

Living a Wise Life

Six sessions applying Old Testament Wisdom Literature to 21st Century Living

Week 1: Pursue Wisdom (*Proverbs 2*)

ICEBREAKER: What has been the most useful bit of life advice that you have been given in the last few months? Discuss in groups and feedback centrally.

Introduction:

How do you make life work? This is the million dollar question. So often we're going along fine in life and then life throws us a curveball. A financial struggle. A relationship struggle. A moral struggle. A health struggle. A spiritual struggle.

The secret of making life work has always been eagerly sought with all sorts of peculiar solutions offered. As Christians we shouldn't be too superior and condescending about this search to try and make life work – because the Bible has its own 'How to Make Life Work' type of literature. It's known as Wisdom literature and it includes three books of the Old Testament which are ascribed to King Solomon – the king famous for his wisdom - Proverbs, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes.

Read Proverbs 1:1-6

*a) Proverbs is Intentionally **Practical***

It is a very down-to-earth, day-to-day book. It doesn't have much to say about complicated theological matters. It gives us a vital reminder that God is not just for Sundays but for every day.

*b) Proverbs is Intentionally **Provoking***

Modern proverbs provoke us to think. E.g. 'A shroud has no pockets', 'Never insult the crocodile until after you have crossed the river.' [ask for suggestions as to what these proverbs mean]. Biblical proverbs work in just the same way. They provoke us to keep learning, however old we are, however well-educated.

*c) Proverbs is Intentionally **Pragmatic***

Proverbs are not promises. They're not – "if you do this, you will be guaranteed this". Rather, they tell us how life generally works. Generally speaking, people who are godly, moral, hardworking will reap rewards and blessings. There is no guarantee though – it is pragmatic advice learnt from a lifetime of experience.

The central message of this practical, provoking, pragmatic book is "Pursue Wisdom". We see this particularly in Proverbs 2.

Read Proverbs 2

1. The Search for Wisdom (v.1-5)

The point: The early chapters of Proverbs are written in the warm tones of a fatherly voice giving instruction to his son – perhaps Solomon himself giving advice to his son. He says that wisdom needs to be actively sought out. **Read v.1-4**

The illustration: This isn't just some short burst of searching like charging around finding eggs in an Easter egg hunt. Rather, like a squirrel storing up nuts for future consumption, we are to store up the pearls of wise teaching for future benefit.

The application: They say "Failure is being successful at the things that don't really matter". We can search for fame, for riches, for love, for fulfilment, for popularity. We can succeed in all finding all of them – but if we haven't found God in our search, then we've failed. A successful search for wisdom will lead to us finding God. Because this search for wisdom leads to God. **Read v.5.**

15 mins

2. The Source of Wisdom (v.6)

The point: The source of wisdom is God. **Read v.6.**

The application: It is such a tragedy when we humans accept all the gifts of life, but ignore the Giver of life. Many people in this world are very gifted intellectually. The God who created them has gifted them with massive brains. And yet they cut themselves off from the source of this gift. When they do that they are not wise. They cannot be – because they ignore the very source of Wisdom. **As Proverbs 1:7 says – The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge/wisdom.**

3. The Sense of Wisdom (v.7-11)

The point: Pursuing wisdom makes sense:

- a) because it is morally good – **read v.9.** So much of wisdom is about making good choices – deciding between what is right and wrong. Having good judgement in life.
- b) because it is personally good – **read v.10.** Generally things work out better when we act wisely. Also **compare v.11 and v.8.** v.11 says discretion protects us and understanding guards us, and yet v.8 tells us that God is the one who does the protecting and guarding. God is the giver of discretion and understanding.

Wisdom makes sense because it is morally good for the world, and personally good for us as individuals.

The illustration: The American pastor, Bill Hybels, gives the story of a man he met in an airport when their plane was delayed. This man was very angry with God for allowing lots of pain into his life, and he told Bill Hybels his whole life story in great detail.

Hybels hadn't told him at this stage that he was a pastor. When the man had finished complaining about God and all that had gone wrong in his life, Hybels asked him a couple of questions.

