

GETTING IT TOGETHER

PROVERBS 1: 1-7

By Pastor John Carlini, D. Mn.

M.I. WE ARE TO BECOME MORE CHRIST-LIKE AS GOD EDUCATES US THROUGH BIBLE KNOWLEDGE AND EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE.

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GETTING IT TOGETHER PROVERBS 1: 1-7

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This morning, we are going to start our journey through the book of Proverbs. We have just finished the book of Romans. Romans was deep in theology and philosophy. It was packed with difficult concepts. And so we had to carefully dissect it into little parts and analyze it bit by bit. It was tedious, but I have to say that I enjoyed it and learned a lot.

Proverbs is quite different. It is poetic. It is not meant to be dissected and analyzed. It is more like art and music. We must let it hit us like a beautiful painting or a catchy tune. We should find ourselves unconsciously tapping our foot to the beat or stunned by its beauty.

Oftentimes, we will read a Proverb, walk away, and after a while realize that it was a shot that hit us and we did not even know we were hit.

Let me give you an example. I'd like to say this happened at that church that was so tough. But no, it happened right here. One year the board was giving me my annual evaluation. They sent me out of the room for about 20 minutes. When they sent for me, Mike, the board chairperson said, "John, we've evaluated the role of pastor, and we've evaluated all of your qualities. As far as we can see, a good pastor should be compassionate, merciful, and kind. We have come to the conclusion that you have all but three of those qualities."

At first I wanted to thank them, but as I thought about it, I discovered that was not a good thing. I am hoping that you will enjoy studying through the book of Proverbs with me since I am so excited about going through it.

It seems to me that for the most part, we easily forget what the Christian life is all about. Ultimately Christianity is our relationship with God. In other words, we should be growing in

our relationship with Jesus Christ. Becoming more like Jesus day by day is our goal. Like the Apostle Paul said in Romans, "We are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds ... We are to be holy and living sacrifices." This is what the book of Proverbs is all about. **WE ARE TO BECOME MORE CHRIST-LIKE AS GOD EDUCATES US THROUGH BIBLE KNOWLEDGE AND EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES.** God educates us through life's experiences! The Proverbs will inform us that we all are fools in one way or another. But it quickly reminds us that none of us have to stay that way.

I. THE TITLE AND AUTHOR (Vs. 1)

NO ONE IS BORN WISE. WE ALL NEED TO LEARN WISDOM THROUGH INTELLECTUAL PURSUIT AND THROUGH LIFE EXPERIENCES.

Verse 1 describes the title and the author of the book. Even though the author of Proverbs is arguably the wisest person that ever lived, his life demonstrates that **NO ONE IS BORN WISE. WE ALL NEED TO LEARN WISDOM THROUGH INTELLECTUAL PURSUIT AND THROUGH LIFE EXPERIENCES.** And one of the saddest things in life is to see people who never seem to learn.

A. PROVERBS

First of all, the book is entitled Proverbs. Even though I like the title, it could be a little misleading. In English, we tend to think of a Proverb as a short, pithy saying like, "A stitch in time saves nine, or Early to bed, early to rise, makes a person healthy, wealthy, and wise."

But the Hebrew word, *mashal* has a little different meaning. It does include these short, pithy sayings, but it also includes parables, famous sayings, and riddles as well. It is poetry. It is not meant to be taken literally. As you read through the Proverbs and as I preach through the Proverbs, do not analyze them to death. Do not absolutize them. Just let them hit you. Enjoy them. Let them be like a mirror to you. Let them penetrate both your mind and your spirit.

The idea is to let the picture that the Proverb is trying to paint, surround us, so that we find ourselves painted into the picture.

What I like about the book of Proverbs is that it gives us some insight into the personality of God. God is an artist, a musician, and a poet. He has a great sense of humor. Jesus used this type of communication a lot.

What the Proverbs are trying to do is take God's written law and apply it to everyday situations. For example, the law says, "Do not steal." A Proverb may say something like, "If a man comes home while you are robbing his house, he may blow your head off with a shotgun."

