

Beginning of Knowledge

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[0 : 00] We are starting a new series, and we're in Proverbs, the book of Proverbs today. If you don't have a Bible, please raise your hand. We'll have someone from our church bring a Bible to you to help.

Sungmin is back from his very long vacation in California, and he is ready to bring you the Bibles that you need. And if you are using one of our Blue Pew Bibles, if you don't have one, you can borrow that from us while you're here.

Proverbs is in page 527. It's in the Old Testament after the long book of Psalms. Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's Word.

Heavenly Father, we come to your Word. Lord, wanting once again to hear your voice, to be addressed by our King, by our Heavenly Father.

We come in particular this morning to the book of Proverbs, the book of wisdom. Lord, we recognize that we cannot have wisdom unless we first humble ourselves before you.

[1 : 27] And that is our prayer this morning, because only you can do that work. That you would instill in us a profound fear of the Lord. Lord, that you would make us a people that tremble before you, that stand in awe of you, that live under your authority, your power.

Lord, that's your prayer. People who know Christ. People who have humbled ourselves, humbled themselves, and have entrusted themselves fully to Christ and His salvation.

Lord, make us such people this morning. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Proverbs chapter 1.

We will just do verses 1 through 7 today. 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.

[2 : 45] 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. This is God's holy and authoritative word. The Bible is immensely practical for all of life.

But because it is primarily concerned. As 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 15 says. With making us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

It doesn't always get into the mundane details of everyday life. The book of Proverbs, however, does get into not only the wisdom for salvation.

[3 : 49] But also wisdom for finance. Wisdom for dealing with your neighbors. Teaches about friendship. Wisdom for parenting, etc.

As Derek Kipner, a Bible commentator, puts it. There are details of character small enough to escape the mesh of the law and the broad sides of the prophets.

And yet decisive. In personal dealings. Proverbs moves in this realm. Asking what a person is like to live with or to employ.

How he manages his affairs. His time. And himself. So considering where many of us are as a church in our stages of life. We thought this would be a very helpful book to go through.

A bit of a change in scenery from where we've been. And in order to interpret any passage of scripture or any book. Correctly, properly. We need to pay attention to three different contexts.

[4 : 52] First is the historical context. The second is the literary context. And the third is the theological context. And this is because all scripture is embedded in a particular historical period and culture.

And so our interpretation needs to take into account the relevant historical context. And so to that end, we need to ask ourselves the questions like, you know, who wrote it? For whom was it written? When was it written? Why was it written? And also because scripture is literature, our interpretation has to take into account its literary context.

The words. The syntax. The structure. The grammar of the text. As well as its genre. Is it a poetry? Is it a proverb? Is it a narrative?

Is it a letter? Or, and since all scripture is divinely inspired, finally we need to consider its theological context. How does a passage or a book fit in with the rest of scripture?

[5 : 54] What does it teach us about God? How does it relate to Christ? And verses 1 to 7 is a preamble of the book of Proverbs. And so it helpfully answers many of these questions for us.

And the overall message of this passage is that we can learn the saving wisdom of God only by humbling ourselves before him. And so first we'll look at the historical context and then the literary context and the theological context of this book going through verses 1 through 7.

So let's look at the historical context to start. Right off the bat it tells us who wrote the book. Verse 1 it says, The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel.

So the whole collection of Proverbs is attributed to Solomon as the lead author. But this doesn't mean that he was the sole author. The book of Proverbs is an anthology.

It's made up of a number of texts written by various authors from various time periods. And different sections of Proverbs are marked with captions that attribute that section to a particular author.

[6 : 59] And I have a list of that to show you. For example, Solomon is the direct attribution. Chapter 1, verse 1. Chapter 10, verse 1. Chapter 25, verse 1. And then it refers to the wise.

Kind of generally a category of the wise people as responsible for the sections between 22.17 and 24.34. And then Augur, chapter 30. And King Lemuel in chapter 31.

So these are all different authors of the book of Proverbs. But because Solomon is the principal author, the whole collection is attributed to him. It's kind of like when you write an academic paper, there's a lead author.

