“Proverbs: How to Be Wise”
Proverbs 1:1-7

We live in what has become known as the “information age,” regarded as a time in which information has become a commodity that is quickly and widely spread and easily available especially through the use of computer technology. The industrial revolution which took place in the late nineteenth century ushered in the industrial age, and the digital revolution in the mid twentieth century gave rise to the emergence of the information age.

An academic study by the University of California, San Diego, suggested that on average each US citizen consumes 12 hours of information—or media—each day.

An average US citizen on an average day, it says, consumes 100,500 words, whether that be email, messages on social networks, searching websites or anywhere else digitally.

We sleep for seven hours a day, which in practice means that three quarters of our waking time is spent receiving information, the majority of which is electronic.

Consider what happens every 60 seconds in the digital age:

- 168 million emails sent
- 694,445 Google searches
- 695,000 Facebook status updates
- 370,000 Skype calls are made
- 98,000 tweets on Twitter
- 20,000 new posts on Tumblr
- 13,000 iPhone apps downloaded
- 6,600 new pictures on Flickr
Isn't it a bit ironic that we live in an age of information, where knowledge and data is literally at your finger tips, but there is so very little wisdom? Information is not the same thing as wisdom. You can possess a lot of information and be unwise.

Who you turn to in order to find counsel or advice may be one of the most revealing things about you. All of us desperately want to succeed in life. We realize our need for wisdom.

Our study of redemptive history has brought us to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, much of which was written by King Solomon. The Bible says that Solomon became the wisest man who ever lived. Early on in his life, the Lord appeared to Solomon and told him that He would give him whatever his heart desired. As the new king, Solomon was overwhelmed by the responsibility of leading the nation of Israel. God had been with his father David, and he knew that his success depended upon God being with him also. And so Solomon recognized his need for wisdom, and that is what he asked for.

1 Kings 4:29-30 - “And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like 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.”

God blessed Solomon with wisdom and so much more. People came from all over the world to hear his wisdom and see his kingdom.

You and I are given a glimpse of his wisdom when we read the Proverbs, most of which were written by Solomon. All together, he wrote more than 3,000 proverbs, many of which are not included in the book.

What is a proverb?
Proverbs are short pithy statements that summarize in a few words practical truths relating to some aspect of everyday life. They are principles more so than they are promises.

Proverbs is a unique book in the Old Testament that shows us how to be wise. Perhaps you feel a bit overwhelmed when you look at life around you. Maybe you find yourself in a season of life in which you have never been before. Like Solomon, you realize your need for wisdom:

• how to live a righteous life in the midst of a crooked generation
• how to have a healthy marriage and a prosperous home
• how to be a good steward of money and possessions
• how to be successful in your interpersonal relationships

The book of Proverbs addresses these issues as well as so much more. Though we live in the information age, there’s not a whole lot of wisdom to be found. That is why you and I need to go to the source of wisdom—Jesus Christ. This is why Proverbs is so important because it shows us our need for God’s wisdom, and the Bible says that such wisdom can only be found through faith in Jesus Christ.

If you want to be wise, then according to this passage, there are at least three things that you need to understand.

1. **Wisdom is the FOUNDATION of moral integrity (1:1-3)**

“The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity.”

Before we can fully understand our need for wisdom, we must first know what it is. It is here that we exercise caution because the Word of God says that there are two types of wisdom.
There is divine wisdom such as we find here in Proverbs. Then, there is the kind of wisdom described in James 3:15 as being earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.

There is worldly wisdom, and then there is other-worldly wisdom!

James 3:17 - “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”

Man’s wisdom is based upon his own faulty logic, but God’s wisdom—other worldly wisdom—flows from God’s perfect and unchanging character. As such, divine wisdom is the basis for objective truth.

Solomon tells us in the opening verses of the book of Proverbs that God’s wisdom is the foundation of moral integrity. That is, it is God’s wisdom that determines right from wrong, good from evil, righteousness from sinfulness. This a crushing blow to the moral relativism of our own age. Two things about this wisdom:

First, it must be REVEALED

The purpose of Proverbs is seen in verse 2—“to know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight.”

Solomon says that we need to know true wisdom. The word ‘wise’ or ‘wisdom’ is used nearly 130 times throughout the book. His objective is to help us understand the wisdom that God has revealed and apply it to life.

The wisdom of God is revealed wisdom. It is not something that human beings have stumbled upon all by themselves.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 - “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

God’s wisdom is bound up in this Book! The role of the Holy Spirit is to lead us into wisdom, and He will not do it without this Word. God’s Spirit opens up our minds to receive the truth of God’s Word so that we worship God’s Son and possess God’s
wisdom. The Holy Spirit uses the truth of Scripture to keep us from unprofitable detours in life.

