

# **A Letter to my son Gregory**

Chapter 3

Proverbs 1:1-6

How to learn and live the book of Proverbs.

JLS Paraphrase

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JLSParaphrase, A Letter to my Son  
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## Proverbs 1:1-4

Son,

Most of the commentators I have read on Proverbs agree that Solomon wrote many of the proverbs attributed to him, and the rest he collected from other sources. It doesn't really matter how many he wrote personally; what does matter is that they are included in the Scriptures for our admonition and benefit. There are precious treasures to be found in the pages of Proverbs, and as we study them together I hope you will make all of them your own. It will take time to acquire them, but the benefits are worth all the work.

All of the paragraphs in chapters 1-9 have been put into layout form, and each of those paragraphs will be dealt with separately. We will build a layout for you as the discussion of each particular paragraph progresses, and there will be a finished layout at the end of each completed discussion. The sequence should be self-explanatory; so, let's get right into the study.

<p><sup>1</sup>The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:</p>
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Verse 1 *"The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:"*

Gregory,

Solomon was the third king of Israel, and his father, David, was the second. I will not duplicate here what you learned in the chapters on Solomon's childhood and adulthood other than to say that Solomon was a great man who aspired to true greatness, yet in the end he lost everything he worked so hard to gain. Regardless of what Solomon was or what he became, he was a teacher of the truth. He was foolish enough not to follow his own teachings, but that does not invalidate the value of the truths he taught. I would admonish you to learn from both his successes and his failures. I have often said that it is unfortunate when I do not learn from others' mistakes, but it is unforgivable when I do not learn from my own. Son, please pay close attention to the lessons Solomon learned and benefit from them instead of having to go through the same school of hard knocks yourself. You will be much better off, and life will be so much easier for you. Now let's look at the first few instructions Solomon shared. I cannot overemphasize how important it is for you to understand them. You must if you are going to gain maximum benefit from Proverbs. Keep in mind that Proverbs is primarily a book about how you should relate everyone around you based upon your relationship with the Lord. Proverbs calls these people your neighbor.

The first six verses in chapter one comprise a single paragraph and contain four foundational steps you should follow in order to learn and live what Proverbs teaches. Solomon wrote the book, so he ought to know the best way to learning its truths. These steps are not only valid for learning Proverbs but are applicable for almost any field of endeavor. Pay close attention as we discuss these steps, because if you follow them properly and do what Proverbs teaches you, you will make great strides in becoming a wise and godly man. The four steps to learning can be briefly summarized as 1) to Know, 2) to Discern, 3) to Receive, and 4) to Give.

During this discussion you will see layouts of the Scripture. We will build them as we proceed. When reading them, keep in mind that they are intended to be read from left to right and from top to bottom just like you would a book. Reading them this way will sound exactly as it would if you were to read it directly from the New American Standard Version of the Bible.

## Step one: To Know

Learn WHAT an instruction is telling you to do

Proverbs 1:1-4

<sup>1</sup>The proverbs of Solomon  
the son of David, king of Israel:  
<sup>2</sup>To **KNOW** wisdom and instruction,

Verse 2A *"To know wisdom and instruction..."*

What does "Know" mean?

The word *"know"* in this phrase carries with it the idea of fully understanding what an instruction is telling you to do and how to carry it out correctly. Since this is the beginning stage in the learning process it is not important at this time to understand why an instruction was given or what obeying it will produce. The important thing to remember here is that you must learn a Scripture well enough to be able to perform it accurately and in the manner the author intended. With some things, it is not critical to understand everything an instruction tells you to do, but with others it is absolutely essential to follow the instructions precisely. For example, if you were to make a glass of lemonade by squeezing a lemon and adding sugar, you could easily sweeten it to taste. You don't need a recipe. But if you were going to make a batch of nitroglycerin, you would want to have every single step of the process written down and follow the instructions carefully and to the last detail. If you are not familiar with the instability of nitroglycerin you might ask, "Why is it so critically important to follow the directions so precisely?" The answer is quite simple. Nitroglycerin is an explosive. If you make one mistake, you may blow yourself into eternity. That doesn't sound like a very good idea. I am not recommending you make any of this stuff, but it is a very appropriate illustration.

Son, if I were to give you a map of California and ask you to drive from the Navy base in San Diego to your grandmother's home in Sun Valley, you would have to know what the symbols on the map mean in order for them to be useful to you. The map is comprised of visual symbols. A major freeway is one thickness of line, and a country road is another. Rivers and lakes are usually marked in blue, and north is always at the top of the map. What am I saying? Simply this: if you cannot understand what the map is conveying to you, you cannot accurately follow the map to your destination. You may finally get there by asking people for directions, but it is much easier and less nerve-racking to know what the symbols mean and follow them directly to your destination. If you do, you will enjoy your time with grandma instead of being frustrated by losing your way and missing out on the fellowship with family.

Whereas a map guides you through its symbols, lines, and numbers, Proverbs guides you through words, word pictures, and thoughts. It is important that you understand accurately what is really being said in each verse or paragraph so that you can know exactly how to follow the instructions given. In order to accomplish this task you must understand what each word means and what the writer intended for you to do. For example, Proverbs 26:4 states, *"Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him."* The very next verse states, *"Answer a fool as his folly deserves, lest he be wise in his own eyes."* Without any explanation as to what these verses are instructing you to do, it would seem that they are contradicting one another. My question to you is this: how would you perform these two instructions with any sense of certainty that you can accurately accomplish what

Solomon was telling you to do? If you are like most believers, you would have to say, "I don't know. Show me."

Consider some of the words used in these two verses. You can read a thorough discussion of the fool in a later part of this book, but for now let's take a briefly look at the word "fool." If a fool walked up to you and looked you square in the eye, how would you know that he was a fool? You have been instructed to respond to him, so it would certainly help to be able to recognize him for what he is. So, how would you define a fool? In this case, a summary of Strong's Concordance definition for this particular Hebrew word is *someone who is bull-headed, immature, and stubbornly insists upon doing whatever it is he has decided to do even if doing so ruins his life or causes his death*<sup>1</sup>. This person is highly opinionated, moves on emotions, and once he makes up his mind to do something, no one will change it. Next, what do the words "according to" mean? The first verse stays "do not answer" a fool according to his folly. This phrase is equivalent to saying "in the same way or from the same perspective." In other words, you are not to answer the fool in agreement with what he believes and asserts to be true. The second verse is much more straightforward. It says that you should answer him with good logic that supports what is morally, ethically, and legally right and fair instead of how the fool feels about a certain thing. With these thoughts in mind, let's put these two verses in today's vocabulary so that they make clear sense to both of us. As you read, think of the blue phrase in parenthesis as the single word "fool" and the words in magenta as the words "according to." or "as his folly deserves." Proverbs 26:4 could be stated, "When (someone who is bull-headed, immature, and stubbornly insists upon doing whatever it is he has decided to do even if doing so ruins his life or causes his death) tries to encourage you to accept his foolish words and ideas, don't encourage him by answering him in the same way or from the same perspective as he spoke to you, otherwise, you will be a fool just like him." With this kind of understanding, the verse becomes something you can accurately do. Verse 5 could be stated, "When (someone who is bull-headed, immature, and stubbornly insists upon doing whatever it is he has decided to do even if doing so ruins his life or causes his death) tries to get you to accept his foolish words and ideas, answer him in a manner that his foolishness deserves so that he doesn't walk away thinking he was right all the time." Having used the definitions in these verses, we can now replace the definition in blue with the single word "fool" and the words in magenta with "according to." or "as his folly deserves." Verse 4 would now read, "Don't answer a fool in the same way or from the same perspective as he would answer you, otherwise you will be a fool just like him." Verse 5 would read, "Answer a fool in a manner that his foolishness deserves so that he doesn't walk away thinking he was right all the time." From what you now know, you should be able to carry out these two instructions accurately as they were intended. Now that these verses make sense they do not appear to conflict with each other as they did before they were explained. My purpose in dissecting these two verses is simply to show you the importance of understanding what the words of an instruction are conveying. After doing so, the instruction becomes substantially more clear and doable.