His name is first. And he's the one that gets cited or mentioned and named most frequently. And this is not surprising because other parts of Scripture corroborate Solomon's great wisdom.

So we see in 1 Kings 3, verses 5-14, that at the beginning of his reign, Solomon asked God specifically to grant him an understanding to discern what is right.

[8 : 06] And it says that God granted him that. And so throughout the Old Testament narrative, Solomon is frequently mentioned as kind of this paragon of wisdom. And we see that specifically in chapter 4, verse 29-34 of 1 Kings.

It says, And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breath of mind like the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt.

For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Ezraite, and Heman, Calco, and Darda, the sons of Maho. And his fame was in all the surrounding nations.

He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. And people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.

So since Solomon wrote the bulk of the proverbs, this also tells us the date, which means it dates to around the 10th century B.C. But we know that there was some redactional activity.

[9 : 14] There's some editing going on later in stages of proverbs. Because chapter 25, verse 1 explicitly tells us, These also are proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied.

So the word copied literally means to move forward, or to pass on, or to transmit. It refers to the copying and editing work of scribes in order to transmit an older document, and to make it available for future generations.

So that means the book of proverbs was redacted in the early 7th century. And if you compare proverbs to other ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, you find that they have a lot in common. For example, especially the sayings that are attributed generically to the wise, you guys saw that earlier, in chapter 22 to chapter 24. That section in particular contains striking similarities, for example, with the Egyptian instruction of a menemope.

And that's sometimes people who don't believe in scripture as the word of God will point to that and say, Well, you see, Solomon didn't write this. You know, he just copied it from his source or

whatnot. But that's actually not at all surprising, because most wisdom, most proverbs that you know, how many of you can identify the author of a proverb that you know?

[10:33] I don't think I can identify a single one. That's the nature of wisdom, which is passed down from generation after generation, and it's known in many different cultures.

And it's also not surprising, because 1 Kings 4, chapter 4, verse 30, which we read earlier, specifically tells us that Solomon interacted with and surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the East and the wisdom of Egypt.

He knew the proverbs of Egypt, and he attributes a section of proverbs to the wise, generically speaking. And Solomon was also married to an Egyptian princess, as we know from 1 Kings 3, verse 1.

So it's not at all surprising to see that kind of parallel. But proverbs does not uncritically assimilate the wisdom of its surrounding culture. It transforms it, because it takes the wisdom gleaned from these cultures and expresses them in its unique theological context, as we will later see.

And we see one notable difference between the book of proverbs and other contemporary ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature right away, in verse 1. Usually, in ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, not only the author, but also the addressee is specifically named.

[11:52] And the addressee is typically the first son of the author, or an apprentice of the author, who will succeed that sage in his capacity working in the royal courts.

So it's a form of professional, it's a manual, it's a professional manual to instruct them so that they can take over for the person that's writing. For example, I mentioned the instruction of Amenemope. It's written by Amenemope, who identifies himself as a scribe in Egypt that oversaw the registry of lands and grains, a role that seems very similar to the one that Joseph occupied in Genesis 41 and 47.

And the addressee of that instruction is his son, the youngest of his children, who is expected to succeed him in the Egyptian court. The book of Proverbs, in contrast, lacks a specific addressee in the introduction.

Solomon does not address his heir apparent, Rehoboam. And by omitting a specific addressee, Solomon democratizes his work to all of God's people.

[13:02] So it says in verse 4, the Proverbs was written to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth. And not only that, it says in verse 5, that those who are already wise, too, may hear and increase in learning.

So the mention of the simple on the one hand and the wise on the other hand, they're groups of the opposite ends of the spectrum. This shows that Proverbs is addressed to all people, applicable to all people, not only to a professional intellectual class.

Now at various points, it does specifically address my son or sons, but that's not because there is a specific son in view. Rather, it's a literary device that sets the book of Proverbs in the context of family instruction.

That's why chapter 1, verse 8 says, Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching. And this is, it uses the male perspective frequently, just as languages in many cultures do, when it applies to both.

So for example, in Proverbs, in chapters 5 to 7, you'll find warnings about the adulterous woman. But because it is given from that male perspective, there are no parallel warnings about predatory, adulterous men, which you should be just as wary of.

