

Craftsmen

CHRIST-CENTERED PROVERBS FOR MEN

John Crotts



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Craftsmen

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INTRODUCTION

THE CRAFTSMAN CAN TAKE a stack of wood and produce a beautiful piece of furniture. He not only possesses intellectual abilities to follow a blueprint or step-by-step instructions, but he is also an artist. His hands manipulate the wood into beautiful shapes. His eyes anticipate the right cuts and movements. His workmanship causes others to wonder at his skill.

My friend, David Peace, is such a craftsman. David works full time as a firefighter and paramedic. On his off days he opened a custom cabinet shop. While I may have the ability to follow instructions and get by with the results, in a short time, with no formal training, David has built exquisite cabinetry and fixtures for half-a-million dollar homes. Most recently, our church hired David to oversee the construction of our entire church building. God has blessed David with the unusual skill and ability to work with wood. The results have been impressive.

Such craftsmanship has an application for all men. While I may never be able to create the products of a master cabinet maker, I am responsible to create my life with equal skill.

Introduction

Every area of my life as a Christian man must be molded by the wisdom of God. My words, my work, my relationships, and even the way I use my resources must flow from a heart gripped by the character of God. Such a heartbeat for God's glory will practically result in a life skillfully lived.

This book is designed to simplify the quest for wisdom. The first section, *The Foundation*, will seek to unlock the meaning of wisdom and its basis—the fear of God. We will also see how the Lord Jesus Christ is the ultimate Wise Man. The second section, *The Handiwork*, will apply God's wisdom to various areas of leadership and living. While the book of Proverbs will be the starting point for our studies, attention will be given to the rest of Scripture as well. Our goal should not be to help ourselves with mere practical pointers. Real life change only occurs as we see the Lord Jesus Christ and seek to conform our lives to his by the power of the Holy Spirit.

section **1**

The
FOUNDATION



1

THE MEANING OF WISDOM

DON'T WE ALL HAVE THE SAME PICTURE of the Wise Man in our minds? He is very old. He is bald with leathery skin and a very long white beard. For some reason, he is short and stubby. He wears a robe or tunic of some kind and sometimes carries an oversized book. He sits under a large shady tree on top of a mountain. The occasional searcher for wisdom, deep in thought about the mysteries of life, makes the fearsome climb to seek out the Ancient One. After the seeker catches his breath, he asks the question of his heart. The answer from this great guru, of course, makes no sense at all. But we figure since he is the wise one, and the searcher spent so much effort getting up the hill, it would make sense if only we were as enlightened as the master.

Though this comical picture of true wisdom is common, it is absolutely wrong. The Bible says nothing about this kind of wisdom. Rather than being vague and “out there”, God’s

wisdom is completely practical. In fact, if you have been blessed with an oversized brain and an IQ that would make Einstein jealous, but you live as though God doesn't matter, you are just a big-headed fool. God's wisdom starts with an attitude (not an IQ) and then works out into a lifestyle. Understanding the meaning of wisdom is a foundational component of knowing what God wants us to strive for. As one wise man observed, "If you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time!"

CONCEPT

The Hebrew word for wisdom is *hakam*. The basic meanings of this term are wise, skillful, or practical. The idea of *skillfulness* emerges from the way the term *hakam* is used in the Bible. For example, the Lord, through Moses, commissioned *skillful* people to make the garments of Aaron the high priest. "And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with the spirit of skill, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him for my priesthood" (Exodus 28:2–3). God actually endowed these people with *a spirit of wisdom* for the task. Being wise in this context has nothing to do with sitting under a tree meditating about the meaning of life. These men were skillful artists whirling needles and threads to produce a stunning garment for the man who would represent the people of God before him.

Another example of the word most often translated *wisdom* is found in Exodus 35:30–35. God calls men by name to be custom builders of God's tabernacle—Bezalel, and later Oholiab, along with others. These men were filled with "the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship." God said he had "filled them with skill to do every sort of work done by an engraver or by a designer or by an embroiderer

in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of workman or skilled designer.” Clearly, God only wanted the finest work done on his meeting place, and he empowered these men to do it.