The Proverbs are geared towards sharpening our minds and giving us practical guidance for everyday life, so that we are learning information and growing through life experiences. Some commentators have tried to rename the Proverbs so the title is more meaningful to us. They have called them, "Wise sayings... Learning to be wise... Insights for living... Good advice... etc.

B. SOLOMON

Here in verse one, Solomon is the named author. Just to make sure there is no mistake, he is identified as the king of Israel and as David's son. When God asked Solomon to ask for anything he wanted, Solomon did not ask for power, riches or fame. He asked for supernatural wisdom and God granted him his desire. His wisdom was legendary in the ancient world.

But as we study through the book of Proverbs, we will see that there are several contributors. There are anonymous contributions by "the wise." Hezekiah later adds some of Solomon's famous sayings. Agur, King Lemuel, and a section called, "Praise for a good wife," are included as well. So, Solomon did not write all the Proverbs. However, he is certainly the main contributor and the driving force behind them. The ones not directly written by him could

have been dedicated to him. The main point of all of these contributors is this: **NO ONE IS BORN WISE. WE ALL NEED TO LEARN WISDOM THROUGH INTELLECTUAL PURSUIT AND THROUGH LIFE EXPERIENCES.**

II. THE PURPOSE (Vs. 2-6)

NO MATTER WHERE WE ARE IN LIFE, WE MUST ALWAYS BE HUMBLE ENOUGH TO CONTINUE TO GROW IN WISDOM.

The purpose of the book is spelled out in verses 2-6. The purpose of the book is to help us mature in our walk with God. **NO MATTER WHERE WE ARE IN LIFE, WE MUST ALWAYS BE HUMBLE ENOUGH TO CONTINUE TO GROW IN WISDOM.** In other words, there should never come a time where we feel we have attained all there is to attain. Too many Christians have stopped growing. Keep this in mind. We have to grow both in information and in experience. Many Christians in the United States have approached their Christian walk just like they approach life -- sitting on the living room couch with the remote control in their hands. We can only grow as we stretch ourselves. It is like running. Most of us cannot even run a few blocks. But if we get out there and run every day, before you know it, we are running 6 blocks, 1 mile, 2 miles, 5 miles, 10 miles, and some may even run the marathon. I can guarantee this. You will never be able to run the marathon sitting on the living room sofa with the remote control in your hand. I can equally state that none of us will ever grow as believers unless we continue to serve God in ways that stretch us and take us out of our comfort zones. God's plan for us is that we all successfully finish the marathon called life.

The NIV captures the poetic nature of this passage the best. Verse one started out simply introducing the title and author. Then if you quickly look down the verses you can see a series of clauses that begin with "for." Do you see that? ... For attaining, for understanding for acquiring for giving, and for understanding ... Do you see that? That is pretty much the way the

Hebrew reads. The NASB translates them as straight infinitives, and that is all right as well. The NLT makes them complete sentences starting with a phrase such as, "The purpose of these Proverbs are."

A. TO THE ROOKIES (Vs. 2-4)

But notice one more thing in the NIV. There is no "for" clause in verse 5. There is a break. Verses 2-4 deal with the immature believers and verses 5-6 deal with mature believers.

In verses 2-4, encouragement is given to the rookies. Do any of you watch "The three stooges?" I have a favorite all time line. Curly is getting on Moe's nerves. Finally, Moe slaps him and says, "What kind of fool are you anyway?" Curly thinks for a moment and says, "Why, is there more than one kind?" Well interestingly enough there is more than one kind of fool in Proverbs. We will discuss them at a later date, but there is a type of fool who lacks knowledge. There is another type of fool who lacks experience. One can be a fool because he is naïve, gullible, or wild. The most serious type of fool though is the one who is just simply rebellious and refuses to listen to good advise.

1. GROWING IN KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE (V. 2)

Look at verse 2. Rookies need to grow in knowledge and experience. These Proverbs are meant to impart wisdom and discipline. Wisdom in the Hebrew Scriptures has to do with God imparting knowledge and people using it in everyday life. For example, the people that built the Ark of the Covenant were given special wisdom by God to build the Ark. People today who have the spiritual gift of wisdom have the ability to take God's Word, the Bible, and apply it to everyday situations.

