Sunday, June 7, 2020

**Lesson:** Proverbs 1:1-4, 7-8, 10, 20-22, 32-33; **Time of Action:** about 950 B.C.; **Place of Action:** Jerusalem

**Golden Text:** “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7).

**I. INTRODUCTION.** The prophet Isaiah noted that secular education had not resolved Israel’s societal problems and he suggested a reason for its failure. He asked, “Where are thy wise men? And let them tell thee now, and let them know what the LORD of hosts hath purposed” (see Isaiah 19:12). The best way to correct social and moral problems is to be willing to understand God’s purpose and also fulfill it. This week’s lesson is concerned with the issue of where knowledge begins. We cannot expect to gain wisdom without beginning at the right starting point.

**II. BACKGROUND FOR THE LESSON.** The book of Proverbs is a great resource for acquiring knowledge. It not only provides factual information to make us wise, but also directs us to the source of knowledge—God. The writing style of the book of Proverbs is parabolic. This means that information is conveyed by likening or comparing the idea
being presented to something else. The Hebrew word for “proverbs” means comparisons, similitudes, or parables. We often use the term “proverbs” to describe a short, concise insightful expression of a particular truth or experience. It communicates practical, moral guidance in an effective way. Parables are intended to draw pictures in the mind; they carry a message that will not be soon forgotten. Solomon wrote the major portion of Proverbs around 950 B.C. Chapters 30 and 31 are credited to Agur and Lemuel, respectively. When Solomon became king of Israel, the LORD appeared to him in a dream and said, “Ask what I shall give thee” (see I Kings 3:5). Solomon responded saying “Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart” (see I Kings 3:9). After God granted the request, “Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country” (see I Kings 4:30). The book of Proverbs contains some of the three thousand proverbs that God gave to Solomon (see I Kings 4:32). Solomon probably spoke many of these when people came to hear his wisdom (see I Kings 4:34). In the chaotic days in which we live, men and women need wisdom to avoid the treacherous pitfalls on the road of life. Proverbs gives timeless principles regarding human character and conduct.

III. THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK (Proverbs 1:1-4)

A. The author of the book (Proverbs 1:1). Our first verse says, “The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel...” Here, in the beginning of the
book of Proverbs, we are told that these are “The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel...” Although, “Solomon” is credited with being the author of “the proverbs,” at least two chapters are ascribed to Agur (see Proverbs 30:1) and Lemuel (see Proverbs 31:1). However, “Solomon” wrote the majority of the “proverbs” in this book. Of course, “Solomon” succeeded his father “David” as “king” of the united kingdom “of Israel” (see I Kings 2:10-12). As believers, we look forward to everlasting life in the New Heaven and the New Earth, but we are still residents of the present earth and must learn to live prudent, honest lives while we are here. The book of Proverbs helps us to do that by teaching us how to live godly lives through wise thoughts and actions.

B. The purpose of the book (Proverbs 1:2-4).

1. (vs. 2). This verse says “To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding...” The term “wisdom” comes from a word meaning “to be capable of judging.” The idea is having the ability to make skillful decisions in divine and human affairs because of past experience and training. Such ability comes only from a relationship with God. The wise person is one who is sensitive to God and willingly submits himself or herself to Him. Solomon, the wise man tells us that the proverbs have several purposes. First, “To know wisdom and instruction;” that is “wisdom” which we get by “instruction,” by divine revelation, so that we may know both how to speak and act wisely, and to give “instruction” to others. In other words, these proverbs are designed to
help us learn to be wise and to accept “instruction” or correction. The Hebrew term for “instruction” means “correction” or “discipline.” It is the usual term for the correcting of children by parents. It’s similar to the Greek word translated “chastening” (see Hebrews 12:5) which means discipline or child training. The second purpose of the proverbs is “to perceive the words of understanding.” The term “perceive” means “to come to understand” or “to apprehend with the mind.” So the phrase, “to perceive the words of understanding” means that the proverbs help us to discern and comprehend “the words of understanding” and insight.