“Detour” - an unexpected turn off of a preferred road

All of us can think back on a time when we operated according to our own wisdom rather than God’s, and it only led to disappointment.

**Proverbs 3:5-8** - “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.”

**Roy Zuck** - “Wisdom means being skillful and successful in one’s relationships and responsibilities. It is observing and following the Creator’s principles of order in the moral universe.”

**Proverbs 3:19** - “The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens.”

Sinful man tries his hardest to explain away creation and ethics and morality. He comes up with theories that leave God out of the equation, but it is all nonsense. Without the revealed wisdom of God, you and I cannot even begin to understand the world around us.

Without a firm foundation, a structure cannot stand!

Biblical wisdom is not a matter of degree. It has little if any relationship to a person’s IQ or level of education. Proverbs teaches us that wisdom is a matter of moral and spiritual understanding. The wisdom that you and I need has to do with character, values, and moral virtue.

True wisdom means that we look at the world through the grid of God’s revealed truth.

Several years ago, there was a wide emphasis placed on the importance of a person’s “worldview.” The first time I heard the term, I was a senior in high school. I can’t begin
to tell you how formative it was for me at that time in my life. We all have a worldview. The question to consider is whether or not my worldview is biblical and founded upon God’s wisdom. Or, is it merely an echo of the culture around me?

The wisdom that you and I need is revealed wisdom that comes from God and is in accordance with His Word.

**Second, it must be RECEIVED**

To be wise, one must possess wisdom, and to possess wisdom, a person must receive it. No one becomes wise by accident. Verse 3 says, “To receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity.” The practical goal of the book of Proverbs is three-fold:

- spiritual depth; “to know wisdom and instruction”
- spiritual discernment; “to understand words of insight”
- spiritual discipline; “to receive instruction in wise dealing”

God reveals wisdom in His Word, and His wisdom must be sought after, welcomed, and received in my life. To be wise is to possess depth of character, to be spiritually discerning, and to be a spiritually disciplined man or woman.

How does this work? Wisdom draws from the deep well of God’s own Word. It then involves the ability to read a situation and make an informed decision. Then, not content with information only, wisdom obeys by applying the truth to one’s life.

We need this wisdom over and over again in life, no matter how old or experienced we are.

**2. Wisdom is the FACTOR behind sound judgment (1:4-6)**

“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.”
If you want to be wise, then not only must you understand that wisdom is the foundation of moral integrity. You must also realize that wisdom is the factor behind sound judgment. In other words, wisdom is the basis behind all of our decision making in life.

Some sources estimate that an adult makes around 35,000 remotely conscious decisions each day. That may sound crazy to you, but in fact, we make 226.7 decisions each day on just food alone according to researchers from Cornell University.

Think about the multitude of decisions that we face:

• what to eat
• what to wear
• what to buy
• what to say
• what to believe
• how to vote

Every single decision that we make in life has some kind of consequence that follows as a result. People often themselves stunned by the consequences of unwise decisions that they have made in life.

**Charles Stanley** - “People usually don’t think about their health until they are sick. They don’t think about the state of their finances until they are facing retirement without sufficient funds or foreclosure and bankruptcy because their spending has surpassed their income. They don’t think about the way they parent until one of their children goes astray or makes a bad choice. They don’t think about their relationships with others until they find themselves in an impasse.”

**Ephesians 5:15-17** - “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”
I need the wisdom of God for major decisions as well as the everyday decisions that face.

**Acquisition of knowledge**

Solomon puts us all in a category where we all need wisdom. Whether one is simple, a youth, or wise, he says that none of us have arrived. All of us need to acquire divine knowledge and insight for life and for eternity.

To be sure, wisdom involves the right kind of knowledge. We need knowledge of the truth. Solomon says that the simple need prudence; youth need knowledge and discretion; the wise need to increase in learning. In the next several chapters, he even personifies wisdom and folly and contrasts the two. Wisdom is described as being like a woman who calls out in the street, raising her voice to those in the marketplace who will listen to her.

On the other hand, Proverbs 9:13 says that the woman folly is loud and seductive. She appeals to the senses and beckons the simple to follow the dictates of their own heart. Her motto is, “If it feels right, do it!”

One of the primary reasons our generation is drowning in a sea of moral relativism is that we have rejected the notion that truth is something outside of ourselves. The Bible says that only a fool says there is no God, also ruling out divine wisdom for life in the world that God has made. I can’t imagine wanting to make decisions in a world where I have set myself up as being the judge, yet this is what we do without the knowledge of God.

