

# Proverbs 1

## *The Beginning of Wisdom*

### Overview

Proverbs 1 opens the entire book of Proverbs and serves as a preamble to everything that follows. In it, Solomon — the primary author under the inspiration of God — sets out the purpose of the book, addresses his son directly, and then dramatically shifts to Wisdom herself speaking in the public square. The chapter divides naturally into three movements: the prologue and purpose (vv. 1–7), a father's warning against sinners (vv. 8–19), and Wisdom's public cry of warning (vv. 20–33).

### Section 1: The Purpose of Proverbs (vv. 1–7)

#### **Proverbs 1:1–6 (NKJV)**

*The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion — a wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, to understand a proverb and an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles.*

#### **Authorship and Authority**

Solomon identifies himself in verse 1 as the son of David and king of Israel. This is not mere literary convention — it grounds the book in a real historical person. Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived (1 Kings 4:29–31), and his wisdom came directly from God (1 Kings 3:12). The words of Proverbs therefore carry the weight of divinely granted wisdom expressed

through a human author.

### Six Goals of Proverbs (vv. 2–4)

Solomon lists specific outcomes he intends for the reader. These are not vague spiritual ambitions — they are concrete intellectual and moral categories: to know wisdom and instruction; to perceive words of understanding; to receive instruction in justice, judgment, and equity; to give prudence to the simple; to give the young man knowledge and discretion; and to help even the wise continue to grow (v. 5).

Notice that Proverbs is explicitly for two audiences: the inexperienced (the "simple" and the "young man") and the already-wise. No one outgrows the need for God's wisdom.

### The Cornerstone Verse: The Fear of the LORD

**Proverbs 1:7 (ESV)**     *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

Verse 7 is the thesis statement of the entire book. The word "beginning" (Hebrew: *reshit*) means the starting point, the foundation, the first principle. This is not merely a pious sentiment — Solomon is making an epistemological claim: you cannot truly know anything rightly apart from a proper relationship to God. Knowledge divorced from reverence for the LORD is not genuine wisdom; it is foolishness wearing an educated mask.

The "fear of the LORD" is not terror, but a deep reverence and awe — a wholehearted recognition that God is God and you are not. It is the posture of the creature before the Creator. By contrast, the fool is not defined by low intelligence but by a moral orientation: he despises wisdom and instruction. Foolishness in Proverbs is always a spiritual condition before it is an intellectual one.

### Discussion Questions — Section 1

1

Verse 5 says that even a wise man should hear and increase in learning. What does this tell us about the nature of wisdom? Is it a destination or a journey?

2

How does the fear of the LORD as the "beginning" of knowledge challenge the way the world defines education and intelligence? Can someone be brilliant yet foolish according to Scripture?

3

Proverbs is addressed partly to "the simple" and "the young." Does that mean older or more experienced believers have less need of it? What does verse 5 say?

## Section 2: A Father's Warning Against Sinners (vv. 8–19)

**Proverbs 1:8–9 (NIV)** *Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.*

### The Family as the First School

The transition in verse 8 is significant. After the grand theological statement of verse 7, Solomon immediately turns to the family. The home is the primary institution for passing on wisdom. This is not a sentimental observation — it is structural. God designed the family to be the place where the fear of the LORD is first taught and modeled.

The word "listen" (Hebrew: *shema*) is a strong command. It is the same root used in the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4. Instruction is to be heard with intention and obedience. Notably, both father and mother are named — the wisdom of both parents is honored here. The garland and chain of verse 9 are images of dignity and beauty. Obedience to godly parental instruction is not a burden — it adorns the child. Wisdom beautifies a life.

### The Anatomy of Temptation (vv. 10–14)

**Proverbs 1:10–14 (NASB)** *My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood, let us ambush the innocent without cause... we will find all kinds of precious wealth, we will fill our houses with spoil; throw in your lot with us, we shall all have one money bag" —*

Solomon describes the enticement of sinners with remarkable specificity. They use the language of belonging ("Come with us" — the appeal to community), they promise material gain ("precious wealth" — the appeal to greed), and they offer shared identity ("one money bag" — the appeal to loyalty and brotherhood).

The sinners in view are not offering a life of dull corruption — they are offering adventure, wealth, and brotherhood. This is how sin always presents itself. It never leads with the consequences; it leads with the appeal. Solomon is preparing his son to recognize the script before it is performed.

### The Fatal Logic: The Trap You Set Is for Yourself (vv. 15–19)

**Proverbs 1:17–19**  
(ESV)

*For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird, yet these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives. Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessor.*

Solomon draws on a striking image: a bird that sees a net being laid will not walk into it. Even a bird has that much sense. Yet the sinners described in this passage are setting a trap for themselves without realizing it. Verse 19 delivers the principle plainly: greed for unjust gain takes away the life of the one who pursues it. This is a literal, observable truth — history is full of men who pursued wealth through violence and deceit and were ultimately destroyed by the same forces they set in motion.

