

How many were here last week for Easter? Let's do that again.

If you have a Bible, go ahead and open to **Proverbs 1:1-7 and Proverbs 3:1-12.**

For those who don't know, we're spending this entire year working through what we call our Year of Biblical Literacy - where we are intentionally teaching through prominent chunks of the Bible, including the major genres, highlighting different themes and ideas, mapping out the story arc of Scripture - all with this hope to empower you to read the Bible for the rest of your life. So along with the sermons, we're putting out podcast episodes and releasing these handouts with each new series that should be on your seat.

To recap our teaching so far this year, we started with the Torah, the first five books of the OT. We just finished a series on the book of Ruth, which ended up pointing us to a coming King named David.

Today, we're starting a new series associated with David's son, King Solomon. We'll be looking at the four books of the Old Testament, commonly called "wisdom books."

- The books included in this section are Proverbs, a wealth of truisms about life to impart wisdom in thousands of ways.
- Ecclesiastes, which shares harsh truths about life
- Job, which shows God's heart toward suffering and tragedy
- Song of Solomon—erotic love poetry - now I'm not teaching that one in part because my parents go to this church, and it seemed weird for me to give them the sex talk

But all that to say - we're gonna spend a good chunk of the series in Proverbs. And if you're not familiar, Proverbs contain around 900 of these little truth nuggets that form and shape a wise life—sort of like an ancient Twitter but by God and...not crazy and...fewer ads.

Now to be clear, they aren't specific promises, but they do say, "This is how things generally work because this is how God designed things to work"

So with that in mind, let's look at Proverbs 1:

#### **Proverbs 1:1-7**

The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:

Pause right there. King Solomon writes a good majority of the book of Proverbs. He's also associated with 3 of the 4 wisdom books. In fact, there's a story in the Bible - in 1 Kings - where God asks King Solomon at the start of his rule - what would you like? And Solomon asks for wisdom. And that's exactly what God does - God fills Solomon with wisdom and becomes the wisest king Israel ever had and people from all over the world would go to Solomon to ask his wisdom on things.

So the point is, if this guy is on the mic about to drop some truth - we'd do well to listen up:

#### **Proverbs 1:2-7**

To know wisdom and instruction,  
to understand words of insight,  
3 to receive instruction in wise dealing,  
in righteousness, justice, and equity;  
4 to give prudence to the simple,  
knowledge and discretion to the youth—  
5 Let the wise hear and increase in learning,  
and the one who understands obtain guidance,  
6 to understand a proverb and a saying,  
the words of the wise and their riddles.  
7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;  
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

So **verses 2 through 6** map out what we're called to do. To know, to listen, to receive, to understand wisdom and instruction. And then verse 7 says how we start this journey: **The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge**

The phrase "fear of the LORD" is a huge theme in the wisdom books, and for good reason. If you want to be wise, it starts with this. In fact, if you skip over to **Proverbs 3** we see the same concept. This Solomon still repeats how crucial it is to be a person of wisdom:

#### **Proverbs 3:1-12**

My son, do not forget my teaching,  
but let your heart keep my commandments,  
**2** for length of days and years of life  
and peace they will add to you.  
**3** Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you;  
bind them around your neck;  
write them on the tablet of your heart.  
**4** So you will find favor and good success  
in the sight of God and man.  
**5** Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
and do not lean on your own understanding.  
**6** In all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make straight your paths.  
**7** Be not wise in your own eyes;  
fear the LORD, (there it is again) and turn away from evil.  
**8** It will be healing to your flesh  
and refreshment to your bones.

Once again, Solomon stresses two things: wisdom is absolutely critical, and it requires to fear the LORD.

One more verse for good measure to show you this is a big deal, **Prov 28:13**

#### **Proverbs 28:13**

Blessed is the one who fears the LORD always,  
but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

So we see this pattern emerging from all these texts: Proverbs 1, 3, and 28. If you start with the fear of the LORD and seek out the wisdom God has for you - your life will be marked by being blessed with favor, and success.

