

Knowledge

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[0 : 00] So, we are looking at the book of Proverbs on Sunday nights in a series, and the book of Proverbs is all about wisdom.

What is wisdom? Wisdom is the skill of a life lived well. It's making good choices. It's knowing what to do, we've said, when there are no rules telling you what to do at every moment of life. And the assumptions of the book of Proverbs are that there are things you have to know in order to have this wisdom.

You have to be in relationship with God, you have to know who you are as a creature, you have to know the world as it's created that it has a moral fabric, that there is a moral order to the world, a moral dimension to it.

And so that means that your decisions matter, and that's fundamental to the idea of wisdom in the book of Proverbs, that your decisions really do matter because you're a moral person.

[0 : 57] So, that means because your decisions matter in all of life, that wisdom applies to every area of life. You can be a wise academic, a wise technician, a wise artist, a wise public officer, a wise diplomat, you can be wise at waging war, you can be wise custodian, a wise mom, a wise dad, a wise minister, or you can be a fool in all of these areas.

And that's fundamental to the book of Proverbs. But tonight we are asking how does knowledge play into this question, this idea of wisdom, how does knowledge, knowing things, relate to wisdom? And we're chapter one, verse seven. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Derek Kidner is probably one of the best Old Testament commentators who's ever lived.

He read a little book on Proverbs and he says that this verse is the motto of all of wisdom literature in the whole Bible, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.

So we're going to look at it in reverse order. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. We're going to look at it and say the concept of knowledge, what does he mean by beginning, and what's the fear of the Lord?

[2 : 13] So first, knowledge. What's knowledge? What's knowledge? What does it mean to know? Now, basically, if you read any psychology or philosophy or even theology or anything like that, traditionally throughout history, people have divided up the human mind or human faculties or abilities into three domains.

And this will be familiar to you because you have them. The first one is the human will. So everybody has, every human has a will. And what's a will? A will is simply that part of you that has the ability to want things.

It's the part of you that can love, that can desire. So for instance, when I decided to marry my wife, I might have said something like this.

I think I did. I surely did. I said, I want to marry her. That's me exercising the faculty of my will. My will. And then secondly, everybody recognizes you also have emotions.

So not only do you have the ability to want things, you have the ability to be emotive. And what are emotions? Emotions are longings and feelings, happiness and sadness and joy and all these types of things.

[3 : 29] So when I came to marry my wife, I said, I want to marry her. That's me exercising my will. Why? Because she makes me happy. Right? That's me exercising my emotive ability.

Right? Will and emotions. And then thirdly, you have an intellect. You have a mind. You have the ability to know things, to know facts, to know about things.

This is the place where you have logic, where you think, where you determine, where you make decisions. So when I came to marry my wife, I knew that she had brown eyes and basically brown hair.

It's a little bit black, but basically brown. I hope. Man, I hope. This is going to be bad.

For instance, let's say that I was going to go right before I was going to marry Heather and I was standing there and Derek lives in Jackson, Mississippi in this illustration. He's in the room with me and I say, I'm going to marry her.

[4 : 27] I want to marry her. She makes me happy. That's me exercising my will and my emotions at the same time. And Derek says, well, point her out to me. And I said, she's the one over there with the blonde hair, the blue eyes.

She's about five foot one. Right? And he went over and said, congratulations. Look, if you know my wife, you know what would happen. I would get slapped in the face because that's not the facts. She doesn't have blue eyes or blonde hair and she's not five foot one. She's five foot seven. And you see the faculty of knowledge, your ability to know facts is a basic presupposition of your ability to want things, to desire things, and to have emotions about them.

You have to know something about something if you want to want it, love it, desire it, or have any type of emotion about it. Now what do we mean by knowledge then?

Today in modern world, typically when we think of knowledge, what we mean is knowing stuff, knowing about stuff, right? Knowing facts, knowing about cars and geography and science and playing trivial pursuit.

[5 : 37] That's knowledge, right? It's knowing facts about things, but the Bible, the Bible is different. In the Bible, this word for knowledge that appears here is not simply about knowing things.

It's not simply about knowing facts, but in the Bible, knowledge is holistic. You could call it deep knowing. It's whole, it embraces, in other words, it embraces all of who you are.

Your emotion, your will, and your ability to have an intellect to know facts. It embraces knowledge, the concept of knowledge in the Bible is about all of who you are, not just about simply knowing facts.

