

The Book of
Proverbs
God's Book of Wisdom

BOOK I : PROVERBS 1 – 15

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Introduction

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

When my wife and I set out to educate our children at home, we were confused by the hundreds of theories on the education of children that were presented at homeschool conventions. Parents who love their children really want to find the best *paideia* (or education) to achieve the best possible outcome, and we were no exception to that rule. We would pick up some new education philosophy or technique in a seminar or recommended resource only to be left in some consternation. We could see how some parents had made poor choices and their children suffered for it. At some point, we became desperate. The matter was of the utmost urgency. We could see that our children's minds, hearts, and souls were at stake. Finally, for us there was no other place to turn than to the very Word of God.

Christian educators do not always look first to the Bible for an educational philosophy or curriculum. The Scriptures are not treated as something useful, or that which would equip the man or woman of God for every good work (including that of educating children). Nevertheless, as believers our first assumption is that God is very wise. After all, He has designed and created this marvelous creature called a "human being," and certainly nobody would know more about their nurture in knowledge than the Creator. He has not left us without operating instructions. And so, we took up the Bible and searched for the words "school" and "education" in the concordance... and found nothing. But then, broadening the search to include words like "knowledge," "understanding," and "wisdom," we landed in one book of the Bible which is dedicated to the subject of transmitting knowledge, wisdom, and understanding to a child. The Book of Proverbs is Education-Knowledge-Wisdom 101, authored by God and recorded by Solomon. Herein is contained both the method and the content of a child's education. It is the essential core curriculum and the corpus of basic knowledge God has laid out for every young

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man and young woman who has ever lived. This is the single most indispensable curriculum for the education of any child, anywhere in the world, at any and all times in human history. If a Christian family is marooned on an island and could grab only a single resource off the sinking ship, this would be it—God’s recommended curriculum. If there was one resource needed to prepare our children for the hard times ahead in the modern world, this would be it.

Professional educators are often surprised to discover that God’s Book of Wisdom has little to say about geography, geometry, or geology. Why would the Creator of the Universe neglect to include something as “important” as the Pythagorean Theorem in His compendium of instruction intended for the training of the young man? What can be said for this “oversight”? It turns out that in the grand scheme of things, *geometry is not all that important*. These thirty-one chapters are short and to the point. Based upon the infinite wisdom of God, matters of the greatest importance are kept for the pedagogy of the Proverbs. Faith and character are primary in God’s system of learning. This is the very warp and the woof of the “Lord’s nurture” of the child (Eph. 6:4). If the training of a child is likened to a building, faith and character make up the foundation, studs, and drywall in the project. Geometry, geography, and geology serve as the accoutrements and the wallpaper, making the house livable. Teaching geometry apart from character may be likened to attaching wallpaper to walls that do not exist—a supreme exercise in futility.

These lessons present God’s basic truths, addressing the classical philosophical divisions of epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics. Here we will grapple with the tension of determinism and human responsibility. We find an entire system of priorities for ethics and purpose for life. We discover the basic constituents of a biblical social system as well as principles for sound economics, government, and general business management. The book gives insight into the proper views of theology, anthropology, and human psychology. We learn much of human character and the intricacies of human relationships. All education programs lay out some categorical system by which to understand life, history, truth, ethics, and reality. Some systems have a semblance of truth, but are fundamentally compromised as far as they ignore the Book of Proverbs and disregard the fear of God (Prov. 1:7).

A great many pastors and Christian academics are reticent to recommend this book to public schools, colleges, or even seminaries. They tell us that the fear of God is appropriate for an occasional Sunday School lesson, but never to be applied in the chemistry laboratory or the algebra class. The wisdom of the Proverbs is seen as obsolete by modern institutions of learning. The sacred-secular divide between sacred knowledge from Scripture and secular knowledge taught in the university has done much damage to the Christian worldview in the West. The failure to communicate this wisdom has been detrimental to education itself. Where parents and churches neglected to teach these lessons, successive generations of the youth abandoned the faith.