2. (vs. 3). This verse says “To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity...” A third purpose of the proverbs is for those who are teachable “To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity.” The word “receive” has the idea of taking possession of something. First, the teachable person will “receive” or take possession of “wisdom.” The word “wisdom” here translates a different Hebrew word from the one in verse 2. Here, “wisdom” emphasizes intelligence and the ability to make skillful decisions. It is discernment. Since God gives “wisdom” for us to “receive” or take possession of, the wise person applies divine guidelines in everyday situations guided by God’s will. Second, the teachable person “receives” or takes possession of instructions in “justice.” The word “justice” here means righteousness or right living. Third, the teachable person “receives” or takes possession of instructions in “judgment.” Although the term “judgment”
in the Old Testament is sometimes translated as justice, here it not only refers to lawful judgment which definitely takes “wisdom,” it also refers to applying good reasoning to everyday situations. Fourth, the teachable person “receives” or takes possession of instructions in “equity” which means treating people fairly. **Note:** To neglect or not “receive” God’s “instruction” results in spiritual immaturity among God’s people. To illustrate this point, the writer of Hebrews wrote “For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (see Hebrews 5:13-14). An underlying problem in many churches today is that many immature Christians are among the members. But immaturity here does not mean lacking in biblical knowledge, but it refers to the inability or lack of desire to put biblical principles to work in everyday life. God wants His people to mature or grow in attitude and practice “unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (see Ephesians 4:13). As His representatives on earth, we should follow His steps (see I Peter 2:21).

3. (vs. 4). This verse says “To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.” Here Solomon says that another purpose of the proverbs (see verse 2 and 3) is “To give subtilty to the simple.” The word “subtilty” means the ability to make fine distinctions. The word “simple” refers to those who are easily persuaded or enticed to follow the wrong people or
advice. A “simple” person is one who must be teachable and willing to pay attention to wisdom’s instruction and correction. Therefore, the phrase “To give subtilty to the simple” means that the proverbs gives the easily persuaded person the ability to make distinctions or discern between right and wrong decisions. The proverbs are also designed to give “the young man knowledge and discretion.” Youth is the learning age that takes hold to instructions, is easily impressionable, and retains what is received. Therefore, the minds of young people must be seasoned well, and this can be done as they gain “knowledge and discretion” from Solomon’s proverbs. Youth is rash, and inconsiderate and therefore needs to be managed by the rules we find here in Solomon’s proverbs. And if young people will govern their ways according to Solomon’s proverbs, they will soon gain the “knowledge and discretion” of the elderly. The Hebrew word for “discretion” means “to think about something with the idea of forming a plan.” Since the activities of life are born in the heart (see Proverbs 4:23), a person’s thoughts, especially a young person, must be disciplined to properly guide his or her character and actions (see Proverbs 23:7). It’s important to meditate on the right things (see Philippians 4:8-9). By submitting to God’s enabling power, the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:16-23), right thinking and planning can produce a godly character and lifestyle. It appears that Solomon was a bit partial to young people when writing this book. No doubt he hoped by it to season the minds of the rising generation with the generous principles of wisdom and virtue.
IV. THE PURSUIT OF WISDOM (Proverbs 1:7-8, 10).
Verses 5-6 are not part of our lesson, but in those verses Solomon basically says that those who are wise could become wiser by listening to these proverbs. They will gain understanding and learn to solve difficult problems (see verse 5). He added that His words will help them understand proverbs, stories with hidden meanings, words of the wise, and other difficult sayings (see verse 6).

