

Proverbs 1:7-33

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn to Proverbs chapter 1. Most of our time tonight is in verses 7 to 9, but we're going to deal with the rest of the chapter.

But what is it to be wise? To be wise is really the skill of living well. The wise person, according to the Bible, has the knack of fitting himself or herself into the world so that they make good decisions. That they initiate and they keep and sustain healthy relationships. And Proverbs is written to feed you and I biblical wisdom. So that priests simply become competent at life.

That's the aim of Proverbs. Successful at life. Not successful in our careers or successful as being a mum or some other small segment of success.

But actually successful at the whole package of life. How do you get savvy for that? How do you get street wise to make everything work together? Marriage.

[1 : 13] Work. Home. Children. Sex. Faithfulness. God. The world. How do you make it all work?

Now I assume that you want your life to work as much as I want mine to work. And so I think Proverbs is the kind of book that when you begin to really get into it, it has you on the edge of your seat.

I hope it has you on the edge of your seat. That we want to know, don't we, how to make life work. All of us do. And so Solomon says to us, for all that you need for life to be navigated well, all you need, well, is wisdom.

So let's begin. How do you get your hands on this wisdom? Solomon gives us very clearly, as we saw last week, and I just want to recap a little bit of that. In verse 7. So we see in verse 7, wisdom is beginning.

Wisdom is beginning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Beginning of wisdom. Wisdom.

[2 : 41] God. To show us different aspects of his character. And here it is. The Lord, which is God's covenant name. Is the God who comes close in relationship to his people.

In a close and binding covenantal relationship. The God who teaches his people objective truths about him. This God is not an abstract deity in the sky.

this is the God who comes down to earth and gets his hands dirty he redeems his people from Israel from Egypt, that is the Lord he comes and gets them, he leads them out with a strong and mighty hand and an outstretched arm he is the God who speaks audible words, the ten commandments so fearing the Lord means knowing him for who he is knowing who he has revealed himself to be knowing his laws and his statutes and his commands it's knowing certain things about him but it's more than that, it is more than knowing things about God the fear of the Lord is having a certain emotional response to God love towards God, yes trust towards him, submission before him so if you've met if you've met Queen Elizabeth if you've been invited to her home has anybody here met Queen Elizabeth?

no well, if you've been invited into her home or to the palace for a banquet and you actually come face to face with Queen Elizabeth well, you would not have been terrified of her but you would have feared her wouldn't you?

you would you would have treated her with all the dignity and all the respect worthy of her person and her office and you would have felt it on the inside not just that you bowed or you curtsied before her knowledge of God and fearing the Lord means knowing who he is and what he's done combined with the appropriate emotional response to those things and inside your heart what you feel about what you know about him is the fear of the Lord there isn't really a better illustration than this than the lion, the witch and the wardrobe when Mr Beaver is talking to the children about Aslan you know this and they hear Aslan's name for the first time and each of the children have this

strange reaction Edmund feels a sense of horror Peter feels brave and adventurous Susan feels something that reminds her of music and Lucy experiences that feeling she gets at the start of the summer holidays and the children ask Mr and Mrs Beaver is Aslan safe?

[5 : 19] safe? says Mrs Beaver don't you hear what Mrs Beaver is telling you? who said anything about safe? of course he isn't safe but he is good he is the king I tell you now here's the key thing here's the vital piece in the trick saw as we as a church family begin to get to grips with the book of Proverbs how is that the beginning of wisdom?

if that is what the fear of the Lord is how does it make you wise? have you tried to think that? how does the fear of the Lord make you wise? well let me tell you why because it puts you in your proper place in the world when you fear the Lord you are recognizing that he is God and you are not he is the creator and you are the creature so the whole point of your life at that point becomes to humbly submit to him and not to try and be him you get off the throne and you let him sit on the throne when you try to live as God you make your own rules and you try to live your own way and you do your own thing and then the proverb says this it says that will harm you it will harm yourself and you will harm others and you will play a part in destroying the world it is as simple as that proverb says listen to C.S. Lewis again in God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself immeasurably superior to yourself unless you know God as that and therefore know yourself as nothing in comparison you do not know God at all as long as you are proud you cannot know God a proud man is always looking down on things and people and of course as long as you are looking down you cannot see something that is above you the fear of the Lord you see is when I abase myself and I humbly accept that his way is best and he knows what is right and I don't know what is right despite what I think or feel and when you live like that the proverb says you will be wise

