

# True Wisdom

## WHERE DOES TRUE WISDOM COME FROM?

Focal Verses • PROVERBS 1:1–9

———— Aim for Change ————

By the end of the lesson, we will **RECOGNIZE** the value of godly wisdom and direction, **VALUE** godly wisdom in our choices, and **APPLY** the standards of wisdom to a specific choice that needs to be made.

———— In Focus ————

Nikki kept clicking back and forth between the websites for her top college picks. Grandma Jean could see Nikki was getting frustrated. “What’s the matter, sweetie?”



**“I still can’t decide which college I want to go to.” Nikki showed her grandmother the pictures of both colleges, with their sunny campuses, happy graduates, and winning athletes. “They’re both offering substantial financial aid. Both have active on-campus ministries. Both have the program I want. I can’t decide; they both look so good.” Jean never had to make this decision herself, but always wished she had the opportunity. She often volunteered at a local Christian charity that offered tutoring and college admission guidance. “I’m glad to know you’ve already considered the finances, and how you’ll stay plugged**



in at church. What did you think of the campuses?"

Nikki sighed. "I haven't gotten to visit either of them. They're out of state, and we could hardly afford the hotels, much less the airfare."

"Well, you can't trust the college's website to show you what the school is really like. Contact a student who goes there now. Have you asked the colleges if they can help pay for you to come visit them? Some colleges do that, you know. Some charities too. I might even have some pull at a certain local charity..." Jean said, winking at Nikki.

*Why is it important to seek wise counsel before making major decisions?*

————— Keep in Mind —————

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge:  
but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7, KJV).







**KJV Proverbs 1:1** The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel;

**2** To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;

**3** To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;

**4** To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

**5** A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:

**6** To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.

**7** The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.



**8** My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother:

**9** For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.

**NLT** Proverbs 1:1 These are the proverbs of Solomon, David's son, king of Israel.

**2** Their purpose is to teach people wisdom and discipline, to help them understand the insights of the wise.

**3** Their purpose is to teach people to live disciplined and successful lives, to help them do what is right, just, and fair.

**4** These proverbs will give insight to the simple, knowledge and discernment to the young.

**5** Let the wise listen to these proverbs and become even wiser.



**Let those with understanding receive guidance**

**6 by exploring the meaning in these proverbs and parables, the words of the wise and their riddles.**

**7 Fear of the LORD is the foundation of true knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.**

**8 My child, listen when your father corrects you. Don't neglect your mother's instruction.**

**9 What you learn from them will crown you with grace and be a chain of honor around your neck.**



# **The People, Places, and Times**

**Wisdom Literature.** The books of the Bible that are considered wisdom literature are Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. Sometimes, some of the Psalms, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations receive this label, too. This is a modern way to describe a genre of literature from the ancient Near East, which was plentiful in Egypt and Mesopotamian cultures as well. Sometimes, wisdom literature directly presents adages or wise sayings (like Proverbs). Other pieces in the genre ponder a deep question over the course of many conversations and situations (like Job). These books present challenges in understanding them, as they ask questions that seem to contradict themselves with doubts, quite unlike the prophetic and narrative books. From this, however, we can learn that God is unafraid of our questions. He welcomes our honesty. Biblical



wisdom literature asks questions and assures us that God has the answers. We just need to trust Him.

**The Book of Proverbs.** Known as a book of wisdom, Proverbs is like a father sitting down with a young son to pass on valuable lessons learned after a lifetime of trials and errors. It is a collection of wise sayings primarily written by King Solomon, referred to as having wisdom that “excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt” (1 Kings 4:30). Other contributors are Agur (chapter 30) and Lemuel (31:1–9). Although somewhat sporadic in its arrangement of topics, Proverbs’ clear purpose and theme are provided in the first seven verses: to teach wisdom and prepare its readers for living godly lives in the fear of the Lord. Wisdom is imagined as a woman throughout the book. Life is unpredictable, and at any moment,



one may need advice about anything from family life to business decisions. Proverbs provides wisdom for these and more, particularly as it pertains to one's relationship with God and others.

