

The Call of Wisdom

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- [0 : 0 0] And where it says son, for the benefit of being... I'm probably the last person to be politically correct.
- When it says son in Scripture, it also means daughter, which is a very hard thing to... When it says brothers, it means sisters as well. But, you know, there is a Bible that actually puts both in.
- But anyway, so here are my children. Your father's instruction and forsake not your mother's teaching.
- For they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck. My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, come with us, let us lie in wait for blood. Let us ambush the innocent without reason. Like she'll let us swallow them alive and whole like those who go down to the pit.
- [1 : 0 7] We shall find all precious goods. We shall fill our houses with plunder. Throw in your lot among us and we will have one purse.
- My son, do not walk in the way with them. Hold back your foot from their paths. For their feet run to evil and they make haste to shed blood.
- For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird. But these men lie in wait for their own blood. They set an ambush for their own lives.
- Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain. It takes away the life of its possessor. Wisdom cries aloud in the street.
- In the market she raises her voice. At the head of the noisy street she cries out. At the entrance of the city gate she speaks. How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?
- [2 : 0 8] How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing? And fools hate knowledge. If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you.
- I will make my words known to you. Because I have called and you have refused to listen. Have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded.
- Because you have ignored my counsel and would have none of my reproof. I also will laugh at your calamity. I will mock when terror strikes you. When terror strikes you like a storm.
- And your calamity comes like a whirlwind. When distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call upon me.
- But I will not answer. They will seek me diligently but will not find me. Because they hated knowledge. And did not choose the fear of the Lord.
- [3 : 0 6] Would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way. And have their fill of their own devices.
- For the simple are killed by their turning away. And the complacency of fools destroys them. But whoever listens to me will dwell secure.

And will be at ease without dread of disaster. Well we certainly thank God for his word. Well stand and sing.

Years ago I picked up a book off a shelf. I can even remember the bookshop. I was with my nan. My nan was very surprised that I took up reading.

As a child I wouldn't read anything. And she was quite surprised and glad that I was reading. And I picked up this book. By a man named Malcolm Gladwell called Blink. And I read the book.

[4 : 0 6] And I thought you know this is brilliant. This is I really like this book. You know why do people know things about knowing what they know. You have to read it. But it's just a wonderful observation.

But at the end of the book. He tells the story of a policeman in New York. Under extreme pressure. When having to fire a gun. A bit like men who've been in the army.

And even women who've been in the army. And even fired. You know assault rifles or something. Something which I've never experienced. And therefore wouldn't know. But I know the truth behind it. Because you hear them speak of it.

And they talk about tunnel vision. And how everything comes very focused. As though nothing else around is even there. And everything almost becomes slow.

And a lot of policemen in New York experienced. Things slowing down. As they were engaged in rapid gunfire. But the end of the book.

[5 : 0 3] He didn't really explain why. And I wish that he had. He pointed out what was true. But never gave the explanation for why it was the case. Then he brought out another book called Outliers.

And Outliers has now become a very popular term for people who are exceptionally good. It's something that they do. And in his book Outliers he spoke about how people become skillful.

And how people become successful. And all of this. And he took different categories. One story he tells is of how all the ice hockey professionals in America are born between something like March and June.

And he thought well why is that the case? That 90% of all are born in those three months. And I'm not going to go into it. But he picks on observations like this.

In his book he speaks about the 10,000 hour rule. That in order for a person to become great at what they do. They need to spend at least 10,000 hours pursuing that particular discipline.

[6 : 1 1] And he says that Beethoven when he was at school with the rest of his buddies. If they had buddies back in the day. That he was no better at playing the piano than any of the other children in his lessons.

But the reason why he became skillful. And the reason why he became good at what he did. Was because he perfected it after at least 10,000 hours of pursuing the same thing.

We hear of snooker players and tennis players that spend hours on the pool table each day. And tennis players that spend hours on the court. And swimmers who do the same in the swimming pool.

And runners likewise. Hours upon hours. And what they have shown is that after 10,000 hours. This is where you find people at the top of their game.

Whether it be playing the piano with a violinist. Or a runner or a swimmer. Whoever it may be. A couple of years later another book came out. By a guy called Jeff Kuffman.

