

Proverbs 1:1-7

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 April 2017

Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 00] Good morning. Would you turn with me to the Old Testament book of Proverbs this morning? That's page 527 in the Pew Bible.

We're starting a new sermon series this morning. If you're new to Trinity, our typical practice is to pick a book of the Bible or a section of the book of the Bible and to just teach straight through it. And we do that because rather than hearing what I have to say or what Pastor Matt or what Pastor Greg has to say, we want to hear what God is saying to us in Scripture.

And we think the best way to do that is to attend closely to the Bible and try to discern and apply to our lives what we find God saying there. So we just finished up a big section of Luke's gospel.

This winter and spring. And now we're going to begin this new season of the year by going through this Old Testament book of Proverbs. If you look in the pew card, in the blue sermon card in the pew, you'll see that we'll be spending the rest of the spring and the summer here together.

[1 : 14] Now, if you're there, if you're there in the book of Proverbs, let me just give you some orienting remarks to this book before we dive in. Let me give you a quick sense of how this book is put together. If you look at chapters one through nine, you can just kind of page through there quickly.

Look at chapters one through nine. You'll see that those chapters are a sequence of speeches that kind of encourage us and motivate us to get wisdom and to grow in it.

They're sort of stoking our desire for wisdom. And then if you look at chapter 10, the beginning of chapter 10 and following, there sort of the Proverbs proper begin. There we have the Proverbs themselves, which are these kind of short, salty little sayings that unpack what wisdom, a life of wisdom looks like in the contours of our everyday life.

And it deals with everything from your work to your relationships, to your emotional life, to how you use your words, the whole gamut. And in all, if you turn the whole way to the end, you see that the book has 31 chapters.

And historically, many godly men and women have made it a practice to read and meditate on one chapter a day of the book of Proverbs, working their way through the entire book every month.

[2 : 26] I think it was Billy Graham who said once that he read five psalms a day to learn how to relate rightly to God. And he read one chapter of Proverbs a day to learn how to relate rightly to people.

Not bad advice from a godly saint. So if you're looking for a way to inject some new life into your personal Bible reading and prayer this spring and summer, maybe you can do just that.

You can take up one chapter of Proverbs a day. And hey, here's the great thing. Even if you miss a day, just look at your watch, see what day it is, and just jump right in. Just pick right up. So that's a little bit of orientation to this book of Proverbs.

But as we launch into the series, we're going to start with just the first seven verses of chapter one. And what we're going to try to do this morning is get an orientation to the theme of the whole book. As we come into this new book, how do we try to grasp the whole? So let's read these first seven verses and we'll try to do just that. The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel.

[3 : 27] Let's pray together.

Father, indeed, what an amazing mystery it is that your grace has come to us. Lord, we stand this morning before you in your presence and we've come now to your word.

Lord, and we pray that your spirit would be at work to open our hearts and our minds and our ears so that we might hear what you are saying to us and in hearing, Father, that we would grow in wisdom and grow in grace.

Father, we ask that you would do this for Christ's sake. Amen. Amen. So we find that these first seven verses tell us the purpose, the big purpose of the book of Proverbs.

Why is this book in the Bible? And it's right there in verse two. Look at the beginning of verse two. To know wisdom. The whole point of this book is to instruct and instill and to get us to know, to internalize, to grasp deep down this thing that it calls wisdom.

[5 : 05] So with our time together this morning, I want to just try to deal with three things looking at these first seven verses. First, what is wisdom? Second, how do we get it?

Or why do we need it? And then third, how do we get it? What is it? Why do we actually need that? And how do we get it? So first, what is wisdom? What is this book talking about?

Well, it's clear, isn't it? From these opening verses of the book that the wisdom that we're talking about here is more than just head knowledge, right? It's more than just an acquaintance with facts about something.

Look at all the different words that are used in these verses to unpack what wisdom is. Imagine a sort of beam of light shining into a prism and then streaming out in the full range of colors.

Wisdom is a bit like that. It's one thing, but within it, you can see a full, whole spectrum. It's multifaceted. It's a multidimensional whole. Look there. We hear in these verses of instruction and insight, seeing things clearly, insightfully.

[6 : 10] We hear of wise dealing, righteousness, justice, equity, living rightly in the world. We hear of prudence and knowledge and discretion.

