Lesson One: Foundations of Wisdom

Opening dialogue:
Why do we need divine wisdom more than ever? What issues do we need help with as we go about our daily lives?

Introduction:
As we discovered from the Book of James, God is generous and lavish with his wisdom if we will ask in faith and use it for his glory and the good of others (James 1:5-8; 3:17-18). James also warn us that there is counterfeit wisdom that leads to disorder and evil (James 3:13-16).

Where did James get all his ideas about wisdom? Of course, the Holy Spirit inspired his writing to the persecuted and scattered churches. But James was a devout Jewish Christian who had much of the Old Testament memorized, including the Book of Proverbs!

The Book of Proverbs is part of a collection of Old Testament wisdom books that include Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. These books are part of the worship and work life of God’s people. These books collect insights from more than 1000 years of biblical history, from Moses all the way to Ezra.

Proverbs is an amazing library of collected poems (Chapters 1-9) and sayings (Chapters 10-31) first collected by Solomon and then added to by subsequent generations. In this lesson, we will look at chapters 1-9 and learn about the foundations for wisdom and the practical ways we can grow in our love for God and obedience to his Word.

Reading #1: Proverbs 1:1-7
Key Idea: God’s wisdom is more than knowledge. It leads us to living lives pleasing to God and helping others do the same.

The fear of the Lord is the starting point. What is the fear of the Lord?

Discussion:
How do we understand the following words? Share an example.

- Prudence
- Discretion
- Discrimination
**Prayer:**
Let’s ask God to give each one in the group a deeper respect for God and desire for wisdom.

**Reading #2: Proverbs 2:1-9**

*Key idea:* God’s pathways to wisdom include real effort…and the results are amazing!
Notice the action words in 2:1-5. The poetic style helps us remember them:

“If you…”
- Accept and store up
- Turn your ear and apply your heart
- Call out and cry aloud
- Look for it and search for it

“Then you will…”
- *Understand and find knowledge*
- *Receive wisdom…knowledge and understanding*
- *Have success and protection*
- *Understand every good path*

**Discussion:**
Why does the Lord ask us to put in the effort to learn and listen, study, and pray? Why not just give us wisdom and guidance instantly?

**True stories:**
- 409 cleaning products are the result of 408 experimental failures!
- Thomas Edison was an amazing inventor and we thank him for a good light bulb—after hundreds of attempts, he finally succeeded.

**Reading #3: Proverbs 3:3-10**

*Key idea:* humility, love, and obedience create pathways for divine blessing.

**Question:**
Why do we keep wanting our own will instead of discovering and doing God’s will?
Notice the practical steps in this poetry:
- Verse 3: Love and faithfulness are displayed when we decide in advance to be loyal to God and serve others.
- Verses 5-6: Trust and submission opens the door to clarity and blessing.
- Verses 7, 9: Fearing God and offering our resources to him.

**A powerful story of putting God first:**

R.G. LeTourneau was one of the more unlikely leaders of 20th century industry. From humble beginnings and a 7th grade education, he taught himself engineering and eventually built a manufacturing empire. His earth-moving machines helped win WWII and construct the highway infrastructure of modern America. By the end
of his life he held 299 patents. He had also become one of the leading spokespersons in the lay-led faith and work movement.

The decision to give away 90 percent of his personal income and stock in the company was the result of a previous decision--made when he was 30 and deeply in debt--to make God his business partner. Chastised by his missionary sister to get serious about serving God, LeTourneau was confused. Like most people, he believed that sincere dedication to God required that he become a preacher, an evangelist, or a missionary.

He attended a revival meeting at church and gave in. Thinking he was headed to the mission field, he sought guidance from his pastor. After praying together, his pastor said, “You know Brother LeTourneau, God needs businessmen as well as preachers and missionaries.” LeTourneau responded, “All right, if that’s what God wants me to be, I’ll try to be His businessman.”

LeTourneau took his business partnership with God seriously, although he felt like God was getting “a sorry specimen as a partner.” When financial success came years later, he believed this made him a debtor to God as well as his fellow man. His commitment to give away so much of his wealth was not a flash of generosity as much as a logical progression from his earlier decision to make God his business partner.

When people understand that their work matters to God and recognize that He is their business partner, LeTourneau’s perspective is a natural response: “The question is not how much of my money I give to God, but rather how much of God’s money I keep for myself.” What would it mean if you recognized that God is your business partner? How do you view money: as a measurement of your worth or a tool for serving God and others?

Let’s prayer for one another and surrender to God.