That's the modern way of thinking about it. And there are multiple terms throughout the Old Testament for the word knowledge, but this little Hebrew word here that gets translated knowledge is little term, daat.

Sometimes the Bible will even say things like this, that the heart knows. It's not even the head that knows, but the heart knows. The knowledge for the Bible is much more deep-seated than just your intellect.

[6 : 36] It embraces all of who you are. And sometimes people express this biblical idea through the difference of knowing reality and knowing truth. What does it mean to know reality?

If I was to ask all of you in an exam, find your body's kinetic energy.

What would you do? Well you know the equation to find kinetic energy. All of you do. The equation to find kinetic energy is $E = mc^2$, right? Einstein's famous equation.

And I could give you some numbers, you could plug it in and you could figure out your body's kinetic energy. That's knowing reality. That's knowing the fact. That's knowing something about the world. Something that's a fact about the world, knowing reality. But if I take you to John 17 and I say, do you know God?

[7 : 32] Right? What would you say? Do you see the difference? If I take you to John 17 and read the passage, the knowledge of God is eternal life.

And you say, yeah I know God. God is a spirit. Infinite, unchangeable, eternal, and his being, wisdom, power, justice, goodness, mercy, and truth, I think, what's Mr. Catechism?

I got that right. Then I would say, no, no, no, wait. That's a definition. That's just knowing about God. Do you know God? Or is God just a concept for you? Do you grasp, do you see the difference? The idea of knowledge in the Bible is not simply knowing about reality, it's deep knowing.

In other words, it's personal, it's relational, it's holistic. In other words, knowing anything in the Bible is answering this question, where does it come from?

[8 : 33] Why does this exist? And how should I relate to it? It embraces all of who you are when you answer those questions.

Human beings are called to know themselves, to know God, and to know the world in this way. In the very beginning, in Genesis chapter one, one of the first commands that God gave us was to till the ground, to till the ground.

And theologians throughout history have kind of said, look, this is shorthand for telling human beings that they are to know the world through culture making. So to till the ground, in other words,

to cultivate the ground gives you the image of planting, of sowing, of being a farmer, of raising up crops.

But the word culture simply comes from the word cultivate, to cultivate, to till the ground, to be like God, like an artist that goes into the world and knows the material world in such a way as to make something of it, to create society.

Now, if I said, what is culture? A lot of people oftentimes will think of classical music or something like that, and that's high culture.

[9 : 41] classical music and going to art museums. You might think of pop culture, Taylor Swift, Drake, and McDonald's, all of which are on a similar scale of quality.

But that's pop culture. But culture, biblical idea of culture is directly related to the biblical idea of knowing things. And it's this, that human beings are called to relate to this world in such a way that you cultivate.

You cultivate the ground, vegetables, and livestock, you cultivate artifacts, you produce goods, you build houses, you build church buildings, you worship, you cultivate institutions, family, government, schools.

You're called to know things in this world so relationally that it's the same idea as culture making.

God created you to be like this. The notion is to be a steward, to be a steward.

And so what Proverbs 1-7 is saying about knowledge is that your relationship to God is the beginning or the ground of the way you relate to everything else in the world.

[10 : 44] The way you relate to everything else in the world. Okay, so that's the idea, that's the idea of knowledge in the Bible. Second, what does a passage mean by beginning?

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. So beginning. When you run, if you run a race, if you enter into the 100 meter dash, there's a beginning point of the 100 meter dash.

It's the starting line, right? And when they say 3, 2, 1, go and you hear the gunshot, you leave the beginning point behind you, right? And you try to get to the end point as fast as possible.

And the better you are at the 100 meter dash, the farther away you get from the beginning point the fastest. That's not what this word beginning here means. So when it says the fear of the Lord, your relationship with God is the beginning of the way you know everything else in the world, the way you relate to everything else in the world.

It's not saying that the fear of the Lord, your relationship to God is something that you leave behind. It's a starting point that you then leave behind. Rather, it's more like saying the fear of the Lord is the ground that you run on as you try to relate to everything else in the world.

[11 : 58] It's like running a race and it's the ground that you're standing on. And this is so anti-modern because what the author here is saying is that knowing God, having a relationship with God, of faith, is critical if you want to truly know anything else in the entire world.