A. The fear of God (Proverbs 1:7). This verse says “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Throughout the book of Proverbs, Solomon mentioned various insights regarding “wisdom.” This verse gives us the key for obtaining “wisdom.” Solomon said that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” To “fear the LORD” means that we are aware of God’s mighty presence that leads us to want to constantly please Him in our attitudes and actions. Some people call this reverence for God. This “fear” or reverence honors and respects the LORD’S Person so greatly that we demonstrate obedience to His Word in all things. This “fear” is not a disruptive quaking in terror that hinders a person’s ability to function; instead it is a “fear” that leads a person to think, act, and live in a right relationship with God. The root word from which the Hebrew word for “beginning” comes, literally means “head” emphasizing whatever is highest, supreme, foremost, or chief. Therefore, “beginning” in this verse means chief or foremost and refers to the necessary step to gaining “knowledge.” The “fear of the LORD” is the head of “knowledge” meaning that of everything there is to be
known, the supreme or foremost thing to know is that God is
to be feared, to be reverenced, to be served, and
worshipped. In order to gain all useful “knowledge” the
most necessary thing is to “fear the LORD.” Simply put,
the “fear (or reverence) of the Lord,” that is, worshiping
Him and regarding Him as truly awesome, is the starting
point and the preeminent part of knowledge. We cannot
expect to profit from the instructions given to us unless our
minds are possessed with a holy reverence for God, and our
every thought and action is in obedience to His will (see John
7:15-17). After declaring that fearing God is the first step in
receiving insight into the workings of God, Solomon also said
“but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” The word
“despise” means “to treat something or someone with
contempt” (see Matthew 7:6). “Wisdom” refers to practical
intelligence that enables one to act prudently within society.
It includes mental skill for solving problems. Such “wisdom”
was given to the tabernacle workers (see Exodus 31:2-6), and
to Solomon (see I Kings 4:29-34). God gives “wisdom” to
those who seek it from Him (see James 1:5). He gives it
through answers to prayers, and through His Word (see II
Timothy 3:14-17). “Instruction” refers to any discipline,
chastisement, or correction that is to help one make wise
responses. A “fool” is someone who lacks understanding,
judgment or common sense. “Fools” treat “wisdom” and
“instruction” (corrective discipline) with disdain or
contempt. “Fools despise instruction” because
“instruction” or correction is the hard way to attain
“wisdom.” “Fools” often “despise” authorities because of
they administer correction. A “fool” laughs at sin (see
Proverbs 14:9), his ways are right in his own eyes (see
Proverbs 12:15), and he rejects instruction (see Proverbs 15:5).  **“Fools”** are so self-serving that they are not interested in submitting to God or His wisdom (see Proverbs 1:29). The truth is, it’s a waste of time trying to teach a “fool” (see Proverbs 16:22; 27:22).

**B. Heeding parental instruction (Proverbs 1:8).**

This verse says **“My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother...”** Those who are wise or seek to be wise regard their parents as their superiors. So Solomon said **“My son, hear the instruction of thy father.”** By interpretation, the word “son” here most likely refers to Solomon’s own “son,” but by application, it includes young people in general. His “son” and all children are called to **“hear”** or pay close attention to his “instruction” or admonition. A person begins to gain knowledge by submitting not only to God but also to parents. Although Solomon seems to indicate that “instruction” or correction comes from “thy father” and “the law” or teaching comes from “thy mother,” they are both responsible for the child’s training, for they are the instructors God has provided to lead children in His ways (see Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4). Children are commanded to obey their parents and to value their “instruction” (see Proverbs 6:20; Ephesians 6:1-2). As noted in verses 2 and 7, “instruction” refers to admonition, correction, and discipline that turn people from wrong behavior (see Proverbs 22:15). Solomon also called on his “son” to **“forsake not the law of thy mother.”** The word “law” refers to rules. As children tend to do, when they are grown they don’t think they still need to adhere to the rules given by
their parents, and they can do whatever they want to do. But Solomon says that’s an unacceptable way of thinking because “the law of thy mother” was according to the “law” of God, and therefore it must never be forsaken. When discipline and correction are given improperly, it can cause children to respond with hatred (see Proverbs 5:12). But when discipline is given by loving parents, it should be accepted graciously (see Proverbs 13:1; Colossians 3:20). “Instruction” and “laws” are things unruly children resist. Parental rules hinder children’s self-centered living and make them responsible. But rules are not to be the ends in themselves; rules should be used as teaching devices. Unfortunately, too often children will not recognize the benefits of “laws” or rules set by parents until later in life. When disciplined children look at the character flaws of undisciplined children, they will better understand the benefits of their own training. Godly training results in the character traits of spiritual beauty (see Hebrews 12:8-11).

**Note:** It’s quite possible that for Solomon the term “fool” referred to atheists, those who have no regard for God, and “despise wisdom and instruction.” They don’t fear God’s wrath at all, nor do they have any desire for His favour since they don’t believe He exists anyway (see Psalms 14:1; 53:1). And to show their lack of wisdom, they won’t thank you for telling them what they can do to escape God’s wrath and obtain his favour.

