

Proverbs, Part 1 7-8-21

Wisdom

The book of Proverbs is 31 chapters long. The majority of it was written, or at least edited, by Solomon, the king of Israel, although some of the later chapters were penned by various authors. The book speaks to the most practical concerns of life - food, sex, money, relationships, family. It does so with a collection of short sayings expressing certain values. For most of the book it goes from one thought to the next without a whole lot of flow or pattern to it. The best way to study the teaching of this great book is to analyze it according to themes, to study it thematically and that is just what we shall do. We will look at five of the major themes of this book taking one per Sunday for the next several weeks.

When you think of Proverbs perhaps one word stands out in your mind. That word is wisdom. Bible scholars classify Proverbs with the books around it as wisdom literature. It is a book full of the wisdom of God. From the very beginning this is clear 1:1-4 *The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: ²To know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding, ³to receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity; ⁴to give prudence to the naive, to the youth knowledge and discretion.* And not only does this book offer us wisdom, but one of its major themes is wisdom. In fact, that is the first topic addressed in the book; so too it will be the first theme from Proverbs that we will cover. We will see in our study of Proverbs today the value of wisdom, the meaning of wisdom, and the acquiring of wisdom.

First then, the value of wisdom. And oh my, is this book ever loaded with praise for wisdom! In fact, the entire eighth chapter extols the value of this quality. In that eighth chapter we see wisdom personified speaking to us and she says of herself Proverbs 8:10-11 *Take my instruction and not silver, and knowledge rather than choicest gold. ¹¹For wisdom is better than jewels; and all desirable things cannot compare with her.* Now this is poetry to be sure and you expect flowery language and maybe even some hyperbole in poetry but don't forget this is not meant to stir up lofty feelings in you but to teach. There is truth here and what it says about the value of wisdom we must take seriously. This book is expressing the values of God. Again, Wisdom speaks 8:18-19 *Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness. ¹⁹My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold, and my yield better than choicest silver.* Now when somebody uses this kind of language you need to say, "Hey, come on, what is there so great about wisdom? Sure, it is a good thing but so great that nothing can compare?" Well Proverbs does also tell us why wisdom is so great. 8:32-34 (NLT) *My children, listen to me, for all who follow my ways are joyful. ³³Listen to my instruction and be wise. Don't ignore it. ³⁴Joyful are those who listen to me, watching for me daily at my gates, waiting for me outside my home!* Man, this is a guy who is concerned about wisdom. He is acting like a man in love, watching and waiting for wisdom. And why is she so wonderful? 8:35 (NLT) *For whoever finds me finds life and*

receives favor from the Lord. Aha, wisdom gives you life. It does not of course mean biological life but a quality of existence, an abundant life if you will.

Let's see some more of what wisdom can do for you. Chapter 1 tells us that it can keep you from calamity. It does so by describing the fate of the man who refuses wisdom. Again, here wisdom is personified and is speaking to the foolish man 1:27-32 *When your dread comes like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. ²⁸Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but they will not find me, ²⁹because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. ³⁰They would not accept my counsel, they spurned all my reproof. ³¹So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way and be satiated with their own devices. ³²For the waywardness of the naive will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them.* But, and here he contrasts the foolish with the wise, 33 *But he who listens to me shall live securely and will be at ease from the dread of evil.* Wisdom is valuable because it increases your security. You don't suffer so much the results of folly and sin. This same theme is carried thru in chapter 2:2-4 (NLT) *Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. ³Cry out for insight, and ask for understanding. ⁴Search for them as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures.* He says, "My son, go after wisdom with all you've got!" 5 (NLT) *Then you will understand what it means to fear the Lord, and you will gain knowledge of God. 9-12a (NLT) Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair, and you will find the right way to go. ¹⁰For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will fill you with joy. ¹¹Wise choices will watch over you. Understanding will keep you safe. ¹²Wisdom will save you from evil people.* Wisdom is so precious because it keeps us from sin. The New Testament says the wages of sin is death. Proverbs 8 said "he who finds wisdom finds life" and that is so because wisdom keeps you back from sin and directs your feet into the path of righteousness. So again, we read in 3:13-18 *How blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding. ¹⁴For her profit is better than the profit of silver and her gain better than fine gold. ¹⁵She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her. ¹⁶Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. ¹⁷Her ways are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace. ¹⁸She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast.* You might think this is overkill but I see that God is trying to make an important point. What is it that you are after in life? What are you really giving yourself to obtain? Is it money or prestige or the pleasures and comforts of life? Oh sure, we give lip service to wisdom but how many people are really working to gain it? I was talking with a young man this week about his spiritual life and during the course of the conversation he told me that he travelled a great deal in his work. He spent a good bit of time in airports and planes. I asked him what he did when he was onboard. He paused and said, "I just sit there or play games on my phone." Now this may seem like a trivial thing to you, but to me it is symptomatic of a great problem. When I sit on planes and airports or doctor's offices I

