

Ask God for Wisdom, to stay on the right path

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[0 : 00] Proverbs and chapter 2, Proverbs chapter 2. As you find your way there, we'll read the entire chapter, which is not that long.

And so we'll begin in verse 1. So Proverbs chapter 2, beginning at verse 1. Now hear God's word. My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding, yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright.

He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. Then you'll understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path. For wisdom will come into your heart and knowledge will be a pleasant to your soul.

Discretion will watch over you. Understanding will guard you, delivering you from the way of evil. From men of perverted speech, who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, who rejoicing doing evil and delight in the perversiveness of evil. Men whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways. So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words, who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God.

For her house sinks down to death and her paths to the departed. None who go to her come back, nor do they regain to the paths of life. So you will walk in the way of the good and keep to the good paths of righteous. For the upright will inhabit the land and those with integrity will remain in it. But the wicked will be cut off from the land and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.

[2 : 48] That's God's word and we'll come back to it. But we come again this morning to Proverbs chapter 2 and you'll notice how in Proverbs chapter 2 it picks up where it left off regarding paths.

Paths lead to places. Depending on what path you're on, that'll eventually lead you to the place that you're going to. So it's vital that we know what path we're on. That there are two paths effectively.

The path that leads to life and the path that leads to destruction. Jesus didn't call them paths, but he called them ways. You know, there's the narrow way and there is the broad way. And some people have even come up with the in the middle way. But there are only two ways and how important is wisdom to walking God's way? Well, if breathing, how important is breathing to your physical life?

Right, once you've worked that out, you will now understand how important wisdom is to your life, period, but especially your life with God. If you could ask God for absolutely anything, and I mean anything now. And God always, you know, by definition can do anything. But if you ask God for anything that you wanted right this minute, or let's go one better, that God gave you the opportunity for you to ask him for anything this morning, what would you ask for?

Well, believe it or not, there was a man in scripture who found himself in this very position. His name was Solomon, King Solomon. And God said to him in 1 Kings chapter 3, ask of me what I shall give you.

[4 : 56] God gave Solomon, sort of, just go for it. Ask whatever you want. And God said, ask what I shall give you.

And Solomon, looking around him, considering his life, considering his purpose, considering his position, considering what he had to do, decided that the best thing to ask God for was wisdom.

The best thing to ask God for was wisdom. The next thing that it says is that this pleased God so much because he did not ask for a long life. He didn't ask for riches that could sort of maintain that long life and give him everything that he wanted. But it pleased the Lord because he asked for understanding to discern what he wanted. Solomon knew that he lived in a world where there was right and wrong.

And it's good, it's refreshing every now and then just to go back to the good old fashioned biblical, is it right or is it wrong? Is it right or is it wrong? Let's just, some things really are that simple. The next thing that it says that not only did God give him what he asked for, wisdom, but God, because of what he asked for, God gave him all the other stuff that he didn't ask for.

So on top of the wisdom, God gave him riches, God gave him honour, God gave him a lot of other things things, God gave him a lot of other things. He said, God gave him a lot of other things.

[6 : 43] And I think there's good reason for that. I think we could almost take up sort of a good sermon, a message on why it is that way round. In other words, Solomon's attitude was he didn't do like I would do, and that is you try to be humble, you ask for the smaller slice of the cake in hope that you get the bigger slice. You know, I don't know if you were brought up with a rule around the table that your brother cuts and you choose, right? Totally unfair.

So Solomon isn't trying to appear humble, you know, I'll have the small things because I hope by asking the small things, then God will look down on me with favour so that I can get the great things. That's how we think. You know, we're canny enough to work out that, you know, people can treat us like that. Well, because he asked for that, I'll give him even more. No, Solomon didn't actually ask for a small thing. He didn't ask for the small things to get the big thing. He asked for the biggest thing possible. Wisdom. But it was an unselfish motive that he had. He recognised that wisdom was not only the thing that he needed the most, but it was the thing that would help him the most and everything he had to do. If he was to live faithfully before God, if he was to live skilfully before God, then wisdom was what he needed. Now, I've got a sneaky suspicion that the book of Proverbs, or at least most of it, was written before Solomon got to 40.

