

Learn to value Godly wisdom

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[0 : 00] Well, morning again, everybody. We're going to read Proverbs chapter 1. Proverbs chapter 1 from verse 8, and we'll read on.

It's quite a lengthy reading to the end of chapter 2. Listen, my son, to your father's instruction, and do not forsake your mother's teaching.

There will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck. My son, if sinners entice you, do not give it in to them. If they say, come along with us, let's lie in wait for someone's blood, let's relay some harmless soul, let's swallow them alive like the grave and whole like those who go down to the pit.

We will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder. Throw in your lot with us, and we will share a common purse. My son, do not go along with them.

Do not set foot on their paths. Wisdom calls aloud in the street.

[1 : 41] She raises her voice in the public squares. At the head of the noisy street, she cries out. In the gateways of the city, she makes her speech. How long will you simple ones love your simple ways?

How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge? If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you.

But since you rejected me when I called, and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, I in turn will laugh at your disaster.

I will mock when calamity overtakes you, when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and troubles overwhelm you.

Then they will call to me, but I will not answer. They will look for me, but will not find me, since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the Lord. Since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.

[2 : 49] For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them. But whoever listens to me will live in safety, and be at ease without fear of harm.

My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding. He holds victory in store for the upright. He is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.

Then you will understand what is right and just and fair, every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard your ways.

Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways, who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways.

[4 : 11] It will also save you from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth, and ignored the covenant she made before God.

For her house leads to death, and her paths to the spirits of the dead. None who go to her return, or retain the paths of life. Thus you will walk in the ways of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous.

For the upright will live in the land, and the blameless will remain in it. But the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the unfaithful will be torn from it.

Amen. And the Lord will bless to us the reading of his word. A young disciple was searching for secret wisdom, and so he went to a spiritual father, a master in the faith, and he asked the master a question.

Tell me, O master, he said, what is the secret of wisdom? The master replied, good judgment. The disciple asked, but how do you get good judgment?

[5 : 30] The master replied, experience. And how do you get experience? The disciple asked. The master said, bad judgment.

In other words, you learn from your mistakes. You gain wisdom over time, and you gain wisdom and knowledge by getting things wrong in order that you might get them right.

That's the path of learning. Misunderstandings, misconceptions. Misapplications. But then also deliberate.

Ignorance. Willful. Hiding from truth. Choices that are made. Bad choices. Bad judgments.

That you know are bad, but you do them anyway. All of these leave us in a place where we need correction, and we need help to understand what is the right way and the true path to follow.

[6 : 49] Proverbs 1 and 2 covers all of that. Proverbs 1 is all about a gang culture in which a young man does not heed the advice of his father and his mother, but instead runs with the crowd, gets involved in the gangs, carries a knife, takes the drugs, drinks the alcohol, gets involved in the fight, which sadly leads to somebody on the opposite side getting stabbed by your knife.

and you end up in prison and a 14-year-old lies dying on a bus and the mother says, I'm not surprised. That's the gang cultures of our current cities.

Happened only a couple of weeks ago and a mother and perhaps a father was saying to the youngsters, don't get involved, stay away. but they knew better.

They thought they had life sussed. They had the experience to know how to live on the streets, how to survive. But it's a fool's game and it leads to the shedding of your own blood, the proverb says.

You are waiting for the shedding of your own blood. That's the way it ends. for those who get involved in the gang culture.

[8 : 26] There must be many a person in prison who sits in the quiet of their cell for 23 hours a day and says, I wish I'd listened. I wish I'd learned from what my mother and father taught me or what my church taught me or what my school teachers tried to teach me.

I wish I'd listened. I was not wise. Wisdom. Hands up if you're wise.

That was a wise judgment. What is wisdom's purpose? Next slide. What is wisdom's purpose?

Wisdom, of course, shines through the book of Proverbs.

There are 125 uses of the word wise or wisdom in the Proverbs. And, as I've already indicated, it is not referring to cleverness.

Not referring to education. Not per se, although it involves education. The kind of wisdom that Proverbs talks about is a wisdom that comes from God that helps us make the most important life choices as we navigate our way through our everyday lives.

[9 : 49] You remember that Psalm 14 opens with the words, the fool has said in his heart, there is no God. So, from the biblical perspective, foolishness is atheism.

Now, there are very clever atheists around and they have all kinds of degrees and they're very influential on the BBC and other places and people think, oh yes, very clever, you know.

What they do is they liberate us from the medieval notion of having to bow down to some fairy-like figure in the sky.