[14:24] But this doesn't mean that Proverbs is only applicable to men. It has an entire section dedicated to praising a woman who fears the Lord, in chapter 31. And this woman also appears to be schooled in wisdom, since chapter 31, verse 26, says, She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

And in several places in Proverbs, it mentions not only the father, but also the mother as the instructor of wisdom in their household to their children. And so this is, in fact, the caption in chapter 31, verse 1, says, The words of King Lemuel, an oracle that his mother taught him.

And so the fact that mothers are able to instruct their children in this wisdom, shows that daughters as well as sons were schooled in this instruction of wisdom, so that they're able to transmit it to their children later.

So that's the kind of historical context. And now let's look at greater detail in verses 2 to 6 for the literary context of Proverbs. Verse 2 tells us the purpose of Proverbs.

It says, To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight. So this is what the book is all about. It's about acquiring wisdom. And this reveals the genre of Proverbs.

[15:39] It belongs to the wisdom genre in the Bible, which also includes the book of Job and the book of Ecclesiastes. And these three books kind of have to be understood in relationship to one another.

These are very general observations. But to make very general observations, Proverbs captures the idealism of a parent, of a well-wishing parent.

Its basic message is, Child, it will go well for you if you live wisely in this way. That's the book of Proverbs. Ecclesiastes, however, captures kind of the realism of a weathered veteran.

It says, No matter how wisely you live, this life is going to throw curveballs at you, and bad things are going to happen. That's Ecclesiastes.

And then Job captures kind of the fideism, the doctrine of faith. It has to filter everything that you experience in life. It's the fideism of a suffering saint.

[16:38] It says, We can't explain all that happens in life, but we have to trust that it all makes sense in the sovereign wisdom of God. And these three books, they kind of work off of each other and nuance each other, expand upon each other to create a very rich matrix of biblical wisdom.

You kind of have to see them together, understand them together. Ecclesiastes is prose, and Job is a mix of poetry and prose, but Proverbs is poetry.

And because poetry is written not merely to communicate an idea clearly, but also to produce pleasure with something beautiful and imaginative, with these striking turns of phrases, it requires that we really meditate, ruminate on the words, and engage our creativity.

And so we need to pay attention when we're reading Proverbs to figurative language and imagery. For example, when Proverbs 10, verse 26, says, Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the slugger to those who send him.

So we're being invited to really meditate on that image. What does vinegar do to people's teeth? What does smoke do to the eyes? And as you're meditating on it, thinking about it, it gets you deeper into the meaning of that proverb.

[17:57] So because of this poetic nature, you really can't give Proverbs a cursory reading, just really quick kind of skimming, and think that you can get much out of it. It doesn't work like that.

You have to meditate on it. You really have to memorize it. And so there's a pastor, Tim Keller, who wrote a book on the book of Proverbs. It says this.

It's a really helpful illustration. He says, A proverb is like a hard candy. If you just bite down on it, you get little out of it and may even get a broken tooth.

Instead, you must meditate on it until the sweetness of insight comes. And because it's poultry, we also need to pay attention to parallel structure.

How are the lines and strophes, how do they modify and magnify each other? To give you an example, let's look at our passage. Proverbs often use bi-kola, which is a line in one verse with two kola or half verses.

[18:55] And here in our passage in verse 2, it's unique. Verse 2 is unique in this passage because it has two infinitive clauses in each column. It says, To know wisdom and instruction.

That's the first half. And then, To understand words of insight. That's the second half. And these parallel half verses shed light on the dual purpose of Proverbs.

Its first purpose is to know wisdom and instruction. That implies an internalization of an experience of the substance of wisdom. It's not merely head knowledge, but heart knowledge.

It's confirmed by the word instruction, which refers to kind of a humble submission to the authority of one's teacher. Job 5.17, for example, translates that same word instruction as discipline.

Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves, therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty. So to know wisdom and instruction is to internalize and obey the substance, the lessons of wisdom by submitting to discipline and correction.