And then we hear of learning and guidance. So wisdom is way more than just head knowledge. That much is clear. But if it's not that, then what is it? Well, the Hebrew word that we translate as wisdom here is the Hebrew word *chokmah*.

And this is where things kind of get cool. If you look at the rest of the Bible, you start to see this word in very interesting places. In Exodus 35, wisdom is what artists have who skillfully design the beautiful tapestries and engravings and clothing for the tabernacle, the place where God was meant to be worshipped.

In Psalm 107, wisdom is what sailors have who can skillfully navigate the winds and the seas and drive their ship rightly to get to their destination.

In Jeremiah 10, wisdom is what goldsmiths have who skillfully show expertise in their craft. So what is wisdom then? In Proverbs, wisdom is the skill, the expertise of living life well, of understanding how life really works and knowing how to achieve beautiful results.

[7 : 39] It's the skill of godly living. Imagine a master of a particular craft, say woodworking, and see her there at work in her studio before this raw piece of wood.

And she cuts and she planes and she sands and she carves and slowly as she goes to work on this piece of wood, something beautiful emerges. And as a master of her craft, as a master of woodworking, she has a deep understanding of lots of things, right?

She has a deep understanding of her materials, how the grain of the wood works, how different woods have different color and density and pliability. And she knows her tools well, right? She knows how each saw and each file and each plane is suited for each particular task.

And she has a vision, too, for what she can create. Whether it be a chair with perfect lines and the perfect angle for your back, unlike our pews that you're sitting in right now.

Or maybe a picture frame with an ornate design, something beautiful. And what the book of Proverbs is telling us is that we can develop this sort of wisdom, this sort of *hokmah*, this sort of skill, not just in a particular area of a particular craft, but actually in the living of a whole human life.

[9 : 00] The way a craftsman produces his work, the way a musician plays her instrument, the way an athlete executes their sport. Proverbs is saying that life itself is something we can live in such a way that we bring forth something beautiful like that.

And wisdom is the skill of doing just that. Speaking of wisdom, Proverbs 4.9, a little later in these early speeches says, She will place on your head a graceful garland.

She will bestow on you a beautiful crown. And over and over again, we see that same theme in Proverbs, that wisdom is the path of beauty and life, of a life well-lived, of a life that flourishes as God intended it to.

So what is wisdom? Wisdom is the skill of living life well as it was fully intended to be lived. It's a fully lived human life. And if that's what it is, maybe it's already becoming clear why we need it.

Why do we need wisdom? Well, I don't know about you, but there are many days when I'm pretty sure that I'm not doing a great job living life well.

[10:16] I think many days my life doesn't look like a thing of beauty or a work of art. It looks a little more like a two-year-old with a permanent marker, right? It can be quite a mess.

And the reality is, friends, that none of us is naturally wise, are we? None of us is naturally wise in this rich, biblical sense. Look at verse 4. There we're told of a certain group of people called the simple or the young, the youth.

And this is Proverbs' way of describing a person who is undeveloped, unformed, immature, who's not prudent or shrewd, who's without knowledge, without discretion at this point. And all of us are there at some point, right?

And the book of Proverbs seems particularly aimed at instructing young people, those who are coming of age, those who need to learn the skill of living well in God's world amidst all the competing concerns and all the sound bites and all the different ways that are being held up for us to live.

Because the reality is, friends, we aren't neutral, actually. We won't just sort of stay in one place. And here's what I mean by that. Notice the two other sorts of people mentioned in these opening verses.

[11:31] In verse 5, we see the wise, right? And then in the second half of verse 7, we see the foolish, the fools. And all of us are either on our way to becoming one or the other.

We will either internalize wisdom and become wise or we will despise wisdom and become fools. There's no middle ground. And the book of Proverbs will contrast these two ways, these two paths, the way of the wise and the way of the fool, over and over and over again.

You see, we all need wisdom because all of us are in a process of becoming. And none of us is naturally wise. Left to ourselves, we actually become fools. But notice, it's not just the simple.

It's not just the youth who need wisdom. Look at verse 5 again. Let the wise do what? Let the wise hear and increase in learning. Even the wise, it seems, need wisdom.

So this book isn't just a big club to hit adolescents over the head with. No. This book is for the wise, too. Because becoming wise, you see, is a lifelong journey.

[12:42] It's a lifelong pursuit. In fact, Proverbs has some of its harshest words. For those who've stopped thinking they need to grow in wisdom.

