

Desire Wisdom

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[0:00] So that's Proverbs starting at chapter 8. Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice?

! At the highest point along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand.! Beside the gate leading into the city, at the entrance, she cries aloud, To you, O people, I call out. I raise my voice to all humanity.

You who are simple, gain prudence. You who are foolish, set your hearts on it. Listen, for I have trustworthy things to say. I open my lips to speak what is right.

My mouth speaks what is true, for my lips detest wickedness. All the words of my mouth are just. None of them is crooked or perverse. To the discerning, all of them are right. They are upright to those who have found knowledge.

Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

[1:09] I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence. I possess knowledge and discretion. To fear the Lord is to hate evil. I hate pride and arrogance, evil behaviour and perverse speech.

Counsel and sound judgment are mine. I have insight. I have power. By me, kings reign and rulers issues decrees that are just.

By me, princes govern and nobles all who rule on earth. I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me. With me are riches and honour, enduring wealth and prosperity.

My fruit is better than fine gold. What I yield surpasses choice silver. I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice, bestowing a rich inheritance on those who love me, and making their treasuries full.

The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old. I was formed long ages ago, at the very beginning, when the world came to be.

[2:17] When there were no watery depths, I was given birth. When there were no springs overflowing with water. Before the mountains were settled in place. Before the hills, I was given birth.

Before he made the world, or its fields, or any of the dust of the earth. I was there when he set the heavens in place. When he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep.

When he established the clouds above, and fixed securely the fountains of the deep. When he gave the sea its boundary, so that the waters would not overstep his command.

And when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was constantly at his side. I was filled with delight, day after day. Rejoicing always in his presence.

Rejoicing in his whole world. And delighting in the human race. Now then, my children, listen to me. Blessed are those who keep my ways.

[3:16] Listen to my instruction, and be wise. Do not disregard it. Blessed are those who listen to me. Watching daily at my doors. Waiting at my doorway.

For those who find me, find life. And receive favour from the Lord. But those who fail to find me, harm themselves. All who hate me, love death.

Wisdom has built her house. She has set up its seven pillars. She has prepared her meat, and mixed her wine. She has also set her table. She has sent out her servants.

And she calls from the highest point of the city. Let all who are simple, come to my house. To those who have no sense, she says, Come, eat my food, and drink the wine I have mixed.

Leave your simple ways, and you will live. Walk in the way of insight. Whoever corrects a mocker, invites insults. Whoever rebukes the wicked, incurs abuse.

[4:14] Do not rebuke mockers, or they will hate you. Rebuke the wise, and they will love you. Instruct the wise, and they will be wiser still. Teach the righteous, and they will add to their learning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For through wisdom, your days will be many, and years will be added to your life. If you're wise, your wisdom will reward you. If you're a mocker, you alone will suffer. Folly is an unruly woman. She is simple and knows nothing.

She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, calling out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way. Let all who are simple, come to my house.

To those who have no sense, she says, stolen water is sweet, food eaten in secret is delicious. But little do they know that the dead are there, and her guests are deep in the realm of the dead.

[5:26] Thank you, Amy. Good evening, St Silas and David. If we haven't met, I am a member here at the church, and I've been invited to bring God's word to us this evening.

Today, tonight, we're going to take a quick look at some of the key points in these two chapters that Amy's just read for us. We're not going to hit every verse, obviously, but I'm hoping that we can grab a couple of big ideas out of the text that will be helpful for us.

So let me first pray for us as we come to the text. Father, we thank you for this call of wisdom that we see in the text. Father, we pray that as I speak tonight and as you move through your word, Lord, you will impress on our hearts this call to seek wisdom and to see the face of Christ.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Now let me share something with you. I have a lot of affection for the wisdom books. That's Proverbs, which we're reading, Ecclesiastes, Job, Song of Songs.

You could argue, and I would argue, many of the Psalms, or the Psalms as a whole, have that sort of wisdom arc to them. In large part because these are books that deal with normal life.

[6:50] They deal with you and I, normal people living normal lives. And they help us to be normal people living normal life. They help us to live out our faith in the real world, dealing with the sort of things that we deal with day to day.

Dealing with human weakness. Dealing with disappointments. Dealing with living in a world in the midst of injustice. And the wisdom books wrestle so honestly with deep questions that we do not immediately know the answers to.

