



Proverbs 1-9: To Know Wisdom and Instruction

OVERVIEW

The propose of the book of Proverbs can be summarized in Proverbs 1:2-7.

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.*

Chapters 1-9 lay out the foundation for wisdom and contrasts the way of wisdom against folly. Solomon does this by teaching his sons. He specifically address son in Prov 1:8, 1:15, 2:1, 3:1, 3:11, 3:21, 4:1, 4:10, 4:20, 5:1, 5:7, 6:1, 6:20, 7:1, 8:24, 8:32. Some scholars believe that Proverbs were originally collected to address the royal court to teach them how to rule justly¹. But it also serves a greater purpose of “shaping men and women into socially and religiously useful members of society.”²

We will study Proverbs 1-9 this summer in class. As part of the suggested family/individual devotions, the remainder of Proverbs will be studied. I hope this intergenerational study will encourage all of us to pursue wisdom, as individuals in the fear of the Lord, and also as families and as a church.

¹ Daniel J. Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms*, 1st ed. (Baker Academic, 2010), 218.

² C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books* (Moody Publishers, 2007), 176.



A NOTE ON SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Small group discussion is an important aspect of this Sunday School class. When studying the Bible we must interpret it properly. Part of the interpretation is to understand what the text means. The meaning of the text is timeless. God's word has a certain meaning and we cannot twist God's word to mean what we want it to mean.³ But God's word in order to be helpful for us also has to be applied. The small group discussions are helping to help us apply the text. Especially with text such as Proverbs, application is not always straight forward. The small group discussions can help each other understand how each text apply to their lives. Members of the small group can share struggles they have in applying this aspect of God's words as well as the joys when they obey God. We need to learn from each other.

Since we have a short time, you will not be able to go through all the topics covered in the verses we study. Keep in mind, the content of the discussion is helpful, but the discussion itself, and the people you get to know is just as important. We are doing an intergeneration class because the Biblical view of fellowship and learning is intergenerational, so take time to enjoy rubbing shoulders with someone you don't always study the Bible with. Learn from their perspective. Always end small group time with an opportunity to pray for each other.

Some helpful "tips" for small group discussion.

1. Encourage each other to speak up. Perhaps it may help to go around the group to allow each person to answer the question. Don't be afraid periods of silences.
2. There are different kinds of questions.
 - a. **Ice breaker questions** which "focus your group on the topic. Icebreakers also allow for you to be creative and engage different learning styles in natural, non-cheesy ways."⁴
 - b. **Factual and closed.** Yes/no type of answers. These don't foster discussion, and may even end discussions. Yet at times may be necessary to get everyone on the same page. Don't use this much if at all.
 - c. **"encounter questions** where your group encounters God's Word and each other through study. This is where classic-observation and interpretation-Bible study questions should be asked. It's through encounter questions that your group will discover what God's Word says and means."⁵ Avoid factual and closed type of questions here.

³ For example. We cannot twist God's word to say that homosexuality is acceptable to God when God makes it clear that it is wrong. Yet, some people (and even some churches) will try to teach that homosexuality is acceptable to God today.

⁴ Mike Hurt, "How to Lead a Successful Discussion-Driven Bible Study," accessed June 19, 2013, <http://www.lifeway.com/article/how-to-lead-a-successful-discussion-driven-bible-study>.

⁵ Ibid.



- d. **Application questions.** “answer the ‘so what?’ of the passage. Application questions can center on actions we need to take, examples we should follow, or attitudes we should adapt. The key is that these questions lead to action.”⁶
3. Pay attention when others talk. Be able to summarize in your mind of aloud what they have just said. Don’t think about what you want to say to the group when others are talking. Think about what they are saying.

Some rules you may use for your discussion. If you use these rules make sure everyone uses them.

1. *No talking when another talks, because his or her thoughts are pearls to cherish, not stomp on (Matthew 7:6).*
2. *No slams, because our goal is to encourage one another toward Christ-likeness (Hebrews 10:24-25).*
3. *No such thing as a stupid question, because asking anything leads to genuinely discovering what's true and what's not (Matthew 7:7).⁷*

For groups with younger children (early elementary) you may have to guide them to application questions. Also, some learning for younger children can come through worksheets, games and activities. But be sure to give them a chance to talk and respond to the text. Young children should always memorize the verses in class.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Karen Dockery, “6 Ways to Get Teens into Bible Study - Student Ministry,” accessed June 19, 2013, <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/Ways-to-get-teens-into-Bible-study>.