[7 : 1 4] Called The First 20 Hours. In that book he actually tells his readers to forget all about the 10,000 hours. And of course this is very appealing.

If I can learn something in 20 hours. What Malcolm Gladwell is saying it takes 10,000 hours. I want to take the 20 hour option. And so he tells his readers.

Just forget about the 10,000 hour rule. You can master it in at least 20 hours. And of course the differences between the books are quite easy to see.

One is offering a way to get successful and skillful. But he's saying it's going to be long. It's going to be hard. It may even be tedious. But at the end of 10,000 hours you're likely to be at the top of the game.

The other guy says, oh no, no. You can get there within 20 hours. I haven't got his book. I've only ever read excerpts off his website. Because I've refused to buy the book on the basis that I don't agree with him.

[8 : 15] And the reason I don't agree with him is because of something that's quite obvious here in scripture. In order for a person to pass on knowledge quickly.

He will often get that knowledge from a person who spent at least 10,000 hours learning it. Think about it. Think about it. So it's very, he's writing a book, yeah.

And all that he has done, and you'll notice this. If you ever read a lot of books on the same subject, one of the things that you'll find is that 70% of everything that you read is the same in all the books.

There's only about 30% of difference. You read four or five books on the World War II, 70% of what they'll say is going to be exactly the same. So once you've read one book, it's clear to say that you've read at least 70% of all the other books.

It's the 30% that's different. The different focuses and attention put on places. And so what this guy is doing is he's basically saying, if you read all these books and focus on the things that are different in each book, you can get to become a master very quickly.

[9 : 25] And you can see how this is attractive. What people want more than anything is the desires to be somewhere or to have something quickly.

It could be the latest get-rich-quick scheme. It could be something else. And it certainly wouldn't be the first time that people in life have tried to get in front by taking shortcuts.

Shortcuts. The trouble is, is that Proverbs clearly teaches that the person who takes shortcuts effectively lies in wait for his own blood. In other words, he suffers at the hands of his own decisions.

And the reason for this is, is that when you try to do something in 20 hours or at the end of 20 hours, what takes 10,000 hours to do, we make mistakes.

When people do hard things, they make mistakes. And the only way you can make less mistakes is if you spend more time learning why you are making the mistakes that you do.

[10 : 33] So this idea that you can somehow get to there after a shorter period of time may have to do with a little bit of skill, but it's very unlikely.

What Proverbs is teaching here is that God wants you to become a skillful Christian liver. He wants you to live the Christian life skillfully.

And the issue here is that you can't live it skillfully without living it for a long time. This is why old men and old women in the fellowship are to be prized above younger men and younger women in the fellowship.

That is, of course, if they have followed the ways of God themselves, or else they've got nothing to pass on. And so the people that we should really pay attention to are the ones who cannot but be motivated by seeking first the kingdom of God.

These are the people to listen to. The people who seem to have perhaps had a very boring life and not experienced many temptations. The question we should be asking is, how did you manage to get through so many temptations without succumbing to them, when I seem to be failing all the time?

[11 : 55] That's the person to ask. But it seems that the information we prize above anything else is experiential information.

We learned last time that the beginning of wisdom is having the right relationship with God. That the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. That we honour God, we love God, we respect God, we listen to God, we treat God as God.

And having the right relationship with God leads to having wisdom. And wisdom leads to living life skillfully. You can't get wisdom in the shop. You can't get it out in the world.

It has to come from God or from godly parents or from godly spiritual parents in the church. This is the only place where wisdom can come from.

He has given it to those who listened. He has given it to those who've lived life a very long time. And so, a general rule would be that an older minister is always going to be better than a younger minister.

[13 : 03] That an older elder is always going to be better than a younger elder. That's going to be the general rule, but it's not always the case. Is it? In the sense that not all old people are wise or follow God or know best.

This is why I evangelise my nan. Who doesn't know Christ and will go to a lost eternity because she will not repent. So, this idea that it's a general rule without exceptions is not true.

It has plenty of exceptions. Both outside the church and inside the church. But people inside the church want a 20-hour option. See, we want the crown at the top of the hill without having to climb the hill.

