

## Proverbs “The Path of Wisdom”

Proverbs 3:1-12; 30:1-4

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### INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Last week we began a series on the big themes in the book of Proverbs.
  - This book is what we call “Wisdom Literature” because its whole purpose is to make you into a wise person who is skilled at navigating the complexities of life.
- We don’t talk a lot about wisdom in our culture anymore. Facts? Yes. Knowledge? Absolutely. But wisdom? Not really. *The Atlantic* magazine published an article that gives one reason why this is the case. The article is titled, “Is Google Making Us Stupid?”
  - The author points out that we are being shaped by the very way we use phones and computers. No longer do we have to think long and hard about things. We expect to receive information in the way our phones and devices give it: quickly, instantaneously, and with little effort involved!
    - The author says that we used be like scuba divers swimming through an ocean of words, but now we just “zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski.”
- We are the smartest generation in history. Knowledge has never been higher or more accessible. But that does not mean we are wise. We all know really smart people who have blown up their lives with some bad decisions. Wisdom is not something you can learn with a quick Google search. It takes time. It is a skill that has to be learned.
  - The most skilled people in sports, music, carpentry, art, or teaching children have put in endless hours of work. What makes them so great is they have grown in their skills to the point that they can discern the smallest things that the rest of cannot.
    - That is wisdom. Wisdom is a skill. It is the skill of knowing how to walk the path of life so that you enjoy it while also avoiding the roots that will trip you or the cliffs that will kill you. Oh, how I need this! On the negative side, I want to walk this path wisely so I can avoid blowing up marriage, alienating my kids, losing my job, or experiencing financial ruin. Positively, on my path of life I want to have a family filled with joy, be good at my job, and handle my money rightly.
- Wisdom is the ability to navigate the path of life with skill. This is what Proverbs is all about. For three weeks I am introducing wisdom and then we will look at eleven very specific and practical topics to make you wise such as how to deal with your anger, communication, money, sexuality, and friendships, to name a few.
  - If you want to grow in wisdom then our passage today says you need to learn how wisdom is a path. You need to understand *the path of wisdom*, *the steps of wisdom*, and *the One who blazed the trail of wisdom*.
    - Just before we start let me recommend a resource to you. Tim Keller has written a year of daily devotionals through the book of Proverbs. I highly recommend it to you and will be borrowing from him today.

## THE PATH OF WISDOM

- So do you want to grow in wisdom? Then let's begin by talking about **(SHOW SLIDE 2)**  
**The path of wisdom.**
  - The book of Proverbs describes wisdom with a few metaphors but one of them is a path. The heart of 3:1-12 is verses 5 and 6. You can see the theme of wisdom as path there. **(SHOW SLIDE 3)**
    - **<sup>5</sup>Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
and do not lean on your own understanding.  
<sup>6</sup>In all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make straight your paths.” (Prov 3:5-6)**
- Later in this chapter it says that if you will seek wisdom, **(SHOW SLIDE 4)**
  - **“Then you will walk on your way securely,  
and your foot will not stumble.” (Prov 3:23)**
- In the next chapter it says **(SHOW SLIDE 5)**
  - **“Ponder the path of your feet;  
then all your ways will be sure.” (Prov 4:26)**
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 6)** Why does Proverbs talk about life as a path? It is an excellent metaphor for life. First, it emphasizes how important the little things are. Going for a long walk simply means putting one foot in front of the other, over and over and over again. If you do this enough times you will get to where you are going.
  - Wisdom is the same way. It is more like a path than it is like a door. A door is something you can open quickly and enter into a whole new place. A path is something you must walk for a long time to get to your destination. We wish wisdom was like a door; just do a Google search, or listen to a podcast, and suddenly you become wise. But that's not the case. Wisdom is gained by doing many little things, over and over.
    - We will look at some of these steps in a few minutes.
- Wisdom is also like a path in that it gives you the easiest way to walk through tough terrain. Of course, you can leave the path but you will get caught in thorn bushes, get stuck in mud, or even fall off a cliff. Along with Genesis 1-2, Proverbs is arguing that God has created his universe in an orderly way. There is a law of gravity. If you're wise you will shape your life around the law of gravity. You will stand near the edge of a cliff to enjoy a view but you won't step over it. In the same way, God has made human life with certain laws. Laws about how to speak in such a way that helps your relationships, laws about how to obtain and not obtain money, and laws about how to enjoy his gift of sex and how not to.
  - Wisdom means learning how God has made human life and shaping your life around it. If you do, then generally speaking, your life will go better. Chapter 3 makes this so clear.
- Look at all the benefits that will come to you if you learn wisdom and walk the path of wisdom. Verse 2 calls you to keep the commands of wisdom **(SHOW SLIDE 7)**
  - **“for length of days and years of life  
and peace they will add to you.” (Prov 3:2)**