They say some things that you would get told off for saying in a Sunday school class. Wisdom books are emotionally honest. They're raw in so many places.

But they're also just a lot of fun to work with and to read and to learn from. In Proverbs that we've been going through, I don't know if you noticed, there's a bit of a dating show subplot going on.

It kind of keeps coming back around. It reaches its zenith when we get to the final chapter. We've all seen dating shows, right? Back in the day, we used to have the OG dating show, Blind Date.

[8:13] I know that for many of you, this was not in your generation, but it was prime time TV in the 80s and 90s. It was like Saturday evening, family entertainment.

I know there are dating shows that are still around. They're a bit mental. Blind Date was like this sort of nice sort of family show. But the host would bring out three guys. I remember it being a nice family show. The host would bring out maybe three guys and they'd come out looking like a 90s boy band, full of swagger.

And they'd bring out the one woman with this sort of removable wall in between the two of them so they couldn't see. The guys couldn't see the woman. She couldn't see the guys.

And she would ask them all of these questions. And they would just lob these horrendous one-liners, chat-up lines over the wall. And then she had to make a decision. And you got to this bit in Blind Date, and it's the same with every dating show that followed it and followed the format, where you're sitting, if you're watching it and you're saying, pick number one.

You have to pick number one. Pick number one, and then they go and pick number three. It's part and partial of the format. It's what makes them so popular.

[9:23] And then if she picks number three, the screen gets pulled back and meets the date. And off they go. Now, one of the central motifs in the book of Proverbs is the motif of the father giving advice to his son.

And it started back in chapter one, verse eight, where we're being treated like the son, getting advice from the father. For clarity, the father is the wisdom teacher. He's Solomon, or he's whatever teacher is teaching at any point in the book of Proverbs.

And we, the community, are like the son. We see ourselves in the son at the feet of our father, receiving wisdom from our father. And the teacher describes two different ways to live, wisdom and foolishness.

And the teacher pictures these as two women over and over again for his son. He says, here's one woman, here's another woman, one's the woman marked by wisdom, one is the woman marked by folly.

Son, choose number one. choose this first woman. Marry wisdom. Live a good, happy, and long life, son.

[10 : 38] Do not sleep with folly and ruin your life. That's the message of these first few chapters of the book of Proverbs. And Proverbs treats us, therefore, as a people who are moved by our desires, who desire things, who want things, who are moved by things, who get attracted to things, who get attracted to people and ways of life and things call out to us and things grab our attention and they want us to move in a particular direction.

They treat us like people who are moved like that. Proverbs doesn't treat us like brains on sticks. It treats us like people who have hearts and emotions and are people who are moved.

So tonight, we want to encourage ourselves to desire wisdom. Desire wisdom from our heart.

Desiring wisdom and then we're going to see a bit about how desiring wisdom fits with the fear of God.

That's not on your sheet, that's a wee bonus. And then we'll look at a little bit about how the desire for wisdom leads us to Christ. So first of all, let's turn to the text so we can see this call to desire wisdom.

All throughout chapters 8 and 9, wisdom is pictured as a desirable woman. That's been the whole thing, pretty much. Someone who offers the reader, the son, in this picture, a fulfilled and happy life.

[12 : 12] In chapter 8, we hear a cry out from verse 4. To you, O people, I cry out, I raise my voice to all mankind. You who are simple, gain prudence. You who are foolish, set your hearts on it.

Listen, for I have trustworthy things to say. I open my lips to speak what is right. My mouth speaks what is true, for my lips detest wickedness. All the words of my mouth are just.

None of them is crooked or perverse. Discerning, all of them are right. They are upright for those who have found knowledge. Choose my instruction instead of silver. Knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies and nothing you desire can compare with her.

Notice some of the details in those verses. In verses 4 and 5, the call goes out to any who will listen to the woman of wisdom.

To anyone, to any of us. The call for wisdom goes out to any of us who have ears and desire to listen.

[13 : 22] It doesn't matter how foolish we are. It doesn't matter how foolish we have been. It doesn't matter the position that we're in today and just now that the call to wisdom comes out to drag us forward and to drag us into that life.

The foolish are cared for. The foolish are protected. The foolish are taught. Wisdom is like that. Wisdom comes to us and protects us and brings us on into a life of wisdom.

