

God's Wisdom

By John Ulrich, Lead Pastor

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Proverbs 8

Good Morning! I hope everyone is doing well. We had a great time in the mountains last week for Calvin and Devin's wedding. It's great to be back!

We are continuing today in our series called "Hidden: Seeing God in the everyday moments of life." This is a series where we are looking at two books in the Old Testament that teach us to see God and his work, even in the day to day moments of our life. The first book we looked at was Esther. Esther is a story that reads almost like a Fairy Tale. It teaches us to look for God when we go through difficult times. God's name is never mentioned in Esther, but we saw that He was at work in every detail of Esther's story, even when she couldn't see him.

So, we looked at Esther. Then last week we started looking at the book of Proverbs. Proverbs is different from Esther. It's a book of sayings or principles. It reads less like a fairy tale and more like a giant bag of fortune cookies. It's got all these great one-liners. It was written by King Solomon of Israel who, apart from Jesus, was probably the wisest man that ever lived. He achieved world-wide fame for his wisdom.

Again, Proverbs teaches us to see God in the everyday moments of our lives. Proverbs deals not so much with religious topics but with everyday topics, like money or friendship or anger or laziness or the words we speak. And again, sometimes it's hard to see God in these everyday moments. Proverbs teaches us that God has woven himself into the day to day fabric of this world. So that nine times out of ten if we live in harmony with God, if we value what he values and live the way he calls us to live in the long run, maybe not immediately, but in the long run, we will be rewarded. We will have good things in our life, good things like stable families and lasting wealth and satisfaction in our work and beneficial friendships. Proverbs teaches us that life lived the way God teaches us to live it is generally good. It pays off in the long run.

The word that the Old Testament uses to describe this kind of lifestyle, the kind that is beneficial in the end, is the Hebrew word "Hoekma," which is usually translated "wisdom." We want to live our lives wisely, successfully in a way that benefits us in the long run. Today we are going to look at the topic of wisdom. Other sermons of this series will look at more specific topics like money (which John looked at last week) or laziness or how we talk to one another. Today we are going to look at the big picture topic of wisdom.

But there's an issue with this topic of wisdom. Where do we get it? Where do we go to get true wisdom? There are so many competing voices out there telling us how we should live, so many sources claiming to have wise advice, advice that will help us live successfully. They're

everywhere! I just looked on the internet for about 15 minutes. I found so many things that were claiming to be a source of wisdom. I saw "Chicken Soup for the Soul." I saw all kinds of wise sayings. I saw a WikiHow article with cartoon pictures on how to become wise. I saw an article with wise sayings from children. I thought some of these were worth sharing. They asked kids for the wisest piece of advice they could give people, and here are some of their answers. One nine year old said "Never hold a cat and a dust buster at the same time." "Never trust a dog to watch your food" (10 year old). "Stay away from prunes." Here's a good one: "If you want a kitten, start by asking for a horse." One frustrated five year old said "If we would just spray the sun with sunscreen, no one would have to put on sunscreen." Not too sure about that one. An eight year old named Eileen said the wisest piece of advice she could give anyone is this: "Never try to baptize a cat." Good advice!

But seriously, where do we find true wisdom? We're going to look at that today. Turn in your Bibles to Proverbs 8. This is a chapter that, unlike the rest of Proverbs, doesn't read like a bag of fortune cookies. It's not a bunch of one-liners. Rather, this chapter is a beautiful poem where Solomon presents God's wisdom as a lady that is crying out to mankind, appealing to them to accept God's wisdom to live the way he designed us to live to heed his advice.

So, in this chapter, Solomon presents the appeal of God's Wisdom. He gives five reasons that we should follow God's wisdom, five reasons we should listen to God's instruction about how we should live. He doesn't tell us what that instruction is. That's found in the rest of the book. But here Solomon gives us five reasons that true success is found only in living according to God's wisdom.

