

## **31 Days to Wisdom**

Proverbs 1

December 29, 2013

Welcome/introduction stuff

Hope you had a very Merry Christmas—delighted that you're joining us this morning

Especially if you joined us for Christmas eve and this is your first time at one of our normal services

we had our largest service ever on Christmas eve with right at 380 joining us, an incredible night both services

Thanks so much to all those who volunteered and served and made that a great night

And while I'm thanking people, I would be remiss if I didn't mention that today is a milestone of sorts—this February is our 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a church

And a couple of years ago the first team of four elders was formed and little did they know that they would be serving and leading the church during a significant time of transition

And over the course of 2013 that core group of four has started to rotate off: Bob Wilson and Ken Garris and John Marshall all have rotated off, and today marks the last week of Mark Matthews term as an elder

All of these elders served longer terms to ensure the stability of the church in the midst of transition

And I'd like to thank them for their hard work

Today we're also delighted to have as our guests a family that was extremely significant during the church's transition

David and Angie Ward and their sons Taylor and Jamison are with us. David served as the interim pastor here at Chatham Community Church before I got here

And now serves at a church in Indiana, but he's visiting with us today and we're delighted to have him and his family with us

And I'm extremely thankful for all the work of these people

we're in a healthy, thriving place as a church because of the countless hours of labor and prayer that this team put in during a critical period in this church's history

I'm so glad that you've joined us this morning, today we're going to kick off a brand new series to help us get 2014 started right

We're calling this 31 Days to Wisdom: 2014 Without Regrets

One of my favorite parts of my job is that I get to talk with people and hear their stories: the good, the bad, the ugly, and the hard.

And when it comes to the category of "regrets" the way it sounds is like is this: "I regret that I DID or DIDN'T DO something."

"I REGRET that I got into that relationship to start with OR that I stayed in it as long as I did."

"I REGRET that I took that job. I REGRET that I made that business decision."

"I REGRET that I didn't take more time to spend with my kids when they were younger."

"I REGRET that I didn't take that risk when I should have."

The emotional baggage of regrets is usually based on a decision that we made, something that we did or didn't do

The Scriptures have a vaccine for regret, something that helps us to fend off regrets, and that vaccine is WISDOM.

Biblically, Wisdom is knowledge and information put to good use at the right time that leads to human flourishing and honors God

Wisdom is the bringing together of right information and knowledge at the right time and THAT is the vaccine, the protection against a life full of regrets

The Scriptures have a whole category of books called "wisdom literature"—wisdom is something that God in HIS wisdom has given to us to help us, to lead us into paths of life

And one of the most practical and most compelling of all the wisdom literature books in the Bible is the book of Proverbs

Proverbs is a meaty and mighty and rich book, filled with all kinds of nuggets of pure gold that serve to guide us to make better and wiser decisions and end up with fewer regrets

So here's what we're going to do to kick off 2014 and we're going to get started today, just a little early.

There just happens to be 31 chapters in the book of Proverbs, each chapter packed with practical life direction

And there just happens to be 31 days in January.

To get you and me and all of us off to a good start in 2014, to a year without regrets, as a church community together we're going to read 1 Proverb a day.

That means YOUR going to read one Proverb a day

That's just one Proverb a day, one chapter, to skim it will take you no more than 2 minutes, to really read and study and apply it would take you just 10-15 minutes

We're going to read one proverb a day and during the week in small groups you'll be discussing what you're reading together

By the way, if you're not in a small group yet, this is the PERFECT time to jump into one as we start this series

we'll be signing up for small groups in here at church on January 12th at our Connection Celebration

And then at the end of each week I'll pick up one of the Proverbs or one of the themes and we'll talk about it here altogether

We're going to talk about how wisdom applies to our internal worlds, to our relationship with God, to our relationships with each other, we'll touch on marriage and on parenting

in a couple of weeks on January 12<sup>th</sup> we'll have a PG-13ish conversation about sex because Proverbs has a whole lot to say about wisdom applied to the area of sex and sexuality

So we'll be spending the month of January rolling up our sleeves and growing up into wisdom together to equip us to make better, wiser decisions