CLASS OUTLINE:

- I. Introduction: The Fear of the Lord Proverbs 1:1-7 (wk1)**
- II. First Discourse: Peer Pressure Proverbs 1:8-19⁸ (wk2)**
- III. Opening Discourses on Wisdom (wk3)**
 - a. Second Discourse: The Call of Wisdom Proverbs 1:20-33*
 - b. Third Discourse: Wisdom required to seek the Lord Proverbs 2:1-22*
 - c. Fourth Discourse: Trust in the Lord Proverbs 3:1-20 (wk4)*
- IV. Practical Wisdom**
 - a. Fifth Discourse: Success and Security in Life Proverbs 3:21-26 (wk5)*
 - b. Sixth Discourse: Neighborly Actions Proverbs 3:27-35 (wk6)*
 - c. Seventh Discourse: Keep Wisdom and Parental Words Proverbs 4:1-5:6 (wk7)*
 - d. Eighth Discourse: Warning Against Adultery Proverbs 5:6-23 (wk8)*
 - e. Ninth - Eleventh Discourse: Debt and Business Practices Proverbs 6:1-19 (wks9-10)*
 - f. Twelfth Discourse: More against Adultery Proverbs 6:20-35 (wk8)*
 - g. Thirteenth Discourse: Parable Against Adultery Proverbs 7:1-27 (wk8)*
- V. Closing Discourse on Wisdom**
 - a. Fourteenth Discourse: The Personification of Wisdom Proverbs 8:1-36 (wk11)*
 - b. Fifteenth Discourse: The contrast of Wisdom and Folly Proverbs 9:1-14 (wk12)*

⁸ Ibid., 197–202 Discourses based on Bullock's classification.



WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION AND THE FEAR OF THE LORD

Text: Proverbs 1:1-7

I. Introduction to Proverbs

a. *Wisdom Literature*

Proverbs is part of the Wisdom literature found in the Bible. The other Wisdom books of the Old Testament include Job, Ecclesiastics, and Song of Solomon. These are practical books that offer wisdom on how to live out Godly lives. Below is a table that contrasts the books.⁹

Proverbs	Theology in Principle	[Epistemology]	Life and wisdom
Job	Theology in Distress	[Theodicy]	Life and trouble
Ecclesiastics	Theology in Perplexity	[Philosophy]	Life and vanity
Song of Solomon	Theology in Love	[Matrimony]	Life and love

b. *Authorship*

Most scholars agree that Solomon took a part in compiling this book, but portions of the book were probably compiled years after his death. Likely Solomon wrote most of Proverbs 1-29:27 and some later additions and editorializing were made to complete the book (Prov 1:1, 1 Kings 4:29-34).¹⁰

c. *What are Proverbs?*

Proverbs are short saying that are memorable and requires wisdom to unpack. For example these two proverbs are both true, but the reader must decide how to apply each proverb.

⁴ *Answer not a fool according to his folly,
lest you be like him yourself.*

⁵ *Answer a fool according to his folly,
lest he be wise in his own eyes. (Proverbs 26:4-5)*

Another feature of Proverbs is that they are typical Hebrew poetry. Where rhyme and meter are important in English poetry¹¹, Hebrew poetry makes use of parallel couplets. Both English and Hebrew

⁹ OTBT II Class notes. Dr. Beacham. Fall 2012

¹⁰ Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*, 188; Otto Zöckler and Charles Augustus Aiken, *Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures : Proverbs-Song of Solomon*, trans. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids Mich.: Zondervan, 1870), 28–29.

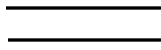
¹¹ For example. Amazing Grace. Note the rhyme (ABAB) and meter (8.6.8.6)

Amazing grace, how **sweet** the **sound**
that **saved** a **wretch** like **me**.
I **once** was **lost**, but **now** am **found**,
was **blind**, but **now** I **see**.

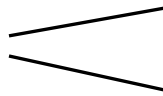


poetry also make use of imagery and various figurative language. A Summary of some of the parallelisms found in Hebrew Poetry are listed below:

- (1) *Synonymous. Here the lines, repeating the same thought, reinforce one another (e.g., Pss 1:2, 5; 49:1; 61:1; 83:14).*



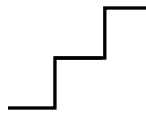
- (2) *Antithetic, where there is a contrast of some kind between the two lines (e.g., Pss 1:6; 37:9; 90:6).*



- (3) *Synthetic, where the second line completes or supplements the thought of the first (e.g., Ps 3:4).*



- (4) *Climactic or stair-like parallelism, where part of the first line is repeated, the thought then being carried forward an extra step. Sometimes a triplet, as an alternative to the couplet, utilizes this method (e.g., Ps 29:1, 2; cf. 96:7, 8).*



Other types are sometimes listed, but most of these are merely variants of numbers 1–3.¹²

d. Theme of Proverbs and Role of Proverbs 1:1-7

The main theme of Proverbs is found in Proverbs 1:1-7. Proverbs 1:8-9:18 can be seen as the introduction to the collection. In the opening 9 chapters, Solomon seems to be giving a series of sermons to his sons about the need for Wisdom in contrast to folly. The remainder of the book are collected proverbs to enforce that wisdom.

