

THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK

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(Wisdom in Proverbs, No. 2)

SUBJECT: WISDOM

TITLE: THE COURSE OF WISDOM

TEXT: PROVERBS

INTRODUCTION. If I were to dedicate this series of messages on wisdom to any one individual I would have to make a very difficult choice. The first person who comes to mind is my mother. I was born when my mother was in her late teens and I have often said she learned on me and James, Linda, and Mike all benefitted from her early lessons in child-care. I watched my mother grow in the Lord from the day Brother M. C. Waldrup returned from the Second World War and announced to people in the Green River community, seven miles west of Sledge, Mississippi, that he would begin holding services again. He had returned to his position as Superintendent of Missions for Riverside Baptist Association, in north west Mississippi. We set up concrete blocks and placed one-by-twelves over them for pews. For the next several years we were fed by one of the greatest preachers I have ever heard. He and his wife, Connie, were often in our home. Brother Waldrup baptized me in Six Mile Lake, and he encouraged me when the Lord called me to preach the Gospel. He was instrumental in my going to Mississippi College and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Brother and Mrs. Waldrup eventually moved on to another ministry, and I left for college without giving much thought to the growth I should have witnessed in both my parents. After college and seminary, I visited my parents and younger brothers and sister as often as possible. In time, I discovered that many people regularly sought out my mother for counseling. A lot of the people who visited her for comfort, encouragement, or advice were closer to my age than hers. That got my attention, and then as I observed her love for them and their respect for her, I realized that these friends recognized in her a wisdom that had not been bestowed upon me upon graduation from college or seminary. She not only counseled others to "Wait on the Lord," she knew to wait on the Lord.

When she lost her voice while teaching a ladies Sunday School class, the diagnosis was a malignant tumor on her brain. The doctor told us that the longest any of his patients had lived with that particular tumor when it had penetrated the brain to that extent was nine months. Mother was with us eight years. The miracle was not in the years, but in the attitude with which she faced the greatest trial of her life. When I was trying to think of something encouraging to say to my mother, she looked at me and carefully formed the words - having to remember how to speak - "It is not what happens to you, but what you do with it that counts." I have never seen anyone do more with such a situation. Her decision about how she would face this great trial and the way she used each opportunity to the best of her ability to glorify the Lord manifested the wisdom of which Solomon writes.

My second choice is another very special lady. Her name is Floy Powell, one of my wife's best friends ever. Her husband, Mack, and I used to hunt and fish together, and we helped raise each others' kids. I often observed that the Lord seemed to give Floy just the right words she needed to encourage or comfort someone. She was an outstanding care-giver, but that is not the reason I would be tempted to dedicate a series of messages on wisdom to Floy Powell. The real reason is that when I was her pastor, I asked our congregation one Sunday evening, "If you could suggest a series of messages from any book of the Bible, which book would you choose?" I anticipated, John, Romans, or maybe Genesis, or Revelation. I will never forget that Floy said she loved Proverbs and would like to hear a series of messages from Proverbs. I also remember thinking, I hate to tell you this but the Lord is not leading me in that direction at all. I was their pastor thirteen years and I do not remember ever preaching more than an occasional message from Proverbs.

I may be confessing to a lack of wisdom, but I struggled with Job the first time I taught the book in a Winter Bible Conference. I invested hundreds of hours in preparation for that study. I also spent a lot of time in Psalms when that was the subject for our Winter Bible Conference. While I have preached from all the books in what we think of as Wisdom Literature, I regret that I have not had the wisdom to spend more time in Proverbs. I am trying to correct that error now.

While there are many subjects covered in Proverbs, the central theme is practical wisdom. We might call it applied wisdom.

I. THE WISDOM WE STUDY IN PROVERBS WILL FIND A PRACTICAL EXPRESSION.

A. This Wisdom Is Intensely Practical.

Perhaps you have heard these words from reinhold niebuhr:

God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know
One from the other.

1. There is nothing in this wisdom that would encourage pride or arrogance.
2. This wisdom does not feed the ego, or lord it over others.

The late Dr. H. Leo Eddleman had been president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary when I was a student. His father had been pastor of my home church and he and my pastor were close friends. We became good friends in the gym. He was in our home a number of times over the years and I often asked him questions about Scripture or his ministry. Everyone who knew Dr. Eddleman knew he was a brilliant man. What some would learn was that he was a very courageous man. What I discovered was that he was a man of great practical wisdom. For

example, he advised told me that he told his two daughters when they were growing up to “get enough education that no one can ever look down on you. And then go on and get enough education that you can never look down on anyone else.” Even I could see the wisdom in that advice.