And that's incredibly anti-modern because in the modern world, reason functions wholly separately from faith in the public square.

So in the modern contemporary world we live in, when we enter into the public square, it's the domain where faith is no longer allowed. But reason is the primary tool that we use to know anything else.

So Peter Atkins puts it this way in a little book called On Being. He says this, the scientific method is the only reliable way to know reality, the only way of discovering reliable knowledge.

And Richard Dawkins, he's more popular, expands on this in the God Delusion, everything we can know about the world can only be accomplished through science.

[13 : 14] Everything we can know about the world can only be accomplished through science. In contrast, he says, religious faith is a persistent false belief held in the face of strong contradictory evidence.

Proverbs is saying the exact opposite. This verse is saying the exact opposite. Gerhard von RYDT, he's one of the best commentators on this book from the middle 20th century, and this is what he says that this verse means.

Faith is not only not opposed to reason, but it constitutes its possibility. Faith is not only not opposed to reason, but faith constitutes the possibility of reason, of knowledge in the world.

And he goes on, to know anything rightly and ultimately means to know it in the light of God. To know where it came from and to know why it exists.

Not just to know the raw facts about it, he says. So in other words, beginning is saying this, your religious faith is the foundation from which all your reasoning proceeds.

[14:27] That's the point he's making. Now what does this mean? This means that every single person has faith as the foundation of all their beliefs about the world.

Every single human being has faith as their foundation of belief about the world. Let me give you an example. It's a pretty popular phrase that you'll hear in the 21st century, that an individual should be free to choose what is right and wrong for them.

Every individual, each individual should be free to choose what's right and wrong for them, right? You've probably heard that phrase. But look, this is the premise underlying a notion like that. That's only true if there's a foundational belief that there is no God, that there is no God up there to hold you accountable.

It can only be the case that every individual should be free to choose what is right and wrong for them. If God doesn't exist, if there's no God transcendent above you that can hold you accountable for right and wrong, you see, underneath every single idea about the world, underneath every single decision in life is a decision, a determination about religious faith, about whether God exists, about whether he's there, about whether you're going to be held accountable by him, about whether you should submit to him or not.

Religious faith, in other words, he's saying, is the foundation of the way you relate to the rest of your knowledge about the world. In other words, what this passage is telling us is an absolute no to compartmentalization in life.

[16:10] In other words, life is not like a stack of dresser drawers. A lot of times we treat life like a stack of dresser drawers and you have religious faith in one compartment and then all the other activities in your life in each drawer and you open each drawer at a different time on each day and you treat each activity separately.

That's called practical atheism. It's functioning with compartments in your life where God only occupies one of them.

It's being a practical atheist, just living life in such a way that God doesn't actually matter to all the other ways you try to relate and know the world. C.S. Lewis, he tries to get at this point in a little essay called *Meditations in a Tool Shed*.

It's not very well known, but he imagines, imagine that you're standing in a pitch black dark tool shed and crayons, what's that sound?

You're standing in a dark tool shed and you're trying to find tools but you can't see anything. The door is cracked and there's only a few little light rays coming through the door.

[17:30] How do you find the tools? How do you navigate the pitch black tool shed? The first thing that happens to you is that you realize that there are a few light rays coming through the door.

You look at the light. You look at the light rays themselves. In the light rays you see that there are specks of dust floating around. I can even see them right now in these lights that are coming down on my eyes.

You see specks of dust floating around. What you do is you realize that light reveals, light exposes the darkness. The only possible way that you're going to see a tool in that tool shed navigating in the dark is if you do what?

You have to actually move over to where the light is piercing through the door and stand where the light is crossing just by your eye and let the light sit at your back and through the light look for tools in the tool shed.

In other words, are you a practical atheist or do you see the whole world, every aspect of your life standing in the light of God looking outward?

[18:40] You see? What is he getting at? In other words, is your relationship with God, Proverbs 1.7, your core identity, your ground, your principle, your beginning point that shines light on every other thing that you try to do in this world, on all of your relationships and all of your knowings and doings.

That's what he's saying here in Proverbs 1.7. That's what Paul's getting at when he says, in everything you do, do it all for the glory of God. Okay, so that's second, beginning.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. In other words, your relationship with God is the ground of your relationship to everything else in the world.