[20:03] That's the one purpose of Proverbs. The second half, so the first half refers to the substance of wisdom. Second half of verse 2 refers to the form of wisdom, the expression of wisdom.

To understand words of insight. It means, to understand means to perceive or to discern or grasp something. And the word refers to a saying, a proverb, words of insight.

And this is a common distinction that a lot of ancient Near Eastern literature make between knowledge and its expression. The substance of wisdom and how it's articulated. You need to both understand what the words are saying and then really grasp and internalize its content, its substance into your life. So then Proverbs is intended both to help us grow wiser and also for us, to help us grasp the wisdom.

To become characterized by wisdom and also to understand the way wisdom is articulated. And verses 3 to 6 then unpack verse 2. Verses 3 to 4 expand on what it means to know wisdom and instruction.

[21 : 11] And then verses 5 to 6 expand on what it means to understand the words of insight. And we know that there's an association between these subsections and the head verse in verse 2 because they're connected by catchwords, which is also a literary device that biblical writers often use, using keywords, repeating keywords or synonyms of words to tie literary units together.

So I have a... I can show you this. Yeah, so the words know and instruction from the first half of verse 2 are repeated again in verses 3 to 4. To know wisdom and instruction.

To receive instruction in wise dealing. Knowledge and discretion to the youth. And then the words understand and the word word are repeated in verses 5 to 6.

To understand words of insight. The one who understands obtains guidance. To understand a proverb and a saying. The words of the wise and their riddles. So using that parallel structure as a guideline, let's then unpack what it means to know wisdom and instruction.

The first half of verse 2. So first, to know wisdom and instruction requires two things. A teachable person and a person who is willing and able to teach.

[22 : 27] So verse 3 speaks of a teachable person. It says, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity. As I mentioned earlier, instruction is a word that conveys a sense of discipline or correction.

So that means we need to be ready to receive instruction. The word receive implies eager acceptance, receptivity. So a truly wise person humbly submits to the discipline of God's word. He doesn't cut through the word of God with the mold of his own worldview and ideas. Making the Bible fit his mold and then cutting off all the excess.

A truly wise person, a godly person, instead, takes the mold of God's word and puts it over himself. Make his life and his ideas fit the mold and get rid of any excess.

Humble receptivity to receive instruction. And a truly wise person does not merely have cognitive wisdom, but also experiential wisdom.

[23 : 45] He has submitted to course correction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity. It's kind of like this. One can understand all the mechanics of throwing a football, yet be completely incapable of throwing a football.

That's me. One can master the details of theology and yet not know God. One can understand the psychology of persons and yet be totally inept at knowing and relating to people.

Similarly, one can have much knowledge and yet be totally unwise in the way he lives. There's a difference between a wise cracker and a wise person.

To know wisdom and instruction requires someone who is teachable. It also requires someone who can teach. That's what verse 4 has in view, to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth.

Being simple can be a sign of godly humility and faith, and that's not the kind of simplicity that's in view here. It's referring to people who are simplistic, naive, gullible.

[25 : 10] It's the type of people who often get duped or scammed. What they need is prudence that can also be translated as shrewdness. And the goal of wisdom instruction is to impart knowledge and discretion to the youth.

Discretion is the quality of being judicious or circumspect in one's dealings, not impulsive or careless. And the youth are identified as the category of people that particularly need this kind of discretion, but youth doesn't merely refer to teenagers in the Bible.

The Hebrew words for young people are not as narrow and specific as in the English. So youth, the word, is sometimes used to refer to infants, Exodus 2, chapter 2, verse 6.

It refers to teens, Genesis chapter 37, verse 2. It even refers to a 30-year-old Joseph in Genesis 41. So anyone who is asking questions like, who am I?

Where do I fit in? What do I believe? How shall I live? If you're asking these questions, you can identify and put yourself in the category of the youth that the Proverbs is addressing.

[26 : 22] So that's what it means to know the substance of wisdom, to know wisdom and instruction, to humble yourself, to receive the discipline, the correction of God's word. Now turning to the second half of verse 2, the form of wisdom, the expression of it, to understand words of insight.

