

**Pastor Kyle Mercer**  
What Is Wisdom?

November 17, 2024  
Series: Wisdom for the Holidays  
Proverbs 1:1-7

**BIG IDEA - WISDOM IS INTELLECTUAL, PRACTICAL,  
RELATIONAL, AND MORAL**

Good morning, Two Cities Church. The holidays are upon us. What is it with Americans and stacking all of our holidays together? First there's Halloween, then there's Thanksgiving, then there's Christmas, then there's New Year's, and then we're depressed until Spring Break. This is how it works.

Just for a second, I want to talk to you about Christmas. Every year, as a church, we have Christmas Eve services. That's going to be true again this year. On the 23rd and 24th, we're going to be having Christmas Eve services. I wanted to tell you today so you can mark your calendar and make it a priority.

Also, we're going to have our normal services on December 22, as well, at 9:00, 11:00, and 5:00. Listen. Some of you are new and don't know me. I never wanted to be a pastor and I never wanted to lead a type of church that was going to beg people to invite people to church. Seriously. I don't want to be like, "Please, please, please invite your friends."

I want you to be so unbelievably overwhelmed by your experience of being a part of our church you go, "I can't help it. I can't help but tell everybody what God is doing in my life through this local church." Having said that, I do want to just say I think Christmas Eve is one of those special times if you have the relational deposits to make a relational withdrawal and invite somebody to church.

Here's why. There are three times a year when people who otherwise wouldn't go to church will go to church. When are they? Well, Christmas (Christmas Eve), Easter, and when life isn't going well. So, I just want to pray for us for a moment as we consider who might be close to us but far from God who we can invite this Christmas. Let's pray, and then we're going to dive into our brand-new series.

Lord, I want to take a moment right now, and I just pray over our church a "Come and see" culture. Jesus, long before you said, "Follow me," you said, "Come and see." The gospel goes forward as we invite people into relationships and rooms where they can hear the gospel.

As we think about the 20-plus baptisms we've seen this service, we know that every one of those, at some point, whether it was a parent or a peer, someone said to them, "Come and see. Come be a part of this." Lord, I pray that you would uniquely use this Christmas season to further the gospel and the mission here in Winston and around the world. In Christ's name, amen.

All right, guys. One of my favorite shows growing up was *Seinfeld*. Raise your hand if you've seen *Seinfeld*. Oh, you've all seen it. Raise your hand if you've binged it. No, don't raise your hand. I don't want to know. Some of you have watched every episode. It was *The Office* of the 90s. I can remember my parents watching it, and then, as I got into middle school and high school, I watched it.

It's hilarious. Right? There's Kramer. Remember him? There's George, there's Elaine, there's Newman, and there's Jerry. Well, here's what's interesting. That show is really about nothing. It's kind of a silly show. It went on for a really long time. Larry David is the creator of the show. He only told everybody this later, but they had one rule behind the show that they told all of the cast members.

They said, "Guys, if this show is going to last for a decade, if it's going to be funny every time we do it, here's the number-one rule behind this show: nobody on the show can ever learn a lesson." You're like, "That's why Elaine can't keep a boyfriend. That's why George keeps having problems at work."

Now listen. It's fun to watch the show *Seinfeld*; it's not fun to live a *Seinfeld* life. If you'll type to or turn to Proverbs 1, we're going through this series so you can learn some lessons. Here's the truth: life is too short and too painful for you to learn everything from personal experience. You have to let other people pay the dumb tax for you. Okay?

Now, I had to learn this. When I was in seminary, I had to take all of the classes you'd think you'd have to take. Like, here's what you'd think. I should take Hebrew and Greek, and I did. Then you think, "Okay. What about New Testament and Old Testament?" Yes, and all of these theology classes, but I took, like, five church history classes.

I don't know if you know this, but they make future church leaders take four or five church history classes. You might ask, "Why would you do that?" So we could learn every dumb thing the church has done for 2,000 years. That's literally the purpose of church history. What's that saying? "Those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it."

So, guys, here we are in the book of Proverbs for the next six weeks. Now, let me say two other things about this series as I'm introducing it. First, we want this to be a practical series. The whole way I teach the Bible is, hopefully, to be deeply biblical but intensely practical, but I mean you're *really* going to find this series practical. In fact, think about this series as a "help with how" series.