We're going to look at this chapter today. My prayer today is simple. I just want you to be convinced, or for some of you convinced more, that God is the source of true wisdom, that what He says to us is good for us, that He is a good and wise God, and that He can be trusted, not just with our life, but with our lifestyle. I want you to begin to believe that true long-term benefit is found in following God's instruction. So, let's read the whole chapter of Proverbs 8. This lengthy, but beautiful poem portraying Wisdom. God's Word says this:

Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand; beside the gates leading into the city, at the entrances, she cries aloud: "To you, O men, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind. You who are simple, gain prudence; you who are foolish, gain understanding.

Listen, for I have worthy things to say; I open my lips to speak what is right. My mouth speaks what is true, for my lips detest wickedness. All the words of my mouth are just; none of them is crooked or perverse. To the discerning all of them are right; they are faultless to those who have knowledge. Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her. "I, wisdom,

dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion. To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.

Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have understanding and power. By me kings reign and rulers make laws that are just; by me princes govern, and all nobles who rule on earth. I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me. With me are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity. My fruit is better than fine gold; what I yield surpasses choice silver. I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice, bestowing wealth on those who love me and making their treasuries full.

“The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works,, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began. When there were no oceans, I was given birth, when there were no springs abounding with water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth, before he made the earth or its fields or any of the dust of the world. I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind.

“Now then, my sons, listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways. Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not ignore it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the LORD. 36But whoever fails to find me harms himself; all who hate me love death.

- Proverbs 8

So, this passage shows us five reasons that we should choose to follow God’s Wisdom, and the first one is this:

God's Wisdom Is Accessible

That's the point of the first few verses of this chapter. Look at what Solomon says there. The Hebrew word for wisdom is in the feminine gender, so he portrays wisdom as a woman, crying out and listen to what she says:

Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand; beside the gates leading into the city, at the entrances, she cries aloud: "To you, O men, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind. You who are simple, gain prudence; you who are foolish, gain understanding.

- Proverbs 8:1-5

What is Solomon saying? Well, it's simple. He's saying that God's Wisdom is not hidden. It's accessible. It's accessible to everyone. She says, "I raise my voice to all mankind." Listen, God's wisdom is not limited to certain types of people. It's not based on your gender or your skin color. It's not based on your income. Not based on your education or even your IQ. I've met some highly intelligent people who didn't seem to have a lot of wisdom!

You may have heard about the five guys that were on a plane - a kid, a preacher, a doctor, the pilot and a lawyer. The pilot came on the intercom and said "Guys, we're going down! There are only four parachutes on the plane. You decide who is staying, but I'm jumping now." And out he went. The doctor said, "I save lots of lives, I need to live," so he grabbed one and jumped. The lawyer said "I'm a Lawyer, so I'm one of the smartest men in the world, I need to live" so he took one and jumped. That left the preacher and the kid. The preacher went to the kid and said, "I've lived a long happy life, and I know where I'm going when I die so you take the last parachute and go." The kid said "No, you take this one, and I'll take the other one. The smartest man in the world just jumped out with my backpack on."

Wisdom isn't based on your IQ! Wisdom isn't based on your age. I don't know if you know this, but the book of Proverbs was actually written to young people, teen agers to teach them how to live well. So, God's wisdom is not based on age, or gender, or race, or any of these factors. Not only that, but the passage says that wisdom calls out to the simple (meaning the ignorant) and the foolish (meaning those who have made bad choices).

The point is no matter who you are, no matter where you come from, no matter what your challenges or even your past mistakes are, God's wisdom is accessible to you. You can do this. It can change you. If your life is clicking along, if you have been responsible with your money and your family is under control and you have a great job, God's wisdom as found in the book of Proverbs is for you! It can help your life! And if your life is a hot mess, if you are up to your neck in debt, if your family is a constant struggle, if you hate your job, the wisdom of Proverbs is also for you! I'm telling you it really can help you change your life! You could learn to live your life in

such a way that is successful by God's standards, if you will just listen to what God teaches in Proverbs.