While in some places in the Bible *hakam* means skillful like a craftsman, the meaning of the term wisdom in Proverbs implies more than skill with needles and thread, or hammers and chisels. Wisdom in Proverbs can be more narrowly defined as *mastering the art of skillful living*. As Richard Mayhue puts it in his book *Practicing Proverbs*, “Proverbs instructs about skillfully manifesting God’s character and will in one’s everyday life, making godly decisions, and being so oriented to God that one’s life choices always please Him.”¹ Wisdom involves learning God’s ways from his Word, and then making right choices based upon his truth. Our consistency in making these right choices is an indication of our maturity and development in wisdom.²

CONNECTION

The practical meaning of wisdom in Proverbs is also uncovered by the connection between wisdom and right behavior. God’s benchmark for evaluating a man’s wisdom is directly related to how morally upright his lifestyle is. This connection jumps out of every chapter in the book of Proverbs. Notice the tremendous impact wisdom makes on a person’s lifestyle in Proverbs 2:7–22. Nearly every line of this section about *wisdom* has something to say about *morality*.

He stores up sound wisdom for the **upright**;
he is a shield to those who **walk in integrity**,
guarding the paths of **justice**
and watching over the way of his saints.
Then you will understand **righteousness and justice**
and equity, every good path;

The Foundation

for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
discretion will watch over you,
understanding will guard you,
delivering you from the **way of evil**,
from men of **perverted speech**,
who forsake the **paths of uprightness**
to walk in the **ways of darkness**,
who rejoice in **doing evil**
and delight in the **perverseness of evil**,
men whose **paths are crooked**,
and who are **devious** in their ways.
So you will be delivered from the **forbidden woman**,
from the adulteress with her **smooth words**,
who **forsakes the companion of her youth**
and **forgets the covenant of her God**;
for her house sinks down to death,
and her paths to the departed;
none who go to her come back,
nor do they regain the paths of life.
So you will walk in the **way of the good**
and keep to the **paths of the righteous**.
For the **upright** will inhabit the land,
and those with **integrity** will remain in it,
but the **wicked** will be cut off from the land,
and the **treacherous** will be rooted out of it.
(emphasis added)

You may think you are wise, but does your lifestyle match up with what God desires? Are you upright, blameless, righteous, and just? Are you a man of integrity and sexual purity? Do you hate pride, perverted speech, and evil? If there is a mismatch between your morality and your claims of wisdom, then use your lifestyle as the final judge of your level of wisdom.

If you are to be a skillful leader of your family, this responsibility will always start with your lifestyle. To grow in leadership means

growing in a godly lifestyle. To grow in godliness means growing in God's wisdom.

CLOSE PARALLELS

In the introduction to the book of Proverbs, Solomon flanks the word wisdom with several parallel words. This array of descriptive words should not be understood as referring to different concepts, however, because the terms expand, reinforce, and enrich the meaning of the concept of wisdom.³

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

(Proverbs 1:1–6, emphasis added)

Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner describes these parallel terms to wisdom as “breaking up the plain daylight of wisdom into its rainbow of constituent colors.” He goes on to say, “These all shade into one another, and any one of them can be used to represent the whole; yet there is . . . value in seeing them momentarily analyzed and grouped.”⁴ Let's follow Kidner's suggestion and consider each of these parts to better grasp wisdom's whole meaning.

Instruction includes the ideas of correction and discipline. It is frequently a companion of the word reproof.⁵ Shepherding children

requires more than just sitting back spouting off proper facts about behavior. Even in teaching Charissa, my oldest daughter, to play softball, I can't pontificate. I have to repeat the lesson again and again. I often have to include correction with my instruction to get the wisdom to take hold. "Don't hold the glove down when the ground ball is coming above your waist, it could pop out and hit you in the face." "That's right, hold your glove facing up to field the ball and make the play."