The moment you think you need, you no longer need to learn. The moment you close your ears to correction and stop being humble. The moment you think you've arrived. Proverbs says that's the moment when you've become the biggest fool of all.

So we need wisdom because none of us is naturally wise. And we need wisdom because none of us has arrived. It's a lifelong pursuit. But now look at verse 3. There we're told about righteousness and justice and equity.

Biblical wisdom, it seems, has a profoundly moral shape. That is, to live wisely is to live in line with God's justice in the world. And what is biblical justice?

Well, there's a lot we could say there. We won't get into all of it. But at a very basic level, biblical justice is that which serves and heals our fractured communities. It's a writing of what's gone wrong.

[13:52] So why do we need wisdom? Not just because we ourselves are so often simple and foolish. Not just because we're often our own worst enemies. But also because the communities that we live in need to see God's healing justice at work.

The world needs people who are wise. Who will live lives of righteousness, justice, and equity. For the sake of our neighbors. For the sake of our world. We need wisdom.

We need to become a wise people. It's part of our servant calling into the world. After all, none of us lives in a vacuum, do we?

None of us is an island. The decisions that we make, the lives that we lead, profoundly affect those around us. C.S. Lewis once described our lives, living our lives like a fleet of ships.

And he said, you know, if your ship is running well, it will sail well with the other ships around you. But then he said, but you know, if your ship is constantly malfunctioning, you're probably going to just end up crashing into all the ships around you and making a mess.

[14:54] And his point was, it matters how you live your life. Not just for your own good and flourishing, but for the good of those around you. We need wisdom because that's what will allow us to actually be agents of healing and restoration in our communities and in our relationships.

Rather than constantly crashing into everyone else and just contributing further to the brokenness in the world. So friends, I wonder, are you starting to see your need for wisdom? Wisdom in the workplace where things are tricky, hard, got to navigate a lot of tricky waters. Wisdom in your friendships and relationships. Wisdom as a parent, as a spouse, as a student. Wisdom in your life. Wisdom in your life. Do you see how much you need wisdom? But you know, there's one more reason why we need wisdom. And this one is a bit more broader in scope. Verse 1 says that these are the Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel. Now, most of the book of Proverbs is written in the literary mode of a father speaking to his son. [16:06] And this father we see here in verse 1 is the king. So he's presumably speaking to his son who will one day reign. Now, what does that have to do with us?

I'm presuming that no one in here is the heir apparent to a throne. Well, in the sweep of the biblical story, friends, it has everything to do with us. Go back to Genesis chapter 1.

There God creates male and female in his image, all of us. And he gives them a task to be his image bearers. That is to exercise a good rule over creation. To cultivate it and bring forth its beauty and praises. And to offer those beauty and praises back to God's glory. So, friends, humanity in creation, all of us were made to reign. To be shapers and creators of culture. But something happened. Adam and Eve, our first parents, instead of reigning under God's good wisdom, chose to be wise in their own eyes and rejected God's rule.

[17:14] And as a result, sin entered the world and we became fools. Subject to sin and stupidity and death. But here's where the Bible gets really interesting.

God actually doesn't give up on his purpose or his plan for humanity. How would God restore his image bearers, his regions of creation, so that his purposes to magnify his beauty in all creation would come to completion?

How would he do that? How would he make us his sons and daughters again and fit us to reign? How would he make us children of the king? Well, that story actually begins with the calling of Abraham.

After the folly and foolishness of the Tower of Babel, God calls Abraham and says, Through you I'll bless the world. And God creates out of Abraham's family a nation, the nation of Israel. And Israel is meant to be a recapturing of the vision for humanity, a people living in relationship with God, exercising his wisdom in the world, a light to all people. But as much as Old Testament Israel gives us a glimpse of God's renewed humanity, they also show us the deep problem that we all need to be saved from.

[18:29] Because just like all of us, Israel falls short. And even Israel's kings fall short of their calling. Even Solomon himself, the fountainhead of Israel's wisdom tradition.

Do you remember the story of Solomon? As a young man, he comes to the throne, and God says to him, Solomon, ask me for anything, and I'll give it to you.

And instead of wealth, or fame, or power, what does Solomon ask for? He asks for wisdom. How can I govern and lead a people so great as this God?

I need wisdom. And God gives it to him. And because Solomon asked for wisdom, and not any of those other things, God gives him everything else besides that he didn't ask for.