And lots of people quote them and think it's clever to quote them. But in order for us to really listen to such atheism, we have to ask, what are they offering us?

What is the end game if you're an atheist? As Tennyson put it, you are cast as rubbish to the void. You die and that's it.

[10 : 46] There's nothing left. Nothing else. What a life. What a lack of hope. Can they explain the mysteries of the universe?

Can they tell us why we are here and for what purpose we were made? No, of course they can't.

The fool has said in his heart there is no God.

Wisdom, on the other hand, real biblical wisdom is all about having a relationship with God. Andy started this series last week by reminding us that fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

And he told us that fear was not like standing in abject kind of, you know, anxiety and just being terrified in the face of God.

But rather it was a respect that you show to God and a reverence you have for God that leads you to do what God wants you to do. The fear of the Lord tells you that God as my creator knows what is best for me.

[12:01] He knows the right kind of life that keeps me happy and keeps me safe in this world and it is wise to follow his advice. Follow his advice and you find pathway in life.

Warren Weasby commenting on this says, a wise person recognizes God as the creator and ruler of everything and sees a divine order that when followed ultimately leads to success.

Wise individuals also point out that there is a moral law in the world ensuring that the wicked face consequences while the righteous are rewarded. Interestingly this wisdom isn't tied to one's IQ or education it's about moral and spiritual understanding rooted in character and values which allows us to see the world through the filter of God's truth.

I like that. Next slide please. Seeing the world through the filter of God's truth. All of us have a way of seeing the world. All of us live by faith don't we?

Even those who claim not to live by faith live by faith. Faith in the future because they plan for tomorrow or they book their holidays or they take out life insurance and they are believing that such actions acts of faith because of course they don't know that they have a tomorrow will somehow provide them with security in the future.

[13:38] Everybody has faith but the question is who is our faith in? What is our faith in? A believer in God has faith in an almighty sovereign creator who is in control of all things and crucially is in control of your life and mine.

And we choose to put our faith in him because we believe he knows what is best. I used to make flat pack furniture flat pack kitchen furniture.

Now if you are a DIY expert you know that when the flat pack furniture arrives you ignore the instructions and then you build something that looks like it was not intended to look and you blame the stupid instructions that you never followed because you know best.

Of course the real really wise DIY man or woman will follow the instructions because they believe that actually the thing has been designed to a plan and they believe that the people who designed it knew what they were doing.

You get the illustration. God is our creator designed us for a purpose and a plan. He provided us with the instructions about how we should live out our lives and he expects us to follow this instruction would be really wise to do so if you want to end up in the place that he wants for you.

[15:18] Being with him for eternity in his presence blissfully happy and content in his presence. Proverbs is partly about telling us the wise way to live.

But it's also partly about telling us the dangerous ways that we should avoid the kinds of things we should avoid. So it's part of what we call wisdom literature.

You've got wisdom literature in the Old Testament. Job is a book of wisdom literature. If your life is falling apart and you get really ill and somebody in your family dies and you suddenly have a run on your finances and you no longer have any and people begin to question your integrity and you feel that it's time to give up on God and lose faith, learn from Job that he knows the way that I should take and after he has tested me I will come forth as gold.

God must have a purpose for this and I am not the creator and he is and he knows what he's doing and it will be okay in the end. Learn that from Job. Wisdom literature is found in Ecclesiastes.

If you turn out to be a very rich person and you happen to be a king somewhere and you could have lots of women as your wives and concubines and you could go around all the fashion shows in the world and get the best clothing and all of the furniture stores in the world and get the best furniture and you could go on as many holidays as you like and you could have a sauna and a jacuzzi and sun would shine every day and you'd have fine food on your table.

[16:59] If you could have all of that you will discover that without God it is all meaningless. It is a chasing after the wind. If you tried to catch the wind it's a really good thing to do.

Go out one windy day up the west cliff run along the beach and try and catch the wind. And then eventually somebody will send for an ambulance because you would have been foolish.

Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless, chasing after the wind. If you pursue pleasure, even if you pursue learning, but you ignore God, you're a fool.

Because none of those things are permanent. But God has put eternity into our hearts. there's a time for all of those things and when you have them and if you have them enjoy them. But they're not forever. Only God is forever. And you must learn that real life does not exist in time but outside of time.

[18 : 08] And it's only when you live in eternity outside of time. And by the way you can do that while you're in time. But as you have a relationship with the eternal God then you have real life.

That's what Ecclesiastes will teach us. And then of course there's Proverbs. And there are lots of them. Lots and lots of Proverbs. And they were written by a very clever chap who also wrote Ecclesiastes.