Understanding involves looking at the heart of an issue and discerning the differences at stake in the choices being weighed.⁶ A wise person of understanding can read between the lines to be able to make the best possible choice.⁷

In 1 Samuel 25, Abigail demonstrates this kind of understanding. Although David and his men had faithfully provided protection for her husband Nabal's shepherds and flocks, allowing Nabal to grow wealthy, Nabal stubbornly refused David's request for provisions. David and his men strapped on their swords to extract their due supplies, but Abigail quickly assessed the situation and went into action.

As David angrily approached, Abigail went to meet him with two hundred loaves of bread, two jugs of wine, five prepared sheep, five measures of roasted grain, a hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs (1 Samuel 25:18). Before David could even get to Nabal's home, though, Abigail bowed before Israel's future king, took full responsibility for Nabal's offense, gave David the gracious gift she had prepared, and blessed him in the Lord's name. David's anger was completely pacified through Abigail's wise actions. Within a week and a half the Lord struck Nabal dead. When David heard this, he sent a wedding proposal to make this woman of understanding his wife.

Prudence can mean shrewdness, cunning, cleverness, or even deceit.⁸ In the context of godly wisdom, prudence means shrewd-

ness or cleverness in the best senses of the terms. Proverbs 1:3, seen above, speaks of prudence as wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity.

To demonstrate the tremendous wisdom of Solomon, 1 Kings 3:16–28 relates the account of two prostitutes with infants coming to the king for a judgment. One of the women has accidentally killed her son by rolling onto him during the night. Before the other wakes up, though, the mother of the dead child secretly switches the babies. Of course the mother of the live baby knows what had happened and demands to have her baby back. They go before Solomon to resolve the matter. The shrewd king, Solomon, declares that the living child should be chopped in two so that each woman could receive half. Horrified, the true mother would rather lose the baby than have her son cut in two. When she offers the whole child to the false mother, Solomon knows she is the true mother and awards the baby to her. After the nation heard about this verdict, they were amazed at the prudence that God had bestowed on their king.

Knowledge in Proverbs is not merely knowing information; it is knowing and doing what God requires as consistently as possible.⁹ The word for knowledge is used as a direct parallel with *wisdom* in verses describing the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). Like wisdom, the idea of knowledge in these passages is not *knowing* facts, but putting them into practice skillfully.

It is a sad truth that many people have vast head knowledge about the facts of the Bible without any real life application. Certain professors, pastors, and even authors of Bible commentaries have made entire careers out of studying the Bible without believing one word of the book they have so thoroughly dissected.

Discretion focuses upon prudent planning.¹⁰ While there are many examples of careful planning, Solomon selected one from among God's smallest creatures in order to instruct his son. He

observed that the ant, even though she is small, not very strong, and lacks a tough task-master, “prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest” (Proverbs 6:8). We will examine the ant’s example of wise hard work later, but for now notice her discretion in planning ahead for the cold winter. My wife and I have some friends who carefully plan their meals for the entire month, but ants literally plan their meals as much as half a year in advance.

Learning means to receive or grasp the truth.¹¹ Learning in relation to wisdom is comprehending the truth of God well enough to pass it on to someone else.¹² An expression used by preachers is, “A mist in the pulpit means a fog in the pew.” When a pastor fails to understand the point of a passage of Scripture it is pretty certain that his listeners will have no idea what’s going on. In the same way, you will never be able to instruct others in wisdom (or lead them!) by word or example, until you have a personal comprehension of God’s wisdom.

Guidance is wise counsel or accurate leadership.¹³ Imagine a ship in heavy fog, trapped in a dangerous storm. The captain is seeking to navigate the difficulties using various instruments, consulting his officers, crying out for help over the radio, and perhaps straining to spy the beam of the lighthouse. The more sure and steady the counsel he receives, the more help he has in facing his greatest challenge. In the same way, wise counsel helps us navigate through life.