Wherever human pride and man-worship prevailed and the fear of God was expunged from the science class and social studies, human civilizations would face increasingly catastrophic consequences. The blame for the failure of the Christian faith in the West, the widespread apostasy, and the breakdown of Christian institutions may be placed at the feet of those who separate the knowledge of chemistry and political science from the fear of God. Christian teachers who teach chemistry, rhetoric, and political science should be less interested in their students learning these subjects than they are in their students *learning the fear of God in their classes* (Prov. 1:7, Prov. 23:17). The same principle applies to all Christian parents who teach anything to their children.

The Book of Proverbs is presented by “Solomon the son of David, king of Israel...to give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion” (Prov. 1:1–4). That being the case, every teaching college in the world should require their students to memorize the Book of Proverbs. Those institutions that claim to share knowledge with young men and women, certainly should incorporate God’s book addressing this very subject.

This instruction comes not as from the mouth of some detached academic lecturer, but as life-or-death lessons from a father crying out for the salvation of his son’s soul. These are exhortations, warnings, and instructions tinged with urgency, tenderness, severity, passion, and love. This may not fit in well with the professional teaching methodology representative of modern schools.

This material is vital. These are the irreducible essentials for our children's discipleship in the ways of God. These lessons set the stage for all other academic subjects our children will pursue, and for any and all economic and "career" pursuits. This will prepare them for life, for marriage, for church life, for work life, and all other relationships. By the time our children leave home, they should be instantly familiar with every principle contained in this book.

God's Book on Life Is for Everyone

Genesis is God's history book of the world. The Book of Psalms is God's book on worship. The Gospels are God's account of our Savior and our salvation. The Book of Proverbs is God's book on life. Every child raised in a Christian family should be thoroughly versed in these portions of Scripture before leaving home. These are also essential for every new believer who is to be disciplined into the Christian faith. The Great Commission requires teaching others to observe and practically apply every command of Christ to their lives, and certainly the Proverbs are not to be neglected in this mission.

Using This Study Guide

The Family Bible Study Guide series on the Book of Proverbs provides contemporary commentary with hundreds of illustrations, applications, and discussion questions to help bring to life these truths in the modern context. These devotionals include extensive tie-ins to the Gospel, the wisdom of Jesus Christ—the Wisdom of God. Using familiar illustrations to the modern reader, we hope to shed light upon gold nuggets of wisdom as relevant today as they were three thousand years ago. Each segment also includes helpful family discussion questions to open up more shepherding opportunities for Dad and Mom. The Book of Proverbs offers ample opportunity for extended family discussion, especially when applying these truths to everyday conditions and conundrums.

For maximum effectiveness in the context of family teaching and worship, the entire family should read or recite the Bible text in unison several times over. Each proverb is packed with weighty considerations

and is worthy of careful thought and meditation throughout the day. Families may also choose to memorize one of the verses in each lesson. This Study Guide favors the classic King James Version with only minor adaptations for the modern reader, such as replacing “thee” and “thou” with “you” and “your,” and changing the older verb forms, such as “seeketh” to “seek.”

Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it. (Proverbs 8:9-10)

Part 1 ~ Introducing the Wisdom of the Proverbs

PROVERBS 1:1–6

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel;

To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;

To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;

To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

*A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of
understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:*

*To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and
their dark sayings.*

These are the Proverbs of Solomon. Herein is a treasure trove of gold nuggets, wonderful insights into divine wisdom. There is no higher wisdom than what God has revealed to man. When Solomon asked for understanding to wisely govern the people of Israel, God gave him a “wise and discerning heart...to discern between good and evil” (1 Kin. 3:9ff). The Proverbs are quoted nineteen times in the New Testament by Jesus and the Apostles, and they are to be considered part of the revelation of God’s truth to man.

The intended audience for these writings is all persons, but especially young men and women, boys and girls, and those who are young in the faith. We need this! By nature, every person is deceived and sinful. By natural birth we are all ignorant. Newborn babies, two-year-olds, and young people make poor choices because they are lacking in knowledge. But, thanks be to God, His Word provides the basic foundation for all true knowledge!

