

Wisdom For Life And Ministry

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.
(Proverbs 1:7 ESV)*

*Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof leads others astray.
(Proverbs 10:17 ESV)*

*'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.'
(Job 28:28 ESV)*

*The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.
(Matthew 12:42 ESV)*

The Value of Wisdom

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Proverbs 2:1-22

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Introduction:

Good morning church. I'd like to invite you to open your Bibles to Proverbs 2; that's on page 528 in your pew Bibles.

How do we live life well? Professor Jordan Peterson recently wrote a book entitled: *Twelve Rules for Life: an antidote to chaos*. The fact that this book is a best seller suggests to me that many people in our world are desperately looking for an answer to this question. How do we live life well?

Life is wonderfully and horribly overwhelming. How am I going to be the husband that I ought to be? Or the father? Or the employee? Or the friend? I'm working hard – why am I not succeeding? Why do I continue to do the things that I don't want to do? How am I supposed to function in a world where – often in the same week – people that I love are being born while other people that I love are being buried? It is emotionally exhausting. Some days it's a dream – other days it's a nightmare. And I am daily reminded that I am completely out of my depth. How do I live life well?

Has anyone else ever asked that question? That's why we need this book. We need wisdom. And true wisdom – the kind of wisdom that positions us to live forever – begins with God. Proverbs 9:10 says:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. (Proverbs 9:10 ESV)

True wisdom is built on this foundation. It sees who God is and who we are. It sees what God has done in Christ to redeem us and to bring us home. It sees that there is a right way to live that leads to blessing and a

wrong way to live that leads to ruin. It sees that, because of sin, sometimes even when we live the right way, we still experience ruin.

Essentially, true wisdom sees the world through God's eyes. It is shaped by the word of God and by Jesus Christ – the Word made flesh. If you are hungering for more wisdom this morning, then I want to encourage you that there is a God who would love to give it you.

To that end, look with me now at Proverbs chapter 2. Hear now God's holy, inspired, wise, living and active word to us today:

My son, if you receive my words
and treasure up my commandments with you,
2 making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to understanding;
3 yes, if you call out for insight
and raise your voice for understanding,
4 if you seek it like silver
and search for it as for hidden treasures,
5 then you will understand the fear of the Lord
and find the knowledge of God.
6 For the Lord gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;
7 he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
he is a shield to those who walk in integrity,
8 guarding the paths of justice
and watching over the way of his saints.
9 Then you will understand righteousness and justice
and equity, every good path;
10 for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
11 discretion will watch over you,
understanding will guard you,
12 delivering you from the way of evil,
from men of perverted speech,
13 who forsake the paths of uprightness
to walk in the ways of darkness,
14 who rejoice in doing evil
and delight in the perverseness of evil,
15 men whose paths are crooked,
and who are devious in their ways.
16 So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman,
from the adulteress with her smooth words,
17 who forsakes the companion of her youth
and forgets the covenant of her God;
18 for her house sinks down to death,
and her paths to the departed;
19 none who go to her come back,
nor do they regain the paths of life.

²⁰ So you will walk in the way of the good
and keep to the paths of the righteous.
²¹ For the upright will inhabit the land,
and those with integrity will remain in it,
²² but the wicked will be cut off from the land,
and the treacherous will be rooted out of it. (Proverbs 2:1-22 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

Here, Solomon has written a poem that highlights the value of wisdom. In the opening verses he pleads with his son to pursue wisdom with the same vigor that he would pursue treasure because wisdom – seeing the world as God would have us see it – is infinitely more valuable than anything else this world has to offer. I want to begin this morning where Solomon ends. I want to consider with you the benefits of wisdom:

The Benefits of Wisdom

I see two benefits that Solomon puts forward in verses 9-21. First, he tells his son that, if you are wise:

1. You will be delivered from the path and the influence of evil

Look again at verse 9:

⁹ Then you will understand righteousness and justice
and equity, every good path; (Proverbs 2:9 ESV)

He's telling us here that when we seek wisdom it comes into us, and it completely changes the way that we see the world. It's like someone turned the light on for the first time, and we can finally see. Once the light is on, you don't want to walk in darkness anymore. That's what he goes on to say in verses 10-15:

¹⁰ for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
¹¹ discretion will watch over you,
understanding will guard you,
¹² delivering you from the way of evil,
from men of perverted speech,
¹³ who forsake the paths of uprightness
to walk in the ways of darkness,
¹⁴ who rejoice in doing evil
and delight in the perverseness of evil,
¹⁵ men whose paths are crooked,
and who are devious in their ways. (Proverbs 2:10-15 ESV)

The more of God's wisdom you can get into your heart and mind, the less of a pull the world will have on you. Do you see that? Derek Kidner writes:

The process is that wisdom and knowledge, when they become your own way of thinking, and your acquired taste, will make the talk and interests of evil men alien to you.¹

When we see the world as it really is – when we see God for who He really is – we lose all appetite for any false substitute. All of the deception of the world – lies that were once compelling and confusing to us – become easier and easier to spot.

Now, that doesn't mean that the lies will cease! Make no mistake about it – the world will try to pull you back down into the mess. One commentator notes:

The world is presented as a place of competing and conflicting discourses: the words of the father, the words of the crooked man, the words of the strange woman. One is hailed from many directions... In discourses that construe the world very differently.²

People are going to try to lead you with them in their foolish ways, but the one who has received wisdom will not go down that road anymore. Hear that: The one who is wise DOES NOT WALK WITH FOOLS ANYMORE. Think about your closest circle of friends; in what direction are they walking? Are they leading you to grow in godliness? Or are they leading you into darkness and ruin? Be careful Christian: You will end up at the same destination as the people who you're walking with. Don't walk with fools. The Apostle Paul warns:

Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." (1 Corinthians 15:33 ESV)

And it's not only the company of fools that we will be delivered from. Look with me at verses 16-19:

¹⁶ So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman,
from the adulteress with her smooth words,
¹⁷ who forsakes the companion of her youth
and forgets the covenant of her God;
¹⁸ for her house sinks down to death,
and her paths to the departed;
¹⁹ none who go to her come back,
nor do they regain the paths of life. (Proverbs 2:16-19 ESV)

Solomon is going to spend all of chapters 5-7 addressing the danger of lust because this letter was written to give instruction to his son, and he knows that the number one threat to his son's life is the temptation of the seductress. How many lives have been forever changed because of sexual sin?

Here we have a woman who has been unfaithful to her husband, and unfaithful to God, and if Solomon's son chooses to accept her invitation then he will sink with her into death. The song of the temptress is difficult to resist, but here Solomon is telling his son that it CAN be done. She CAN and MUST be resisted.

This text is telling us that – even though temptations will inevitably come our way – the one who is wise will have the power to resist them. The New Testament promise for this is found in 1 Corinthians 10:13:

¹ Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 17; IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1964), 59.

² C.A. Newsom as cited in Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 1-15*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 219.

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, **that you may be able to endure it.** (1 Corinthians 10:13 ESV)

The one who is wise is enabled by God to say no to the forbidden woman.

Is that you, Christian?

The forbidden woman is the flirtatious co-worker. She calls out to you from those websites on your laptop. She cries out from the television shows that you have allowed into your home. The one who is wise has every tool that he needs to be free. If you have surrendered to the invitation of the forbidden woman, you need to know this morning that you are on a road that leads to pain in this life, destruction in your family, and ultimately, death apart from God. Don't be a fool.

Deliverance from the path and the influence of evil. That is the first benefit. The second is like it. If you are wise:

2. You will be set with the righteous on the path that leads home

Look with me at verses 20-22:

- ²⁰ So you will walk in the way of the good
and keep to the paths of the righteous.
²¹ For the upright will inhabit the land,
and those with integrity will remain in it
²² but the wicked will be cut off from the land,
and the treacherous will be rooted out of it. (Proverbs 2:20-22 ESV)

If we're going to understand these final verses, then we need to understand what Solomon means when he refers to the "land." Commentator Bruce Waltke is helpful here:

"Land" can refer, among other things, either to arable ground in general or to Israel in particular... But in the wisdom literature, which treats humanity apart from Israel's historic covenants, [land] more likely refers to the ground in general with its fatness, increase and fruit; as such it is a metonymy for life.³

"Land" equals life. Solomon is looking his son dead in the eye and saying: "You have a choice now, son. You can live your life God's way and it will lead to freedom and blessing and LIFE, or you can live your life your way; you can run with the fools and sleep with the forbidden woman, but that road leads to death."