- Verse 4 says calls us to deeply learn God's faithful love for us and to show it to others. Then listen to the benefit of walking this path. (SHOW SLIDE 8)
  - **"So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man." (Prov 3:4)**
- Verse 6 says that if you trust in the LORD and acknowledge him (SHOW SLIDE 9)
  - **"he will make straight your paths." (Prov 3:6)**
- Verse 8 says if you place your whole life under God and turn from evil then you will experience physical strength. Verse 8 says, (SHOW SLIDE 10)
  - **"It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones." (Prov 3:8)**
- Verse 10 says if you will give generously to God of your money then God will give generously to you. Verse 10 says, (SHOW SLIDE 11)
  - **then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine." (Prov 3:10)**
- (SHOW TITLE SLIDE 12) Who doesn't want all that? If you will walk the path of wisdom, your life will go better, you'll live longer, you'll have favour with God and people, you'll be physically and psychologically healthier, and you will have more money.
  - Right away we say, ***"What? Solomon, you're not living in reality. Aren't you overstating your case?"***
- The key to is interpret this book correctly and read it as a whole. Many other Proverbs speak about how wicked people prosper, how innocent people suffer, and how God disciplines his children. This book is not naïve to the hardships of life.
  - Here is the key: Proverbs focuses on the fact that God made his universe to work a certain way. Oh yes, human sin disrupts this perfect order but there is still order. We all know this.
    - Who is wealthier: the lazy person or the hard-working person? Generally, it is the hardworking person.
    - Who experiences less mental stress: the person who lies all the time and has to keep up a false front or the person who tells the truth? The truth teller.
- So, we are seeing that there are some great incentives to learn how to walk the path of wisdom. As we learn these steps and do them over and over again, we will find that life works better for us, even if it takes a long time to see the results.
  - Okay, so what are these steps that we need to do over and over again to stay on the path of wisdom?

## THE STEPS OF WISDOM

- Let's turn now in the second place to talk about (SHOW SLIDE 13) **the steps of wisdom.**
  - Now we come to the practical stuff; the areas we need to grow in if we want to be wise. There are five of them listed in these verses, but there are many more throughout Proverbs. Let's look at the ones here.
- First, to grow in wisdom take steps to (SHOW SLIDE 14) **know God.** Look at verse 3. (SHOW SLIDE 15)
  - <sup>3</sup> **Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you;**