The very first time I ever studied God's word and applied it to my life it was a passage in the book of Proverbs. I studied a passage about the sluggard, about the lazy man, a passage that we will look at in a couple of weeks. Just one verse. It turned my world completely upside-down. It changed the way I looked at work and procrastination and the opportunities in my life. That same verse that was so life-changing is in your Bible too! I promise! It's accessible to everyone. So, we should choose to follow God's wisdom because (1) it's accessible. Secondly, we should follow it because:

God's Wisdom Is Moral

This is a point that Proverbs is going to make again and again and something that we have to get if we are going to understand God's wisdom. God's wisdom is moral. Look at what wisdom says:

My mouth speaks what is true, for my lips detest wickedness. All the words of my mouth are just; none of them is crooked or perverse.

- Proverbs 8:7-8

Skip down to:

"I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion. To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech

- Proverbs 8:12-13

Now what are these verses saying to us? They are saying that God's wisdom is always moral. It's not separated from right and wrong. You cannot separate wise living, successful living, happy living from morality. Wisdom and morality go together. I say that's important for us to understand, because I think some people try to separate the two. They try to look at wisdom and counsel and successful living as something that is very much value-neutral, like wisdom is a series of life-hacks, like it's a bag of techniques that enable us to get what we want and that makes us wise.

I think of some counselors, even Christian counselors that friends of mine have gone to for wise counsel and they go in and the counselor just kind of says "Well, what are your goals?" Like any goal is OK, like as long as we are successful at whatever we set out to achieve we're wise.

But that's not the way that the Bible portrays wisdom. Wisdom isn't just succeeding at anything. It's succeeding at the right things. Wisdom can't be separated from morality, because we are moral beings. We are made in the image of a moral God, and He made us for moral purposes.

So, to try and evaluate someone's wisdom, their success or failure in life, without taking morality into account is like trying to evaluate a wristwatch without knowing whether it keeps time. We might say "OK, wow. I really like that watch. It's faster than the others. It's winning. It must be better!" But the purpose of a watch isn't just to run faster. It's to keep the correct time. That's a big part of what makes a good watch!

It's like that with us. Wisdom isn't separate from morality. It's not value neutral. The book of Proverbs calls us to recognize that morality is wise. That in the long run we are wisest, we are

happiest, we are most successful, if we live according to God's plan, including his morality. That life is going to be simpler and more satisfying if our words are honest, not crooked and perverse. That we are going to be safer and happier if we avoid pride, and arrogance, and evil behavior. God's wisdom is moral. The third reason we want to choose God's wisdom is:

God's Wisdom Has Amazing Benefits

Solomon tells us in this passage that if you pursue wisdom, you don't just get wisdom you also get wisdom's friends! Wisdom has some incredible friends. Look at what our passage says:

Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have understanding and power. By me kings reign and rulers make laws that are just; by me princes govern, and all nobles who rule on earth. I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me. With me are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity

- Proverbs 8:14-18

We won't spend long on this, but if you look at these verses closely, you'll notice that although the passage uses a lot of different words the benefits it lists basically come down to three things:

1. Sound judgment the ability to make solid decisions.
2. Power, or authority the ability to rule well, and
3. Enduring wealth. True material, physical prosperity. Riches that don't go away.

Those are some of the side benefits you get when you get wisdom. If you think about it, it makes perfect sense that these things would come together as a package. If you have wisdom, you will have the ability to make good decisions. Because if you have wisdom, you will be thinking of the long-term consequences of the decisions you make. If you have wisdom, you'll be taking different factors into account like right and wrong and the purpose for which we are made. So you will by definition make good decisions. And if you make good decisions, you're going to be given power. Nine times out of ten, people on this earth will recognize the quality of your judgment, and they will ask you to lead. You will be someone that people want to entrust things to. You'll be given authority. If you're given authority and power and you make good decisions, you will not only have wealth, but lasting wealth. Money will be given to you, because you have authority and that money won't burn a hole in your pocket because you will act with long-term consequences in mind.