Because it seems that everything after 40, for Solomon, seemed to have gone pear-shaped. It's as if he has forgotten all the wisdom that he received. Having turned 40, this worries me.

And it worries me for a couple of reasons, because the scripture is full of people who make big mistakes when they get old. And we're going to see in a minute that when you're a child, you've got nothing to throw away. But when you're an adult, you've got plenty to throw away. Big mistakes are made when you're big, not when you're small. And so we could speak about what is the purpose of wisdom in line with other blessings. I think God withholds a lot of blessings from his people, simply because they do not have the wisdom to handle the blessings if they had them.

In other words, it's quite obvious in the New Testament how often, and in the Old Testament, how blessings become idols, that we love the gift more than the giver. The prodigal son, or both prodigal sons, they were both lost, remember? That is why Jesus tells the parable, beginning in verse 1 in Luke 15, of a sheep who's lost away from home, and a coin that is lost in the home. So that by the time we get to the two sons, we understand that they're both lost, but lost in different places. But both sons wanted what the father had without the father.

[9 : 51] They had turned the blessings into the father, idols, what they wanted the very most. And I think one of the reasons why God withholds many blessings from his people, it's just sort of an implication from scripture, is because we do not have the wisdom or the prayer life to be able to handle them.

Some things just cannot be handled without wisdom and without prayer, and I think God holds them back for that reason. So we are to seek wisdom, we are to seek instruction and answers for life from God.

We're not equipped to live this life. We don't have everything that we need to live this life in and of our own. We have to ask God for it, so that we're not led off the right path, on to the wrong path, with the danger of never getting back onto the right path. That's what Proverbs 2 points at.

It's possible for a believer, for someone to be growing up, hearing all of this, to wander off the right path and never get back on it. And Jesus said exactly the same thing, but he used different words. He says, what use is it? Remember, he calls believers salt and light.

And then he says, what use is it? If salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? In other words, it is quite possible for you to get to a point of no return. You know, I'm not denying that when Christ saves us, he saves us eternally. Once saved, always saved. I'm not denying that fact.

[11 : 28] That is true, but it is equally true, as Jesus points out, that it is possible to get to a point of no return. Hebrew 6 might call it apostasy, that you have experienced all the good things of God, but then have wandered so far that you can never regain or come back again. The salt has lost its saltiness. So staying on the right path is not sort of child's play here. It's really important that we stay on the right path. And that's what we learned last time. This time, it's about how to avoid the wrong path. Okay, so positively, how to stay on the right path.

This time, negatively, how to stay off the wrong path. So what have we learned so far? Well, we've learned that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. That means that having the right relationship with God is how wisdom comes into your life. Fearing of hurting the one you love the most. Have you ever been in that position? Have you ever feared hurting someone you've loved or you love? Well, if you can understand what that is and what that feels like, then that is what here is spoken of in regards to your relationship with the Lord. We ought to fear hurting God. We ought to fear bringing shame on God. We ought to fear sinning and putting God to open shame. We ought to fear that.

And once we fear that out of love for Him, that is what opens the gate to receiving wisdom. The right relationship precedes getting the wisdom. Then we're told here in Proverbs 2 that we're to ask for wisdom.

And James 1 says this, that if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach and it will be given to him. So you have a divine opportunity given to you by God for you to be able to ask God for wisdom this morning. And God is definitely, because He said He would, He will definitely give it to you. You can have as much of it as you like, but all you need to do is ask. The question is whether or not you will ask. You can be taught to ask. You can be instructed to ask. You can be shown why asking is so very important. You can be shown why you need it.

