

The Key to Wisdom

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[0 : 0 0] turn back in your Bibles back to Proverbs chapter 1 page 6 to 8 and as you do just as I mentioned last week we're going to do a short three-week series in the book of Proverbs and today being the first one I'm going to try and do a little bit something a little bit different and that is I'd like to try and give you an introduction to the book as well as a few tips on how to read it with some examples along the way plus the key to wisdom which is a whole lot to fit into one sermon I realize so you will have to work harder today than you will the next couple of weeks when we look at some topics and what Proverbs has to say about those but for now let me start by asking if you remember the cartoonist Jeff Larson he wrote he drew the series The Far Side and you'd remember his most famous or I think his most famous cartoon is this one at Midvale School for the Gifted and he's pushing on the door that says pull I show you this because I think it helps illustrate the difference between being clever academically gifted and being wise or in this case not so wise that cleverness and wisdom are different aren't they as someone once said cleverness is knowing that a tomato is a fruit do you know that tomato is a fruit but wisdom is knowing not to put it in a fruit salad because it doesn't quite work there's a difference between cleverness and wisdom right wisdom is about in other words knowing how to live well in this world so that we don't look like a fool or fall into traps because it's easy to fall into traps since life is not always black and white is it for example sometimes we are to follow instructions literally and walk on the marked walkways that's what to do other times though we're not meant to follow signs literally like hug the left curb when leaving and the guy's literally hugging the left curb or more seriously avoiding scams you know knowing when a text message is from a fake vicar or the real one we need wisdom because life is not always black or white not always easily discerned which way to go and the purpose of proverbs is to give this wisdom our point one verse one this will be our longest point have a look in your bibles at verses one to three he says the proverbs of Solomon son of David king of Israel and they are for gaining wisdom and instruction before understanding words of insight for receiving instruction in prudent behavior for doing what is right and just and fair and now verse one we're told these are the proverbs of Solomon son of David but he didn't actually write all of them on the back of your outlines is a structure of the book of proverbs it's a pretty long book it's 31 chapters but don't get overwhelmed just look at the bold headings and you'll see the first nine chapters are really telling us to get wisdom that's what they're really about with some examples of wisdom along the way but the other collections the other headings have got collections from Solomon and others but the editor attributes it the whole thing to Solomon because he did write most of them you can see there that his first collection is 12 chapters long another collection from someone else is only one chapter and so on but what more than that Solomon was the epitome of wisdom in Israel at the time in 1 Kings chapter 3 God said look I'll give you anything you ask for and then because he asked well God says because you didn't ask for a long life or wealth or the death of your enemies things that we might be tempted to ask for God says I'm going to give you wisdom and make you wiser than anyone else in the Old Testament

and so because Solomon was the epitome of wisdom and because he did write most of proverbs anyway the whole book is attributed to him but the point here is that it's written to give us wisdom that's what verse 2 says for gaining wisdom and instruction verse 3 says for receiving instruction on prudent or wise behavior in other words it's how to live well in this world that's not always black and white but notice the rest of verse 3 it goes on to say for receiving instruction in doing what is right and just and fair as we'll see later on proverbs is about teaching us how to live in this world wisely as God sees it not as our world sees it or even as we see it it's what is doing what is right and just and fair in God's eyes our world will say look what matters is building your own wealth and here's the guide to do here's some wisdom to become rich but God says in proverbs a generous person will prosper whoever refreshes others will be refreshed our world says believe in yourself that's the secret to success but God actually says in proverbs actually no trust in the Lord instead lean not on your own understanding in your ways submit to him and he will make your path straight he will help you walk right in life that's true success the point is proverbs gives us wisdom to live well well in this world as

God sees it and so the first tip to reading proverbs if you like is if you're going to look for proverbs about how to get rich or when to start a company those sort of worldly concerns it's not going to tell you that but it is going to tell you what God thinks is important to living well in this world which is actually for our good anyway isn't it because God knows what's best for us I mean if you've had to look after children whether you're a parent or not we know what's good for them I mean kids will happily eat maccas every night of the week wouldn't they well some of the kids I know would but we know as adults it's not good for them and so we lead them on the right path to fruit and veggies and one day they'll thank us for it maybe but the point is we know what's good for them so we lead them in the right path and that's what God does in proverbs and so this is wisdom to live well in the world as God sees it for our good but it's also wisdom for both the simple and the wise verse 4 it says the proverbs are for giving prudence to those who are simple knowledge and discretion to the young and notice here how simple is paralleled with young and so it's it's refers to those who are naive or gullible because of their age they just don't it's not that there's anything inherently wrong about them they're just young and gullible naive and we know that ourselves we know little kids often believe anything don't they and so there's wisdom for them to help them avoid the traps and not to believe everything for example if you look at verse 8 just in the next column there the proverb takes on the father's instruction to a young son and the father tells the young son to not forsake his instruction or his mother's teaching why well verse 10 my son if sinful men entice you do not give in to them if they say dot dot dot and as we read this it kind of feels like it's a no-brainer like who would actually go along with someone who wants to lie in wait for innocent blood verse 11 i mean who's going to do that but that's because we're actually got life experience and no it's wrong young kids can still fall into that trap i mean we call it peer pressure today don't we where they end up doing silly things i like these uh teenagers in parramatta last year who were caught on camera one guy starts to try and break into the shop the others kind of go i'll have a look and then before you know it he's trying to break into the shop and kicking the door and the like one person tries to stop him but in the end he gets through and she follows suit because everyone else is doing it and then they end up stealing two thousand dollars but get caught by the police they needed this wisdom in verses eight to ten to not let sinful people entice you to do silly things and so proverbs is wisdom for the simple and young if we come to parts of proverbs and go oh this is common sense this is a no-brainer what's so great about this well it's probably because you're wise and you've got more life experience it's for the simple and young at that point but it's also for the wise and mature verse five let the wise listen and add to their learning and let the discerning get guidance wise people know that they don't know everything i mean is that a mark of wisdom and so wise people know they've always got something else to learn that as some proverbs say they need to still heed discipline or correction because they're not perfect and that the wise still