But discipline is also necessary. The NASB translates the word instruction. In other words, not only is wisdom necessary, but experience in using it is also imperative. For example,

I could go to mechanic school and learn everything about cars, how they run and how to fix them. I could graduate with honors. However, until I actually fix a broken car, my knowledge is useless.

I would say that most Christians in the United States are stuck at this rookie level. Most of us do not even know what the Bible says. We have not read it and we do not study it. We do not even have the necessary information to understand what life is all about. So even though many valuable learning experiences come our way, we will not be able to take advantage of them because we cannot even begin to recognize them.

But there is an equally seductive sin that exists in churches like ours. Many of us read and study our Bibles diligently, but we do not listen to God's Spirit and we do not look for His hand. We are not living in submission and obedience to God. Even when God speaks to us through other people and through life experiences, we do not listen. I think that it is no fun to suffer or experience setbacks. But it is even sadder if we do not learn anything and consequently, do not grow as a result of the suffering.

Look at the last phrase in verse 2. The Proverbs are good for understanding words of insight. In other words, if we can learn from the wise people who have gone before us, then we will be able to discover and recognize the lessons of life. Hopefully, we can learn from their lessons.

So reading the Proverbs and the rest of the Bible will help us grow in knowledge. As we get up, move out of our comfort zones, and obey God, we will gain valuable insight as well. Therefore, one thing immature believers must do is grow in knowledge and experience.

2. BECOMING MORE LIKE JESUS (V. 3)

Verse 3 informs rookies that we must become more like Jesus. Our goal is to cooperate

with God in His plan to make us more like His Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Let me point something out here. Verses 2,3 & 4 are connected by another literary device. If you look at verse 2, you'll notice that the second characteristic is discipline. In verse 3 the first characteristic is discipline. Look at the second characteristic in verse 3. It is the prudent life. And sure enough prudence is the first characteristic listed in verse 4.

But back to verse 3. We are to live a disciplined lifestyle. In other words, we are to be focused on correct living. Wisdom will help us to size up a situation and make good choices. Actually that's what prudent means here. It means to be shrewd, clever, and wise. Jesus always knew how to size up a situation and how to act.

But look at the second half of verse 3. These are attributes of God that He invites us to share in with Him. God is righteous, just, and fair. When we confessed our sins and invited Jesus into our hearts, we were made right with God. Since we have the Spirit of God, we are to act justly and fairly with all the people we come in contact with. We as believers should be socially concerned for justice and fairness. As we learn what is right, just, and fair, we can start to practice these concepts and ask God to make them part of our permanent character.

3. BECOMING MORE MATURE (V. 4)

Verse 4 informs us that we need to mature in our faith. We really are gullible and naïve when it comes to the Devil. The Bible says that Satan roams the earth, looking to devour us. Jesus said that Satan's mission is to steal, kill, and destroy. The Devil hates God. He cannot harm God in any way. So he goes after the next best thing, God's children. If you are a believer, then you are Satan's enemy and target. The Proverbs will help to prepare you to fight off your enemy. If we grow in knowledge and wisdom, and if we practice it in everyday life, we will become shrewd, crafty, and wise. We will have the ability to make good plans and

decisions. We will be able succeed in life.

Do not miss the poetry in verse 4. The proverb here is comparing young people with being simpleminded. Actually what the proverb is saying is that in general, young people are naïve and easily confused by Satan and the world. As we study through the book of Proverbs, I would like you young people to understand this. There are many lessons in life you will have to learn the hard way. All of us in the older generation have had to learn the hard way as well. However, there are some lessons that you cannot afford to learn the hard way. For example, you have heard me say that it is almost impossible to recover from addictions. You cannot afford to learn your lesson the hard way when it comes to drugs and alcohol. There is only one in a thousandth chance to recover from these addictions. Add to that the permanent damage they do to the mind, you can see why you cannot afford to learn the hard way. Another area that the Proverbs point to over and over again is the area of sexuality. If you get HIV or AIDS, you can be sure you are going to die. There is no second chance. If you get certain sexually transmitted diseases, you may not be able to ever recover from them. If you get pregnant, you can be sure your life will be changed forever. You can pretty much recover from learning some lessons the hard way in many areas of your life. But there are certain lessons that you cannot afford to learn the hard way.