I kind of think about it this week the fear of the Lord makes you wise because dot dot dot dot dot think about that the fear of the Lord makes you wise because it teaches you to live on your knees the fear of the Lord makes you wise because it teaches you to live on your knees the wise person knows what life is like from knee height they know the knee height perspective on themselves they've humbled themselves wisdom is seeing the world from your knees it's a person that knows that they need to look after God and not look down on others here's how one commentator puts it I like this the fear of the Lord is the affectionate reverence of the child who bends himself humbly and carefully to his father's law isn't that nice the fear of the Lord is the affectionate reverence of the child who bends himself humbly and carefully to his father's law and I think you can actually measure this in some ways so if someone was to say to you you are the sort of person who cannot be taught anything you know everything you always have an answer for everything well perhaps we're proud and you don't fear somebody outside of yourself you don't bend yourself into someone else's mould and so perhaps you've never done it with God but when you are moulded and shaped and bent by God and not yourself then you will be wise and you will live wisely as letters are to the alphabet as notes are to music as numbers are to maths so the fear of the Lord is to being wise and living well now we've taken our time again on that tonight because it's essential it's essential for the whole book that you start here it begins at the cross doesn't it wisdom begins at the threshold of fear in God and you will grow to love his wisdom and not despise it that is wisdom wisdom's beginning but we're going to linger a little bit on wisdom's mediators number two wisdom's mediators as I really got into it this week

I really this is the point that's really hit me Proverbs is a very surprising truth to beat into your thick head about fear of the Lord and it's this here is the surprise you should not have to come to church to get it you should not have to come to church to get the wisdom of the Lord to get and learn the fear of the Lord now yes it should be there hopefully that is what happens isn't it when we come Sunday by Sunday we are helped to fear the Lord by everything we do as a church family but Proverbs says God has built the world he's built the world in such a way that you shouldn't have to come to church to find it we think don't we that the fear of the Lord is in the religious section of life it's a churchy thing it's why you go to Corn Hill it's why you go to theological college so that then as the preacher or the Bible teacher you can mediate the fear of the Lord and wisdom to the rest of congregation no says Proverbs categorically look at verse 8 it does not say listen my son to your rabbi's instructions it does not say verse 9 verse 8 hear my son to your minister's instructions it does not say listen my son to your house group's leader's instructions it says listen my son hear my son your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching listen my son to your

parents' instructions do you see the two mediators of wisdom do you see them there first is parents and the second is the mouth so hear my son your father parent instruction the mouth forsake not your mother's parent teaching the mouth they're the two mediators now this is not meant to be spiritualised it really isn't or explained away this is real flesh and blood father and mother looking their young child in the eye and saying listen to the words we are speaking listen to our instruction listen to our teaching the home is the first threshold of wisdom not the church the mother's lap the father's knee that is how

God made the world that a life lived well and wisely flows from parent to child and godly home is the fount of all this world's wisdom and I think here the book of Proverbs is going to do something for us if you're like me if you've never really thought about it it is going to raise this question what is a parent for what is a mum for what is a dad for we tend to think they just exist don't we a mum and a dad they exist because a child exists and we're all in it together and somehow under one roof if we muddle along it'll all work out just without much thought Proverbs says no Proverbs says I don't care how bright you are tonight nobody is born wise not one single person is born wise and the path to wisdom runs through your living room and your kitchen and your bedroom and you need to know what you're for don't we

[13:33] I need to know what I'm for if I'm a parent what am I there for I am there verse 8 to mediate wisdom to my children now sometimes that happens brilliantly doesn't it I had a great illustration about Oscar Pistorius' mother and then I remembered that he just murdered someone so that illustration didn't work so well but let me read you this Tony Griffin is from Bolton Tony Griffin was born with cerebral palsy he quickly learned to ignore the taunts directed at him by other children he said children can be cruel and you get the mickey taken out of you but I got used to it and I go on with it they never let it let me down I was sporty and active as a teenager I loved the gym I used to live there he went to his first Paralympics at the age of 16 in the south of France he's competed in three Paralympic games and events including the javelin weightlifting and football his world record throw of 50 metres in the Indian club in the hammer still stands in total he won seven gold medals three silver four bronze he went on to win 38 international medals in all competitions during his decade long career in the 70s and 80s his mother died in 1989 and such was her influence that

