

The Beauty of Wisdom

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[0 : 00] Everyone, good morning. So we're reading from Proverbs chapter 3. We'll start at verse 13. Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding.

For the gain from her is better than gain from silver, and her profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

Long life is in her right hand. In her left hand are riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her. Those who hold her fast are called blessed. The Lord by wisdom founded the earth.

By understanding he established the heavens. By his knowledge the deeps broke open. And the clouds dropped down the dew. My son, do not lose sight of these.

[1 : 05] Keep sound wisdom and discretion. And they will be life for your soul, and adornment for your neck. Then you will walk on your way securely. And your foot will not stumble.

If you lie down, you will not be afraid. When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden terror, or of the ruin of the wicked when it comes.

For the Lord will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught. Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.

Do not say to your neighbour, go and come again tomorrow, I will give it, when you have it with you. Do not plan evil against your neighbour, who dwells trustingly beside you.

Do not contend with a man for no reason, when he has done you no harm. Do not envy a man of violence, and do not choose any of his ways.

[2 : 03] For the devious person is an abomination to the Lord, but the upright are in his confidence. The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous.

Towards the scorners he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favour. The wise will inherit honour, but fools get disgrace. Cool.

Thanks, Ben. Hi, everyone. My name's Andrew. I just want to say a big thank you to Caleb and Emily for the wonderful video they've just done for us on Wisdom as well. So today we're going to be, we'll be switching gears.

We're moving out of our Revelation series and into Proverbs, as Marty mentioned. So I want to start by telling you a story about a prince who became a king.

It's a man who had everything he could want. A father and mother who loved him, a land of peace and prosperity, respect from his enemies, and even fame that spread throughout the nations.

[3 : 10] Yet for all this, the young king felt weak and insecure. He wasn't sure of himself. Until one day he had an Aladdin-like moment. You know the Disney movie Aladdin?

The story of the genie and a lamp and the three wishes? Well, for this young king, his name was Solomon. He wasn't actually approached by a genie with a lamp, but he was summoned by God to speak with him.

And in a quite spectacular moment where he's approached by God, God says to him to ask for whatever he wants and he will have it. Just like, kind of like Aladdin's wish.

Now think of that for a moment. King Solomon, he knew he was a man with more than any other, and yet he gets asked by God, what do you want? Unlike Aladdin, he couldn't actually ask to be a prince or king.

He already was that. But now, within reach, could be even bigger rewards. He could have long life, immortality, possibly even a kingdom that dominated the earth for generations and generations.

[4 : 14] So it could have all been his. Yeah, what happens next is kind of extraordinary. Solomon stops. He steps back and says to God, I'm just like a little child and I don't know how to carry out my

duties.

I don't know what to do. And then he says, I need wisdom. So Solomon had the whole world at his feet, whatever he wanted, and he simply chose wisdom.

Why would Solomon plead for wisdom? Well, this is what we're going to be talking about today. We find ourselves in the book of wisdom called Proverbs. And just to get some context, and Marty's mentioned this exact verse, which is really helpful.

Proverbs chapter 1 verse 7 says this, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Fools despise wisdom and instruction. So wisdom and the fear of the Lord are mentioned at least 18 times together in Proverbs.

So it's pretty significant. So what is the connection between wisdom and the fear of the Lord? And why is it important to start here? Warren Wisby says it like this.

[5 : 19] He says, So this fear, or a healthy fear, you could call it, actually comes from a place of deep reverence and awe for God.

And this is the key for understanding Proverbs, and especially chapter 3. Wisdom is always relational. In fact, we're going to understand today how when we bow down in fear and awe of the one who made us, we actually stand in the true beauty of wisdom.

I'll say that again. When we bow down in fear and awe of the one who made us, we stand in the true beauty of wisdom. You see, it's like the fear and awe of a child with a parent.

You see, kids fear their parents not only because they can help them, but also because they can hurt them. And a key part of the job description for any parent is to try and develop with their child a healthy fear and sense of awe or respect for them.

Sometimes this involves modelling behaviour, sometimes correction, mostly teaching, but always unconditional love. So the lessons learned in wisdom always have a relational component with them.

[6 : 53] So if you jump with me now into Proverbs 3 verse 13, here we can see the beauty of wisdom as it is communicated like a father to a son. And we can see the father speaking to his son.

And he says these words, Blessed is the one who finds wisdom and the one who gets understanding. For the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit from gold. She is more precious than jewels and nothing can desire can compare with her.

You know, if we step back for just a moment, remember our author Solomon. He's confident, isn't he? He's a man certain he's made the best choice, the choice to pursue wisdom.

And he's a man satisfied with the results of asking for wisdom. And there's a couple of things to notice here. Firstly, he draws us into looking at wisdom by comparing it to materials we're familiar with.