Wealth, and fame, and power. Solomon becomes the wisest man of his day, and the kingdom of Israel enters a golden age. But even Solomon, the wisest man in his day, even Solomon ended his life in the depths of folly.

[19:40] Didn't he? He takes scores of wives and concubines. He allows idolatry to creep into his house, and his court, and his nation.

He leaves his kingdom to a son who is so foolish that the kingdom is torn into practically as soon as his son begins to reign. And friends, if Solomon was the wisest man in his day, and yet prone to so much folly, what hope is there for us?

But here's the good news. In time, one greater than Solomon would come.

A king whose life was marked by wisdom in every way, who displayed the image of God perfectly in every interaction, in every word, in every deed.

When Jesus comes, there we see the true king, and the true Israel, and the true humanity, living in full grasp of wisdom.

[20 : 48] I had coffee with a friend earlier this week, and we were just sort of ruminating on Jesus in the Gospels, and how he always seems to answer people so rightly.

When they need a rebuke, he gives a rebuke. When they need a question, he asks a question. When they need a gentle word, it's a gentle word. Everything done with such perfect, utter wisdom. And all of his followers, who knew him closely and well, would all just give constant affirmation to the same thing.

The Apostle Paul will write, as we read earlier in the service, Christ is the one in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Wisdom and knowledge. Those are familiar words now, aren't they, from the book of Proverbs.

This is what Proverbs is all about. Wisdom and knowledge. And what we see in light of the New Testament is that they're ultimately his. They're ultimately in Christ. But you see, friends, Christ has come, not just for himself, but for us.

[22 : 02] To make us his own. When we're united to him by faith, our sins are forgiven, and we become what? Children of God.

And in Romans 8, Paul will put it this way, and if children, then heirs. Heirs of God and fellow heirs of Christ.

Heirs. Future royal reign. God's God. We need to see that Jesus has come to rescue us from our sin and folly, to make us God's children again by grace, so that through the ongoing exercise of his spirit in us, you and I might live into that original calling that God gave us to be his wise image bearers in creation again.

Why do we need wisdom? Because, friends, if you are in Christ, you are a child of the king. You're sons and daughters of the living God. And you and I are meant to display God's wisdom in the world.

To live life now in every way, whether it's in our family, or in our work, or with our friendships, or with our words, or our wealth, or whatever, in such a way that it will be a sign of God's good reign and his coming reign of peace and justice.

[23 : 21] So, you see, wisdom isn't just about being successful or happy or hitting the mark or whatever. Wisdom is about living into our identity, our status, as God's rescued image bearers, redeemed by the blood of Christ, saved to reign with him one day.

So, friends, when you take up the book of Proverbs and read it, and you hear a father speaking to his son, regardless of who you are, male, female, rich, poor, speaking to you, you're the one who's been destined and chosen and redeemed to reign.

And you need this wisdom so you can do it well. So, how do we get it? Where do we get this wisdom that we need?

This wisdom that we need to live as people, the people that Christ has rescued us to be? Well, look at verse 7. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.

We'll see the same thing at the end of this opening section of Proverbs in chapters 1 through 9. In chapter 9, verse 10, it ends with the same note, practically. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

[24 : 41] Now, what does the Bible mean by the fear of the Lord? Well, fear here doesn't necessarily mean terror or fright.

Rather, fear of the Lord is awe and reverence. It's realizing deep in your bones that God is the center of existence and that He is our complete, He is worthy of our complete and utter worship. It's hard to capture this fear of the Lord in words, isn't it? I imagine it's a bit like what people feel when they stand on the edge of the Grand Canyon. I've never been to the Grand Canyon.

Maybe some of you have. But I imagine that to behold something so great and so massive and so breathtaking and so intractably real right before you, I imagine that to stand there on that edge and to see that giant thing yawning before you, that it's so massive and so breathtaking that for a moment you just stop thinking about yourself.

and that for a moment you have a right sense of your smallness in the world before the face of something so powerful and so great.

[26 : 07] Do you see how that's a different kind of fear than being merely afraid? There's an old passage in *The Wind and the Willows* where rat and mole go looking for the baby otter and they stumble into the presence of God.

And that passage goes like this. Suddenly the mole felt a great awe fall upon him. An awe that turned his muscles to water bowed his head and rooted his feet to the ground.

It was no panic terror indeed. He felt wonderfully at peace and happy. Rat! He found breath to whisper shaking. Are you afraid?