Mr Griffin who was married with six children bared his medals with her he said she was the driving force in everything I did she made me the man I am today so it felt right to do it Wilma Rudolph anybody remember her she won three gold medals in the 1960 Olympics and was the fastest woman in the world Wilma Rudolph wore metal braces on her legs as a child until she was at least nine years old she said my doctors told me I would never walk again my mother told me I would I believed my mother now it's brilliant isn't it's really striking really striking you are that immediate wisdom to your children you are that immediate wisdom to your children we think of those two people with so much going against them our mother can inspire that a wise man forms character in the depths of her child's heart so that child becomes a certain sort of person a wise parent sets the grooves in their child's heart in which his life is running even after the child has left and is going and fending for themselves and notice this the instrument of mediation for the parent is the mouth speech a child does not become wise through osmosis but through instruction and teaching so from verses 1 to 7 the child becomes wise when you see the words through knowledge discretion through discipline through correction through justice and although in verse 8 and 9 mother and father in view it is actually the father that dominates this world of instruction wisdom in many ways the wisdom that

Solomon wants you to attain only begins in chapter 10 and chapter 10 is where the actual wisdom begins but everything from proverbs 1 to 9 are a series of verses from a father to a son it's a father to a son instructing about wisdom so just look at chapter 2 verse 1 my son if you receive my words chapter 3 verse 1 my son do not forget my teaching it's what you have again and again and again chapter 4 verse 1 hear oh sons a father's instructions chapter 6 verse 20 my son keep your father's commandment do not forsake your mother's teaching husbands dads men well you didn't get off lightly this morning but you don't get off lightly in Proverbs and we're going to approach the father son's speeches in different ways some weeks we'll focus on the son as the listener but this morning Proverbs shines the light on the ideal father and this book shows us the indispensable dad there's going to be people here tonight their children have flown the nest and their children are no longer under your care and tutelage but others of us here are wrestling with what it means to be a dad and

to raise our kids some of us aren't yet dads but we will be one day but Proverbs says this if you are a parent you are a pastor if you are a dad you are a shepherd of the sheep placed in the care of your family and the beginning of your children's wisdom in life starts with your wisdom in learning how to fear the Lord and here's why I think this material can be so so helpful that we need to choose particularly as fathers our mouths as the deliberate means of speaking to our children and instructing them because if we don't we will just speak to them in other ways just listen to this from a book called

Father Hangar all fathers are speaking about God the Father constantly fathers do not have the option of shutting up what they are saying may be true or false but they are not in a position where they can refuse to say anything a father who just sits and stares a father who is down in the office all the time a father who deserts the family a father who just donated sperm at the sperm bank all of them are speaking every one of them is saying something all the time a father who teaches his son how to swing a bat a father who listens to his daughter explain why Peter Rabbit shouldn't have disobeyed a father who kisses their mum on the lips a father who reads for hours to the family in the evening all of them are speaking too silence is the typical male saying but it does not mean that we are not speaking when we are silent we are just choosing to instruct our children in other ways and in ways that will not lead to them being shaped and formed in wisdom and so

[19:57] Proverbs says to you and I whether you do it on your knee whether you do it across the table or in the car or by the pool or in the park your job what you are for as a parent is to instruct them construct them in the fear of the Lord so that they become wise so I think the million dollar question is this what are parents supposed to say to their children what are the words we are meant to instruct and teach what does it look like to mediate wisdom well here I want to introduce and actually let the father introduce what I call wisdom's pictures so thirdly wisdom's pictures and here is just a taster of what is coming but this father is an artist and a poet he is very skillful because he uses pictures to convey wisdom to his children and the first thing he does is introduce his son to a woman and later on he introduces his son to another woman now of course if you are at the appropriate age meeting a woman is going to be something any son is interested in look at chapter 1 verses 20 and 21 wisdom she cries aloud in the street in the markets she raises her voice at the head of the noisy street she cries out at the entrance of the city gates she speaks this is lazy lady wisdom who the wise father is leading his unformed son to meet and she's publicly crying out all young people young men to all use to the gullible to the unformed and she's urging them to accept her and fall in love with her and trust her and follow her now this lady wisdom is not god himself but this lady stands for god she is god's mouthpiece and in somehow in herself she represents god's wisdom and when you think about it it's not really a strange idea so has any got a 50 pence piece here