Because Proverbs 1-9 are designed for parents to teach children, it is especially fitting for a intergeneration class. Some may have concerns about the section dealing with adultery as it may seem inappropriate for children. Yet, if we do not teach young children about proper role of husband and wife

¹² Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1798.



in marriage, and about sexuality, they will learn it in schools. MN law requires that children grade 6 and higher receive "Responsible family life and sexuality education."¹³ But even before 6th grade, children are exposed to sexuality explicit music and indoctrination concerning acceptable sexual behavior. If parents want to teach their children in this area, we much find age appropriate means to communicate God's design for men and women. Solomon thought it was important. Also, because proverbs are designed to be short and memorable, we will emphasize memorizing verses through this study.

II. Proverbs 1:1-7

a. Proverbs 1:1

The proverbs found in this book, or section (Chapters 1-9) are either written by Solomon or are collected by Solomon. Solomon's reign started about 967 B.C. Note the subheading of Prov 10:1 as attributing that section to Solomon, and Prov 25:1 are attributed to Solomon but are collected by Hezekiah around 720 B.C. See also Prov 30:1, 31:1 for possible other sources.

b. Proverbs 1:2-6

Four characteristic of biblical wisdom are given here¹⁴:

1. Practical
2. Intellectual
3. Moral
4. Mysterious

Note that this section speaks to specifically to the youth, but also to the wise. Wisdom and instruction and mysterious riddles, yet they can be learned and applied. Wisdom can be understood as from God to men in contrast to instruction which if from men to men.

In contrast to the wise, three kinds of foolish persons are described in Proverbs:

1. The Simple –inexperienced, open minded. This is the most excusable as they can learn become wise.

¹³https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/text.php?version=latest&session=ls88&number=SF0451&session_year=2013&session_number=0

¹⁴ Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, vol. 14, The New American Commentary (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1993), 67–68.

The vocabulary of this section indicates four characteristics of biblical wisdom. First, it is *practical*. "Wisdom" includes the idea of "common sense" and the ability to cope with daily problems and can also refer to occupational skills (Exod 28:3; Ps 107:27). Second, it is *intellectual*. This is implied in words like "understanding" and "knowledge." Solomon's own fascination with natural history illustrates this (1 Kgs 4:33). Third, it is *moral* and involves *self-control*. This is indicated in words like "right and fair" and "discipline."⁷

Fourth, Proverbs draws the reader into the *mysteries of life*. This is implied in terms like "parables" and "riddles." The ancients were intrigued at riddles (Judg 14:12–19), but more is involved here than casual entertainment. Biblical wisdom seeks to resolve or at least adjust to the ambiguities of life. It seeks the reality behind the appearances. Not only that, it affirms that the believer can understand mysteries that outsiders cannot and so may couch its teaching in enigma (Matt 13:10–17).



“Merely having an open mind is nothing. The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid.” C.K. Chesterton

2. The Fool – people who choose not to change in light of wisdom. They bring on trouble for themselves and others.
3. The Scornor – these are people who not only reject wisdom, but they actively express contempt. And try to drag others into foolishness. They are almost a lost cause.

c. Proverbs 1:7

This is the key verse of the whole book of Proverbs. The personal name of the LORD is used here. There is no knowledge apart from God. And a foolish person hears wisdom from God and turns away from it. There are many that know the word of God, yet do not apply it in their lives. We cannot know God unless we fear God. Fearing God is the first step to trusting and obeying him. Job knew this cf Job 28:28. Solomon came back to this in the conclusion of his search for meaning in this frustrated world (Ecc 12:13-14).

Worldview

All knowledge that is useful for wisdom is built upon the fear of God. Though we can gain knowledge from a variety of sources all knowledge in order to be useful in wisdom must be built upon the foundation of Word of God. The Word of God reveals God and what men must do to be right with God. Any knowledge of the world apart from that foundation is foolishness.

All human knowledge to be applied in a Christian’s life must be viewed through the lens Scripture. All knowledge must be build upon God’s word not apart from God word. Knowledge is like bricks used to build a house. You can build a great house using bricks without a foundation. However for a house to withstand the elements, you must built that house upon a foundation. The bricks not only have to connect (relate) to other bricks but also connect to the foundation. The fear of God is that foundation. Luke 9:7:46-49 illustrates this idea. Jesus says that obedience to God is the foundation.

III. Discussion questions:

You don’t have time to go over every question. Choose the ones you think are most appropriate for your group to discuss.