We're in the Multiply Initiative. If the Multiply Initiative is (I'm using a metaphor here) a book, every series in the Multiply Initiative is a new chapter. So, why are we talking about wisdom? Because you can't multiply if you're not wise. By definition, what a foolish person does is squander what God has given them. So, we're going to help you with how. In fact, I think this is so important.

There's a YouTube channel called *Dad, how do I?* Have you seen this? This guy is a dad. He's actually a good dad, but his kids' friends were coming over to the house, and he realized these kids didn't have dads. So he started a YouTube channel called *Dad, how do I?* Guess how many subscribers it has. Five million. We live in a fatherless generation.

So, we wanted to be unbelievably practical. We don't want to just tell you *why* to multiply. We did that in the first series. Why? Because you were made to multiply (Genesis 1:28). We don't even just want to tell you *what* to multiply, although we put, I think, some healthy pressure on you and said, "Choose something, write it down, and drop it in the bucket." So, there's *why* and *what* to multiply. We want to tell you *how* to multiply.

Why are we doing this at the holidays? Because we uniquely feel the need to be wise probably most acutely at the holidays. We have more time off. Mom and Dad are home a little more. The kids are home from school. We're hanging out with the in-laws and the outlaws. We're traveling. We're overwhelmed with money, because maybe we can't give the kids the Christmas we want to give them, or maybe we have so much money we're trying to control ourselves not to spoil our kids. All that is felt.

On top of all that, everybody is beginning to think about the new year. They're evaluating their past and heading into their future. So, with all that said, I think it's very timely for us to spend the next six weeks in this book. We're just going to cover seven verses today, which is considered the preamble, the prologue, the introduction to the rest of the book of Proverbs. This is going to be more of a 30,000-foot view of Proverbs today, and then we'll begin to double-click and dive in next week.

Turn with me to chapter 1, verse 1. "***The proverbs...***" We need to talk about what a *proverb* is. We will. "***...of Solomon...***" Every book of the Bible has a divine author and a human author. Solomon is the human author, and he's defined two ways. "***...son of David, king of Israel...***" We don't all know the Bible to the same degree, and that's fine. I want to tell you something about Israel's history.

The most famous king in all of Israel was King David. He was incredible. I mean, he had his own failures and faults and flaws, but he was an incredible king. He had all of these sons. David basically designed the plans for the temple. They were given by God, but he designs these plans for the temple, and he fights all of these unbelievable wars. Then he's old and dying, and he picks Solomon to be the next king.

Now, listen. We don't know for sure because we don't get an age, but when we put the whole story together, it appears that Solomon, when he becomes king of the nation of Israel and is called to build the temple, is somewhere between his late teens and his early 20s.

So, imagine the average senior in high school or sophomore in college, and he is called to lead a nation and build a temple. He does what I think a lot of us would do. He is completely overwhelmed, and in 2 Chronicles, chapter 1, Solomon goes to God in prayer and says, "God, I don't know how to lead these people," and he prays this prayer: "Lord, will you give me wisdom?"

Actually, in one of the most famous interactions between God and a king in the Old Testament, God says to him, "Solomon, since you didn't ask for money, and you didn't ask for power, and you didn't ask for victory over your enemies, but instead you asked for wisdom, I will give you wisdom and everything that comes with it, which will include power, money, and victory over your enemies."

That makes me think of this as we begin. How many of you just need to start praying for wisdom? I mean, we have a verse for this. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask for wisdom, and God will generously give it." Now, here's the thing about Solomon. Let's do a little background on the author of this book.

We are told in another place in the Old Testament that Solomon wrote 3,000 proverbs and 1,000 songs. Now, how many songs do we have in our Bible from Solomon? Just one, the Song of Solomon, or the Song of Songs. We went through that years ago. We may need to eventually go through that again. That was a powerful song.

How many proverbs do we have of the 3,000 proverbs? Well, it depends on how you count. Some of the proverbs are repeated. If we took the entire book of Proverbs, there are somewhere between 800 and 900 proverbs. We can't get through the whole book in six weeks, but let me show you how the book of Proverbs is designed. It'll make more sense to you.

The first nine chapters are speeches, chapters 10-30 are sayings, and chapter 31 famously ends with the poem of the virtuous or Proverbs 31 woman. So, it's speeches Solomon gave, then it's sayings he said or collected, and then it ends with that poem. Now, here's what's really interesting. I would be remiss not to mention this, especially to parents.

