

The Beginning of Knowledge

Proverbs 1:1-7

Proverbs 1:1-7 - *“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, judgment, and equity, to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, to understand a proverb and an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”*

Background Notes

The first seven verses of the Book of Proverbs provide the author, the purpose, and the theme of this book of Scripture. Proverbs is one of the most practical books in the Bible. It's filled with common sense advice for living. An old saying about the book is: “because the proverbs are sanctified horse sense, they give you stable thinking!” Seriously speaking, if you have a good working knowledge of the Book of Proverbs, and you follow its advice, you will live a life that is productive and pleasing to God.

Here's a suggestion on how to get that “good working knowledge.” There are 31 chapters in the book. Read one chapter a day, every month. If the month has fewer than 31 days, read a couple of extra chapters on some days to make up. If you do this every month for a year, you'll have a good working knowledge of the Book of Proverbs!

The proverbs are more than just “popular sayings.” They are **wisdom statements**, and **moral maxims**, and **prudent precepts**. For example: “March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb” is a popular saying, but it's not a proverb. But “Make hay while the sun shines” is a proverb. And, “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush” is a proverb. And “A penny saved is a penny earned” is a proverb. What's the difference? Proverbs contain **wise advice**. Although these illustrations aren't *biblical* proverbs, they demonstrate what proverbs are: wise advice, not just pithy statements.

It's hard to outline the Book of Proverbs because there doesn't seem to be any logical order to the proverbs. They cover every situation that we encounter in life, but they are not topically arranged. Why not? Why not have all the proverbs dealing with money grouped together, rather than scattered throughout the book? Answer: because that's how life comes at us! We never know what will happen on any given day. As we live our lives, many different topics confront us every day. Life's situations are not arranged topically. So the Book of Proverbs comes at us the way life comes at us.

Doctrinal Points

1. The primary author of Proverbs is King Solomon.

“The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel...” (v1). The first verse of the book sounds like Solomon is the only author of the Book of Proverbs, so why does our doctrinal point say that King Solomon was the **primary** author? Because other verses in the book suggest that other wise men contributed to this inspired book. From Proverbs 25:1, it seems that the Book of Proverbs didn't take its final form until King Hezekiah's time, around 700BC, but the primary author of the book is King Solomon.

According to 1 Kings 4:32, Solomon spoke 3000 proverbs and wrote 1005 songs! We don't have near that number of proverbs in the Book of Proverbs, so the several hundred that we have from the pen of King Solomon is only a selection of the 3000 proverbs he wrote. Some of Solomon's proverbs are also in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

2. The practical purpose of Proverbs is wise counsel.

Proverbs 1:2-6 - *“To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity, to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, to understand a proverb and an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles.”*

In these verses we have the purpose of the Book of Proverbs: to give moral discernment, to provide the instruction needed for a life that is pleasing to God, and skills for living the way God intended believers to live. Notice the contrast between wise people and foolish people from **God's perspective**. Wise people want to know and learn wisdom, and they're willing to receive instruction about what is right and just and fair behavior. Foolish people despise wise counsel and hate instruction (v7).

And notice that becoming wise in God's eyes is a **learning process**. Gaining wisdom is not automatic. But even a naïve person can become prudent, and young people can acquire knowledge and discretion (v4). A wise person can increase in learning and understanding (v5). The wise person thinks about and meditates on proverbs that may seem like a puzzle or riddle, but with insight and wisdom these proverbs give counsel for godly living (v6). The practical purpose of Proverbs is wise counsel.

3. The positive theme of Proverbs is “Fear God.”

Proverbs 1:7 – *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.”*

There are a lot of negatives in Proverbs, such as “don’t do this” or “don’t do that,” but the overall **theme is positive**: “**Fear God.**” Fearing the Lord doesn’t mean cringing in terror before the Lord. It means showing reverence and honor to Him, because He is God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. 1 Peter 2:17 says, “*Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God.*” This is wise counsel for living, similar to what we have in the Book of Proverbs - and it starts with the foundation of putting God first. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The positive theme of Proverbs is “Fear God.”

Proverbs 9:10 says, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy one is understanding.*” What’s the difference between knowledge and wisdom? One way to understand the difference is: **knowledge is the accumulation of truth in one’s mind. Wisdom is the application of truth to one’s life.** The fear of the Lord is the foundation for both knowledge and wisdom.

Do you show proper reverence for God? Do you honor Him with your lips and life? Do you worship Him by the way you live? Is the Lord #1 in your life? The positive theme of Proverbs is “Fear God.”

Practical Applications

1. Seek wise counsel.

“*A man of understanding will attain wise counsel*” (v5). How do you make important decisions in life? Hopefully, you do more than just flip a coin to make important decisions. There are biblical guidelines for making right decisions and one of them is right here: seek wise counsel.

Do you seek godly counsel when you have to make a major decision in life? Proverbs 11:14 says, “*Where there is no wise counsel, the people fall, but in the multitude of counselors, there is safety.*” And in Proverbs 15:22, we read, “*Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established.*”

So whether it’s a question of job change, or choice of church, or lifestyle, or education for your children or grandchildren, or even where you go on vacation: **seek wise counsel.**

2. Start with the right framework.

When I say “the right framework,” I’m thinking of a jigsaw puzzle. When you put together a jigsaw puzzle where do you start? Some people start with the main item of the puzzle, like a house or boat. Other folks start with the most colorful object, like a red barn. But most of us start with the outside edges – the **frame** of a puzzle. When we get all the edge pieces put together, it’s a lot easier to fit the other areas of the puzzle into the correct relationship with each other.

So let's apply this jigsaw puzzle concept to the area of knowledge. Think of each piece of the puzzle as a piece of knowledge or "a truth." In order to get all the pieces of knowledge or truth into the right place and position, and into the right relationship with all the other pieces, **you've got to have the right framework - the right worldview.**

What is the right framework? It is the fear of the Lord. "*The fear of the Lord is the **beginning** of knowledge.*" If you fear the Lord, you recognize the Lord as the Creator and the Sustainer of all things. You'll acknowledge Him as the sovereign Lord who has authority over all things, and you will honor and show reverence to Him. If you start by recognizing this, all pieces of truth will fit in perfectly. How can we possibly hope to have all the pieces of knowledge in the right place if we don't start with the right framework – reverence for the Lord? Other people may be experts in some areas of the puzzle, but **if they don't have the right framework, they're bound to distort the truth.** In fact, they may even **suppress the truth.**

Romans 1: 18-20 tells us how people who don't acknowledge or reverence God have constructed for themselves a distorted framework, and thus they can't put their pieces of knowledge in the right places. Then they spread their distorted "knowledge": "*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse*" (Romans 1:18-20).

Make sure you get your **framework for knowledge from the Word of God**, not from people who don't have the right framework. If what they say disagrees with God's Word – it's wrong! Colossians 1 gives us the right framework: "*He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist*" (Colossians 1:15-17). Thus, the Creator God has authority over our lives.

Acknowledging the existence and authority of the Creator God is the right framework. If the Lord God is the Creator of all things (not a Big Bang of mass energy that came from nothing!), then we are responsible to respect His authority. All knowledge we accumulate must fit properly into the framework of His authority. "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.*" **Start with the right framework!**