But none of those things can make you ask. Hence the frustration of a father with his son, that he does all that he can, but it's up to the son as to whether or not he will listen and heed to the instruction. All of this comes down to whether or not we're going to ask God in prayer. So notice what it says here, verse 4, verse 3, sorry, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver, and if you search for it as hidden treasures. In other words, go out of your way to get this wisdom. Wisdom is the most precious thing that you're going to be able to have in your Christian life, you know, because wisdom is not something other than God.

[14 : 36] Wisdom is God, and we spoke about that at some point in an evening message, just to put it as simply as I can now. If God had to rely on wisdom, then God has to rely on something greater than himself, right? And so we understand wisdom to be God, to be God himself, so that God only ever relies on himself rather than something external or greater than him, because there is nothing greater than him.

So wisdom is having God, having God instruct your life skillfully, the believing life. The other thing we're to recognize is that the wisdom of God is a supernatural gift, and therefore cannot be attained through natural means. In other words, it can't come from working for it, it can't come from being disciplined, it can only come as a gift from the supernatural. And so you're to cry out to God for the wisdom you need to live the life that God has actually given you. And the sole reason you're to ask for this, or at least the primary reason here, is so that you can keep walking on the path of life, and not just assume you're on it, but to know you're walking the way that God wants you to walk.

Secondly then, why is it so important to avoid the wrong path, and how do we avoid it? And this is where illustrations break down. So I'm going to try and tell you as best I can by illustrating it this way.

Imagine for a moment that a person growing up is like a building with stories being put on it. Have you got the two pictures? So imagine a child just being born. He's a month old, or she's a month old, and we'll call that layer one on the foundation, okay? And then the building over here, also it has its first layer on the foundation. The next thing that happens is that when the child grows, it's important that the child grows up centrally, focused on Christ, central on Christ, founded on Christ. And in the same way, when you build layers on a building, I don't know if you've ever seen it happen, you will notice that the second layer doesn't get built on the foundation, foundation. It gets built on the first layer, which is on the foundation. And you'll notice this if you've ever played that game Jenga, where you build the bricks up, and you know just how important it is for each layer to be centered on the layer beneath it, which is centered on the layer beneath that. The moment you start going off, how much longer do you think you have before it topples? And so a life that is growing up, that's decentralized. In other words, I just fancy a change. I'm going to go this way, I'm going to go that way. The picture that you're to have in your mind, imagine the Jenga blocks, is placing those blocks off center. And if you start placing those blocks off center, how much longer do you think it'll be before you're off center and fall under your own consequences? You suffer under your own decisions.

And what the son is trying to instruct his son here is that he has to grow up in a particular way. The foundation that he has has to be right, but so does each layer of learning have to be right. So does each layer of instruction, so does each part of life growing up have to be built on the one that is central beneath it. And so what we see is that children go through phases. It's only a phase, but what if the phase is the last phase? Or they'll grow out of it. This father here, just like God the father, never assumes that we will grow out of it. Never assumes that it's just a phase. God the father never looks down on us and goes, he's just going through a phase right now. God the father never looks down on us and thinks, oh, he'll grow out of it in his own time. God doesn't think like that.

[18 : 55] And God doesn't think like that because he knows small errors here lead to big errors there. The father wants to protect his son from getting to the point in life where he throws everything away.

David didn't throw everything away when he was young. He did it when he was old.
Solomon didn't throw everything away when he was young. He did it when he was old.
And do you know why?

Because both David and Solomon, like you and me, we don't have anything when we're young. We don't have anything to throw away. When we're young, we can, you know, we can afford to make mistakes without big consequences.

But when we get old and we have things like good marriages and good homes and good jobs, well, then the temptation is to throw it all away because you have something to throw away. I fancy a change. And what the father is trying to protect his son from is that type of decision making.

That he's trying to protect his son from getting to the point in life that when he is older, he doesn't throw everything away, having taken a lifetime to get it, or at least a certain amount of lifetime to get it. The son knows he doesn't have anything, and so he doesn't miss anything.