I find it fascinating that the first nine chapters are a conversation of a father with his son who's probably around the age of 13. By the way, if you were to ask, "Who's the target audience of Proverbs?" the answer would be "Young people." Now, all of God's Word is for all of God's people, but think about it this way.

Proverbs is wisdom for young people, Ecclesiastes (which nobody ever reads) is wisdom for old people, Job is wisdom for suffering people, Song of Solomon is wisdom for single or newly married people, and Psalms is wisdom for people who are struggling with mental health.

Here's the amazing thing. I have never gotten over the way the father teaches the son about wisdom. You can check me on this. Read chapters 1-9 this week. For some of us, the way we teach the Bible to our kids is boring. By the way, when I'm teaching other people how to preach, I always say, "If it's not interesting, don't talk about it" or "If you cannot figure out the most interesting way to talk about this, do not talk about it."

Here's how the father talks to the son. Imagine this. This is true. You can go read this. He says to his 13-year-old son, "There are going to be two beautiful women who are going to want to be with you and invite you into their home." Now, what does a 13-year-old boy think about all the time? Attractive women.

The father says, "Actually, there are going to be two attractive women. One is called Lady Folly." This is the first nine chapters. "One is called Lady Wisdom. There are paths to both of their houses, and the path you go on and the woman you are intimate with will determine and define the direction of your entire life." How many of us need to get better at teaching truth?

With that said, let me introduce you to this whole idea of wisdom. In verses 2-7, we are first introduced to the theme of wisdom. This theme will show up 125 times, either with the word *wise* or *wisdom*, and in the first seven verses we're given nine words that talk about wisdom. I'll show you this. Look here.

***"The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth—let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction."***

I want to talk about what a proverb is. Proverbs are mentioned there. Think about it this way. A proverb is a container of wisdom. It's one way for wisdom to come to you. There are a lot of ways for wisdom to happen. Wisdom could happen by a body of teaching. That

happens every once in a while. Jesus teaches the Sermon on the Mount. It's a bunch of wisdom.

Wisdom sometimes comes in narrative. Why do we have classic kids stories that we read to every generation? Well, there's a lot of wisdom in there. That's why. Wisdom can come by watching someone's example. Here we're told wisdom comes in a proverb. Now, what is a proverb? Listen. A *proverb* is a small statement about a big truth. It's a short sentence that takes a long time for someone to learn.

Every society has proverbs. Right? "The early bird gets the worm." That's a proverb for our society. Or "Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater." Proverbs are so important that it's one of the ways God is going to begin to communicate things, age-long wisdom, to the next generation.

Now, there are a couple of things I want to say about proverbs that are helpful to know. Proverbs are not promises. Critics of the Bible will say something like, "Are you one of those indie-fundie Christians? Do you read the Bible literally?" What they mean by that is "Do you read the Bible woodenly?" No, we do not read the Bible woodenly. We do read the Bible literally, but when we say "literally," we mean normally. We mean we read it with the author's intent when he wrote it.

For example (you know this), you read poetry very differently than you read narrative, and you read a letter or an epistle very differently than you'd read the apocalyptic book of Revelation or prophecy of Daniel. But when you read proverbs, they're not promises. Proverbs are high-probability statements. They tell you what generally happens, but they don't mention the exceptions.

By the way, this is why Proverbs is right next to Psalms in your Bible. Proverbs tells you the ideal, and Psalms is God's people wrestling with the ideal not happening in their life. In Psalm 73, famously, the psalmist cries out to God, "God, why do the wicked prosper?" Why is he saying that? Because the book of Proverbs tells us the wicked will *not* prosper. He's wrestling with this.

Let me give you two examples of how people take proverbs and think they're promises. They're principles and high-probability statements. Sometimes people will read (this is a proverb), "The fear of the Lord prolongs your life." Then they'll think of someone very godly they knew who died at a young age. Well, that's the exception, not the rule. What it's saying is when you fear the Lord, you're going to live more in accordance with divine design, and most likely you're going to live a lot longer.

Or how about this? "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is older he will not depart." That's a principle, but everybody knows that family that has three kids, and two of the three kids are loving the Lord, walking with the Lord, and one, at least in this season, is not. These are high-probability statements.

But we need to talk about a bigger category, which is...*In general, what is wisdom?* In verses 2-7, he gives a long definition of wisdom, but wisdom is hard to define. A lot of words are hard to define. Part of how I see my role is to try to define things for us. So, let me generally give you a definition of wisdom, and then I'll give you a biblical definition of wisdom.