I'm going to go on a pound coin have you got a 50 pence piece get the 50 pence piece out and you look at the back and who's on the back the woman Britannia isn't it Britannia on the 50 pence piece the woman goddess who somehow who somehow summarises the essence of what it means to be British power and might and majesty if you're from America it's it's Uncle Sam isn't it Uncle Sam pointing out pointing that finger out at you and the essence of a country dramatically expressed telling you to do something it's Yoda isn't it in the Vodafone adverts you see now from the Star Wars Star Wars this little this little kind of wise man the essence of wisdom who's now been replaced by Vodafone I read a report last week of Tottenham a player in Crystal Palace and the defender from Palace he missed the penalty really badly in the first half and the reporter in the Telegraph said this Lady Luck was wearing white and we know what that means don't we it's the personification so here in Proverbs it is a way of saying what Solomon is going to offer us in this book of Proverbs which are going to teach us to be wise what is he going to offer us it's so real it is so substantial that it's just like encountering a real woman on the street and urging you to listen to her and accept her but this father also says to his son God's wisdom is so real and yet folly and foolishness are just as real so Lady Wisdom is not the only woman you're going to meet in life you also get to meet Dame Folly so let's go to her chapter 9 verse 13 and we're going to meet this woman in coming weeks the woman's folly is loud she is seductive and knows nothing she sits at the door of her house she takes a seat on the highest places in the town calling to those who pass by who are going straight on their way whoever is simple let him turn in here and to him who lacks sense he says stolen water is sweet two women who represent two options in life

Lady Wisdom or Lady Folly being wise or being an idiot and they are both going to preach to you and my aim in preaching and your aim if you're a parent at home is to instruct yourself and then the people in your care to listen to only one of those women and not the other because here is what they teach us so if you're a father and you're thinking hang on how do I instruct my children in wise living here is what you tell them you tell them there are only ever two ways to live there are only ever two ways to live the wise parent teaches their children so that the child knows it at the core of their beings that mum and dad do not care less whether I grow up to be a brain surgeon or a street cleaner or a gardener or a mechanic or a lawyer or a rocket scientist or a teacher what they care about is how I do those things how I do them and the father says to his son whatever you grow up to do in this world with all its things and all its diversity and all its wonderful richness and complexity actually my son there are only two ways to live and that is what the wise father teaches his children and Proverbs gives you some pictures to do it well as well as there being two women let's just briefly look at this there are two paths there are two houses there are two feasts two paths chapter 1 and verse 15 the ESV is not great in Proverbs ok but two paths verse 15 my son do not walk in the way with them hold back your foot from their paths here is the father teaching his children not to follow the ways of evil men verse 22 how long or simple ones will you love being simple how long the scoff is delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge woman wisdom now asks how long will you simple one love your simple ways your simple paths it's the same word as chapter 1 verse 15 contrast that with chapter 4 verse 11 look at the contrast between the folly of chapter 1 and then verse 11

I have taught you the way of wisdom I have led you in the paths of uprightness so the wise parents says to their children life is not just Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday it's not January February March April it's not just 2013 2014 is that we're bumbling through time one day after another the wise parent says life is a journey and you're always going somewhere and you're always becoming someone and every single decision you make along the way is shaping your heart and it moulds your character so that we're always becoming the end of the journey we're always either being wise or foolish and every moment every step we take either takes us closer to one of those destinations and as you travel along the path that you're choosing living the journey you are plotting for yourself by Sam you are choosing to live in one of two houses the house of the foolish woman the house of the adulteress is the house of death chapter 2 verse 18 for her house since the death and her paths to the departed here's the adulteress her house sinks down it leads to death and her paths to the departed the spirit of the dead when we get to chapter 9 we're going to see that wisdom has built her own house and she calls people to it it's stunningly beautiful and everyone should want to live there and enter it what did