## Background

The purpose of the book of Proverbs is summed up in chapter 1 verse 2 (KJV): "To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding." In other words, Proverbs aims to teach the readers wisdom so that they will allow wisdom to govern their lives. Applying wisdom to one's life means approaching all of life's situations and challenges from God's point of view, thinking, and living according to His will and truth. That is why "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7, KJV). Therefore, possessing wisdom is related to one's relationship with God. Reverence and awe toward God is the



essential prelude to all wisdom and successful living. Wisdom is one of God's divine attributes. God, in His grace, must reveal it if we truly grasp it. Wisdom takes insights gained from our knowledge of God's truth and applies them to our daily lives.

If we have wisdom, it will lead to godly living. God wants us to be fair and righteous. The foolish do not act by God's Word and reject all instructions. They are self-reliant and prideful. Their only hope is to answer wisdom's call to listen and obey, resulting in safety and peace. The alternative is to be destroyed by acting wayward and self-righteous (1:32–33). The results of seeking wisdom present a clear contrast with living a life of foolishness.

The Book of Proverbs, which is classified among the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament, is a collection of proverbial sayings. It is a collection of sayings from different authors over



time and finally collected into a single book. Solomon wrote many of the sayings but also collected 3,000 proverbs (1 Kings 4:29–34). Some proverbs in this book were written by Agur and Lemuel, who are otherwise unknown. Many scholars agree that the book is an anthology comprised of seven discrete units (1–9; 10:1–22:16; 22:17–24:22; 24:23–24:34; 25–29; 30; 31). Chapters 1 through 9 are considered wisdom for young people. But all people can learn from the wisdom shared.

*How did Solomon use godly wisdom as king?*

### At-A-Glance

- 1. Wisdom for Godly Living  
(Proverbs 1:1–6)
- 2. Foundations for Wisdom (1:7–9)

## In Depth



## **1. Wisdom for Godly Living (Proverbs 1:1–6)**

Solomon is identified as the author. The student (son) is addressed by a teacher (father) (vv. 2–3). He is being told how to get wisdom for godly living, which will lead to appropriate actions. God wants us to be righteous, just, and fair. The teacher is the one who provides the student with the guidance and sound advice necessary because they may lack proper judgment (v. 4).

The theme of the book of Proverbs is contained in verse 7. We are wise if we have a “fear of the LORD,” which is awe, reverence, and respect for God. True wisdom comes from God. We need to have a relationship with God and obey His Word. The Word gives us a revelation about who God is and His requirements for living as faithful believers.



**Those who will not pursue wisdom are called “fools” who “despise wisdom and instruction” because they think they know everything and do not need God. Fools cannot distinguish between good and evil or right and wrong. People who are arrogant and self-sufficient will reject the need to depend on God or anyone else. It is very hard to convince them otherwise. They do not understand that God is the source of all wisdom and has given them the ability to succeed.**

## **2. Foundations for Wisdom (Proverbs 1:7–9)**

**Families are the foundation on which children should learn about loving and honoring God. Parents have to set an example. The instructions are a warning from the father to his son about listening to instructions given by his parents and not being enticed by sin. Sin often looks and feels good.**



However, it is only a temporary feeling that will leave us empty.

*How can parents instruct and demonstrate to their children a “fear of the Lord?”*

## **Search the Scriptures**

1. What is the purpose of the Proverbs (Proverbs 1:2–3)?

2. What is “the beginning of knowledge” (v. 7)?

## **Discuss the Meaning**

1. Discuss the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Are both important?

2. When making major decisions, it is good to seek wise counseling. Whom do you trust to give you wise counsel?

3. How has their advice impacted your life?

4. When contemplating an important decision, how can one know



**whether the choice is God's will or one's flesh?**

## **Liberating Lesson**

**Life is full of choices. Every day, we choose whether to go to work, what to do at work, what to eat, who to talk to, how to comb our hair, what clothes to put on, when to go to bed, and so on. Hundreds of choices are made with little thought. But life often gives us difficult decisions that need to be made.**

**When we witness injustices in our communities, we can either turn the other way or stop and intervene. If we intervene, there may be consequences that affect us and our family. How can we use godly wisdom while trying to help others be treated fairly? It is a challenging answer. Perhaps join or organize protest groups, march, create online petitions, and learn other nonviolent techniques. We can no**



longer sit in the churches and ignore the social, religious, and civil injustices that are manifesting themselves in our communities. It is time to decide how to help our neighbors, regardless of race, religion, or nationality. What is God calling you to do? Seek wise counseling before acting and trust God for the outcome.

