



Wisdom
week 7





Introduction

As we consider what it is to live in this world, creatures of our creator in his creation, it logically follows that there are good and appropriate ways to live in this creation. There are of course poor and inappropriate ways also, which neither respect our creatureliness, our creator, nor the creation. The way the Bible likes to talk about these polar opposite ways of living are, respectively, wisdom and folly. To be wise, then, is to operate, or live your life, in ways which respect the created order, while to be foolish is to disrespect it.

Multiple times in the Scriptures we are exhorted to be wise, and to live wisely. Sometimes however the word “wisdom” is more about skills, for instance the builders of the tabernacle are given wisdom to build and craft and sew (eg Ex 28:3). But if we consider the definition above, thriving in this world is part of being wise – living in line with our creator and his creation. However we also see in the second creation narrative that the first couple ate the forbidden fruit because it would grant some kind of wisdom, comprehension or understanding, apart from that given by God and deducible from his creation.

The point of this is the importance of getting our wisdom from God, first and foremost. There is wisdom in this world, the outcomes of science and inquiry, but it is there as a gift of God in his ordered creation. But key to understanding wisdom is knowing that God revealed his greatest wisdom in the folly of a crucified Christ. All our wisdom makes sense only as it begins in Jesus.



Devotion I: Proverbs 4:20-27

Any reflection on wisdom must begin with Proverbs, the central of the three “wisdom book” (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes). Here we hear from the father, speaking to his son, bidding him heed his warnings and instructions. The father would teach his son so that he is safe and wise to the wiles of the world.

He grounds his call for wisdom first in his senses: his ear, his eyes. The ears make sense: one listens to words of instruction. But the eyes? This could well be the idea of a filter or a lens, that wisdom is seeing the world through right eyes, seeing through the lies of this world. But then he moves to the heart as the centre of being and action; this is where wisdom should be stored and guarded. A heart which stores up godly wisdom will inform a life which honours God.

Wisdom sounds like something which belongs in the intellectual realm, but it is immensely practical. Wisdom means speaking well in this world, with kindness and truth. The language of looking here uses the word “directly,” normally translated “straight” or “upright,” the point being the moral dimension of seeing, seeing rightly, which continues in the next two verses.

Wisdom is a whole of body, whole of life mindset, as well as way of life. It begins by listening to God, turns into a mindset, and is lived out in all of life.

Devotion 1: Proverbs 4:20-27

Questions:

1. What are all the different body parts mentioned in these verses? Why are these mentioned?
2. What is the father's ultimate hope for his son?
3. In what area of your life do you most need God's wisdom? Where do you require his filter to see rightly?
4. How can you be more active in perusing wisdom?

Prayer:

Dear God,

I thank you that you made your creation in a way which works well as we heed your wisdom. I pray that I might eagerly pursue it and heed it, that I might live well.

In Jesus' name,

Amen

Proverbs 4:20-27

20 My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words.

21 Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart;

22 for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body.

23 Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

24 Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips.

25 Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you.

26 Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways.

27 Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.

Devotion 2: Psalm 37:1-9

One of several wisdom psalms, Psalm 37 has similar themes to those found in Proverbs. In particular this psalm raises the issue of envy or the coveting of the success of the wicked. For while being wise means walking in step with God, obeying his commandments, trusting that his way is right in the world, this does not necessarily mean that things will always go well. The problem highlighted here, as well as in Job and Ecclesiastes, is that too often it is the wicked who prosper, while those who trust in God go backwards. The promise in verse 2 however is that those who eschew God's wisdom, trusting in themselves, are like the grass which soon withers, like greenery which quickly fades. Their prosperity will not last long, but the one who trusts in Yhwh has the promise of the land, the idea of a long-awaited but always certain promise.

Wisdom in this psalm is about waiting on God. When we trust that God knows best, that his wisdom is how to live rightly in this world, even if in the short term our circumstances are not the best. As we patiently wait, we live upright, godly lives, we are "still before Yhwh," and we do not fret when the ways of the wicked succeed.