You read one Proverb a day to grow in wisdom as a vaccine against regrets and to move us all toward wisdom in 2014, we'll be discussing Proverbs in small groups

and I'll be picking up one Proverb or one theme and we'll be talking about it together on Sunday mornings

And ultimately what I hope to do all throughout this month is point us to how Jesus is the fulfillment of all of this

The Scriptures declare that all of the universe was made by God's wisdom, that all the intricacies and beauties and complexity of it is all by a wise designer

And that ultimately, Jesus himself as we talked about back in the fall IS the WISDOM of the universe, the wisdom that organizes, orders, and creates and sustains all things

And that while we can all grow in making better every day decisions by reading and learning from Proverbs

True and final and ultimate wisdom is found supremely in Jesus, the wisdom of the universe

and that life only finally comes together as we find our wisdom and our very lives in him.

To help us to do this, we've got a new book on our Resource table—"Making Life Work" by a pastor named Bill Hybels who's one of the many people who have led me into wisdom along the way

It's all about Proverbs, putting God's wisdom into action; he picks up on several key themes of the book of Proverbs and unpacks and applies them to everyday life.

I'd encourage you to pick up this book at our Resource table, it's \$10 like all our books are on the table, and read it as a companion guide to your study of Proverbs,

This book will help you to apply the stuff that you're reading and fill in more gaps than we could here in the 4 or 5 weeks we'll be talking about this together.

And at the end of this series in early February we'll have a book-discussion on the book as well to help us with the process of integration and application

So that's where we're headed for the next five or six weeks or so

Today, to get us started, we're going to look at Proverbs 1, and to get you off on the right foot and give you a head start for January 1<sup>st</sup>, we're going to read it together!

We're going to do something that we do here about 2-3 times a year and that is instead of me doing a normal talk or sermon

We read the Scriptures together and have a large group Bible discussion on what's happening and what we discover

Because one of the things that I want so badly for each of you is to read your Bibles, but I realize that it's a kind of big and intimidating book

And some of you feel like you've tried to read it before and never understood it or never gotten anything out of it

So I want to help you as we get started together reading Proverbs together this month to be equipped and able to pick up your Bible and actually get something out of it

To read Proverbs this month not just to sort of check it off but to read it and start to actually have moments of aha and worship and conviction and paying attention to what's going on.

So I'm going to briefly again teach you a simple method of Bible study that I learned, I didn't invent, that I've taught here before

And after we go through that, we'll spend time in Proverbs 1 both on our own and then together

So if you will, pull out the clipboards underneath your seats and we'll walk through this

### **Inductive Bible Study**

#### **I. Observe: Creatively and Actively (Listen)**

**Primary Question: What does the writer say?**

***Not what do I wish they said, not what did my grandma or my aunt or my old pastor say that they said—what did they actually say??***

-We listen, Scripture speaks. ***ANY OF YOU HAVE A GOOD LISTENER IN YOUR LIFE? WHAT DO THEY DO?***

We want to be good listeners—listening thoughtfully and actively. This means asking lots of questions, putting yourself into the text as one of the characters, etc.

-Basic reporter/observation questions: who, what, when, where

-what would it feel like to be a disciple, Moses, Jesus, a person in a church getting this letter in this situation?

-Repetition, metaphors, cause & effect words, conflict or tension points

-what connections can be made from what is said to other parts of that specific book? What about other parts of Scripture?

-Read and Re-read! Read it out loud. Don't just skim it but press into it, attend to it.

#### **II. Interpret (Understand)**

**Primary Question: What does it mean? (especially to the people who would have first read this)**

-What questions arise from the observations just made?

- Looking to grasp the significance or main points of what is being said.
- These are the WHY questions or the 'WHAT DOES THIS MEAN' questions.

Based on what we have heard from and observed in the Scripture, what are the main points in the passage, why is it written the way it is written, why did this character respond a certain way, what would this have meant to the original audience? etc.

-Only ONE true interpretation: author's original intent

Sometimes this is tricky—there are things that are a part of the culture and part of the situation that people 2,000 years ago would have understood that we just don't

And some things we just can't fully get or understand, some things require some careful nuancing or further study.