## **Application for Activation**

When we have to make life-altering decisions, the burden can make us feel inadequate in understanding what to do. We need to seek to evaluate life situations in light of God's character and purposes and make decisions based on divine wisdom. We must rely on something other than foolish people to help us. They will lead us astray, and our situation will end in calamity.

Whatever choices must be made, we can rely on God for help. We should consciously apply godly standards of



wisdom to the choice that needs to be made. We need to read the Word, pray, talk to other Christians who have shared experiences, pray some more, and then act by what the Holy Spirit guides us to do. If we obey the Spirit, we will have the benefit of peace.

## Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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# More Light on the Text

## Proverbs 1:1–9, KJV

**1 The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel;**

“Proverbs” is not only the title of the book, but it also designates the specific type of Wisdom Literature that comprises this book. “Proverb” in Hebrew is *mashal* (maw-**SHAWL**). Although a *mashal* is usually a brief, concise saying, it can also refer to longer discourses. Therefore, a proverb refers to various wise and insightful pronouncements that are designed to teach us how to live godly lives.

Solomon, the third King of Israel, reigned from 971–931 BC. A prolific writer, he wrote 3,000 proverbs, 1,005 songs (1 Kings 4:32), and at least two Psalms (72 and 127), as well as three of the five Wisdom Books in the Bible—Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon (also known as the Song of Songs). Job and Psalms comprise



the remainder of the Wisdom Literature that generally deals with our human struggles and real-life experiences. They emphasize the things that are necessary to gain moral excellence and, in so doing, live a godly life that finds favor with God. Although most of the proverbs were written by Solomon (1:1, 10:1, 25:1), there were other authors as well, such as “The sayings of the wise” (22:17–24:34), Agur and Lemuel (chapters 30 and 31 respectively).

Solomon qualifies to write the majority of this collection of wise sayings because he cries for wisdom. Although he was not the eldest son of David, Solomon was given the honor of succeeding his father, David, and ascended the throne at only twenty years old. Nevertheless, when told by God that he could request anything he desired, a youthful Solomon wisely asked, “Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come



in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, that is so great" (2 Chronicles 1:10, KJV).

God granted his request. Solomon's wisdom was so legendary that even kings (1 Kings 4:34) and queens (1 Kings 10:1–13) came from near and far to sit and learn at Solomon's feet. Solomon's request for wisdom to faithfully carry out his assignment as judge over the people of Israel is an example we can all follow. Each person has been given a divine purpose. Your assignment can only be faithfully executed through the wisdom that comes from God. James tells us that wisdom is available upon request (James 1:5).

**2 To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; 3 To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; 4 To give**



**subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. 5 A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: 6 To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.**

After identifying himself as the principal author of the book of Proverbs, Solomon immediately sets forth the purpose of the book through a series of infinitive clauses (vv. 2–3)—to know, to perceive, to receive—and then explains who his intended audience is—the simple and the young man (v. 4).

The first stated purpose and the primary goal of the proverbs, these pithy sayings is “to know wisdom and instruction.” Instruction (Heb. *musar*, moo-SAR) means doctrine or discipline. Wisdom (*khokmah*, khook-MAW) is the skillful use of that knowledge by



putting it into practice so that one can live a godly life, pleasing to the Lord. In the Old Testament, *khokmah* often refers to the mental and physical skills of craftsmen, sailors, singers, and so on. Such was the case in the building of the Tabernacle in the wilderness when God selected Bezaleel, who was “filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship” (Exodus 31:2–3, KJV). But later on, as in Proverbs, *khokmah* focused on the skillful application of moral and ethical principles that resulted in godly living. Consequently, a person with wisdom has “expertise” or “skill” in godly living, and the proverb is the vehicle to help the simple and the young to know wisdom and instruction and to follow its precepts.