The definition of *wisdom* in the world is skillful living. That makes sense. I mean, that *is* a wise person. It's not just that they know things. They are able to skillfully live. But there's worldly wisdom and there's godly wisdom. Those are different. So, we want to talk not just about being worldly wise but godly wise.

For example, I don't know if you've ever read *The Pilgrim's Progress*. I love that book. I recommend getting it on Audible and letting your kids listen to it with you. It's one of the most popular fiction books in human history. It was written by this guy named John Bunyan. (I'm telling you this for a reason.) He's in prison, and he's writing the story of the Christian life through metaphor.

The main character is this guy named Christian. Christian has this burden on his back, sin, and he doesn't know what to do with it. As the story goes, he meets his friend Evangelist. (Everything is very straightforward here.) Evangelist tells him how to get rid of his burden of sin, and he's so happy. Then he begins on this journey, the Christian life.

Do you know one of the first people he meets right after he meets Evangelist? You have to go read this. He meets Worldly Wiseman. The first person he meets is worldly wisdom. Worldly Wiseman is very sophisticated, very well dressed, and very well educated, and he tells Pilgrim not to worry about anything Mr. Evangelist told him.

He tells him there's a different way to get the burden off his back. He tells him he's too worried about the internal and not worried enough about the external and spends time telling him how, instead of worrying about the burden on his back, he could teach him how to live a life of ease and comfort.

So, what is godly wisdom? Here's my definition of *godly wisdom*: it's living out God's Word in God's world. Isn't that what we struggle with? How many of you know every Bible verse on marriage and your marriage is a wreck? You've read Ephesians 6. You're like, "I know what it says, and my kids are crazy. I've read the book of Proverbs, and we still spend way more than we make."

It's about God's Word, knowing what it says. Then you have to understand God's world, and then you have to understand how to live out God's Word in God's world. Guess what? A lot of people struggle with that. I can't tell you how many times I do premarital counseling with people, and they're like, "I have no idea how to have a Christian marriage." Why? Well, they've never seen it lived out.

We're in that time of year where everyone is trying to go, "How do we put Christ at the center of Christmas?" If someone says that to me, I'm betting there's a 99 percent chance they didn't grow up in a Christian home. They're like, "I know we should. I know what the Bible... I can't do it. How do I do it?"

There are two things I want you to understand about wisdom that'll impact this series. Wisdom is two things in the book of Proverbs. It's how to live God's Word in God's world. Here's the second one: How do I live in the gray when things are not black and white? Now, obviously, I'm a black-and-white guy. I'm like, "This is right. This is wrong. This is good. This is evil. This is godly. This is ungodly."

That's a lot of things, don't get me wrong. Maybe we would say *most* things are black and white, but the longer you live, the more gray you're going to realize certain areas of your life are. Everybody thinks they know exactly what they're going to do as a parent until they have kids. They're like, "Okay. It's a lot different. The idea of parenting, knowing exactly what I'm going to do, versus me and my spouse leading these kids in this time."

Wisdom is "What do I do when I don't have a Bible verse?" I'm not being heretical in saying this. There isn't a Bible verse for everything. Here's what sometimes happens. What do you do if you have two Bible verses that address the same issue but would make you do different things?

I've told some of you the story before of the dad... This is a true story. His rebellious son comes home to live with him and his wife, and he wakes up at 3:00 in the morning and hears the door open, and it's his son getting into a car with some people and leaving. He immediately goes, "What do I do?"

He said, "The first thing I thought of was the lost sheep. I thought, 'I've got to go after him.' The second thing I thought of was the father in the Prodigal Son story. 'No, I'll be here when he gets back.'" What do you do when you have two options? How do you uniquely love your spouse based on who you are in this moment? That's the need for wisdom.

Okay. In verses 2-7, we get the four components of wisdom. I'll just give them to you, and then I'll show them to you. They rise right out of the text. Wisdom is *intellectual*, *practical*, *moral*, and *spiritual*. You're going to see this rise right out of the text. Verse 2: "**To know wisdom...**" The first thing he talks about is the mind. Look. "**...and instruction** [teaching], **to understand words of insight...**"

Now, we all know this, but let me say it out loud. There's a difference between data and information. Information is when you gather data. There's a difference between information and knowledge, and then there's another differentiation between knowledge and wisdom.



