

August 4, 2019 by Steve Brandon



# Get Wisdom

## Proverbs 1:1-7

1. Solomon got wisdom (verse 1).
2. Proverbs gives wisdom (verses 2-6).
3. The key to wisdom (verse 7).

This morning, we begin our exposition of this great book of the Bible. One of the reasons we will be in the book of Proverbs is because it is a book written for young people, and we have a lot of young people at Rock Valley Bible Church. About half of us are under the age of 18, and as a pastor, I feel the burden to help you parents in the raising of your children. There is no better place for that help than the book of Proverbs.

It is the divine child-rearing manual. One of the classic commentaries on the book of Proverbs was written by Charles Bridges and published in 1840. Spurgeon called it "the best work on the Proverbs." Bridges calls Proverbs "A Book for the Young."

You can see this if you just survey the first few chapters:

1:8 "Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching."  
1:10 "My son" ...  
1:15 "My son" ...  
2:1 "My son" ...  
3:1 "My son" ...  
3:11 "My son" ...  
4:1 "Hear, O sons, a father's instruction."  
4:10 "Hear, my son, and accept my words."  
4:20 "My son, be attentive to my words."  
5:1 "My son, be attentive to my wisdom."  
5:7 "And now, O sons, listen to me."  
6:1 "My son" ...  
6:3 "My son" ...  
6:20 "My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching."  
7:1 "My son, keep my words."  
7:24 "And now, O sons, listen to me."  
8:32 "And now, O sons, listen to me."

In the first eight chapters alone, that is more than twice every chapter that this father is appealing to his children: "My son!" "My sons!" Always with an exhortation to holiness, walking in the ways of the Lord, walking in the ways of wisdom.

All of you parents should be speaking in this way with your own children, teaching them, imploring them with urgency, directing them in the ways of wisdom.

Though Proverbs was written some 3,000 years ago, its wisdom is very applicable for today's young person.

Consider a few of the topics that Proverbs covers. It covers the temptations of peer pressure. It addresses matters of poverty and justice. Proverbs warns against sloth and sexual temptation. It speaks about understanding the ways of evil men and women. It counsels toward self-control: watching your words, being careful with your eyes, controlling your desires. Proverbs talks about the effect of wicked rulers on a society. It promises blessing to those who walk in righteousness. It shows the harm that will come to the wicked. It advises generosity and kindness. Proverbs speaks of financial matters. It has counsel for relationships. It teaches marital fidelity, and how to run a business.

Is this not relevant for today's youth?

Indeed, Proverbs is "A Book for the Young." It is helpful for the youth in every generation, because every generation faces similar temptations. They may come in different ways today because of technology, but at the root, people are people. The young people of today face the same temptations that people of old did.

Listen to what Charles Bridges says in his commentary:

Our young are growing up at a period, when "the foundations of the earth are out of course;" and when subtle and restless efforts are making to poison their hearts, and pervert their ways. Nothing therefore can be more important, than to fortify them with sound principles. What this invaluable Book impresses upon their minds is, the importance of deep-seated principles in the heart; the responsibility of conduct in every step of life; the danger of trifling deviations for expediency's sake; the value of self-discipline; the habit of bringing everything to the Word of God; the duty of weighing in just balances

a worldly and a heavenly portion, and thus deciding the momentous choice of an everlasting good before the toys of earth.

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Bridges wrote this more than 150 years ago. It could be written today. The world is there, seeking to poison the minds of our children, and there is nothing more that our children need than having “deep-seated principles in the heart” by which they live their lives.

Proverbs will help them to understand the world, their relationships with other people, how the Lord works in this world, and how to come out unscathed by it.

My heart and prayer for the young people of this church is that they might come to embrace the book of Proverbs, and love the book of Proverbs, and walk in its ways.

Listen to the testimony of Hanna, my daughter:

I spent last year at Jackson Hole Bible College. During the year, we have a variety of classes: Old Testament survey, New Testament survey, Prophets, Galatians, and many others. But one of my favorites was Proverbs, even though some of my classmates struggled with it because we had to memorize 120 verses, word for word, in 45 days. My friend and I talked about it, and we were so thankful our professor was making us do it, because it was so beneficial for our lives.

We weren't learning dates or facts. We were learning verses from the Bible that are going to benefit us for our whole lives. Another reason I loved it is because Proverbs is so applicable. With some books of the Bible, the application takes some work to find. But in Proverbs, what it says is the application. I would just encourage you to be excited about learning Proverbs, and to dig deep into it, because it is the way God instructs us to live our lives. And when we live the way God instructs us, we give Him glory.

Proverbs is a blue-collar book. It is not so much a book about knowing as it is a book about doing. I would love for our preaching through Proverbs to have a similar effect upon your lives as well. Young people, may you come to love the instruction in the book of Proverbs. It is practical. It can be life-changing.