To put it another way, God actually wants to have a good life, based on how he defines it, insofar as it depends on you... on how you make decisions, how you relate to others, how you handle all the things that often fall into the category of wisdom -- your time, money, relationships, family and more.

Again, insofar as it is up to you, God wants you to have a blessed life, and according to these verses, the blessed life is the life that operates wisely.

So all of this poses the question: What does the fear of the LORD mean anyway? It's in the Bible a lot, but my hunch is that's not a phrase we use often, if...ever.

- For some, you grew up in church, and this phrase can feel like **white noise**. Its like, a churchy word people say but doesn't mean much like "bless your heart"
- For others, you may hear that phrase and think of **God as some bearded guy in the sky** who is always disappointed in you and keeping a record of all the wrongs you did. So when you hear fear the LORD, its this connotation of judgment.
- Or for others of us, maybe you grew up in a more seeker-friendly church environment, that phrase was **downplayed a lot** because God is your buddy. And Jesus is a friend of mine. So when it comes to this phrase "fear of the LORD" you may have a hard time piecing it together

So what I want to do this morning is bring some clarity to it. Three things:

## 1 - A right estimation of God's character

I'm pulling this from Proverbs 3, verses 11-12 -

### Proverbs 3:11

My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline  
or be weary of his reproof,  
12 for the LORD reproves him whom he loves,  
as a father the son in whom he delights.

In other words - the context says what it looks like to fear God is that of a loving father who can and will discipline and correct the child he loves.

Now I know some of you in here will hear "fear of the LORD" and "The LORD's discipline," and depending on your family background, that will be a real struggle because you had an unhealthy fear of your father. And if that was you I want to say two things: 1) I'm so sorry you had to go through that, and 2) the LORD is not like that at all

In fact, I know this because look at how v.12 reads - "The LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights"

So this verse is talking about disciplining out of love and delight and not out of control or anger. Loving discipline says, "I love you so much, I want what's best for you so I'm giving you this consequence because I don't want you to do this again."

A very basic example, I think about being a dad right now. We just got back a couple of days ago from a week-long family road trip, and despite me telling all of my kids now at least 1 billion times - I still had to tell them before they got out of the van - kids "we're in a parking lot, please walk. Do not run. Please look where you're going. Please pick up your feet as you walk, don't scoot your feet, or you'll trip."

And you'll never believe this, there were still plenty of times I had to grab them by a shirt collar because they got too close to a moving car they weren't paying attention to, or I had to pick them up because they were about to trip, or they began running towards a car they didn't see backing up - and I had to use the emergency dad voice - which is no one in the family likes - I don't even like it - but its loud, and low, and gravelly - a bit like Batman. But they know they stop dead in their tracks when they hear that.

They have a healthy fear when they hear that voice. And what soon follows is some sort of consequence because I want them to learn - if they do whatever they want to do in a parking lot, they will die. And as a loving dad, I don't want that, so whatever voice or consequences I need to do to invoke some healthy fear so they live, so be it.

That said, I think that's part of what it means to fear the LORD. He's your loving father who delights in you and doesn't want you to die. So when he gives you commands in Scripture to obey, he's not doing that to take something away from you. He's trying to give something to you—he's trying to show you how to live.

So when you suffer the consequences of your sin... listen, that's not God being harsh to you. That's God trying to get your attention that sin isn't good. And sometimes, he'll let you experience the consequences now in hopes that you'll pay attention and repent so you won't suffer a whole lot more later.

I know some of you are living in that right now, and the best thing I could say to you is: Pay attention, don't make light of the Lord's discipline. It's because he loves you. Repent, trust in Jesus, and avoid the worst that could come.

**So that's number one, number two.**

## 2 - A right estimation of God's power

Fear of the Lord is rooted, yes, in God's loving character and it's also rooted in his power. And when you look at the whole scope of Scripture and see His power, some very important truths jump off the page:

- It's that God is God and we are not.
- He is the Creator, we are the created.
- He decides how things work, and we do not

Now, I know that in our cultural moment, you're supposed to treat anyone with power with suspicion. Power will inevitably lead to exploitation and corruption. Still, the picture we see painted in the Bible is that it's the most beautiful thing in the world when we submit to God's power, according to how he outlines it in Scripture. When people submit to God's power, it leads to human flourishing in your life and in others. Your soul becomes aligned with the person who loves you and created you and created everything else.