Here's the problem in our society. We have more information than ever, and we make dumber decisions than ever. Have you noticed this? From what I could find this week, we're getting five times the amount of information that our parents got every day. Some people think (we don't know this for sure) the information overload is leading to our anxiety, because having a bunch of choices and not knowing what to do with them and being anxious are the exact same things.

We don't even know what to do with all this information. Do you guys remember COVID? (You know I have to bring up COVID every three or four services. Welcome.) During COVID, everybody started using the words *misinformation* and *disinformation*. While *that* was happening, do you remember how your aunt became an infectious disease expert overnight?

Then the Ukraine/Russia crisis happens, and your uncle becomes a foreign policy expert overnight, because there's so much information. We need to take information and turn it into knowledge. That is the purpose when the university system is acting rightly.

Think about someone who wants to be a doctor. Well, good luck. Say you get through medical school. Then you have to basically decide... There's just too much to know, so you're like, "Okay. I will devote the next five to eight years so I can be an ENT doctor." I mean, that's it. "I will carve out this little area, and I will take information and turn it into knowledge by God's grace."

But we know you need more than knowledge, because we watch very smart people do very stupid things. What's interesting is in the Bible, there's no connection between IQ and wisdom, which leads to the second thing. Wisdom is not just intellectual; wisdom is practical.

Look at verse 3. "***...to receive instruction...***" That's the mind. Here are the hands. "***...in wise dealing...***" The Christian faith is not just about what we believe; it's about how we behave. It's not just about learning; it's about living. A lot of times, Christians think, "I believe in Jesus." That's great. We'd also like you to live *for* Jesus, and if possible, we'd like you to live *like* Jesus.

This is why the number-one picture for wisdom... I gave you a definition: God's Word lived out in God's world. The number-one image in the Bible for wisdom is a path. That's why the most famous verse in Proverbs says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding, but in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

The imagery of the path is so powerful that Jesus picks it up. We may not have noticed it because in the Greek it's translated *way*. So he'll say, "Narrow is the way that leads to life, and few find it. Broad is the way that..." Any Jewish person in the first century would go, "That's the book of Proverbs."

So, part of what I want us to do in this series is genuinely ask and answer, if only in our own hearts and before the Lord, the question...*What path are we on...really?* The Bible teaches that it's not enough to make plans. That's what you do in your head. You have to have a path. That's what you do with your hands and your feet.

Here's the thing. I used to do a lot of premarital counseling, and here's what I know. Every couple plans to have a great marriage. No one goes, "You know what? We're going to have a terrible marriage. We're planning on it from day one." But then you watch their path, and you go, "If you're on your own device every night for the last two hours and you only rest together, but you never relate together, that's a path."

Everybody who's in the church plans, "Our kids are going to love the Lord, and we're going to be faithful. We're going to have a Christian family." Then you wake up one day, and your kids are all teenagers, and you're like, "What path are we on?" The thing is... You know this. If I said to you guys, "Hey, I'm headed to Tennessee right after service," but I get on 40 East... Some of you are not very directionally... That's going to take me toward the beach. Okay?

Here's the thing. If I get on 40 East... This is what some of us do. We get on 40 East. We go in the opposite direction. Then we pray about going 40 West, and we tell everybody we're going 40 West. Could you imagine? I call everyone. "I'm so excited to see you. It should just be a couple more hours." I'm never going to get there.

So, part of what wisdom literature does is it makes us ask the question...*What path are we on?* The temptation is for all of us to think, "I can head on a certain path and it not end up in the place it has led to for every person who has ever traveled that path." Only the path of purity leads to intimacy in marriage. Only the path of generosity leads to you owning stuff and stuff not owning you. Only the path of honesty and vulnerability leads to deep relationship.

Then he tells us it's not just intellectual and it's not just practical. I actually think the world could get there on those two. They could go, "I get it. I get it. That makes sense." You don't even need to know the Bible for that. Well, the last two are really important. It's that it's moral. Look at these words. Look at verse 3. "**...to receive instruction in wise dealing...**" Here it is, three words that speak of Christian ethics. "**...in righteousness, justice, and equity...**"

*Equity* has been captured by our culture. That word literally means a straightness or uprightness about your life. Here's what we're uniquely told. The proverbs and wisdom literature fit under the larger category in Christian theology called *Christian ethics*. You know this. It may not seem obvious in all your decision-making, but under all your decision-making is a value system, so you are inescapably a moral creature, unfortunately. There's no escaping it.