I believe that at this stage in the life of Rock Valley Bible Church, it will be helpful for us to spend some extended time in the book of Proverbs, not only for the sake of the children, but also for the sake of parents, to know how to instruct your children.

But lest you think that the Proverbs are only for parents or for children, think again. Proverbs 1:5 says, “Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance.” In other words, the Proverbs are not only for the young. They are also for the wise, that is, those who have been walking with the Lord for years and have figured out much of life. There is always more to learn, and the wise will increase in their wisdom. “Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser” (Proverbs 9:9).

Proverbs is for all of us, young, old, wise, or foolish. It will instruct us all in the ways of wisdom.

So, with that as an introduction, let's dig into the book of Proverbs.

The theme of Proverbs that we will continually come back to week after week is this: “Get Wisdom.” I believe that is the theme of Proverbs. It is all about getting wisdom. It is the title of my message this morning.

My title comes from chapter 4, when Solomon fills in some details of his life. Look over at chapter 4:

#### Proverbs 4:1-9

Hear, O sons, a father's instruction,  
and be attentive, that you may gain insight,  
for I give you good precepts;  
do not forsake my teaching.  
When I was a son with my father,  
tender, the only one in the sight of my mother,  
he taught me and said to me,  
“Let your heart hold fast my words;  
keep my commandments, and live.  
Get wisdom; get insight;  
do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth.  
Do not forsake her, and she will keep you;  
love her, and she will guard you.  
The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom,  
and whatever you get, get insight.  
Prize her highly, and she will exalt you;  
she will honor you if you embrace her.  
She will place on your head a graceful garland;  
she will bestow on you a beautiful crown.”

My first point comes from verse 1:

### **1. Solomon got wisdom (verse 1).**

In verse 1, all we see is the name of the writer of Proverbs: “The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel.” He is identified as the “son of David” and the “king of Israel.” This places him in history, living about 1,000 years before the coming of Christ. He ruled and reigned over Israel for forty years until his death.

But when the Proverbs were written and compiled, everyone knew about King Solomon. He was the wisest king that ever lived.

To give you perspective, let’s suppose that the Proverbs were a book about basketball. It would sound something like this: “The highlights of Michael Jordan, Chicago Bull, NBA Champion.” In our culture today, we know about Michael Jordan. He was the best basketball player ever to live. We have seen his highlights, his dunks. We know about his Nike sneakers.

In sports circles, there is constant discussion about who the GOAT is, that is, the Greatest Of All Time. When it comes to basketball, Michael Jordan is always in the discussion. I would argue that he is the GOAT. And if we as a church had an opportunity to run a basketball camp, and Michael was coming, all we would need to do is let the community know that Michael Jordan is coming to town. Can you imagine the throngs of young people who would come to learn from the master himself?

We know so much about Michael Jordan that we need little explanation of who he was. Just the name alone is enough to draw attention. Likewise, to those in Israel, there was little need for explanation of who Solomon was. He was simply the wisest in the land.

In fact, Solomon was the GOAT of wisdom. We read in 1 Kings 4:29-34 of his wisdom:

#### 1 Kings 4:29-34

God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth 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 Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol, and his fame was in all the surrounding nations. He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish. 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.

We have here in Proverbs some of those 3,000 proverbs that he wrote. There are a little less than 1,000 verses in Proverbs, 31 chapters, about 30 verses each chapter.

But not all of the proverbs in Proverbs are from Solomon. In chapter 30, we have the words of Agur son of Jakeh. In chapter 31, we have the words of King Lemuel. There are also a few places where Solomon may have been quoting the wisdom of others. In Proverbs 22:17, we read, “Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise.” In Proverbs 24:23, we read, “These also are sayings of the wise.” But for the most part, these 1,000 or so proverbs were written by Solomon, the wisest man ever to live.

The story of the Queen of Sheba gives perspective:

#### 1 Kings 10:1-9

Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones. And when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her. When the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his cupbearers, and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the LORD, there was no more breath in her. She said to the king, “The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom, but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report that I heard. Happy are your men! Happy are your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness.”

The Proverbs are worthy of our attention because of who wrote them. Solomon did. Solomon got wisdom.

Let’s look now at my second point:

## **2. Proverbs gives wisdom (verses 2-6).**

I get this from verses 2-6, in which Solomon lays out his purpose in writing these Proverbs:

#### Proverbs 1:2-6

to know wisdom and instruction,  
to understand words of insight,  
to receive instruction in wise dealing,  
in righteousness, justice, and equity;  
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 purpose of Solomon in writing the Proverbs was to pass on his wisdom. In other words, God did not give Solomon wisdom simply for Solomon to sit on it. No, he gave him wisdom to pass on to us.