## What does "Wisdom" mean?

Wisdom is the underlying goal of the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 9:10 states, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,...*" Most all of the commentators I have read on Proverbs agree that this is the key verse for the book of Proverbs. As you study, try to pay close attention to what a given passage teaches about wisdom. It is the thing above all else that you really need to find. Here in verse two the word "wisdom" includes both the knowledge and the skill to live a godly life.<sup>2</sup> As will be seen in the discussion of chapter two, wisdom is not merely good decision-making based upon trustworthy knowledge and sound, godly understanding. No, it is more than that. It is also the performing of that good decision you make based upon trustworthy knowledge and sound, godly understanding.

## What does “Instruction” mean?

Strong’s defines *instruction* as discipline, chastening, correction. The dictionary defines discipline as training that develops self-control, character, or orderliness and efficiency, chastening as to punish in order to correct or make better, and correction as to affect a change that corrects a mistake; change from wrong to right, or from abnormal to normal. So then, instruction’s goal is to 1) train young men so that they will have more self-control and character, 2) punish young men so that they will become better people, or 3) correct young men so that they will abandon wrong practices and choose to do the right things instead. It is obvious that all three aspects of instruction are designed to benefit his son even though it may be painful when they are applied.

The word *“instruction”* as used in this verse is referring to a direct or indirect teaching as to what you should do or not do. You see, even though some of the verses in Proverbs do not actually give a direct instruction, they are teaching what to do by inference. For example, Proverbs 25:11, *“Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances.”* Although it does not tell us the specific words to say, we are to choose our words carefully and make them the most appropriate for the particular occasion. Please don’t read a verse like this and pass over it as though it had nothing to do with you personally. You can benefit from all of what Proverbs teaches, and you will gain the most benefit by personalizing each verse. Remember, though, that the goal in step one of your study is to understand each instruction in Proverbs well enough to carry it out accurately. So, once you have mastered this step for a given verse or paragraph you need to progress to step two.

## Step Two: To Discern

### Learn WHY an instruction was given

Verse 2B *“to discern the sayings of understanding,”*

Proverbs 1:1-4

<sup>1</sup> The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:
<sup>2</sup> To <b>KNOW</b> wisdom and instruction,
To <b>DISCERN</b> the sayings of understanding,

What does the word “Discern” mean?

The word *“discern”* as used in this verse conveys the idea of gaining an understanding of both the personal benefits that come from performing an instruction and God’s purpose in giving it. Blind obedience can get a job done, but understanding the reason behind an instruction gives the doer more incentive for doing it. Consider Solomon’s warning in the early part of chapter seven where he warns against getting involved with an adulteress. Some folks might say, “Yeah, but you just don’t want us to have any fun.” I’ll admit that from a purely fleshly standpoint the initial involvement with an adulteress is a thrill, but after she gets her hooks in you, it isn’t fun any more. The end of the chapter talks about how she creates all sorts of hurts and heartaches for her sexual partner. Those include loss of property, all kinds of frustrations, and possibly a premature death. That is why Solomon

instructed his son to avoid this kind of woman. It must be remembered, though, that a proper understanding of why you should do a certain thing (step 2) can only come after you understand how to accurately carry it out that instruction (step 1).

Son, what I am asking you to do in this learning process is not necessarily easy. It takes time to gain a proper knowledge and understanding of Scripture. Don't be shocked, but it took about a year and a half before I started getting a good handle on what many of the verses in Proverbs were teaching. A year and a half later I had a better and more comprehensive understanding of what they were teaching and how they tied together. About three or four years after that I was more of how parts of the puzzle came together. What am I saying? It is simply that a valuable knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures takes time and effort. Most people are not disciplined enough nor determined enough to stick with a consistent study of the Scriptures longer than a month or two. Consequently they never gain a solid understanding of what a particular portion of Scripture teaches. Let me give you an example.

There are a couple of friends where I work who for some time have allowed me to bounce ideas off of them regarding what I had learned from Scripture. We fellowshiped together as often as we could, and most of the time it was centered around what the Lord had shown me about Proverbs or Ecclesiastes. One of those men once asked me if I would teach him to study like I do. I told him it would take months of doing the same thing over and over again in order to gain a good understanding, and he agreed that he would discipline himself to stay with it. After about two months he told me he was not learning as much as he would have liked, so he abandoned the method I showed him in favor of going to commentaries to learn what other people had to say about the passage he was studying. He learned a lot that way, but many months later I mentioned to him that I had learned the deepest things from Scripture by majoring on the basics. When I showed him what the Lord had given me as a result of thousands of hours of meditation and study, he agreed.

Studying Scripture in order to really know it is a lot of hard work, but the rewards are tremendous. Understanding the Bible is important, but learning it so that you can do what it teaches should be the key element of your study. Knowledge alone puffs up, but the kind of wisdom that comes from trustworthy knowledge and sound, godly understanding of the Scriptures is profitable in everything. True wisdom never makes a person proud because a truly wise man has learned humility whether or not he even realizes he possesses it. Scriptural knowledge alone, if not lived out, gives its owner reason to boast in what he knows, but most of the time this kind of knowledge is useless in the sense that it does not change his life or make him a better person in the sight God and men.

Always remember that understanding is based upon a knowledge of the subject at hand. What do I mean by this? Let me explain by sharing with you the learning process I went through to become a fairly confident mechanic when troubleshooting the production machines where I work. These machines are rather complicated pieces of equipment that are automated by the use of several computers called programmable logic controllers. These are merely fancy computers that make machine parts move. The machines I maintain have several of these devices communicating back and forth with each other, and they tell the electric motors, brakes, hydraulic and pneumatic cylinders what to do and when to do it. When I first started becoming familiar with the machines I had to learn what the individual parts were, what they were called, and what they did in a normal and correct cycle of the process. (This is the same as step one in Proverbs.) I wouldn't say it was an overwhelming task, but it was a big job. After learning how a machine was supposed to run, I then started to learn why a tire moved from one point in the process to another. (This is the same as step two in Proverbs.) One device had to tell the computer it was finished while another had to tell the next computer it was ready for the tire to move into the new position. When the machine stops running, it may be a device three or four processes ahead that actually caused the problem. Once I learned how the machine should operate if everything is working properly, I then had to learn what happens if it doesn't. Knowing the proper function of a device allows me to understand what happens if that device does not work properly. It was only after I had gained this kind of understanding that I could walk up to a machine and determine with any reasonable sense of confidence what was keeping the machine from running. You see, knowledge alone helped me understand what the machine was supposed to do if everything worked right, but it did little to help me understand what generated the problem when the machine didn't run right.

Now, you might say, "Well, what does fixing a machine have to do with understanding what the Scriptures are telling me to do?" Consider Proverbs 3:5-6, "*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.*" You can clearly see that the Lord is asking you to trust Him in everything that life dishes out to you. The question becomes, how do you respond when things really get tough and hope seems to vanish into thin air? Let me give you a personal example that happened to your mother and me last year. Remember, we are talking about understanding why an instruction is given and God's purpose behind giving it.

In March, 2000, we were part of a group from our church touring the Holy Land around Jerusalem. The first several days went quite well, but near the end of the tour your mom started getting seriously ill in a very short period of time. Within an hour or two she was in the emergency room in Jerusalem fighting for her very life. I watched as she lost all feeling in her face and arms and finally lost her ability to breathe. At one point she turned toward me and said, "I think I am going to die." What could I say in response, because it was certain that the doctors didn't know what was wrong with her? They were good doctors, but the symptoms were not the kind that gave the doctors clear indication of what was wrong with her. To make a long story short, I stood by her side, and for all I knew at the moment, I watched her die. At that instant in time I had lost my dearest friend in this world. Yet, the Lord gave me the sweetest peace I had ever experienced just at the moment I needed it. In my mind and heart the Lord had done well in taking her. As it turned out, the doctors whisked her away and put her on a ventilator. Praise the Lord, she made a full recovery, and I thank the Lord for giving her back to me with no lasting disabilities. But the thing I want to share with you here is the sweet peace I had when I thought I had lost your mother. It was several days later before I realized why I had that overwhelming sense of peace in such a difficult time. Let me explain.

