

Wisdoms Heart

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[0 : 00] Good morning. So our first Bible reading is from 1 Kings chapter 3, starting at verse 5. Verse 5.

At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, Ask what I shall give you. And Solomon said, You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David, my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you.

And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and I have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of David, my father, although I am but a little child.

I do not know how to go out or come in, and your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude.

Give your servant, therefore, an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this, your great people?

[1 : 18] It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word.

Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you, and none like you shall arise after you.

I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honour, so that no other king shall compare with you all your days. Our second reading is from Proverbs chapter 1, starting at verse 1.

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.

[2 : 48] 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.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Fools despise wisdom and instruction. That's the word of God. Well, good morning, everyone.

My name is also David, one of the pastors here. And according to my many family members, wider family members, and most of my neighbours, I would also be considered a loser.

Now, behind general politeness and friendliness, and there is that, on most part, behind general politeness and friendliness, they think I'm gullible.

Believing what the Bible says about God, about Jesus, about sin, and about my need for salvation through Jesus. And they think I'm naive. And they think I'm naive.

- [3 : 59] To shape my life in service of Jesus. Convinced that in relationship with Jesus, I have found the good life that they too are desperately searching for.
- That's just naive. And it hurts. Nobody likes to be considered a loser.
- Nobody likes to be considered gullible, naive, a fool, easily swayed and deceived as to what is right and good.
- We crave to be validated by family and friends thinking that we're wise.
- That we're living the good life every day. And behind all that, what that means is we're all philosophers.
- [5 : 08] Phileo means to love and sophia is the word for wisdom. So we're all lovers of wisdom. We all have a form of wisdom. Something we're committed to.
- An understanding of the nature of our being. And an understanding of the nature of the good life. The problem is that as philosophers, we cannot agree where the divide between the losers or the fools and the wise is.
- We cannot agree on what wisdom looks like and plays out in life. So in Asian, Middle Eastern and Melanesian cultures, age or grey hairs as they're called is wisdom.
- But increasingly, that is being rejected by the young people who've come to conclude that grey hairs is the protection of the traditional life.
- Not necessarily the good life. On the other hand, youth is wisdom in Western culture. And so grey hairs, like myself, are dismissed as sort of past their use-by date to speak wisely on any subject in our changing world.
- [6 : 39] Information, education and technology is wisdom for many. That is, touted as a pathway to ending poverty. Ending conflict.
- Delivering the good life. And yet strangely, with vast amounts of information available at the click of a mouse. With more people educated to a higher level than ever before.
- Greed and poverty continue. And in fact, we're more disconnected. More unhappy. And more dysfunctional than ever.
- Some claim that the life of self. The life of pleasure is wisdom. So they say, well, accumulate stuff while you're able. Eat, drink and party.
- Others say the exact opposite. The selfless life. Of serving others is wisdom. So declutter your life.
- [7 : 44] Get rid of stuff. And invest in experiences. We can't agree on what wisdom looks like.
- Most commonly in Australian culture, people are committed to a form of wisdom driven by autonomy. That is, self-confidence that says, I know better than anyone else.
- And self-expression. I will do life my way. And the evidence is everywhere, I think. So children will naturally back themselves against their parents' advice.
- Adults will naturally back themselves against the governing authorities. People even live contrary to that which hard evidence suggests might be wrong or bad for you.
- So committed are they to their particular form of wisdom. And so I think, in realistic terms, we're caught between a rock and a hard place.
- [8 : 59] On the one hand, people are unsure what wisdom and the good life looks like and are searching desperately for it.
- Yet strangely, on the other hand, they resent and resist anyone who introduces wisdom which is contrary to their own settled wisdom that they've been living by for a long time.
- The two just don't gel. And perhaps the current mantra of no judgment. It's everywhere these days.

Perhaps that reflects the insecurity we feel about being wise. It seems to me that people don't want their wisdom, their wisdom, to be challenged.

Lest they be exposed as actually being unwise. So the way to deal with it is not to rethink your wisdom, but to put out the mantra, no, don't judge me.

[10 : 06] Don't challenge me. I've got to be right. And from that place between the rock and the hard place, let's jump into Proverbs for clear instruction on the big question of life.

What is wisdom? And how do we get it? Now, verse 1 introduces us to the author. The principal author and compiler of this book we call the book of Proverbs is King Solomon.

