

# Proverbs 1:7

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[ 0 : 00 ] And let me read you verse 7. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, the beginning of knowledge, fools despise wisdom and instruction.

! The fear of the Lord is the most powerful computer in the world. In order for you to function properly as a thinking, feeling human being, in order for you to function in this world as God intended for you to function, in order for that computer to work, you have to have an operating system.

And God has given us that in the Bible, and that's Proverbs 1-9. You've got the operating system on which the computer of your mind and heart works. I don't know if you have an operating system on your computer, but without it, your computer won't work.

And in the first nine chapters, that's what we're going to do. We're going to install the operating system. And we'll find out there's key principles for you and I to understand. But once we've installed the operating system, from chapter 10 on, there are hundreds of thousands of Proverbs jumbled up together.

And you can think of that as the software or the virus protection that you need to download. So we're going to install the virus, the, uh, it's a terrible illustration, isn't it?

[ 1 : 30 ] I can no extent for what it's worth. But anyway, it works. We're going to install the operating system. So there it is in verse 7. And you find it dozens and dozens and dozens of times in the book of Proverbs.

And that's why I just want to speak on this phrase tonight, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It's there in chapter 9, verse 10. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of the wisdom. And you find it dozens and dozens of times.

It's the refrain of the whole book. It's the motto. It's the melodic line. It's the string that ties together 900 Proverbs. How do you, how do you handle that? Well, this is the operating system.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And we're going to think about that. Proverbs is not, um, a recipe book for right living. Uh, you know that kind of thing.

Principles for success in your business. How to keep a happy marriage. All things like that. And what you've got there in those books is just human wisdom cobbled together. But Proverbs is not like that.

[ 2 : 26 ] What is Proverbs? It is a call to worship. That is what Proverbs primarily is. The call of Proverbs is to put God in his proper place in our lives.

That's what we do. It's not on Sunday morning when we have the call to worship. It's saying put God in his proper place. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And unless we fear the Lord, we can't begin to live properly as human beings.

Now let me ask you, um, well there's three sections, um, tonight. First of all, what are you building your life upon? What are you building your life upon? What are you organizing your life around? Well it says here, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. That doesn't mean that you just start with it. Uh, and then you forget about it. The fear of the Lord is like the multiplication table. Um, you learn the multiplication table, didn't you? I hope when you were a child. But once you've learned it, you'll forget it. Uh, it's the foundation for doing maths.

[ 3 : 24 ] It's the foundation for going to the shops and buying stuff. It's a foundation, a mathematical foundation that you lay. And when it says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, it's not saying this is something elementary.

Or this is something Old Testament. And now we've moved on to the New Testament, we can forget about it. No, no. When it says the beginning, it is saying it is the foundation on which you and I build our lives.

And so what is the foundation that you're building your life on? Is it the Lord? Because you can be sure that every one of us is building our lives on some foundation or another.

What you believe about God or what you don't believe about God or what you refuse to believe about God is the foundation on which you live your life. You see, people don't really believe that today.

They say you need to keep faith separate from the rest of your life. So some of you will remember Christopher Reeves. Do you remember the famous Superman? He had that terrible accident. He died a few years ago. But he ended up in a wheelchair and he became a great campaigner for stem cell research.

[ 4 : 27 ] He became a hero. And all sorts of issues like that. And famously he said to a bunch of students at Yale University, when matters of public policy are debated, no religion should have a seat at the table.

A lot of people think that way. They believe that. In other words, what Christopher Reeves would say was leave God out of it. Your faith belongs in private, not in public.

So when it comes to debating stem cell research or abortion or euthanasia, any of those issues, religion should not have a seat at the table. What you believe about God is irrelevant.

It should not be part of the conversation. And that's what a lot of people in our culture think. What a lot of people believe. But the book of Proverbs begs to differ. Because the book of Proverbs says your faith, what you believe about God, is actually fundamental.

It is where you begin to be wise. It is the source from which all your thinking flows. It is the foundation, what you believe about God, on which everything else rests. Because everybody has faith.

[ 5 : 31 ] Everyone. So even if they don't admit it, even if they say they're an atheist, even if you don't believe in God, that is a religious position. You cannot prove, can you, that God does not exist.