Son, I have been studying Proverbs for almost 24 years now, and that period of time comprises somewhere between 10,000 and 15,000 hours of study and meditation. Somewhere near the middle of that time I was meditating upon all the verses in Proverbs that deal with the sovereignty of the Lord. By the way, there are enough verses on this subject to fill much of a page with just the references. It was during this study that I finally understood the kind of God the Lord really is. I had been saved for thirty-five years, but during all those years I really didn't know the Lord the way Romans 8:28 teaches. This verse states, "*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*" Up to that point in my life I had followed Him out of duty in an academic sort of way, but He had not been a personal God to me. I knew He was out there somewhere, but there was nothing personal about the relationship. It wasn't that I didn't want a close, personal relationship with my God; it was that I didn't know how to acquire it, and I didn't know anyone who could or would teach me. During this study of Proverbs I had literally immersed myself in Scripture, and to my surprise and pleasure the Lord allowed me to understand Romans 8:28. For the first time in my life it became clear to me that the Lord doesn't do anything to us, for us, or with us that is primarily intended for our hurt. No, each thing the Father allows to come upon us is designed expressly to bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ and ultimately to the Father. Let's say, though, that I get into a car wreck and lose my leg. Is that bad? Not necessarily. It is only bad if I perceive it to be bad. You see, if I know that everything the Lord does to or with me is designed to bring glory to His name, then I can and will see it as something good directly from the hand of the Lord even though it may be a painful experience. Gregory, when I finally understood this principle, I saw the Lord as a loving Lord, and it thoroughly changed my life. I told the Lord that if He took my wife to be with Him I would say He had done well. If He took you or your sister I would say He had done well. When He takes my life I can say He has done well. When I lost your mom in that emergency room in Jerusalem I didn't feel a need one time to pray and ask the Lord to do something different than what He had chosen for her. I didn't need to pray because in my mind and heart the Lord was not doing anything wrong. He knew what He was doing, and by His grace He would receive the glory no matter what the outcome for your mom. So you see, when I watched your mom die it was not the first time I had given her up to the Lord. I had won that battle years before. It was merely the first time I was forced to say goodbye to my best friend for the rest of my earthly life. The peace came from understanding the heart of God in dealing with His children, and when the test came I could continue to trust Him because of His loving heart. Isaiah 26:3 is certainly true when it states, "*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.*" KJV.

Son, I am living proof of this verse, and it is so sweet. Hopefully you will someday be able to experience this same kind of trust and see the deep peace it brings to your life, but it only comes through immersing yourself in the Scriptures.

Three weeks before we took the trip to Israel we were driving across town when a woman crossed a double yellow line to pass us while we were making a left hand turn. The impact caved in the door post on the driver's side of our car, but thank the Lord no one was hurt. The woman who hit us was all shook up and apologized profusely. I simply told her that it was only a car, and it could be replaced. As the Lord would have it, our car was damaged severely enough for the insurance company to render it totaled. Well, both mom and I liked the little car very much, so as part of the insurance settlement, we bought the car back for a small sum and had it repaired by a fellow who does this kind of work on the side. That was all well and good, but let me tell you another beautiful part of the whole story. When we arrived home from Israel the insurance company settled with us, and the money we received was enough to pay the last of the hospital bill our medical insurance would not cover for her stay over there in the hospital. You see, the Lord allowed us to get into that car wreck several weeks earlier so that there would be money available to pay the hospital bill for something that would take place later. The Lord did in fact work all things together for good from that wreck. He is indeed a loving and caring God. Can you see that understanding the Lord's intent behind the instruction in Romans 8:28 gave us the peace of heart we needed to actually trust Him in practice.

Now, let's get back to step two of our study. If you have learned a portion of Scripture well enough to accurately perform what it is instructing you to do but do not have a good understanding of why it was given, I encourage you to seek out that reason. Pray, and ask God to reveal it to you. Study the verse or verses in depth, ask questions about the text, find out what the individual words mean, and keep searching until you gain an understanding of the heart of God in the matter. Once you do, you will see how obeying the instruction will be good for you. When you come to this point, you are then ready to move to step three. This next step is probably the most important of the four steps because without practicing what you learn your life will never change. All of your knowledge and understanding will be a purely academic exercise ending in frustration.

## Step three: To Receive

### Learn HOW to live what you have learned

Proverbs 1:1-6

<sup>1</sup> The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:
<sup>2</sup> To <b>KNOW</b> wisdom and instruction,
To <b>DISCERN</b> the sayings of understanding,
<sup>3</sup> To <b>RECEIVE</b> instruction in

After learning how to accurately carry out a Scriptural instruction (step 1) and what benefits or detriments will result from doing or avoiding a certain thing (step 2), it is time to put what you have learned into practice. Acquiring knowledge and understanding is good, but they are of no real value until you start using them in everyday life. In the illustration above, it was not merely knowing what Romans 8:28 taught that brought the sweet peace. No, it was living out the understanding I had

gained about the heart of God and resting in His loving care. It was indeed a sweet experience to see God keep His word.

If you are willing to discipline yourself enough to study your Bible and spend the time it takes to understand it, you will gain valuable wisdom by which to conduct your life. Each time you learn something from the Scriptures and are sure you have a good grasp of what it is teaching, put it into practice immediately. You see, the first two steps in Solomon's order of learning are important, but they are merely head knowledge. They are, in essence, useless until you start living them. That is why verse three uses the word "receive." You must receive them into your life and put them into practice before they become of any real value to you. When you live out the Scriptures they will benefit you in the following four areas.

## Wise behavior (the KJV translates this as Wisdom)

(Making wise decisions and following through with them on a personal level for your own benefit)

Proverbs 1:1-6

<sup>1</sup>The proverbs of Solomon  
the son of David, king of Israel:

<sup>2</sup>To **KNOW** wisdom and instruction,

To **DISCERN** the sayings of understanding,

<sup>3</sup>To **RECEIVE** instruction in

**wise behavior,**  
righteousness,  
justice, and  
equity;

Verse 3 "To receive instruction in **wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity;**"

How do people conduct themselves in this life? Some are self-disciplined and careful; most, though, have little or no self-discipline and consequently live a life of no profit in the long run. Deep down inside I think most people would like to be wise, but they don't know how. In verse three Solomon explained that you are to practice what you know of the Scriptures in order to be a wise man. The meaning of the Hebrew word for "wisdom" KJV or "wise behavior" NASB used in verse three is not the same as the word for "wisdom" in verse two. In verse three the word more closely conforms to the concept of being prudent or circumspect. "Wise behavior" then is the practice of conducting yourself on a personal level in such a manner that you carefully consider all of your options, understand their consequences, and choose only those that will produce the best and most productive results.<sup>3</sup>

You are the one who for the most part will determine the outcome of your life. Unforeseen circumstances can take their toll and problems can hinder your progress through life, but most of the time you are the one who will determine how you will respond to difficult circumstances. Solomon stated in Ecclesiastes 9:11 that time and chance overtakes us all. Things can and will go wrong, but your attitude toward them is the thing that will determine how you will fare as a result of a particular situation. If you understand the heart of God, then you will come through each situation with a sweet

spirit. Then too, the choices you make in life set in motion actions and their corresponding results. This is called “sow and reap”. Normally, when you make good choices you reap good results in return, and when you make bad choices you reap the hurts, heartaches, and sorrow that are the normal and natural results of such choices. Never forget the warning in Galatians 6:7-8 which states, *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life.”*

Gregory, evaluate your own personal approach to life's situations. Do you carefully evaluate the choices you make? Do you look ahead to what those choices will produce for you tomorrow, next week, or several years from now? It is important for you to develop this kind of outlook, because what you do today will in one way or another affect you for the rest of your life. Take for example a young lady I heard about several years ago. She was a believer in Christ, but in a weak moment she agreed to go to a party with a somewhat wild young man. She knew better, but she wanted to have some fun. It seemed innocent enough, but during the party her date had too much alcohol to drink. On the drive home the guy wrecked the car, and the girl's face was cut up pretty badly. After her recovery, her face was scarred for life. Because a moment of desire was more important than principle, she had to pay for her poor decision the rest of her days here on earth. Her scars were external, but poor decisions can also produce internal hurts and scars as well. You have had some real hurts and disappointments, so you know this can happen. Please learn well what Proverbs has to teach you so that the same unnecessary hurts and heartaches never take their toll upon you again. You will learn that if you will honestly evaluate how your choices will affect you and choose to do only those that will be good for you both today and in the future, you will experience a good life free from the hurts that result from poor choices. This is what *“wise behavior”* is all about.