We are like the man who gets the letter through to say you've made it into the SAS or the Royal Marine Commandals.

Or you've made it into this top university. And the moment we get the letter, we go, I hope it's not difficult. The reason it's great is because it's difficult.

[14 : 16] And the reason why the Christian life is great is because it's difficult. Now, you can live the Christian life in your own way, or you can pretend to live the Christian life in your own way if you want to.

But there is a way of living it. And it takes a long time. But we live in a world where you can have now and pay later. In other words, just have it.

The trouble is, God doesn't work that way. But because the world offers us those options, we think that we can have them as well in the church. But we can't because wisdom takes a long time to come.

And to become skillful at living the Christian life takes a long time to happen. And so the way to be a faithful believer and the way to be a skillful believer is to receive wisdom.

In other words, listen to God and prize that above everything else. In other words, if you want to be advantaged in life above what you presently are, then listen to wisdom.

[15 : 15] But if you want to be disadvantaged, then reject the wisdom and instruction that you hear from God's Word. Disadvantage yourself if you want to. In the same way, children in school, you get a teacher that will spend hours on putting a lesson together, then teach the lesson.

And the child can nullify all the good teaching by simply refusing to listen. Just nullified.

And it's only by the sheer repetition of it does the child eventually come out of school with an education. Through the constant repetition, hopefully something gets picked up.

But children who learn a lot, in the same way Christians who learn a lot, learn a lot because they listen to what God is saying to them. Notice then, in verses 8 through to 19 in particular, the importance of both education and environment, but how environment is not education.

The environment that the son finds himself in here is an educational one. Another one, he's being said, look, you're in a family environment, you're in a covenant environment.

[16 : 31] You know, your parents believe, you know, God believes, but it doesn't make the son a believer. The son has to commit to the same truths that the parents are committing themselves to.

There is no automatic, you're in, because you're my son. And so the son is brought up in an environment where he is being instructed, and what better environment is there to be brought up in?

And so the father has the advantage because the father knows, and the son is at the disadvantage because the son doesn't know. So, I'll tell you a story, and when I tell you this story, you'll look at me and think he hasn't changed one bit.

When I was a young boy, I used to stand on the Hoover and open the front door. My mum lived at the top of Poulter Avenue, my nan lived at the bottom, and both houses were on the same side of the road. And I used to stand on the Hoover, undo the lock, and walk down to where my granddad was alive.

And they used to find this funny, and of course, you know, I only remember ever doing it once, but they said it happened quite a lot. I can remember once that my granddad took me out to what was then known as Parr Duck Pond.

[17 : 38] It's now a health complex and spa and all of that kind of thing, not for me. And I won't, you know, he used to smoke and drink, so I'll remove the expletives.

But we came back, and he grabbed me by the shoulder, dragged me to my mother, and said, take the little, he thinks he knows everything.

Well, I'm glad you didn't laugh too much, because you obviously have changed. The son disadvantages himself by thinking he knows better than his father.

And in the same way, we can disadvantage ourselves by thinking we know better than other Christians who've actually, actually know better. Sometimes we just have to be told.

It's easy to be told at a certain stage, from an older to a younger. It's far harder for me to stand here, and hopefully if you respect me as a minister of God and ignore that I'm younger than you, and just treat it as the word of God that you're receiving, you'll understand that this is coming, hopefully, from God and not from me, and that the instruction is not coming from a 40-year-old, but coming from the eternal God who's very old.

[18 : 56] So the father is at the advantage because he knows, and the son is at the disadvantage because he doesn't know. And the way the son, as believers, can continue to disadvantage themselves is by thinking they know better than what they actually do.

Thinking they know more than what they actually do. And so the father wants to instruct his son by giving him instruction, and the son will bear the advantage of that instruction if he heeds to it, if he listens to it.

The trouble is, is not even the father can make his son do that. And God, though he pours it out and pours it out and gives us his spirit, still contends with a heart that has the capacity, because of his sin, to say no.

So education and environment go together. In a God-honoring environment, you'll be instructed in God's ways. In a different kind of environment, verse 10 and verse 11, my son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.