That advice took on special significance when I recalled the student who returned to the dorm from a first - and only - date with a very beautiful girl. Someone asked, “How was your date with Susie?” I can assure you that was not her real name. The student replied, “All right. But she blows her knows.”

She blows her nose??!!!

“Knows - K-N-O-W-S.”

There is no wisdom in spouting off about how smart you are. There is wisdom in making a practical application of the lessons the Lord gives you.

B. It Is God’s Purpose to Impart Wisdom to all Believers.

1. He has given us His Word to instruct us.
2. He has given us His Spirit to convert those lessons into wisdom.

II. NOW, I WOULD LIKE FOR US TO CONSIDER THE COURSE OF THIS WISDOM.

A. God Imparts Wisdom to Guide Us in all Areas of Everyday Life.

1. This wisdom is available to young people as well as older people, 1:2ff.
2. Wisdom helps us find the will of God and do it, 1:7; 3:5-6.

ILLUSTRATION: “ The knowledge that the ungodly person hates is not practical, factual knowledge. On the contrary, he prides himself in how much he knows. Someone has estimated that, if all of man's accumulated knowledge from the beginning of recorded history to 1845 were represented by one inch, what he learned from 1845 until 1945 would amount to three inches and what he learned from 1945 until 1975 would represent the height of the Washington Monument! Since then it has probably doubled (several times) . Few people, however, would argue that the incredible leap in scientific, technological, and other such knowledge has been paralleled by a corresponding leap in the common sense wisdom, not to mention spiritual and moral wisdom. If anything, man's understanding of what he is doing and why he is doing it seems to decrease as his practical knowledge increases. The more learned he becomes in that superficial kind of knowledge, the less need he sees for

the knowledge that comes only from God” (Author unknown, Biblical Illustrator).

B. God Imparts Wisdom to Guide Us in Relationships.

1. Wisdom should be applied in the home, 31:10ff.

“The righteous man walks in his integrity; His children are blessed after him” 20:7.

“Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it,” 22:6.

2. Wisdom edifies the individual, and encourages obedience to God.

“My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent,” 1:10.

“Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Though they join forces, none will go unpunished. In mercy and truth Atonement is provided for iniquity; And by the fear of the LORD one departs from evil,” 16:5.

3. Wisdom helps us in relationships with others, 12:26; 16:24.

4. Wisdom governs civil authorities (8:15; 16:12-13).

“Divination is on the lips of the king; His mouth must not transgress in judgment. Honest weights and scales are the Lord's; All the weights in the bag are His work. It is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness, For a throne is established by righteousness,” 16:10-12.

“Mercy and truth preserve the king, And by lovingkindness he upholds his throne,” 20:28.

III. GOD IMPARTS WISDOM TO HELP US TO UNDERSTAND HIM.

A. He Is Omnipotent.

“The way of the LORD is strength for the upright,” 12:29a.

B. He Is Omniscient.

“The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good,” 15:3.

C. He Is Sovereign.

“The LORD has made all for Himself,” 16:4a.

D. He is Just, 15:11; 16:2; 17:3; 27:15ff.

“Hell and Destruction are before the LORD; So how much more the hearts of the sons of men,” 15:11

E. He Gives Wisdom to Believers to Enable Them to Glorify Him.

1 His wisdom will guard you against evil.

“Discretion will preserve you; Understanding will keep you, To deliver you from the way of evil,” 2:11-12.

2. The wisdom of God is the key to holiness.

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil.” 3:5-7.

3. The wisdom God gives affirms our trust in Him.

“So that your trust may be in the LORD; I have instructed you today, even you,” 22:19.

As we have seen, the wisdom that believers receive from God is very practical. God equips us to worship Him, serve Him, and witness for Him. In the process of sanctifying believers, the Holy Spirit nurtures and develops us into mature Christians. A mature Christian is a Christ-like Christian. I know that should go without saying, but there is no denying the fact that there are a lot of people out there who are professing a faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, who cannot be distinguished from the world. The Bible teaches that only a fool says there is not God. May we not conclude then that it is a very foolish believer who does not pursue wisdom, righteousness, and holiness?