Along with knowing wisdom and instruction, the second stated purpose of Proverbs is “to perceive the words



of understanding.” *Bin* (**BEEN**), the Hebrew word for perceive, means to have insight and discernment. Such things allow one to distinguish between right and wrong, as well as to gain mental acumen. Not only must we seek wisdom, but we must also perceive it when we find it.

Finally, the third delineated purpose of Proverbs is “to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity” (Proverbs 1:3). Receive (Heb. *laqakh*, law-**KAKH**) means to take in hand, to take possession of, or to accept. The idea here is that the proverbs are to be grasped and taken hold of as a valuable possession. When received in such a manner, the proverbs will teach (1) wisdom, so the simple and the young can live wisely; (2) justice, that which is right or just; (3) judgment, how to decide a case; and (4) equity, evenness, uprightness, and straightness.



After giving the purpose for the proverbs, the writer now explains who his intended audience is. It is “to give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.” Even though the proverbs are intended for the simple and the young man, their impact is so far-reaching that it also extends to the person who is wise. If the already wise person pays attention to know, perceive, and receive these words of instruction, they will become even wiser (1:5). The word simple (Heb. *peti*, peh-TEE) refers to someone who is naive and ignorant. It is a person whose exposure to life and wisdom has been limited. Because of inexperience, they are gullible and easily influenced, especially in a negative direction.

**7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction. 8 My son, hear the instruction of thy father,**



**and forsake not the law of thy mother:  
9 For they shall be an ornament of  
grace unto thy head, and chains about  
thy neck.**

The initial six introductory verses climax in this theological expression, “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” One cannot obtain knowledge of spiritual things if they begin at the wrong point, refusing to reverence God. The “fear the LORD” is recognizing who God is—holy, mighty, just, and worthy—and then recognizing who we are to God—flawed, ignorant, weak, but loved. This should make us respond by reverencing, worshiping, obeying, and serving Him. Even though the word “fear” (Heb. *yir’ah*, year-AH) is often used to describe situations that cause terror or anxiety, it is also commonly used to describe situations of reverence and respect for God or man. The essence of *yir’ah* is a recognition that you are under



someone's or something else's power, plus a recognition of your relationship with that power. You can hope for mercy or favor if you have a positive relationship. If not, you tremble for the worst.

The essence of true knowledge is fearing God. In fact, this phrase, "the fear of the LORD," is so central to the wisdom that it occurs 30 times in the Bible, and of that number, it occurs 14 times in Proverbs alone. Proverbs delineate these benefits of fearing the Lord: (1) it prolongs your life (10:27), (2) it provides confidence (14:26), (3) it helps in resisting evil (16:6), and (4) it produces riches and honor (22:4). These benefits result from hearing and heeding Proverbs 23:17, KJV: "be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long."

Having contrasted the stark differences between the wise person who fears the Lord and the fool



who despises wisdom, the sage now calls for the son to hear and heed his parents' instruction. The word "hear" (Heb. *shama'*, shaw-MAH) does not only mean to hear with the ear but also to heed and obey the instructions given. The instructions given are critical to living a good life with honor and integrity—do not pay attention to sinners who entice you with doing evil.

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## Say It Correctly

Proverbial. pro-**VERB**-ee-al.

Subtlety. **SUH**-till-tee.

Naïve. nie-**EVE**.



# Daily Bible Readings

## DAY 99

1 Kings 15–16  
Psalm 40:9–13

## DAY 100

1 Kings 18–20  
Psalm 40:14–17

## DAY 101

1 Kings 21–22  
Psalm 41:1–6

## DAY 102

2 Kings 1–5  
Psalm 41:7–13

## DAY 103

2 Kings 6–11  
Psalm 42:1–7

## DAY 104

2 Kings 12–14  
Psalm 42:8–11

## DAY 105

2 Kings 15–17  
Psalm 43