Silver, gold and precious jewels. Now, often you'll see this in Proverbs. Solomon uses things we're familiar with to draw us into deep and profound truths that we are unfamiliar with or they're unknown to us.

[8 : 01] So this comparison of precious jewels to wisdom is really powerful. Basically, the father is saying to his son that wisdom in itself is much more profitable and desirable than any earthly thing of value.

Now, that's a big claim. Two years ago, Alex and I went to the UK on a holiday. And as part of the trip, while in London, we had an opportunity to visit the Tower of London.

Now, this place is just steeped in history and legacy. And one of the significant things about the place isn't actually the place itself, but it's what's inside.

Inside are the crown jewels, the most precious jewels the Windsor monarchy have, and no doubt some of the most precious jewels on earth. Now, did you think it was easy to see those jewels and get close?

Not at all. They are guarded by the Queen's most experienced guards called beefeaters. And the jewels are housed in these glass, probably bulletproof glass containers.

[8 : 59] They have alarm systems everywhere, CCTV, and just to top it off, this really annoying treadmill that makes you go past the precious jewels so you can't actually stop and linger.

Otherwise, you have a pile on in the treadmill.

So in other words, the value of these jewels is absolutely priceless. Yet God says through Solomon, jewels are valuable, yes, but not nearly as precious as the wisdom I can give to you.

The beauty of wisdom never shines or fades in comparison with gold, silver, and precious stones. Why? Because it gives you this. It gives you long life. It gives you honour and peace.

In fact, those that pursue and take hold of it, they are called blessed. Now, I think it's good to just stop for a second and consider that because today it seems many people understand their faith either through a lens of suffering or through a lens of material blessing.

I.e., I have to suffer to be approved by God. Or if I give a lot to God, I'll be blessed with a good life filled with the possessions I want. True wisdom is neither of these.

[10:07] It says, True wisdom.

Now, the second thing to notice here is that wisdom is personified by being compared with a woman. Now, the significance in comparing wisdom to a woman, I think it has to be understood in the context of the father teaching his son here.

And for the sake of words here, it could be a mother or daughter. It's basically illustrating a parent-child relationship. But I think in this situation, dad or the father knows his young son is entering the world with many things that will catch his attention.

And one of those things is women. So the father wisely catches his son's attention by drawing to him, drawing him to what is important to him. So he likens the pursuit of wisdom to be like that, to be like the pursuit of a young woman.

Now, something interesting happens when a young man pursues a young woman. It's almost like it seems nothing else in the world seems important to him but her.

[11:37] And you know what happens is his mates start to wonder where he's gone. His parents notice when they try to speak to him. He's just really preoccupied. He really isn't listening. So he becomes so committed and passionate in the pursuit of her that it even changes his behaviour around other people.

And I think Solomon uses this illustration to really capture a powerful scene of this passion and pursuit. He's really saying this is how important wisdom is to you in your life.

Your passionate pursuit of this beautiful thing and precious thing called wisdom will be the making of you as a young man or a young woman. And he even connects wisdom to being like a tree of life. And this is imagery that basically has a foretaste of heaven, a direct link to that. So in obtaining wisdom, there is a sweetness, there's a satisfaction to the soul that nothing else can mirror.

So the father is saying to his son, chase the beauty of wisdom. That is most important because wisdom is beautiful and beneficial and we should pursue it with all we have.

[12:50] Okay. But doesn't all this talk about beauty and pursuit sound a bit self-indulgent? You know, maybe even a little bit hedonistic. Well, continue reading with me about the logic in wisdom.

Chapter 3 verse 19 says this. The Lord by wisdom founded the earth. By understanding, he established the heavens. By his knowledge, the deeps broke open and the clouds dropped down the dew.

Wisdom's beauty can be seen throughout our creation, can't it? Everywhere we look, from sunrise to sunset, mountain to valley, forest to desert, we can see God's handiwork everywhere.

Yet this didn't happen by chance. God is very clear that the very laws of nature around us were built into the universe by his very wisdom.

And it extends further, I think, and it implicates that we are thinking God's thoughts after him when we honestly study creation and examine the wise principles and patterns God has intricately designed.

[13:53] Leading quantum physicist of his time, John Polkinghorne, when talking about the notion of the universe coming into being, he actually makes this comment.

He says, do you know how exact this universe had to be in its fine tuning to bring about mankind? He said the exactitude is something like this.

The exactitude demanded is it's like taking aim at a one inch square object at the other end of the known universe, 20 billion light years away and hitting its smack bang bullseye.

Or it's about a similar chance to a tornado ripping through a rubbish tip and producing a jumbo 747 as a result. This is the exactness of the created order.

It is God's wisdom on full display. So on the basis of God's wisdom through creation, we find we have divine purpose and can find divine patterns in his handiwork.