[20 : 10] The father knows that it won't always be the case. And so God the father, just like the father here, is trying to instruct the son and prepare him for a future when he will have more than what he has now. The trouble is, with anyone growing up in Christ, as it is with any child growing up in the home, is that they think their parents are being picky.

Why are you always on my back? And the truth is, is God is on our back because he knows we won't grow out of it. He knows that little bits here mean big bits there.

He knows that by being off a little bit here, it'll be a big bit further down the line if it goes uncorrected. God never assumes that we will ever grow out of it. We have to be instructed out of it.

We have to be led out of it. We have to be brought out of it. And that's what wisdom is for if we find ourself on the wrong type of path or we find others on the wrong type of path. Little mistakes here are big mistakes there. And as I said last week, that when you're five years old and you steal from your brother, you get a slap on the hand.

But when you're 35 years old and you steal, you get put in prison. Okay? There are lessons to be learned when you're young that's to teach you what could happen to you when you're older. The thing is, it's much worse when you're older.

[21 : 44] Consequences are far greater. And so if you think, oh, well, I don't need this because I'm skillful enough to live the life that I have anyway, I'm not so sure. I'm not so sure. I think one of the reasons why some people make more mistakes than others in life comes down to how they treat the wisdom of God that they have or don't have. Now, that's not to say that one person is better than the other person. It simply means they're listening to instruction. They are understanding that paths lead to places. And wisdom keeps us on the right path. It's not about being better than anybody else. It's not about being worse than anybody else. It's about being safe. It's about being faithful. It's about being kept to the end by God that speaks to us. In fact, the way God protects us is actually by us speaking, is actually by him speaking to us and by us listening. That's how we're protected. So if you're sat there thinking, how could God ever allow this to happen? Well, did he say anything at any point about not doing that or not going there? Right? Did he tell you to, you know, I want, when we used to lead the Sunday night group with the teenagers that used to come back from the church, I said, if you ever have those moments where you're sat on the settee and you're with your boyfriend or with your girlfriend and you're in the room on your own and you shouldn't be, you know, you know, the general rule was, you know, nothing below the forehead and even that's too much, you know, and they would, ooh, you know, and go, and I said, you ever been there and then that, there's those car lights that pass by your window and you sit up in fear that it's your parents or their parents and then it's not? I said, that's your way of escape. That's God telling you, now listen, and that's how God instructs us, by showing us not only in the lives of other people but in our own life, how to avoid the things that can get us into trouble. So thirdly, what Solomon knew,

Solomon knew that he couldn't handle life all by himself. Solomon knew that he didn't have the skills needed to live life faithfully. Solomon knew that faithfulness was really, really hard and he also knew that unfaithfulness was really, really easy. Okay, to be unfaithful, it's easy.

To be faithful, it's extremely difficult and we cannot do it with the skills that we have in our own makeup. We need the wisdom of God to teach us to live the skillful life that he wants us to live. So Solomon knows that he doesn't know everything. And I don't know if you remember our Bible studies, but what is the first point of learning? Have you ever met a person who doesn't know that they don't know? Can you teach them anything? You can't teach a person who doesn't know that they don't know anything because generally they think they know everything.

All learning begins when you know you don't know. That's why you learn. Solomon knows that he doesn't know. And that is why he asked God for wisdom. Because he knows he doesn't know that he has the knowledge or the instruction of the skills to live life and fulfill the purposes of God that God has actually given him. He knows that wisdom and protection go hand in hand. If I'm to be protected in life, then I need the wisdom of God. And this is repeated time and time again. And I think one of the reasons why it's repeated time and time again is because repetition is just so incredibly important.

And I'm not just saying that because I repeat myself a lot. You know, it's the, you know, please understand me. It is a biblical mandate for us to understand just how important repetition is.