But there was an intended message, sent by the author, and in order to respond or apply that message appropriately to my life

WE ARE NOT free to just interpret it any old way that I want to

This is exactly what happens to people when they're reading the Bible all the time: we hit up against stuff we don't like or don't understand so we just start making up stuff

And say things like "well, this is what I think it means to me."

And sometimes we can't fully understand because it's a different culture or there are things we kind of have to guess at or fill in the gaps as best we can

But we're not free to just invent and make up interpretations of Scripture that are comfortable or convenient for us

We must understand and get to and deal with the author's original intent as best we can in order to make proper application

### III. Apply (Respond)

**Primary Question: What does this mean for me/we/our community**

- What do I need to **do**?
- How does this change my **internal world** of thoughts, beliefs, motives, will, attitudes?
- What promises can I hook my life into?
- What does this tell me about the character of God and his activity?

-How might this apply to our church community and to my neighbors and friends who don't know God?  
-how could I pray for myself, my circumstances, or others using this passage?

Okay, so OBSERVE, INTERPRET, APPLY

What does it say, what does it mean, what does it mean for me, we and our community?

This works together like a cheerleading pyramid—going to channel your inner-cheerleader here this afternoon.

I thought about calling a group of you up here to do this live, but we'll settle for a graphic instead

At the base of the pyramid, you need LOTS of observations

Then, the next level, you've got a little fewer interpretations

Then at the very top, you've funnel it down to just a couple of applications

BONUS QUESTION: HOW DOES THIS POINT ME TO JESUS?

Okay, so this is a very, very simple tool, but with this little tool that I've just given you, you are now better equipped to read the Bible than 90% of the people in the world

And with this little tool, you're going to be much more open to and able to get something out of the Scriptures

And we're not just going to talk about this, we're going to do it.

Next page is Proverbs 1—let's set you up with a little bit of context and helps for how to read Proverbs

Proverbs is mostly written by a guy named Solomon, who reigned as king of Israel around 900 BC.

He was the son of one of the most famous kings in Israel's history—a guy named David, you might of heard about David and Goliath, that's his dad

In one of the early stories about Solomon we hear that God appeared to Solomon and invited him to ask for anything he wanted

And Solomon asked for wisdom—which was very wise! And God poured out wisdom on him and according to the Scriptures he became literally the wisest man on earth

In fact, he was so wise that other kings and queens from other countries heard about him and came to test him and learn from him

And Israel flourished under the reign of Solomon in large part because he was so incredibly wise

So Solomon wrote down some wise sayings or Proverbs and they're recorded here for us along with a couple of other people who contributed to the book as well

What Proverbs gives us are PRINCIPLES for living a healthy and flourishing life, NOT PROMISES

Very important to distinguish between these two things.

A promise is something like in the New Testament when Jesus says "I will always be with you." His presence is with us always, no matter what, no matter where, we can bank on it—that's a promise

A principle is something that's generally true and is foundational for good living but because we live in an uncertain world, there are circumstances that could move things in a different direction

For example, the Proverbs say that if you train a child up in the way that they should go when they grow old they will not depart from it.

Now generally speaking, that's a true principle. Generally speaking that's a good way to parent and raise your kids.

But most of us know kids who have been raised by wise and godly parents who have gone their own way

And in fact, we know that this is a principle and not a promise because Solomon's own son was a complete and utter disaster  
and made a humungous, selfish, proud decision early on his reign as king

And it split the nation of Israel into 2 nations on the other side of his foolish, proud decision.

So these proverbs are principles, not promises

These aren't hard and fast rules for living, they are wise principles that we are to take and apply and live out of with wisdom and understanding

Things might not always turn out exactly this way but this is generally the path to life

For our session this morning I'm going to give you about five minutes and with that little half-sheet in hand I want you to do STEP 1: Just observing, making observations

What kinds of things stick out to you? What's repeated? What are the themes that are here? What questions do you have or does this passage generate?

To help you get started I'm going to set you up a little bit here: one the key words and themes here in Proverbs 1 is "LISTEN"

Who SHOULD Solomon's son listen to, who SHOULDN'T he listen to, and what are the consequences or results of our listening?