The best case scenario for young people is to learn your lessons from those who have gone before you. Look for mentors. They can help save you a lot of grief.

But let me make one passing comment as we leave this section. The one characteristic that is essential to grow from a rookie to a veteran is humility. We always have to be able to look at our own lives and revisit the question, "What kind of fool am I?" We all have blind spots. We all need to instruction of the wise. Pride will keep us a fool. Humility will help us

to become one of the wise.

B. TO THE VETERANS (Vs. 5-6)

And that brings us to the advice to veterans in verses 5-6. If there is a message that comes through loud and clear in these verses, it is this: there never comes a time where we can say that we have arrived -- especially when it comes to wisdom. The nature of wisdom is such that the wiser we become, the more we come to realize how foolish we truly are and how much more we have to seek out God's wisdom. Jesus consistently spoke in parables and even the scholars in His day could not seem to grasp the meaning of many of His parables and proverbs.

1. THE CONTINUING JOURNEY (V. 5)

I know that there are people who think that they have reached spiritual maturity. However, the truly mature, realize how little they actually know and how far they have to go. Here is what our attitude towards wisdom is to be. First of all, all of us should be disciplined by someone more mature than we are. Secondly, we should be discipling someone who is less mature than we are. When we preached through the "Purpose Driven Life" series, we said that one of our purposes was discipleship. In discipleship, the key is to become more like Christ. We should all be in at least two discipleship situations: one where we are being disciplined and one where we are discipling.

2. THE CONTINUING CHALLENGES (V. 6)

God is so big and so complex, we will never be able to understand everything there is to know about Him. So the upshot of all this is that the same attitude that enabled the young believers to grow into mature believers, is the exact same attitude that mature believers must exhibit if they are to continue to grow in their relationship with God. And that is an attitude of humility. As we study the Bible more, we will be able to understand our life experiences better.

The better we understand life experiences, the more we will understand the Bible. And the cycle spirals upwards. The upshot of all this is **NO MATTER WHERE WE ARE IN LIFE, WE MUST ALWAYS BE HUMBLE ENOUGH TO CONTINUE TO GROW IN WISDOM.**

III. THE THEME SONG (V. 7)

TRUE WISDOM ONLY COMES FROM GOD.

And that will bring us to another question, "What exactly is wisdom?" Well, verse 7 kind of becomes the theme song for the entire book of Proverbs. The theme of this song will be **TRUE WISDOM ONLY COMES FROM GOD.** The interesting thing I have observed over the years is how positive people seem about their decisions. They have all sorts of reasoning, but if they were to be honest with themselves, and submit to the collective wisdom of Godly people, they would easily see the flaws. Think about the New Testament gift of prophecy. Two gifts that go along nicely with prophecy are wisdom and knowledge. In the New Testament church, if a prophet has a message, a word of wisdom, or a word of knowledge, he or she is to submit that word to other prophets to judge before he or she acts on it. That is what the Proverbs are all about. They are a collection of wise sayings from different people. Wisdom becomes wisdom because it comes from God to His community.

A. FEAR OF THE LORD

Let us examine the components of wisdom. First of all it begins with fear of the LORD. Notice that the word LORD is in all capital letters. That is representative of God's proper Name, Jehovah or Yahweh, whichever you prefer. There is only one God. There is only one way to be reconciled with God. There is only one access to God, and that is through Jesus Christ. If some human philosophy or religion were making that claim, that would be arrogant. However, it is God Himself Who makes this claim. God designed the universe and

all the laws that govern it, both physical and spiritual. He is a living God Who sees, hears, and knows all. He destroyed the earth and wiped out the entire human race except for 8 people. He struck people dead on the spot for disobedience. For example, we studied a passage a few weeks ago about the early church where God struck a husband and wife dead in church for lying.