1. Read Chesterton’s quote. What is the goal of Proverbs for the simple?

“Merely having an open mind is nothing. The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid.” C.K. Chesterton

2. If Wisdom is from God and instruction is from men, what are some examples of each? (Think of a scenario when each is useful?)
3. What do you call a person well versed in the intellect of wisdom and instruction yet does not exhibit the moral and practical aspects of wisdom? What are some areas in your life that you know wisdom (intellectually) but does not apply wisdom (morally and practically)
4. Do you agree with Solomon that there is no knowledge apart from the fear of the LORD? Why?



5. What does it mean to fear God? In what ways do we fear God? In what ways do we not?
6. What prevents you from being a wise (or wiser) person?
7. Why is wisdom mysterious? Why must it come in riddles rather than simple imperative (commands) statements? (see introduction section on Prov 26:4-5) How do you solve the riddle of Prov 26:4-5?
8. Who comes to mind as a wise person? How would Prov 1:1-7 judge this person? What does a stereotypical simple person look like? How about a fool, or a scorner?

IV. Memory Verse

⁷ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;

fools despise wisdom and instruction. Proverbs 1:7 (ESV)

V. Activities for younger kids

Use as necessary

d. Big Solid Bible, flimsy toilet paper rolls, Jenga blocks,

Ask students to choose either Bible or the toilet paper rolls as a foundation to build a structure made up of the Jenga blocks. Explain the word of God is more dependable than anything else. The fear of the Lord is where true knowledge begins. Don't be a fool, build your life on the word of God.

e. Solving riddles.

Give the students a few riddles. Ask them to solve the riddles and explain to them that Proverbs are sometimes like riddles. You must think about them for a while before you get it. This requires Wisdom. So to be wise (obeying Proverbs) you need Wisdom. E.g.¹⁵

- Mary's father has 4 children; three are named Nana, Nene, and Nini. So what is the 4th child's name?
- What is Full of holes and still holds water?
- What happens when you throw a white rock into the Red Sea?
- What is black and white and read all over?
- What word in the English language is always spelled incorrectly?

¹⁵ From http://kids.niehs.nih.gov/games/riddles/not_so_hard_rd1.htm

Answers:

- Mary's father has 4 children; three are named Nana, Nene, and Nini. So what is the 4th child's name? (it is not Nono, it is Mary)
- What is Full of holes and still holds water? (a sponge)
- What happens when you throw a white rock into the Red Sea? (it sinks)
- What is black and white and read all over? (a newspaper)
- What word in the English language is always spelled incorrectly? (incorrectly!)



VI. Suggested Family or Personal Devotionals

Here are some suggested readings for you to work together as a family or individual through the week. It may be helpful to set aside a daily routine for devotionals as a family: perhaps early morning, before or after dinner, or right before bedtime routine. Choose a time when the family is usually all together. There will be exceptions but try to be consistent. Also, keep the devotional time short. Regular short devotionals are better than long infrequent devotionals.

Each day review the memory verse for the week:

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

a. Day 1: Proverbs 10

Today's Date _____

This is a long section and there are many related proverbs. As a family (or individual) choose one set of proverbs that you feel is most applicable to you.

1. Write out the proverb here.
2. What kind of parallel statement is this proverb? Are the lines similar, contrasting, do they complete a thought? (Don't worry if you can't do this part with younger children)
3. What does this proverb teach me about wisdom and foolishness? About God? About men?
4. What should I do differently based on this proverb? Look for ways though daily interaction to show how this proverb applies in your life.
5. Review the memory verse for the week together.



d. Day 4: Matthew 7:21-27

Today's Date _____

1. For children sing the song, "The Wiseman Built his House"
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkNOcr5iHP4>
2. A parable is a story that is a comparison. They are similar to a proverb except that it is usually a bit longer. Let's figure out what Jesus is comparing.
 - a. What is the house built upon the rock compare to?
 - b. What is the house build upon the sand compare to?
 - c. What does the rain and floods compare to?
3. What was Jesus doing in Matthew Chapters 5-7? Why do you think Jesus tells this parable at this time in Matthew?
4. (Bonus) How does this parable relate to Proverbs 1:7?
5. Review the memory verse for the week together.

e. Day 5: Proverbs 10-11

Today's Date _____

1. As you reread Proverbs 10-11, did any other proverbs jump out at you as something that is immediately applicable? If so write it down here.
2. Look back on Day 1 and Day 3. Of the proverbs you copied down. How did you do?
 - a. Write down a situation where you followed the command of that Proverb
 - b. Write down a situation where you could have applied that Proverb but did not.
3. Ask God to provide wisdom not only as something you know in your mind, but wisdom as a skill you practice. In your prayer commit yourself to apply God's wisdom in your life.
4. Review the memory verse for the week together.



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