notice that most people just sit there and it really blows my mind. With all the many things there are to learn in life, with all the great books that you could read, with the very word of God at our disposal here are people with hours on their hands doing nothing with it. Are they seeking wisdom as silver or searching for her as for hidden treasure? Do you believe Proverbs when it says that wisdom is more precious than jewels? Are you a pursuer of wisdom?

Oh, but the word of God says wisdom is where it's at. Wisdom is what you want. Wisdom is what you want to acquire. It is what you want your children to have. What do you want to give your child? A good swing set? A fun childhood? A good education? Don't confuse that with giving him wisdom. We have a country full of educated fools and many parents are satisfied with preparing their kid to make a buck while they neglect training in wisdom. The kids don't see Mom or Dad seeking to grow wiser; they don't get encouragement in that themselves. It really must not matter. What a contrast there is between what many of our kids get and what Solomon got as a child. *4:3-5a When I was a son to my father, tender and the only son in the sight of my mother, ⁴then he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments and live; ⁵Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding!"* In my Bible there are exclamation marks after both exhortations. It's as if David grabbed the shoulders of his son, looked him square in the eye as if to say, "My son, don't you miss this! You set yourself diligently about the task of gaining wisdom." He could have emphasized the secrets of military warfare, or the first principles of politics, or the smartest way to run the economy, but instead he directed his son to pursue wisdom. And Solomon saw in his father a man who called the law of God his delight and meditated on it night and day.

Do we treasure wisdom like this? David said of wisdom *4:6-9 Do not forsake her, and she will guard you; love her, and she will watch over you. ⁷The beginning of wisdom is: acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding. ⁸Prize her, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. ⁹She will place on your head a garland of grace; she will present you with a crown of beauty.* Here is a Dad who wanted the best for his son. He seeks to give him a taste, a longing for wisdom. He says something we need to hear. In NIV *4:7 The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.* The NAS says *7b With all your acquiring, get understanding.* You want to make a good living, you want a nice family, a husband or wife, you want to have a healthy body, you want a good car and house and wardrobe. You are out to get all these things and this verse is telling you that in all your getting make sure you get wisdom. It is primary. It is supreme. So, make it Job One. Make it a conscious endeavor. Everybody would say they want wisdom but if you ask them what they are doing to gain it they will draw a blank. You be different. Make it a conscious pursuit, make plans for growing wise. Take pains to carry them out. The Scriptures tell us wisdom is worth it.

Well, it's time we move on to the meaning of wisdom. It may help us to clarify exactly what wisdom is, or at least to determine what the book of Proverbs means by the word. The word wisdom is used synonymously and as a parallel to the terms translated "understanding," "discretion," "prudence" and "knowledge." You can see in 4:5a *Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding!* 5:1-2 *My son, give attention to my wisdom, incline your ear to my understanding; ²that you may observe discretion and your lips may reserve knowledge.* 8:12 *I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion.* So, these associated terms tell us a great deal about what wisdom is. There is definitely a cognitive dimension. It is an accurate perception of the world. But it goes beyond that. We see repeatedly in this book that the wise man is distinguished from the foolish man by his behavior. Being wise not only determines your creed it shapes your conduct. As we have already seen, wisdom is so valuable a quality because it keeps you from sin. The man who knows what to do and how to do it but does not get it done is not the wise man biblically speaking. He is a foolish man. Examples of such people are all around us. Knowing right does not ensure doing right. You can find numerous physicians who know better than anyone the negative effects of certain behaviors and yet they themselves live those behaviors. Wisdom involves a mental insight and perception, but it is more than that. So, the definition holds that wisdom is *an applied understanding of the world and life*, knowing how to live and actually living that way. It means letting the truth which you understand about the world control your deeds, your words, your thoughts and emotions. You can't do right until you understand what is right. And to see the world and life biblically means that you see everything thru the viewpoint God gives us in His word. That to me is step one in wisdom. You develop God's outlook on the world around you. You understand the value of things, the place of things, the purpose of things. And you know most of all that there is a creator who made all things, upholds all things and in whom all things find their ultimate purpose. That's why 9:10a *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.* People wonder what that fear is. The fear of God is the desire to please Him, and the last part of that verse helps clarify. 10 *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.* Knowledge of God is the first rung on the ladder of wisdom, and without that your understanding of reality is terribly deficient. Wisdom is an applied understanding of the world and life, knowing how to live and actually living that way.