need know they still need to listen to advice from others because they don't know everything and so here is some more advice for those who are still wise and so if proverbs is for the simple and young but it's also for the wise and mature then it's for everyone isn't it but it's also to help us understand proverbs itself verse six it says it's for understanding proverbs and parables the sayings and riddles of the wise proverbs which seems a bit odd when we first read it how does proverbs help us to understand proverbs i mean it seems a bit odd doesn't it and the answer is by practice the more we read the book of proverbs pondering what they mean and how they might apply the better we get at understanding proverbs and riddles and wise sayings both in this book and in the world the more we practice the better we get i mean we know that from other things in life don't we there's even a proverb about it practice makes perfect yeah so the more we read proverbs the more we understand it the more we practice it the more it helps us to understand other proverbs like for example these two here which seem contradictory uh the first verse verse four says do not answer a fool according to their folly but then verse five says do answer a fool according to their folly and so which is it the more we ponder it the more we think about it the more we'll see that actually this is for these are for two different situations and two different fools actually so in the first case there is no winning for this fool uh when you try and answer them you just get sucked into their foolish argument and i've experienced this uh when i've tried to talk with mormons or jw's at the door i've really wanted to try and share with them the good news of jesus but i don't know if you've ever had this experience you just go round and around and around in circles and so what i do now is i say would you like a glass of water you're probably tired from talking i don't mean that rudely i mean that genuinely it sounds more rude than i meant it i don't mean that rudely but then i actually say look i'm not going to talk any further with you um but if you want to know how to be saved by not doing works come back to this house i'll happily talk to you then but it's better not to answer a fool and get sucked into their folly you see but the second proverb is a different situation a different fool who may be open to correction and so letting them think they are wise in their own eyes and letting them continue in their own folly is actually not for their good and so you might answer them to help them live more wisely so for example i remember when one of my kids was quite young i won't say which one but someone from our church uh said to them and this was when they're in about grade one oh i hear you're learning mandarin at school after which my child said no i'm learning chinese mandarin is a fruit now they were wise in their own eyes but we corrected that we answered them for their own good and said actually it can be both the point is and this is the next tip the more we read proverbs the more we practice it the better we get at seeing that there's proverbs for different situations because this book itself knows life is not always black and white there will be different situations in fact the more we read proverbs the more we'll realize that while they are true because they're

based on an ordered world that god created and so if you do a then b is going to happen because that's the way god has ordered it we're going to also realize that there are exceptions to these proverbs because our world is fractured and fallen for example in chapter 3 the proverbs of chapter 3 says if you keep my commands in your heart they will prolong your life for many years and bring you peace and prosperity and if you fear the lord and shun evil this will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones and there is truth in this because the way that god has created the world so for example in 2016 cnn reported on a survey uh where they surveyed they did a study on 75 000 nurses over 20 years and they some went to church and had a faith and others didn't and this is what they said going to church could help you live longer study says over 20 years the research was done another uh study found something similar a bit earlier in 2006 it's hard to know how much stock to put in these things but when you think about it it kind of makes sense god says you know don't stress and worry pray and commit and it does help us have peace and not stress which lowers the bp and all the rest of it god says don't get drunk and sleep around and that does protect us from all sorts of heartache disease financial ruin and the like and so yes it is true that when we listen to god's teaching his word it does promote a long life and nourishment but i'm sure you've already realized that it's not always true is that there are exceptions because we live in a broken world those christians in the state of maripool in india they fear god and shun evil but they are not receiving nourishment for their bones they are receiving beatings to their bones because of persecution we know that there are christians we know who who do seek to follow god's teaching but they don't enjoy peace and prosperity in fact even the book of proverbs realizes this and so it has proverbs about a day when god will put everything right god works out everything to its proper end even the wicked for a day of disaster the lord detests all the proud of the heart be sure of this they will not go unpunished even proverbs knows there has to be a day when god will put things right which we know is the last day when jesus returns where treasures gained by wickedness will not profit but righteousness will deliver from death for us who believe in jesus we have his righteousness we will be delivered from death we have the guarantee that god will put all things right but until that day the next tip is to realize that while proverbs are true because it's based on god's ordered world there will be exceptions because the world is fallen and fractured but because they are generally true then they're still worth listening to and yet before that we need to know the key to all this wisdom which is verse 7 verse 7 the fear of the lord is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and instruction if you want wisdom it begins with having a fear of the lord that is that is the key to wisdom but what exactly is it well later in proverbs we see that it involves humility humility is the fear of the lord elsewhere in the old testament like deuteronomy and to shun evil it says deuteronomy talks about uh hearts having a heart that fears god so that we

