

True Wisdom

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[0 : 00] Amen, everyone. Father's Day is fast approaching, in case you weren't aware of that, and haven't made that all-important purchase. So I'm going to make a recommendation for you here.

It's called, it's a book called The Worst Case Scenario Survival Handbook. It's a great recommendation. It's a great book to gather. It's a book that lists a number of dangerous situations that you can find yourself in and how to deal with those dangerous situations.

It's a great blokey book to stick on a bookshelf or something like that. It's actually a serious book. These guys are not having a lend to themselves. They're serious sort of survival trainer kind of guys.

And when I say dangerous situations, I mean dangerous situations. For instance, page 46. How, this is full of wisdom, right? How to fend off a shark. We all need to know that.

Page 64. How to deal with a charging bull. Page 57. How to wrestle free from an alligator. Which includes the immortal line.

[1 : 11] I love this. If its jaws are closed on something that you want to remove. For example, a limb. Tap it or punch it on the snout.

Now that's really helpful information. This book, as I said, is totally serious. It gives you instructions on how to deal with a bunch of worst case scenarios you find yourself in day by day.

Or in most cases, I think none of us find ourselves in those situations. Such as page 54. How to escape from a mountain lion. Apparently, it suggests take your coat off and wave it up really big. And it makes you look bigger than it is. And it runs away like a pussycat. And it goes on and on. How about this one? How to leap from a motorbike into a car. But there's a key footnote.

There's a key footnote to this one. And it says, remember that in many newer cars, only the front windows roll all the way down. Key bit of information there.

[2 : 15] If you're hoping to get all the way into the car. Okay. How about this one? How to manoeuvre on the top of a train. And again, a very, very helpful tip in the footnotes.

If a tunnel is approaching, lie down flat quickly. Like, who hadn't thought of that? And apparently, it's how to manoeuvre on the top of a train in order to get inside the train.

I find standing at the platform when the doors open the easiest way. Personally, I'd recommend that. Or how about this one? Page 114. How to land an aeroplane.

And it begins with the rather disconcerting sentence. If the plane has only got one set of controls, it recommends you push, pull, drag, or carry the pilot out of the pilot seat first.

And then take the controls of the aeroplane. Really helpful bits of information here. I can imagine this is great bedtime reading. This is a sort of wisdom that you want to pass on to your children.

[3 : 22] So I'm thinking that it would be great to read to my kids. And I could just... And so, you know, how to deliver a baby in a taxi. There's another one. How to perform a tracheotomy.

I could just imagine, you know, my girls, just tell me the tracheotomy one again. You know, just in case I might need to know that. How to do it with a biro. You can do that with a biro, apparently.

Anyway. It's all the stuff that you need to survive. And I've got to suggest that the book deals with situations that most of us will never, ever face.

By contrast, the book of Proverbs, which we're launching into for the next 10 weeks, deals with things that we face every single day. It's a book that is full of wisdom for living.

So if you're going to make it through life without making a total mess of it, we need wisdom. That's what Proverbs is saying. And every one of us, in fact, will make a mess of life if we don't find and we don't grow in wisdom.

[4 : 26] That is, if we don't... We can have love, but not wisdom. And if we do have love, but not wisdom, we will harm people with the very best of intentions. If we have courage, but not wisdom,

we will blunder boldly.

Such as jumping from a motorbike into the front window of a car. You know, it takes wisdom not to do that sort of thing. If you have technology, but not wisdom, you will use the very best of ever communications ever invented in order to broadcast stupidity.

If you have biblical truth, but not wisdom, we will make the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus look ugly to people. If you have revival in the church, but not wisdom, you will use the power of God to put the church in reverse gear.

Wisdom is essential. And so I would recommend the complete worst case scenario survival book for a laugh. And I would also recommend it if you're planning on camping beside the East Gallagher River sometime in the near future.

But Proverbs deserves our endless attention. The great Billy Graham used to read a proverb a day every month.

[5 : 44] Every month he'd read through the whole book of Proverbs. And he did that for years and years and years because he wanted to grow in wisdom. So I think it deserves our endless attention.

And yet for most case, for most Christians, what we tend to do with the book of Proverbs is we dive in and we grab one proverb here, a proverb there, a proverb there, our particular favourite proverbs. And we pin everything on those.

We actually look at the whole book and investigate what the entirety of wisdom is saying. T.S. Eliot spoke to our times, I think, when he asked these three questions.

He said, where is the life that we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom that we have lost in knowledge? And where is the knowledge that we have lost in information?

