

PROVERBS 1:1-7

[PRELIMINARY REMARKS]

- Two weeks ago we closed out our kick-off series *Possible* by inviting you to write down what you're asking God to do in your life this year, then put it in the Hope Jar.
- Well, it turns out we needed more than one jar. In fact, we now have three of them!
 - Two of them are right here with us this morning.
 - The third will stay out in the Welcome Hall, so if you weren't here that week, you can still add your hope today—and as new people join us throughout the year, they can add theirs too.
- We're going to keep praying over these hopes as a church, and we're looking forward to hearing the stories of what God does.
- All of that leads us naturally into where we're headed next. Naming a hope is one thing. Learning to actually walk toward it—day by day, under God—is another.
 - So today we're starting a ten-week series from the book of Proverbs called *Foolproof: God's Wisdom for Your Life*.
 - Each week, we'll look at how God gives us wisdom for a different area of life.
- Today I want to introduce us to the book and make sure we all understand something up front.
 - This isn't a self-help series where we get a new lifehack/protocol each week.
 - Instead, it's grounded in the gospel—wisdom starts not with better habits, but with knowing God.
- Let's pray, and then we'll open his Word.

[INTRODUCTION]

- **Author Jerry Bridges tells the story of a wealthy businessman who left a \$50,000 inheritance to a destitute relative.**¹
 - This was **quite a sum** of money at the time—perhaps equivalent to half a million dollars today.
 - The **lawyer** for the estate duly notified the relative—telling him the money had been deposited for him at the local bank.
 - **Weeks** went by, but the poor old man never collected any of his inheritance.
 - **Finally**, the banker called: "You know you have \$50,000 you can draw on."
 - Uncertain, the old man **replied**, "Can I get 50 cents to buy some cornmeal?"
He'd never had any money—and he couldn't get his mind around his newfound wealth.
He asked for 50 cents—when he could easily have had much, much more.
- **Story illustrates the plight of many Xns today—might be a parable of me/you.**
 - Life in the Kingdom of God gives us access to the unsearchable riches of X.
 - We're **not** referring to financial wealth, but to the **abundant life** that can be ours in the gospel—a life of love, joy, and peace.

- Every believer has **access to a fortune**—but most don’t take advantage of it.
Why? Because we don’t understand the riches of grace.
As a result, we settle—for far less than God offers us.
- **The goal of series is to access some of these riches.**
 - Our **bank account** will be the Book of Proverbs.
 - Each week, make a **withdrawal**—and see how God’s wisdom can enrich our lives.
 - This week, we’ll introduce ourselves to this **book of wisdom** by asking 2 questions **about wisdom**: 1) *What is it?* 2) *How do you get it?*
 - I believe our answers will **pay dividends** in the weeks ahead.

[WHAT IS WISDOM?]

[State]

- We all probably have a **general sense** of the answer...
 - But when we’re asked to define it, it’s tougher than we might think.
 - The notion of wisdom can feel a little **mystical/enigmatic**.
 - **Yoda** is wise. **Gandalf** is wise. **Dumbledore** is wise.
 - Type “wise” into Google Images—get **owls**/picture of **Gandhi**.
 - Is that what we’re aiming for?
- Thankfully, the Bible paints a much more **earthy/practical** picture.²
 - Proverbs begins by taking the term “wisdom” and explaining what it is by giving us a bunch of **synonyms** for it.
 - If wisdom is the rainbow, here are some of its colors.
 1. **v.2a**: Wisdom described as **INSTRUCTION**: carries the idea of *training/discipline*.
 2. **v.2b**: Wisdom described as **UNDERSTANDING**: comes from a verb that means *to discern/know right choice*.
 3. **v.3**: Wisdom called **WISE DEALING**: *good sense/practical insight*.
 4. **v.4**: Wisdom is **PRUDENCE/DISCRETION**: these terms refer to those who’ve *made plans/have their affairs in order/know ropes*.
 5. **vv.4-5**: Wisdom called **KNOWLEDGE/LEARNING**: an informed mind, yes; but more than that, the ability to *apply one’s intellect*.
- **Taken together** we see that in Bible:
 - Wisdom is NOT a mystical thing—grow beard, smoke pipe, and issue wise pronouncements!
 - Instead, wisdom is much more **earthy/practical**:
 - Wisdom is discipline, right choices, good sense, smart planning, applied knowledge.
 - This led **Ray Ortlund**—who’ll be speaking at our men’s conference on October 10—to define wisdom this way: *“Wisdom is skill, expertise, competence that understands how life really works, how to achieve successful and even beautiful results.”*³