First Hybels said to the man "You said your former wife turned into a horrible, evil person. I wonder what your relationship with her was like before she became evil. How did you treat her? Were you good to her? Were you faithful to her? Or did you perhaps do some stupid things that might have contributed a little to the breakdown of your marriage". The man admitted he had done a few stupid things.

Then Hybels said – “And about your tens of thousands of pounds debt and your tax problems. Did you ever let your spending get a little out of hand? Did you ever spend more than you earned? Did you ever buy anything impulsively?” The man admitted he had.

Then Hybels said – “You’re frustrated because no one will give you a job. Just a question – were you a model employee? If I called your last three employers, would they give you a glowing reference”. The man admitted that he was sacked from last job because he had lost his temper a few times and told his boss where to go – eternally.

Then Hybels told the man he was a pastor – and said this: “I don’t think it is fair to blame God for any of the problems you’re blaming him for. The Bible says – if you sow folly, you will reap heartbreak. It seems to me that you have sown plenty of folly and now you’re reaping a predictable harvest. My advice to you is to enrol in the school of wisdom”.

BUZZ GROUPS: Give an example of when you have not had good judgement in a decision you have had to make, like the man in Bill Hybels’ story.

4. The Salvation of Wisdom (v.12-19)

30 mins

The point: In these verses, we see two particular groups of people – the morally wicked and the sexually wayward. Wisdom will be our salvation and protection from these two groups. **Read v.12 and v.16.**

The illustration: Give a personal example of when you have fallen into sin morally/sexually, and how wisdom from God then saved you.

The application: This may have been written 3000 years ago, but it is far more bang up to date and contemporary than any other attempt to make life work. The two biggest temptations that we face are the temptations of moral wickedness and sexual waywardness. If we are walking with God, we are walking in the opposite direction to the rest of the world. That means there will be plenty of temptation to be turned around – away from pursuing and walking with wisdom.

BUZZ GROUPS: Give an example of when wisdom has enabled you to be saved from moral wickedness or sexual waywardness.

5. The Success of Wisdom (v.20-22)

The point: In the 21st century, walking in God’s wisdom can be perceived as restrictive and unfulfilling. Yet, the reality is that it enables us to enjoy God’s blessings .

The illustration: There is a Thomas the Tank Engine cartoon which pictures Thomas, on his side, having fallen off the train tracks. He’s shouting, “I’m free! I’m free at last. I’ve fallen off the rails and I’m free!”. The reality is that Thomas the Tank Engine is far more “free” when his wheels are on the rails and he is operating in line with how he has been created to function.

The application: This earth was created to be inhabited by men and women who put God first, and because they put God first, live their lives to serve others. If we decide

to jump off those rails of loving God and loving others, then no wonder disaster and pain and frustration follow.

Conclusion:

The fulfilment of God's wisdom is Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 1:24, Paul writes that Jesus Christ is the "wisdom of God" and a few verses later he says that Jesus "has become for us wisdom from God - that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption." (1 Corinthians 1.30)

The pursuit of wisdom starts and ends with a pursuit of Jesus. If we're not connected to Jesus, we can't possibly make life work. In fact, it's not just us pursuing Jesus, for Jesus first pursued us, like the shepherd searching for the lost sheep. Jesus pursued us to his death on the cross. Because of the cross, Jesus Christ – the wisdom of God - has become our righteousness, our holiness and our redemption.

Through his death, he offers us his *righteousness* through trusting him, he offers us *redemption*, redeeming us from the power of sin in our lives, and he offers us His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to dwell and work in us so that we might live lives of *holiness*.

How do we pursue wisdom? It starts by accepting Jesus' pursuit of us, and letting him give us all we need to live a life of wisdom.

45 mins

MINISTRY IDEA: As one group, speak out thanks to Jesus for his pursuit of us. Thank him for giving us righteousness, holiness and redemption. Pray for the Spirit to fill everyone with an increasing desire to pursue wisdom by pursuing greater intimacy and depth in their relationship with Jesus. After a time of waiting for any words/verses/pictures, encourage people to pray for each other in small groups where there are particular areas of life in which they are needing to know/obey God's wisdom.