Listen, all these things go together with wisdom. We're just going to touch on the book of Proverbs in this series. I promise you if you study this book and apply the principles, life will tend to go well for you. This book will teach you to have a completely different take on things like money and leadership and consequences, and it will improve the quality of your life. You probably began to see that as John talked about money last week. We'll definitely see it as we look at laziness and work. If you dig into this book (especially you teenagers!), it will change your life. It has benefits.

So we want to choose God's wisdom (1) because it's accessible, (2) because it's moral, and (3) because it has great benefits. Now, the fourth reason we should choose God's wisdom is one

that this passage makes a big deal of and it's one that I love. It's this: We should choose God's wisdom because:

God's wisdom is woven into this world

Listen to what Wisdom says in verses 22-31. It's a lengthy paragraph, but I love it!

*"The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works,, before his deeds of old;
I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began.
When there were no oceans, I was given birth, when there were no springs abounding with
water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth,
before he made the earth or its fields or any of the dust of the world.
I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the
deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when
he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he
marked out the foundations of the earth.
Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in
his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind.*

- Proverbs 8:22-31

Isn't that a beautiful description? What are these verses telling us about God's wisdom? They are telling us that wisdom was brought out before God created this world. She was there before there was water the passage mentions oceans and springs. She was there before the earth before mountains, before hills, before the fields, before the dust. She was there before the heavens were set in place. She was brought out before Creation.

And she as involved in creation. The text says "I was there when God marked the horizon, there when God set up the water cycle with oceans, and clouds, and atmosphere. I was there when he set the boundaries of land and sea. When that happened, Wisdom was the craftsman by God's side. God's wisdom was involved in Creation. And she delighted in creation.

Why? Why did rejoice in the whole world and delight in mankind? Because at Creation, God wove his wisdom into the very fabric of this world. God brought out his incredible unsearchable wisdom, wisdom that allowed him to make the principles and processes that rule the natural world, wisdom that allowed him to make an incredible world, that can sustain and renew itself although we do our best to mess it up, wisdom that allowed him to make man in his own image as someone who could discover and delight in God's wisdom with him. God brought out this wisdom and he wove it into the very fabric of the world. So that if we will only look, we will see that there is an amazing, intelligent Creator who is the wisest of philosophers, the most brilliant of scientists, the most creative of artists. If we will only look, we will be led to rejoice and delight with wisdom. If we only look, we will be driven to worship.

How can you look at the world and not be drawn to worship? Can you not see God's wisdom woven into this world? Can you not see the order and design of an intelligent creator

everywhere you look? In the principles that hold galaxies and solar systems together and determine their orbit? In the cycle of the heavens the turning of the seasons that gives us the gift of variety in our year and gives us times of harvest and rest? Can you not see the hand of a Creator in that? Can you not see God's wisdom when you look at the variety and detail and beauty and intricacy of creation?

Last week, we had Calvin and Devin's wedding in Ferguson NC in the Blue Ridge mountains. I have to say I hope you appreciate the incredible beauty of our state. The view was breathtaking, and we saw so much wildlife. We kept seeing these big beautiful moths that looked just like leaves when they were on the ground. Here's a picture. They're about this big, and they're called imperial moths. Kelley and I saw evidence of other moths, like this. These are called Luna Moths. Aren't they beautiful? So the last night we were staying there, I just thought I'm going to leave the porch light on tonight and see what's there in the morning. It was incredible! There were at least ten different kinds of moths! There was a big imperial moth that looked like a yellow leaf. But there was a moth that was green, with all these geometric patterns on it. There was one that looked exactly like a curled up leaf. There was a leopard moth, a white one with pretty black spots, and a bright white one with like fuzzy lace all over its head and legs. It was incredible! I thought "That's just from one kind of insect in one little part of one little corner of the world."

Now can you not see the wisdom of our Creator in that? Some of you ladies are going "No. No, I cannot. Those are bugs and bugs are evil!" My sister from Indiana actually would not get out of her car, because she heard the tree frogs and didn't know what they were! She thought they were flesh-eating cicadas or something!