[POLL EVERYWHERE?]

PRAY: 5 minutes and then we'll get started

PAIRS: SHARE

1. K.O. #1: v. 4-5: for giving prudence to those who are simple.  
knowledge and discretion to the young—  
<sup>5</sup> let the wise listen and add to their learning,  
and let the discerning get guidance

IQ: Who's invited to this party in v. 4-5?

IQ: Makes sense that the simple and the young might need help—why the wise and discerning? Why would they be invited?

IQ: Who has known someone that they would call wise? What characteristics mark them?

What posture do they have toward new information and learning new things? Why?

AQ: What does it mean, then, for us to become wise people? What kind of heart posture does it require?

AQ: How do we cultivate that kind of heart? What things block us from having a teachable eager to learn heart? What things help us to move in that direction?

APPLICATION: as we start this series, start this new year, start off in Proverbs, are you willing to be teachable? Are you willing this January to put off whatever might get in the way?

PAUSE: you know what we just did? We just OBSERVED, INTERPRETED, APPLIED

Observation: who's all is invited to learn wisdom?

Interpretation: why would an already wise person need more wisdom? what are some characteristics of wise people?

Application: how do we become those kinds of people?

In just one part of this chapter we went from a simple observation about who's invited here to what I think is really THE CORE QUESTION OF OUR LIVES:  
will we have a teachable heart before God?

Scripture says and illustrates that if we won't do this, nothing else we do in our lives will ever matter, period.

All we just did was Observed, Interpreted, and Applied and some of you need to seriously wrestle with the implications of what we just applied.

Let's bounce down to verse 7 because this is really the thesis statement for how Solomon is thinking about wisdom

**2. KO 2: <sup>7</sup>The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,**  
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Like I said, I think that this is sort of Solomon's thesis statement for the whole book of Proverbs, but it takes some some unpacking to really get it.

IQ: Let's talk about this word "fear"—what does this NOT mean? What are the types of fear that AREN'T healthy or good for our relationship with God?

IQ: So let's talk about it positively: what DOES it mean to have a healthy and holy fear of the Lord?

IQ: What does it mean that this type of fear is the beginning of knowledge?

AQ: Is a healthy and holy and rich fear of the Lord widely understood in our culture? What are the different messages we get from the world around us in terms of how we should relate to God? There's a whole mix of them, right? What are they?

AQ: Given that the world we live in isn't going to help us here, how do we cultivate in our own lives this fear of the Lord?

AQ: Let's move this from the individual level to our life as a church—our culture as a whole isn't going to help us cultivate a healthy fear of the Lord, but as a church community here, a big part of our job is to help each other move in this direction!

How do we become a church community that encourages and helps each other grow in the right and holy fear of the Lord?

PRAY HERE???

What else did you see? Where else does listening or not listening take place here?

### 3. KO: Listen to your parents instruction!

Parents, going to make some application here for us quickly and then we'll keep moving:

The application this forces me to consider is simply this: is what I'm teaching my kids worth them listening to?

what are you teaching your kids?

You ARE teaching them all the time, shaping values, giving them a grid or a set of things to value, whether you mean to be or not!

You teach them by how you're living your life—what do YOU spend your time, energy and money on? What do your kids see about what matters to you?

You teach values and worldview by what you inhibit or what you set a boundary around in their experience

what kind of t.v. and video games and movies do they watch? What kinds of images are in their heads?

How many hours are they plugged in a day and what's that doing to their minds, hearts, spirits, bodies?

There are all kinds of things pulling at their time and energies, what kinds of decisions do you make in your family for school, sports, music, and are those WISE decisions?

And perhaps even deeper, are you teaching them that WHO THEY ARE is NOT those things but something much deeper and more important?

I was talking with someone a week ago about his high school experience as a wrestler. He was a good wrestler. And people praised him for being a wrestler.

And the message that he took in was: I. AM. a wrestler! That's my identity! That's what makes me valuable and important!

And then he got to college! And then got his butt kicked regularly!

And because his identity had been built on sinking sand, on something that was small and shallow and thin like a sport, he went through a major identity crisis.