The back story, which was read to us, is really, really important. That Solomon prayed for discernment and a truly understanding heart in order that he might be a good ruler of God's people.

Now, in response to that, God gave him the gift of wisdom. So we see the correlation there of what wisdom is. And lots of insights have been recorded in this book called the Proverbs.

And it's named after a particular style of writing, usually short, pithy sentences that come in two parts, two parallel phrases, which present truth for life.

[11 : 19] But when we dig into these first seven verses, we find that even though we call it the Proverbs, the actual title of the book is anything but short and pithy. In fact, the title of the book goes for the first six verses.

The first six verses is actually one sentence. And it takes six verses to describe what these Proverbs and what wisdom is.

And verse seven then introduces the theme of the book. And the prize on offer as we decipher this stuff is wisdom.

True knowledge. True understanding of life and our place in it. True discernment. True ability to live the good life that is beneficial, rewarding, and delightful.

Even as we'll see over the next few weeks, even though it might not be popular. Now the verbs and nouns of verses two to five map out the pathway to wisdom and describe its essence.

[12 : 26] So look at verse two with me. To know wisdom and instruction. To understand words of insight. Now for us to know is just about having lots of information.

But that's not what it is in Hebrew. To know in Hebrew is to have a really deep personal insight into a subject which actually shapes who you are and how you live.

It captures your heart. Captures your attitudes, your desires. And overflows into particular behavior. Verse three.

To receive instruction in wise dealing. In righteousness, justice, and equity or fairness. To receive instruction in wise dealing speaks of the humility.

A humility that recognizes both the need to learn. Because we don't know naturally what the good life is or how to get it. And in submitting to the one whose voice is authoritative to tell us what the good life is and how to get it.

[13 : 38] The good life here in verse three. Picked up in these three nouns is all of life lived under God's control.

And reflecting first of all God's perfect character or righteousness. And expressed. God's character expressed to others around us.

In justice and fairness. All of life. Lived under God's control. Now why is that in?

Well let's take a step back. And remind ourselves that sin you see has broken God's pattern for life. And what sin does is it reduces people to a grotesque distorted sense of self.

Expressed in autonomy from God. Or as it's called here in verse seven. Foolishness. So therefore healer.

[14 : 46] Wisdom therefore is the healer of God's world. God's sinful world. Wisdom is the restorer of a true sense of self. Expressed in life lived under God.

It's a big topic. It's a big prize to win. A serious prize to miss out on. Verses five and six.

To nurture prudence. Sorry, four, five, and six. To nurture prudence or knowledge. And I've got discretion down there.

But discernment is the word I wanted. Not discretion. Is the word that should be there. To nurture prudence or knowledge. And discernment in how to live well. Making good decisions in every situation and circumstance of life.

See, wisdom is not just an external commodity. That's there on the shelf.

[15 : 50] And we sort of dip into it. When we find it desirable. Wisdom is something that changes us from the inside out. And is constantly modeled, therefore, to others around us in the way we live.

And what we live for. Wisdom, it talks about the simple here. But wisdom is not an intelligence boost for people with a lack of intellect. That's not what's meant there.

It's discernment and understanding of life for those who do not yet have it. And who are stumbling around in foolishness.

As such, it is particularly relevant to young people. Who typically are known for their energy for life. And yet perhaps lack of direction.

In how to apply that energy for good. Verse 5. Wisdom is not a fixed state.

[16 : 55] It's not as if it's like riding a bike. You can't get to the point of saying, well, I am wise. I have nothing more to learn. As older people. We need to be learning constantly.

Listening. Hearing. And allowing God's word. To change thinking and guide into new patterns of living. And I think that's particularly relevant for older people like myself.

Because it's hard for us to do that very thing. It's hard for us to change as we get older. Because to do that, we have to admit that we may have been wrong for many years.

In something we've held. We've held. We've held. We've held. We've held. And wisdom's not something we grow into naturally.

And that's why the theme of the verse is stated in verse 7. The key to, or the heart of wisdom, is fear of the Lord. Now the word beginning is not a journey marker.

[18 : 04] It's not that the idea of beginning means, well, we start off in the process of being wise by the fear of the Lord. And then somewhere, sometime, we move on to some other thing that's not disclosed here in this verse.