By this point in the sermon you are supposed to be so convinced of the value of wisdom and so in touch with the meaning of this precious quality that you are ready to yell out, "How can I obtain wisdom?". There are some specific things that you can do to grow in wisdom. Wisdom, of course, is not an absolute thing that you either have or you don't. It comes in measure and even the wisest among us can still grow in wisdom. How you can do that is our focus now. Wisdom is available for the man, woman, boy or girl who wants it. You don't have to go to a mountain in the Himalayas. You don't have to take some

secret study course that will give you access to the wisdom of the masters. I had a step-father who was in a cult called the Rosicrucians. He owned a trunk full of secret literature that he got from this group and he kept it locked up because no one was allowed to see. He talked about the wisdom he got from the divine masters who lived somewhere between earth and heaven. Dear people, wisdom is offered to you by God free of charge. This is one of the emphases of Proverbs. Look with me. 1:20 *Wisdom shouts in the street, she lifts her voice in the square. 23 Turn to my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.* Wisdom isn't trying to hide anything. She is shouting for you to come and get her. 2:1-7a *My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, ²make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; ³for if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding; ⁴if you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; ⁵then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God. ⁶For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding. ⁷He stores up sound wisdom for the upright.* Here is the promise. It's interesting that it even says God stores up wisdom for the upright. I once heard a speaker say that most people must have plenty of common sense because they sure haven't used much. Here God says he stores up wisdom for some because most folks don't care to take their share. In chapter 8 again we find wisdom calling out to us to come and drink in her goodness. 17 *I love those who love me; and those who diligently seek me will find me. 9:1-6 *Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars; ²she has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table; ³she has sent out her maidens, she calls from the tops of the heights of the city: ⁴"Whoever is naive, let him turn in here! To him who lacks understanding she says, ⁵Come, eat of my food and drink of the wine I have mixed. ⁶Forsake your folly and live, and proceed in the way of understanding."* Some people would make you think that wisdom is playing hide or seek with the world of men and only the really clever can ever obtain. But here God presents wisdom as laying out a feast for whoever would come and take. Yes, even you can become wise.*

Now, of the things that make for wisdom some you have control over and some you don't. One thing that tends to increase wisdom is age and experience. The tough thing about experience is not that you can't get it but that you can't avoid it. When I was being considered for the pastorate of our Florida church I was only 24 years old and the pulpit committee was obviously concerned about that. They voiced their concern to one of my references, my pastor and mentor, Jimmy Young. They said, "But he's so young." Jimmy's response was classic. He said, "He'll get over that." And you know, he was right. Age and experience you can't avoid and you can't speed up. You can however fail to learn from it, and many do. I remember seeing a Peanuts strip where Charlie Brown was lamenting another defeat in baseball. Lucy pointed out to him that losing is good because you learn from your failures. Charlie Brown said, "If that were true I'd be the smartest kid in the

world.” But some people never learn or they learn very slowly. Thankfully, however, there are some things you can do to gain wisdom that are up to you and can be done at any age. Our list for today includes three.

Number one is to read and meditate in God’s word. I start here because you expected me to and because it strikes me as the most obvious thing to do. If you believe that we have in the Scriptures a book inspired by God you cannot sincerely claim to be a seeker of wisdom unless you are also a student of this word. No, the Bible will not in itself answer all your questions about life. It does not give specific guidance about what you should buy and sell and say and do in every situation. But if you hope to have any wisdom at all for those specific decisions you will need the more general wisdom that is to be gained from learning the truth which God has revealed to us. This book is a treasure-chest of wisdom. I said that wisdom really consists of having a biblical world and life view and the only way to obtain that is to drink in the word of God until your very blood becomes bibline. And the power of this word to give a man stability and direction and insight is incredible. Psalm 119:97 *O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.* And his commitment to the Scriptures made him wise. He goes on to mention three groups that he surpassed in wisdom because of the word. 98-100 *Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever mine. ⁹⁹I have more insight than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. ¹⁰⁰I understand more than the aged, because I have observed Your precepts.* It is possible to be without a diploma and yet be wiser than a Ph.D. if you love the word. It is possible to be wise though young if you drink in the wisdom of God. And you’ll notice he says in verse 100 that he understands more than the aged not simply because he knew God’s law, but because he observed God’s precepts. Wisdom is found not in a mere study of the Bible; you must read it with an eye towards doing it. Wisdom looks with a willing heart upon all that God would say both to learn and to do. One great way to start taking in the wisdom of Scripture is to read the Proverbs in these next weeks. I’ve known Christians who have committed themselves to read thru the book of Proverbs each month, one chapter a day for the rest of their lives. Beth and I, several years back, went thru this book and picked at least one verse from each chapter to memorize. And that exercise is still bearing fruit in my life today as those verses come back to me and guide my thinking and behavior in numerous areas of life. So, take advantage of the source of wisdom God has placed in your lap. Grow wise by reading and meditating in God’s word.

