Chasing Wisdom: So Happy Together

Proverbs 3:13-35

I'm sure many of you couldn't help the reaction you had in your mind when you read the title of today's sermon, So Happy Together. You probably started humming the song that goes by this title which came out in 1967 and was sung by The Turtles. It's a very simple and catchy song that a guy sings to his girl about the happiness he finds in imagining them together for the rest of their lives. "No matter how they tossed the dice, it had to be, The only one for me is you and you for me."

We all understand that fundamental delight that comes from a guy and girl finding each other and falling in love. It's important to think about that for a moment because when Solomon tries to motivate his son to pursue wisdom in Proverbs, one of the ways he does that is by comparing wisdom to an attractive woman. We saw wisdom as a woman in Proverbs 1, but that passage was more of a warning from her. Now in Proverbs 3 Lady wisdom won't speak, but Solomon will compare wisdom to a woman and one who is desirable and who leads to happiness and joy. Look at Proverbs 3:15. He's directly addressing his son's desires and promising that if he chases wisdom, she will bring happiness and joy if they are together.

There's nothing wrong with desires, in fact, we are creatures who *want* at the most basic level. And because of that there's nothing wrong with wanting happiness in life. We are designed to pursue joy. Our problem is that we try to find lasting happiness in places where it can't be found. We go after cheap imitations and believe that they can fulfill our desire for delight throughout our lives. Solomon comes along and says, true and lasting delight is available and can be had in wisdom. *Desires are a good and natural part of our humanity and wisdom is our aid in directing them properly.* – Ryan O'Dowd

So, here's what we will see today in Proverbs 3:13-35, **5 Ways that Wisdom Grows Our Happiness.**

1. **Her Value brings Flourishing (vv. 13-18)**

Verse 13 begins a new section, and I want you to notice the first word in verse 13 and the last word in verse 18. When you see bookends like this you know that everything in the middle goes together and these bookends provide the theme for the middle portion. So, what does it mean to be blessed? There are two Hebrew words that are translated blessed in the OT. These two are the same word and if you look down to verse 33 you will see the word “blesses” and this is the other word.

The word in verses 13 and 18 is the word Ashre and it’s where we get the name Asher. So, what does this mean? Often, we think of someone who is blessed as someone who has received God’s approval. It’s sort of a top-down perspective of your life. That’s the word in verse 33 but not this word. This word is viewing a life from a horizontal perspective, and it could be translated happy, flourishing, well-being, or a good life.

I have a book called *God and the Art of Happiness* and it spends a ton of time explaining the OT teaching on this word, Ashre. The author has a term for the Bible’s philosophy of happiness, Asherism. Here’s how that book defines happiness according to Asherism: *It is enjoyment of ourselves, others, and the earth itself in obedience to God's call, and it is the celebration of that call by donating ourselves to the flourishing of creation."* - Ellen Charry

In other words, happiness or Ashre comes from enjoying life as God designed us to live it in relationship with Him and giving ourselves in service of others for their good. That sounds a lot like wisdom and it’s why verse 13 says this. The finding here is not someone walking along the beach and happening on a beautiful shell. The finding is a years long search aimed at acquiring wisdom.

Wisdom brings flourishing and a good life because of her value. Look at verses 14-15. You can see here that wisdom is personified as a woman who is worth the pursuit. In fact, she is more valuable than abundant financial resources. Why? Look at what she brings in verses 16-17. The picture here is of a full and satisfying life, something financial resources can never fully secure for you. Notice the further description of the benefits she brings in verse 18.

The tree of life is only mentioned a few places in Scripture. The early chapters of Genesis where it was placed in the Garden by God, several times in Proverbs, and then at the end of the Bible in Revelation where the tree of life will be in God's presence and bring healing to the nations.

If you remember from the Genesis story Adam and Eve sought wisdom and knowledge in themselves by trusting the words of the serpent and eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil rather than from the tree of life. What happened to their access to the Tree of life at that point? Listen to Genesis 3:22-24. Humanity lost access to it because we were wise in our own eyes. But wisdom here is a tree of life, but we can't get ourselves back to wisdom and the tree of life on our own. How do we access it? Well, listen to Colossians 2:1-3, 6-7. Wisdom comes through humble submission to Christ and trust in Him. And wisdom brings flourishing with her. Let's move to our second way that wisdom grows our happiness.

2. **<u>Her Usefulness is Indisputable (vv. 19-20)</u>**

Look at verses 19-20. If God utilized wisdom to create all that exits, certainly wisdom is useful for us as well. Now obviously we will never have the knowledge and wisdom at our disposal that God has at His. And yet, there's a form and structure to His wisdom that we can imitate. In the creation account you have the six days coming in two sets of three and the days correspond to one another. The first three days are God creating the framing of the universe or the canvas on which He will paint and then on days 4-6 He is filling out the frame or painting on the canvas. On day 1 he creates light and darkness and day 4 the sun, moon and stars. Day 2 he separates the water below from the sky above. Day 5 he fills the water with fish and the sky with birds. Day 3 he creates dry land and plants, day 6 he fills the land with animals and human beings.

Listen to Proverbs 24:3-4. Wisdom requires us to recognize the order God built into creation and into us as humans, and then to work to build and fill out and work within that order for the good of those around us. You see this in the last phrase of verse 20. The dew refreshes and nourishes the land, and as we grow in wisdom, we see its usefulness and turn that to serve others.

3. **<u>Her Guidance creates Security (vv. 21-26)</u>**

One of the things that most people would say is necessary for happiness is a sense of security. A sense of rest and confidence in the present and the future. People everywhere are searching for security and yet, in this broken world, it is elusiveness. But not if you have wisdom. Look at the further encouragement in verses 21-22 to value wisdom's guidance that leads to the benefit of security and rest in verses 23-26. Let's read all of these verses.