## Justice (Righteousness KJV)

(Being a man of legal and moral integrity on a personal level)

Proverbs 1:1-6

<sup>1</sup>The proverbs of Solomon  
the son of David, king of Israel:

<sup>2</sup>To **KNOW** wisdom and instruction,

To **DISCERN** the sayings of understanding,

<sup>3</sup>To **RECEIVE** instruction in

wise behavior,  
**righteousness**,  
justice, and  
equity;

As important as it is to discipline yourself to make wise decisions by evaluating everything you do on a personal level, it is equally as important for you to be a good man in every aspect of your life. If

you are to be a *"righteousness"* man you must [always discipline yourself to do what is right before both God and men](#). You alone know what kind of person you really are on the inside. Others see your attitude and actions by observing how you conduct yourself, but they can only make an educated guess as to what kind of person you really are on the inside. They may think they know you, but only God knows what you are both on the inside and the outside. One of the reasons Solomon wrote Proverbs was to help young men like you shape and mold your inner being into the kind that is genuinely humble, giving, and wise. This aspect of your walk through life is what integrity is all about. You see, what you do when no one is there to see you is the kind of person you really are. If you desire the wrong things when you are alone, sometime, somewhere when you are with other people you will desire, and ultimately do, the wrong thing and show others your true colors.

Son, how do people perceive you? More importantly, what does God see in you? Are you consistently the kind of person who desires to be and do good? If you are, it will be obvious to others when they regularly see you convey a good, kind, and loving attitude toward others. The question you need to ask yourself is this: "When others see me, do they see this kind of person, or do they see me as a hypocrite by professing to be a Christian while at the same time losing my temper, cursing, laughing at dirty jokes, watching immoral movies, indulging in immoral sexual activities or wishing I could?" Son, it matters how you are perceived by those around you, because what you are is a reflection upon the name and reputation of the Lord Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 6:20 states, *"For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."* KJV Since He has saved you from your sins, you should live as though you were not a slave to those sins any longer.

What does it mean to be a righteous person? First, it means that you have been born again by simple faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ when He died on the cross of Calvary and rose again from the grave. By being born again and accepting the free gift of eternal life through Christ you are made a new person. This makes you positionally a son of God. When you trusted Him as your Savior you were legally adopted into the family of God. You cannot perform any works to help Christ save you (see Ephesians 2:8-10). No one will get to heaven by good works, because the gift of salvation and eternal life are only gained by faith alone. Second, being righteous is the normal and consistent practice of doing good and avoiding sinful practices both privately and in public. This kind of conduct is based upon a sound fear of the Lord and is discussed more fully in the discussion of Prov. 1:7. Having integrity is also a necessary characteristic of a man who desires to be righteous. Dr. Stuart Custer shared with me a good definition of integrity. ["The word "integrity" comes from the word integer, the number one. It means that a person of integrity is not two-faced or double-minded. He is a person of truth and honesty. He says what he means and will keep his promises. This is what the Lord Jesus referred to when He said, "No man can serve two masters. . . You cannot serve God and mammon" \(Matt. 6:24\). The man of integrity is on God's side."](#) This is the kind of man who will always do right, and this is the attitude that will enable any man to be truly righteous.

Son, are you this kind of man on the inside? Only you really know. I hope and pray you will really desire and strive to become such a man. Immerse yourself in Scripture, and ask the Lord to show you from His Word how to be successful at it. If you really want this kind of life God will show you, and when you find it, you will experience life in a way you never thought possible. Living this kind of life is even sweeter than you can imagine.

## Justice (Judgment KJV)

(Being a man of integrity in your dealings with others)

Continued on the following page

## Proverbs 1:1-6

<sup>1</sup>The proverbs of Solomon  
the son of David, king of Israel:

<sup>2</sup>To **KNOW** wisdom and instruction,

To **DISCERN** the sayings of understanding,

<sup>3</sup>To **RECEIVE** instruction in

wise behavior,  
righteousness,  
**justice**, and  
equity;

## Justice

The word justice as used here means **to consistently do what is right and fair to others morally, ethically, legally, and spiritually**. It is important to make wise decisions and be a person of integrity on a personal level, but it is also necessary for people to be able to trust you publicly. They need to know that you will treat them right and fairly every time they have dealings with you. It is not enough to merely hold to the letter of the law in you dealings with people. No sir! You must also be fair with them ethically and spiritually. If you conduct yourself in this manner, you will never have trouble keeping the laws of the land, and the people you interact with will see you as an honest man of integrity they can trust.

I once knew a man in a former church who was a professed believer and ran a construction business. The structures he built were sound buildings and were done in a quality manner. Although he did good work, he cheated another man one time. Legally he was within the law, but morally, ethically, and spiritually he was expressly disobedient of the teachings of Scripture. Well, he got away with the cheating, and the other fellow spent a long time paying back his creditors for what the first man had taken from him unethically. I have seen this unjust man around town a few times since, and every time I see him the thought immediately pops into my mind, "I cannot trust this man. Don't have any dealings with him."

As you will see later in this commentary, the way to get things is by freely giving of what you have to those who need your help. The problem for many people with regard to justice is that their greed and selfishness take over, and they try to get at the moment what God would have given them in time and with His blessing if they had sought God's will and let Him provide. Matthew 6:33 states, *"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you."* The things God wants to give you will come to you if you seek His will and follow His way. Never forget Prov. 10:22, *"It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it."*

## Equity

(Dealing with everyone without bias or favoritism)

Proverbs 1:1-6

<sup>1</sup> The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:
<sup>2</sup> To <b>KNOW</b> wisdom and instruction,
To <b>DISCERN</b> the sayings of understanding,
<sup>3</sup> To <b>RECEIVE</b> instruction in
wise behavior, righteousness, justice, and <b>equity;</b>

## Equity

*“Equity”* simply means **freedom from bias or favoritism**.<sup>4</sup> Most people have prejudices. It is only natural, but when you were born again by faith in Christ you were changed. First Corinthians 5:17 states, *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”* Just because you did certain things before you were saved does not mean that you should continue doing those same things after you come to know Christ in salvation. If you were to ask a cross-section of unbelievers how a Christian should conduct himself and how he should treat people, they would expect a lot more of a Christian than most professing Christians expect of themselves.

If you treat people with respect and let them know that they have worth as an individual, they will accept you, and they will be more open when you try to speak with them about trusting Christ as Savior. This whole idea of treating people with worth can be summed up by James 2:8 where it states, *“... You shall love your neighbor as yourself...”* If you treat people in this manner they will sense that they are your equal, and you will be more effective in touching their lives for Christ.

To sum up the first three steps of learning and living Proverbs, you must 1) learn what an instruction is teaching so that you can perform it accurately, 2) gain a correct understanding of why the instruction was given and how performing it will affect your life for good, and 3) receive the truths of Proverbs into your life by living them and experiencing the good that comes from doing them. The four areas of conduct you must practice are shown in the chart below. Learning Proverbs by experiencing them on a private level will cause you to make wise decisions (*wise behavior*) and become a man of integrity (*righteousness*). Learning Proverbs by experience on a public level will also cause you to become a

man of integrity (*justice*) and treat people without bias or favoritism (*equity*). You see, both the private and public aspects of your life must be pure, clean, and good. You cannot be a good example to a lost and dying world unless people see your good and godly conduct in all of your daily activities. If you are not this kind of man, you may fool people for awhile, but sooner or later the real you will surface, and people will see you for what you really are.

Here is verse three in a nutshell and shows how you should conduct yourself.