That is a leap of faith. It is a religious stance. Ah, but you say, well everybody must be free to believe what they want. Free to make up their own mind. You can't tell people how they should live their lives.

Well actually, even that, isn't it, is a religious statement. Think about it. So I mean, the assumption that there is no God. So it doesn't really matter what people believe.

Well, you can't prove, can you? Nobody can prove that there is not a God. That is a leap of faith. That may be huge of that, probably not. But you'll have friends that they think that.

But that is a leap of faith. They hope it's true. They gamble it's true. But they've got no proof, can they? And once you take that leap of faith, then everything proceeds from it.

[ 6 : 35 ] Now let me give you some very extreme examples. They're very extreme. Just to make my point. And I'm deliberately doing that. Think of Peter Singer. He's quite a famous atheist. He's an evolutionist. And he has written a law of scientific theories.

Singer's position is this. Human beings are naked apes. That we've evolved. And that we are just animals. There's no real difference in Singer's mind. Between animals and human beings.

And his definition of life arises from the view that it is being self-conscious. Right? That is what life is for Peter Singer. It is being self-conscious.

So because you are not actually self-conscious until six months old. Infanticide is okay in certain circumstances. According to Peter Singer. Given that there may be some disability.

Or financial restraint. Or whatever it is. Given circumstances. You can kill your child six months after it's born. Now I hope that shocks you. As all Peter Singer would say. But it is logical.

[ 7 : 37 ] You can't fault his logic. There is logic to his position. Which flows out of his religious views. At least he's being consistent with what he believes. Many people aren't.

Pol Pot. Do you remember? Pol Pot. The leader of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. When he took over the capital of Cambodia. Phnom Penh. He forced a population of two million out into the countryside.

Many of them died of starvation. He started wiping out a third of the Cambodian people. One in three. He's one of the biggest mass murderers in history.

Now why did he do that? Why would anyone want to do that? What makes a man behave like that? Or think that he can behave like that? Well it's interesting isn't it? Then in the early 1950s.

Pol Pot had studied under the atheistic philosopher. Jean-Paul Sartre in Paris. And he'd adopted Sartre's view of atheism. Now I know very little about philosophy.

[ 8 : 36 ] But even I know. Jean-Paul Sartre basically had the view. That life had no meaning. And people had no value. They had no intrinsic value. That was in the 1920s.

And 20 years later. Pol Pot puts his religious belief into practice. In the killing fields of Southeast Asia. Now they are extreme examples. Aren't they? And most people are not consistent. And they don't follow through on what they believe. But the point is this. Everybody. Everybody's got a faith view of reality. Out of which you live your life. Let me give you the testimony of a man called Sheldon Van Auken.

He wrote *A Severe Mercy*. It's this book. It's quite a good book actually. It's a book which deals with the question. The whole question of suffering. And when his wife went through terrible suffering. And he came to faith. This is what he said. He was converted in Oxford.

He was a friend of C.S. Lewis. And he wrote to C.S. Lewis. Christianity has come to seem to us probable. It all hinges on Jesus. Was he in fact the Lord, the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel?

[ 9 : 38 ] The Holy One of the Christians. Was he indeed the incarnate God? Very God and very God as a creed says. This was the heart of the matter. Did he rise from the dead? The apostles, the evangelists, the apostle Paul believed that he did with utter conviction.

Can we believe on their belief? Christianity, the divinity of Jesus, in a word seemed probable to me. He says, okay.

But there is a gap between the probable and the proved. And how am I going to cross that? If I were to stake my whole life on the risen Christ, I want proof. I want certainty.

I wanted a sea of eat a bit of fish. I wanted letters of fire across the sky. I got none of these. And I continued to hang around on the edge of the gap. The position though, and this is the point, was not as I had been comfortably thinking all these months.

It was merely whether I was to accept the Messiah or not. It was the question of whether I was to accept him or reject him. And then he says, it dawned on me there was a gap behind me as well.

[ 10 : 40 ] A lot of people don't realise perhaps the leap to acceptance was a horrifying gamble. But what about the leap to rejection? There might be no certainty that Christ was God.

But there was no certainty that he was not. And this was not to be born. I couldn't cope with that. I could not reject Jesus. There was only one thing to do.