Right knowledge is very important. An ignorant person walking out into thin ice will fall through it and potentially drown. At one point, the Lord God points out concerning Israel: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you” (Hos. 4:6).

There is a dearth of knowledge everywhere today. Year by year, maturity and marriage for young men and young women is delayed. Extended adolescence is encouraged. Too many middle-aged men act like they are fourteen years old. The need is desperate now. “Get wisdom. With all your getting, get understanding!,” comes the cry of this Book. Where young men see no need for this urgency, they admit to being satisfied with their own foolishness.

As described in the first three verses, the purpose of Proverbs is to train a person *how to think*, how to discern a wise person, and how to discern between good and evil. Rather than simply providing answers for every situation in life, this book is intended to train the young man or woman how to work out the problems and come to wise conclusions.

To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity; To give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion...

God’s truth revealed to man includes the subject area of right and wrong. How might we know when someone is doing something wrong? What is the just treatment of those who do wrong things? Children and young people who are doing the wrong thing require correction and reproof. They are in need of *knowledge* when they are misguided, deceived, or ignorant. They need *wisdom* so they will do the right things. They need *skillful knowledge* to handle relationships and get a job done. They will also need a *subtle knowledge* for figuring out how to work through complex problems and conflicts in human relationships. This is the purpose for God’s book of wisdom.

A wise man will hear, and increase learning. The wise man is teachable—quick to hear and slow to speak. He listens to the teachers God has assigned to him. Whether the word comes as a rebuke, a teaching, an encouragement, or a challenge, this man is eager to grow in his knowledge and wisdom. Moreover, the wise man will improve in his ability to understand a proverb and the deeper things there are to know about the nature of God, the will of God, the nature of man, the material world, the Gospel, and the mystery of godliness. Over the years of his life, he will have obtained a sum-total increase in true knowledge and wisdom.

He will attain unto wise counsel. By listening to wise counselors, the wise son steers the ship of his life in a better direction. He actually makes course corrections according to the counsel he receives. The New Testament Christian recognizes this as the life of repentance, whereby he is ever and always transformed by the renewing of the mind, in order that he may “prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2).

Family Discussion Questions:

1. What is the purpose of the book of Proverbs?
2. How is a wise person defined in these verses?
3. What are the dangers of ignorance, or the drawbacks for the person who lacks wisdom?
4. Are you interested in increasing learning? Are you a good listener at church or in family Bible reading?

Part 2 ~ The Foundation of Knowledge

PROVERBS 1:7

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The first lesson in God’s Book of Wisdom is the most important of all. Before moving on to any other statement relating to science, history, the nature of man, the nature of God, salvation, or anything else, this is the first proposition for any and all true knowledge. *The foundation or starting point of all knowledge is the fear of God.* Before the smartest men in the world set out to prove the existence of God, they must fear God first of all. This is fundamental. They must assume God’s existence and fear Him before coming up with arguments for His existence. Contrariwise, ultimate foolishness begins with doubting the existence of God. Moreover, there is no right view of science without a reverence for the Creator. There can be no wise governing of nations, but only the destruction of nations without leaders who fear God.

Before anybody can know anything about anything for certain, they must first fear God.

Without this fear of God there can be no proper understanding of Jesus's death on the cross. The crucifixion of Christ is public knowledge, the world over. But not many have stopped to ask the obvious question, "Why is this Man suffering on the cross like this?" The Gospel has already explained this, that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." The sincere inquirer would ask further, "Why would the Father give up His Son to such a horrible death?" Who or what would demand such a punishment as this? Actually, the explanation should be quite understandable. Certain crimes committed by men do require serious punishment. All peoples and cultures are familiar with such things as justice, judges, and judgment. So it should come as no surprise to learn that God is just and requires the death penalty for the violation of His commands. But now, this Man on the cross is innocent, for He has committed no crime against God or man. Why must He suffer in this way? He has taken this punishment upon Himself in the place of others who are guilty of crimes against God. There can be no other acceptable explanation than this. These violations of God's laws must have been very serious indeed to require such severe punishment as the suffering of God's own Son on that cross.