And he said to me, "It was stupid for me to have my identity wrapped up in wrestling.

What I needed was someone to help me to find my identity as a child of God, as someone made in God's image who just happened to have some small gifts and abilities in wrestling.

So that when that was gone, I didn't fall apart with it."

Parents, are you helping your kids find their identities in the deeper, truer things about them

beyond what they happen to be good at or what you WANT or WISH for them to be good at?

Are you parenting with wisdom and helping your kids grow up into wisdom?

We're launching a parenting seminar for about 4 weeks with Traci Paxson starting on January 12<sup>th</sup>.

I'd really encourage you to take a couple of weeks to invest some time and thought into your parenting.

So that you might grow in wisdom around parenting so that what you're teaching your kids might be worth them paying attention to.

#### 4. KO: Who should his son NOT listen to? Sinful men!

IQ: Why?

IQ: What does this Proverb say about the final outcome of people who spend their lives pursuing evil? (v. 18-19):

***These men lie in wait for their own blood;  
they ambush only themselves!***

***<sup>19</sup> Such are the paths of all who go after ill-gotten gain;  
it takes away the life of those who get it.***

IQ: What does it mean that ill-gotten gain takes away the life of those who get it?

AQ: When we're considering cheating on our taxes or going after something that's a little or a lot un-ethical, is this what we think will happen to us?

AQ: What do we think will happen to us if we get what we want even if it is gotten illegally or in some wrong way?

AQ: Solomon says that walking the paths chasing after ill-gotten gain is de-humanizing, it takes away our life. Is that only true for financial ill-gotten gain? What else does that apply to?

Sin is thin! It is self-destructive! It starts off fun and rewarding and easy but you hit diminishing returns quickly and before long it takes away the life of those who live in it

Holiness, following after Jesus, is rich! It starts off hard and at first you're like why am I even doing this?

But as completely the opposite of sin, the deeper you press into it, the richer the rewards, the greater the return on your investment!

Christmas eve we talked about this good news: God is more for you than you are for yourself.

Sin starts easy and then sours quickly, it's thin, like a vapor, and it's ultimately self-destructive

Following after God into his ways and his life is rich, thick, substantial, that's the way to life

Finally in v. 20, we meet wisdom!

**5. KO: Where is wisdom calling out from?** How does wisdom call out for people to follow her?

KO: Compare and contrast wisdom's call and the sinful men's call. How do the sinful men call people to follow them?

IQ: What does this tell us about the nature and character of the sinful men v. wisdom?

KO: What does wisdom want? What is she upset about and longing for?

KO: What will happen to the person who disregards her call? (Again, pattern of self-destruction when we disregard)

I want to pull back here and share something I got from a great book called "Necessary Endings" by Henry Cloud

We just met 3 types of people: wise, foolish or mockers, sinful or evil  
these three types of people or patterns of behavior run all throughout the book of Proverbs and I want us to be equipped to think well about this

Cloud in his book points out that these three patterns of behavior are helpful ways to see both ourselves and the people around us and help us to relate well to them

And help us to make adjustments in ourselves as we see wise, foolish and even evil behavior inside each of us and as we have to deal with people who also display all these behaviors

Wise	Mocker/Fools	Evil
<p>Truth -&gt; Adapt:</p> <p>That's true, I need to own that problem, deal with that</p> <p>Don't like it, but when something brought into the light, see what's true, I adapt to it</p> <p>I adjust myself to reality</p>	<p>(Not stupid, maybe smartest/most beautiful, most capable people in the room)</p> <p>Truth -&gt; No Adaptation</p> <p>Shoot messenger: defend, deny, minimize, externalize, always outside selves -&gt;DON'T OWN-&gt;</p> <p>Change truth in some way to adapt to THEM rather than adapting to external realities</p> <p>Wise/Fool all about WHO or WHAT will shift: person or the reality around me?</p>	<p>(Fools hurt you, not trying to, they just avoid responsibility)</p> <p>Evil people enjoy hurting/sabotaging/causing someone or something to fail</p>
<p>Take a quick look in mirror: we each display some different patterns in different ways in our lives.</p> <p>There have been times when I've been simultaneously wise and open and teachable in my job</p>		

and foolish and in denial in my relationship with my wife or kids.