[Illustrate]

- This practical emphasis is illustrated in how the Bible uses the term—Ortlund gives us some examples:⁴
 - In **Ex 35** the term *wisdom* is used to describe the skill of an **artist** who adorns the tabernacle.
 - In **Jer 10** the expertise of **goldsmiths** is called the work of *wise men*.
 - Or in **Ps 107** the know-how of **sailors** who use the winds and tides to navigate to their destination is called *wisdom*.
- In the Bible, then, wisdom isn't abstract, theoretical, airy-fairy philosophizing.
 - Instead, wisdom understands how **real** life can work **really** well.
 - For this reason, several theologians define wisdom as SKILL IN LIVING.

[Apply]: And who doesn't want that?!

Skill in living! An understanding of how real life can work really well!

- Life is full of COMPLICATIONS, and there aren't always CLEAR RULES—there's no user manual that tells you exactly what to do in every situation.
- I wrote a list of ten examples:
 1. How do I manage my **time** when there's always more to do?
 2. How do I make a **budget** that survives first contact with Target?
 3. How do I raise my **kids**—or love my aging **parents**?
 4. How do I love my **spouse** when I know I'm right about how to load the dishwasher?
 5. How do I become **content** and not compare myself to others?
 6. How do I have a difficult conversation with my **employee** or **boss** without rehearsing it angrily in the shower for the next six months?
 7. How do I love someone when they're making **sinful** or **destructive** choices?
 8. How do I become a **good neighbor** when we're the family that let the grass die and regularly parks 37 cars all over the street?
 9. How do I **heal** from the hurt I carry inside?
 10. How do I navigate **political division** without blowing up Thanksgiving dinner?
- What do we do when **there isn't a verse that tells us exactly what to do**?
 - What we need is WISDOM: the **moment-by-moment** ability to navigate the complexities of life, in a way no list of rules ever could.
 - That's what Proverbs offers: an earthy/practical sense of how to live.

SKILL IN LIVING.

[Transition]

- But—and this is crucial—Proverbs is going to insist that **skill in living** isn't enough.
 - You can be skilled with **money** and make money your god.
 - Skilled with **people** and use them.
 - Skilled at getting **what you want** and want all the wrong things.
- Biblical wisdom isn't just knowing how life works—it's knowing how life works **under God**.
- Which brings us to the second question...

[HOW DO YOU GET WISDOM?]

[State]

- The ANSWER comes in v.7:
 - **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.**
 - KNOWLEDGE here is one of the colors that make up the rainbow of WISDOM.
 - That's why **Pro 9:10** says: **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.**
- CLEAR ENOUGH!
 - If you want to be wise, **be afraid, be very afraid**—of God.
 - So I'm going to spend the rest of the sermon telling horror story after horror story till we're all a complete wreck—**full of dread but very wise.**
- This verse sounds strange to us because we don't use the word FEAR in quite the same way that it's used in Bible—as it's used here, fear has at least **two different dimensions.**

[Illustrate]

1. First, the fear of the LORD involves REVERENCE.

- To fear the Lord is to have a posture of humble submission before him.
 - He is **God**; I am not. He is the **creator**; I am the creature. He **knows best**; I do not.
 - Remember with me in this moment—there is a God, and we are not him.
- Sometimes we forget this distinction:
 - Proverbs says: **Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding (Pro 3:5).**
 - But we do trust in ourselves, we do lean on our own understanding, and we do act as though we know best.
- This never ends well:
 - **There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death (Pro 14:12).**
 - So much of our dysfunction—personal, relational, whatever it is—traces back to this one root: we've chosen to go our own way, not God's.
- And this is why we need reverence—a posture of humble submission before him in which we trust that he knows better than we do.
 - So when God speaks about **money**, and his wisdom conflicts with our instincts—we trust him.
 - When God speaks about **sex**, and his wisdom conflicts with our desires—we trust him.
 - When God tells us to **forgive**, and everything in us wants to hold on to the offense—we trust him.
- Why? Because God is God, and we are not. He knows best; we do not.
 - We embrace a posture of humility that acknowledges: When God and I disagree on something, one of us is wrong—And it's not him.
 - This kind of **reverence** is the beginning of wisdom—because it puts us in a position to follow his ways, not our own.