Again, I can't help but think about parenting with this one. On the flipside those of us who had parents who modeled unhealthy fear, can have an altogether different problem. Because in some circles today, certainly not all, but some, we are more likely to have the opposite problem: for kids **not to have a healthy fear** of their parents at all, and therefore for us to not have a healthy fear of God's power

Here's what I mean: I heard of a comedian who posted a video titled "Parenting Then and Now." He was juxtaposing the no-nonsense parenting that some my age grew up with today's parenting styles. And to be clear, this is satire if anyone gets offended:

So the comedian played the role of a modern parent, wearing a flannel, and he said

"we've tried every type of parenting, gentle, permissive, attachment, pescatarian, aromatherapy....now sweetie, what you just did was an un-yes, because we don't say no in this house...you are going to have 7 minutes of time out because you're 7, but don't worry I'll hold your hand the whole time...Come here Renan, and let's embrace, and I want to say sorry that you disobeyed. It's my attachment style, that's why you disobeyed, it goes back generations...Thomas Jefferson is the reason you disobeyed."

Now that's extreme, but I just want to point out the obvious, for kids who are shaped by even a more realistic expression of sort of coddling style of parenting, what can logically happen is they end up thinking my parents are essentially powerless. I don't need to respect them because their behavior toward me doesn't earn or demand my respect. At worst, it can completely overwhelm them because to a child, there is nothing more discouraging than realizing their parents are powerless and ineffective.

Now, kids can't articulate it, but they actually need, for their own mental and emotional health, parents who are the right kind of powerful. They need a mom and dad whom they realize they are ultimately no match for. Parents that kids cannot conquer or control. Parents who have the kind of power, patience, and wisdom that they don't.

Here's a quick example: I recently started doing this with my kids. Right now, a couple of them get really scared when it gets to bedtime. Their greatest fear is a monster sneaking into their room and waking them up in the middle of the night, which is ironic because my greatest fear is my kids sneaking into my room and waking me up in the middle of the night.

And so we go through this routine at bedtime, where we'll pray together, and they'll pray out loud "God, please don't let monsters sneak in," we'll snuggle for a bit - but then when the bedtime routine is done and they're still freaking out - I'll say something like "Hey kids, tell you what. Daddy loves you. My job is to protect you. Those monsters aren't real. Your dad is. And if ever those monsters did show up, or if you imagine monsters showing up - I want you to imagine your dad punching those monsters in the face. So you don't need to be scared of those monsters. Those monsters need to be scared of me." And I'd say most of the time, that works. They have a smile on their face and think, "Ok dad's here to beat up some monsters. I can go to sleep."

So...in a similar way...when we're talking about having a fear of the Lord and a right estimation of his power, I'm saying there are no monsters in your life too big for him to handle. Those monsters are scared of him. There is no challenge, obstacle, problem, or sin too big for him because he has all the power to handle them.

And if you're ever going to be a person of wisdom, there is a sense in which you have to learn to walk in this healthy fear of God...

...To see that God is God and you are not. That while you might be overwhelmed with life, he never is... He doesn't make panicked decisions like you do, he doesn't get all worked up over what might happen in the future because he holds all that stuff in the palm of his hands... which means he not only has the right power for life, but the right perspective on it too...

...which leads me to the last thing...

### 3 - A right estimation of God's wisdom

So if God's character is loving and He is all-powerful, then it follows that his wisdom is what actually *is* wisdom - when he says how to live, He actually knows what He's talking about.

And look—there is no shortage of people who have opinions on how you should live your life, but notice what this Proverb says:

#### Proverbs 14:12

There is a way that seems right to a man,  
but its end is the way to death.

Leaning on our own understanding, and being wise in our own eyes is following the way that seems right to us. And ultimately, all of that, separated from God, will lead to the way of death, the destruction of our lives.