Privately - on the inside	Publicly - on the outside
1. Make wise decisions ( <i>wise behavior</i> )	3. Be a man of integrity ( <i>Justice</i> )
2. Be a man of moral integrity ( <i>righteousness</i> )	4. Treat all men without bias or favoritism ( <i>Equity</i> )

## Step Four: To Give

### Recognize WHO to help and how to help them

Proverbs 1:1-6

<sup>1</sup>The proverbs of Solomon  
the son of David, king of Israel:

<sup>2</sup>To **KNOW** wisdom and instruction,

To **DISCERN** the sayings of understanding,

<sup>3</sup>To **RECEIVE** instruction in

wise behavior,  
righteousness,  
justice, and  
equity;

<sup>4</sup>To **GIVE** **prudence**  
to the **naïve**,

The last of Solomon's four steps is to "give." You might say, "What in the world do you mean? What am I to give, and to whom am I to give it?" I'm glad you asked. In this verse the word "give" means to share with others the things you have learned and the blessings you have experienced from practicing Proverbs. This gives them the opportunity to experience the same blessings as well. When you practice what Proverbs teaches, you will learn many valuable lessons and gain the wisdom to make good and profitable decisions that bring about good and successful results. You will also gain a great deal of peace and contentment. People who know nothing about what you are experiencing need to

be shown how they too can experience these blessings. In essence, you are to be giving of yourself by investing your life in the lives of others. This really benefits the body of believers.

Let's assume that you desire to teach someone what you have learned, but you don't know who to help. Proverbs clearly shows you. Verse four states that there are basically two types of people who need the help you can give. The first group consists of those who are "naïve." These folks need to learn how to become prudent. The second group is the "youth." These are those who are immature and need to learn how to conduct themselves in a manner that produces good and lasting results. These young people need to learn knowledge, but knowledge alone is dangerous for a young person. They need to temper that knowledge with good decision-making ability. Our generation is a generation of knowledge and scientific discoveries. The average high school student knows a great deal of facts, but they are not being taught right from wrong, good decisions from poor ones. Consequently they make many poor and costly choices.

In any study it helps to understand the meaning of the words being used. Before this study I did not know what it meant to be naive or prudent. Maybe you are like I was, so let's stop here and do a brief study of what characterizes a naive and a prudent person and see how they approach choices in life. Afterward, we will sum up step four and make application.

## Naïve

Exactly what does it mean to be naïve? Would you recognize this kind of person if he were to associate with you? Let me say from the start that a "naïve" person is not necessarily a bad or evil person. No, he is simply [one who seldom if ever seriously considers the cost or consequences of the thing he chooses to do or say](#)<sup>5</sup>. He is not aware of nor does he care about what will happen to him after he does what he has decided to do. Consequently, he makes many foolish and costly choices and then has to suffer the consequences. When he makes a poor decision and is punished for it, he wonders why he is being punished since he meant no harm in what he did.

I once saw a newspaper article about a man in California who wanted desperately to fly. On July 2nd, 1982, Larry Walters tied 42 helium-filled balloons to a Sears lawn chair in the backyard of his girlfriend's house in San Pedro, California. He had decided to take a BB gun along so he could shoot enough balloons to enable him to settle to the ground when he was ready to land. Well to say the least, things didn't work out like he had planned. When he filled the balloons the chair was tied to a car bumper, and when he severed the rope there was much more lift from the balloons than he had figured. He was said to have ascended at 1,000 feet per minute and stopped rising at approximately 16,000 feet in altitude. He supposedly shot some of the balloons to descend, but he dropped the gun. Somehow he got back on the ground without serious injury, but he had to pay a hefty fine for flying his "aircraft" without FAA approval<sup>AA</sup>. That little stunt could have cost him his life. Understand though, he didn't fly the chair because he was a bad person. No, he flew it because he was naïve enough to think it would work.

A simple example of a naïve young person is the guy who says, "I'm tired of living under my parents' rules. I going to join the marines and get away from all of those rules." Yeah, right!

A naïve parent may send his or her child to a state school where the professors do their best to destroy the faith of anyone who claims to be a Christian. Then when the young person comes home from school and tells his parents he doesn't believe in the Bible and Jesus Christ any more, they are shocked at how something like this could have happened. In essence, the parents were not prudent enough to check out the school before sending their child there. They would have been much safer sending their child to a Christian college or university.

Being naïve could be something as simple as dropping out of high school, marrying the wrong woman thinking life will be a fairy tale experience, or getting into debt so far you can't see your way out. There are so many ways in which a naïve man can show his true colors. The important thing to remember here is that the "naïve" man for whatever reason he chooses [does not weigh the cost or consequences of the decision he is about to make](#).

## Prudent

What does it mean to be prudent? Can you define the word? To be quite frank, I couldn't do so before this study. A *"prudent"* man is simply **someone who carefully evaluates the cost or consequences of each choice he makes, and if that choice will produce something good he proceeds. If it will produce undesirable results, be costly, or bring about punishment he refrains.**<sup>6</sup> This process of evaluating choices is a good safeguard and shows a wise approach to life.

To be prudent you must approach every decision in life with the same scrutiny. Always remember that it is not wise to be prudent in one area and foolish or naïve in another. No, you must work at being prudent in every area of your life no matter how small or insignificant the decision may be. It just makes good sense to do so.

## Prudent versus Naive

There are a lot of parallel comparisons in Proverbs. Some are direct parallels where similar things are being compared. Others are inverse parallels where opposites are being compared. Most, if not all, of the comparisons between the prudent and the naïve are inverse parallels. We have defined a prudent and a naïve man in the paragraphs above, so let's see from Proverbs how they compare to each other. We will look at the aspect of being naïve first, prudent second, and then we will compare the two in chart form.

## The Naïve man in Proverbs:

Prov. 14:15 states, *"The naïve believes everything, but the prudent man considers his steps."* As a result, he says and does many things that come back to haunt or hurt him later, and he makes many poor and costly choices. In the end, he has to suffer the undesirable consequences that are the natural result of his poor choices. Prov. 22:3, *"The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, but the naïve go on, and are punished for it."* Prov. 27:12, *"A prudent man sees evil and hides himself, the naïve proceed and pay the penalty."* Prov. 14:18, *"The naïve inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge."* Take, for example, Prov. 7:6-23 where a young man lacking sense chooses to indulge in an illicit sexual relationship with another man's wife. He did not set out intending to be wicked or destructive. No, he was merely looking for a good time. It appeared thrilling to him, so without thinking the whole thing through he went with her. What he did not know was that his little fling would quite likely cost him his life. He could have caught a terrible disease or been killed by a jealous husband. At any rate, a fling like this could very likely turn into something very, very ugly. This kind of thing happens to those who simply don't consider the end results of what they are about to do. They merely do what they want and then pay the penalty later. You see, the naïve man makes many foolish choices that bring undesirable results, yet that does not necessarily make him a fool. A fool is foolish, but not all foolish people are fools. So, as you can see, the naïve man is someone who could really learn and benefit from what you are learning from Proverbs about godly living, and he is the one Solomon says you are to seek to help. Once you start living the instructions in Proverbs and gain a knowledge of the good that comes from doing so, be looking for people who can benefit from what you have learned, and share it with them if they are willing to learn.

## The prudent man in Proverbs:

The prudent man is different from the naïve in that he carefully considers the consequences of what he is about to do or say. Prov. 14:15, *"The naïve believes everything, but the prudent man considers his steps."* If the results are going to be good he proceeds, but if they are going to hurt him or cost him unnecessarily, he will refrain from doing that thing. Prov. 22:3, *"The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, but the naïve go on, and are punished for it."* Prov. 27:12, *"A prudent man sees evil and hides himself, the naïve proceed and pay the penalty."* Therefore, the prudent man saves himself from most

of the hurts and heartaches that come upon the naive man. Prov. 14:18, *“The naive inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.”* Once a man is able to evaluate his choices in this manner he is well on the road to becoming a wise man.

## The Prudent versus Fool:

The fool will be discussed when we look at Prov. 1:7, but it would be good here to take a brief look at the fool with reference to both the naive and the prudent man. Most all of the verses in Proverbs dealing with the prudent and the fool are inverse parallels (or opposites) just like those comparing the naive and the prudent. There are three primary definitions for a *“fool”* in Proverbs, but the most prominent definition is *someone who is bull-headed, immature and unwilling to change his mind once he has made a decision, even if following through with that decision will ruin his life or cause his death.*<sup>4</sup> Whereas a naive man acts out of ignorance and apathy, the fool acts out of confidence that he is right. After all, his opinion, as you will see in a later chapter, is the only thing that matters to him. Be that as it may, how does a fool compare to a prudent man?