And if they say, come with us, verse 11, you know, don't do that. Why? Well, because in a different environment with different people, you will get a different kind of education.

[20 : 16] You're going to learn different things. So don't go down that road. And so when you're in a different environment with different people, you will learn different things.

But when you're in a loving environment where God is prized above everything else, then you will learn what God wants to teach you. And that'll keep you from the temptations of the other environments that are out there.

We need wisdom. We need to receive wisdom. We need instruction, because a loving environment alone is not enough. If you went out into Sunday school now, you would notice teachers, not just today, but any day you go out, looking after the children.

There's a certain amount of care there, or quite a lot of care. And you must know that, because you who are parents are in here while your children are out there.

So you must trust the people that are out there to love your children, to treat them the way that God wants them treated. And that's what's happening. But you also know that a loving environment is not enough.

[21 : 25] They have to be taught the gospel. They have to hear instruction. And so while a healthy, loving environment is necessary, a healthy, loving environment alone does not advantage a child.

What advantages believers of any age is receiving the word of God. There are two ways, then, in which lessons are learnt.

The first way is by learning them, by sitting and learning from somebody else. The other way is how I've learnt most of my lessons, by not listening and suffering the consequences.

Adam and Eve, I think, are the best example of this. And this is where I want to draw your attention. They were told, once they were created, that they could eat of any tree in the garden.

Everything was yes, and there was only one no. So, you're not allowed to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. For the day you eat of it, you will surely die. So, they knew the truth of death, because they had been taught the truth about death, and how death happens, and what will happen when they die.

[22 : 37] But they hadn't experienced it. And what this teaches you, it is possible to know the truth, without experiencing that truth.

But we tend to prize experiential learning above everybody else. We say things like this to people. Unless you know, unless you've been through what I've been through, you just don't know.

Unless you've experienced what I've experienced, you just don't know. In other words, unless you've had the experience, you don't know what you're talking about. However, according to Scripture, that doesn't seem to be the complete truth.

One of the truths is this, that you can know what will happen, without it happening to you. It's called instruction. Adam and Eve knew the truth about death, before they experienced the truth of death.

So this idea that we need to somehow experience it, before we can truly know it, well, it's certainly not the case in everything. What Proverbs is teaching here, is that there is a way of learning truth, without consequences.

[23 : 53] There's a way of learning truth, and the truth about consequences, without the need to experience those consequences. And let me also point out, that those who pry experiential learning above everything else, there is absolutely no guarantee whatsoever, that just because you have experienced something, that you have actually learnt your lesson.

That somehow, that because I've gone through it once, I am now a perfect guard, against going through it a second time.

But I think we can all stand, or sit here this morning and agree, that we've all made the same mistake, more than once. So the idea that somehow, experience and consequential learning, is somehow this great teacher, I don't think it's a great teacher at all.

The greatest teacher is the one who knows best. God knows best, and so we should listen to him. So truth can be known, without the necessity, of experiencing bad consequences.

And the way it is known, is by receiving the truth, that we are hearing. The danger however, is for us to be overconfident, like the child, who thinks he knows better than his granddad.

[25 : 30] Now the people who are caught, in the consequences of their actions, more than anybody else, I think are the people, who are overconfident. It won't happen to me. I will get away with it.

Normally the final words of a person, just before they trip over their own pride, and fall. They think they have a better control, over their life, than what they actually do.

And yet God's saying here, in order to be a skillful liver, in order to have real control, over your life, you need wisdom. You need instruction. You cannot go it alone, and think somehow, you're going to come out okay in the end.

That you're going to think the right things, while you're in church. And you're going to believe the right things, while you're out in the world. And you're somehow going to live in the right way. You can't do it without instruction, or wisdom, or without God at all.

But overconfidence teaches, that we can do it. It teaches us, that we don't have to be committed, to the wisdom, or the instruction that we receive. And so when that happens, what kicks in, is some kind of a self-confident attitude, that thinks I can do it without God.

[26 : 37] The trouble is, we can't do it without God. We certainly can't live the life, that God wants us to live, without listening to what God has said, about the life, he wants us to live.

You just can't do it. Young Christians, immature Christians, whatever age you may be, 10 or 90, like young people, often imagine the future differently, than the person who is mature.

