

**“Wise Up”**  
*Proverbs 1<sup>1-7</sup>*

## **Introduction**

In the limited time I have this morning I want to introduce you to the summer sermon series I have planned for us on “Proverbs: the way of Wisdom”.

**SLIDE1** One of the things the Bible frequently and urgently commends to us is to “get wisdom”. Indeed, Proverbs 4<sup>7</sup> says, “The beginning of wisdom is this: get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.” Wow! Really? Why is that? Well, the reason the Bible urges us to get wisdom so forcefully is because life is precious & we only get one chance to live it well. You see, when I was playing golf and my opening tee off shot was a real groaner, no one objected to me simply reshooting it. But there is no “reset” button in real life (or with some I golf with). That’s why many of the lessons in the book of Proverbs give us not only the beginning of a story but also the end, the place where a choice is made and consequences of that choice. Teaching us why & how to “Wise Up”.

- Proverbs are key truths & principles drawn from stories and intended to be reapplied to our stories. Take a proverbial nugget like this: **SLIDE2**
  - *“There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.”* (14<sup>12</sup>; 16<sup>25</sup>)
  - An short story of what this looks like (1<sup>10-14</sup> = easy money, & 1<sup>15-19</sup> = costly)
  - Theft = a common “get rich quick” scheme...

For example, I came across the story of a man in Seattle who attempted to siphon gasoline from a motor home parked on the street (free gas). Someone spotted him and reported his activities to the police, who upon arrival at the scene found the suspect, curled up sick as a dog right beside the motor home. Apparently while he was trying to steal gas he put his siphon hose into the motor home's sewage tank by mistake and...I don't think he'll do that again!<sup>1</sup> **SLIDE3**

OK, so you may not have done something that foolish in your life, but we all have person examples of dumb things we've done we wish we hadn't. “Don't

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<sup>1</sup> Possible proverb, “Stealing seems so sweet, but it leaves a lasting stench.” (cf. 9:17 “Stolen water is sweet...”)

make a mountain out of a mole hill” was undoubtedly articulated after having over reacted to a relatively small issue. Once stated in proverbial form, this nugget of wisdom became a verbal reminder to put and keep things in perspective (12<sup>16</sup> “Fools show their annoyance at once, but the prudent overlook an insult.”).

← LIFE      DEATH → Prov. = verbal signs posted at key decision points.

**SLIDE4**

### **Biblical Contact**

Everyday we make decisions in life, decisions that have real and lasting consequences: for good or for bad. The Bible’s wisdom literature (mainly Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes) is designed to help us “Wise Up”, to navigate life well. Thus most Proverbs are memorable capsules of wisdom concentrate. They are truths chiselled in words and polished through use by those who have traveled the path ahead of us.<sup>2</sup> They instruct and remind us that every choice leads us down the path of two possible destinations: life or death. **SLIDE5** **Read Proverbs 1<sup>1-7</sup>**

### **Structural Contact**

**Q<sup>1</sup>** - Where are the Proverbs from? **SLIDE6**

The opening verse of the book identifies the famous King Solomon as the author of this book, or more accurately the primary compiler of this book since other sources and collections are clearly identified elsewhere (e.g. “thirty sayings of the wise”—22<sup>17</sup>-24<sup>22</sup>; “the sayings of Agur” in ch.30; the sayings King Lemuel’s mother taught him in ch.31). Solomon’s wisdom was world famous, as we read in 1 Kings 4:29-34: **SLIDE7**

*<sup>29</sup>“God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. <sup>30</sup>Solomon’s wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. <sup>31</sup>He was wiser than any other man...<sup>32</sup> He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. <sup>33</sup>He described plant life...He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. <sup>34</sup>Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.”*

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<sup>2</sup> Look before you leap; Too many cooks spoils the soup; When a crime goes unpunished, the world is unbalanced.

What we have in Proverbs is actually a world-class curriculum compiled for the king's son.<sup>3</sup> (Clear signs of it being an international education) But in Israel this world-class private education was handed out for public consumption to all those willing to apply themselves to learning it also. So the final line in verse 7b is itself a precious nugget of wisdom telling us that only a fool would neglect such an opportunity to “Wise Up” by studying this book. **SLIDE8**

**Q<sup>2</sup>** – What kind of education can we expect from studying Proverbs? (vv.2-3)

Clearly, as the second half of verse 2 points out, we can expect to improve our understanding and insight into life, how it works and how to navigate it well. As commentator Derek Kidner notes, “*the wisdom it speaks of is the kind that must engage the whole [person]; not only [our] power to think straight, but [our] managing of [daily] affairs, [our] sensitivity to people, [our] character and [our] morals.*”<sup>4</sup> So even more important than the promise of increasing our *mental* capacity is the promise of increasing our *moral* ability and integrity. Proverbs aims to shape our beliefs (inner) and our behaviour (outer), our character & our conduct (= the point of verse 3).

