

Whatever You Get, Get Wisdom

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[0:00] Well, that was from the Bible Experience, which is a great audio Bible that some of us love and listen to intently.

So check it out at your local Coorong or something, or Word. We're looking at wisdom tonight. Before we do that, I'm going to pray, and then we'll get underway.

Father God, you are the source of wisdom, and so tonight we pray that we would be ready to hear from your Word, that you would help us to understand what wisdom is, and that you would show us how we can be wise.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. So we're looking at wisdom, and the first thing that my degree, which I'll talk about in a minute, has taught me to do is to define your terms.

So I want to start by defining wisdom. And when I think of wisdom, I think of a couple of things. The first thing I think of are those kind of one-liner statements that people think are wise for some reason.

[1:10] So maybe someone like Confucius might have said some of them. So he says things like, man who lives in glass house should change clothes in basement. Or, when you have faults, do not fear to abandon them.

Remember, no matter where you go, there you are. Found a few other people, not from Confucius, some other apparently wise people. One lady, if you surrender to the wind, you can ride it.

I tried that yesterday. I've got a sore knee. A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle. How's that? That's deep.

That's wisdom beyond all pales. Some other things you might think of. Maybe you think of old people with white hair. A bit like that maybe.

It looks pretty wise to me. The other thing that I think of is education, which is why I mentioned my degree. And I bought my degree. It's still in its plastic case.

[2:11] I got it, what? Ooh, it's upside down. In August last year, still in its plastic case, this is the first time I've used it. So maybe degrees make you wise.

I think that it's about education. Other people can't really work it out. They're a bit confused about what wisdom is. So they made up a test to try and help people work out how wise they are.

I found this test on the internet, on the New York Times site. And I have relatively moderate wisdom, a score of 3.4 out of 5. And you can get a 4 or a 5, which is relatively high wisdom.

And that was particularly unhelpful because I didn't know what that meant. And I didn't seem to ask me questions that I thought pertained to wisdom. Just asked me what I would do if someone was crying in front of me.

And I said I'd hug them. And so apparently that's not the right thing to do. If it was, I would have got a 5. The other thing people think of is street wise. So maybe you think of, and this is what I think of, like people, you have really smart people, but sometimes they're not really like that wise as to how they go about things.

[3 : 22] And they're a little bit sort of awkward and stuff. But there are other people who are really quite wise in how to go about life. And they know how many things to have in the fridge so their food doesn't go off all the time.

or whatever wise things their life has taught them. So their people can be wise in that way. But as good Christians, as people who love God and who want to see what the Bible has to say, it's important for us to look at what the Bible says about wisdom.

And so luckily for us, the Bible does give us a bit of an insight into wisdom and to what wisdom is. And so the first big idea that we find in the Bible is that real wisdom comes from a fear of God.

So you can find that in Proverbs 9 and 10, 9 verse 10, sorry, Proverbs 1 verse 7 and Job 28 verse 28. All of those say that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, which leads you to wonder, well, what does it mean to be afraid of God?

Because perhaps like me, you don't really, when you think about the way you relate to God, you don't think of fear as perhaps being the primary feeling that you have towards God.

[4 : 41] So is it, does it mean we should be, to be wise, we need to sort of quake in our boots before God? Does it mean we have to be scared of talking to Him? Does it mean that we should be afraid of Him like we might be afraid if we're in a bank that's getting robbed?

Or is it more like a fear of, we have of people finding out our deepest, darkest secrets and being ashamed? What kind of fear are we talking about?

And I think, as you sort of digest it and you read the rest of Scripture, you see that to fear God is talking about being afraid of running away from Him.

It's talking about being afraid of seeking our refuge or trying to find our joy or our fulfilment in anywhere or anyone else but God.

And so if we fear God it means we remember and we remind ourselves how scary it would be if we were separated from God. And that's what ultimately would happen if we put our trust in those other things, those things that don't actually produce any fruit.