We talk a lot about God being a loving and compassionate Father -- and He is. But He is also a holy, living, powerful and dangerous God as well. Fear here is not merely respect. Fear means like we said before, shake in your boots, pee you pants fear. God is not to be toyed with.

B. IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

Knowing God is the first step in gaining wisdom. He is the creator and sustainer of the universe. If He blinks, we will vanish from existence. So God's commands are not meant to be suggestions -- they are meant to be obeyed.

This healthy fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. The word beginning here doesn't only mean beginning in the sense of sequential time. It means much more than that. It means foundational. It is the bottom line and foundation. In other words, fear of the Lord is not only the beginning, it is the middle and the end as well. Everything we think and do should be permeated, energized, and empowered by God. God gave us the Holy Spirit to live in us to accomplish this task. Think about how we live our lives. Think about how we act towards others. Think about what comes out of our mouths. Can we say that what we say, think and do is being energized and empowered by the Holy Spirit? If not, then what we are saying and doing are coming from, energized, and empowered by the Devil.

C. DON'T BE FOOLISH

I am excited about preaching through the book of Proverbs because if we take these

lessons seriously, we can save ourselves a lot of pain and grief. So my plea to all of us as we start this book is, do not be foolish. Take these lessons to heart. The book of Proverbs starts and ends with this theme, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." Life starts and ends with God. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. God permeates all of life. Look for Him at work, at school, at play, in your car, everywhere. Look for Him, find Him, and fear Him. That will be a good start to gaining wisdom. Because the fact is, **TRUE WISDOM ONLY COMES FROM GOD.**

I think we tend to make life complicated. It is not. Solomon summed it up nicely in another one of his books, Ecclesiastes. He said, "Fear God and keep His commandments. That is the whole meaning of life." Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul and with all your strength. And love your neighbor as yourself."

You see, life is simple. It is not easy, but it is simple. Here is how our simple approach to life is supposed to look like. **WE ARE TO BECOME MORE CHRIST-LIKE AS GOD EDUCATES US THROUGH BIBLE KNOWLEDGE AND EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE.**

You may be sitting here this morning thinking that you know it all, or perhaps that you understand life and have it all together. You may not be willing to sit and listen to more sermons about wisdom or take advice from more mature believers. Think about Solomon's life. Next to his father David, Solomon was the greatest king in all of Israel's history.

When he was just starting out in life, God appeared to him in a dream and said to him, "What do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you!"

Solomon did not ask for wealth, power, or prestige. Instead, he asked for wisdom to

govern God's people fairly. So God replied, "Because you have asked for wisdom in governing my people and have not asked for a long life or riches for yourself or the death of your enemies, (verse 12) I will give you what you asked for! I will give you a wise and understanding mind such as no one else has ever had or ever will have! (Verse 13) And I will also give you what you did not ask for -- riches and honor! No other king in all the world will be compared to you for the rest of your life!

What a start, but Solomon, with all his wisdom, ended his life tragically. Going against God's commands, he married many foreign women who worshipped other gods. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines. They turned his heart away from God and God's wisdom.

Let me just read God's response.

"⁹The LORD was very angry with Solomon, for his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. ¹⁰He had warned Solomon specifically about worshipping other gods, but Solomon did not listen to the LORD'S command. ¹¹So now the LORD said to him, "Since you have not kept my covenant and have disobeyed my laws, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your servants."

How could someone with such a good start end up so poorly? He forgot that fear of the LORD is not only the beginning of wisdom, it is the middle and end as well. I think there are a couple of real dangers we must beware of. First, some Christians never grow in their faith for one reason or another. But I am guessing the two primary reasons are laziness and not willing to change one's lifestyle. In other words, many Christians are just too plain lazy to learn how to read and study the Bible.

On the other hand, there are those immature Christians who know they will have to change their behavior if they really dig in the Scriptures and learn what pleases God.

For many people who have been Christians a long time, pride keeps them back from growing in their faith, learning to serve God in new and exciting ways.

Whatever the reason, the results are the same. If we forsake growing in our faith through knowledge and experience, we will end up as tragically as did Solomon. May that never be!