A healthy fear of the Lord starts from the beginning realizing that his thoughts are higher than our thoughts, his ways higher than our ways, so we would do our best to listen and obey.

I have a buddy who recently traveled to Kenya. While he was there, he traveled with a couple of local guides who gave him all sorts of information he wouldn't have known otherwise

- The water is safe to drink here, not there
- It's safe to go down these streets, but don't go down those streets
- He said at one point, they were driving down the road, and one of the guides said, "See that black spot over there on the road? That's where two thieves were caught on a motorcycle. And... a crowd beat them to death in the street and burned their motorcycle." The wisdom there is, "Don't steal in Kenya."
- He said at another point, they were stopped at a police checkpoint, and the police kept wanting a bribe. And the driver kept saying no. So then the police tried opening the van doors, and the driver just kept locking the doors saying "No. You're not doing that. We're not paying you." And my buddy's like - ok what are we doing?
- Later on they were traveling through the safari. They came up to a pack of lions, maybe 30 yards away. My friend was like, "Uhh, should we be scared?" The guide was like, "No, if you don't mess with them, they don't mess with you." "Oh ok." "BUT," the tour guide said, "If you ever see a hippo coming towards you, may God have mercy on your soul...because they're hungry, hungry." Ok, I made that last line up but...

But I think when it comes to navigating our lives, we should have a bit more of that mindset that my friend had in Kenya: "If you don't want to die, listen to me. Follow me if you want to live." Our posture in life should be like being in an unfamiliar place full of danger, knowing that we need help to survive and thrive because we can't do it on our own...

#### Transition

Because the picture the Bible paints is that our default posture is we will do what's right in our own eyes, and it leads to death. And if that's not bad enough, we have anti-wisdom surrounding us from a million different places on top of a spiritual enemy that wants to destroy us.

And the way out of that is to have the fear of the LORD. That is what's going to keep you safe. That's how you begin not to ruin your life.

And if the Bible doesn't emphasize that enough - I think one of the most sobering stories on the topic of wisdom actually happens out of Solomon's own life. If you remember, Solomon - the wisest man to ever live. Wrote a ton of stuff about living wisely.

And yet the way his story ends...you can find it in **1 Kings 11**...he marries and sleeps with hundreds and hundreds of women (which, for the record, the Bible says not to do), and in the process, he stops seeking after God. He loses the fear of the LORD and turns his back on God

**1 Kings 11:11**

Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you..."

Solomon is a cautionary tale. He lost the fear of the Lord, and as a result, for him, he lost the kingdom. (The kingdom which, by the way, God's people had been longing to establish ever since Genesis 12 with Abraham. What was promised for so long is all starting to crumble because this king lacked the fear of the LORD.)

**Conclusion**

**So this morning I think we would do well to start with a simple heart check.**

To ask ourselves,

- How is your attitude before God?
- Are you operating from a healthy, appropriate fear of the Lord?
- Do you have the right estimation of his character, his power, and his wisdom?

To ask yourself

- Are there any areas of your life where you know what God says, but you've just sort of shrugged it off because you think you know what's best?
- Are there any specific areas where your heart has grown hard towards God?

Wherever I would consider this morning two things:

1 - If you notice that you have lost a right estimation of God's Character, Power, and Wisdom, then let Jesus be where you find it again. Jesus calls himself the better Solomon, who never fails. He came to bring the back the Kingdom on Earth as it is in Heaven so that we can have life. Jesus is the embodiment of all God's love, all of God's power, and all of God's wisdom - and He invites us to follow Him and let his life, death, and resurrection recalibrate your heart to understand the fear of the LORD truly.

2 - If you find your heart lacking a fear of the LORD, then let this be an invitation to repentance. An invitation to a healthy fear of the Lord that produces wisdom and wholeness.

And if you can't put your finger on anything that might be that for you, consider this an invitation to keep trusting, keep yourself in the fear of the Lord, today and tomorrow and the next day with no days off, so that you don't wind up like the wisest man who ever lived and lost it all, but instead you can look more like King Jesus - the embodiment of all wisdom.

**Pray. Communion.**