1) The fool’s attitude is such that he encourages others to do whatever they want while the prudent man encourages folks to use caution and weigh the results of each thing he does; Prov. 12:23 states, *“A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims folly.”*

2) A fool acts out his own perverted attitudes and beliefs while the prudent man wants to know more about his choices; Prov. 14:8, *“The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way, but the folly of fools is deceit.”*

3) The fool does things that display his undisciplined and ignorant ideas while the prudent man acts and makes decisions based upon trustworthy knowledge and sound, godly understanding; Prov. 13:16, *“Every prudent man acts with knowledge, but a fool displays folly.”*

4) A fool will not change his mind because he will not accept either discipline or instruction while the prudent man appreciates both discipline and instruction; Prov. 15:5, *“A fool rejects his father’s discipline, but he who regards reproof is prudent.”*

5) After a fool does something stupid and is faced with the penalty, he loudly lets everyone know how unfairly he has been treated while the prudent man keeps quiet when he has been dishonored; Prov. 12:16, *“A fool’s vexation is known at once, but a prudent man conceals dishonor.”*

## Prudent versus Naive versus a Fool:

I don’t want to belabor comparisons here, but it is good to be able to compare these three types of people. The naive man doesn’t understand the results of what he is about to do, nor does he care; the fool thinks he is right, so he will do a certain thing even if it costs him his life; but the prudent man wants to know all about the opportunity at hand so that he can use trustworthy knowledge and sound, godly understanding to decide whether to proceed or refrain.

Once you start practicing the truths of Proverbs you will discover how good they are, and you will experience the sweet blessings that come your way. As a result, you will have the resources to guide the naive man into becoming prudent. You can help change the naive man, but there is no hope whatsoever of changing a fool. Proverbs 27:22 states, *“Though you pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him.”* Once he makes up his mind to do something he will not change it even if he dies trying to fulfill his desire.

The following charts show the actions and/or attitudes of these three types of people. The first chart shows general principles that have been condensed in order to give a visual representation of how these three types of people compare. The second chart contains verses with references to one or more of the three types of persons.

General principles:

Naive	Fool	Prudent
Acts out of ignorance	Acts out of arrogance	Evaluates consequences before proceeding
Is punished, but may learn from it	Is punished and never learns from it	Learns beforehand and avoids the punishment
Makes friends with whoever happens to come along	Makes close friends only with fools like himself	Makes wise men his close friends
Is punished and regrets	Is punished and strikes back	Avoids punishment
Doesn't see the danger ahead	Confident he can avoid the danger ahead	Refrains in order to avoid the danger
Believes everything	Believes his opinion is right	Seeks sound sources to learn what is right
If disciplined he may learn to avoid being caught	Rejects discipline	Appreciates discipline and learns from it.
Will die prematurely	Will die prematurely	Will live a long life
Complacent	Angry	Patient
Impatient	Impatient	Can wait

Scriptural principles:

Reference	Prudent	Naive	Fool
Pr 14:15	Evaluates his choices	Believes everything	
Pr 8:5		Instructed to discern prudence	Encouraged to discern wisdom
Pr 22:3	Sees evil ahead and hides himself	Proceeds and is punished	
Pr 27:12	Sees evil ahead and hides himself	Proceeds and pays the penalty	
Prov 14:18	Crowned with knowledge	Inherits folly	
Prov 18:15	Acquires knowledge		
Prov 12:16	Conceals his shame when dishonored		Shows his frustration immediately
Prov 12:23	Conceals knowledge		Proclaims folly
Prov 13:16	Acts with knowledge		Displays folly
Prov 14:8	Understands his way		Is deceived about his way
Prov 15:5	Values discipline and reproof		Rejects his father's discipline
Prov 17:28			If he keeps quiet, he appears to be prudent

Now that you have a reasonable understanding of how a naive man makes choices, let's assume for the moment that you want to help him become prudent. How would you accomplish this task? Let me use an example from Scripture to make the application practical. Please allow me to use this illustration for naive women even though the text calls them foolish. Remember that I stated earlier in this discussion that a fool is foolish, but not all foolish people are necessarily fools. Naive men are foolish, but the one distinguishing characteristic of a fool above all others is that he completely rejects God. The naive man, on the other hand, could take God or leave him. He just doesn't care. So, if you think of a naive man as being foolish in his actions or words, this illustration fits the bill well.

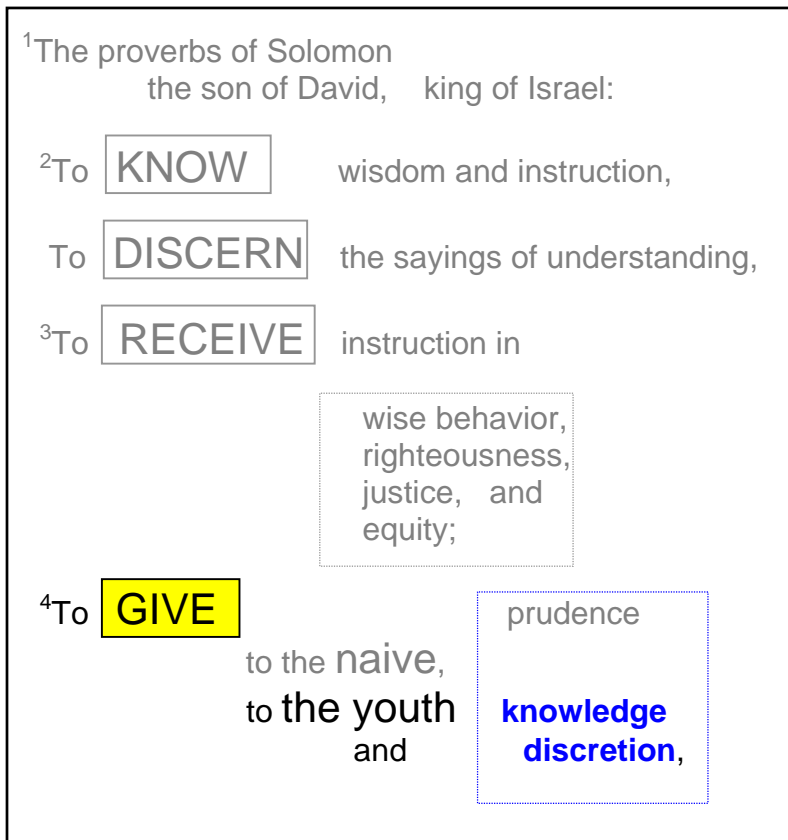
In Matt. 25:1-13 Christ states, *"<sup>1</sup> Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> And five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. <sup>3</sup> For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, <sup>4</sup> but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. <sup>6</sup> But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' <sup>7</sup> Then all those virgins rose, and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> And the foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' <sup>9</sup> But the prudent answered, saying, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' <sup>10</sup> And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. <sup>11</sup> And later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' <sup>12</sup> But he answered and said, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' <sup>13</sup> Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour NASB (KJV adds -- wherein the Son of man cometh)"*

Notice that the main difference between the prudent and the naive was planning. The prudent evaluated what they would need to keep their lanterns lit even if the bridegroom waited until morning to arrive. They took extra oil just in case, and it saved them from disaster. Those women who were naive (or foolish) had not even consider the possibility that they might run out of oil.

Your job, as explained in Proverbs, is to help people who are naïve learn to wisely evaluate the decisions they face. Teach them the four step to learning and living Proverbs. By using these steps they will learn to consider all that could or would go wrong and what benefits they would gain if they proceed or refrain. Teach them to start with small decisions and use those successes to work up to the bigger ones. As they succeed in the smaller decisions they will gain confidence that their decision-making ability will work well in the more important decisions as well. Since you will have gained the knowledge and experience by following the first three steps taught by Solomon, you should be well-equipped to fulfil the task of a teacher in step four. The only thing stopping you is your desire and the self-discipline to do it.

## The Youth

Proverbs 1:1-6



Having discussed the naive and prudent man, let's now look at the other type person you are to help if you are going to follow Solomon's advice in step four. The word "youth" in this verse refers to **someone who is young enough that he or she has not yet acquired the maturity or ability to make good decisions that produce good and successful results**. The youth who need your help are not necessarily people who are already in trouble or engrossed with evil; they merely need sound guidance before they make a mess of their lives. Verse four states that you are to teach them "knowledge." You might say, "Well, they go to school don't they? What more do they need to know?" Yes they do go to school, but

if they are enrolled in our public schools they are not taught right from wrong, good from bad. When you see a youth who needs your help you are to teach him the knowledge he will need to make good decisions. But remember, knowledge alone is dangerous for a young person. He also needs to be able to make good and profitable decisions based upon the trustworthy knowledge he gains.