He was called Solomon. He was a very clever chap with Solomon. And a very wise man as well. And he's going to teach us the purpose of wisdom.

So we must learn from him. We'll come back to him in a moment. Next slide please. There are two New Testament verses that it's worth getting our heads around. James 1, 5, and 6.

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask of God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. In other words, if you want to know how to live, ask God.

[19 : 14] And then do what he says. There are lots of people that ask God for stuff. Like they go to the doctors, they say, oh, you might have a very serious illness, I'm going to send you for tests.

Turns many a person to prayer. God, please give me health. Please ensure that I'm not seriously ill, and that I won't die.

God's forgotten. Many people do that.

They're asking God to escape danger, but they're not asking God about how they should live their life. Lots of people treat God like that, kind of like the emergency room in the hospital.

when they fix you up, well, you curse the hospital because it took too long, and they weren't very clever, and it was a waste of your time, blah, blah, blah.

[20 : 20] If any of you lack wisdom, he should ask of God, who gives generously. If you want to know the way to live, James says, ask God, but make sure you follow his advice. James 5, 3, 17, the wisdom that comes from heaven is, first of all, pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, and good fruit, impartial, and sincere.

In other words, the wisdom you ask God for makes you a better person. It makes you a person who is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, and good, impartial, and sincere.

Lots of people claim to be religious, and they're not very nice people, but they're not therefore receiving the wisdom of God, because the wisdom of God makes you a better person.

Not a perfect person, but a better person. Because your integrity is proven by the life you live, not the words you speak.

Words are just words, unless they're backed up by lifestyle. God. So there's something really special about biblical wisdom. It's all about skillfully living and developing a godly character that shines through in our everyday lives and relationships.

[21 : 43] It impacts our relationships, and that's why one of my favorite passages in Proverbs is right at the end, when it talks about the godly wife, the wise woman, and the way she lives her life.

Wisdom made her a good person. That's what wisdom does. Wisdom gives her the skills to manage her household, and to shop at the market, and to be a good companion to her husband, and to be a good mother to her children.

God give her that wisdom that made a difference to the way she lived. And this same God gives us this same wisdom to run businesses, to be good teachers, to be efficient workers, to be obedient children, to be godly moms and dads, wisdom is designed to change the way we behave.

Okay, let's move on then. What can we learn from Solomon? We talked about him. Solomon received the wisdom of heaven. Next slide. Wisdom's value. Solomon valued wisdom because he was asked, you might remember this, when he became king, he was asked by God, what would you like me to do for you?

Now imagine God coming up and saying, I'm prepared to give you anything you want to. It's a bit like, this is a bit like the story of Aladdin and the lamp.

[23 : 28] Yeah? Except you've not got a genie, you've got God. And you've not got three wishes, you've got as many as you like. What would you like me to do for you?

And Solomon says, give me wisdom so that I know how to rule my country. And God said, that's a really good choice.

I'm really glad you made that choice. And because you made that choice, I'm going to give you riches and honor and everything else. Because you thought first of all of others. You didn't think about yourself.

And you thought about your responsibility as a king and you wanted to do what was right by your people. And crucially, you wanted to do what was right by me. And because that was in your heart, I'm going to honor you so much and bless you.

You're going to be the greatest king in all of the earth. How wise was Solomon. He chose wisdom. Let's look at the next slide. Wisdom, says Proverbs 4 verse 7, it's a wonderful verse, wisdom is supreme, therefore get wisdom.

[24 : 32] Though it costs all you have, get understanding. The most important thing you can possess in life is the wisdom that God gives you. The most important book you have in your library is the book that God has given you.

It has instructed you and taught you in a way nothing else does and will. Isn't that the case? That's why we read it so often, isn't it? That's one of the amazing things about being a Christian.

You can read any other book and just, I loaned somebody a book and they were giving it back this morning and said give it to somebody else. I won't read it again. It's not because I didn't value the book but I got its message and I could read another book similar but I never say that about the Bible.

I will read it again and again because it's like looking in a mirror each morning and it tells me how to live each day. I need wisdom from God.

I need it to direct my life each day to inform my decision making and to teach me how I can best honor him and care for others.

[25 : 45] Wisdom is supreme therefore get wisdom and in all your getting, one translation as in all your getting, get understanding.

Now, rulers valued wisdom. Do you remember Joseph? He was a very wise young man. Potiphar saw his wisdom and said, I need you on my team and so he went on his team and then later on they wrote a musical about it.

