

GET WISDOM AND LIVE

(07/12/2014; Proverbs 4:1-7; Steve Thiel; Valley Community Baptist Church)

Sermon Theme → Wisdom comes to the one who fears the Lord, is humble, repents and believes in the True Wisdom of God, Jesus Christ. That wisdom brings discernment, righteousness, and eternal joy.

Introduction

I'm wondering if you remember those commercials on television a couple of years ago called – "*Got Milk*"? You know the ones; they often featured a famous athlete or movie star with a milk mustache. Well, I want to show you one of my favorites as we get started. I think you'll like it! [Show "*Drink your milk kids – Got Milk?*" Video]

Introduction Continued

Obviously, milk is essential for strong bones. But just like everything in life, we only drink it to the level at which we think it's helpful. BTW, did you notice? As soon as those kids thought milk would keep their arms from ripping off, they started chugging their glasses. Including the mom! You see. I'm going to argue that the same is true for wisdom. When we realize that wisdom is essential for life, we'll do everything we can to get it. Which is why Solomon exhorts us in Proverbs 4:5-7, "*Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.*" (NIV 1984)

According to Solomon, we should be doing everything possible to be wiser tomorrow than we are today. And he's not just speaking to recent graduates or current students. He's talking to all of us! So much of our life and culture has been professionalized and institutionalized that we start thinking it's the responsibility of a professor or institution to impart wisdom to us. So, essentially, the push is for more teachers, more professors and more institutions of higher education. The implication seems to be that wisdom is something you purchase with tuition and class fees, rather than a daily, lifelong process of growth. But we should never be content with the wisdom attained through formal education. Understanding is not simply more classes and wisdom is not the amount of letters after your name – MD, PhD, or MDiv. When Solomon said in Proverbs 4:5, "*Get wisdom, get understanding.*" He's not saying, "*Go back to school. Get more degrees.*" Not that's there's anything wrong with more schooling. It's just not his point.

Transition → And yet, the command comes to us all. Get wisdom! So what does it mean? How shall we get it? And why is it so important? Those are the questions that I want to ask. And those are the questions that I believe Proverbs answers so clearly! Let's begin with this question, why is wisdom so important?

I. Why is Wisdom So Important?

Four reasons on why wisdom is so important, all flowing from Proverbs 2 – 4. Wisdom brings discernment. Wisdom delivers from evil. Wisdom brings happiness. And most

importantly, wisdom brings life. We'll start with the first, wisdom brings discernment.

1. Wisdom Brings Discernment

Listen to Proverbs 2:1-5, 9 → *“My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; for if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding; if you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will discern the fear of the LORD and discover the knowledge of God... Then you will discern righteousness and justice and equity and every good course.”* (NASB 1995)

You know, from my perspective, Christians are the smartest people in any room. And I completely believe that. They're the smartest people in their homes, in their offices and in any public setting. Now why do I say that? Because they can discern between right and wrong. They understand the difference between good and evil, righteousness and wickedness. They have a moral compass to guide and direct them through the waters of life's most difficult questions. Just think of the “hot-button” issues in our country today.

Example of Abortion

Just think of abortion. Christians believe the Bible and understand that when a baby has a heartbeat, hands & feet, and is able to reach out of the womb and grab a doctor's finger, that's a baby. And babies have a right to life. Thou shall not murder. Christians are not confused about that.

Example of Homosexuality and Same-Sex Marriage

Or how about the “hot-button” issue of abortion and same-sex marriage? Again, the Bible is our guide. It says that marriage was designed by God to be between one man and one woman. They were created for one another and perfectly designed, not only for companionship, but also to have children. That doesn't make Christians judgmental. It's just makes them discerning.

Transition → Proverbs 2 tells us that wisdom brings discernment. It's important because it enables you to fear the Lord, discover the knowledge of God and determine what is good and right and fair and just. That's the first reason why wisdom is so important.