Just sound bites of information. That's the way we operate at the moment. We get on our phones, we look at Wikipedia and just particles of information floating across us. And I think what we need is we need Proverbs to counsel us in how to live well.

[6 : 50] And that's what's at stake here. It's not just about surviving and it's not just about dying, but in fact about how do we live and how do we live well. That's what Proverbs is about. This book works well, I believe, when we slow down and we think and we listen and we journal and we pray.

I think we need to do that. It's time to get off the information high, Googling stuff all the time, and just to pick up the Bible, go deep and grow in wisdom. That's what we're seeking to do in the next 10 weeks and hopefully beyond this.

So let's first of all, Proverbs chapter 8 just read out to us. In verses 10 to 11, it reveals for us the importance of wisdom. It says, Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies and nothing you desire can compare with her. Notice the progression. Wisdom is speaking and wisdom says, I am more important than silver. Then it progresses and says, I'm more important than gold. And then it says, I am more important than rubies.

And then finally, wisdom gets down to being greater than anything than you could ever possibly desire. That's a pretty high call. Wisdom is infinitely more important than all the wealth and the fame and the power in the world.

[8 : 12] Far more important than the greatest of circumstances in this world where you've got all the wealth and the power and the influence and the beauty and everything else. Far greater than having all the greatest circumstances in the world is in fact the ability to handle and to grow and to flourish whatever life circumstances are.

And why is that important? Because only a tiny, tiny minority of people in fact get their life circumstances where they actually want them to be.

And absolutely no one ever keeps them there. No one. Not a single person. Wisdom is infinitely more important.

There are plenty of people in this world who have got talent and wealth and intellect and charisma and credentials and beauty and their lives have unraveled and there are people who have got very little of all of those things and in fact they have lived life very, very well and the difference is wisdom. Wisdom is not the same as moral goodness. It's related to it but it's not identical to it. It's obvious that to be unethical is stupid in the long run.

[9 : 26] Wisdom is not being less than ethical but it is far more than just being ethical. For example, it is good and right to help a person from a position of poverty, to help them out of their poverty.

It's noble, it's good, it's right and you can do that completely, totally ethically and still completely screw up their life at the same time.

That is, you can do it with a lack of wisdom. If you do not understand all the complexities that are associated as to why people might be in poverty you can screw it up. See, it's not even good enough to be people of high principles and morals.

We need to be people of wisdom or we will ruin our lives and the lives of other people. We need wisdom so much. You know, to make a bunch of decisions in this world it is, all you basically need is knowledge.

That is, with the right knowledge you can pick the right car. It's a Toyota Prado. You know, it's straightforward. With the right sort of knowledge you can, you know, get the right medication.

[10:39] You can build a bridge. You can fill out the form correctly. But what about the decisions that we face every day across all of our lives such as, who should I marry?

Who should I date? Who, you know, should I, in fact, break up? What career should I go into? What school should I enroll into? Should I buy this house? Should I move to that house?

Where do I live? What church do I go to? Should I change jobs? Should I confront the person right now or should I just hold back a little bit?

Should I take that risk or just play it safe? That's the multitude of decisions that we make every day. And the rules don't apply. There's no rules that says that person is the person you should marry.

And a wrong decision in some or any of those things can be a real disaster. And the moral rules don't cover them. They might give you a broad framework, but they don't cover the specifics.

[11:43] And knowledge and facts and principles aren't enough. I'd go as far as to saying that the reason why so many of us are so stuck and anxious and stressed is because we don't have the wisdom that we need to deal with the situations we're currently facing.

It's not just a matter of knowledge. It's not a matter of IQ or moral principles. It's a matter of wisdom. And we are perishing for the lack of wisdom. It's more important than silver, more important than gold and jewels, more important than anything you could possibly imagine.

So what is it? Verses 8 to 16, we have wisdom speaking again. And we get a few clues as to what wisdom is here. It says, I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence.

I possess knowledge and discretion. To fear the Lord is to hate evil. I hate pride and arrogance, evil behaviour and perverse speech. Counsel and sound judgment are mine.

I have insight, I have power. By me, kings reign and rulers, issues, decrees that are just. By me, princes, governors, nobles, all who rule on earth.

[12:51] So there are at least three things here that wisdom speaks about and gives us an idea of what wisdom is. Notice firstly that wisdom has insight in verse 14.

The word insight there is translated from a Hebrew word which basically means to know how things really are. It's understanding of how things really are.