[17 : 54] keep his commandments so that's kind of how it's expressed but at the same time it also involves loving god with all our heart and so you've got fear love and obedience all in our heart they all seem to be compatible and go together and so i think the best definition i've found so far i'm happy to have other ones but is by this guy who says the fear of the lord is that humble and affectionate loving or by which the child of god bends themselves carefully to their father's law or word that's the beginning of wisdom and by beginning our writer doesn't mean it's the first step and then you forget god you stop fearing him stop having this all now he means first and foundational step that shapes all other wisdom going forward that helps us to interpret all other wisdom it's the key that keeps unlocking all other wisdom let me see if i can illustrate um i was speaking with someone from saint john's when i was down there and they have cancer and i remember her sharing with the church one sunday how the doctor told her that it's incurable and she's only got certain time to live and so his advice to her was twofold one you need to get your things in order your affairs in order and two here's a pamphlet with some uh contact details about grief groups to help you get through the grief and the fear and the like but this person had a fear of the lord she had a humble and affectionate all for god that carefully obeyed his word and so she responded to the doctor saying i'm not fearful or worried i'll take your advice about getting my things in order but i don't need this pamphlet i know where i'm going and i can't wait to get there the doctor looked a bit worried about the last comment and she said she said i'm talking about heaven you see her fear of the lord interpreted the doctor's wisdom and it sifted through it it took some of it about getting her things in order but it left others of it about the grief groups because she knew where she was going that's how the fear of the lord is that first and foundational thing to wisdom how it interprets all the other things so that what we're left with is true wisdom and so do we have that humble and affectionate awe of god that moves us to carefully obey his word that helps us to rightly interpret all other wisdom so we're left with the good stuff or do we have a half-hearted and ambivalent awe of god that only occasionally obeys his word and takes on other wisdom which isn't all that true or worse still do we ignore god's word altogether and become like the fool that's what verse seven says the second half did you notice but fools despise wisdom and instruction i remember when those digital cameras first came out you probably don't even remember what digital cameras are but you're all on your phones uh but when first digital cameras first came out one of my relatives got one for christmas he was very excited but he was too impatient to listen to his kids on how to use it because let's face it my kids know more about technology today than i do and we should always listen to them about technology not everything um and so my relative just started to try and take photos i like this lady but he had the camera around the wrong way there's the kind i know cameras look very different today but you can remember what they like he needed that proverb uh in chapter 18 which says to answer before listening even to your own kids well that is folly and shame but that's even more true

if we don't listen to god's word if we don't have a fear of the lord an f-o-t-l then it means we become an f-o-o-l a fool only one letter difference but it makes a huge difference in life doesn't it of course we have more than israel had we have god's spirit and god's son in fact we heard in our second reading that all the treasures of wisdom are found in christ he is the true solomon son of david who gives wisdom he is the word of god that is wisdom in other words he is the one who embodies god's wisdom and modeled it for us he lived with the fear of the lord such that he humbled himself and obey his father's word even to death on a cross and so we can look to christ not only for eternal life in the world to come but for wisdom to this live this life now i remember when we were when christians were wearing those um bracelets do you remember these wwjd and you could even get key chains and the acronym stood for what would jesus do um you know how would he live in whatever situation you're faced in what would he say to you that kind of thing and this uh fad went out of fashion uh partly because that's what fads do you know they become a bit daggy and they go out of fashion uh but partly because people said oh well we can't do miracles so that doesn't quite work but they've kind of missed the point that actually we are to follow christ's example that's what the bible tells us in places like this and so i don't know i think i want to bring back wwjd if you if you want true wisdom if you want to fear the lord then ask yourself how would christ respond what would he say to you in this situation how would he live after all he is the embodiment of god's wisdom and so to wrap up proverbs is about giving us wisdom to live well in this world as god sees it for our good it's wisdom for both the simple and the wise sometimes it'll seem too simplistic because it's not for you it's for the simple as well as the young it helps us to understand how to read other proverbs that depend on the situation and what the fool is like or what's going on it helps us even to know that proverbs are true but there are exceptions because we live in a broken world but it also teaches the most important thing and that is the key to true wisdom is to have a fear of the lord like christ and so will you be an f-o-o-l a fool or will you have an f-o-t-l and be wise like christ let's pray to be this one let's pray uh gracious father we do thank you for this book of proverbs which does give us wisdom to live life well in this world as you see it but father we thank you even more so for the lord jesus who is your wisdom embodied to us and so father we do pray that you would help us uh like christ to have a right fear of you one that is humble and stands in affectionate or carefully obeying your word that we might sift through the wisdom of this world and find true wisdom to live life well for our good and for your glory we ask it in jesus name amen