[5 : 51] And I think that if you want to test how afraid of God you are, you should look at how you're behaving. And so if we choose maybe to be generous with our money or to accept humbly someone's rebuke or to not do this or to do that, then if you keep making the wise and godly decision then perhaps that's a good indication that you have a fairly healthy fear of God where if you keep going it doesn't really matter, God doesn't really care, then it's probably a good indication that you need to examine yourself and examine how much you fear God.

Wisdom begins with the fear of God. And Proverbs 4 which is where we're going to zoom in on our discussion of wisdom tonight helps us also to understand what real wisdom is, real godly wisdom.

And so to look at Proverbs 4 we need to quickly, very quickly look at what Proverbs is trying to do and where we're at to now. So Proverbs is a pretty interesting book, there's lots of debate about what it is and what it's trying to do but luckily the first seven verses contain the key to understanding Proverbs.

So if you want to maybe open to Proverbs in the Pew Bibles about probably page, the Proverbs 4 is on page 511 so Proverbs 1 is probably going to be about 509, 510.

The first seven verses in chapter 1 set out the purpose of the book. So verse 2 says that Proverbs is for learning about wisdom, verse 4 says it's primarily for young people to learn about wisdom and verse 5 says that not only is it just for young but anyone who thinks that they're wise or who wants to be wise, they'll also read and learn from Proverbs about how to be wise.

[7 : 51] And then verse 7 it comes down to that key idea, the foundational idea of the fear of God being the beginning, here it says knowledge but also of wisdom.

And then it moves on to show how this young person is being taught by their father and taught to avoid evil associations in chapter 1, not to resist lady wisdom.

Then it goes on in chapter 2 to talk about how good the way of wisdom is and in chapter 3 he's extolled to trust and honour God. Verse 5 of chapter 3, trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight.

And then it keeps going in chapter 3 to say how great wisdom is and the benefits of being a wise person and living a wise way of life. And then finally he's told that wisdom is very very good and he should want it.

And that's where we're at when we get to chapter 4. And at the start of chapter 4 the first nine verses our young learner who's learning from his probably his dad is told that he needs to embrace wisdom.

[9 : 07] So verses 1 to 4 we see a father instructing his child that he should be listened to and that that's a good way of him to gain insight and that this is what his father did for him and wisdom is something that gets passed on from generation to generation.

And hopefully this young person if he becomes wise will do the same to his young people. And then in verse 5 the young person gets told get wisdom.

wisdom. And I think that this implies some sort of activity that wisdom is not sometimes we think of wisdom as being sort of a very cerebral thing that sort of just dawns on you one day like a shaft of light out of the sky while you're sitting under a tree with your legs crossed and going and then wisdom will just come to you.

But wisdom is you've got to be active in your hunt for wisdom in trying to get wisdom. It's got to be something that's got. And you see that again in verse 7 the beginning of wisdom is this to get wisdom.

And then verse 8 he's told to go on to value to embrace wisdom and verse 9 we see that wisdom will make you beautiful and will ultimately result in a reward.

[10 : 27] And it's fair to say that this reward might not be immediate but probably ultimately will find its fulfillment in heaven. And I think that it's because of this future aspect of the benefits of wisdom that it could be easy for us in our pursuit of wisdom or for this young person that the Father's teaching in Proverbs 4 to walk away and to believe the lie of foolishness that the way of folly will bring you success.

That you can walk away from wisdom. And that's why I think in the next verses from 10 through to 19 the Father encourages his child to stay on the right path.

So that's what he does in verse 10 you see there a plea to stay on the right path and he asks the young person please accept my words and you will live a long life.

Don't give in to the way of folly. And then in verses 11 through to 13 he moves on to the benefits that wisdom has. He says wisdom will allow you to get on with your life unhindered by things.

It will help you to run without stumbling and wisdom he says in verse 13 is your life. So get wisdom. And then he moves to warn him against wickedness, against the lies and the ways of wickedness.

[11 : 59] wisdom is and I think it's interesting to note that instead of contrasting wisdom to foolishness, he contrasts wisdom to wickedness.

And I think that that implies that wisdom is the way of righteousness and foolishness and wickedness are related.

So wisdom, it's not just about being wise or being smart, being old, whatever, it's about being righteous. And the other thing you'll note is that he is very clear on telling the young person to avoid the path of the wicked.