All roads are not created equal.

But if you are wise, you will be set with the righteous on the path that leads home. And you will not walk that path alone! Remember, the evil path that led to destruction was filled with fools and forbidden women who were eager to walk with you. But here, wisdom places you in the presence of the righteous! Can I tell you

³ Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 1-15*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 234.

something? I am so thankful for this! I am so thankful that I am walking with a godly wife, and godly friends, and godly mentors and elders and brothers and sisters in the faith. When I act like a fool, I am rebuked. When I stray from the narrow path, I'm brought back into the fold.

Hear this: If you are wise, not only will you be living a godly life, but you will be living that life IN COMMUNITY. If you are wise, you will not walk alone.

The one who is wise surrounds himself with brothers and sisters to hold him accountable. He becomes a member of a faithful church because he wants accountability. He seeks godly friends, because he knows what's at stake.

And by God's grace, the one who is wise stays on the path that leads him home, where he hears his master say:

Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master. (Matthew 25:23 ESV)

Do you want that?

Listen closely: The text tells us that not everyone will receive wisdom. Solomon presents his son with a choice, and you and I have that choice before us this morning. Which path will you choose? Which wisdom will you accept? That of the world? Or that of the God who made the world and everything in it? This brings us full circle to the beginning of today's text. Solomon is here telling his son that, *if* he wants the benefits – if he wants to be delivered from the path and the influence of evil and set with the righteous on the path that leads home – then he MUST GET WISDOM.

Thankfully, in the opening verses of our text this morning, Solomon provides a portrait of the kind of person who God delights to give wisdom to.

The One Who Receives Wisdom

Let's take a close look at the one who receives wisdom, because by God's grace that's who we want to be.

Look with me again at verses 1-5:

My son, if you **receive** my words
and **treasure** up my commandments with you,
² **making your ear attentive** to wisdom
and **inclining your heart** to understanding;
³ yes, if you **call out** for insight
and **raise your voice** for understanding,
⁴ if you **seek it** like silver
and **search for it** as for hidden treasures,
⁵ then you will understand the fear of the Lord
and find the knowledge of God. (Proverbs 2:1-5 ESV)

Look at the verbs that Solomon uses here. He is being very intentional to show us that seeking wisdom is not a passive endeavour. It is ACTIVE! He uses eight verbs to express this one truth: Those who receive wisdom from the Lord are those who press in!

It is all too easy to sit passively, week after week as the word of God is preached to you. But the one who receives wisdom is the one who actively reaches out and lays hold of it. My mind immediately wanders to the woman who was cured of her bleeding. Do you remember that story? Jesus was walking through a crowded street, and everybody was bumping into him and touching him, but one woman who had been suffering from a bleeding problem for 12 years BELIEVED that Jesus was the answer and so she laid hold of him in faith. And she was healed! I think of the four men who BELIEVED that Jesus could heal their paralyzed friend so they found a way through the crowds and cut a hole in the roof so that they could lay their friend before Jesus' feet. And he was healed! It is not enough to sit in the crowd as the Wisdom of God passes you by.

The one who gets wisdom is the one who receives God's instructions and **treasures** them up in his heart. Matthew Henry writes:

We must hide them with us, as we do our treasures, which we are afraid of being robbed of. We must not only receive, but retain, the word of God, and lodge it in our hearts, that it may be always ready to us.⁴

Solomon goes on to say that we need to **make our ears attentive**. We need to lean in and listen well! Did you know that God will hold you responsible for how you listen?

Have you ever heard the safety instructions that are given on a flight before take-off? The stewardess stands in the aisle, waving her hands and hoping that you're reading along in the safety manual. But you're not, are you? Because you've heard this before. You've heard it so many times, in fact, that you're pretty sure you could take the stewardess' place and give the announcement for her. So, you tune out and think about how much you wish you could speed up the clock by two hours to get to where you REALLY want to go.

But we would listen differently if the plane were going down, wouldn't we? If we could feel the turbulence, and the air masks had fallen down from the overhead compartments, then we would likely lean in and listen as the pilot gave us our instructions on the overhead.

Unfortunately, I find that many Christians today read their Bibles and listen to sermons like they listen to their flight attendant. The pastor's waving his arms around, hoping and praying that you are tracking along in the text, but your mind is already fixated on tonight's family dinner. There's no urgency. We crack open our Bibles each morning, but we don't actually expect to FIND anything there.