The pristine holiness of God and His ultimate commitment to righteousness calls for such severe judgment and a pouring out of wrath over the sin of man—here witnessed at the crucifixion of His own Son. And, we cannot but respond in quiet reverence and godly fear. Here more than anywhere else, we come face to face with the terrible severity of our own sin. The children of Israel may have feared God as He thundered on Sinai. Surely, they had come face to face with the commandments of God, and their own sinful condition. But even more so, we tremble at Calvary. What tremendous guiltiness, what terrible offensiveness, what deep-stained unholiness would require the most pure, most holy, most undefiled, and most loved Son of God to suffer and die in our place? Here we tremble. Now, we fear God here at the foot of the cross in the view of the Son of God suffering for us. The atoning work of Jesus is meaningless to those who have yet to

realize the severity of their sins, and have never come to the beginning of knowledge concerning salvation.

But then, the questioner pursues the matter still further. Why would this Man suffer on the cross for guilty sinners? Why would the Father give up His Son to meet the requirements of justice for sin? The answer is that “God so loved the world.” He did it for love. At the cross is where mercy conquers judgment, and love meets the wrath of God. Our response therefore is to fear, and to love, because He first loved us.

Too many professing believers still recoil against any notion of fearing God. They much prefer to see God as a friend who loves, and a friend to love, rather than a father to honor and an authority to reverence. However, a genuine fear of God may combine with a realization of His love for us and a love for Him, especially at the cross. The greater the awe-filled-ness we experience at the cross, and the greater our realization of the magnitude of our sin and the holiness of God as we view the suffering of the Son, the more we will respond in love for God and His Christ. For we realize that this ultimate sacrifice was in our place. Why would any person receive or appreciate that divine sacrifice if they saw no need for it? Nobody would respond in love for God, or appreciate His love demonstrated at the cross, without first realizing something of the egregiousness of his sins committed against God. Both fear and love are absolutely appropriate dispositions towards God as our Father. But, fear and love also meet together at the cross of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the first qualification for any teacher or the first indication that any person has real knowledge or true wisdom is this *fear of God*. All teachers who purport to share knowledge with students must themselves fear God first. They must teach the fear of God as the beginning of knowledge. When navigating a busy train station, occasionally a person may board the wrong train. Of course that train will always take him to the wrong destination. Knowledge may also be seen as a quest or a journey. Those who fail to get on the train of the fear of God will never arrive at the destination or the city of true knowledge. Today, the majority of colleges, schools, teachers, and media claim to disseminate knowledge, but freely admit they do not fear God or teach the fear of God. These bastions of false learning are

to be strictly avoided by Christian families or any other person who maintains a modicum of true wisdom.

Science teachers who genuinely instruct on the workings, the wonder, the order, the beauty, the expanse, and the glory of the universe, or the complexity of the human cell, or the astounding variety of life forms in the earth must at some point convey the awesomeness of the Creator. He lifts his arms and says in a hushed tone, “Class! Silence for a moment! All, stand in awe of Him! Let us worship God who created all of this!” Then, he should end the class with singing a psalm of praise to God.

Fools despise wisdom and instruction. In contrast to the person who fears God, the fool ignores God, despises God, and pretends He does not exist (Ps. 14:1). More than this, the fool despises wisdom and instruction. While the atheist professor claims to have achieved some learning in bits and pieces, he is fundamentally flawed in all his thinking. He despises the knowledge of God, and therefore he has nothing but contempt for real knowledge and true wisdom.

Family Discussion Questions:

1. What is the starting point of all true knowledge?
2. Why are people turned off by the idea of fearing God?
3. What is the relationship between fearing God and loving God?
4. What may be said of highly intelligent college teachers who do not fear God? What can we say for those who have studied through 1,000 textbooks on science, history, or literature, none of which has emphasized reference for God? What becomes of these people?
5. How may we grow in our fear of God, and reverence for Him, while we study science, history, and other school subjects?