

Wisdom and Knowing God

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[0 : 00] In my job, I have lots of conversations with people who are wrestling with spending time listening to God speak and putting his word into practice.

It is very easy, isn't it, to get out of the habit of listening to God speak. It's very easy to forget God's word, isn't it? But why should we? Why should we listen to God's word?

Why is it important to keep his instruction near? Why should we keep it in our minds? Why should we meditate on it? Well, tonight, as Daniel said, we're back in Proverbs.

And in the passages since the prologue that Mark gave us last week, the author has developed a style of teaching wisdom as a parent instructing a child.

You can see on the screen in chapter 1, verse 8, listen, my son, to your father's instruction and don't forget your mother's teaching. And again, in chapter 2, verse 1, my son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you.

[1 : 13] And in chapter 3, in tonight's passage, my son, don't forget my teaching and keep my commands in your heart. There's a big emphasis in these chapters of the Proverbs on the need for this son and also for us as the reader to listen to the teachings of the father and to not forget them.

And the more we unpack wisdom in this passage and in the book, we'll see that knowing and living this wisdom is the same as knowing God and living in relationship with him.

So, since this is such a big deal, how about I pray that we might hear and understand God's word tonight. Heavenly Father, strengthen us to have ears ready to hear and hearts ready to understand your commands so that we may know how to live wise and godly lives.

Amen. Right at the start, we see what this wisdom has to do with knowing God. Take a look in your Bibles, point 1, verse 1.

My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart. For they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity.

[2 : 41] What's this got to do with knowing and relating to God? It was through commands like this that God spoke to Israel so that they could know how to live in relationship with him.

When they were in the wilderness, before they entered the promised land in Deuteronomy chapter 32, on the slide, God said to them, take all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of the law.

They are not just idle words for you, they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess. Can you see the similarities in these two passages?

Listen to God's word and don't forget. Take the words to heart. Keeping these commands will produce long life. With the Israelites, as with the wise in these proverbs, those who listen and hold on to God's instruction will know him and live.

As we look at these verses in this chapter, you may notice a structure which begins with a command for the wise followed by the reason they should keep it.

[3 : 59] For example, let love and faithfulness never leave you, then you will win favour and a good name. Do not be wise in your own eyes, this will bring health to your body.

Let's take a closer look at one of them. Verse 5. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways submit to him and he will make your path straight.

Here we see the father encouraging the son to depend on the Lord and not on himself because it is the Lord's wisdom and understanding that will bring long life.

And what's the result of living this way? He will make your path straight. Or in other words, God will guide and protect you. Sounds good, doesn't it? But let's take a moment to think harder about this command.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Submit to him in all your ways. How do you think you're going at that?

[5 : 10] Are you convinced in your mind that what God wants for you is best? Do you let him have full control? Do you lean on his understanding or on yours?

Do you think God can't handle? Do you think God can't handle? Or maybe doesn't really understand as well as you do?

It's not very easy to just hand control over, is it? Especially with relationships or carefully laid plans or dreams that we deeply desire.

A job, for instance. Marriage. Retirement. Even ministry. The difficult challenge of this command is to ask ourselves, Do I trust in the Lord with all my heart, all my plans, all my life?

Even with my kids' lives? Do I trust that God is doing right when I don't get what I want? When my plans fail, perhaps?

[6 : 23] When I don't get the result that I hoped for? I'm sure you'll agree that this is really hard, isn't it? But a wise person who listens to God's wisdom in relationship with God will trust him with all their heart, will not lean on their own understanding, and will make him known in all they do.

And therefore, God will guide this person. He will make their path straight. He will strengthen them to walk in his ways. The difficult commands of this opening section just keep coming.

Just look at verse 9. Honour the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops. This command is also about trusting God with all our hearts.

Is our trust in God reflected in our willingness to hand over to him what he's graciously given to us? I think it's important to remember that this command isn't only for the wealthy, but a challenge for all to honour God with what he's given us, even if you're a poor uni student.

[7 : 47] The Lord isn't honoured simply by large gifts, but by sacrificial gifts, meaning a person with less may honour God even more. The generous person who does this, they trust the Lord with all their heart, don't they?

They lean on God. They lean on God's understanding, knowing that God does right with what he's given them, even if it's hard.

And I know this year has been very hard, hasn't it? It's been very hard on the wallet and the well-being of many of us.

And verse 10 isn't teaching about God as an ATM or an investment strategy, but a reminder that those who entrust themselves to God will be blessed by him.

So whether you have much or little, let's be challenged to be generous with what God has given us and to pray, thanks God for all you have given me out of your goodness.

[9 : 06] Help me to trust you with it. The final command in this section is about discipline.

Verse 11 says, My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke. This is a really tough command to accept because discipline isn't nice.

But this is designed to teach us what a relationship with God is like, a relationship which includes discipline. In fact, without discipline, there would be no relationship at all.