Secondly, it also says that wisdom dwells with prudence. That's not an old-fashioned girl's name. In verse 12, so it's not, she's hanging out with prudence, wisdom's with prudence.

It's actually not probably the best English translation. A better translation is the word shrewdness. Shrewdness, not prudence. Shrewdness here, we often regard it as a negative thing, but here shrewdness is positive.

It's not scheming and plotting. It's a resourceful cunningness about life. Wisdom here is knowing how things not just are, but how life works, how things happen in life.

[14:00] And thirdly, verse 15, it says, by me kings reign and rulers issue decrees that are just. So wisdom is not just about how things are and how things actually work, but it's knowing what to do about it.

It's very practical. So wisdom is very, very practical. It's not just theoretical. Think of the difference between the great English detective Sherlock Holmes and his sidekick, Dr. Watson.

A client would walk into Holmes' apartment in 221B Baker Street, and he could... Holmes would take one look at the person and know 19 things about them, just like that.

And he'd always say to Watson, it's elementary, elementary, my dear Watson, elementary. And Dr. Watson would see the same person but not have the same insight or the same shrewdness.

The not obvious, the non-obvious, was obvious to Holmes, whereas it wasn't so much to Watson. Holmes sees clues. Watson sees a blur.

[15:10] Holmes sees distinctions. Just had more clarity. So what is wisdom? Gerhard von Rad, a 20th century German theologian, you have to be German to have a name like that, wrote a book called *Wisdom in Israel*, and it's a pretty hard, difficult book, so you just read the conclusion, that gives you the answer.

And in it, he gives a definition of wisdom according to Proverbs. And it's a great definition. He says, wisdom is becoming competent with regard to the realities of life.

I love the word becoming. It's saying there that wisdom is something that you grow in. It's becoming competent with regard to the realities of life. It's knowing how things really happen, how things really are, and knowing what to do about them.

So it's intensely practical. It's not theoretical. Kind of ironic, me doing a sermon like this. It is the art of being successful across all of life.

It's knowing how life works and living it well. And wisdom finds its seat, its centre, not in the mind, but in the centre of the being, what the Bible calls the heart of the individual, the soul of the individual, which incorporates the intellect and everything else, it's the centre of, the heart of the person is the centre of the person's moral and intellectual decision-making.

[16:47] But there's this huge problem in gaining wisdom. The problem is highlighted in verses 22 onwards.

And here we have wisdom speaking. And wisdom says, I was there when this world was made. That's the bottom line. So let me have a read through here.

It says, The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works before his deeds of old. I was formed long ago, ages ago, at the very beginning when the world came to be. When there were no watery depths, I was given birth.

When there were no springs overflowing with water, before the mountains were settled in the place, before the hills, I was given birth. Before he made the world or its fields or any of the dust of the earth, I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep its command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was constantly at his side.

I was filled with delight day by day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind.

[18:05] And so what we have here in Proverbs 8 is wisdom being there as God creates the created order, brings everything into being.

And the creation account here is a unique creation account. You see, most ancient societies either regarded the creation of the material world as an accident of the gods, it's like they lend against something and the universe is made, that was a bit of a mistake, didn't mean that to happen.

Or it's a result of the gods having a battle and they create the world for some strange reason. And here it says the creation account is based on the wisdom of God.

It was deliberate. There's a sense here of this overwhelming joy where God designed the world to be a place of beauty and power and order and joy and peace. God made the world with wisdom.

And that's why the wise of Israel said that wisdom worked. Because it aligned, wisdom is just simply being aligned with the wisdom of God in creation.

[19:23] That's why it works. If God created the world according to wisdom, then there is a pattern to all that he's made. It's connected.

That is, reality's not random. And if wisdom made the world, then wisdom can be perceived. And to a great degree, can be lived in accordance with.

Now, it's obvious for most people that there are physical patterns patterns in the reality of our physical world. There are patterns there, such as the pattern of aerodynamics.

If an object fits with the pattern and the rules of aerodynamics, it will fly. If it doesn't fit with the pattern of aerodynamics, it won't fly.

Such as falling off a ladder. You won't fly. You will crash and burn. If you disregard the patterns of aerodynamics, you will crash and burn.

[20:32] And the wise of Israel also concluded that there is a relational fabric to reality that if you don't follow those patterns, you will relationally crash and burn.

And they also concluded that there is a spiritual fabric to the created order that God has made. And if you don't follow those spiritual patterns, you spiritually will crash and burn too.

That's the wisdom of Israel. That's what we see in Proverbs. And so what foolishness is, is going against the grain, going against the weave, going against the pattern, going against the structure that God has put in place in his created order that he made with wisdom.