But the one who is wise feels the turbulence outside and listens closely to the captain. She reads her Bible, not out of duty but out of DELIGHT! She memorizes verses that will help her to face the challenges that are before her. She identifies the lies that the enemy would use against her and she meditates on God's truth, because she knows that there is a WAR being waged in the world. More than that, she has seen glimpses of the goodness and the glory of God and she desperately wants more! So she **inclines her heart** to respond to what she sees and hears. The one who gets wisdom is the one who invites God to speak into their life and affections.

At times when we feel like perhaps wisdom is nowhere to be found we need to **call out!** We need to **raise our voices** in pursuit of instruction from the living God. The one who gets wisdom is the one who is in the

⁴ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible (Unabridged)*, Accordance electronic ed. 6 vols.; (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2004), paragraph 17771.

habit of saying, “Speak O Lord! Show me how to live!”

We need to **seek** wisdom as if it were more valuable than silver or gold, because it is. We need to **search for it** as we would for treasure that would forever change the fortunes of our family – because this treasure WILL forever change your family. How many families have been set free from a systemic cycle of sin – abuse or addiction – because God intervened and made someone wise?! What is more valuable than that? What will leave the greater lasting impact on your family two generations from now: The hours that you spend working overtime so that you can afford the mortgage on your oversized house? Or the hours that you spend teaching your children to know and serve the Lord? The one who gets wisdom is the one who recognizes it as infinitely valuable and who seeks it with all they’ve got.

Is that you?

I have had the privilege of walking with some brothers who are still very young in their faith and I am humbled and inspired by their tenacious hunger for the word of God. They have been living life their own way for a long time, and now they are CONVINCED that God’s way is best. So, they want to know:

What does God say about my sex life?

What does God say about the way I use my free time?

What does God say about my work and my money?

Those are the questions that a wise man asks! Those brothers will get wisdom! THAT is what Solomon is calling for in this text. It is an active, hungry pursuit of the wisdom of God.

As we conclude, maybe you’re here this morning and you find this to be very intimidating. You were never much of a student. You’re pretty sure that you’ll never understand the Bible the way that the person sitting next to you does. And in the midst of all this insecurity, you’re wondering whether or not God’s wisdom is accessible to you. We’ve been talking about the value of wisdom, but I want to conclude our time this morning by turning your attention to the God who gives wisdom.

Look at verses 5-8:

then you **will** understand the fear of the Lord
and find the knowledge of God.

⁶ For the Lord **gives** wisdom;

from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;

⁷ he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;

he is a shield to those who walk in integrity,

⁸ guarding the paths of justice

and watching over the way of his saints. (Proverbs 1:5-8 ESV)

The BEAUTY and the GLORY of our text this morning is that the one who truly seeks WILL get wisdom! We can say that with confidence because we know the One who gives wisdom. And He is generous! And He delights to reveal Himself to us! We see that in today’s text, and we see it all throughout the Bible. In Jeremiah 29, God says:

You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:13 ESV)

That sounds a lot like Jesus doesn't it?

For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks **it will be opened**. (Matthew 7:8 ESV)

Listen: In God's Kingdom, you are not limited by your IQ. The kingdom of heaven is filled with the intelligent and the unintelligent; the young and the old; those who are highly esteemed in the world's eyes and those who have been written off. God is no respecter of reputation. He is not looking for the best and the brightest. No, He is looking for a particular kind of person:

this is the one to whom I will look:
he who is humble and contrite in spirit
and trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2b ESV)

There are people in this room who never got a high school diploma but who have been filled with more wisdom than many presidents and kings have ever had. God uses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and the weak things of the world to shame the strong. If we seek Him – and I mean TRULY seek Him, in his word, and in the life, death and resurrection of the Word made flesh – He will never send us away empty handed. Seek wisdom.

²¹ For the upright will inhabit the land,
and those with integrity will remain in it,
²² but the wicked will be cut off from the land,
and the treacherous will be rooted out of it. (Proverbs 2:21-22 ESV)

Who are you? Which path are you on? Who are you trusting in this morning? Our text is both an invitation and a warning. The one who is wise will respond with humility. The fool will carry on in his folly. So again, I ask who are you?

This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray together.