2. The second dimension of the fear of the LORD is **AWE**.

- To fear the Lord is to have a kind of wonder-filled delight, characterized by gladness and joy.
- We don't use the term fear this way, but we see this connection all over the Bible:
 - **Pro 28:14:** Happy is the one who fears the LORD always.
 - **Isa 11:3:** Delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
- Have you ever experienced something that made you feel impossibly small and impossibly alive at the same time?
 - It's the Grand Canyon at sunrise.
 - It's the moment you first held one of your kids.
 - It's the Hubbards when they received that letter.
 - It's what we felt in this room when we heard about the Hubbards receiving that letter.
 - In that instant, you don't feel diminished—you feel like you've brushed up against something bigger than yourself, something you can't explain, and something you don't want to look away from.
- What creates this kind of awe—this wonder-filled amazement for the LORD?
 - Quite beautifully, the Scriptures tie it to the gospel.
 - **Psalms 130:3-4:** If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O LORD, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, **that you may be feared.**
 - It's his love—his mercy and grace—that fills us with awe.
 - And nowhere do we see that more clearly than at the cross.
 - This week I was reminded of a beautiful prayer—meditate on the love of Jesus with me.⁵

*Christ was all **anguish** that I might be all **joy**,
cast off that I might be **brought in**,
trodden down as an **enemy** that I might be welcomed as a **friend**,
surrendered to **hell's worst** that I might attain **heaven's best**,
stripped that I might be **clothed**,
wounded that I might be **healed**,
athirst that I might **drink**,
tormented that I might be **comforted**,
made a **shame** that I might inherit **glory**,
entered **darkness** that I might have **eternal light**.*

- Do you see how he loves you?
 - As we stand at the cross, we find Jesus fearfully beautiful.
 - And it's this kind of **awe** that's the beginning of wisdom.
 - **Reverence** calls us to submit to his ways.
 - And **Awe** makes us glad to do it.

[Apply]

- **[Unbeliever]:** If you've never seen God that way, can I encourage you to now?
 - Maybe you've thought of him as angry, as someone to avoid—or maybe you've barely thought of him at all.
 - But isn't the Bible's picture of him incredible?
 - He is all-powerful AND he is full of love.
 - The holy God who gave himself to save you.
 - So you can come to him through Jesus—with reverence and awe.
 - He'll receive you, forgive you, and give you a fresh start.
- **[Believer]**
 - For those of us who follow Jesus, this is also the kind of fear we need to be wise—reverence and awe.
 - We need more than lifehacks, protocols, pointers, and tips!
 - We need an encounter with the living God, and then a humble re-mapping of our lives in light of his grace.
 - We need to learn what it means to live in joyful response to who he is and what he's done for us.
 - It shapes our **words** and our **friendships**.
 - It shapes our **rest** and our **money**.
 - It shapes our **marriages** and our **sexuality**.
 - It shapes our **parenting** and our **time**.
 - It shapes our **outreach** and our **mission**.
 - In the rest of this series we'll look at each of those areas and see how we can live skillfully under God.

[CONCLUSION]

- But today, it all begins here:
 - *What is wisdom?* Skill in living.
 - *How do we get it?* By fearing the LORD.
 - **Reverence:** There is a God—and I am not him.
 - I don't have to carry the weight of being in charge.
 - I can submit to him and follow his plans.
 - And **Awe:** The one we bow before loves us.
 - We can trust the God who gave himself for us.
 - In fact, there's no better way to live.
- Don't go scrounging around for fifty cents, when the riches of God's wisdom await.

We can live skillfully by approaching God with reverence and awe.

[THE CLOSE]: Pray

- We all have things we're wrestling with—see the list on page 3.
- This week, help us not lean on our own understanding and go our own way.
- Instead, we bring these things to you:
 - With **reverence**—you know better than we do.
 - And **awe**—you love us, you gave yourself for us—so we can trust that your ways are best.
- Help us, Lord, to live differently—to live skillfully—because we trust in you.
- We ask this in the name of Jesus. AMEN.

RESOURCES AND ENDNOTES

Resources

This list contains some of the resources that were used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*.
- Ray Ortlund, *Proverbs: Wisdom That Works*.
- Logos Bible Software.

Endnotes

¹ See Jerry Bridges, *The Gospel for Real Life*, 16.

² I owe this section to Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, 34-35.

³ Ray Ortlund, *Proverbs: Wisdom That Works*, 28.

⁴ Examples come from Ortlund, 28.

⁵ See *The Valley of Vision*, "Love Lustres at Calvary."