[14:56] And through God's wisdom, he established creation and he gave us order and order. It's an order designed for harmony. And when God's creation lives in harmony with God's purpose and

design, it is living with the purpose it's been destined for.

Doesn't that just make you want to stand in awe and fear of God? This is the beauty of what his wisdom demanded. And we can't even begin to really fathom or comprehend it, can we?

Well, like a father to a son, there is a particular beauty in God's ultimate creation, mankind. And I really love the way a guy called Ravi Zacharias brings this point home.

He says it's like this. He said, God's image is on you in a general sense and God's unique gifting is in you in a particular sense. You see, God's image bears on us uniquely, just like a parent does to a child.

He cares for us and finds us more valuable than we could possibly imagine for ourselves. So verse 23 actually leads us into showing this care of the father towards us.

[16:09] It's like a father stepping alongside to say, now you have it. Now you see wisdom. Don't lose sight of it. And look, I think on the surface, it could easily seem like we need to work hard to keep it if we want to see the benefit.

And that kind of appeals to us, doesn't it? Okay, if I do A, read the book and complete B, implement the saying, then I will get C, which is a nice choice reward.

Sounds a little bit formulaic though, doesn't it? So let's be clear. It is very easy to read this way, but that is not the way God speaking through Solomon intended it to be read. Follow closely with me in verse 26.

It says this, For the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your feet from being caught. In other words, when we surrender to God, when we bear down before him, we can help us as we are and say, I need wisdom.

God will give it. And in his good providence to us, he has promised to supply and empower us. Our job is to simply follow him by faith. And when our confidence is in the Lord first, he works the rest out.

[17:22] It really isn't, it simply isn't rocket science to understand this. So when in real humility, we bow and say to God, I can't do this on my own. Show me your way, come into my heart and change me.

You know what? It happens. And in God's providence, he can provide much more than what we could ever expect. In verses 21 to 26 alone, we find that God will.

He will secure our way so we don't stumble. Keep us safe while we rest. Our sleep will be sweet. And we won't need to fear sudden disaster or tragedy.

In God's good providence. In God's good providence, two things can generally happen when we experience these benefits. Firstly, we can be grateful and turn our worship back in reverence and awe to the author of wisdom, God himself.

Or we can forget where the blessing came from and find ourselves groaning and pursuing our own means to satisfaction in this life. And forgetfulness is the curse of wisdom.

[18:25] And the whole book of Proverbs, particularly Proverbs 3, is littered with references about not forgetting the precious benefits of good wisdom. And is it any wonder we need so many reminders?

Even Solomon and David showed they forgot the benefits of wisdom at points in their own lives.

Throughout the Old Testament, we are reminded of how the Israelites forgot God again and again and again and turned their back on wisdom.

Deuteronomy 6 is a great reminder of how in the middle of material affluence and possessions, God warned the Israelites not to forget his name and his blessings.

Yet they did. So it's just so important we come back to the beauty of wisdom and the true life we possess in the pursuit of it again and again. And, you know, if I'm really honest with you, the appeal of wisdom and trusting in God has been really difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic.

How are you going with it? How are you going with pursuing wisdom through this time? How are you going with worrying over what you possess? How are you going with it? How are you going with it? So like unlike any time before us, most of, well, unlike any time in our generation before us, most of us have been in a position where we have either lost or gained something financially through this.

[19:43] Has your change in physical wealth left you uncertain that God's wisdom is best? Do you lose sleep at night worrying over your shoulder about what will happen to your retirement income, to your savings, to your super?

Or are you more concerned about your pursuit of God's wisdom and thankfulness for his benefits? You know, I spent some time talking with someone recently who isn't a Christian about how they've been going through the COVID-19 pandemic.

This person was telling me how wonderful life has been for them. They have everything on the surface. Surface, it appears they have everything they could want. Success in relationships. Comfortable lifestyle.

A huge gain in finances during the pandemic. It all seems well, but this person has a nagging doubt in the back of their mind. They keep thinking, what if I lose it all?

So to try and fight the fear, they try to juggle multiple things at once, trying to hold more and more things to escape the fear. Yet they still fear they will lose it all.

[20 : 47] You see, when we pursue wisdom and we make it our life passion, when we bow down in awe and fear of the one who made us, we don't need to fear. We hold a hope.

We have a promise and a confidence that is irresistible. And it's not in us. It's in him. We need to fear the creator more than creation.

And when that happens, there's a harmony and order of wisdom that marks us. Others see it because wisdom rightly ordered in our lives changes our outlook and our relationship with others. Verses 28 to 32 move us into thinking through our relationship with others. Now, if I can just pause for a moment and before we look at these verses and point out and appreciate that Proverbs is an intensely practical book, possibly the most practical book in the Bible.