Every decision you make is moral in nature. We know we live in a moral universe, because the most painful things that happen to us are the failures of others toward us morally. That's why it takes forever for people to get over betrayal. Like, forever. This is why the things that bother us the most about ourselves, and maybe the things we wouldn't talk to anybody else about, is where we struggle morally.

Here's the other image. I want to give you images. In Proverbs is the image of a path, and it's the image that you're headed somewhere. The other image is that you're becoming a certain type of person. Years ago, I read this book by Jerry Bridges. You can read anything by Jerry Bridges. He's dead and with the Lord now. Everything he wrote was fantastic. He was very practical.

I don't remember what book it was, but I was reading one of his books. They say books don't change people's lives and paragraphs don't change people's lives; sentences do. I remember being in college. I must have been a junior or senior. I just read... It was so simple, but Jerry Bridges wrote, "You will one day be who you are now becoming."

Some of you are like, "That is the most obvious thing anyone has ever said," but to me, that is exactly both the hope and the warning of Proverbs. Wherever you are, that's where you start. The Jewish people looked at Proverbs as the training manual and textbook to raise up future leaders, and they knew if a person lived out and applied these proverbs by faith, it would completely transform their life, which leads to the fourth thing.

It's not just intellectual, practical, and moral but also spiritual. Verse 7: "***The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.***" This will be the first, certainly not the last, mention of God in the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs is a very God-centered view. Here's maybe one other way to think about wisdom. Wisdom is asking, "What is God's perspective on my life and my situation right now?"

Have you noticed that when something happens, an event happens, everybody has a perspective? When Duke and UNC play each other and one wins and one loses, both teams and fans have a perspective. When a presidential election comes and goes, everybody has a perspective.

Basically, part of how you're trying to get wisdom from God is you're saying something like, "Lord, I don't want to start with myself; I want to start with you. God, I want to get your perspective on my situation. I'm too temporary in my sight; you're eternal. I'm too sinful; you're sinless. Would you give me your perspective?"

The fear of the Lord is one of the ways God leads us. In the New Testament, we talk about being led by the Holy Spirit. Listen to this. God gives us an objective word and a subjective spirit to apply it to us. What I mean by that is... This is a scary thing to do, but you can try this. You just take God's objective Word, if you're a believer, and then you ask the Holy Spirit to help you personally apply it.

Say you're a wife and you say, "Okay. The Bible says to respect my husband." Well, you could try to figure out the Greek word for *respect* and the historical context or you could just say, "Lord, would you lead me? What does it mean to respect my husband based on who I am and who he is?"

A husband can say, "Okay. It says I'm supposed to lay my life down for my wife and sacrificially love her." Then, if you ask this question, "God, I want to get your perspective on our marriage and how I uniquely could do that for my wife," here's what's going to happen. Something is going to pop into your head, and it's going to be what you don't want to do. That's how you'll know it's from the Holy Spirit. You're like, "That's it. I don't want to do it. It must be from the Holy Spirit."

Lastly, guys, I want to talk about the four types of people wisdom interacts with. What I'm giving you guys, hopefully, is a framework for this whole book. Let me show you. In verses 4-7, we're introduced to four types of people. Well, three, actually, and then one more a little bit later.

**"...to give prudence to the simple..."** If you underline in your Bible, underline the word *simple*. **"...knowledge and discretion to the youth..."** *Simple* and *youth* are the same. **"...let the wise hear and increase in learning..."** You can underline *the wise*. That's the second category of people. **"...and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction."**

There's also a fourth person I'll introduce you to in a second called the *scoffer*. Here's the interesting thing. Anytime the church is gathered, like right now... What's hard about this sermon is some of you are very simple, some of you are very foolish, and others of you are very wise. It's hard to speak to all three.

So, let me just talk about each category. There's the simple, the fool, the wise, and the scoffer. (We'll get to the scoffer in a second.) The *simple*. Here's what *simple* means. The Hebrew word *simple* means uncommitted. It literally means, to pick up what I've been talking about, they have yet to choose a path.

Hear me say this. It is not a sin to be simple. Everybody comes into the world simple. They come into the world a newbie and a novice. It's the same idea of being innocent or being naïve. This is what parenting is. Parenting is raising children when they're young and simple, and you're trying to help them choose the path of wisdom, not the path of folly.