Let's look at verses 5 to 6. 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. So the subsection is connected to the second half of verse 2 by the words understand and words. So it's possible to know, as I said, it's possible to know the form of wisdom without understanding its substance.

But it's also impossible to understand the substance of wisdom without grasping the form. You also need to understand what the words mean. You have to grasp it. And so, you know, you need to be able to understand it before you can apply it and obey them.

And so that's what verses 5 to 6 are concerned about. Even the wise should pay attention because then they will increase in learning. And whoever understands will obtain guidance to understand a proverb and a saying the words of the wise and their riddles.

[27 : 38] Several different words are here used to refer to a proverb. It's called a proverb, a saying, words of the wise and riddles. Habakkuk 2, verse 6 uses three of these four words to refer to the exact same song.

So we know that these words are not referring to different types of proverbs or wisdom sayings. It's all referring to the same thing. But it does highlight different aspects of what a proverb is like. And so a proverb is literally kind of a form of parable. It's kind of a metaphor. The book of Proverbs includes sections of longer narratives as well, but it features what we've come to associate primarily with the word proverb.

These kind of pithy, kind of punchy, witty sayings that you guys know, I'm sure, several from memory. And so that means by definition, because it's a proverb, proverbs do not come with qualifications, nuances, and footnotes.

If it had those things, it would be an essay. It would not be a proverb. It would no longer be pithy or witty. And for that reason, we need to be careful not to absolutize the proverbs to make it fit every context.

[28 : 53] Instead, we need to use the proverbs in their appropriate contexts. And we can see this even in the examples of non-biblical proverbs. So to give you an example, sometimes in life, a speedy response to a situation is called for.

So there are proverbs that say that, right? He who hesitates is lost. A stitch in time saves nine. You guys understand what that means?

Nobody stitches up things anymore. If you have a little hole, like a pinhole on your shirt, if you don't stitch it up in a timely fashion, it's going to become this gaping larger hole that's going to require nine stitches instead of one.

That's what that means. So you've got to respond quickly to a crisis or a situation. So these proverbs are calling for a quick response. But then there are other proverbs that call for a more slower, measured, and deliberative response to things, like, look before you leap.

Haste makes waste. They're contradictory. They advise opposite things. But we know from experience that these sayings are both true.

[30 : 01] Similarly, Proverbs chapter 13, verse 25 says, The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite, but the belly of the wicked suffers want. Pretty straightforward, right?

If you live righteously, you will have plenty to eat. If you live wickedly, you will go hungry. However, just two verses earlier, Proverbs chapter 13, verse 23, it says, The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice.

This proverb suggests that though the hardworking and righteous poor people could have plenty to eat, theoretically speaking, injustice robs them of the fruit of their labor.

So we see a similar tension like this all over Proverbs. Just to give you another similar example, Proverbs chapter 15, verse 6, It says, In the house of the righteous there is much treasure, but trouble befalls the income of the wicked.

Once again, pretty straightforward. If you're righteous, God will reward you and you'll be rich. However, just a few verses later, it says in Proverbs 15, verses 16 to 17, Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it.

[31 : 17] Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it. And still later, Proverbs 16, 8, says, Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice.

These latter Proverbs suggest that sometimes crooks acquire great revenues with crookery, with injustice, and that the righteous who fear the Lord are sometimes poor, but that nevertheless it's better to be righteous.

The interplay between these Proverbs reveals something more profound. And it's generally true that honest, hardworking person gains prosperity.

But that's the way God has ordered the world to work. However, this world is also broken and sinful and backwards, and so we are commanded to seek righteousness even when it leads to poverty and hunger.

So because of its proverbial nature, some Proverbs are by necessity partial. So we have to be careful not to take them as divine absolutes that fit every single situation.

[32 : 27] So we would be causing a lot of trouble and doing damage to people's lives, for example, if we use Proverbs 15, 6 to bludgeon every poor person in the church and saying, well, you are full of injustice, aren't you?

That's why you're poor. That may be true in some cases, but it's definitely not true in other cases. That's why chapter 1, verse 6, calls Proverbs a riddle. It's something like solving a puzzle, and only when they are put together do you truly appreciate the profound wisdom and beauty of God's word. That's the literary context of Proverbs. And finally, let's turn to the theological context of Proverbs. I feel a little bad.