[28 : 02] Jesus say a wise man built his house upon a rock and when you travel along these two paths and enter these two houses what you're offered is two feasts that's what we're going to see in chapter 8 a meal of life and a meal of death lastly I took a meal and came with friends out for a meal in Glasgow and the meal was easily one of the most delicious meals I've ever had I can tell you where I went you can take me there again and Dick who took us out he didn't seem to notice how great the food was I don't know whether he's used to it but the other us the three of us were absolutely delighted you know how it is when you eat really good food you have it in your mouth you have that smile you look at each other you can't believe it and you stop after each mouthful because you enjoy it so much and the meat falling off the bone everything about it was right and it went right down deep into our souls it makes you feel amazing a really good meal a woman wisdom says come and eat with me drink deeply into your soul and I will give you and your whole life it will be sweet and healthy and whole and it will be the most delicious of meals teach your children there are only two ways to live and let me finish with point four wisdom's outcomes wisdom's outcomes there's two dramatic end points of choosing either to ignore the father's instruction or to accept it and let me change tack let me speak to you if you are a child or you're adolescent let me speak to you so let me speak to you listen up so you are standing some of you on the threshold of adulthood some of you have got a little bit of a way to go but some of you are teenagers and you're working out what you're going to do and this chapter in Proverbs says to each one of us particularly children and young people you have to choose between suicide and safety you have to choose between harming yourself and others or saving yourself and others that's your choice the root of suicide is the way of the gangs the way of the crowd look at the first ten of chapter one can you see that my son of sinners entice you do not consent it's peer pressure it's group pressure and that is the way to booby trap your whole life now the gang the in crowd probably doesn't say to you verse 11 do they

they say if they say come with us let us lie in wait for blood let us ambush the innocent without reason

I doubt whether they say that to you school they they don't or college but the group will always say to you verse 13 they say we shall find all precious goods we shall fill our houses with plunder let's do this to get valuable things let's give our lives to get stuff let's give our lives to the here and now and all will be well and proverb says to you that is like setting an ambush for your own heart it's the suicide bomb where you trap yourself and you destroy yourself look at verse 19 such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain it takes away the life of its possessors so I want you to know there is a way that you can have absolutely everything and be left with nothing you can have absolutely everything and be left with nothing it's the incredible thing to say that those who embark on the path of folly they do not simply harm themselves which is true but they destroy themselves like in verse 29 to 31 because they heeded knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord who would have not of my counsel despised all my reproof therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way and have their fill of their own devices here is a lady that you need to listen to as you grow up God's wisdom for your life because if you do if you listen to this woman do you see verse 33 what is the result whoever listens to me will dwell secure will be safe and will be at ease without dread of disaster people who listen to God and listen to lady wisdom are safe they are at ease they are free from harm and if you do that parents and if you do that young people and you do that children if we do this well there is one other wonderful outcome so I wonder whether you noticed it in verses 8 and 9 let me finish with this but in verse 8 and 9 wisdom makes you beautiful hear my son your father's instruction for sake not your mother's teaching for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck it's not clear enough there they are symbols in verse 9 of success and beauty so when you win a medal at the olympic games what do you get what do you get what do you think

Dominic yeah you get a medal where do they put your medal yeah and what else do you get what else do they give you do you remember Dominic they give you flowers they give you flowers what do they put a wreath on the head don't they put a crown on your head so again look at verse 8 9 look at verse 9 it's exactly what happens at the olympics you get a wreath around the head you get a graceful garland for your head and you get a medal for your neck to show their worth so you get a gold medal because you are a gold medal winner and Solomon is saying to you children and to us who are adults those who embrace the wisdom of this book which their parents mediate to them they are like heroes on a podium it's the exact opposite of our culture isn't it well like heroes on a podium wear the teachings of this book clothe yourself in them and Solomon says you will wear the great wreath of victory and honour and prestige parents teach these paths teach these women teach these houses teach these feasts to your children

I've been told that a phrase that I've got waiting for me in years is as a father is this you are not going out in that well I wonder if tonight as God's family can you hear him saying to you tonight in Proverbs you are not going out in that I don't want you going out wearing that wear this instead take lady wisdom's jewels dress yourself in these words and you will be beautiful and safe forever whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease will be at rest without dread of disaster