You cannot disassociate spiritual maturity from wisdom. Wisdom increases as we grow in Christ-likeness. Every mature Christian can look back to decisions and actions that were foolish. You may cringe at some of the mistakes you have made. Thank God, we do not have to remain static. There are Christians who seem to drift along without giving much thought to the will of God until He takes some action to get their attention. Then they submit themselves to Him, and he begins to bless them and nurture them, and as He does that He produces fruit that will bless that believer, his family, friends, and the Lord’s church. No longer does he look to the church with the attitude of “what’s in it for me?”, but asks, “what is God getting out of me?” Prayer is not an exercise of selfishness in which one uses intensity of emotions baptized in religious cliches to see what he can get out of God. Prayer become a time when the believer seeks to be sure that God is getting what He wants from the

individual.

God gives us wisdom so that we can glorify Him. I will never forget Bob Moore. He was one of our deacons at Hillcrest Baptist Church, Nederland, Texas. Bob was a quiet man with a face that seemed almost stern until he was smiled, but he was a man who valued humility, sincerity, and honest. He was also a man who understood that once he was ordained as a deacon, he had to put the interests of the church above his own interests. When I tried to express my appreciation for the way the Pastor Search Committee did their work, he thanked me, but quickly added, "I want you to know that there are a lot of members of our church who would do just as good a job, if not better, than the ones who were elected."

If you have seen a power play in a local church it is refreshing to find a member who really prefers to honor for others rather than himself. When the committee came to hear me preach the first time, one of the members was not with them. He was on vacation. The next Sunday, we had visitors in the morning service. Vernon Greenville and his wife had planned their vacation to allow them to come through Bastrop, Louisiana to hear the man their committee had visited with the previous Sunday. I had no idea who he was, except that he was "just a Texas deacon who was on vacation."

Later, when I mentioned Vernon, Bob Moore said, "I love Vernon Greenville. In fact, if God called him to preach I would have voted for him to be my pastor." I appreciated the attitude this mature believer had toward a fellow member.

Many people in our church wanted to build a Christian Life Center, but I was genuinely concerned about our lack of space for worship, and shared my concern with our deacons. The second service every Sunday morning was packed and there was no room for growth. We had hundreds of lost people all around us and they were building four hundred houses beginning four blocks from the church. If we did not provide room for growth we would not grow.

They agreed but many of the young adults were in a church basket ball league and they wanted a gym comparable to the one in the largest church in Beaumont. I had moved back to Louisiana when they voted on the building. I learned what happened later. When the motion was made, Bob stood up and spoke against it, stressing the need for more worship space and outreach. The church was packed with young adults who wanted a gym and game rooms. When the votes were counted they had won, and they were excited.

Bob stood and asked permission to say something. He said, "My church has voted to build a Christian Life Center, and I want you to know I am one hundred percent behind what my church is doing. You can count on me to do everything I can to support this effort. Now, I would like to encourage all of you who have voted to build this building to join me in supporting it and in paying for it. Some of you are not even helping to pay the light bill at this time, but I would like to challenge you to get behind what your church is doing. I can assure you I am one hundred percent behind it."

Later, I mentioned a situation in which I was placed in the awkward position of having to ask a Nominating Committee not to nominate a man to teach a class. In the first place, the men in the class liked the teacher they had, and he was doing a good job. In the second place, the man they wanted to nominate had left and returned more than once - and he would do it again. But when he prayed, they were moved by the eloquence and fervor and felt that they just had to get him back into a classroom. Bob's immediately response was, "Johnny, your deacons should never have let you get into a position like that. Not one of them had his living on the line, and you did. Deacons ought to protect their pastor from a situation like that."

Wisdom that is from God will glorify God, reach out to lost people, and preserve the fellowship of the saints. I thank God that there are some people in most churches who have pursued this kind of wisdom, and they have found ways to make a practical application of that wisdom in everyday life situations. However, I am absolutely convinced that there is no one here who should not be seeking greater wisdom.

CONCLUSION. God does not give you wisdom to inflate your ego. He does not give you wisdom so you can gloat over your success at Bible trivia. He gives you wisdom to glorify Him and His church. Let me challenge you right now to take a serious look at your own life and see - not what you are getting out of God and His church, but what He is getting out of you. Will you ask Him for Wisdom, and then trust the Holy Spirit to make you a blessing. If you are a blessing to your family, your friends, and your church, you will never be denied God's richest blessings.

INVITATION.