, we share in the brokenness and confusion of the world because we are of the world. The Apostle Paul says that in Romans 8 – in the same passage we just looked at above. He said:

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:22–23 ESV)

Are you hearing that?

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<sup>5</sup> Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 39.



The world is under the curse – and we are under the curse. Things aren't working right out there and things aren't working right in here either.

We aren't thinking right and we aren't FEELING right. Jeremiah the prophet said:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9 ESV)

That's what the Bible says and therefore wise people understand that we cannot trust ourselves. You cannot follow your instincts. You cannot be led by your gut. You cannot do what feels right – because your mind and your heart have affected. You aren't thinking straight – you aren't feeling straight and therefore – YOU ARE NOT TO BE TRUSTED.

The Bible says that again and again and again. You are not to be trusted. I am not to be trusted. Our desires are broken, our perceptions are DISTORTED, our conclusions are irrational – WE CANNOT BE TRUSTED.

Wise people understand that.

And therefore wise people trust in the Word of the Lord.

That is WISDOM in the Bible and that is faith. In Isaiah 66:2 God says:

this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2 ESV)

You see TREMBLING at God's Word can act as a SYNONYM for faith precisely because of what such an attitude presupposes. If you TREMBLE before the Word of God you are admitting that you are a broken sinner. You are under the curse. You made a terrible mistake in trying to run your own world BUT NOW YOU ARE REPENTING OF THAT. Now you are RE-ORIENTING your life around God's Word. You are allowing him to be the parent again. You are acknowledging that he is the MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE. That is CONVERSION! That is FAITH! And that is WISDOM in a broken and fallen world.

Fourthly, to be wise in this world is to understand:

#### **4. That God is working a long, slow plan to redeem and restore all things**

The state of affairs BEMOANED by the preacher in Ecclesiastes thankfully will not last forever. God PROMISED that at the same time that he announced the curse the Genesis 3. He said to Adam, “cursed is the ground because of you” and he also said to the serpent who deceived Adam:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15 ESV)

So into the world that Adam and Eve had decided to rule over themselves without reference to God – God unleashed two things. A promise and a curse.

The curse is God saying: “You can go. You can leave. You can be in charge. But understand this: I will not support you in your rebellion. In fact, I will resist you. You can leave this place and wander out into the desert of moral autonomy but know this my child – I will poison the wells. And the further you go from me, the harder I will make it for you. Because I know what you don’t. I know that you can never be happy apart from me.”

That’s the curse.

The curse is God poisoning the wells in the desert of our disobedience. The function of the curse is to turn us around and to send us home.

And that’s where the promise comes in. The promise is that at some point in the future – once you have DESPAIRED of your moral autonomy. Once you have come to DESPISE the world as you have made it – once you have DESCENDED into servitude and bondage - at that point I will send you a Redeemer. He will destroy your enemy at some considerable cost to himself.

That was the promise – but it has been LONG and SLOW in working out. The preacher in Ecclesiastes is at the end of his rope – he’s exhausted. He’s almost lost faith in the promise of God to send a Redeemer. Job does a little better. His life isn’t working out the way he thought it would

but he refuses to give up hope. He says:

I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. (Job 19:25 ESV)

That's FAITH in a broken and fallen world.

That's wisdom.

Wisdom is knowing that things don't always work out.

Good people are not always rich, healthy and happy.

Well raised kids do not always grow up and love Jesus.

That's how it is supposed to go – but that isn't how it ALWAYS ACTUALLY DOES GO - at least at the present time.

BUT.

WISDOM understands that EVENTUALLY God will come and set things to right. God will come and wipe all the cheaters off the board. So wisdom understand that now is NOT the time to “DO WHATEVER WORKS” – now is NOT the time to abandon the rules – now is not the time to make a deal with the devil - because God is watching – he will come and the MEEK REALLY WILL INHERIT THE EARTH.

Wisdom PROMISES that – Old Testament and New. Proverbs 2:21-22 says:

21 For the upright will inhabit the land, and those with integrity will remain in it,  
22 but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it. (Proverbs 2:21–22 ESV)

God will come and WEED THE GARDEN brothers and sisters. Jesus said that too. He said in Matthew 13:

Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send

his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, 42 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (Matthew 13:40–43 ESV)

Are you hearing that today?

Are you hearing the call to PATIENCE?

It's a LONG PLAN; it's a SLOW PLAN, I understand, but it's a sure plan. Wise people know that and act accordingly.

And then fifthly and finally, wise people in the Bible understand:

### **5. That the wisdom of God has been revealed climactically in the person and work of Christ**

So to review – this is God's house. We messed it up. God's Word is true. God's plan is slow – but in the end – it all lands finally and climactically on the person and work of Christ.

That's WISDOM 101.

That's the foundation upon which everything we are going to say over the next several weeks needs to be laid.

You see the goal of wisdom is not just to help people live better lives in a broken and fallen world. That's a by-product, but that's not the goal. Because just like the preacher in Ecclesiastes discovered, wisdom apart from redemption actually leads only to frustration. Wisdom, apart from redemption, is just re-arranging deck chairs on the Titanic.

But thanks be to God - Jesus came to do MORE THAN THAT. Jesus came to put the universe back in order and to put US BACK in the place we were created and intended to be. The Apostle Paul talked about that in Ephesians 2. He talked about how the life, death and resurrection of Jesus was actually the centerpiece of God's PLAN:

a plan for the fullness of time, **to unite** all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:10 ESV)

That phrase there “to unite” translates the Greek word *anakephalaiomai* which means literally, to bring everything under the head. To bring everything into alignment under Christ.

You see, when we tried to reach UP and become gods we threw the universe out of alignment. But when Jesus REACHED DOWN – humbling himself and becoming obedient even to the point of death on a cross – he put everything BACK into alignment. He absorbed the curse. He isolated the virus. He bore it down to death itself and thanks be to God – on the third he rose again.

And thus began the new creation – where everything will work again just as it was originally created and designed to do.

That is wisdom 101. That is the foundation for life abundant and life everlasting. And that’s the Gospel – thanks be to God. Let’s pray together.