Now it's not like that. The beginning word here is a defining word. It's an essential foundation, a fundamental characteristic of wisdom is fear of the Lord.

It will always be there over a lifetime. The fear of the Lord at heart is what wisdom is. So to know wisdom, back in verse 2, to know wisdom is to fear the Lord.

Put it the other way around. To fear the Lord is to display wisdom. And by contrast, verse 7, the word fool in Hebrew is literally evil, E-V-I-L.

A fool is anyone, therefore, who rejects God, His ways, and His instruction. A fool is anyone who's committed to being autonomous. Or as the Bible says in other parts, someone who's committed to being wise in his own eyes.

- [19 : 24] So what is the fear of the Lord? Well, it's a disciplined, thoughtful response to God's words, desires, directions, rules, and demands.
- And it's also a humble relational response, driven by desire to love, honor, trust, and obey God, given His prior relationship and commitment to us.
- Fear of the Lord is not a cringing terror of a child before an abusive alcoholic father.
- Fear of the Lord is not the grudging, minimalistic obedience, driven by a desire to pacify God's anger or a fear of God's revenge.
- Fear of the Lord is not trying to buy God off. Fear of the Lord says, God is God and I am not.
- [20 : 40] I am not the source of wisdom and truth. God is. God is. And I ought to listen and learn. I am not the author and sustainer of my life.
- God is. And I will gladly submit to His rule. Now, some scholars suggest that the Proverbs, when you read them at face value, is proof that God trusts people to steer their own lives with their own wisdom.
- And so they would say these Proverbs are just moralistic, just nice little moralisms. That anybody can take them on board and discover wisdom. And that God is totally comfortable with the sufficiency of natural human virtue to achieve well-being in this life, apart from divine assistance.
- that we can actually say with confidence, I did it well and I did it my way through my own understanding. Through my own intuitive sense of what the good life is, I have discovered it and I've lived it.
- Well, Proverbs blows that right out of the water. Verse 7. The very theme, the very first statement of the theme, which opens up over the next chapters, as we'll see over the next few weeks, blows it right out of the water.
- [22 : 13] Because wisdom is completely anchored in and defined by fear of the Lord. Not the natural wisdom of humanity.
- Which is actually declared to be foolishness. Because it promotes autonomy for being wise in your own eyes. And so it's precisely because we naturally lack wisdom, and precisely because we naturally default to foolishness, that the person seeking wisdom needs to look to the Lord for its foundation and for its development over a lifetime.
- And when we look to the Lord, we discover that Jesus is the face of wisdom. Literally, Jesus is the face of wisdom.
- Now, Proverbs is entirely consistent with the whole Bible, which identifies two types of wisdom, two kinds of wisdom. James 3 puts it like this, wisdom of the world and wisdom from above, or heavenly wisdom.
- As I've already said, worldly wisdom promotes a life of autonomy from God. Wise in my own eyes. Self-reliant. Self-made by obeying external rules.
- [23 : 40] Even doing religious deeds. And with no need for instruction about good life, because I've already discovered the good life. I've got it under control.
- This popular wisdom, and it is popular, believes that then God accepts us on the basis of our self-generated wisdom.
- And is happy to be in relationship with us on the basis of our self-generated wisdom. Proverbs tells us that it's totally wrong.
- It's deadly, says Proverbs, to believe that. And so what we actually need is someone who will break through the dullness of our own minds, the foolishness of our own thinking, and reveal true wisdom to us.

And that, my friends, is exactly what we see and hear in the gospel. In Luke chapter 6, verse 46 to 49. Sorry, it's so small. I'm not much good at these PowerPoint things.

[25 : 07] Luke chapter 6, verse 46 to 49. Jesus tells the story as he's speaking the gospel about two builders. One is wise, one is foolish.

the wise one is the one who hears the word of Jesus and obeys. That's like building your house on a rock. The other hears but doesn't pay any attention and builds his own house in his own place of choosing like on a sand pit.

Wisdom and foolishness. My friends, the gospel is, in other words, a call to wisdom in Christ. Wisdom is built on the foundation of submission to the word or rule of God in Christ.

And quite literally, Jesus was the word of God. But even better than that, Jesus is our wisdom. Look at 1 Corinthians 1.