Notice in verses 6 to 9, we see a really righteous beauty. Our words are true. Our words are honest. There is nothing hidden. There is nothing shady. There is nothing that is putting us in danger. There is nothing to shy away from in the things that she says and the way that she speaks and the way that she uses her mouth.

There is trust word in this woman. There is reliability. There is honesty consistent with her approach. Wisdom has been personified into a woman in many other places in the book of Proverbs.

[14 : 38] You get into more detail of living virtuously under the rule and the watchful eye of the Lord. How we organise family life so that children are being brought up well so that we honour wives and husbands so that we love well.

How we go about work so that we approach work with a good attitude so that we earn money in the right way and we use money in the right way. How we then go out and use our money in generosity. How we use our mouth in various ways to speak in all of our speech. How all of these things when well applied and well left out lead to peace and holiness and worship of God.

That's what the majority of the book teaches us to do in all of these little details of life. And everything that the woman says here as she calls out and she shows these trustworthy words and

the trustworthy nature of her approach is consistent with everything that she's been saying because everything that she's been saying in these verses she's says openly she says in the public place she says in the place that is above board.

She's not whispering in the shadows she's proclaiming in the public square because her words are righteous. In verses 10 and 11 there's direct comparison with other desirable things.

[16:11] What are you going to desire more? Are we going to desire the person whose words are true or are we going to desire silver and gold and precious rubies?

Now the sun in this image is also the prince isn't he? And princes they have access don't they?

To gold and silver and so these things are not out of reach. A foolish prince can run very quickly and establish himself very quickly in gold and silver and jewels and all of these other things so these things are not out of reach.

So it's an easy temptation but the direct comparison is designed to speak to us at that desire level. She is more desirable than these things. She's more desirable than gold. She's more desirable than jewels.

She's more desirable than wealth because of her righteousness, because of her honesty, because of her mature wisdom as she honors God. Let's jump quickly to chapter 9.

[17:13] We'll come back and grab some other things. But chapter 9 brings together the women of wisdom and the women of folly. It contrasts them and it asks us which of these two women is more desirable.

Notice that they both invite us over for dinner. We get a dinner invitation from both women in chapter 9. Verse 4 and verse 16 are word for word the same call from each woman.

Let all who are simple come to my house. But look at the difference. In verse 2, the woman who has organized her life, the woman who is living by principles of wisdom, has the best meat, the best wine, she's bought wisely, she's dealt honestly, it's good, it's nutritious, it's good for you.

There's free provision for all that need it. In verses 5 and 6, it leads to life, it leads to insight. But in verses 17 to 18, in the fool's house there's stolen water, there's shady food, and there's death.

There's a picture of life and a picture of death. One is open and honest and nourishing, one is shady and dishonest, exciting but deadly.

[18:30] because we all have the ability to get excited by things that are foolish, to get excited by things that look good but are deadly. And the teacher asks us like the father asks his son, what house do you want to go back to each evening?

What house do you want to go for dinner in? Where are you going to call home? Now, I think it is really important as we've been saying that we see the desirability of wisdom because the teacher in picturing us like a young man who needs advice for, you know, does he pursue this woman?

Does he pursue that woman? What does he do? He recognises that we have passions and desires that push and pull us in different directions. We can make wise choices and we can make unwise choices.

And unless we desire the good outcome of a life of wisdom, we'll never choose to hitch our life to wisdom. Unless we have within us a desire to choose that life of wisdom, we're never going to do the things that lead to that life of wisdom.

And this is what makes the big picture image so good. Because what illustrates that principle more clearly than a young man choosing which women he should ask out, which women he should pursue?

[19:55] do? Because young men make all sorts of crazy decisions when faced with that exact question, don't they? And we all know it. This is why it works.

This is why the image works. Because young men make all sorts of stupid decisions when it comes to this question. Sometimes by pursuing someone who is attractive and exciting but has no time for God, but also by overlooking godly and wise women because they don't tick a box that they think is important.

And it's that desire to sit the young man down and to say to him, godliness is key. Wisdom is key. These deep nourishing things are key. That's the important desire that drives the imagery in the book. And of course for balanced young women can be just as bad at this as young men at times. And so the outcome for us is to desire wisdom, to desire godliness above everything else. I don't know, perhaps for one or two in the room, there is a route one application to look again at that person that's sitting beside you or sitting in front of you and sitting behind you and see the value in

godliness.