Afraid, murmured the rat, his eyes shining with unutterable love. Afraid of him? Oh, never, never. And yet, and yet, oh mole, I am afraid.

Then the two animals crouching to the earth bowed their heads and did worship. Are you afraid? No. But yes, all at the same time.

[27 : 18] you see, friends, the fear of the Lord is reverence shot through with love. And it's love shot through with reverence.

And that is the beginning of wisdom. To have God rightly at the center of our lives in awe and in love. Because after all, if God is God, then surely it is the height of foolishness to live with anything else as the driving center of our lives, is it not?

If God is our creator and our redeemer, if God is not just the ground of our being, but the deep ocean of our bliss, if God is not just our rightful judge, but our only hope, friends, if God is God, then wisdom, living with skill in God's world has to begin with right life-centering awe of Him.

Because otherwise, something else will get into the center and it will just throw things apart. And this fear of the Lord, we're told, is the beginning of wisdom.

And beginning, I think, in two senses. It's the beginning because it's the first step. Proverbs is saying here that without the fear of the Lord, you'll never know real wisdom.

[28 : 44] You've got to begin here. You can try all sorts of tips and tricks and self-help techniques and they will help you accomplish some things, but you won't be wise. But the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, not just as the first step, but as the foundation of all else.

It's the beginning in the sense of the principle that feeds it all. You never leave it behind. It's like food coloring in the cake mix that just colors and spreads and moves and changes the whole thing. The fear of the Lord is like the alphabet to the poet or the musical scales to the virtuoso violin. It's like numerals to the genius mathematician. It's there in everything.

You never leave it behind. It's the foundation on which everything rests. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. That's what we need. That's how we grow in wisdom.

That's how we begin to be wise. So how do we get it? How do we get the fear of the Lord? If that is the beginning of wisdom, if we're lost without it, if we can't even take our first step, if the fear of the Lord is the first step and the foundation of all else, how in the world do we get the fear of the Lord?

[30 : 01] How on the one hand do we see God in all of his glory and majesty, and on the other hand, how do we get out of ourselves? How do we shed our pride and our self-centeredness that makes us such fools? How do we experience God in all his godness with all the humility and awe and love that he deserves?

Here's how. You see that the one in whom were hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, the very incarnate wisdom himself, went to the cross for you.

If you want to grow in the fear of the Lord, you look at the cross and there you see the one greater than Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, dying in the place of fools like you and me because he loves us.

You see there the real cost of our foolishness, don't you? That our pride and sin, that our rejection of God deserve death and there you see God judging sin because he's just.

But there you also see the real depth of God's love for us. That though you despised him, Christ did not despise you. And that though you thought yourself above him, he humbled himself for you.

[31 : 25] How do you get the fear of the Lord, awe and love for this one true living God? How do you begin down the path of wisdom? You look away from yourself and ultimately you look at Christ crucified and you fix your gaze there until love and awe and humility begin to grow.

And then you've taken the first steps of wisdom and then the foundation will be laid and you will fear him rightly and you will grow wise. After all, the whole book of Proverbs is about him, really, isn't it? If Jesus is the one in whom all treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. In fact, this whole book is ultimately not just the words of Solomon from long ago, but it's the words of the risen living Christ speaking to us today.

It's the words of the living Jesus speaking to us, counseling us, teaching us, helping us, correcting us, encouraging us, instructing us so that we might become, through his spirit and by his grace,

those wise image bearers that he died to make us.

This is why we're studying Proverbs, friends. And ultimately, Christ is wisdom and that's who we're going to see in this book and he's the one we need and as we behold him, ultimately on the cross, he'll make us wise.

[33 : 08] let's pray. Lord Jesus, we confess that we are often so foolish, Lord, not just in the things that we say or the things that we do and not just the decisions we make, Lord, not just in the laziness that we sloth into, but Jesus, we are so foolish to put other things in the center of our lives other than you.

We're so foolish to think much of ourselves and to think little of you. So, Lord, we pray that as we come to the table now, you would, by your spirit, re-center our hearts on you, on what you've done for us and help us, Lord Jesus, to grow as a church, as people in the real and right fear of the Lord so that we might become wise and so that we might glorify you.

We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen. Let's pray. Please be ■,bey to the Holyini, give us amaçongle, see you, Lord, amen. Let's pray. Amen. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Amen. Let's pray. So, let's pray.