Let me give you an example. If a youth learns all about the act of sexual intercourse in school, he might venture to experience it with some young girl before marriage. If all he is taught is how to perform the act, he may not be aware of the moral or medical implications that would otherwise cause him to refrain and save himself for his future mate. So, he does need to be taught knowledge, but he also needs to be taught *“discretion.”* This is [the ability to understand when a thing is good or bad and using this understanding, know how to make good decisions that produce good and successful results](#). Once they know right from wrong, good from bad, they need to learn how to best use that knowledge to make good decisions. Self-discipline plays a big part in the process of learning discretion by a young person, and your job is to teach them how to do this so that it becomes a normal and natural part of their manner of living.

## How to affect others for good

Having learned to accurately live out the Scriptures and having experienced the good that comes from living them, you are ready to start investing yourself in the lives of other people. At this point you are ready to start practicing step four of Solomon’s four steps in learning and living Proverbs. In order to get where you are now you went through several stages of progress, even if you didn’t realize it. First, you learned accurately what was expected of you. You learned exactly how to accomplish what each Scriptural instruction was telling you to do. Therefore, you can no longer plead ignorance if you don’t do what a Scripture instructs you to do. Second, you invested enough time studying and meditating upon those verses that you came to understand the heart of God behind those verses. You now understood that God does not do anything to us, for us, or with us that is primarily intended for our hurt. On the contrary, everything He does is designed for the express purpose of bringing glory to His name. By now you also understand the good that comes from doing what you should and the hurts you will avoid by abstaining from what you shouldn’t do. Third and finally, armed with this knowledge and understanding, you put the verses into practice by living them. This is where the rubber meets the road. Undoubtedly, you have experienced many good things, and you saw how you avoided difficult or costly decisions by following biblical principles. So, how do you teach a naive person or the youth to be prudent. Lets look at them step by step

1. If he has never trusted Jesus Christ as personal Savior by faith alone, you need to teach him how to trust Christ as his own Lord and Savior. No one can be truly prudent until he knows Christ, has a proper fear of the Lord, and has assurance that heaven is his home. Anything short of this causes decisions to be clouded with doubts and questions that hamper a really good choice in the decision-making process.

2. Show him verses from Scripture that teach right from wrong, good from bad. This step alone could save him from a multitude of hurts. Teach him accurately what the verses are telling him to do, and encourage him to start doing them right away.

3. Teach him through verses of Scripture why things are right or wrong, good or bad. Blind obedience alone is not enough to last through really tough times when a person starts to question what he or she really believes. Each person must cultivate his own convictions, not adopt the convictions of his parents or someone else he knows. The only safe way to approach the matter of convictions is to settle the matter before the test comes along. Otherwise, he could be swayed one way or another when a difficult test surfaces.

4. Teach him to carefully discern right from wrong and understand the consequences of choosing wrong. It is not enough to understand the fact that things will go well if you do right, but he needs to fully understand that he could end up being seriously hurt or even killed if he makes bad choices in matters that really make a difference. Remember, though, that he needs to use the same evaluation process on the little decisions as well as the big ones, because if he is not careful he will establish a pattern in little things that will end up adversely affecting his decision-making in the major things.

5. Encourage him to discipline himself by making good choices based upon what he has learned up to now. Knowledge and understanding are useless unless they are put into practice. It works the same for anyone who would learn and do the first three steps in Solomon's four steps of learning and living Proverbs. In helping other people you are merely duplicating in them what you went through to become one who could genuinely help others attain godliness. Try to remember the struggles you experienced while you were learning to discipline yourself to do what Solomon taught you. The people you will attempt to help will experience much of the same struggles, so encourage them. You have not only experienced the blessings from the Lord, but you will know what they are going through when they face struggles.

6. Encourage him to share his successes with you. If he follows these steps, he will see successes, and you will be encouraged to help him even more.

7. Encourage him to find someone else who needs what he has learned, and get him started teaching others as soon as they are ready. You will be there to help him when he has questions about the best way to share knowledge and understanding with these new people. Before long, he will become what you are, and the process will start all over again with a new generation of believers.

So, let's condense these seven steps.

1. Get him saved and free from doubts about their salvation.
2. Teach him right from wrong and what produces good results.
3. Teach him why a thing is right or wrong and what produces good results.
4. Teach him how to evaluate choices based upon what is right or wrong.
5. Encourage him to use self-discipline in order to practice what you have taught him.
6. Encourage him to share his successes with you as they occur.
7. Encourage him to become the teacher and do for others what you have done for him.

In conclusion:

We have now finished the first four verses of Proverbs chapter one, but there are two more verses that together with the first four comprise the first paragraph of chapter one. Before we discuss them, let's quickly review what we have learned thus far. We have seen that there are four steps to follow in learning and living the things taught in Proverbs. They are:

- 1) **to know**—that is, learning an instruction well enough that you can perform it accurately;
- 2) **to discern**—that is, to gain an accurate understanding of why a verse or verses were given and what God intended to accomplish in and through you as you obey them;
- 3) **to receive**—that is, to put what you have learned into practice by living it day after day. It is here that you begin to experience the blessings that come from faithful obedience to God's Word; and
- 4) **to give**—that is, to share what you have learned and experienced by teaching the youth and naive people the process of becoming wise and prudent like you so that they too will make good decisions that produce beneficial results both today and in the future. Then after you have taught them, encourage them to become a teacher by helping someone else gain what they have learned.

## Verses 5 and 6

### The attitude that breeds learning

Proverbs 1:5-6

<sup>5</sup> A WISE MAN	will HEAR and INCREASE IN LEARNING,
and	
A MAN OF UNDERSTANDING	will ACQUIRE WISE COUNSEL,

6to UNDERSTAND

a proverb and  
a figure,  
the words of the wise  
and their riddles.

It is interesting to note that for a person to want to be wise shows some wisdom, and it takes some understanding to know to search for understanding. Therefore, the man discussed here is not necessarily in possession of all these characteristics but desires to acquire them. Proverbs 4:7-9 states, *"The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding. Prize her, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a garland of grace; she will present you with a crown of beauty."*

Verse 5a *"A wise man will hear and increase in learning,"*

This is the key verse for Proverbs 1:1-6 and establishes the attitude necessary for learning the truths contained in the book, or any other portion of Scripture for that matter. In order to understand this verse it is first necessary to define both the *"wise man"* and the *"man of understanding."* The word for *"wise man"* in this verse refers to *one who is skillful in technical work, able to make good decisions about moral, ethical and personal matters, prudent, and shrewd in all his dealings, all of which produce the most successful results.*<sup>7</sup> This man has learned the knowledge and understanding he needs and has honed the skills he possess until he is able to bring about the best and most successful results from every decision he makes and every action he performs in every area of life and practice. Oh, that doesn't mean he doesn't make any mistakes. No, but his normal daily approach to life is one of a person who is in control because he has the ability to make good and productive decisions based upon trustworthy knowledge and sound, godly understanding.

Notice the outlook of the man who desires to be wise. He is always listening for more knowledge and understanding so that he can learn from it. This is what I call **passive learning**. He is ready to

learn if the knowledge comes to him. This kind of attitude reminds me of many people in our churches these days. They come to hear what the preacher or teacher has to say hoping to learn from them, but when they walk out the doors of the church their seeking process ceases. They simply do not want to go to the work of getting knowledge and understanding by searching for it themselves, and their Bibles collect dust all week. They simply will not put forth the effort to find knowledge and understanding on their own.