Once I had seen the gap behind me, I turned away from it and flung myself over the gap towards Jesus. Early on, a damp English morning with spring in the air, I wrote in my journal and I wrote to C.S. Lewis, I chose to believe, I choose to believe in the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

In Christ my Lord and my God. Christianity and the ring and feel of unique truth. None of us can afford to be neutral. Now what I want to say to you tonight is a long quotation I know.

Probably you're asleep by now. But you've got to take the leap of faith one way or the other. There is not a vacuum out of which you can live your life.

[ 11 : 45 ] You have to sooner or later. You have to realise that there is a yawning gulf to be jumped in front of you or else behind you. You cannot stay where you are.

C.S. Lewis, who the man writes to, says, I believe in God as I believe in the Son. Not only because I can see it, but by it I can see everything else.

And that is what this proverb means. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. As Calvin said, you don't begin to know yourself until you know God. We can't understand ourselves.

We can't understand our place in the world until we know God. And come to know God. It's like putting on night vision goggles, isn't it?

Not that I've ever done that. But you put on night vision goggles and they help you see in the night. And it's a dark world that we live in. And we can only see our way through life if we have the fear of the Lord.

[ 12 : 42 ] If we know God and are rightly related to him. Let me ask you again. What are you building your life upon? B.E. Warfield tells a lovely story about two men in the U.S.

At a time when it was quite unsettled. One was a general in the U.S. Army. And these two men met somewhere down in the south of America. In a city where there was a lot of civil unrest.

And it wasn't really safe to be out in the streets. And as they were walking along the streets. One from one direction and the other on the other side of the street. Going the other way. One, he observed a man approaching him.

He says of singularly composed calmness and firmness. Whose very demeanor inspired confidence. So impressed with him is bearing amidst the uproar.

That when he had passed he turned back to look at him. Only to find that the stranger had done the same. On observing this he walked back to the stranger. And poked him in the chest with his forefinger.

[13:36] And asked him. What is the chief end of man? It's the first question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. What is the chief end of man? To which the reply was to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Ah, he says. I knew you were a Shorter Catechism man. And the other guy said I thought so as well. That's what Proverbs 1 verse 7 is all about. What is your chief purpose?

What is your chief purpose? It is to glorify God and to enjoy him. It is to put God in his proper place. And that will change the way you look.

It will change the way you walk down the street. It will change the way you do maths. It will change everything about you. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The second question then is this. Why fear?

Why should I fear him? How could I have any sort of relationship with somebody I'm afraid of? Now I know theologians and lots of preachers and I think at times I have said it.

[14:36] It's not really fear. It's respect. But actually you cannot say that. You cannot. Think of Christian books on the fear of God.

I can think of one published in the last 50 years. Think of books on how to live your life. How you should love God. Well there's many on there.

But books on the fear of God don't sell. And yet the fear of the Lord is mentioned over a hundred times. In the Bible. And not only in the Old Testament.

It's there in the Acts of the Apostles. It's one of the key factors in the growth in the New Testament church. So if you remember after Ananias and Sapphira that affair we're told that great fear seized the city.

The entire city was afraid. And we're told that people didn't dare join the church. And yet they couldn't help themselves from joining it. In the New Testament the fear of God the scary terrifying fear of God is actually a growth factor in the church.

[15:41] Is it the same of being afraid of the dark? Why are kids afraid of the dark? Well because they don't know what's in the dark. Is it? It's a fear of the unknown.

The fear of the Lord is not a fear of the unknown. So you notice that in verse 7 the Lord is in capital letters. And when that word in your Bible Lord is in capital letters it's very important that you notice that.

Because when you see the word Lord in the Bible in capital letters it's telling you something very important. It is not Allah it is not Krishna it is not Buddha it is Yahweh it is the God of Israel. It is the covenant Lord.

Lord. And that is what the word Lord in capital letters means. It is God's name it's not his title. Of course he is a Lord. But when you see the word Lord in capital letters in the Bible that's not his title. So my official title what I sang on your passport is reverent. Isn't it? But can you imagine you come to my house and Claire and the kids are around the table would you pass the salt reverent?

[16:42] Could you get me a glass of water reverent? It would be odd wouldn't it? It would be strange. It would be very odd. And I like being called reverent. When you see the word Lord it is not his title it is his name.

So when we talk about the fear of the Lord in verse 7 we are not talking about fear of the unknown. This is not the unknown God. This is not some spooky God consciousness that sends shivers down your spine but you are not quite sure why this is Yahweh.