**C. Warning of potential opposition (Proverbs 1:10).** This verse says “My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.” In this verse, Solomon gives another
general rule to young people to be aware of bad company. He said “My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.” The word “entice” means “to lead on or attract by arousing hope of pleasure or profit.” It also carries the idea of tricking someone. This is good advice for parents to give their children when they send them abroad into the world. For sure, they will face peer pressure no matter where they are, at home or abroad. Peer pressure is nothing new; it has existed since the beginning of time (see Genesis 3:6; 11:1-4). The company we keep can affect us positively or negatively (see Psalms 1:1; Proverbs 16:29). Solomon’s warning to his “son” concern keeping company with “sinners.” More often than not, “sinners” or unsaved folk, seek to involve others in their sin. They will “entice” others to join in. They don’t threaten or argue, but “entice” with flattery and good sounding words to bring others along to sin with them.

When “sinners” attempt to apply peer pressure to join in with their wickedness, Solomon cautions young people not to be seduced or taken in by them. He said “Consent thou not” or don’t give in to them (see Ephesians 5:6-8). People, whether young or old, need to realize that even though “sinners” may “entice” you, they cannot force you to go along. We must not say as they say, nor do as they do, or do whatever they want us to do. Simply put, don’t have any fellowship with them (see II Corinthians 6:14-18).

V. THE PERSONIFICATION OF WISDOM (Proverbs 1:20-22, 32-33). Verses 11-19 are not part of our printed text, but in those verses, Solomon continues to delve into the
ways people can be enticed to do wrong including plots and schemes. No matter what things may look like, the object of these sinners is to hurt people even by murdering the innocent and taking whatever they could (see Proverbs 1:11-14, 16-19). In verse 15, Solomon again encourages his son to stay away from them.

A. Wisdom’s availability (Proverbs 1:20-22).

1. (vs. 20). This verse says “Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets...” Here, and in the next verse, “wisdom” is personified as a woman crying out the rules of “wisdom.” Solomon said “Wisdom crieth without” meaning that “wisdom” is out in the open; it’s not hidden. “She (wisdom) uttereth her voice in the streets.” God has made His “wisdom” available everywhere. “Wisdom” cries out loud “in the streets” through the people of the community and in the city. Parents, neighbors, pastors and educators “voice” or declare the need to follow right moral practices. While many ungodly voices are heard, God has given man a conscience to distinguish right from wrong (see Romans 2:14-15).

2. (vs. 21). This verse says “She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying...” Still speaking about the many places that wisdom could be heard, Solomon said here that “She (wisdom) crieth in the chief place of concourse.” This refers to the noisy gathering “place” of society. In that day, it would be the open market or town square. Wisdom was also heard crying out “in the
openings of the gates.” This refers to the entrance into “the city” where the elders carried on the business of “the city” (see Ruth 4:1-2). All over “the city” wisdom spoke as she “uttereth her words” of instruction. We are told what some of those words were in the remaining verses. **Note:**

Our LORD Jesus, who Himself is the wisdom of God (see I Corinthians 1:23-24) fulfilled this verse. He taught openly in the temple, in crowds of people, and said nothing in secret (see John 18:20). He also commanded His disciples to preach His gospel on the housetops (see Matthew 10:27). There is no language where wisdom’s voice is not heard. Truth does not try to hide in corners, nor is virtue ashamed of itself. Godly wisdom is everywhere available today as well. It is spread by radio and television and through godly pastors, teachers, parents, and neighbors as they share truths from God’s Word. By listening to God’s wisdom, anyone can have a personal relationship with Him and live a godly life. The voice of wisdom cries out to warn society of possible tragedy if it is not heeded.

