

Week 2 - Why Seek Wisdom?

READ = PROVERBS 2:1-22

There once was a marriage counseling ministry at a church that offered three kinds of counseling: Pre-marital counseling, Marriage Difficulties counseling, and Marriage Maximizing. The third one is for couples who aren't having problems, but simply want their marriage to be all it can be. You might think those sessions would be easier, but as it turns out, not so! Those sessions are actually harder, because while they're similar to helping marriages in crisis, these couples are unwilling to admit anything is wrong. They want to pretend everything is okay, but at the same time try to get the help they need!

This experience shows us that the first obstacle to getting help in life, is being willing to admit it. You will never want wisdom until you realize you don't have it. In chapter 1, we saw that a wise person is not someone who has obtained wisdom, but simply someone who *wants* to be wise. Chapter 2 moves on to offer encouragement to seek wisdom earnestly. It is a longer sermon-style proverb told from the perspective of a father addressing his son about how to obtain a good life. He is trying to show his son what seeking wisdom looks like, and all the benefits that he will obtain from it.

How to Seek Wisdom, vs.1-4

Receiving It v.1, "listen to what I say..." – The first step in seeking wisdom is to be open to receiving it. The father is offering wisdom. The first step in gaining wisdom is seeking. The first step in seeking wisdom is being open to receiving it. Receiving wisdom is not a passive thing. It means valuing what someone is telling you, being attentive to it, and being humble enough to realize you need it.

Storing It v.1, "and treasure my commands." – One of the biggest reasons wisdom isn't valued is because we think we don't need it right now. Wisdom isn't always immediately applicable to our current situation. There is a reason for this. It is better to learn how to handle a hard situation before we are actually in that hard situation. Like basic training which equips soldiers with how to handle circumstances before they encounter them for real in wartime, wisdom is often offered in times of peace, but if we will treasure it and store it away, we will have what we need when the time comes. To do this, requires patience and a focus that sees farther than our immediate concerns.

Hunting for It vs.3-4, "cry out for insight/ask for understand/seek it like silver & hidden treasure" – Seeking wisdom starts with the humility and being open to receiving it. Seeking wisdom means storing it to use at a later date. Seeking wisdom means earnestly, sincerely, single-mindedly searching for it. It means realizing its true worth and wanting it above all. If someone told you that someone close to you knew the secret location of a million dollars, what would you do? Most of us would drop everything, try to figure out who it was who knew, and how to get them to tell you how to find it. That is how we are supposed to seek wisdom, like a hidden treasure.

Why Seek Wisdom, vs.5-22

Most people after reading that you have to “*seek them like hidden treasures*” feel a sense of let-down. Like the hokey ending to a bad movie where the hero uncovers a treasure chest, opens it up, and the only thing inside is a note that says, “peace on earth” or “love each other.” We want real treasure not cheap platitudes that don’t work. Truth be told, most of us don’t ever seek wisdom because we don’t think we will find anything but overly sentimental bumper stickers, or overly bitter rants about the way things used to be. That is why this proverb proceeds to show the benefits we can expect from wisdom. This is what wisdom will do for you.

Wisdom Will Draw You Closer to God, vs.5-8 – The first reward for seeking wisdom is that it will draw you closer to God. As we saw last week, wisdom, at its core, is theological. Seeking wisdom leads to God because you will discover the fear of the Lord. And, seeking God leads to wisdom. Look at verse 6, “*for the Lord grants wisdom.*” Some people just want God to tell them what to do. Others want to decide what to do on their own. Both are extremes. God doesn’t want immature, ignorant people who don’t know how to live. He also doesn’t want independent, isolated people who don’t realize their need for him. He desires to give us wisdom, not so that we can be free of him, but so that we can be free, joyful, mature partners with him.

Wisdom Will Help You Live Well vs.9-11 – Wisdom leads to God. Wisdom also leads to a good life. Sometimes we think the path wisdom will lead us on is like quitting a bad habit or going on a diet. All that we see is delicious, but bad for us, food we have to give up. But the picture painted in the next few verses is an internal transformation, changing us from the inside out.

- o You will know the right thing to do v.9 – The first thing wisdom will give you is insight into what the right path is. As you think about which path is right and why, you will see the value of wisdom and desire to choose rightly.
- o You will enjoy doing the right thing v.10 – As you think through wise choices, wisdom will become more than just a habit. It will become pleasing to you. You will see good produced by wise choices and will enjoy doing good. You will also see evil for what it is and no longer desire it.
- o You will be protected from evil v.11 – Wisdom protects you from evil both by showing you the right way to go, but also by making you the kind of person who delights in choosing rightly. It’s a double defense that leads to living well. You will know the right thing to do and you will enjoy doing it.