Solomon wants his readers, in verse 2, to know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight. He wants us to know what is right, what is wrong. He wants us to have insight to understand deeply the things of life: the actions of others, the motives of others, the consequences of our own actions.

In verse 3, Solomon wants his readers to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity. He wants us to know how to interact with people wisely, so that we do the right thing, the just thing, so that we are fair to all, even when others are pushing us to cut corners or show favoritism.

In focusing upon his younger readers, Solomon wants, in verse 4, to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth. He wants young people to grasp an understanding of the world around them, not simply to let their days pass by, but to live with purpose, with good judgment and common sense, with moral principle rather than mere impulse or passion of the heart.

In focusing upon his older readers, Solomon wants, in verse 5, the wise to hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands to obtain guidance. He wants the wise not to rest on their laurels, but to press on in their learning. He wants us to know that the day we stop learning is the day we become fools.

In verse 6, Solomon wants his readers to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. He wants us to think long and hard about his writings, to meditate upon the deep truths in the Proverbs, to bring their insight into the fabric of our lives. He wants us to know what is wise, to understand the tricky things of life.

This is Solomon's purpose: to pass on his wisdom. And this takes work.

I am not sure if you noticed the picture on our teaching slide: there is a picture of a shovel, digging in the ground. If there is anything that is true about using a shovel, it is this: it is hard work. After five minutes of digging dirt, you will break out in a sweat. It takes effort to dig a hole in the ground. It takes effort to till the soil.

That is what you need to do with the book of Proverbs. You need to work at it, dig, labor, break out in a sweat. Wisdom does not just come to us naturally. We need to work for it.

The natural way for us to walk is the way of the fool. Proverbs 22:15 says that folly is bound up in the heart of a child. Children do not need to be taught the ways of foolishness. They need to be taught in the ways of wisdom. "A child left to himself brings shame to his mother" (Proverbs 29:15). If you let a child learn for himself, he will walk in foolish ways.

So when it comes to wisdom, you need to work to get it. That is the idea of the shovel in my teaching logo. Week after week that we are in Proverbs, be reminded of the work it takes to be a wise person. And notice what that work produces: not just knowledge of the Bible, but the doing of the Bible. The goal is not to be a church that merely knows the Proverbs. It is to be a church that does them. As James says, we must be doers of the word and not hearers only. The 120 verses Hanna memorized are just the beginning. They need to move from the mind down into the hands and feet.

A great illustration of the work involved comes at the beginning of chapter 2:

Proverbs 2:1-5

My son, if you receive my words  
and treasure up my commandments with you,  
making your ear attentive to wisdom  
and inclining your heart to understanding;  
yes, if you call out for insight  
and raise your voice for understanding,  
if you seek it like silver  
and search for it as for hidden treasures,  
then you will understand the fear of the LORD  
and find the knowledge of God.

It is only with deep effort and labor that you will find the wisdom you need for this life. It requires receiving the Proverbs (verse 1), treasuring them up in the heart (verse 1), attention (verse 2), a desire of the heart (verse 2), prayer (verse 3), and diligence (verse 4). Only after you put in that sort of work will you get wisdom.

But it is not as though you can ultimately find the wisdom in your own ability. "For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2:6). Ultimately, any wisdom you glean from the book of Proverbs will be God-given, not achieved by your own effort. Effort and hard work are needed, but ultimately, it is the Lord who gives the wisdom. Solomon understood this very well. This reminds me of Philippians 2:12-13: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." You labor and strive. But you do so knowing that ultimately it is God's work in your life that is determinative. Take up your shovel. Dig. Search for wisdom. But realize that in the end, it comes from the LORD.

When he was a young man, the LORD appeared to him in a dream and said, "Ask what I shall give you" (1 Kings 3:5).

1 Kings 3:6-14

Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. Your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?" It pleased the LORD that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days."

Solomon's wisdom was not self-generated. It was God-given. As we read earlier, "God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore" (1 Kings 4:29).

This leads us naturally to my final point this morning:

### 3. The key to wisdom (verse 7).

In verse 7, we read, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:7). What is the key to wisdom? The fear of the LORD.

This is not the only time in Scripture that this is mentioned. It comes up several times in the book of Proverbs. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight" (Proverbs 9:10). "The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom" (Proverbs 15:33). This was not new to Solomon. It also comes up in Psalm 111, which our best guess is that David wrote. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10). Job also taught the same thing: "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom" (Job 28:28).

This is the key to understanding the Proverbs: the fear of the LORD. We will go astray in the book of Proverbs if we forget the key. If we make the Proverbs simply about moral living, we have missed it. If we make the Proverbs about how to live, we will fail in understanding them. Because ultimately, our wisdom comes from the Lord, and we need to seek wisdom from him.