Very clever that. That was a joke. It was obviously a bad joke but never mind. Good story. And Joseph was wise because God gave him wisdom.

And the thing is people began to see it was because of God. Pharaoh had lots of wise men but he had nobody like Joseph who he thought of as a son of the gods.

That was his pagan thinking. But nonetheless he saw that this wisdom was divinely given. There have been very wise philosopher kings like Plato and Socrates and Aristotle.

[26 : 48] Not in that order. It was Socrates, Plato and then Aristotle. Wise philosopher kings they called themselves. And they made the point often that society couldn't survive without wise people.

You need wise heads, technocrats, philosophers, doctors, scientists to run a country and to make sure it thrives.

We don't despise experts and expertise. We need them. We wouldn't despise an expert, would we, if we were going for a medical test. Yeah, we might ignore the politicians because we think they're all stupid.

They're not stupid. But we talk like that. We wouldn't think that of our consultants in hospital. We really hope they're educated, don't we? There's nothing wrong with wisdom.

We need it in society. But even better if it's godly wisdom. Solomon said, let me have wisdom. It's the most important thing. It's the thing I need most of all.

[27 : 56] And he got it. And the very first thing he did was to be able to solve a problem with a mother who claimed that there was a child who was living that was hers and another mother who said, no, no, hers is the dead one and that one's mine.

And he suggested a gruesome outcome for them, which revealed the true heart of the real mother. He showed his wisdom.

the queen of Sheba. You know, I mean, she was like the Kim Kardashian of her day. She came right across the world just to see him, to sit and learn from him that she might gain wisdom.

We're told that Solomon wrote over 3,000 proverbs. He was a very wise man. Not all of them are in the book of proverbs because there are other contributors to the book of proverbs like Hezekiah and Aha and Lemuel, but nonetheless, most of it belongs to him.

Godly wisdom that he shared with the world. But here's the sad thing about Solomon. Solomon had all of this wisdom, but Solomon loved many foreign wives.

[29 : 17] he had a weakness for women. Now, you're talking about a serious weakness here. 11,000 of them. 11,000. Now, it was a different world to the one we live in now.

He wasn't stuck in the same room within 24 hours a day. These were people who he hardly would see. Yeah, that would be bad, wouldn't it? You would kind of like, imagine who got the remote. That would be terrible, wouldn't it? So, there they are, all of these women. And the issue was, they were foreign wives.

So, he did a silly thing that we all do sometimes. He knew what Deuteronomy said about when you get a king, you're then going to want to marry lots of women, and you might marry women who are not Jewish women, and then they're going to bring their gods with them, and they're going to turn your heart away from the God of Israel.

That was the warning in Deuteronomy. He knew that. He'd heard that. He'd read that. But he ignored it. And there's the rub. That's why he's so like us.

[30 : 25] we can read what Scripture says, we can hear what God says, but it doesn't necessarily mean we'll do what it says. And that's why James said, don't just be hearers of the word, be doers also.

Don't be like the person who looks in the mirror and then forgets what they look like. If you read the wisdom of God, do it. That's the truly wise person.

Solomon sadly didn't and the end of his reign ended not as well as it could have done. He made many, many mistakes in life, unfortunately.

His heart led him away from the very advice he penned. God. And every preacher knows what that's like.

If only I was good as my preaching. I'm not saying my preaching is good, by the way, but you know what I meant by that. If only I did what I know is right.

[31 : 32] But sometimes I can read it in scripture and then go out and immediately disobey it in practice. Can't you? So what would wisdom teach us to do then?

If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to purify us from all unrighteousness. I do hope that Solomon and some wise people around him, when he got around to his 7,776 wife, somebody might have suggested to him, Solomon, do you think you better call it a day?

You're not very good at this relationship stuff. Except that probably didn't happen because they would be afraid. You know, there's something about if you're digging holes, stop digging.

He didn't stop digging, for he was not wise. But that reminds us, you see, that information alone, that does not lead to transformation. it is not enough just to heed and read the wisdom of God.

We must do what it says. So that's what it means by getting wisdom. Get hold of it and apply it to your life. Now think about Proverbs for a moment.

[32 : 47] They are little snippets of information, little parables, little allegories sometimes, such as this one, Proverbs 17, verse 1. Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.

I like that, don't you? It's like Christmas when all of the family who you never said, not our Christmas Lisa, don't look at me like that. When all of the family who you've never seen for months, they all come round and you hope that mother-in-law, not my mother-in-law, you hope the mother-in-law is not going to remind you that she would have preferred it if her daughter had married the other man. And you could have really done better for yourself, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And then you think, goodness, I'll be glad when this day is over. Better a crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.