3. (vs. 22). This verse says “How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?” In this verse, Solomon speaks to three groups of people who are normally unresponsive to God’s wisdom. The first group addressed are “ye simple ones.” Solomon asked them “How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?” Those who are “simple ones” are people who are easily persuaded or deceived into doing the wrong thing. To “love simplicity” means to “love” being simpleminded. The second group is
called “scorners” or scoffers, those who mock or make fun of anything and anybody. The Hebrew term for “scorners” literally means “to speak barbarously” or “to stutter without making any sense.” The point is that “scorners” are not worth listening to. Those who mock or make fun of the child of God makes no sense with their words, nor can they because they are ignorant of God’s truth (see I Corinthians 2:14). The child of God is a citizen of heaven (see Ephesians 2:19), and therefore speaks a language that’s different from the world. Solomon said that “the scorners delight in their scorning.” In other words, “scorners” or scoffers love to ridicule and find “delight” in scoffing or mocking others and even mocking wisdom. But those who scoff at religion may be especially meant here. The worst sinners, (if we can say there are some worst than others) are those who scorn or scoff at the idea of submitting to the truths and laws of Christ, and to the reproofs and admonitions of His Word. They even take pride in running down everything that is sacred and serious. The third group is “fools.” Solomon said that “fools hate knowledge.” As noted in verse 7, a “fool” is someone who lacks understanding, judgment or common sense. That said, there’s no wonder that “fools hate knowledge.” They “hate” to be instructed and reformed, and have a deep hatred for serious godliness. We can see why Solomon asked “How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and (How long will) the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?”

**B. Wisdom’s promising offer (Proverbs 1:32-33).**

Verses 23-31 are not part of our printed text, but in those verses wisdom continues to say to the simple ones and
scorners that if they would turn and pay attention to her rebuke, she would pour out her spirit on them and make her words known to them. But because they refuse to listen and make fun of her counsel, wisdom would also laugh at them when disaster comes. Wisdom then said that when disaster falls on them, the simple ones and the scorners will seek her out but won’t find her because they hated knowledge and didn’t choose the fear of the LORD. As a result, they would be left to their own devices and suffer for their own ways they have chosen. The remainder of our text begins with verse 32.

1. (vs. 32). This verse says “For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.” Wisdom continues to speak to the simple ones and the scorners here saying “For the turning away of the simple shall slay them.” This means that the rejection of wisdom by the simpleminded has such an effect on their lives that it could lead to their death. In addition, “the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.” In other words, “fools” are content to follow their own foolish ways, being lifted up with pride, and attaching themselves to the world, which will ultimately “destroy them.” The idea presented here is that both “the simple” or simpleminded, and “fools” are proud that they can turn away from God and not be bound by the restraints of His rules. But that very thing “shall slay them” or be detrimental to them.

2. (vs. 33). Our final verse says “But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.” Wisdom’s words brings this
chapter to a close with an assurance of safety and happiness to all those who submit to the instructions of wisdom. First wisdom says “But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely.” Wisdom declares that if the simple ones and the fools choose to “hearkeneth unto me” or follow after wisdom, they will live in safety because they chose not to go along with those who would do wrong. Second, wisdom said that the simpleminded and the fool will also “be quiet from fear of evil.” In other words, if the simpleminded and the fool choose to “hearkeneth (to pay attention) unto” wisdom they will be calm and have no disturbing apprehensions of danger. They will not only be “safe” from “evil,” they will also be “quiet from the fear of evil.” The word “evil” in Scripture often refers to some sinful act or behavior (see Judges 2:11; I Kings 11:6; Proverbs 1:16), but here “evil” most likely refers to harm done to someone. The person who is wise as a result of pursuing wisdom that comes from God will not be nervous or overly concerned when people want to do them harm. The point is that the wise person, those who follow after the LORD and receive His wisdom can utter the words of the psalmist “even if the earth is removed, we shall not fear” (see Psalms 46:2). If we seek God’s wisdom, who is Jesus Christ and always let His Word rule us and be our counsellor, then, we too will be able to “dwell safely” and “be quiet from the fear of evil” that’s everywhere in this world.

VI. Conclusion. The Bible exhorts us to search for and find wisdom; but many people don’t understand what wisdom is.
Our culture often twists the meaning of the word. Some people feel that if one knows a lot, he or she is wise. This is not necessarily the case. A person may be a well of knowledge and still lack ethical direction. This week’s lesson has taught us that the fool who lacks the wisdom that comes from God is morally deficient and inclined to do evil. But the wise person listens to the wisdom that comes from God and therefore, he or she exercises moral discernment and prudence. They are skillful in reasoning and resourceful in applying truth. That’s true wisdom!

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