That is a helpful way to understand what the fear of the LORD is: to realize that any wisdom we have in this life does not come from ourselves, but from the LORD. We fear him, we reverence him, we seek him, we worship him, knowing that "every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). We are not sufficient for our own lives. We need the Lord's help to live wisely. This is the fundamental realization of Proverbs: the wisdom we need comes from the LORD.

At the end of verse 7, we read: "fools despise wisdom and instruction." Note that in Hebrew poetry, the second line of a verse is often related to the first. Sometimes the second line restates the first; sometimes it adds a contrast. Here it adds a contrast. The first line says that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. The second line says that fools despise wisdom and instruction. The implication is clear: those who do not fear the Lord are fools.

The fear of the LORD bears on this thought, because there will be times in life when you hear what is right, but your heart is tugging you away from what you hear. You don't want to go that way. Perhaps it doesn't all make sense to you, and in your own wisdom you would follow another path. The fear of the LORD will draw you to walk in the right way, even when your sinful heart is tugging you in another direction, even when everything in your mind is trying to justify your wrong behavior. The fear of the LORD will compel you to walk in his ways and not your own. The fear of the LORD will cause you to love wisdom and instruction. "Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still" (Proverbs 9:9).

As I close this morning, I feel the need to talk about the sad part of the story of Solomon. With all his wisdom and insight, he turned away from the Lord (1 Kings 11:9). Against his own counsel, he pursued foreign women, who turned his heart away from following the Lord (1 Kings 11:4). Against his own counsel, he followed after foreign gods (1 Kings 11:7-8). It is a sad story, really, of a man who had so much wisdom and obtained so much success, only to turn away in the end.

Such a story is not foreign to us. Just this week, in the news, we heard of a highly successful Christian pastor and author, Joshua Harris. He came out this week denying his faith. He wrote, "I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus. The popular phrase for this is 'deconstruction,' the biblical phrase is 'falling away.' By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian."<sup>[2]</sup>

Joshua Harris was pastoring a megachurch, with thousands coming to hear him each Sunday. I have read his books with great profit. In fact, I remember one time passing out one of his books to every family in our congregation, along with a CD of one of his sermons. The book was endorsed by John MacArthur himself. Joshua Harris was in our camp.

Yet today, he has denied the faith. It is sad to see that he is not following his own advice. I believe the core issue, both for Solomon and for Joshua Harris, is the loss of the fear of the LORD. Solomon wrote better than he lived. And Harris, having once proclaimed the gospel faithfully, has now stood up and said, "I am not a Christian." To say those words in the presence of God is to have entirely lost the fear of him.

Regarding both Joshua Harris and Solomon, I read something this week that is so true. Andrew Walker wrote: "People do not abandon the faith for exclusively intellectual reasons. There's a moral subtext. Our conduct gives shape to our belief. The head justifies where the heart bends, and apostasy is more often the result of ethical revolution than doctrinal innovation."<sup>[3]</sup>

That was true of Solomon. It was his passion for foreign women that led to his downfall. And I suspect that in future days, we may learn of some sin of Joshua Harris that led him away from the Lord as well. "The head justifies where the heart bends."

Now, there is a legitimate question about what to do with his writings. Should we burn his books? We are not burning Solomon's books. There is much that Solomon still has to teach us.

If nothing else, these men teach us an important lesson: salvation does not come through wisdom. If it did, Solomon would never have turned to apostasy as he did, nor Joshua Harris, nor others. Salvation comes through Jesus Christ, when we realize our failures and our sins, that we can never live up to the wisdom that Solomon calls us to live.

In fact, I have a friend who was saved while reading through Proverbs. He saw the wisdom in the book. He saw his own foolishness. He cried out to the Lord and was saved from his sin.

So, as we work through Proverbs over the next few months, we need to keep this in mind, which is what verse 7 is about. It is the fear of the LORD that we need to keep front and center as the key to Proverbs.

Proverbs works in us very much like the law. It directs us how we ought to live. But as we read it, we discover that we do not measure up. That realization should not produce despair, but should lead us to call out to Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Even the wisest man who ever lived failed. If Solomon could not endure to the end in his own strength, what hope do we have? The answer is: none, in ourselves. We need a Redeemer. That is why Jesus came. There is hope in Jesus Christ. As we fear the LORD, we will walk in humility before him, and that humility leads to confession, which leads to faith and trust, which leads to new life in Christ. So let us get wisdom. And let us begin with the ultimate wisdom: the recognition that we do not have enough wisdom in ourselves, and that we must find it in the one who is Wisdom himself.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on August 4, 2019 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org](http://www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org).

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[1] Charles Bridges, *A Commentary on Proverbs* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1846), xiv.

[2] Joshua Harris, Instagram post, July 2019. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B0ZBrNLH2sl/>

[3] Andrew Walker (@andrewtwalk), Twitter, August 2019.