**Application of knowledge**

Sound judgment involves acquiring the right knowledge and then applying that knowledge to your own personal life. It doesn’t matter what you know if it has not become personal and experiential.

As we trust and obey, God makes us wise.
All throughout the Old Testament, the Hebrew word translated as ‘wise’ is used to describe those who are skillful in working with their hands (workers in tabernacle/temple). This shows us that biblical wisdom is extremely practical, affecting every area of my life:

- it will determine what you do with your money
- it will impact the way you use your time
- it will influence your priorities in life
- it will shape your sexual ethic

Truly, wisdom has practical import into every area of life. Feel the weight of that! By and large, when I stand before God one day, the issue I will face is how I responded to God’s wisdom.

Did I live my life based upon God’s wisdom, or did I follow the crowd? Did I imitate the world around me and embrace its faulty ideals?

**Warren Wiersbe** - “The pages of history are filled with the names of brilliant and gifted people who were smart enough to become rich and famous but not wise enough to make a successful and satisfying life.”

Simply read the Bible and you will find out that even Solomon himself became foolish later on his life. It started by multiplying wives for himself and entering into political marriages. Such a thing might have been good politically, but it was terrible for him spiritually. In Ecclesiastes, we read his own testimony of how he pursued whatever his heart desired, and by his own admission it left him empty on the inside.

Eventually, Solomon made the choice to worship false gods in addition to God.

If the wisest man who ever lived could become so foolish, then what about us? If the son of King David himself needed the wisdom of God, how much more does a simple man like myself need it?
If wisdom is the foundation of moral integrity, and if wisdom is the factor behind all sound judgment, then where do I go to find it? This is the question that gets to the heart of Proverbs.

3. Wisdom is the FRUIT of a right relationship to God (1:7)

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

This verse sums up the entire message of the book of Proverbs. Regardless of the amount of information a person has, no one possesses true knowledge without being rightly related to its divine source.

Notice that this knowledge begins with the right disposition. In verse 7, Solomon says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Only a fool would despise wisdom and instruction. This is the arrogance of being above instruction.

This means that a person can't even begin to be wise apart from being properly related to God, which Solomon refers to as “the fear of the Lord.”

“Fear” - *reverential awe that results in worship and obedience*

Rather than being a sense of dread or foreboding, this ‘fear’ is eagerness to please Him, willingness to serve Him, and humility to be instructed by Him.

God's Word says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Rather than starting with us, it begins with God. The world around us says, “Follow your heart.” Christ says, “Become a fool in the eyes of the world and follow Me.”

*Proverbs 28:26 - “He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be delivered.”*

The wisdom of the world is based upon faulty conclusions:

- wisdom is limited to the mind of man
- wisdom comes from what is perceived by the senses
• wisdom is doing what man defines as rational

• wisdom does whatever works

Solomon says that true wisdom is the polar opposite. It comes from the mind of God. It is supernatural, even seen as irrational by those who do not understand it. Rather than doing whatever works, it seeks to do what it right. This is the wisdom and knowledge that is founded upon the fear of God.

Wisdom begins with a right relationship to the Source. What if I told you that wisdom is more than just a principle? The Word of God tells me that wisdom is a Person that I can know and have a relationship with, and His name is Jesus.

Colossians 2:3 - “In Jesus Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

The Bible says that you and I need a wise and knowledgable King to rule over us, and Jesus is the only One who qualifies.

Isaiah 11:2 - “And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.”

Jesus Christ is the eternal wisdom of God that you and I are in desperate need of.

1 Corinthians 1:20-24 - “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

Jesus Christ became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, and as such, is the Source of all the Christian’s boasting. Let him who boasts boast in the Lord!
If you want to be wise, you must:

- realize that wisdom is valuable
- remember why wisdom is essential
- recognize where wisdom is found

I imagine you are familiar with the expression “ship of fools.” It comes from a famous oil painting by Hieronymus Bosch who painted it in the late 15th century, and it now hangs in the Louvre in Paris. Filled with symbolism, the painting shows ten people on board a small vessel and two people who have fallen overboard swimming around it. It is a ship without a captain, and everyone onboard is too busy drinking and feasting to know where the waves are pushing their boat. They are fools because they are enjoying all the pleasures of this world without knowing where it all leads. Atop the mast hangs a bunch of dangling carrots, and a man is climbing up to reach them. Yet above the carrots we find a small but significant detail—a human skull. The ship of fools, who think all is perfect, are sailing to their own destruction. The only pilot on board, the only figure leading the way, is death.

Proverbs 14:12 - “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”

Proverbs 14:27 - “The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.”