CONTRAST

The variety of terms used in the Proverbs to describe wisdom help us to grasp its meaning. Another way to understand a concept, however, is by examining its opposite. You can teach someone to appreciate the sharp angles of a square not only by pointing out

positive examples of the squares themselves, but also by contrasting squares with circles. Likewise, the Proverbs do not merely sing the virtues of wisdom, they also offer pointed descriptions of foolishness.

The Fool

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

(Proverbs 1:7)

Doing wrong is like a joke to a fool,
but wisdom is pleasure to a man of understanding.

(Proverbs 10:23)

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."
They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds,
there is none who does good.

(Psalm 14:1)

Throughout the Bible, the character most unlike the wise person is the fool. Like the variety of parallel words for wisdom, Proverbs uses several different terms for the concept of foolishness.

The key Hebrew words which are translated as *fool* (*'evil*, and *nebalah*), add up to the same meaning. A fool is someone who lacks wisdom, even despising it. He also despises the discipline necessary to attain wisdom. So maybe we could say a *golf fool* would be someone who not only hits every ball into the woods, but also hates hearing about how he could improve his game. He refuses to practice, and becomes obstinate even when Tiger Woods drops by to offer a few tips. Mental equipment is not the issue in foolishness. Being a fool is a chosen lifestyle. The fool has a character that is selfish, stubborn, and pigheaded. He declares, "My way or the highway!" He lives as if God does not exist instead of living reverently in light of the reality of God.

The Fool's Gallery

In addition to the terms translated *fool*, considering two other characters in the fool's gallery in Proverbs helps us understand the concept of foolishness.

The **Scoffer** moves beyond the fool's random mischief to the deliberate damage of ridicule and disparagement.¹⁴ This person is not content to wallow in his own personal mud hole of foolishness, he actively uses his mouth to spread his sin to others. The Lord Jesus Christ said there is a direct pipeline between a person's heart and a person's mouth. "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). A scoffer is a person with a heart of refined foolishness. Because of the folly fully developed in this person's heart, a cynical tongue is inevitable.

The **Sluggard** is a close relative of Mr. Scoffer. He is lazy and selfish. He will not plan ahead. He will not work. He will not save money. He begins to believe his own excuses for his laziness.¹⁵ While the ant tirelessly toils, storing up provisions for the winter, Mr. Sluggard watches from under a shade tree. Day after day the ant thoughtfully prepares for the future. Day after day Mr. Sluggard wastes time indulging his desires for pleasure, while constantly excusing himself from work. He lives for the now, so when the dark days of the future come, he is desperately trying to survive. Fools live short lives for obvious reasons.

The Naive

Another character found in Proverbs is the naive or simple person. While in some ways he is related to the fool, in other ways he is not quite as hopeless. The Hebrew word for "simple" means to be gullible, easily lead, or morally irresponsible.¹⁶

The simple believes everything,
but the prudent gives thought to his steps.
(Proverbs 14:15)

While adults can be naive, teenagers provide a prime example of the meaning of the word. Teenagers are beginning to move from dependence upon their parents towards increasing independence. They take on greater responsibilities and receive more privileges. Often, though, trouble comes into their lives due to their inexperience. The temptations of the world create challenging situations for the untried young man or woman. They can easily become spiritually sidetracked by making wrong choices in response to new temptations because of their naiveté.

The prudent sees danger and hides himself,
but the simple go on and suffer for it.
(Proverbs 22:3)

Many teens are taken in by bad deals. Unfaithful friends sting them. They are seduced sexually. Many children are conceived in the wombs of naive young ladies. The naive are in a dangerous stage of life.

Naiveté is not restricted to young men. How many men naively let their children surf the internet unsupervised? How many Dads don't stop their daughters from leaving the house dressed to seduce? How many men watch all kinds of sleaze on TV with their kids? Do you know the character of your kids' friends? There are appalling consequences waiting just ahead for simple men.