Devotion 2: Psalm 37:1-9

Questions:

1. What expectations are there in this psalm from the way things will generally be in this world?
2. What exhortations are we given, and what promises?
3. How do you tend to respond when godly wisdom doesn't advance you and instead you see evildoers getting ahead?
4. How can committing yourself to God's wisdom help you in these circumstances?

Prayer:

Dear God,

I pray that you would keep reminding me of the rightness of your wisdom. Thank you that your promises are not dependent on current affairs, and that you will always fulfil your word.

In Jesus' name,

Amen

Psalm 37:1-9

1 Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong;

2 for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.

3 Trust in Yhwh and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.

4 Take delight in Yhwh, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

5 Commit your way to Yhwh; trust in him and he will do this:

6 He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.

7 Be still before Yhwh and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.

8 Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.

9 For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in Yhwh will inherit the land.



Devotion 3: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

While the New Testament book of James has much to say in line with the Old Testament picture of wisdom, in 1 Corinthians Paul subverts the traditional concept of wisdom. While wisdom leads to success, prosperity, and generally living well in the world, Paul draws on Isaiah to speak of God's wisdom which frustrates and confuses those who are wise in the eyes of the world. Among the wise (like his audience, the well-educated and self-assured Corinthians) God has instead revealed himself in the foolishness of the cross.

This is a particular challenge to us, as we consider the world we are in and the traits that are valued in our society. Our world demands power and wisdom, but instead God offers the crucified Christ. And yet this is his ultimate wisdom, the way he reveals himself and challenges the pride of the world. But while the promises of wisdom in the Old and New Testaments sound different, their goal is the same. To live wisely in God's world means knowing him and living according to his revealed will in his world. This can not be done any better than by trusting in Jesus and learning wisdom from him: strength in weakness, wisdom in folly.

Devotion 3: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Questions:

1. What continuities and discontinuities can you see between God's wisdom in the Old and New Testaments?
2. What wisdom do Jews see in power and Greeks see in wisdom?
3. Where do you see wisdom? How does this passage challenge your assumptions?
4. What does it mean for you to learn your wisdom from the crucified Christ?

Prayer:

Dear God,

Thank you that you have revealed yourself in Jesus, that I can know true wisdom in my weakness. I pray that I might see through the false promises of worldly wisdom and trust in the wisdom revealed in Jesus.

In Jesus' name,
Amen

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written:

*"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."*

20 Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

22 Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Family Discussion Point

We all face many choices in our life. Some of them are small, like “should I choose the chocolate or the strawberry flavoured ice-cream?” And some of them are big, like “should I study medicine and become a doctor, or law and become a lawyer?” How can we be wiser to make the right choice? Where do we get wisdom from?

When Solomon had to take up the role from his father David to be the king of the Israelites, God asked him what he would like from him. Solomon did not ask for wealth, or long life, but he asked God to give him a heart of understanding so he can correctly lead God’s people. (1 Kings 3). Solomon became the wisest person in the Old Testament, and he wrote the Book of Proverbs – a book full of wise sayings.

Read Proverbs 4:20-27.

20 My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. 21 Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; 22 for they are life to those who find them and health to one’s whole body. 23 Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. 24 Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. 25 Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. 26 Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways. 27 Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.

Wisdom is not just about our head, or our brain, it involves our whole body! Our ears are to listen to God’s words; our heart is to hold and keep God’s word; our mouth is to say things pleasing to God and helpful to others; our eyes are to look straight, following where God’s words point us, and not to be distracted by things around us; and our feet are to walk on the path with God, away from evil. This is what wisdom is about!

Questions:

1. What are some of the ways you could “listen” to God’s words?
2. What does it mean to “keep God’s words within our heart”?
3. Do you think we can ask God for wisdom just like Solomon?

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for the Bible because it is your words and wisdom that I need in my life. Please help me to spend time reading and remembering your words in my heart. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