**bind them around your neck;  
write them on the tablet of your heart.**

**<sup>4</sup> So you will find favor and good success  
in the sight of God and man.**

- Steadfast love and faithfulness are words God used to describe himself when he entered into a covenant relationship with Israel. Like a marriage covenant, God promised to always be committed in his love and to be faithful to Israel. This goes to an even greater level when God makes a covenant with his people through the blood of Jesus Christ. We become Christ's bride.
- Growing in wisdom means going deeper and deeper into knowing who God is and what he has done. Write it on your heart. Work it into yourself. Listen to music that celebrates it. Read books to teach you more. Meditate on scripture.
  - As you become secure in God's love and faithfulness to you, then you will have a great inner strength. And you will show this kind of love to others and so find favour with them as well.
    - What are you doing each day to know God in a deeper way?
- Second, to grow in wisdom take steps to **(SHOW SLIDE 16) know yourself.**
  - I mean this in the sense of verse 5 and verse 7. Verse 5 says, **(SHOW SLIDE 17) "do not lean on your own understanding."** And verse 7 says, **(SHOW SLIDE 18) "Be not wise in your own eyes."**
    - It is the fool who thinks they have it all figured out. The fool is always making excuses for why they make bad decisions and have problems with others. It's someone else's fault. It's a unique situation. Wisdom begins when you daily humble yourself and admit you are in constant need of wisdom, constant need of God's help to guide your life. Becoming wise means you learn all your weaknesses, your flaws, the way you tend and toward certain sins.
      - That's a painful thing to do though. You will only be able to be totally honest about your own weakness if you keep this with the first step of knowing God. It is knowing God's deep love for you in Christ that will enable you to see your weaknesses, sins, and faults.
- Third, to grow in wisdom, take steps to **(SHOW SLIDE 19) submit to Scripture.**
  - When you see that you are not wise and that you need God to teach you wisdom then this next step just makes sense. Wisdom is saying, ***"I do not have life all figured out but God does. I will submit to what he says."*** This is why Solomon says to his son in verse 1. **(SHOW SLIDE 20)**
    - ***"My son, do not forget my teaching,  
but let your heart keep my commandments."***
  - So how are you daily taking these steps in wisdom? Read this book. Meditate on it. Learn it. Memorize it.
- Fourth, to grow in wisdom take steps to **(SHOW SLIDE 21) be generous.**
  - Look at verses 9-10. **(SHOW SLIDE 22)**

- **“Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce.”**
  - The firstfruits were the first part of the harvest. The farmer did not even know how good the rest of the harvest would be but he would give the firstfruits to God. This is a call to give to God first from your paycheck, not waiting to see how the month will go and what is left.
    - Otherwise you end up like the farmer who told his pastor that one of his cows had surprisingly given birth to two calves. The farmer said, ***“when I sell them I will give the proceeds I make on one of them to the church.”*** A few weeks later the farmer informed his pastor, ***“I’m sorry to say it pastor, but the Lord’s calf died.”***
  - For many of us, it’s far too often that the Lord’s calf that dies. I mean, we don’t give in a way that is planned and deliberate. And so we spend our money on other things and discover that there is nothing left for the Lord.
    - In contrast, to grow in wisdom means to be generous with what God gives you – to do this first! What can you do to ensure you are giving a generous percentage of your income to the Lord?
- Finally, to grow in wisdom means to take steps to **(SHOW SLIDE 23)** learn from adversity.
  - Look at verses 11-12. **(SHOW SLIDE 24)**
    - ***“<sup>11</sup> My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, <sup>12</sup> for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”***
  - Verses 9-10 said that a generous life will often lead to greater financial prosperity, but that is not always the case. Life is filled with all kinds of trials and troubles. God disciplines his children. This is not saying that every suffering and pain is God’s discipline. But here and in Hebrews 12 we are not to get angry with God’s discipline in our lives are grow weary of it. It is proof that he loves us.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 25)** Elisabeth Elliot helps us to understand this. She had a lot of trouble in her life. Her husband Jim Elliot was killed as a missionary. Her next husband also died. She tells of visiting a farmer named John Jones in northern Wales.
  - She watched as one day he brought his sheep and rams to a vat of antiseptic fluid. They had to be put in this or else they would be eaten by insects and parasites. She said that one by one John seized the animals take them into the vat and force their whole bodies under the fluid. They would struggle to climb out. The sheepdog would snarl and snap at them and John would have to force them under again and again.
    - She wrote, **(SHOW SLIDE 26)** ***“I’ve had some experiences in my life which have made me feel very sympathetic to those poor sheep. I couldn’t figure out any reason for the treatment I was getting from the Great Shepherd I had trusted, and like these sheep, I didn’t get a hint of explanation.”*** She goes on to say what our great problem is. **(SHOW SLIDE 27)** ***“We refuse to admit the distance between the Great***

Shepherd and us sheep. . . . The wisdom differential between the two of us is infinitely greater than the wisdom differential between a shepherd and the sheep. Sometimes the most loving thing to do with a sheep if you're a shepherd is grab it, cast it down, seize it, and tie it up, with not a word of explanation."

- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 28)** Difficulties and suffering are inevitable. They will either make you wiser or more foolish. Accept trouble as a moment to teach you how to walk the path of wisdom.
  - So wisdom is gained step by step over a long time of knowing God, knowing yourself, submitting to Scripture, being generous, and learning from adversity.

## THE ONE WHO BLAZED THE TRAIL OF WISDOM

- Now that we've talked about the path of wisdom and the steps of wisdom, let's bring it all together by talking **(SHOW SLIDE 29) The One who blazed the trail of wisdom**
  - Proverbs 30 contains the words of a wise man named Agur. He is seeking wisdom. But he can't see where the path goes. He has come to see, like we all must, that he really is not very wise at all. He confesses that he cannot understand God. He cannot understand life. He cannot understand suffering. He realizes that his great problem is that no one can really answer such questions unless they could somehow go to heaven, learn such answers, and come back down to earth to teach us. Only one who could do this could blaze the trail of wisdom for us all to follow. And so he says this: **(SHOW SLIDE 30)**
    - **"<sup>3</sup> I have not learned wisdom,  
nor have I knowledge of the Holy One.  
<sup>4</sup> Who has ascended to heaven and come down?  
. . . What is his name, and what is his son's name?"**
- Centuries after Agur spoke these words, one of the smartest teachers in all Israel, a man named Nicodemus, took a young man named Jesus aside for a conversation. Jesus starts telling him things that no man could know such as how the Spirit of God works and how one enters the kingdom of heaven. Nicodemus cannot comprehend how Jesus could claim to have such knowledge. Jesus says, **(SHOW SLIDE 31) "No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man."**
  - Nicodemus knew the Scriptures. He knew Agur's words. Nicodemus must have been shocked. Jesus is saying, ***"I am the one that Agur was searching for. I am the Son of Man from the heavens and have come down to reveal wisdom to you. I will blaze the trail of wisdom for you."***
- And then Jesus says something even more shocking. **(SHOW SLIDE 32) "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."**
  - Jesus is saying, ***"I have come from heaven and I am going back to heaven by the way of the cross. I'm going to be lifted up. I will live a wise life but will be cut short so you can have eternal life. I will lose the favour of God and man so that you can gain it. I will trust in God with all my heart but my path will not be***

***straight. My path will destroy me so that your paths can be straight. I will lose all my riches so that you can become eternally rich."***

- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 33)** So you see, ultimate wisdom is a person. It is Jesus. To be his disciple means to follow him – to follow the path he blazes ahead of you. Growing in wisdom means knowing Jesus, knowing the covenant he made to take us as his bride. Knowing that he has all wisdom that we do not and trusting him with all our heart.
  - You can trust him because he has proved his love for you in giving his life.
- This is what carried Elizabeth Elliot. Here is what she writes:
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 34)** "There will be no intellectual satisfaction on this side of heaven to that age old question, "Why?" But although I have not found intellectual satisfaction, I have found peace. And the answer I say to you is not an explanation but a person; Jesus Christ, my Lord and my God. . .
    - **(SHOW SLIDE 35)**. . . It's He who was the Word before the foundation of the world, suffering as a lamb slain, and He has a lot up His sleeve that you and I haven't the slightest idea about now. He's told us enough so that we know that suffering is *not for nothing*."
- Grow in wisdom. Step, step, step, step. Each day. Know God, know yourself, submit to the Scriptures, be generous, and learn from adversity. Keeping following Jesus down the path and you will become wise.