Verse 5b *"and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, ..."*

Now, let's look at the *"man of understanding"*. Here is one who **has discernment, insight, and good understanding of what is required of him if he is to reach the goal of becoming truly wise.**<sup>8</sup> I say this because unlike the man who seeks knowledge in a passive manner, this man searches for wisdom through his own energies. He searches for and finds reliable resources. These will include seeking counsel from the Bible, from wise men, from good books, from nature, etc. The main difference here is that he has gone beyond passive learning and into the realm of **active learning**. It takes a lot of hard work and discipline to gain the kind of knowledge and understanding that brings real wisdom, but every bit of the effort is worth the tremendous results that come in return. The man who practices an active search for wisdom will eventually reach the goal of becoming a wise counselor. The word *"wise counsel"* as used in this verse refers to **the ability to counsel and guide others by the use of good reason and discretion.**<sup>9</sup> This is the ultimate goal, because when you can counsel someone else in this manner you have all the resources needed to counsel and advise yourself with good discretion. You see, if you are not living what you are sharing as counsel to others, you certainly don't have any business counseling anyone. When we get to Proverbs chapter two you will again see this idea of passive and active searching for truth.

Do you desire to be a wise man? Do you want it badly enough to work for it? If you answered yes, then you have shown wisdom in desiring it. You see, if you really want to be wise, you show that you possess at least some wisdom. Consider Proverbs 4:7 where it states, *"The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding."* This is the verse that generated my study of Proverbs and whose meaning eluded me for thirteen plus years, that is, until the writing of this portion of the commentary. You see, you have to begin your search for wisdom and understanding somewhere, but the desire and self-discipline to want it is the initial wisdom that will eventually lead you to the full stature of being a wise man. If this verse were to be reworded, I believe it would read something like this: "The beginning of wisdom is having the desire and self-discipline to search for her however and wherever necessary so that you can become a really wise man. As you search for her, be sure to grasp all the understanding that comes your way so that you will be fully prepared to be and act like a truly wise man." That is a mouthful, isn't it? Yet you can become this man if you desire it with all your heart. Remember, though, that it may take years to get there. Even so, all the work is worth the effort.

Verse 6 *"to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles."*

<sup>5</sup> A WISE MAN	will HEAR and INCREASE IN LEARNING,
and	
A MAN OF UNDERSTANDING	will ACQUIRE WISE COUNSEL,

<sup>6</sup>to UNDERSTAND

a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles.
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Okay, we've discussed the attitude necessary to *"increase in learning"* and *"acquire wise counsel,"* but what is the reason for doing so? Verse six tells us. By the way, did you notice that verse six is a continuation of verse five. The thoughts of both verses run together to form one sentence. Notice the first two words in verse six, *"to understand."* These are the key words for the paragraph and are set in a solid red box. Both the NASB and the KJV use these words, but I like the wording in the Spanish Bible much better. It says *"in order to understand."* You might say, "Well, what's the difference." The English version reads, *"A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles."* But the Spanish reading is much more clear. Let's add the words *"in order"* to the English reading, and it reads like this: *"A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, in order to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles."* To make it even more clear it could rightfully be stated, *"A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, in order to understand all that follows in the book of Proverbs."* Yes, this is the reason for a passive and active search for wisdom. That's right. The goal is to understand all of what Solomon and the others contributors of Proverbs were trying to teach you. It is obvious that Solomon and the other writers really wanted us to learn what they shared, but understanding doesn't come any other way than by study, meditation, and plain old hard work. If you will pursue wisdom in this way you will surely find her.

What kind of things will you learn from your study of Proverbs? There are two general categories of instructions in Proverbs that we need to examine. See next page.

a proverb and a figure, ..... the words of the wise and their riddles.
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First, there are *proverbs*. These are condensed, to-the-point sayings that carry a truth to be learned. Many of the verses in the book of Proverbs are indeed proverbs but certainly not all of them. Although understanding these proverbs sounds easy, there is somewhat of a problem. Many proverbs are straightforward and have easy interpretations, but some are in the form of *a figure* and have interpretations that are not at all apparent to the casual reader. It takes much study and meditation to understand some of the teachings behind these verses. Do you remember I said that Proverbs 4:7 took thirteen years for me to understand with a reasonable degree of confidence that what I had learned was appropriate for the verse. Each person who seriously studies Proverbs will run across some verses that are difficult for them to understand, but with dedicated study and meditation, they too can be understood.

Second, there are *the words of the wise*. Proverbs chapter thirty in its entirety is one such passage. As you will see when reading about that chapter, the whole of Agur's discussion is a rebuke of two young men by their father. Each time I read the words Agur shared with these two boys and see the sophisticated logic he used, it causes me to conclude once again that he is their actual father. In verse six of Proverb chapter one the NASB refers to some of the words of these wise men as "*riddles*," but I prefer the wording in the JKV which calls them "*dark sayings*." I like this wording because it seems that the real truths of some of the difficult passages in Proverbs are hiding in the shadows as it were. It took about ten years to understand the logic behind chapters three and thirty, but when the logic of them finally surfaced it was something of rare beauty. This kind of understanding comes only through hundreds or thousands of hours of study and meditation. The key is to park at a particular passage and refuse to leave it until you understand what is being taught. The following chart condenses the ideas in verse six.

Somewhat easy to understand	More difficult to understand
Proverbs →	A figure
Words of the wise →	Their riddles

On the following page you will find a finished layout of verses 5 and 6. Now that we have come to this point in our discussion, you should be able to understand what the paragraph is teaching.

<sup>5</sup> A WISE MAN	will HEAR and INCREASE IN LEARNING,
and	
A MAN OF UNDERSTANDING	will ACQUIRE WISE COUNSEL,

<sup>6</sup>to UNDERSTAND

a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles.
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What have we learned about Proverbs 1:1-6 thus far?

There are four steps to learning and living the book of Proverbs. They are:

- 1) **To Know**—That is, learn **what** the verse says well enough to carry out the instruction accurately.
- 2) **To Discern**—That is, learn **why** you should follow the instruction - what benefits result and God's intent in giving them.
- 3) **To Receive**—That is, learn **how** they work by practicing them each day.
- 4) **To Give**—That is, share what you have learned and experienced with those who need what you have learned and experienced.

In order to successfully learn wisdom, you must practice **passive learning** coupled with **active learning**. You will do so for the purpose of ultimately **understanding** all of the teachings presented in Proverbs?

Gregory, it is my desire that you will spend the time necessary to truly learn and experience the truths of Scripture. They were meant to help us live for Christ and ultimately for the Father, so determine in your heart that you will learn them. Dedicate yourself to them, and they will make your life sweet and secure. I pray you will.

On the following page you will find a full layout of Proverbs 1:1-6. It should make good sense to you now. If not, I have not done my job very well. Look it over, and ponder the depths of this section. Everything you do with the rest of Proverbs hinges upon understanding and use of this paragraph. Son, I hope you will learn and use it well. See a full layout on the following page.

Proverbs 1:1-6

<sup>1</sup>The proverbs of Solomon  
the son of David, king of Israel:

<sup>2</sup>To **KNOW** wisdom and instruction,

To **DISCERN** the sayings of understanding,

<sup>3</sup>To **RECEIVE** instruction in

wise behavior,  
righteousness,  
justice, and  
equity;

<sup>4</sup>To **GIVE**  
to the naive,  
to the youth  
and

prudence  
knowledge  
discretion,

<sup>5</sup>A WISE MAN will HEAR and  
INCREASE IN LEARNING,

and

A MAN OF UNDERSTANDING will ACQUIRE WISE COUNSEL,

<sup>6</sup>to UNDERSTAND

a proverb and  
a figure,  
the words of the wise  
and their riddles.

Footnotes:

- <sup>1</sup> Strong's definition for "fool" <0200>
- <sup>2</sup> MacArthur Study Bible, copyright © 1997, Word Publishing, pg. 877
- <sup>3</sup> Strong's definition for "wise behavior" <07919>
- <sup>4</sup> Derived from definition of "equity" from Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, Merriam-Webster Inc., 1983
- <sup>5</sup> Definition of Naive from (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, Merriam-Webster Inc., 1983) verse 4 – get source Page 16
- <sup>6</sup> Definition of Prudent from (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, Merriam-Webster Inc., 1983)
- <sup>7</sup> Strong's definition for "wise man" <02450>
- <sup>8</sup> Strong's definition for "Man of understanding" <0995>
- <sup>9</sup> Strong's definition for "wise counsel" <08458>
- <sup>AA</sup> See -- <http://www.markbarry.com/amazing/lawnchairman.html>