You see, when you're a child, you can get away with it. When I grew up in a house, where there were seven boys, if you stole, what was on your brother's plate, at tea time, you'd probably get a punch.

Because your mum wouldn't see it, we were clever enough, to make sure that she was, out of the room. If you stole, one of your brother's toys, or threw his Lego out the window, still quite bitter about that, with my brother doing it to me.

I have forgiven him, but I remind him, when I see him, you remember that day, you threw my Lego out the window? How dare you? The consequences, are quite mild.

[27 : 57] Your brother tells, mum on you. Your brother gives you, a thump on the arm. Your brother nicks something, that belongs to you. And this is weird, to learn these type of lessons, because if you start stealing things, when you're an adult, you don't get a thump on the arm, you get put in prison.

Men will do, what they did as boys, if not taught differently. And women will do, what they did as girls, if not taught differently. Instruction, is about, instructing, the immature believer, to be a strong, and faithful believer.

Because, if not, we will do, after 10 years of being a Christian, what we were doing, when we were the first year, being a Christian. We've not moved on.

So, when the father, teaches his son here, that there are lessons, to be learned, he teaches them, that such lessons, verse 19, is that paths, lead to places.

Okay? Paths, lead to places. Such are the ways, of everyone who is greedy, for unjust gain, it takes away, the life of his, of its possessor. In other words, paths, lead to places.

[29 : 19] Let me, sort of, bring this in, to the rest of the, the chapter here. When the Bible speaks, of a wolf in sheep clothing, it's speaking, of a hidden danger. But it speaks, of a hidden danger, that you ought, to be able to see.

In other words, if it was completely hidden, you know, you're not aware at all. But a wolf in sheep clothing, is a danger, that is hidden, that you can know about, if you know, what you're looking for.

And so, people who are, receiving the instruction, of the Lord, and the wisdom of the Lord, are not left, to the hidden dangers, of life. They are aware, of what is coming. The storm clouds, are gathering, and they can see it.

And the wise person, is the one, who can see, storm clouds gathering. So, we need to be, in the right path, or on the right path, in order to end up, in the right place.

If you spend, all your time, on the wrong path, then according to Proverbs, you'll end up, in the wrong place. And this is, very different. Let me, let me point out, the difference, just in case, it's not clear.

[30 : 31] Being on the right path, is not the same, as avoiding the wrong path. They are two, completely different, realities. Avoiding, the wrong path, is basically, doing mostly, what the world does, but drawing the line, in different places.

In other words, I will go that far, with you, but I'm not going to go there. I will do that, I will think that, but I'm not going to go, any further. You're on their path, but you're drawing lines, in different places.

Being on the right path, is an entirely, different path, altogether, because it leads, to an entirely, different place. And so don't think, that somehow, you can grow up, as a Christian, and, or even, somehow, grow these children, up in Sunday school, and think, well, what to teach them, is what to keep them from.

When Proverbs is saying, it's not about, the way to keep them from, is by getting them, on a different path, altogether. Rather than being, on the same path, as everyone else, but keeping them, from the dangers, let us be, on a different path, altogether, in the first place.

And this is what, wisdom, teaches us. Turning away, from the path of God, leads to danger. Being complacent, and sort of, drifting like sheep.

[31 : 50] Have you ever seen, how sheep get lost? Being in a rural church, I decided to, go out and, whether it's a day, that I'd walk now, to school, what's nursery, whatever it was, not old enough for school, preschool nursery, and there's, plenty of fields, plenty of sheep, they have, either a really boring life, or just quite a, contended one.

But have you ever seen, sheep get lost? If you stand and watch them, long enough, they head down, nibble, nibble, nibble, nibble, nibble, nibble, and they're gone. That's how sheep get lost.

Sheep get lost, but not looking where they go. Just complacent. The grass here, is just like the grass. Complacency leads to danger, but whoever listens to the voice of wisdom, verse 33, dwells secure.

I mentioned last week, that some believers avoid Proverbs, because in their mind, there's no guarantees.