But seriously, can you not see how God has woven his wisdom into the fabric of this world? No wonder Wisdom rejoiced when God made the earth! It's not just in moths or seasons or sunsets that we see it. God has also woven his moral wisdom into this world.

I don't know how he did it, but he constructed this world in such a way that even though there is evil in the world, even though it's fallen, nine times out of ten whatever you do, whether you do the right thing or the wrong thing, it will come back to you in kind. Nine times out of ten if you do what's right, you are ultimately rewarded. Nine times out of ten if you do what's wrong, you will face difficulty.

God has woven that wisdom into this world and, just like with the moths, it's all around us if we will just take time to see it. And the book of Proverbs helps us see it. That's why Proverbs says things like: Pride goes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before the fall. Those who give to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses. The greedy bring ruin to their own households, but one who hates bribes will live.

God has woven his wisdom into this world, his creative wisdom and his moral wisdom. If we look carefully, we'll learn to see it. And if we see it, we will learn to trust him and we will learn to choose God's wisdom. So God's wisdom is (1) accessible, it's (2) moral, it (3) has amazing benefits, (4) it's woven into this world. Now there's one more reason we should choose God's wisdom, and it's this:

5. Because God's Wisdom Gives Life

Look at how this chapter closes. It says this:

Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the LORD. But whoever fails to find me harms himself; all who hate me love death.

- Proverbs 8:34-36

What is the writer saying? He's saying that receiving God's wisdom isn't just a nice thing to do. Receiving God's wisdom is not just a great decision for your career or your bank account. Receiving God's wisdom is a life or death matter! He says "Those who find me (wisdom) find life. Those who hate me, those who reject me, those who shun wisdom love death."

Now why would the writer say that? Why would he make this wisdom such a drastic thing? Well, there are other factors we could look at like the way that foolishness, which is the opposite of wisdom, invites calamity. But ultimately, the reason that the choice to follow God's wisdom is such a drastic thing is a life or death thing is actually this: **BECAUSE GOD'S CHIEF WISDOM IS JESUS**. God's chief wisdom, the main place that his wisdom is revealed, the chief spokesperson of his wisdom. the chief demonstration of God's wisdom, is his Son, Jesus Christ.

Think about it. What this chapter says about Wisdom is true in a greater way of Jesus. We said God's wisdom is accessible. The chief means by which God became accessible to all is through Jesus. Jesus is the way that God's wisdom and his love became accessible to the whole world. We said God's wisdom is moral. The chief demonstration of God's morality is Jesus. Jesus didn't just talk about God's morality. He came and showed us like no law could, like no prophet could, what God's morality truly looks like when it's lived out. We said God's wisdom had side-benefits, that things like wealth and power came with it. Jesus came, and he revealed true wealth and true power. He told us how to get them through God's Kingdom. We said wisdom was with God before He created this world, and that wisdom had a hand in the creation of everything that is and that's exactly what the New Testament says about Jesus. It says "All things were made by him (Jesus) and without him nothing was made that has been made." He was the craftsman at God's side when the world was created. We said that Wisdom gives life, that choosing God's wisdom is a life or death matter. Jesus said "I am the way, the truth, and the life no man comes to God the Father, except through me."

Everything that is true of God's Wisdom in this chapter is true of Jesus, because Jesus is God's Wisdom. I'm not saying that this chapter was written only about Jesus. It's not. It's also an invitation to the practical wisdom of God that we find in Proverbs. That wisdom finds its fullest expression in Jesus.

It is in Jesus that we find the accessibility and morality of God's wisdom. It is in through Jesus that we find the life and benefits that God's wisdom offers. And it is through Jesus that we find how God has woven into the fabric of this world into the seasons of this world that move from the death of winter into the life of spring, into the history of mankind and into the story of this book. His chief wisdom, the wisdom of the gospel of Jesus, the place wisdom starts, is with Jesus. So today, this passage encourages us to choose God's wisdom, and the way to start choosing that is by choosing Jesus.