This is the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob the God who has entered into covenant and promised with his people. This is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is what we are talking about. So it is not the unknown God.

It is not the fear of the unknown. You and I need to be afraid not because of what we don't know about him but because of what we do. We know who he is.

He has revealed himself to us hasn't he? Let me mention two ways in which he reveals himself. First of all he reveals himself as the creator.

[17:49] And creation itself should tell us why we should fear God. He made us. The Bible says he made us after his own image and his own image and the trouble is we have returned the favour haven't we?

We have tried to remake God in our own image. So people say my God would never do that. Of course your God wouldn't do that. Your God wouldn't say boo to a goose would he? Your God is impotent. And he doesn't exist except in your imagination. The real God the real God will well just think about what Barbara Boyd she's got this illustration which is really helpful. Listen to what she says. She says if the distance between the sun and the moon is 92 miles if that is the distance between the sun and the earth imagine that as the thickness of a sheet of paper just a single sheet of paper the distance between the sun and the earth is a single sheet of paper then the distance between the earth and its nearest star would be a stack of papers 70 feet high and the diameter of our little galaxy would be a bundle of paper about 300 miles thick and our little galaxy is just a little stack of dust in the part of the universe that we can see it's only one of thousands of millions of galaxies and if that is how big the universe is how big is God? We should be afraid of God because he's bigger than you he's brighter than you he's better than you and you see the Bible says he's spoken this this vast universe which is too vast for you and I to comprehend he's spoken into existence shouldn't you fear a God like that? [ 19 : 44 ] Here we are on a Sunday night and God speaks to us through his word and what do we do? We say well I'll have to think about that do we sprint to obey him when he speaks to us? Is there a fear of God in the congregation Sunday by Sunday as God's word is expanded this is the God who speaks and the universe springs into existence we don't even gather our thoughts together he holds this vast universe together by the word of his power do you remember the disciples in the sea of Galilee?

there's this raging storm and they're terrified they're scared aren't they? and they wake Jesus up and say don't you care? don't you care we're going to drown? Jesus stands up on the rocking boat and he says to the storm and the wind and the waves stop and instantly there's flat calm and do you know what we're told?

We're told that they were terrified of course you say they were terrified I'd be terrified to be in a rocking little boat on a storm but no they were terrified after the storm had stopped that's what it says the waves had died down the sea was calm now and they were terrified who's this in the boat with us?

what kind of person is this who can command the wind and the waves? this is the creator of the heavens and the earth and he's in a little boat with us and we should fear him but if creation shows us what it is to fear God surely the cross must think about the cross ask yourself the question who killed Jesus?

there's lots of answers to that question but do you know what the bible's answer is to that question? it is God Isaiah 53 verse 10 Isaiah says it pleased the Lord to bruise him he's put him to grief the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of soul it says that about Jesus it's Jesus who keeps the blood circulating in your body Jesus does that it's Jesus who keeps the atoms together in your body and we invite him into our lives to be our PA he's the Lord of creation he's this glorious creature of the heavens and the earth and yet it pleased the Lord to put him to grief and that should scare us to death because if that is what God did to his beloved son the

[ 22 : 31 ] Lord Jesus when sin was found upon him then what is he going to do to you if you continue living in defiance of him if you continue to live as an autonomous human being thumbing your nose at God living in rebellion against him what is he going to do to you will at the end of time will you sort of wimp and say well boys will be boys let's forget about it of course he's not going to do that the cross is bad news isn't it before he is good news because the cross shows us in the starkest possible way how scary God is and how seriously he takes human sin and rebellion that he will not spare his own son when sin is found upon him by impetition it's not that Jesus was personally a sinner but Jesus took our sin upon himself and he became our substitution and when sin was found upon him God turned his face away the writer to the Hebrew says it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living

God and Jesus fell into the hands of the living God at Calvary and that ought to scare us because he is there instead of us where we should be because of our sin and our rebellion that is the message of the cross to us Jesus dying on the cross at the hands of the living God Matthew 10 28 he says do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell that is not some theoretical thing that is not something that just trips off the tank that is exactly what is going on at the cross isn't it when he cried out my God my God have you forsaken me he is going through that he is putting himself into the hands of the living God he is

suffering what you and I deserve to suffer you think what are you trying to do to that are you trying to scare me yes because there's something to be frightened of isn't there that if you are on the wrong side of the living