In verse 15 you'll see it, avoid it, do not go on it, turn away from it and pass on. And I think that is a good reminder and rebuke for us because I think that many of us, I include myself in this, don't avoid the path of the wicked but we kind of like to flirt with it a little bit.

And so instead of asking questions like how can I please God who is all glorified and holy of holies, we ask questions like what is the most bad thing I can do that will not make God angry?

[13 : 23] And we ask those kind of questions because we want to flirt, we want to find out how much wickedness, how much folly can I kind of get away with before God's going to be really upset with me.

But that is not the attitude that this man is teaching his son or his daughter to have here. The attitude that we sometimes have of flirting with wickedness rather than fleeing from wickedness, I think, again, comes back to that idea of fear of God.

If we don't have an appropriate fear of God, then we'll easily stumble into flirtations with wickedness rather than trying to avoid it at all costs.

As soon as we see or notice ourselves sort of walking down and starting to be a bit wicked, we need to just get away from it as fast as we can, avoid it. We want to be people who live our lives in a way that most pleases God.

And we want to ask questions about our lives like how can I most please God not be wicked or foolish and say how much can God let me get away with. And then as he's talking about the wicked in verse 16, he shows us that the wicked are completely and totally and utterly corrupt.

[14 : 47] And I guess that's more reasons why you should avoid them. And they are intentionally corrupt and they intentionally make other people, try to make other people stumble.

So why you would think you could even flirt with these people who once you start flirting with them are going to actually try and trip you up, try and make you fall is folly, is stupidity.

And that's why wise people avoid the way of the wicked. And then in verses 18, 19, we get a contrast between the righteous and the wicked.

So the path of the righteous is like the light of the dawn. sun is going to rise. And I don't know how many of you are morning people and like to get up and watch the sunrise.

I'm more of a sunset watcher. It's much more appealing to my sort of body clock. But I have on occasion gone up a mountain and watched a sunrise.

[15 : 53] sunrise. And as someone reminded me earlier this week, what you see when you see a sunrise is if you get out of bed early enough, which I always kind of got, I kind of got the back half of sunrise whenever I went to a sunrise rather than the full dawning of sunrise.

But if you watch a sunrise from the beginning, it starts with darkness and then you see the sun pop up from behind the mountain. But before that, it just starts kind of giving a bit of light from behind the mountain.

And then finally the sun comes up and colour and light goes all through the clouds. And it really is quite beautiful and definitely is worth getting out of bed for.

And I think a righteous person, this is what he's saying, a righteous person is a bit like that. At the beginning, a righteous life, you can just sort of see the shafts of light as they pop up from the beginning.

But if you continue on that path of righteous living, of wisdom, then like a sunrise, like a dawn, the sun will come up and light will shine all through your life.

[17 : 05] But at the start, when you're young, when you're still just beginning on your trip to try and be more wise, it's not as glorious as it is when it reaches its fulfilment.

And so I think this is how wickedness tries to trick you, especially when you're younger. It says, it tries to look a bit brighter.

It tries to be more, make itself seem more satisfying and better than these little shafts of light and the promises that a wise life will have.

life. And, you know, when you're faced with the choice, will I, you know, do a wicked thing or will I do a righteous thing? Will you resist temptation?

The wickedness, it's so tempting because it looks so light, maybe because you haven't fully seen the sunrise of righteousness rise yet.

[18 : 09] And so that's how we fall, I think. We believe the lie. We believe that that's as good as we can get. The kind of, I don't know what it would be like, maybe like someone lighting a flare next to you at sunrise.

Go, wow, that's awesome. I'm going to get some flares. Yeah. But if you just wait, they're probably actually ruining a beautiful sunrise.

So, let me assure you that as you pursue wisdom, as you pursue a path of righteousness, that in the end, when you get to heaven, when you get to judgment day, the joy and the beauty of living a life of righteousness is going to far outweigh those momentary flares which just die out and lead to nothing in the end.

And this kind of deception is that the wicked way has is why I think the next few verses, the father goes to talk about the choices, to talk about why you need to guard your heart and stay focused on your walk.