It says in verse 12 that the Lord disciplines the one he loves just like a father does a son. Discipline is the proof that God loves you.

But the tricky thing about discipline is that we may not know when or why God is disciplining us.

[10 : 14] And discipline is tough because it can cause pain, can't it? And anger. It can last a long time. It can even cause relationship tension.

But the purpose of godly discipline is to teach, not to harm. It comes from love, not from spite. And so commands like this can help us when we're suffering and finding things tough, which many of us are, because we know that God doesn't dislike us.

He isn't neglecting us and letting us suffer because he's unkind. But he's acting toward us in love for our good, even if it hurts, even if it's uncomfortable, even if we would never choose it for ourselves. This year I've wondered about the Lord's discipline. It's hard to know if our current hardship is God's discipline.

But what I do know is that God is in control of our situation and he disciplines those he loves as a father, the son he delights in.

[11 : 29] The following section of this passage is about the desire and blessing that wisdom brings.

Point two. Have a look at verse 13. Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding. She is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold.

She is more precious than rubies. Nothing you desire can compare with her. Down to verse 18. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her.

Those who hold her fast will be blessed. It's a strange way to describe wisdom, isn't it?

How can wisdom be so good? What would make wisdom so desirable? Well, this wisdom is no ordinary wisdom.

[12:26] It's not just the thing that makes you smart. Look what is said about it in verse 19. By wisdom, the Lord laid the earth's foundations.

By understanding, he set the heavens in place. By his knowledge, the watery depths were divided and the clouds let drop the dew. There's more to this wisdom than simply good instruction.

This wisdom is old and of great value even to God, as it was by this wisdom that God created the world. No wonder it's more precious than all the world's riches.

This helps us to see why knowing this wisdom means knowing God. Have a look at this verse in Colossians chapter 1 on the screen. For by him all things were created, things in heaven, things on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by him and for him.

The wisdom by which God created the world, the him of Colossians 1.16, are the same thing, the Lord Jesus. He is the true wisdom of God.

[13:42] That's why this wisdom is so desirable. That's why this wisdom gives life. And that's why those who know this wisdom are in relationship with God.

In John 12, Jesus says, whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me.

Knowing God's wisdom, knowing Jesus is knowing God. What a great challenge to seek God's wisdom, because only by knowing and understanding it, by knowing him, will we have the blessing of life that it promises.

And so, in this final section of the passage, the father teaches his son about what godly, wise living looks like in point three.

In verse 21, the father begins again, reminding his son to hold onto the wisdom for the life and protection it brings. And then he spends the rest of the chapter unpacking what wise living looks like.

[14:54] Grab your Bible, I'll read from verse 27. Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in your power to act.

Do not say to your neighbour, come back tomorrow and I'll give it to you when you already have it with you. Do not plot harm against your neighbour who lives trustfully near you. Do not accuse anyone for no reason when they have done you no harm.

Do not envy the violent or choose any of their ways. For the Lord detests the perverse, but takes the upright into his confidence. The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous.

He mocks proud mockers, but shows favour to the humble and the oppressed. The wise inherit honour, but the fools get only shame. This is the wise lifestyle that reflects a relationship with God. The life that brings God's blessing, favour and honour. I wonder what you noticed in these verses. Living wisely in response to holding on to God's wisdom means not withholding good, not planning evil and not envying evil or choosing any of their ways.

[16:23] Among God's people, we see what happens when they don't hold on to his commands. They forget to love their neighbour and they withhold the good they are able to give.

This is part of Jesus' lesson in Luke 10, isn't it, that Karen read earlier. Don't wait to figure out who your neighbour is before you love them. Love them as God has loved you.

Friends, the wise life, the life which holds on to God's instruction, which seeks godliness, uprightness, righteousness, humility and wisdom is the Christ-shaped life.

And it's important to keep seeing the link between this wisdom and Jesus because it's easy to read a passage like this and think, well, if I do all these good things, then I will receive blessing and long life and riches.

But the Proverbs, they aren't just promises from God. If you do this, I will give you that. But rather they are principles for our life.

[17:41] And so it's important to see Jesus in the wisdom of the Proverbs because it isn't by making sure we do these things that we receive God's blessing and life, but by understanding that

holding on to God's wisdom, which is knowing and trusting Jesus, who saved us on the cross, which gives us everlasting life in heaven.

So let's be encouraged tonight as we read and listen to God's word to continue to listen and know and understand the wisdom of the Proverbs because only through a proper knowledge and practice of this wisdom can we know him and have life.

How about I pray that God would strengthen us to do this. Heavenly Father, we thank you for all the practical wisdom in the Proverbs. We thank you for teaching us how to live lives which are pleasing to you.

We thank you, Father, for the Lord Jesus who because of your great wisdom and love you made known to us. Strengthen us, Father, to never forget this wisdom that he may always shape and control our lives.

Amen. Amen. Amen.