

Session 1

Chartered Waters

God's Word warns us of the consequences of foolish choices.

Proverbs 1:7-19



**How would you describe the difference between knowledge and wisdom?
How should information lead to a change in behavior?**

The knowledge of God and the knowledge to live wisely are interrelated. Next to the knowledge of God in salvation, the knowledge to live wisely is the most important kind of knowledge. Godly knowledge is more than information; it is about transformation. You can be factually right but spiritually wrong. Solomon's argument in the Book of Proverbs is simple: godly wisdom is applied truth that leads to transformation and wise practical living.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The Book of Proverbs begins with an invitation and a warning. The invitation comes in the form of a call to be wise. Solomon urged anyone who would listen to hear and obey the call to walk in the path of God's wisdom. Wisdom is personified, as if she is a woman who calls out in the street, inviting all who will hear to come and embrace God's wisdom (1:20).

There's a warning here as well. Solomon warned of the trouble that awaits any who will not heed the call to live wisely. He turned his attention to his son (1:8-19). His son would need to make up his mind to walk in God's wisdom. Making that decision would not be easy since he would encounter evil people who would try to entice him to join them. They would try to persuade him that the road they took would be fun. It would involve violence, murder, and theft. Solomon warned that these gang members themselves would eventually have their lives stolen from them. The consequences of rejecting godly truth and wisdom are devastating.

Both of these great admonitions—the call to hear and obey the wisdom of God and the warning of what happens when true wisdom is rejected—are summed up in one of Solomon's most famous sayings, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and discipline" (1:7).

It is within this context that Solomon methodically and urgently began his book. Solomon's call—God's call—for the people of God to live within the safe boundaries of God's wise counsel is needed now just as it was needed then. It is the wise person who hears and obeys the call of God. It is the wise person who considers Solomon's warnings. It is the fool who rejects both.

PROVERBS 1:7-19

7 The **fear of the LORD** **A**

is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise **wisdom** **B** and discipline.

8 Listen, my son, to your father's instruction,
and don't reject your mother's **teaching** **C**,

9 for they will be a garland of favor on your head
and pendants around your neck.

10 My son, if sinners entice you,
don't be persuaded.

11 If they say—"Come with us!
Let's set an ambush and kill someone.
Let's attack some innocent person just for fun!

12 Let's swallow them alive, like Sheol,
whole, like those who go down to the Pit.

13 We'll find all kinds of valuable property
and fill our houses with plunder.

14 Throw in your lot with us,
and we'll all share the loot"—

15 my son, don't travel that road with them
or set foot on their path,

16 because their feet run toward evil
and they hurry to shed blood.

17 It is useless to spread a net
where any bird can see it,

18 but they set an ambush to kill themselves;
they attack their own lives.

19 Such are the paths of all who make profit
dishonestly;
it **takes the lives** **D** of those who receive it.

Passage Outline

Starting Point
(Prov. 1:7)

Path of Obedience
(Prov. 1:8-9)

Resist Sin
(Prov. 1:10-14)

Sin's Results
(Prov. 1:15-19)

Keywords

- A. Includes awe, reverence, respect, worship, trust, commitment, obedience, submission, and love—all qualities of a right relationship with God. Lord refers to the personal name Yahweh, God of the covenant.
- B. True wisdom comes from knowing God (Jas. 1:5), trusting Him, and turning from sin (Job 28:20-28).
- C. "Law" (KJV). Torah in Hebrew. Here the word refers to parental teachings based on God's laws that provide children moral guidelines and direction.
- D. In Mark 8:36, Jesus said, "For what does it benefit someone to gain the whole world and yet lose his life?"

EXPLORE THE TEXT

In verse 7 we find a summary of the whole Book of Proverbs. To *fear* the Lord involves reverencing, respecting, and trusting Him. Not everyone responds positively to God’s invitation. Some reject God’s wisdom.

KEY DOCTRINE: Man Only the grace of God can bring people into His holy fellowship and enable them to fulfill the creative purpose of God (1 Cor. 12:21-31).

How might a person be intelligent and unwise at the same time?

BIBLE SKILL: Dig deeper into the meaning of a key word or phrase. Take a closer look at the meaning of “the fear of the Lord” in Proverbs 1:7. Read the verse in different translations. Use a Bible concordance to look for other passages in which the phrase is used. Consult a Bible dictionary for more insight. Write in your own words the meaning of the phrase and how it relates to spiritual growth.

Wisdom is not gained through experience alone. Experience is important but not determinative. Instead, we come to know the wisdom of God through the means by which God reveals to us His wisdom. His Word (John 17:17), the person of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:30), the ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13), and general revelation (Ps. 19:1) are the sources of godly wisdom.

Verse 8 reminds all fathers and mothers of their responsibility to nurture their children in the faith with godly instruction. Paul wrote of this in Ephesians 6:4, “Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

How does listening to godly counsel lead to blessing?

The next piece of wisdom Solomon gave his son was to resist sin. He knew that the enticement and temptation could be difficult to reject—especially for a young person.

Sin affects more than the individual. It impacts those around us, sometimes in abusive ways. When God’s truth and wisdom are rejected, harmful and disturbing things will happen.

How might being mindful of the consequences impact how a person responds to temptation? Which has the greater impact: focusing on the consequences of disobedience or the rewards of obedience?

Solomon’s warnings were not angry prohibitions; they came from the heart of a loving father pleading with his son to stay true to God. One consequence of unwise, sinful living would be the harm and destruction of other people and their property; another consequence would be self-destruction.

How does sin lead to self-destructive behaviors? To what examples can you point?

APPLY THE TEXT

- True wisdom starts with a right relationship with God.
- Obedience to godly counsel leads to favor in life.
- Wise believers resist the pressure to engage in wicked activities.
- Ignoring godly wisdom leads to self-destruction.