So, in verse 20, he says again, listen to me, listen to me, I have things to teach you. And then he says in verse 21, to guard your heart and let my words stay in your sight and in your heart.

[19 : 46] And I think for us, that means keeping the word of God in our heart, reading it regularly, letting it grow, letting it grow in us, letting it change us, not forgetting to spend time with God.

And the reason why it's good to do this kind of stuff in verse 22 is because these words bring life, words of wisdom bring life. But as we've said before, it's easy for us to get distracted, it's easy for us to divert our attention to those momentary flares.

So, we need to be vigilant and that's what he says in verse 23, be vigilant in keeping our hearts on the path of wisdom. Deciding to be wise is not just a once-off decision.

You don't just go, yeah, I'm going to go be wise today and for the rest of my life. You have to daily decide, yes, I want to be righteous, I want to follow God, yes, yes, it's not simply something that is a once-off.

Sure, once-off you decide I'm going to follow Jesus and then you're fine, you're safe, God's got you. But as that works itself out daily, you've got to consciously make decisions to follow God and God helps you to do that.

[21 : 13] And then in the last few verses, verses 25 through to 27, we see the way of the wisdom, the way of wisdom is the straight path.

And if you keep your eyes fixed straight ahead and you keep walking the way that you should and then you'll avoid swerving off to the right or the left where evil is waiting to make you stumble.

people. And so today, I think that that straight path we follow, we keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus and if we don't waver to the left or to the right, just keeping our eyes focused on Jesus, then we'll be able to persevere until the end, not getting led away from God into sin.

So wisdom comes from God. It comes from fearing God, not fearing him in a way that makes us unable to approach him because we live post-Jesus, post-Jesus' death and resurrection.

We see in Hebrews 4, verse 16, if you look there, that we can approach God with confidence. So it's not a fear that turns us away from God, but it's a fear that reminds us how holy God is and how all-satisfying God is and how without him our lives would be far, far less enjoyable, less good.

[22 : 53] But we need to remember also that to be wise, we need to be humble in that confidence that we have before God, not just doing anything we please because we can be confident, but remembering that it's not what we do that means we can be confident.

It's what Jesus has done on the cross that means we can have that confidence. And so fearing the Lord will help us have the right attitude in this fear of God.

Wisdom is hearing and doing the word of God and being humble enough to react when that wisdom comes to us.

And as Christians, we also need to have, need to be praying, need to be spending time asking God to give us judgment and discernment to know what the will of God is, what the wise decision is in any given case.

I don't think that wisdom is reducible simply to knowing stuff, nor is it simply a matter of having a really switched on mind. But I think wisdom is something that is relational.

[24 : 15] It's taught in a relational way. So in Proverbs, we saw it's a father instructing his child. And the only way that we can actually be wise, the way of wisdom, is a right relationship with God.

And Proverbs 4, I think, picks this up when it talks about wisdom and it equates it with righteousness and shows that it's wickedness that is set up in opposition to a wise life.

The wisest way that anyone can live, if you want to be wise, is to be a sold out follower of Jesus Christ. And Jesus said when he was walking on earth 2,000 years ago, I will show you that what someone is like who comes to me, here's my words and acts on them.

That one is like a man building a house who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it because it had been well built.

But the other one, the one who hears and does not act, is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell and great was the ruin of that house.

[25 : 38] A wise person responds to the words of Jesus to follow him. So the question is, will you choose wisdom?

Will you build your foundation for your life on Jesus? Or will you be foolish? Will you continue to ignore him? And when the time comes, will you watch as your life is washed away just like that?

Be wise. Put your hope, put your trust in Jesus. And I can assure you that the Bible promises that in the end you will be blessed.

Let's pray. God, we thank you for sending your son Jesus to this earth.

Lord, we thank you that you've chosen many of us here to follow him. And Lord, we pray that as we've made that wise decision and that decision to live a wise life, you would help us to continue daily to choose wisdom, to choose you and not, Lord, to be distracted from the path by wickedness.

[26 : 57] Lord, give us the strength that we need to choose you each day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.