I'm going to avoid Proverbs, because it's only a maybe. The trouble is, you can't trust in God, with all your heart, on a maybe. The other problem, if you believe that Proverbs, speaks in maybes, as in it's not a guarantee, it's only a possibility, you've got a bigger problem, and that is, that God is expecting you, to keep his word, but God's not expected, to keep his own.

[33 : 24] Maybe I will, maybe I won't. So, there's a big problem, in not taking Proverbs, as certainties.

Proverbs disagrees, with the fact, that it doesn't offer, any guarantees. It offers a lot of guarantees, but it offers, a lot of guarantees, if you follow, its instruction.

On the flip side, what does not listening, to Proverbs guarantee? In other words, if you, I'm not going to listen, to Proverbs, because it doesn't, guarantee me anything.

Okay, but what does not listening, to Proverbs guarantee? Well, it guarantees, that turning away, leads to danger, and complacency, leads to being, led astray.

Well, a summary conclusion then. The reason why, ends are predictable, the reason why, the father can teach, his son about the future, is because, ends of pass, are predictable.

[34 : 29] There is nothing, new under the sun. So, you who sit in the church, and see new things happening, and all the young people, look at this new thing, we're doing, you sit there, and think it's been done, three or four times before.

Why is that true? Well, because you've been there, you've seen it, there is nothing new, under the sun. Certain outcomes in life, are very predictable.

Since the issue then, is Proverbs, and wisdom, and instruction, we ought to recognize, that it speaks as much, to us and our situations today, as it did to the people, back then.

That those who authored Proverbs, have a testimony to tell, with the faithfulness of God, and God is proved faithful. But the challenge is this, even as a believer, this morning, or as an unbeliever, what path, are you actually, on?

What are you actually, committed to, in life? I was challenged, greatly the other day, by a minister, it was not the other day, it was a bit ago, we were talking about, biblical decision making, how to make the right decision, and he looked at me, and basically said, that it doesn't matter, what decision you make, it always, it always comes after, seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.

[35 : 59] So I said to him, if I wanted to move, to say Hawaii, and become, the first Baptist minister, of the church there, you know, and minister, to the Christians there, he said, yeah there's a church there, yeah there's a need, for a minister there, yeah there's a need, for that.

But are you going, because you're seeking, first the kingdom of God? God, even though you'd be doing, exactly the same thing? Not that, not that I'm going to Hawaii, I couldn't, there's snakes, and everything there, it's just, you know, you know, there's probably other things, if there's not snakes, I just, you know, I absolutely love Scotland, you know, I mean it's cold, all these tropical animals, stay far away, it's just, you know, Roland Iceland, is what I say.

What are you committed to? Are you committed to, seeking first the kingdom of God?

Are you committed to, God first, and let everything else, fit in? Yeah, do you know, we'd all perhaps like to live, in a nicer place, than what we do. We'd all perhaps like to have, a different house to live in, than what we do, or, other places to go, or other things, we'd all like something, we'd all almost like to be someone else, and be somewhere else.

And it's interesting, because the person that we, we just might like to be like, and to be where they are, they are thinking exactly the same thing. The unsettledness of the heart, is caused by not being committed to anything.

[37 : 42] Are you listening to God? Are you hearing what God has said? Well, wisdom doesn't want to leave you where you are, wisdom wants to put its arms around you, wisdom wants to love you, wisdom wants to protect you, wisdom wants to make sure, you're on the rock, wisdom wants to keep you, from the dangers that are in life, wisdom wants to keep you, from the slippery slope, that leads into moral, and spiritual, and even physical danger.

Wisdom actually wants, the very best for you, all the time. Wisdom wants you, to listen to its warnings, not because wisdom likes, the sound of its own voice, but because it loves you.

Wisdom wants you to listen, and not ignore what she has to say, because she knows better. She wants you to dwell secure.

And so wisdom calls for you to be committed. Wisdom calls for you to say this morning, yes, I will commit myself to what I have heard, and follow it the rest of the days of my life.

And so don't think that you're beyond this, with no further life to live. The fact that you do have a further life to live, is you're here. The only time you have no life to live, is when you're in the grave, and you're not there yet.

[39 : 02] And so until you get there, you need to listen to God. And so we must listen to her, and we must accept her offer, for she knows best.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.