God that is a terrifying thing however the cross gives us another reason to fear God and this is where we've got to end Psalm 130 says out of the depths I cry to you O Lord O Lord hear my voice let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy if you O Lord should mark iniquities O Lord who would stand if you O Lord kept a record of sins who could stand if you O Lord that's what John Newton means when he says for his grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed what taught me to fear God his greatness yes his creation yes his holiness yes but his grace God dealing with me as I don't deserve what do

I deserve I deserve his angry punishment and rebellion and yet what Jesus bore the cross is what I deserve grace is God dealing with me as I don't deserve and that's that shivers on our spine when you see that at the cross God did not spare his own son but delivered him up for us all we should fear a God like that it's not so much a Grand Canyon moment they say when you go to the Grand Canyon it's one of the few things in life that doesn't disappoint I've not been there but you go there your mouth is agog you can't believe it wow but this is not a Grand Canyon moment I can't believe it's happening to me moment why oh Lord such love to me and this is what it means to fear the Lord this God who is too huge for you to take in and who is too holy to even look upon sin and yet he loves us little specks of dust that we are that he loves us so much that he came in the person of his own son to die for us

I should fear him for his greatness I should fear him for his holiness I should fear him because of his grace and let me end you my last point is this if you fear God why fear anything else this is the fear that drives out all other fears fear him but you saints and you will then have nothing else to fear let me introduce you to three people in the Bible who fear the Lord Isaac is the first one Isaac how do you know Isaac fears the Lord because God in the Old Testament is described as the fear of Isaac and that tells you and I as much about Isaac as it does about God now we organise I organise my life around our fears don't they lots of preachers prepare too much they over prepare their servants why do they do that they do that because they're afraid of the communication and they're afraid of not being perceived as a great preacher they spend all their time preparing servants and they should be out seeing people and visiting and doing one to one

[ 27 : 51 ] Bible studies and we all organise our lives around our fears what is your fear perhaps you're afraid of losing your comfortable lifestyle you're afraid that your lifestyle won't be able to come on you're afraid of becoming poor so if that is what you fear that's what your life will be about perhaps you're afraid of rejection and you're afraid of not being in the inner circle or afraid of not having friends but if your fear is that you'll be left out of the inner circle your life will revolve around trying to please people all the time we build our lives around our fears well for Isaac what was his fear Isaac's fear was losing God in his life let me ask you does God matter that much to you is possible to believe in God is possible to even be inspired by God and for God not to be your fear the worst nightmare for

Isaac was losing God out of his life or think of Moses Moses friends must have thought that Moses had a nervous breakdown when he left Egypt fled from Egypt there's a lovely summary in Moses life in Hebrews 11 where Moses when he had grown up he refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter he chose to be mistreated with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time he regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt the son of Pharaoh's daughter at the time when Egypt is a world superpower how's he turning your back on that and identifying yourself with a bunch of people who are about to be exterminated the Jews why would he do that well listen to what it says it says by faith he left Egypt not fearing the king's anger he persevered because he saw him who is invisible the invisible face of God was more real to Moses than the very visible face of Pharaoh and the invisible smiles and the invisible frowns of God mattered more than the very visible smiles than the frowns of his peer that's what it means to fear the Lord and that is how we're going to live properly on a Monday morning when we wake up and the first thing we acknowledge and we remember that God is God and he's a God of power and he's a God of grace and we seek his face so that he becomes not just a concept but a reality that we're living in his presence and we see him who is invisible or take the last thing the apostle Paul 2 Corinthians 5 verse 11 knowing the fear of the Lord we persuade man

Paul says knowing the fear of the Lord what else can we do but seek to persuade people to fear God is to know him for ourselves but it is also to want to make him known to others fearing the Lord is not a cringing cowering petrifying paralyzing kind of fear it is joyful it is liberating and if we fear the Lord we will want to tell him as a man John Newton very famously said at the end of his life two things I can remember and only two things I am a great sinner but Jesus is a great saviour and to fear the Lord means that God becomes great in your estimation and you well not so great you are a great sinner but Jesus is a great great saviour let's pray