[21 : 20] But for all of us, there is the call to desire wisdom, to hitch our lives to it. Now, let's think about this call to desire wisdom and how that interacts with the fear of the Lord.

How does that interact? Because I put it to as this picture of wisdom, as beautiful and desirable as it is as something to be embraced and loved, it probably challenges our understanding of the fear of the Lord.

And I know that the guys have been doing good work in this and I'm probably not going to say anything new but hopefully I can back up what the other guys have been saying. The question is how do we fear the Lord?

How do we fear the Lord but positively love and embrace wisdom? And that question reveals why fear of the Lord cannot have that simplistic definition.

It can't just mean God is big and powerful and you and I have to live in constant fear that we're about to get smashed, that we're about to get on God's last nerve and he's about to go quickly back to wrath.

[22 : 32] It can't simply mean that if the rest of the picture is so beautiful, lovely and desirable that he wants for us. For many of us our challenge is to remember that God watching actually means he's looking out for our good, loving us, pursuing us onto life, giving godliness and wisdom.

That's what it means for God to be watching us when we are with him. And this is where this passage helps. The fear of the Lord comes up twice. It comes up in chapter 8 verse 13 which says to fear the Lord is to hate evil.

I hate pride and arrogance, evil behaviour and perverse speech. This is wisdom speaking again. And this does show us that to embrace wisdom is to reject the pride, the arrogance, the behaviour and the speech that mark the woman of folly.

But note that the entire context shows us that God is for you, God loves you, God wants you to embrace righteousness, God wants you to reject these things and to find fulfilment and wisdom. The context is about the joy of moving forward into a life marked more fully by wisdom than it is by folly. In chapter 9 verses 10 to 12 they say the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

[23 : 57] For through wisdom your days will be many and years will be added to your life. If you're wise your wisdom will reward you. If you're a mocker you alone will suffer.

The fear of the Lord is experienced differently by the wise and by the foolish here. the foolish suffer. They're punished. There's a lot for them to just straight up fear.

The wise flourish. They're made wiser and they live a more fulfilled life. And it's a real important point. if we live in a world controlled by a God who is for us who loves to be gracious to us who loves to help us follow wisdom then following wisdom means and the fear of the Lord means that the fear of the Lord leads us into greater joy.

If that's the world we live in then the fear of the Lord leads us into greater joy. If the Lord is calling us to embrace the fulfilling holy life of wisdom then those of us who have come to God through Jesus can be confident that he supports us to embrace Christ more fully.

And so this passage speaks to freedom and it speaks to joy. It speaks to the things that are there for us as we live the Christian life. If the young man in this book embraces wisdom his fear of the Lord relies on his embracing the grace of the Lord and living in knowledge that God is for him.

[25 : 38] Now you and I will experience joy differently at different times won't we? That's normal. Sometimes we'll struggle. Sometimes we'll struggle to feel it and we need a Christian brother or sister to come alongside us and to remind us and that's normal.

That's normal life. In fact one of the reasons that I really enjoy wisdom literature is that it tells you that there's a righteous way to love, there's an unrighteous way to love, one gives you joy, one brings you to ruin but then in books like Job and Ecclesiastes and Psalms it really tests that claim. Can we say that this righteous life brings us to joy? It tests it, it wrestles, the books wrestle against the hardest things in life and at the end of the day they show us that God is good, that he loves us, that he's for us and that he pulls his people through the darkest possible situations and he pulls them through to the other side.

So however we're feeling about these things right now, we can look to these two women, the women of wisdom, the women of folly and understand that wisdom is longing to embrace you, to teach you, to help you to live in the fear of the Lord.

That is the Lord's longing for your life. As he calls you and wants to embrace you and help you to live wisely. Now we've thought about the personification of wisdom and even how we might see wisdom in the people around us.

[27 : 17] But wisdom in Proverbs is properly an attribute that belongs to God. Something that flows out from God himself.

Primarily wisdom reveals to us something about God himself. And as we recognise this, we'll see how wisdom will lead us to Jesus.

Look with me at the second half of chapter 8 from verse 22 on which we'll read verses 22 to 31. The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works.