Conversely, there have been times when I've been absolutely unwilling to deal with the truth and adapt to it in my work even while being very attentive and open at home.

Where do you display these different patterns?

WHERE are you wise and responsive to truth, where are you foolish, and are there places where you are evil?

Before you dismiss too quickly, ask you this: is there anyone or anything that you would delight to see fail? Jealous of anyone? Ever taken a small step to undermine someone or something—spread a rumor, share a bit of gossip, in the hopes that it might negatively impact someone else that you just don't like?

1. Where are you wise, where are

<p>you foolish, and where might you be prone toward evil?</p> <p>2. Who do you listen to? Who are you following? The sinful men in Proverbs 1 and wisdom in Proverbs 1 and the fools and mockers in Proverbs 1 all invite us to listen to them and all of them make promises. Who do you listen to? Who's promises are you hooking into?</p>		
<p>Issue not only about us: we have to relate to people for whom these realities are in play as well.</p> <p>Any of you ever have to work with a fool at your work-place?</p> <p>Any of you ever have to manage or supervise someone who's a fool or even evil?</p> <p>Any of you have a parent or sibling who refuses to take responsibility for their actions? Ever have a family member who's an addict and who refuses to deal with it?</p> <p>Here's how Cloud</p>		

<p>suggests we relate to these people in these different areas</p>		
<p>Wise: Talk! Feedback -&gt; Ownership -&gt; Improvement</p> <p>These people are healthy enough to hear and receive feedback and process it well and change/develop and grow</p> <p>If you ARE this person, you think this will work with everyone</p> <p>You think that if you just talk long enough, if you just work with them long enough you can get them to see and respond to the truth</p>	<p>Fool: (after a while when it's clear no response): Stop Talking About the Problem!</p> <p>Not listening to you about the problem any more! Not working!</p> <p>Talk about how talking about the problem is not helping</p> <p>"Been late on every assignment for the past six months, we've been talking about this problem for six months, not going to talk about that any more.</p> <p>What we need to talk about is how do I talk to you about the problem so we can get a resolution?"</p> <p>"We've talked and talked to death about your addiction problem. I'm not going to talk about that any more, you're not listening. What we need to talk about</p>	<p>Evil: Lawyers, Cops, and Courts</p> <p>Protection Mode: don't talk, don't negotiate, don't get sucked in</p> <p>Talk to my attorney, go to the shelter, get a restraining order, get someone fired who needs to get fired or quit and find another job</p> <p>These people are dangerous or abusive or manipulative and you need to put a strong and thick wall between you and them.</p>

	<p>is the fact that our conversations aren't getting you any healthier. I need a resolution here to this problem.</p> <p>So here we're establishing limits, boundaries and consequences:</p> <p>"I'm not giving you any more meaningful work because when you're late, our whole department suffers and I'm not giving you that kind of power any more."</p> <p>"I can no longer ride the ups and downs of your addiction or expose my family to your issues. I love you, but we're not coming to your house again until you get help."</p>	

We're going to spend these next 31 days pursuing wisdom, and by God's grace I hope that it'll help each of us in our lives in really practical and specific ways

And Solomon was a very wise guy, but there was something he didn't know when he wrote this 900 years before Jesus

And that is that when Solomon is calling us to follow and pursue and hear wisdom, he's pointing us to the son of God, Jesus himself who the Scriptures say is the one who IS all wisdom

This past fall we looked at John 1, and in introducing Jesus, John says that he was the "Word who became flesh"—in Greek thought, the Word was the organizing principle or organizing WISDOM of the universe!

Wisdom incarnate, wisdom in the flesh, that's who Jesus is. And my prayer is that at the end of this month, we'll have a fuller and richer understanding of Jesus as we walk through this together.

My friends, 2013 is coming to a close and 2014 is about to kick off. I want to invite you to kick it off right with us together—you've already gotten day 1 started and it's not even January 1<sup>st</sup> yet.

Let's roll up our sleeves together and make this a year with zero regrets as we grow in and learn and serve the God who is all wisdom.