Wisdom Will Protect You from Bad Relationships vs.12-15 – Not only does wisdom positively and proactively help you live skillfully, but it will also protect you from the ways of people who don’t care for wisdom. We sometimes excuse our association with bad people by saying we are trying to change them for the better. The proverbs are clear that if a person doesn’t want wisdom it will lead them and those around down a terrible path. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:33, “*Don’t be fooled...bad company corrupts good character.*” This proverb goes on to describe the signs of such a person:

- o Speaks twisted things v.12 – Jesus told his disciples in Luke 6:45, “*A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart.*” The words that come out of a person’s mouth are an indicator of what is inside of them. A person speaking twisted things is revealing what his heart is full of.
- o Pleasure in doing wrong vs.13-14 – What we take pleasure in is a further indicator of the state of our soul. None of us is perfect. We all still stumble into sin. Sometimes we embrace sin willingly. But to call sin good, to no longer be ashamed of sin, or to long for sin more than righteousness is a dangerous place to be. In Philippians 3:19, Paul talks about people who “*brag about shameful things.*” They are proud of what they should be ashamed of.
- o Crooked in their ways v.15 – The wicked are people whose paths are crooked. They get distracted and delayed by every sort of evil. They turn aside to investigate new opportunities for indulging their desires. Their path isn’t clear to themselves, and they try to hide it from others. Secrecy and deception are signs of an unwise person.

Wisdom will Protect you from Ruining Good Relationships vs.16-19 – This proverb refers to two kinds of people that wisdom will help you avoid: evil people (v.12) and immoral people (v.16). Both of these represent types to be avoided. The call to avoid the promiscuous woman occurs several times in the Proverbs. It is addressed to a married young man. It promises that wisdom will help you avoid her and in the process preserve your current marriage. It shows how wisdom will protect us from ruining our good relationships. The promiscuous woman is the symbol for a relationship saboteur. It might also be the backstabbing friend, or the gossipy co-worker, someone who will destroy good relationships if we aren’t careful, giving us three characteristics of such a person.

- o Seductive v.16 – Flattering is hard to resist. The reason is that relationships are hard, especially between people living closely, whether they are married, friends, family, or coworkers. We see people at their most vulnerable and at their worst. We are always around them so we don’t censor ourselves. Often we dump our negative emotions on them. Then all of a sudden we meet someone new, who tells us everything we want to hear, who only focuses on what they like about us, and takes our side in every struggle we are in.
- o Abandons v.17 – Flattering offers a false promise that relationships should be easy and that those “other” relationships are bad for being hard. It’s a lie. Its goal is to cause us to forsake our commitments and leave when times get hard. That is what this woman in the proverb has done and what she will encourage you to do, by promising you ease and pleasure.
- o Follows v.19 – All of this becomes possible by encouraging you to forget the promises you made. She leads you down “the road to the grave,” and encourages you to follow. Covenants and promises are there to help you keep going through the hard stuff, giving you reason to stay focused and continue on the “path of life” when you feel like giving up or going astray. Ruined relationships happen when people forget the promises they made to one another, and leave when things get hard.

Only Two Possible Destinations vs.20-22

The Proverb ends with a description of the only two destinations in life. Wisdom and righteousness will lead to blessing and abundance. The wicked will be cut off and removed. The writer is *not* saying that if we do what God says then God will externally give us blessings, and if we don't, he will smite us. He's saying that the paths we take lead to different destinations. Wisdom is a harder path of training, and at times can be difficult, but it leads to integrity, to life and blessing. Wickedness offers ease and pleasure, but leads to death.

As Jesus says in Matthew 7:13-14, *"You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult."* Don't be deceived by the offer of an easy journey. First, it's a lie. Second, it doesn't matter if the journey is easy - if it doesn't lead you where you want to go!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why is wanting wisdom the most important starting point?
2. What are the words used to describe our search for wisdom? Why do we often not search this way?
3. How can we start our search for wisdom?
4. How does wisdom draw us closer to God?
5. How does wisdom help you live well and enjoy living?
6. How does wisdom protect us from bad relationships? How do we sometimes excuse or justify remaining in bad relationships?
7. How does wisdom protect us from ruining good relationships? (The example was between a husband and wife.)
8. What other relationships might this apply to?