2. Wisdom Delivers You from Evil

Second reason → Wisdom delivers you from evil. Just listen to what Solomon says next in Proverbs chapter 2:10-14 → *“For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you. Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways, who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil.”* (NIV 1984) How does wisdom do that? Well, it gives you both the desire and the knowledge to know what is holy and righteous and good. And therefore, enables you to discern what is evil and wicked and wrong. You can assess the situation and say, “This doesn't look good. This is NOT the right way to go.” The outcome is death and destruction, which is the example that Solomon gives us next in Proverbs 2.

Proverbs 2:16-19 → *“(Wisdom) will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. None who go to her return or attain the paths of life.”* (NIV 1984)

Transition → These are such helpful and practical things. Are you starting to see why wisdom is so important? It brings discernment. It gives you the way of righteousness and, therefore, delivers you from evil and the path of sin and destruction and death. That’s pretty important, don’t you think? But wisdom also brings happiness; third answer to the question why is wisdom so important? And it’s NOT like the happiness of this world, which is shallow and fades quickly, but a happiness that lasts, a joy that endures.

3. Wisdom Brings Happiness

And we all want to be happy, don’t we? I mean, this is common to every man, woman and child. Now, we don’t always agree on what brings happiness, but we do all long for it. In fact, our country was founded on a freedom to pursue it. Remember these words, *“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”* Thomas Jefferson, The Declaration of Independence.

And this pursuit of happiness is not bad, it’s good. The problem with evil is that it finds happiness in ways that displease and dishonor God, whereas godliness finds happiness in ways that bring glory to God. So we’re talking about godly wisdom. Listen to Proverbs 3:13-18, *“Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness; and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her.”* (NKJ)

Proverbs 24:13-14 says, *“My son, eat honey, for it is good, yes, the honey from the comb is sweet to your taste; know that wisdom is thus for your soul; if you find it, then there will be a future, and your hope will not be cut off.”* (NASB 95) In other words, godly wisdom not only brings happiness but a hope-filled future. It’s a lasting joy, rather than a happiness that is fleeting and fails you in the end. Because I’m NOT trying to say that the joy that comes from godly wisdom is the only happiness out there.

Our thirst for happiness is insatiable in this world. And if we don’t seek for it in godly ways, then we will find whatever substitutes we can to fill the need. Executives find it in climbing the corporate ladder. Athletes find it in breaking world records. Scholars in publishing books. Gamblers at the blackjack table. Musicians in selling records. The sources of happiness apart from God are endless. Drugs, sex, television, eating, walking, drinking, running. But the happiness that these things bring is NOT true and lasting. It’s

NOT ultimate and eternal. It's NOT the joy for which we were made. And therefore, it leaves us unsatisfied and incomplete, frustrated and knowing that there must be something more. And there is something more → Because the ultimate and eternal happiness that we're craving is only found in wisdom. That's why Solomon exhorts us, "Get wisdom, get understanding... Though it cost all you have, get wisdom."

Transition → So why is "Wisdom" so important? Because its peace and stability and happiness are more profitable than great riches. It delivers us from evil; it protects, guides and brings discernment. It's all that is good and right and godly. In short, it's who God made us to be. That's why He desires and commands every single one of us to get wisdom. Let me flip it around to make it more obvious. Who here wants to be foolish, anxious, unstable and unhappy? Who wants to be evil and unprotected and left to perish? No one does. That's why wisdom is so important? One final reason why wisdom is so important is because he who finds wisdom finds life. And we've heard this language already in many of the passages we've looked at, but it's everywhere in Proverbs 2-4.

4. Wisdom Brings Life

- Proverbs 2:16, 18-19, 21 → "(Wisdom) will save you also from the adulteress... For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. None who go to her return or attain the paths of life... For only the upright will live..." (NIV 1984)
- Proverbs 3:17-18, "Her ways (the ways of wisdom) are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of LIFE to those who take hold of her..." (NASB 1995)
- Proverbs 4:20-22, "My son, give attention to my words... Do not let them depart from your sight... For they are LIFE to those who find them..." (NASB 1995)

And who here doesn't want life? Could you even imagine sitting there and telling me that you'd rather choose death than life? "Yeah, Steve, I get what you're saying. Godly wisdom brings eternal life. But you know what, I'm really not interested. I kind of like the death option." That would be like the kids in the commercial saying, "I'd rather have my arms ripped off than drink milk." That's crazy! Of course it's crazy. That's why they chugged their glasses down and started drinking right out of the carton. Wisdom is important because brings life, eternal life!!!