So we come to this kind of unique fork in the road with these verses where a very practical, don't do this kind of stuff line is taken. Now, when I read this the first few times, to be honest, it really jarred me quite a lot.

[21 : 53] All along in the verses before this, we've been hearing about the beauty of wisdom, the logic of wisdom and the amazing providence of God. Then all of a sudden, bang, the language and the tone changes.

The more I've read of it, though, the more I'm convinced that we need to understand these words as an expression of a father coming alongside his son and gently pointing out to him what the consequences of following wisdom are versus the consequences of foolishness.

And in a strange irony, just before I wrote these words, I had a similar experience with my dad that night. Dad and I were just talking on the phone about a particular topic and dad said to me rather firmly, he said, don't say that because of this reason.

Now, when he said it to me, I didn't take it as a command like I have to do this. I simply took it as, hey, OK, that's a wise thing to consider what dad's saying.

So I should listen to what he said. So when we are told to give to our neighbor in these particular verses and not withhold good, it is really all about how we are going to live wisely towards others.

[23 : 07] And, you know, I think there's an interesting parallel here back in our verses 13 to 18. See, verses 13 to 18 speak of this incomparable value of beauty, of wisdom in comparison with earthly riches like silver, gold and precious stones.

You see, if we are fixed and we have an earthly perspective focused on riches in this life, we not only bypass the much richer reward in gaining wisdom, but we can also be tempted to withhold what we can give to others and keep it to ourselves.

And it's so tempting to put our own self-interest ahead of our neighbors and buy the me first culture that our society just applauds everywhere around us. Now, alongside this character trait greed, this sin greed, there are other traits also in a similar category.

Those who plan evil against their neighbor, those who get into unnecessary disputes and those who envy those who are violent or corrupt. Now, it's clear, quite clear God doesn't reserve his thoughts about this kind of person.

He describes them in verse 32 and 33 as an abomination, as wicked and as devious. The curse of sin is called out loud and clear.

[24 : 28] And this is the person in chapter 1, verse 7, who doesn't listen to wisdom and instruction. They are the fool that Proverbs talks about. And God's response is also clear.

His hand is on the righteous. His hand is on the humble. And his favor is turned to the wise. A really key verse, I think, that locks or bookends wisdom together is in verse 34, where it says, Toward the scorners he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor.

And this verse has really strong links with New Testament passages in James and 1 Peter. Both 1 Peter and James clearly talk about humility as primarily focused on submitting to God. So we've really come full circle. We started with this picture of young King Solomon on his knees before God. Solomon reached out to God in humility, requesting that he be given wisdom. He submitted to God and is the young man with everything, yet he lacked wisdom. But Solomon is really only a foretaste of the one who modeled and lived ultimate wisdom in humility. [25 : 44] He's also a king, but he lacked nothing. And in God's wisdom, our King Jesus came down and as an ultimate act of wisdom gave his life for you and me.

His death was a breathtaking act of humility that broke the curse of our sin. It is beauty of the grandest measure beyond all logic and God's ultimate act of providence to us. You see, we walk every day deciding to make a choice about the wisdom we all exercise. We can pursue the beauty of wisdom, looking to the cross of Christ and what he has done to change us. We can bow down in awe and fear of the one who made us. There is no comparison, no comparison to the satisfaction and life this gives to us. To walk and pursue this direction is the ultimate purpose and task we've been given in this lifetime. Look, it's quite possible you've heard these words today and your soul is simply weary of doing good. You're fighting the race, but you're weary. If that's you, I'd encourage you to rest in the beauty of wisdom. [26 : 59] See how God is changing you and has changed you. Look to the one who promised you the incredible benefits of wisdom. And just like verse 18 says, those who hold fast will be called blessed.

Or maybe you have been experiencing the weight of discouragement or forgetfulness and you've become more focused on what this world has to offer than the glory of the riches of God's goodness in wisdom.

Don't forget the voice of the father. He's beckoning you and reminding you in verse 21. Don't lose sight of wisdom and discretion. If you let God be your confidence again, you will not stumble. It could be too that you've come along today and you've just never really fully considered that knowing Jesus is actually living the wise life. I've got good news for you. You can pursue this life in him today. Just like Solomon said. Solomon said, I'm just like a small child and I don't know how to find my way. Just like Solomon, you can bow down in awe and fear of Jesus and confess you need his wisdom to change your life today.

[28 : 10] And God always keeps his promises. In humility, you'll be given his favour, his blessing and an inheritance that can never be lost.

If you'll pray with me now. Father God, we thank you for the beauty of your wisdom. Help us not to forget all the benefits of a wise life found in you.

And we ask that you would help us all together learn to live and model the wisdom Jesus shows us through our work, our schools, our families and church life together. Father, may your wisdom in us shine the light of the gospel to those around us who don't know you.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.