As you guys know, Dr. Mohler was here. I tried to spend as much time as I could with him the three days he was here. We talked about anything. I asked him questions the whole time, and we talked a lot about parenting. He basically said, "Kyle, the job of a parent is to build an unbelievable relationship with your kids." That's rule number one. I've told you

this before. You can have the best relationship with your kids of anybody on earth because they so want it.

He said the second thing is to have that relationship so they come to you and ask you all of the questions about life. He said the third thing is all you do is answer their questions in an age-appropriate way for them. This happened to me a few weeks ago. My son William, who's 10, plays soccer. I pick him up at night, and we have 20 minutes together in the car. It's really great. Sometimes we listen to music, and sometimes we talk.

He was tired, so we were just kind of sitting there in silence, and then out of nowhere he says, "Dad, why do we pay taxes?" I was like, "What?" This was a month ago. I was like, "Why did you ask that question?" He goes, "Because I'm seeing these advertisements that say Kamala taxes *this* and Trump taxes *this*." He says, "What are taxes, and why do we pay them?"

I started to talk about... We were actually driving on a road at the time, and I was explaining how things got paid for. It was a really sweet moment. I thought, "When things are working right, this is exactly how the world should work." The young people should ask the older generation how to learn and not be simple.

By the way, for each one of these there's one thing the Bible says to do for them. So, what does the Bible say to do for the simple? It says teach them. I don't know if you've ever noticed this. Our services, on average, go about 80 minutes long. Over half of the service (that's a lot of it) is given to the public teaching of the Word.

Some of you are simple, and you don't need to be simple any longer. The prerequisite to growing is being humble, so you just have to be humble and go, "I don't know what it means to be married. I don't know how to raise kids. I don't know how to manage finances. I don't know how to read my Bible." That's totally fine. You just want to be honest and go, "Guys, we all start that way. That's totally fine." And you want to find other people.

You grow by finding dimensions of your life you're simple in, and then you grow in that area, and it's usually what you're most interested to learn about. You can't make yourself interested in things. If you give a parenting book to a single guy in his 20s, he's going to be like, "What am I supposed to do with this?" But if you give a parenting book to somebody overwhelmed with their three kids, they will read it, and then they will read it again, and then they will underline it. You know what I'm saying?

Second, the *fool*. The fool is the person who has chosen the wrong path and knows it. I'm very concerned about this, because some of you are foolish. The most likely person to be foolish is somebody who grew up in a great church and with great parents. A lot of students and young people get inoculated with just enough Christianity, and here's what happens.

Here's another definition of wisdom. *Wisdom* is a way to live your life so it works well for you and everybody you know and love for the longest period of time possible. Well, guess what? There are not that many ways to design your life so it can work that way. A lot of times, people don't even realize what they've had the opportunity to grow up in.

Here's what it says. Let me give you a couple other proverbs about the fool. Here's another proverb about the fool: "The fool does not listen but only wants to share his opinion." The Greek word for *fool* is *Twitter*. I'm just kidding. The other thing about the fool... This is humbling for us, guys. This is another picture of the fool. "The fool sees danger coming but keeps going down the same path."

Usually, they think they're the exception to the rule. "I can get on *this* path that led to *this* negative place for everybody else, but somehow, I'm going to be the exception to this rule." Here's what's most sad about the fool. Once or twice in Proverbs it says about the fool, "The fool brings great shame to his mom and dad."

Some of you are being foolish, and it is breaking the hearts of the people around you. The word to the fool is to turn around. It's a hopeful word. The word to the fool is to repent. It's not too late. You can see danger. You can jump off that path. You can jump onto another path. You can head in the other direction.

That leads to the *scoffer*. Let me show you the scoffer. The scoffer is in chapter 1, verse 22. "***How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?***" Okay. What is this scoffer? The scoffer is the fool on steroids. The scoffer is somebody who is settled in their rebellion and recruiting others.

It's a small category of person, but they exist in every generation. They write books. They write blogs. They have podcasts. They have YouTube channels. Sometimes they're late-night talk show hosts. What's interesting is the scoffer, we're told, ridicules and mocks God, his Word, and his people.

Think about what was, at least for a while, called the *new atheist*. There were these four guys, including Christopher Hitchens and some others, and they wrote books. Here are the titles of a couple of their books: *The God Delusion* or *God Is Not Great*. I had my own experience with a scoffer. I was a brand-new believer, and I went to Elon University. I was simple, you could say. I was naïve.