It's going against wisdom. That's what foolishness is. But, and here's the problem in gaining wisdom, there are two things that you must know about these patterns in order to be wise.

And you must hold both of these things together equally. Equal weight. Firstly, you have to see and admit that there is a pattern. God has made the world and there is a pattern to it.

[21 : 50] There are principles in life which customarily work. Secondly, you've got to see and know that you cannot see the entire pattern.

You can't see the entire pattern. Much of the pattern is in fact hidden from us. And that's the problem of gaining wisdom. For instance, in chapters 10 to 15 of Proverbs, you get Proverbs about the principles of how life normally works.

And they say things like, if you work hard, you'll prosper. If you're lazy, you'll be poor. If you raise a child in the right way, they will love you when they get older.

And if you read those chapters with a conservative, moralistic bent, and you believe that there is order, you believe there's a pattern in the created life, you will say things like, yeah, that's right, I knew there was a rule for everything.

There's a rule for everything. And then you get to chapter 16. And you get to chapter 16 and suddenly there are exceptions to the principles of how life normally works.

[23 : 10] For instance, some people who live according to God's moral absolutes have a fairly lousy life. Some people who work hard but stay poor because of oppression.

And some people raise their child right but they go off the rails at some point in life. And so if you read that section with a liberal bent, that is you don't believe that there's an order that you need to abide by, you go, yeah, that's right, life's messy, always said it was messy, can't predict anything. And yet wisdom is holding the both together. It's a matter, it's admitting that there is a pattern that I must submit to and that I can't make up the rules for myself.

I don't define reality for myself. But if I live like that then Proverbs says I'm a fool. But wisdom is also acknowledging that I can't see the whole pattern.

There are hidden things. And if I think that I can see all the pattern and if I think I know how all of life works then I'm a fool according to Proverbs.

[24 : 24] So you can be a conservative fool or you can be a liberal fool. You can be a moralistic fool, you can be a relativistic fool.

We are all one or the other depending on our ideology and our personality I suspect. So in a nutshell if you're a person who thinks that if you have a good life, live a good life, it will go well for you, then you are a conservative fool.

But if you're the kind of person who says I can decide my own reality, I can decide what is right and wrong for me and I don't believe there's any divine order that I have to submit to, then you're a liberal fool.

And we're all fools one way or another. Let's just close the sermon there. No, we'll keep going.

We're all fools one way or another. And we as a society are split on this.

We are pushing each other more and more into areas of foolishness. The same sex marriage debate is a classic example of this.

[25 : 30] Church goes all moralistic and over here the liberals go whatever. It's all relative, there's no order.

And we're pushing ourselves more and more into foolishness. So what's the solution? There is a solution. Did you notice that as chapter 8 was read out to us that wisdom is personified?

Wisdom is I, me, my. You see that right through chapter 8. Wisdom is not an abstract quality but in fact a person. That's how wisdom is perceived in Proverbs.

And as hopefully we've seen in the introductory video which we saw last week and hopefully you've seen it throughout the course of this week, wisdom in that little video as it is in Proverbs is depicted as a woman.

A woman in fact who calls, lady wisdom who calls, calls, calls. And interestingly enough that the Proverbs were originally a manual, a wisdom manual for the young men of Israel which is why most of the Proverbs are addressed to my son.

[26 : 50] They were four. They were a wisdom manual for the old men of Israel training the younger men in Israel and so you want to get their attention? Make wisdom a woman. You know, who's calling you?

Of course their attention is there all the way through. So wisdom here is not so much a matter of mastering a bunch of rules and principles. wisdom is in fact a love affair in Proverbs.

It's a love affair. We need to long for wisdom. We need to love wisdom. We need to pursue wisdom. But what if wisdom in fact was a person?

What if you got into a relationship with this person and they made you wise? They helped you to see a pattern to the world and they helped you to see your limitations that you don't know the entire pattern of the world and so they called you to trust them because they knew the entire pattern of the world.

What if this person made you competent with regard to the realities of life? Helped you to know how things actually are, how things actually work and what to do about it?

[27 : 56] This at least means that those of us who have never had wise parents, never had wise counsellors, never had wise guides, never had the wise mentors, would have someone who could make us wise even if we were into our 80s and 90s.

It's not too late. The wisdom train had left and you weren't on it but it's not too late. What if there was still a chance to get on the wisdom train because wisdom was a person who you could have a relationship with, someone like a wonderful counsellor?