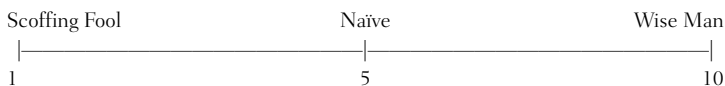
The Proverbs give the most sober warning a naive man could hear—you can graduate to become a fool.

The simple inherit folly,
but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.
(Proverbs 14:18)

According to Derek Kidner, “One does not stay still; a man who is empty headed will end up wrong headed.”¹⁷ The classic example of the naive man is found in Proverbs 7:6–23. Solomon tells the story of an aimless, inexperienced man drifting along, dangerously dancing with temptation. Instead of carefully avoiding a tempting situation, this young man passes along the streets where the adulterous woman lurks. Certainly, Solomon paints this woman with guilty words of seductive dress and flattering and persistent words of temptation. The young man’s naiveté is seen as he puts himself in harm’s way, listens to her seductive words, and finally goes along with her. Solomon also highlights his ignorance of the consequences of his actions. “All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life” (Proverbs 7:22–23).

The young simple man is interested in trying something new and exciting. He likes the element of risk and sneaking around at night. A sexy woman is interested in him! The most dangerous quality of a naive person is he thinks he can handle temptations. He underestimates the seductive power of sin, and is ignorant of sin’s deadly consequences. Solomon’s simple man became enticed; he sinned; and he ultimately dies. The naive man has now had his graduation ceremony. He is now a fool, and will suffer the consequences of being a fool.

A naive person is not yet as guilty or as hopeless as a full-fledged fool, but he is well on his way. The naive person could be called an F.I.T.—a Fool-In-Training. We could create a chart to help us track his path.



Where are you on this chart? In which direction are you moving? Remember, you are *never* standing still. If you think you are, you are surely moving backwards. There are rich rewards for wisdom and serious consequences for foolishness. You now know the stark dangers of being naive. Are you continuing to coast along the Fool's Highway? This is very serious—life and death are ultimately on the line. Even your eternal destination is at stake. While you might not suffer the fruit of your folly today or tomorrow, be certain that your foolishness will always catch you.

True wisdom is more than just sitting under a tree and philosophizing about life. It involves the hard work of craftsmanship. The wise craftsman searches out inspired truth from the Book of God and then carefully seeks to apply those truths to real-life situations. The result of this lifestyle craftsmanship is not about a bald head, beard, and a permanent spot on a high hill for people to come to seek out your wisdom, but a life that others recognize as skillfully lived. A wise life is a life worth living and a life worth following.

Study Questions—CHAPTER 1

1. According to the definition of God's wisdom, compare the role of a person's attitude to that of his IQ.
2. Three terms that help describe the meaning of the Hebrew word for wisdom are:

3. In Proverbs, wisdom is portrayed as mastering the art of skillful living. Describe the two main components that are necessary for skillful living.
4. What is a reliable indicator regarding your maturity and development in wisdom?
5. Describe examples of the relationship between wisdom and right behavior as they are portrayed in Proverbs.
6. Explain the significance of God's benchmark of a man's wisdom based on each individual lifestyle. How would you judge your own personal level of wisdom?
7. What is the impact on a man's life when he grows in godliness?
8. List seven components of being wise that will help you to grasp the concept of wisdom.
9. When describing a person who is unwise, the Bible refers to this character as a _____.
10. In Proverbs we can see examples of the type of person considered as being unwise. Three characters that are described as fools are _____, _____, and the _____. Give a brief description that identifies the characteristics of each of the above examples.



GUT CHECK:

Based on the chart on page 26, place an “X” where you see yourself in regards to being a wise man.

- In what direction are you headed? Remember there is no such thing as sitting still.
- What is your plan of action in your quest for wisdom?