Evaluate your obedience to God and His counsel on a scale of zero to ten. In what areas do you need to be more obedient to God and His Word?

Discuss with your Bible study group ways people provide godly counsel. Discuss the role the group has in providing godly counsel and fostering obedience.

Identify areas in which you face the greatest temptations. List potential consequences that might accompany that temptation and rewards for resisting. Ask God to help you remain faithful to Him and for His help when facing temptation.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Having a relationship with God makes you wise.

Read Proverbs 1:7, underlining the words fear and wisdom.

Wisdom has a starting point. It begins with a sincere relationship with the Lord. Coming to a saving knowledge of God through the person of Jesus Christ—who is our wisdom (1 Cor. 1:24)—is the beginning of a life well lived. Thus, wisdom is found in a Person with whom we can have a relationship. Our continued walk in godly wisdom—and our ability to make wise choices—will progress as we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. (See 2 Pet. 3:18.) Sadly, many Christians look everywhere except to God’s Word for guidance in making wise choices. The way to wisdom and understanding begins with seeking God.

Rather than beginning a life-long journey of knowing and loving God, the fool says in his heart that there is no God. (See Ps. 14:1.) The fool may be intelligent by worldly standards but cares little for the wisdom of God and refuses to accept God’s loving discipline and wise instruction. Verse 7 reminds us that the dividing line between the wise and foolish person is not intellect but a relationship with God.

When have you been intelligent and unwise at the same time?

Day 2: Pay attention to wise counsel.

Read Proverbs 1:8-9, considering how God dispenses His wisdom.

God uses several sources that reflect the truth of His Word. For example, the instruction of a godly parent can be used by God to illuminate and instruct us in the wisdom of God. Solomon called his *son* to listen to the instruction of his father and to the wise teaching of his mother. Listening means more than hearing; it means to pay attention, absorb, and apply what’s being said. Solomon may have had in mind here his own son, Rehoboam. Rehoboam would become the next king (1 Kings 14:21) and would need God’s wisdom to rule well. Solomon may also have been addressing any of his other sons or all young men in general. Certainly, these divinely inspired proverbs are useful for every young person who wishes to live wisely. To pay attention to God’s wise counsel through our parents is like receiving a *garland of favor on your head and pendants around your neck*. These are metaphors that speak of the blessings we can receive when we pay attention to wise counsel. The wise response to godly counsel is obedience.

How have your parents been used by God to dispense His wisdom to you? If you are a parent, are you open to God dispensing His wisdom through you?

Day 3: Wise people run from temptation.

Read Proverbs 1:10, noting the instruction to avoid negative peer pressure.

There is something luring about sin. Sinful temptations draw us, allure us, and entice us to go off the path God has set for us in His Word. Temptation is common to all people, yet God provides escape routes for those who have been tempted to sin (1 Cor. 10:12-13). The question is not if we will be tempted, but what we do when we are tempted. It is the wise person who runs from temptation. (See Gen. 39:10-12; 1 Cor. 6:18.)

How does Christ offer true riches and true community?

Day 4: Evil behavior is the way of life for an unwise man.

Read Proverbs 1:11-14, noting the evil behaviors these people wanted to have for fun.

Verse 11 addresses the peer pressure of evil people who attack and abuse the innocent just for fun. Abuse must never be excused at any level. These evil thugs claimed they could swallow people alive, like *Sheol*. The term *Sheol* was used to describe the place of the dead. The thugs boasted that they could swallow innocent people whole in the same way that the *Pit*—an open grave—would swallow a corpse.

If these evil people thought nothing of abusing and killing innocent people, then they certainly would think nothing of devaluing, taking, and destroying property that did not belong to them. The wrongful taking and plundering of property not only harms individuals and families, but also is a violation of at least two commandments—stealing and coveting.

Such evil and twisted behavior becomes a way of life for the ungodly and unwise person. Is it any wonder that Solomon warned his son against falling for the enticements of ungodly and unwise people? He called his son to resist and flee all temptation, and in the next section Solomon would point to the consequences of following the wrong crowd.

How does being mindful of the consequences impact how you respond to temptation? Which has the greater impact: focusing on the consequences of disobedience or the rewards of obedience?

Day 5: Sin leads to self-destruction.

Read Proverbs 1:15-19, highlighting verse 15.

The unwise person ends up on the path of self-destruction. Notice the phrases and images Solomon used in verses 17-19. The unwise and godless person is like a bird that cannot see the trap set by his own sin even though it's in plain sight. The *ambush* that ungodly people think they have set for others is actually set for themselves. They end up destroying their own lives.

Tragically, the unwise person is blind to what is happening. Self-destructive behavior is often hidden from the very person who is self-destructing. Too often, the unwise person has become so blinded to his own unwise behavior he thinks he is only experiencing a season of bad luck or a series of heartbreaks that have nothing to do with his ill-conceived and ill-advised choices. Godly wisdom will remove the blinders that cover the eyes of the unwise, helping them to see the connection between their unwise, ungodly choices and the tragic consequences those choices produce.

How does sin lead to self-destructive behaviors? To what examples can you point to in your own life?

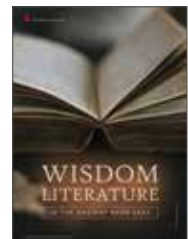
TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Proverbs 1, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

What does it mean to fear the Lord?

How can these verses apply to spiritual children and spiritual parents in a church body?

Why can it be difficult for people to recognize the self-destructive nature of their sin? How can we avoid this trap?



For additional context, read “Wisdom Literature in the Ancient Near East” and “Solomon: His Life and Times” in the Summer 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.