Before his deeds of old I was formed long ages ago at the very beginning when the world came to be. Where there were no watery depths I was given birth and where there were no springs overflowing with waters.

Before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills I was given birth, before he made the world or its fields or any of the dust of the earth, I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters could not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was constantly at his side, I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing in his presence, rejoicing in the whole world and delighting in mankind.

[28 : 48] In these verses we see wisdom personified as we are used to, but no longer as a woman calling out to us or calling out to the young man in Proverbs, God, but as one that is distinct from God, but in the beginning with God.

One that is sharing the work of God in the beginning with God. It builds upon a statement back in 319 where God creates by wisdom.

So it's important for us to ask, what is going on with wisdom in these verses? Blatantly we want to ask, are these verses just talking to us about Jesus in the beginning?

Is this a prophecy straight up about Jesus in the beginning? Because we might get this idea from John's Gospel, we see in chapter 1 of John's Gospel, Jesus is with God, he was God, through him all things were made, John 1 verses 1 to 3, he's called the Word and it's very similar to the concept of wisdom.

In 1 Corinthians 1 24, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, he's called the wisdom of God in the New Testament. Back in Proverbs 8, not every detail of the poem matches up to Jesus, does it?

[30 : 16] Verse 22, for example, has caused a lot of people a lot of headaches. The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works before his deeds of old. So is this Jesus?

Well, it is. And it isn't. It's interesting. It's an Old Testament thing. Let's recognise what we're reading as firstly, an Old Testament poem about God's wisdom.

The primary thing the poet is trying to do is to get a clear picture of wisdom. That's what the poet's trying to do, get a picture of wisdom, personify wisdom. So we see wisdom as an attribute flowing out of God and this is really significant and important because the Old Testament doesn't fully explain who Jesus is or how we have one God and three persons.

That fuller explanation is left for the New Testament. what it does is give us a very complex picture of God, a more complex picture of God than we maybe give it credit for.

Where attributes of God, such as wisdom of God, such as the word of God, such as the glory of God at various points, act as though they are God himself. If you want the theological terms, it's hypostatizations.

[31 : 44] This is where things like the wisdom of God and the word of God are distinct from God himself but they get treated like God. So the word of God is praised, the word of God is sent, the wisdom of God creates.

Things that only God does get spoken about within his attributes. And within the Old Testament, this is a complex mystery. And this happens because there comes a time, in fact, there has already come a time, when that blind date wall gets pulled back and you finally get to see the true and full picture of the person who has been so attractive throughout all of the Old Testament.

And his name is Jesus, God in the flesh. the fulfilment of the wisdom of God, fulfilment of the word of God, fulfilment of the glory of God. And suddenly, at that point, it all makes sense.

And at that point, all those references to the spirit of God make sense too. But what does that mean for us? It means that God has written into his world patterns of wisdom that flow out of his own character that are designed to lead us directly to Jesus.

That attractive pattern of godly, wise living, that thing that is so fulfilling and so attractive in Christian living, in wisdom here, is what leads us to Jesus because Jesus is the fulfilment of wisdom.

[33:23] Jesus is where it is all pointing. Jesus is the one who fulfills it all. See, we can see wisdom in one another, can't we? But if we're looking for 100% wisdom from each other, we get disappointed.

If husbands and wives are looking for 100% wisdom and satisfaction from each other, they place an unbearable burden on each other because we are all in progress.

We are all helping each other along on this path of wisdom while we remember grace. But when we look to Jesus, we see it 100%. Jesus is the one who honours his father in all things and saves all who trust in him by his death in the cross.

And so it leads us to look to Jesus. So tonight we've had a brief look at Proverbs 8 to 9. The message is simple. Desire wisdom, choose wisdom, marry wisdom.

That pattern of God living, that pattern of family life, that pattern of work and worship. Recognise the world that we live in where God is good and powerful and wise and holy.

[34:37] And he calls you to embrace this thing that he loves. And let that desire lead you to Jesus, who contains all of God's wisdom, 100% being God himself.

Marry wisdom, love Jesus. Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you for the beauty that you've put into the world, the beauty that you've put in this deeply satisfying way of life because it reflects who you are and it reflects your beauty and it reflects the beauty of Christ.

Father, we pray that as we think on these things and as we embrace wisdom in our lives, we will see how it is reflected there in Christ and we will return all of the worship to him.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.