Okay? So, thirdly, let's talk about that relationship to God, the fear of the Lord. Now, Tom preached a really good sermon on this a couple weeks ago, but we'll come back to this kind of concept again and again.

What does it mean to fear the Lord? The fear of the Lord. Ereha Von Rad, the same commentator, he says that you can't treat fear of the Lord like you might do other phrases to understand what they mean.

[19 : 59] That's break down each word and say, what does fear mean? What does of mean? What does Lord mean? Then put it back all together. It would be like asking, what does the word butterfly mean?

You might be a very excellent trained philologist and you say, well, I'll tell you what it means. You take the word butter, you take the word fly. And I know what butter is, butter is churned from cow's milk.

It's a spread on toast. It's delicious and fly. Flies are insects, right? And they're a particular annoying at this time of the year. And so what's a butterfly?

It's clearly, it's a flying insect that especially is attracted to butter, right? That would be the same thing that would happen if you try to take the phrase fear of the Lord and break it down into its parts and understand it.

Okay, it can't be done. You got to treat it as one word. The fear of the Lord. It's a singular concept in the Bible. And the reason you can't break it down is because fear, the word fear for us doesn't mean exactly what fear meant in the Old Testament.

[21 : 01] Fear for us means timidity, shaking in your boots, scared. Don't hit me. You know, that's fear. Don't, don't, Martin Luther before the Reformation talked about how he misunderstood fear of the Lord and he was always walking around thinking that he was going to get struck by a bolt of lightning for his sins, right?

That's the way a modern person would think about fear. But that's not what's getting at here. In the lie on the witch and the wardrobe, Lewis gives a fantastic little phrase to the mouth, mouth of Lucy. Lucy's asking about Aslan, the Christ figure, the God figure in the lie on the witch and the wardrobe. And she asked this, is Aslan safe?

The character says no, of course not, but he's good. And so there is a slight aspect of terror before God, but that's not what's being talked about here.

And here's why. Look, Deuteronomy 10, 12, to fear the Lord your God and to love him with all your heart. To fear the Lord your God and to love him with all your heart.

[22 : 08] Now the second phrase in that passage explains the first. To fear the Lord your God is to love him with all your heart. And to love somebody with all your heart isn't to be scared of them all the time. It's not about being scared.

Or this one even more, Psalm 134, with God there is forgiveness, therefore I will fear you.

Now you don't typically, you're not typically scared of someone who has forgiven you. With God there is forgiveness. Therefore I fear you, it can't possibly mean timid and scared. Has to mean something, it's not being scared.

And this is what the fear of the Lord means. This is what Tom told us. The fear of the Lord is all wonder and joy before the greatness and majesty of God and His works that rearranges your entire life.

It's all fear, it's all wonder and joy before the greatness and majesty of God and His works that rearranges your entire life.

[23 : 10] If you read any psychology at all ever, if you took a psychology 101 class in college or something like that, it's a pretty common notion that you can tell what you love most by asking what you fear most.

What do you fear most? And your answer to that question will also be the same thing as what you love most because what do you fear losing the most? What do you fear losing the most in life? And that will tell you exactly what it is that you love. And that's one of the ways to get at your idols, to expose your idolatry. And if it's not, if the answer to that question is that it's not God, then that means God simply functions like a concept and aspects of your life.

God is a concept for parts and compartments of your life. In other words, idolatry is practical atheism.

Idolatry is practical atheism. The fool says in his heart there is no God, Proverbs 14.1. In other words, the fool, it's trying to know who you are, what the world is, navigate through the tool shed of this life apart from the existence of God at your back, shining His light rays down through your eyes onto the world.

[24 : 25] That's foolishness. Instead, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of all knowledge.

This means your relationship with God is so at the core of your identity that every single thing you feel, you want, and you know in this world is done in the light of God.

Is that you, that your relationship with God is so at the core of who you are that every single thing you do in life, what you feel, what you want, what you know is motivated by the existence of God? No, of course it's not. Of course that's not you. That's none of us.

You see, none of us truly have the fear of the Lord as the beginning of all our knowledge. Do you at every single moment of your life see your life participating in the mission of God?

[25 : 30] No, you don't. That's fundamental to our sin nature. This is a pretty popular illustration that kind of floats around.