I was like, "Oh, Elon is like a Christian school. It has a Christian heritage. I think I'll get a minor in religion." Massive mistake. So I go, and I'm like, "Oh, great." So I look, and I can't believe this. My freshman fall semester I could take New Testament 1. "I'm going to learn so much about the Bible." What I didn't realize was, for the next four months, the professor was going to try to undermine the confidence any students in his class had in Scripture.

By the way, this is something parents need to think about. The Bible says in Psalm 1 that the righteous person does not sit in the seat of scoffers. We obviously are not going to be able to put our kids in the seats of believers all the time, but we should not put our kids in the seats of teachers who are going to undermine the values and authority of Scripture.

That leads to the *wise*. I mentioned the wise. The wise person is the person who's headed on the right path and helping others. Now, here's the truth about us, guys. I wish I could say, "Some people are all wise, some people are all simple, and some people are all foolish." Am I the only one who would say I feel like all three are part of my life?

I'll tell you where you're wise. Here's the question you can ask to know if you're wise in an area. "Can I say to other people, 'Follow me as I follow Christ' in this area of my life?" Or here's a real "get to your heart." "Would I be okay if my kids lived this way in this area of my life?" You'll go, "Maybe I'm not as wise as I thought I was."

Some of us are wise in some areas, and if you're wise, you disciple others. Some of us are simple in some areas, and that's okay. Every time you enter a new life stage... You're like, "How do I be an empty nester?" Well, you're simple in that area. That's okay. You figure that out, like everybody else before you has. Then some of us are foolish.

Well, here's the controlling motivation under all this, and this is where we'll close. I've mentioned it one other time, but I want to talk about it one more time. Verse 7: "***The fear of the LORD...***" That phrase will be used 18 times in the book of Proverbs. "***...is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.***"

The introduction to Proverbs ends by telling us to fear the Lord. Now, can we just be honest? Most people, maybe even most Christians, do not naturally fear the Lord. We *should*. Sometimes we live like we are functional atheists. Here's what it means to fear the Lord. It means a couple of things.

First, it means I fear the right things. Again and again, the Bible says, "Do not fear." I think you know this. It's the number-one command in the Bible. The number-one command in the Bible (366 times in your Bible) is "Do not fear." Yet, at the same time, we are commanded to fear the Lord.

I think the problem in our lives, at least early on... Why do people do all of these foolish things? Why are we so worried about our kids in middle school, high school, and as they go off to college? You're like, "Dude, please don't fear man more than you fear the Lord. Please don't go off to college and let man be big and God be small in your life."

If you had to boil it all down, why do we fear the Lord? Whether you're a Christian or not a Christian, why do you fear the Lord? The answer, biblically, is very easy: because sin has consequences. That's it. Now, we know that because of what Jesus Christ did... If

you're a believer, he died in your place for your sins, and you are not going to have to experience the wrath of God because of what Jesus has done.

But nobody could look at their life or the life of other Christians who have gone before them and say, "There are not consequences for our sin." So, part of what you do is you humble yourself and say, "God, listen. I fear, even as a believer, what it would be like to live contrary to the way you're asking me to live."

This is why Jesus famously said in one of his most famous statements ever in John 14:6, "Guys, I am the way, I am the truth, and I am the life." Translation: "I am the path." The Bible says in Christ are all the treasures of wisdom. So, if you'll close your eyes and bow your head, I want us to go to Christ together and ask for wisdom.

James 1:5 says if any of us need wisdom... Some of you need wisdom. You need wisdom in your marriage. You need wisdom with an addiction. You need wisdom as you head into the holidays. You need wisdom with your parents or your kids. We just start by saying, "Lord, would you give us wisdom? Would you give us wisdom so we can multiply, so we can multiply the gospel and the mission of Christ all over the earth?"

I just want to give you a second to admit, if only to yourself and to the Lord... Is there an area of your life right now that you're simple in? Maybe you just say, "Lord, would you let me study your Word? Would you put someone in my life? I'm simple in this area, and I don't want to be simple." The simple need to be taught.

For others of you, are you on a foolish path? Maybe no one knows it but you. You've almost gotten caught, and you can see danger in the distance. The Lord right now is giving you an opportunity to say, "It's not too late." God loves when people repent. It's not too late to turn off that path.

Lord, would you raise up men and women, especially in the older generation in our church, to be wise sages, to invest in the young men and women? Lord, would this be a church where people can come and have their lives changed and transformed and then walk in the path of wisdom? We ask this in Christ's name, amen.