I'm sorry if this sounds a little more like a lecture than a sermon. We're getting to Christ here in a second. That's kind of hard with the introductions to books.

[33 : 32] The Bible scholars have at times struggled to make the book of Proverbs fit with the rest of Scripture. It's unique because it doesn't really talk about the covenant between God and his people, about God's salvation plan, that all the other books in Scripture talk about.

So some scholars have gone so far as to say that this is a book of secular wisdom that doesn't require a belief in God. But that's actually a very bad mischaracterization of the book.

Because it says in verse 7, and this is really the thesis statement of the entire book, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The author of Proverbs situates the book in the worship and fear of the Lord, which is a common refrain through all of Scripture. And the Lord in all caps as in here, it's the proper, it's the personal name of God.

It's the name that God revealed to His covenant people in Exodus chapter 3, verses 14 to 15. I am who I am. Say this to the people of Israel.

[34 : 45] I am has sent me to you. God also said to Moses, say this to the people of Israel. The Lord, Yehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you.

This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. That means Proverbs cannot be separated from the rest of Scripture in which God has revealed Himself and His plan of salvation.

Yes, Proverbs is a book, but it's in a more important sense a chapter in a larger book called the Bible. The Bible has God as the ultimate author behind the immediate human authors.

Therefore, like every part of the Bible, Proverbs yields its fullest and richest fruit only when it's viewed in light of its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

So what does it mean to fear God? To fear God is to relate and respond to God appropriately with reverent obedience and humble submission.

[35 : 59] It doesn't refer to being terrified. It refers to being in awe. I've used Exodus chapter 20 verse 20 before as a case in point to prove this.

After God appears to the Israelites to give them the Ten Commandments, Moses says to the people, Do not fear, for God has come to test you that the fear of Him may be before you that you may not sin.

It's the exact same word in both of those occurrences, the word fear. Don't fear because God has appeared to you so that you might fear Him. Right? And that's not a contradiction.

Moses doesn't want the people to be terrified and to flee the presence of God. He wants them to stand in awe of God, to revere God and to fear Him in a healthy sense so that it constrains their behavior and produces obedience in their life.

That's the fear of God. To summarize it, to fear the Lord is to live every waking moment in the presence of God under the authority of God and for the glory of God.

[37 : 03] That's what fear of God is. To live before the face of God as if He's always with you. To do all things and say all things as if you're always under His authority.

And to do everything for the glory of God. That's to fear God. And this is a very relevant reminder as we go through the Proverbs because people and there's a lot of you out there because this is Cambridge.

I include myself in this so please don't be offended. People with control issues love the book of Proverbs. They do. Why? Because they feel like to use a rock climbing metaphor like they feel like Proverbs gives them handles or holes that they can use then to scale the wall of life.

Oh, this is straightforward. I can do this. If I do these things then I will have a materially and spiritually successful life. This gives me control. Handles for life.

But the book is not intended to be used that way. It's intended to make us more dependent trusting of and submitted to God. That's why even though Proverbs chapter 4 verse 7 exhorts us to get wisdom and whatever you get get insight and then later in Proverbs chapter 21 verse 30 it tells us no wisdom no understanding no counsel can avail against the Lord.

[38 : 41] If we think that we can manipulate God by mastering these Proverbs we are deeply mistaken. Right apprehension of the Proverbs the right appropriation of the Proverbs begins with the fear of the Lord.

It begins with humility. It begins with faith. It begins with submission before God. That's why verse 7 contrasts fearing the Lord with despising wisdom and instruction.

Only when we humble ourselves before God in faith are we truly ready to learn wisdom. And note well that the fear of the Lord is the beginning.

It's not the end. It is primary not secondary. It's foundational. It's not incidental to wisdom the fear of the Lord.

It is the principal thing. Bible scholar Bruce Walke puts it this way what the alphabet is to reading notes to reading music and numerals to mathematics the fear of the Lord is to attaining the revealed knowledge of this book.