Transition → Which brings us to our second question. What is wisdom? I mean, what is it really? What are the characteristics of a person who has wisdom? What does it look like? Well, I came up with two essential characteristics for godly wisdom to be acquired. But then, I believe, the book of Proverbs is going to move us to another question, a better question. And that is "Who is wisdom"? But first, what is wisdom?

II. What (Or Who) is Wisdom?

1. Wisdom is Fearing the Lord

The first characteristic you already know. Pastor Jay got us rolling last week by looking at

- Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge"

- And Proverbs 9:10, *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. And knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”*
- Proverbs 31:30 also says, *“Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.”* (NASB 1995)

The wisdom that leads to life and eternal happiness begins with knowing and fearing God. And there’s a way to fear God → So that you don’t have to fear God. Fear God in such a way that you have reverence for Him, respect and honor, recognizing that He is the creator and sustainer of all the world → So that you don’t have to fear God, knowing that to reject Him and His Son Jesus Christ is to choose destruction. It’s to choose eternal judgment. That’s what Proverbs 16:25 is talking about when it says, *“There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”* (NASB) That death is what the Bible calls hell, weeping and gnashing of teeth, where the worm never dies and the fire is never quenched. So fearing the Lord – recognizing that we’ve sinned against a holy God and deserve His judgment – is the beginning of wisdom, because it starts us on the road to life. It’s the first step and every other step flows from it, including humility.

2. Wisdom is Humility

The second characteristic to godly wisdom is humility. Proverbs 11:2 says, *“When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.”* (NIV 1984). A wise person is a humble person. And this makes total sense with what we just said, doesn’t it? I mean, proud people don’t fear the Lord. They’re arrogant, self-confident, and self-consumed. They can’t even get to first base in wisdom. In fact, they’re not even trying to get to first base, because they’re convinced they’re already there. There’s nothing to add to people who are wise in their own eyes! But the people who fear the Lord are humble. They depend on God for everything. They’re teachable and want to grow. Humble people are easily corrected and want to be corrected, so that they can walk in truth.

Transition → So what is wisdom? It’s fearing the Lord and walking humbly before Him, which is a great definition and a good start in answering the question, “What is wisdom”? But here’s the problem. Proverbs doesn’t leave wisdom at a “what.” It pushes us to a “who.”

3. Wisdom is a Person

If you have any time today, read through the first 9 chapters of the book of Proverbs, and you’ll see that “Wisdom” is continually personified → Wisdom is a PERSON!!!

- Proverbs 1:20-23, *“Wisdom shouts in the street. She lifts her voice in the square... she cries out... ‘How long, O naïve ones, will you love being simple-minded?... Turn to my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit on you...’* (NASB 1995)

Do you see? Wisdom is a person. A person who gives us the Spirit.

- Proverbs 2:2, 4-5, *“Make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; If you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasure; then you will discern the fear of the LORD...”* (NASB 1995)

Those who seek for the person of wisdom with all their heart will fear the Lord.

- Proverbs 3:13-18, *“How blessed is the man who finds wisdom... For her profit is better than the profit of silver... She is more precious than jewels; And nothing you desire compares with her. Long life is in her right hand... Her ways are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life...”* (NASB 1995)

Wisdom is a person. She is more profitable than anything because she is the giver of LIFE. No place makes that clearer than Proverbs 8:34-35. Listen to this.