### Discussion Questions — Section 2

4

Verse 10 says, "if sinners entice you, do not consent." How does the framing of this as "enticement" rather than command or force change how we should think about resisting temptation?

5

What is the significance of Solomon naming both father and mother in verse 8? What does it tell us about the role of the home in God's design for discipleship?

6

In verses 17–19, Solomon says the wicked are setting a trap for their own lives. Can you think of examples — biblical or from life — where this principle proved true? What does this teach us about the nature of sin?

## Section 3: Wisdom Cries Out (vv. 20–33)

**Proverbs 1:20–23**  
(NLT)

*Wisdom shouts in the streets. She cries out in the public square. She calls to the crowds along the main street, to those gathered in front of the city gate: "How long, you simpletons, will you insist on being simpleminded? How long will you mockers relish your mocking? How long will you fools hate knowledge? Come and listen to my counsel. I'll share my heart with you and make you wise."*

### Wisdom Personified

In verses 20–33, Wisdom is personified as a woman crying out in the most public places — the streets, the public square, the city gate. The city gate in ancient Israel was the center of civic life: where business was transacted, legal cases were heard, and community matters were decided. Wisdom is not hiding in a library. She is proclaiming in the marketplace.

The personification of Wisdom here is a powerful literary and theological device. It emphasizes that wisdom is not merely a set of principles but has a voice, a character, and a relentless desire to be heard. Many scholars see in this personification a foreshadowing of Christ himself, described in the New Testament as the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30). While this study focuses on the text as it stands, it is worth noting that Proverbs 1–9 lays groundwork the New Testament builds upon significantly.

### Three Categories of People (vv. 22–23)

Wisdom addresses three distinct groups, each representing a different posture toward her counsel:

Type	Description	Problem
<b>The Simple</b>	Naive, easily led astray	They love their simplicity — they are comfortable in ignorance and resist being disturbed by wisdom.
<b>The Scornor</b>	Delights in mocking	Not merely ignorant — actively hostile. Scorning wisdom is their pleasure. This is a hardened posture.
<b>The Fool</b>	Hates knowledge	The fool is defined by a moral choice. Foolishness is not a lack of IQ — it is a rejection of God's authority.

## Wisdom's Warning and Its Consequences (vv. 24–33)

**Proverbs 1:24–27**  
(NKJV)

*Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, because you despised all my counsel, and would have none of my rebuke, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, when your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you.*

These are sobering verses. The language of laughing at calamity is jarring — but note carefully: this is not God taking pleasure in the destruction of the wicked in a sadistic sense (compare Ezekiel 33:11, which says God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked). Rather, this is the language of vindicating justice — the very thing the fool refused to heed has now arrived, and the case for wisdom has been proven utterly.

The fool will seek wisdom when disaster comes — but it will be too late (vv. 28–29). This does not contradict the gospel — the New Testament is replete with calls to repent while there is time. It underscores the urgency of hearing wisdom today.

**Proverbs 1:33 (NLT)** *But all who listen to me will live in peace, unthreatened by fear or disaster.*

The chapter closes with the positive promise: those who listen to Wisdom will dwell in safety and peace. This is not a promise of a consequence-free life, but of the security that comes from living in alignment with the order God has built into creation.

### Discussion Questions — Section 3

7

Wisdom cries out in the most public places — the streets, the square, the city gate. What does this tell us about the accessibility of God's wisdom? Does God hide wisdom from people who want it?

8

The three types — the simple, the mocker, and the fool — represent different postures toward wisdom. Which of these is the most dangerous, and why? Which is the most reachable?

9

Verses 24–31 describe consequences that come when wisdom is repeatedly refused. How does this square with the grace of God? Does this teach that there is a point of no return?

## Application

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Proverbs 1 is not merely instructional — it calls for a response. Consider these personal application points:

- a. Examine your starting point. Is the fear of the LORD truly the foundation of how you approach decisions, relationships, and knowledge? Or do you sometimes treat God's wisdom as one input among many?
- b. Identify the voices of enticement in your life. The sinners of verses 10–14 often offer belonging, profit, and shared identity. Where are these voices speaking in your current season?
- c. Listen today. Wisdom is crying out. Make a specific commitment to spend time in Scripture this week with the posture of a learner, not merely a reader.
- d. Pass it on. Solomon wrote this for his son. Who in your life — a child, a younger believer, a friend — could benefit from the wisdom you have received? The chain of verse 9 is meant to be handed down.

### Memory Verse

*"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;  
fools despise wisdom and instruction."*

**Proverbs 1:7 (ESV)**

## A Note on Interpretation

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This study interprets Proverbs 1 literally unless literary devices clearly indicate otherwise. The personification of Wisdom in verses 20–33 is a recognized figure of speech (prosopopoeia) — Wisdom is not a separate divine being but is portrayed as a person for vividness and rhetorical power. All other elements of the chapter — the authorship, the historical setting, the father-son relationship, and the consequences described — are taken as straightforwardly as

the text allows. The foundation of verse 7 holds not just for Proverbs but for all biblical study: begin with reverence for God, and understanding will follow.