Secondly, grow wise by listening to God’s people. 1:5 *A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel.* There is a wealth of knowledge and insight to be derived from other people if you are humble enough and willing enough to listen. God has placed wisdom of all sorts all around you in the people in your church, in the books available for your reading, and in your own family. The first people God sends you to for wisdom are your parents. You kids listen up now.

1:8-9 (NLT) *My child, listen when your father corrects you. Don't neglect your mother's instruction.* ⁹*What you learn from them will crown you with grace and be a chain of honor around your neck.* And again in 6:20-22 *My son, observe the commandment of your father and do not forsake the teaching of your mother;* ²¹*bind them continually on your heart; tie them around your neck.* ²²*When you walk about, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk to you.* Believe it or not young people your parents have a better understanding of life than you do. God has given them to you to be guides so pay attention to what they say. You grow wise by listening to your parents.

And you adults need to be listening to others as well. Find out what others have learned about being a parent, about how to use your money, about what books to read, about what the Scriptures teach. The writing of books is endless. I know I will die with a long list of books I want to get to. Reading is a way to tap into the wisdom of generations past, to gain the insight of specialists and to learn from the experience of others. Blessed are those who learn from their mistakes; even more blessed are those who learn from the mistakes of others. Reading or listening to others lets you do that. And may I note here that the wise man acquires wise counsel. There are so many wise and godly people to listen to that to waste your time getting the advice of the world is silly. If you have a tough moral question do you ask your neighbor or an elder in your church? Who are you tuning in to? God says to listen to the wise. Don't feed your mind the nonsense of this world. 15:14 (NLT) *A wise person is hungry for knowledge, while the fool feeds on trash.* And there is plenty of trash out there for those who want it. Psalm 1:1a *How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked.* But in the counsel of God's people there is wisdom. Seek it out.

So, you may gain wisdom by reading God's word, by listening to God's people, and thirdly by asking for God's help. This is prayer. Proverbs 2:3 says you will acquire wisdom if you cry for discernment and lift your voice for understanding. There is also that well known word in James 1:5 *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.* The Lord invites you to ask. I was halfway thru my sermon preparations for this week and I was really struggling when finally, it hit me to pray for insight and ideas from the Lord about this sermon. How God answered you can judge for yourself, but I saw how easy it is to forget to ask the Lord. He says ask and He will give wisdom. Oh yes, there are other conditions, but in this case, I believe there is only one. You must ask sincerely. That is, you must really want to do the right thing, no matter what that is. You can't ask for wisdom about how to spend your money until you are prepared to give it all away if that is God's will. You can't ask for wisdom in relationships unless you are humble enough to put others first. I'm convinced that many times people say they want wisdom and what they really mean is they don't

want to do anything stupid that would cause them problems in life. Do you want wisdom? Really? Even if it means sacrifice which it often does?

If you want wisdom, it's there for you to take. God offers it to you. Why then are there so few who are wise? There is a problem with getting wisdom. I Corinthians 1:30 *You are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God.* So, great! Grace offers wisdom in and through Jesus, but receiving it takes humility and effort. Rats! Thomas Edison said, *Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls & looks like work.* Yep. Charlemagne, the medieval king of France, used to put a Bible under his pillow at night in hope that its wisdom would somehow sink into his head. Lots of folks try such gimmicks in order to get what God promises to the man who reads His word, listens to His people, and asks him for help. The acquiring of wisdom does take a bit of effort. It is far easier to think ourselves wise than to make ourselves wise. But the lesson of Proverbs is that real wisdom is worth the price 4:7a (NLT) *Getting wisdom is the wisest thing you can do! 8-9 (NLT) If you prize wisdom, she will make you great. Embrace her, and she will honor you. ⁹She will place a lovely wreath on your head; she will present you with a beautiful crown.*