What's interesting is there's a lot of other wisdom literature in ancient Israel apart from what we have here in Proverbs and in the rest of the Bible.

Another piece of wisdom literature in ancient Israel is called the wisdom of the son of Syriac and in it there's this interesting call and challenge.

The son of Syriac says this, turn unto me you who are untaught, why do you say you are lacking in these things? Why are your souls so thirsty?

[29 : 08] I say to you find wisdom, put your necks under its yoke and bear its burden. If you are intent you can find wisdom, see with your eyes that I have laboured for it and I have found for my soul much rest.

Now that is a typical invitation to pursue wisdom in ancient Israel but can you imagine the listener who, how they would have responded a couple of centuries later when a rabbi and a teacher and a wise man got up and said these words, come to me, come to me, come to me, come to me, all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Similar statements. In fact, most biblical scholars think Jesus was actually quoting the son of Syriac. The son of Syriac says put your head into the yoke of discipline and training and you work hard, you work hard, you work hard, you work hard and you pursue wisdom and you will get rest for your souls.

And Jesus says come to me, come to me, take my yoke upon you, learn of me and I will give you rest for your souls. You see, what Jesus is saying there in that moment and Israel would have realised this in that moment is that Jesus is saying I am wisdom.

[30 : 40] I am wisdom personified. Wisdom is not a body of knowledge that needs to be mastered, it's not a body of principles to be memorised, it is knowing Jesus, coming to Jesus.

That's where wisdom begins. And that's what John chapter 1 affirms too. There are so many parallels between Proverbs chapter 8 and John chapter 1 and this is how John chapter 1 starts, it says in the beginning was the word.

Now the word there is translated from the Greek word logos which has massive connotations for wisdom attached to it. So without too much paraphrasing, you could read it like this, in the beginning was the wisdom and the wisdom was with God and the wisdom was God, he was with God in the beginning and through him, that is through the wisdom, all things were made.

Without him nothing was made that has been made, in him was life and the life was the light of all mankind. Then down into verse 14, the wisdom became flesh and made his dwelling among us and we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father full of grace and truth.

John is telling us here what the secret of wisdom is. John reveals that Jesus is the wisdom of God to us. He is the wisdom of God on display.

[32 : 05] So those of us who are potentially even gathered here now waiting for an airtight argument about God before they would believe in God, I think you need to be encouraged just to think again a little bit.

When Jesus says I am the wisdom of God to you, he is saying that he is the ultimate argument for the existence of God. What if God did not send an airtight argument but he sent an airtight person? What this means is that it doesn't matter who you are or where you are in your faith journey or how much you or how little you believe or whether you believe nothing at all, sit down with a group of people and go through the life of Jesus.

Read about him, work through his life, his teaching, his accomplishments and his promises and you will be shocked because it will be the first time in your life that you've ever met someone who's perfect.

No one, no wise person ever makes a guy like Jesus up. He is the ultimate argument for the existence of God in the form of a person.

[33 : 23] He is wisdom personified but he is also the wisdom of God for us. Jesus is like in many ways like a whole heap of wise guys that came before him and after him and they all say he is the wise way to live.

Jesus did that like a bunch of other guys did but no other wise person in the history of the world apart from Jesus ever said but I've come to live that wise life for you. No one's ever done that. Otherwise people say this is how you should live do it and you will live well and you will flourish. Jesus is the only one who says this is how you should live but I've lived it the way you should have lived and not only lived the life you should have lived I've actually died the death you should have died because of your failure to live the way you should have lived because of your foolishness and that's why Jesus says here my yoke is the only yoke which is light my burden is the only easy one and what's more Jesus is the wisdom of God with us in a very confusing world where the patterns don't always make sense.

and they don't always make sense. They're the source of great anxiety for us in life when the patterns don't work the way that we think they're going to work and we think in those moments that God's abandoned us he's got no idea what he's doing but Jesus is wisdom of God with us because the tragedy and the injustice of Jesus dying on the cross followed by the triumph and the victory of the resurrection is the clarity and it's the ultimate example and the most brilliant clarity of how even though we can't see that there's wisdom at play wisdom is in fact at work in and through the same event that's the wisdom of God the death and resurrection of Jesus the wisdom of God on full display knowing that even though it doesn't look right God's at work and the patterns are in play and this is the wisdom of God and Jesus calls us to it and so as we begin these ten weeks in Proverbs hear the call of

Jesus on your life come to me come to me come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest take my yoke upon upon you and you learn from me for I am gentle and I am humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light numbers for you and I and I have