[26 : 13] Wisdom's cultivated by repetition. You get good at something by practicing it a lot. And you get good at the Christian life by doing it God's way a lot. The Christian life is cultivated by practice and repetition. And I've got a friend who's a fantastic carpenter. He will tell you that in order to make that rugged bit of wood, that beautiful chair, he has to sand it over and over and over and over again in the same place using different grades of sandpaper over constant repetition. So the beautiful chair that you see at the end is simply an accumulation of repetitions of sanding and cutting and so forth.

To think you can get to that stage without the repetitions you need to get there is just utter foolishness. This is why Paul in the New Testament never goes, oh, do I have to tell you again? Do I really have to tell you again? Has it got to this stage where I have to tell you again?

No, repetition is like putting on another coat of varnish. Repetition is like doing another bit of sanding just to make it even more smoother than it was before. It's not a burden, it's a joy.

So repetition is incredibly important. Hence why Proverbs says the same thing over and over and over again. The other thing it says, which we notice here, is that we are to commit ourselves to the wisdom that we receive. In other words, we're to listen to what God has said and then we're to do what God has said and also to recognize that when we receive wisdom, if you go down to the end, verses 20 through to 22, that wisdom teaches us to live with a delayed gratification.

In other words, the best is yet to come. You're to nurture in yourself delayed gratification rather than being distracted with what the world has to offer you now. The best is yet to come. I know we live in a world where you can have now and pay later. There's nothing about saving up anymore.

[28 : 28] That gratification can be bought with a credit card or with a loan. Gratification can be bought instantly. But what God is teaching us here through wisdom is that there is a delayed gratification that you ought to hold on to. That all the type of things you really want in life, if only you really needed them, will come to you if you stay on the right path before God. So don't go spending your life and spending your attention on things that will just take you away from God and will take you on to the wrong path because the danger is you may not get back onto the right one. That's the danger, that you can go so far down the road that you've gone so far that you cannot find your own way back.

And I've seen this happen to different people, even to myself, where my mind goes off on a tangent and I start thinking things and I get so far down the road in my thoughts that I start doubting what I really believe, that Jesus is my Lord and Savior. It's happened to me. It's happened to many others.

And the danger is I'm not skillful enough to take myself down that road thinking I can get back again. And neither are you without the wisdom of God, that is, which we all need. So God gives us wisdom to be faithful, but also to wait, just to wait. God is teaching us we can go without now. We don't need it now. It's going to come, but we can go without. Have a delayed gratification. The best is yet to come.

So suck it up and put it up. What you got now and just roll with the punches. It's going to get better. God's will on earth is being done as it is in heaven. Okay? The very prayer teaches us that things is getting better. In conclusion then, Proverbs teaches us that we're to be attentive, that we're to receive wisdom. We're to incline our ear, verses three, four to five. We're to call out for insight. We're to raise our voice for understanding. In other words, we're to pray.

We're to recognize that wisdom is the most important thing that we could actually ask for. And what is interesting here is that we're to understand that how something so precious and something so very important for life can be given to you simply by you asking.

[31 : 03] I don't know anything as precious as this in the world that you can get simply by asking. But wisdom, which is far more precious than silver, far more precious than it says here than hidden treasures, you can get from God simply by asking him for it. And so for those this morning who don't have enough wisdom to ask for wisdom, which is the problem, isn't it? What do you do for the person who doesn't have enough wisdom to ask for wisdom? Hence why Proverbs is written. You have to be told to do it. It has to be pointed out to you, all the things that have been pointed out to you this morning so far. So that just as I ask for myself and you ask for yourself, you teach somebody else that they need also to ask for themselves. The Father instructs his son as God instructs the Father and as God the

Father instructs us all with the wisdom we need to be skillful in life. Faithfulness is hard. Unfaithfulness is super easy. So we're to ask God for wisdom, to avoid the wrong path, and to stay on the right path. So, simply put, ask God for wisdom. Amen.