I like this one from the Greeks. When you want to drink of milk, you don't buy the whole cow. cow. I like that. I would never have thought of doing that, but obviously in Greece, that's a proverb.

I do like this one. Empty vessels make the most sound. Or this one, home is where the heart is, which I always think is weird because I think I'd rather have my heart in my chest, connected to my blood supply, but apparently I can leave it at home and it'll be okay.

[34 : 21] That was a joke, bad one. Never mind. Or what about this one? Many hands make light work, unless of course in the kitchen, because in the kitchen, too many cooks spoil the broth.

That's good, isn't it? It's like this proverb applies, but only a little bit and not in every circumstance. But exactly. When you're reading the book of proverbs, do remember that.

The proverbs are not necessarily universal applicable truth. In every circumstance, they are bits of helpful information and insight that sometimes only have certain applications at certain times.

Just a little hint when you're reading. Some have universal application, some in specific circumstances, and learn to discern between both. So let's pursue wisdom.

The first nine chapters of proverbs are all about wisdom and how it applies, but did you notice that the writer constantly refers to roads that you take, paths that you take in life, paths of wisdom, like we mentioned the gang culture, but also there was the warning about the adulterous woman.

[35 : 39] Now, here's good news, ladies, you'll be pleased to hear this. Wisdom in Hebrew is feminine. And that just kind of tells you something you always kind of thought, but never dared say, that it really is the women who keep the world going, and the men are stupid.

But interestingly too, wisdom is a good woman, but not an adulterous woman, not a seductive woman.

man. And in the first nine chapters of Proverbs, you've got both things going on at the same time. You can follow the woman that leads you to God, or you can follow the woman that might lead you to her bed, but she will also lead you to your death.

And really, this is a warning to the men, because the men have to realize that they are faced with real choices in life, some are going to lead you to a good life, and some are going to destroy you. Some are going to leave you with alcoholism, some are going to leave you with drug addiction, some are going to leave you with a string of broken relationships, some are going to lead you to a place of degradation, because you chose the wrong path, and you ended up in a mess that you can't get out of.

[37 : 10] It's very stark. Which way are you going to go? Get wisdom. Get godly understanding.

Follow the right path, and avoid the wrong one, and realize that wisdom is always in the market square, calling out your name, saying, come, follow me, do what I say.

Listen to your father and mother, do what they say. Don't run with the crowd. It's dangerous. Get wisdom.

The Bible describes Jesus as wisdom from God. The Bible says that if we want to find the wisdom of God, we find in Jesus one who is greater than Solomon.

He teaches us the way that we should go. He says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. Come, follow me. And you will have wisdom from God. So wisdom makes her appeal.

[38 : 13] That's slide. Listen to your parents' advice. Do what your parents say, especially if your parents are godly. Now, it might be your parents, it might be your grandparents.

Listen to their advice. Why? Because they're experienced. They've walked this road a long time. You know, when we're teenagers, sorry teenagers, but this is true. I used to do as a teenager to, I used to think, goodness, may I have nothing to learn from my parents.

Which was a complete reversal of what it was like before I was 11, where I thought everything my parents said must be true. And then I discovered that as I got older, lots of what my parents taught me was absolutely spot on.

And sometimes I wished I should have listened when I was a teenager. They have the experience in life, and if they're godly, they have God's word, and they know what it's like to walk this road, and they know the dangers and the pitfalls, and when they give you advice, listen, he says.

Listen to your parents' advice. But he also says, don't ignore the call of wisdom, of reason. wisdom. That's what verse 20 through to the end of chapter 1 is about.

[39 : 34] Wisdom is calling out in the street. Wisdom is telling you, follow me, do what I tell you, and those who ignore her voice will face destruction.

So get wisdom, and get understanding, and get it before the storm of judgment comes, before your last opportunity to respond to wisdom's voice has gone, and all you've got left is regret.

Proverbs 1 verse 33, whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease without fear or harm. Hands up if you're wise.

In spite of our lack of wisdom, our lack of understanding, in spite of the waywardness of our hearts, in spite of the fact that we so often mess up, God is ready and willing to give us the wisdom we need to live the life he intended us for to live in order that we might live for him in all eternity.

And the wisdom that comes from God is Jesus. Jesus says, come, embrace me, take hold of me, then you will find wisdom, then you will find life, then you will find that peace that passes all understanding that will guard your heart and mind throughout this life and for all eternity.
[41 : 18] Amen. Amen. Amen.