I first heard it from Tim Keller, but he got it from Elizabeth Elliott, so everything does not go back to Tim Keller. It at least goes back to Elizabeth Elliott. She says this, if the distance between the Earth and the Sun, 92 million miles, was only the thickness of a sheet of paper, then the Earth and the nearest star, the Earth to the nearest star besides the Sun, would be a stack of paper 70 feet high. And the diameter of our galaxy would be a stack of papers 310 miles high. And our one little galaxy would be like the size of one speck of dust sitting on the entirety of planet Earth amongst other galaxies.

And if God holds all that together by the word of His power at every single moment, is this the kind of person that you ask into your life to be your consultant?

Is this the kind of person that you ask in your life to stick in your Sunday compartment? Or is your relationship with God the motivating factor for all of your knowledge?

[27 : 02] What are consultants or people that we bring into our life pay to tell us something, and if we like it, then we keep them around, and if we don't, we dismiss them?

Is this the kind of person that you keep in your life as a consultant? And if it is, then that means more often than not that God is simply a concept for you.

God is abstract. You know about God, but you don't know God. What does it mean to know God? It's like saying to someone, what does it mean for God to be abstract?

It's like saying to someone and trying to describe to them the sweetness of the most perfect strawberry in all the world if they've never tasted a strawberry.

It's impossible. You can't do it. But grasping God, knowing deep knowledge of God, true knowledge, the type of knowledge that's being talked about here, it's tasting that perfect strawberry.

[28 : 05] It's not just telling somebody that honey is sweet, it's tasting honey for the first time. It's grasping hold of it. It's tasting its sweetness. And so here's the message of the book of Proverbs, Proverbs 20 verse 6 in closing.

Who can say, I have made my heart pure, and I am clean from my sin? And answer, nobody.

Who can say I have made my heart pure and I am clean from my sin? Who can say that everything I do in life is motivated by my relationship to God, by my fear of the Lord? Nobody. Nobody. Three times in Genesis 1 to 3, the very beginning of the Bible, this word knowledge is used.

It's brought up. And it's first used in Adam and Eve's relationship to God, that God knew them and that they knew God.

That's, it's deep. It's personal knowledge. That's why the Bible also uses the word, the same exact word, knowledge to describe sexual relationships.

[29 : 12] Adam knew his wife. This is not simply knowing about things. This is a different type of knowledge. God knew Adam and Eve, and Adam and Eve knew him. That's the first time it's used.

But the next time, the next time the word knowledge is used in the Bible. The very second time is that after Adam and Eve's sin, it says that they knew their nakedness.

Now we've just figured out, no, it's not simply knowing about. It's not simply knowing the fact of, because Adam and Eve were naked the whole time. It's not as if they all of a sudden sin and said, oh my, I'm not wearing clothes.

I forgot to put them on. That's knowing about. That's knowing the fact. But what does it mean that they knew their nakedness in the same way that God knew them and they had known God? Same

word.

But now after sin, they know their nakedness. What does it mean to be naked? It means that your identity has been exposed.

[30 : 14] That the knowledge of God that was a friendship just moments before they ate of the tree now has become the knowledge of nothing but a judge.

They exchanged the relationship of friend for judge. Thousands of years later, Jesus Christ would come to this world to image God, to make God known.

And in Matthew 27, when he was on the cross, they ripped his clothes off of him. They took away his robe and they gambled it. He was completely and utterly naked on the cross.

And he had to be. Why? Because he who knew no sin, who had no deep core identity of sin, you see, had to become sin for us.

His nakedness was the physical outworking of our core identity that we know sin. He became what he knew not, sin, so that in him you might know God for the first time.

[31 : 27] And the knowledge of God is eternal life. And it's only in that knowledge of God that you can then go on to know the world rightly, correctly, that you can have true knowledge.

As you come to the table tonight, do you compartmentalize Jesus Christ as your Sunday consultant? Do you compartmentalize Jesus Christ to be your Sunday consultant?

Or do you stand in the world like you stand in a dark tool shed with the rays of the light of God emitting through Jesus Christ as your very eyes to see the world, to know the world, to act into the world?

Let's pray. Father, we ask now that as we come to the table of you, our Lord, that we would repent of the ways that we have not let our relationship with God be, with you be the navigating factor in the way we know everything else, relate to everything else.

We repent, Lord, and we ask that you would give us joy and forgiveness as we come to your table. Amen.