[40 : 02] Being wise in the dealings of this world does not begin with reading about the dealings of this world. It does not begin with those what they call the books for dummies series.

It doesn't begin with watching how-to videos on YouTube. YouTube. If you want to be truly wise in the dealings of this world you need the fear of God.

That is the foundational principle. It begins with knowledge of God. And every subsequent proverb that we read in this book we have to read in light of this reality.

And faith in God is not this tells us that faith in God is not something that you attain at the end of your lifelong pursuit of wisdom and truth. Some of you are not yet believers and followers of Christ and I want to exhort you with this.

Don't wait on faith. Faith is not something you arrive at after a lifelong pursuit of truth. If you don't know God you haven't started on your journey of knowledge.

[41 : 07] Because all knowledge is incomplete unless it is situated in its proper context with relation to God. This is something, this is why I think sometimes it's difficult for genuine Christians to defend Christianity.

Not because there are no reasons for their faith, they have plenty of reasons for their faith, but they just have a hard time articulating that. And G.K. Chesterton explains it this way in his book Orthodoxy, it is very hard for a man to defend anything of which he is entirely convinced.

It is comparably easy when he is only partially convinced. He is partially convinced because he has found this or that proof of the thing, and he can expound it. But a man is not really convinced of a philosophic theory when he finds that something proves it.

He is only really convinced when he finds that everything proves it. Sometimes Christians have a hard time defending Christianity, not because they have these proofs, they don't have reasons for it,

because to them, everything makes sense in light of Christianity.

Everything in their life is evidence of Christianity. C.S. Lewis puts it eloquently this way, I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.

[42 : 35] fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Yet there is a conspicuous absence of the fear of the Lord in our world.

Quoting from Psalms, from the Psalms, Paul writes in Romans chapter 3, none is righteous, no, not one. No one understands, no one seeks God.

All have turned aside, together they have become worthless. No one does good, not even one.

There is no fear of God before their eyes.

That is the single most devastating malady that currently humanity is experiencing. More significant, more threatening than even the coronavirus.

virus. We are a proud people, brazen people, a foolhardy people, and we desperately need the wisdom of God.

[43 : 45] And we find that wisdom in the person and work of Jesus Christ who is described in God's word as the wisdom of God. Please follow along with me as I read 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verses 17 to 25.

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of the sage? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

[45 : 07] For the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men. God the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ that he was crucified for the sins of his people and that he was raised triumphantly for our new life and resurrection so that we might be pardoned of our sins and granted citizenship in his kingdom.

That good news, that gospel is the wisdom that fools despise. In Jesus, God has destroyed all human pretensions to save themselves because if you look around our world is full of human wisdom and human strategies for salvation.

Human wisdom believes that capitalistic economies and the generation of wealth or the socialistic redistribution of wealth can solve poverty and all these human ills.

Human wisdom believes that if we have just enough technology if we have just enough scientific advancements that we can solve all of the world's problems. Human wisdom believes that proper education will bring an end to human ignorance and misdemeanors.

Human wisdom believes that through self-help techniques like yoga and mindfulness and dieting that we could attain health and peace in the world.

[46 : 38] that's like telling people that you can cure cancer by eating blueberries. Human wisdom believes that advancement of philosophy and learning can lead to enlightenment and salvation.

Human wisdom believes that worshiping idols created by our own hands can bring salvation to people. in essence human wisdom believes that we have the power to save ourselves.

That is the essence of human wisdom. And as such there are pretensions of human pride and they amount to the worship of the creature instead of the creator.

But God has made foolish the wisdom of the world by ordaining that through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

It's not those who claim to be able to save themselves. It's only those who believe that they cannot save themselves and cast themselves at the feet of Jesus saying I need you to save me Lord.

[47 : 54] I need your grace in my life because I cannot save myself. These are the people who are truly wise. They are the ones who are truly saved. Only those who humble themselves before God attain saving wisdom.

So if you want to begin in earnest your quest for knowledge to start your journey on the path of wisdom I exhort you this morning to come to Christ.
He is the wisdom of God. Please take a moment to reflect on that and we're going to respond by praying corporately together at the church.