- Proverbs 8:34-35, *“Blessed is the man who listens to me (Wisdom)... For he who finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD.”* (NASB 1995)

Jesus Christ is the Wisdom of God

Could it be any clearer than that? Solomon commands us to listen and seek wisdom because he knows that he who finds wisdom finds life. And he’s not ultimately talking about a what – earthly knowledge or information. He’s talking about a “who”, Jesus Christ. Because salvation and eternal life are only available in Him. Because “there’s no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

- That’s why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, *“...We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”* (NASB 1995).

Jesus Christ is *“the power of God and the wisdom of God.”* It’s the power of His death, burial, and resurrection, and the wisdom of His finished work on the cross that brings discernment, power over sin, righteous living and true lasting joy. In Him, we have life!

III. How Do We Get Wisdom?

Which brings us to our final question – How do we get this wisdom? I want to close by giving two biblical instructions on how to get wisdom. The first flows directly from what I just said about Jesus being the wisdom of God and is clearly the most important.

1. To Get Wisdom, You Must Come to Jesus

The first thing that you must do to “get wisdom” is you must come to Jesus.

- You know, in Matthew 12:42, Jesus makes an amazing statement to a group of people who were testing Him. He says, *“The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.”* (NASB 1995).

Something greater than Solomon? That’s the understatement of the year. Solomon spoke about the wisdom of God. Jesus Christ IS the wisdom of God. Others spoke about truth. They pointed to the righteous way. And spoke of life. But Jesus Christ IS the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Him (John 14:6). The prophets gave promises, but all the promises of God find their yes and amen in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). Don’t you see? People pointed to the salvation that God would secure. But to Jesus Christ came to earth secure it, God in the flesh, on a mission to purchase salvation with His own death, burial, and resurrection – and then offer it freely to anyone who will receive it. He

came so that we may have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10). He came so that we would have joy, and that our joy would be made full (John 15:11). Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God. So when the bible says, “Get wisdom,” it’s saying, “Get Jesus!” It’s saying, “Come to Jesus!” And how do you do that?

- **Proverbs 3:5-7 → “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil.” (NASB 1995)**

So how do you come to Jesus? It starts by taking ownership for your sin. Don’t lean on your own understanding. Don’t be wise in your own eyes. Acknowledge that you’ve sinned against a holy God by disobeying His commandments. You haven’t loved Him with all your heart. You haven’t loved your neighbor as yourself. You haven’t even kept your own personal moral code, which is why you should fear the Lord → Because sin has consequences. And the consequence of sin is eternal destruction – the reality of hell. But for those who turn away from evil, who repent and trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and the hope of eternal life, they are promised the glory of heaven, eternal joy and happiness, the ultimate fruit of wisdom. And in the meantime, He gives you wisdom for life and godliness. He will make your paths straight. He will guide you in the way of righteousness for His name’s sake. So how do we get wisdom? The one absolutely essential thing to do is come to Jesus!

2. To Grow in Wisdom, Know the Word of God

Secondly, for those of you who have already come to Jesus, you might ask how can you grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ and get more wisdom? I would say this. Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh. John 1 says, “*He dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from Father, full of grace and truth.*” To get more wisdom, to get more Jesus, we need to continue NOT leaning on our own understanding and NOT being wise in our own eyes, but instead, being students of the Word. We need to know it. We need to love it. We need to apply ourselves to it, by studying it daily, thinking, meditating and memorizing the Word of God.

- **Romans 12:2 says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” (NASB 1995)**

If you want to get more Jesus, stop listening to your own thinking, stop listening to the world, and start listening to the Word of God. Start doing that today, even 15 minutes a day; as Pastor Jay said, start reading a Proverb a day. I’d suggest adding a Psalm a day and a chapter from one of the Gospels a day. That will take you only 15 minutes. You can read a chapter in the Bible in 5 minutes, 3 chapters in 15 minutes. And I promise you that you will not be the same person next year as you are today. Your mind will be stretched, your heart enlarged, your zeal for the things of God more fervent. And you will grow in godly wisdom. And it will be evident and obvious to everyone around you.

Closing → May God give us the grace that we would be people who come to Jesus and who keep coming to Jesus, by knowing and loving the Word of God, for our good and God's glory. Let's pray!