- Current educational system is “producing mental giants and moral pigmies”.
- Child psychiatrist Dr. Robert Coles work on what he calls “moral intelligence”. Coles met with six year old Ruby Bridges **SLIDE9** and was profoundly impacted. In *The Moral Intelligence of Children*, he suggests “we need to develop three kinds of intelligence: intellectual, emotional, and moral. We have long placed a premium on intellectual intelligence, and in the past generation or two have also emphasized emotional intelligence....Yet it is our moral development that allows us to live out our conscience, and thus live a life that is sane and whole.” **BLANK10**
- Explain the Hebrew word for “wisdom” (*hokmah*)...craftsman...of life
- Notice the related words like “instruction/discipline” (מוֹסֵר) = correction, character formation (requires verbal<sup>12:1</sup> & physical<sup>13:24</sup> correction from an external

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<sup>3</sup> The court setting shines through many of the proverbs, and yet “unlike analogous ancient Near Eastern titles...this title mentions no addressee such as Rehoboam...By omitting a specific addressee, Solomon and/or the final editor ‘democratizes’ his work to shape the national character of [all] Israel...not just a prince.” Waltke, *Proverbs 1-15*, p. 174

<sup>4</sup> Derek Kidner, *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job & Ecclesiastes*, p. 19.

authority to whom we must submit...Contrast the “wisdom” given to the SFU graduates a month ago by Dr. Trottier: “don’t look to an external authority, but to yourself”). = foolish!

- “acquiring” = actively possessing<sup>Infinitive</sup>, grasping, seizing (not passive)

- Thus “a disciplined and prudent life” = internalized wisdom, sensible behaviour (i.e. “doing what is right<sup>sedeq</sup> and just<sup>mispat</sup> and fair<sup>mesarium</sup>) **SLIDE11**

Q<sup>3</sup> – Who is proverbs for? “the simple” & “the wise” = two ends of the spectrum

As verse 4 notes, it is especially for “the simple” meaning, not those with dulled intellectual abilities but to those who are “young” in terms of being naïve, gullible, immature, unskilled when it comes to life (cf. the 3 or 4 classes of “fools”: 1) the simple/gullible, 2) the “fool”—v.7<sup>kesil, ’ewil</sup>, 3) the “mocker”, and 4) sluggard).

Its primary focus is the young adolescent who is entering into adult life and responsibilities without the necessary experience and insight required to make wise choices. In the face of the advertiser’s snapshot appeals to easy sex and easy money, Proverbs sits down with the youth and walks them through the motion picture version of life. The one that presents not only the appeal of the advertisers images, but the tragic and all real lasting consequences of choosing instant gratification over God’s advice.

Dear Ann: I am 16 and in a well-known private girls’ school...Like nearly all the other students here, I have already lost my virginity. Although most people consider this subject a very personal one, I feel the need to share this part of my life with girls who are trying to decide whether to have sex for the first time. In all the years I’ve been reading your column, I have never seen the honest-to-goodness truth about this subject and I think it’s time somebody spoke out...I truly regret that my first time was with a guy I didn’t care that much about...I realize now that the first time is a very big step...After you’ve done it, things are never the same...My advice is...Be smart and save yourself for someone you wouldn’t mind spending the rest of your life with. Sign me—  
SORRY I DIDN’T AND WHICH I COULD TAKE IT BACK

DEAR SORRY: I’ve heard your story before but never in such clear and rational language. Thanks for performing a real service—more than you’ll ever know.<sup>5</sup>

Proverbs provides a real and lasting service for the young & immature. But verse five tells us that it is not only the young person in need of ongoing wisdom.<sup>6</sup> Our need to “wise up” never stops. Listen to another letter, this one written by someone much older than a teenager. She writes:

<sup>5</sup> The Vancouver Sun, Monday, September 23, 1991, p. C5.

<sup>6</sup> The tragic irony is that the wisest of all men died such a fool because he stopped following wisdom.

“My age is sixty-seven, and after nineteen years of a marriage that was impossible in my opinion, I did seek a divorce. I sincerely believed that my children and I would be better off if I got out of the marriage, and this was confirmed and encouraged by therapists....I was forty and attractive and wanted to ‘grow’...I did what I thought was the best....[recently] a friend said to me that getting a divorce is like getting hit by a Mack truck. It is. For everyone involved....I am sorry that I did not get better counselling...I wish I knew then all the things I know now. It takes so long to attain wisdom, when it is needed when one is young.”<sup>7</sup>

No wonder we hear the repeated refrain throughout Proverbs, “get wisdom, though it cost you all you have, get understanding.”(4<sup>7</sup>)

**Q<sup>4</sup>** – So where do we start? **SLIDE12**

Verse 7 tells us that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.”

- “fear of the LORD” = a compound word (e.g. “butterfly”). “To fear him means essentially to submit to his revealed will”<sup>8</sup> whether through the Mosaic Law, the prophets, or the books of wisdom. It is having a deep reverence and respect for God so that our ultimate loyalty is to Him.
- e.g. Joseph’s response to workplace temptation in Gen. 39...“Come to bed with me!” He couldn’t betray his human master’s trust<sup>vv.8-9</sup> because ultimately, “How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?”<sup>v.10</sup>

So the fear of the LORD “is not a mere beginner’s step in wisdom, to be left behind, but the prerequisite...its intended pattern.”<sup>9</sup> Fear of the LORD is to wisdom what the alphabet is to language, what numbers are to mathematics (the foundation, the fundamentals). There is no true wisdom without it.

- How do we wise up? (**CARTOONS13**: “You are here”)

**Applications** (**RESOURCE14** = “The Wise Person According to Proverbs: an outline”)

- Begin with wisdom himself (v.7a) **SLIDE15**
- Choose & learn a Proverb a day (= how we “store up” & “acquire” wisdom) **SLIDE16**
- Read a chapter & memorize a Proverb a day (Bible App tool) **SLIDE17&18**
- Collect a pocket of Proverbs (write on back of resource card) **SLIDE19**

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Michelle Weiner-Davis’ book *Divorce Busting*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>8</sup> Bruce Waltke, *Proverbs 1-15* (NICOT), p. 65.

<sup>9</sup> Derek Kidner, *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job & Ecclesiastes*, p. 19.