Notice the bookends in verses 23 and 26 regarding your feet. Dangers abound on the pathway of life. A twisted or broken ankle could be deadly during this time if you are out on your own. But even with all of the threats and dangers that are there, security can be found through wisdom. Notice verse 24.

We are never more vulnerable than when we sleep. And falling asleep requires the act of letting go and trusting that you will be ok. Wisdom instructs us that God has got us in our most vulnerable moments and so our sleep can be sweet. The reason wisdom provides security for us is found in verse 26.

The Hebrew word translated confidence here is strikingly similar to the Hebrew word translated fool. What defines a fool? Someone who is confident in self. And what defines the wise? Listen again to Proverbs 3:5-7. In an increasingly polarized and online world, it often feels like the only option is to stake out an opinion on everything and hold to it tenaciously. But when everyone does this on every topic and most of us shouldn't have strong opinions because we just don't know, it creates lots of ignorant conversation and increases polarization. Don't follow the culture in this descent into foolishness. Chase wisdom instead. Trust the Lord and don't lean on your own understanding. Fill your mind with the biblical story and let that be your confidence and He will keep you. And this will enable you to serve others well.

4. **<u>Her Justice Serves Others (vv. 27-32)</u>**

We saw the importance of justice and equity to wisdom back in Proverbs 1:3. A major part of wisdom that leads to happiness and well-being is learning how to handle others with justice and service. Look at verses 27-32.

Notice that verses 27-28 describe us withholding good from those around us. We don't think of ourselves as failing to do good to others, but I think this statement explain what happens to most of us. *Your obligation to your neighbour is seen to override your own convenience.* – Lindsay Wilson

I would say that many of us just simply don't pay attention to others most of the time. We are wrapped up in our own lives, our own schedules, the fires we have to put out. We don't stop and consider our neighbor either in church or out.

Now notice in verses 29-31 that wisdom keeps us from sins of commission or actively causing harm to our neighbors. It's easy to read these verses as describing some sort of physical violence, but it may include verbal fights, gossip, slander, or some harm that doesn't include my fists. The foolish person who harms one's neighbor is called devious in verse 32 and the Lord hates this way of life. And notice the wise are called upright and are in the Lord's confidence. What does that mean?

You probably have people in your confidence in your life. You trust them and are willing to disclose personal information to them that you wouldn't just publish on Facebook. To be in the Lord's confidence is to be on the inside, closely associated with Him. Wisdom positions us there. And it does this because of our last point this morning.

5. **<u>Her Humility Yields Favor (vv. 33-35)</u>**

These verses close out this section and basically give us a summary of what we've seen throughout chapter 3. In each verse there are two opposite terms, one describing the foolish and one the wise. Notice verse 33. Now verse 34. And verse 35. I want to draw your attention to a coupe of things in these summarizing verses.

First, notice in verse 34 that he gives favor to the humble. Listen to James 4:6-10 which quotes this verse. But keep in mind that humility doesn't earn us grace. Verse 34 says that he gives grace. It's always a gift, undeserved and based on nothing good in us. But humility does position us to see grace and receive it. If you

are wise in your own eyes and confident in yourself, you will not be able to see your need for grace.

And then, second, notice the language in verse 35. The wise inherit honor. Again, they do not earn it. Inheritance is not something that you work for. You receive it because you are a part of the family. But notice the foolish get disgrace. They earn it. It's the just reward for their foolishness.

The further I get into these chapters in Proverbs, and we are only 1/3 of the way through chapters 1-9, the more I see humility as the primary and decisive posture of the wise. Humility sees my need and so listens. Humility trusts, rests, and is confident in God and not self. Humility takes correction to heart and grows from it.

And so what this means for today is that if you want to be happy, grow in humility. Stop paying attention to yourself so much and learn to give yourself to God and others. If you are having trouble doing this, start with the cross, where Jesus Christ gave His life for you and to glorify God. Start there and let the cross work a little humility and happiness into your life. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 11/1/26

- What is your favorite song or album from your teen years?

- Why do you think Solomon compares wisdom to a woman several times in chapters 1-9?

- The sermon pointed out two different Hebrew words both translated ‘blessed’ in Proverbs 3. One is top-down (God’s approval), the other is horizontal (flourishing, a good life). Why does that distinction matter for how we understand what wisdom promises?

- Verses 14-15 say wisdom is more valuable than silver, gold, or jewels. Do you find that convincing? What can money secure, and what can’t it?

- Give an example from your life and experience of how wisdom brings more happiness than money.

- Why is wisdom compared to the tree of life in verse 18?

- What happened to human access to the tree of life in Genesis 3, and how does that connect to what Solomon is saying here?

- The sermon described God’s pattern in creation as ‘build the frame, then fill it.’ Where in your life, your home, your work, your relationships, could you apply that kind of intentional ordering?

- Verse 26 says the Lord will be your confidence. The sermon noted that the foolish person is confident in self. What would it look like in a specific situation to shift that confidence from yourself to God?

- Explain how this quote given in the sermon may change your actions, “Your obligation to your neighbor is seen to override your own convenience.”

- What’s one situation where this principle would actually cost you something?

- What would be the benefits of being “in the confidence” of the Lord?

- The sermon said humility doesn’t earn grace, but it does position us to receive it. Why would pride make someone unable to see their need for grace?

- The sermon said if you want to be happy, stop paying so much attention to yourself. Does that feel true to you? Where in your life does self-focus actually undermine your happiness?