If you want to turn over to that with me now or look at it up on the screen if you've gone, that's even worse, isn't it? My goodness. Sorry. That's embarrassing. Damien did try to bail me out of trouble but not even Damien could save me from that.

[26 : 28] So, believe me, it's actually 1 Corinthians 1 verse 18-25. Let me read it to you. Paul says this to the Corinthians. Remember, Corinth was the center of intellectual life.

It was the center of knowledge and wisdom in the very comments in Paul's day. It was a magnet for philosophers, professors, scientists, and the arts, the performance of wisdom.

And Paul has this to say to them. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing.

But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. For it's written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

[27 : 48] For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to the Gentiles.

But to those who are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. The power of God and the wisdom of God.

Their knowledge in Corinth was, so-called knowledge, was in learning and words, intellectual attainment, dramatic performance.

But the irony of it was as they pursued wisdom, their brand of wisdom, it actually kept them from knowing God and from discovering true wisdom.

That is, until they met and responded to Jesus. We're told here that Jesus is the embodiment of God's wisdom.

[28 : 59] How does that work? Well, because he himself was God, he saw God properly in his entirety as the ruler of this universe in all his holiness and righteousness.

righteousness. Jesus understood God's demand and righteous requirements clearly. He responded perfectly, living the good life of perfect obedience, justice and fairness, expressing God's character to all around him at every moment.

And what happens in the gospel is that as we get Jesus, we get wisdom. Perfect wisdom. God has uploaded his wisdom into us by his Holy Spirit.

Our challenge, therefore, as Christians, is simply to, well, it's not that simple sometimes, but in one sense it's simple. Our challenge is on a daily basis to express the mind of Christ in every situation and circumstance.

of our lives. And as we struggle to better and better express the mind of Christ in every circumstance and situation of our life, that is to grow in wisdom.

[30 : 33] But here's the problem for us, because we constantly default to displaying our own form of wisdom. and we default to that by grasping at our own abilities and our own competencies in life.

So we think wisdom comes in being seen to be competent as parents, or competent in the workplace, or competent at sport, or competent in relationships.

and we measure wisdom by our competency, even though we cannot carry the load of that on a daily basis, it crushes us. We just cannot do it consistently, and we know and fear that it's exposing us every day as being really unwise.

it suggests to us that we've not got true life. My friends, the comfort for you this morning is that Proverbs tells us we can't be competent in the way we want to be.

Proverbs tells us we don't need to be competent in the way that we think we have to be. we tend to drag all our competencies from God's sphere.

[31 : 55] We drag them into our own sphere of effort and ability and action. But what we need to do as Christians is recognize that God is competent in all things, including your life and mine.

We need to trust and value his competency for us and in us in Christ producing righteousness, justice, and equity.

Proverbs shows us the extent of God's demands on our lives, the fear of the Lord. It's a huge thing. But it should not lead us to despair as we contemplate how do we do that?

Instead, it should humble us and point us to the Lord Jesus who promises to transform us, to transform us from the inside out into the wise, godly person that we want to be and that God has created us to be.

And you see, that's the aim of Proverbs. The aim of Proverbs is not simply to modify your behavior and make you a better version of your old, distorted, sinful self.

[33 : 28] The aim of Proverbs is to show you how to be transformed through the work of Jesus for you and in you by his spirit to make you the wise image bearer you were created to be.

So my friends, I finish with just a very simple but I hope a profound question for you. Which side of the divide are you?

Are you defined by autonomy from God? And you may well be defined by autonomy from God even though you claim to live under his rule and even though you are quite active religiously, you're here this morning, it's quite possible still to be defined by autonomy, self-reliance, self-made, self-promoting, self-satisfying, wise in your own eyes.

Now I'll bet if that's you, your friends, your wider family and your neighbours will admire you because of what you've achieved for yourself, what you've made of your own life.

But God will judge you a loser, a fool. The other side of the divide, are you a fool in the eyes of the world because they can see clearly your first point of reference is always obedience to God in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[35 : 20] Yet confident you're a person of true wisdom, defined by Christ and glad submission to his word at every point in life.

there is no third alternative. Let's pray. Lord, help us to be wise, not in our own eyes.

Help us, Lord, to come to Jesus for power and wisdom. Help us to stand firmly alongside him, gladly living under his rule and seeking daily to express his character in ourselves and to those around us.

In Jesus' name I pray.