

## ***The Pursuit of Wisdom*** Proverbs 2

Something that never ceases to amaze me is how people (myself included) will expend vast amounts of time and energy - and often enormous amounts of money - pursuing something ***when we think it's worth it.***

A couple of examples from my life. In 2004 we were back in Mississippi visiting my family. While we were there, Riley (age 10 at the time) and I took a 24-hour fishing trip to the Gulf of Mexico with a family friend. For all our time and effort we caught one keeper - a flounder (which is an asymmetrical fish that hangs out on the bottom of the bayou). I can remember driving back thinking, "That was one expensive fish!" But that experience and those memories were absolutely worth the time, energy, and money.

In 1985 Brenda and I moved from South Mississippi to Deerfield, Illinois (north of Chicago) to go to seminary. It felt like we were reenacting the Beverly Hillbillies - moving from Mississippi to a very affluent part of the country. We invested three whole years and a lot of money to get a theological education and to prepare for being a pastor. I can think of many examples of how I have expended vast amounts of time, energy, and money pursuing something because I thought it was worth it.

Almost every single one of you can think of similar examples in your life - how you've invested time, energy, and money pursuing something valuable to you.

- \* Starting a business requires whole-hearted devotion, time, energy, study, focus, etc.
- \* Getting an education
- \* Medical treatment
- \* Fishing or hunting expeditions
- \* Athletics - training, research, diet, coaching, etc.

I think it's beyond debate that we ***can*** seek after things whole-heartedly ***if we deem them to be valuable.*** The passage we're going to consider today, Proverbs 2, challenges us to seek wisdom whole-heartedly. Wisdom is basically skillful living. If you have wisdom, you are skillful in how you speak, in how you treat other people, in how you use your money, in where you go and what you do. If you have wisdom, you are able to use knowledge in everyday life.

I'm wondering if you would be willing to make a modest investment - say, one to three hours this week - pursuing wisdom in some area of your life. Try to identify a specific area of your life that needs an upgrade. For example:

- \* Maybe you need skill in the way you speak; perhaps you're often frustrated in conversations . . . or people often misunderstand you. . . or you say things you wish you hadn't. You need up upgrade your skill in speaking.
- \* Maybe you need skill related to the temptations you face - either avoiding temptation or dealing with temptation when it comes. The goal isn't merely to avoid sin, but to avoid temptation; maybe you're inept at staying out of tempting situations.

\* Maybe you need skill in relation to money. You can be wise in relation to money whether you have a little or a lot; you can be foolish with money whether you have a little or a lot.

The message of Proverbs 2 is that wisdom in these and many other areas of life is available and accessible for those who want it. I trust that we'll emerge from Proverbs 2 with the desire for wisdom and with the confidence/faith that God is willing to give it to us.

Proverbs 2 is written from the perspective of a dad trying to convince his son to pursue wisdom. He first tells his son that wisdom is attainable. If you don't think God will give you wisdom if you seek it, you won't waste your time seeking it. You'll conclude, "This is who I am; this is how I act; I will never be different." But Proverbs 2:1-6 tells us that:

**God gives us wisdom when we seek it whole-heartedly.** (Proverbs 2:1-6) These verses presuppose that the father has already taught his son well. He challenges his son to retain what he's already learned and to continue seeking wisdom.

1 My son, if you will receive my sayings,  
And treasure my commandments within you,

To treasure something is to value it above all else. Think about the question, "If your house (or apartment or dorm room) caught on fire and you could rescue only one thing, what would it be?" It might be a picture or a ring or a family heirloom. Whatever it is, that object would be the thing you treasure – what you consider to be more valuable than anything else. The father wants his son to treat his teachings like that – like something so valuable that the son would never let it fade from his mind and heart.

Verses 2 through 4 advocate a very intentional, passionate attitude toward learning wisdom.

2 Make your ear attentive to wisdom,  
Incline your heart to understanding;  
3 For if you cry for discernment,  
Lift your voice for understanding;  
4 If you seek her as silver,  
And search for her as for hidden treasures;

To "make your ear attentive" and to "incline your heart" (verse 2) basically means to adopt a teachable attitude. You are saying to God, "You've got my ears. You've got my heart. I want to understand what wisdom means in my life. Teach me Your ways." Here's a very important point: A teachable person assumes that s/he has blind spots and deficiencies; as unteachable person assumes the opposite - that s/he is basically "good to go."

The father wants his son to be so teachable that he "cries out" and "lifts his voice" for discernment and understanding. In Proverbs 1 Lady Wisdom was out in the street, **lifting up her voice** and **crying out** to offer wisdom to anybody who will receive it.

Here the father, in effect, tells the son to respond in kind, lifting up his voice and crying out for wisdom. He wants his son to seek wisdom as if it were a hidden treasure.

How would you rate yourself on teachability? On a scale of 1 to 10, how teachable are you? If you're thinking, "Leave me alone; there's nothing wrong with my life," then you're closer to 1. If you cry out to God for wisdom, if you go to the Scriptures with a sense of adventure about what you'll find there, if you invite others to speak into your life, you're closer to 10.

This matters because ***passivity is the enemy of godliness***. If you eventually want to become apathetic toward God, do nothing. If you want to drift into unbelief and/or cynicism, be passive in your walk with God. The world will squeeze you into its mold; you will fit right in. I have seen this happen in people's lives over and over. I've seen this dynamic in my own life during certain seasons. That's why Scripture often urges us to seek God in very intentional, rigorous ways.

God promises little or nothing to the person who has a take-it-or-leave-it attitude toward wisdom. But notice what God promises the person who wants wisdom more than anything else:

5 Then you will discern the fear of the LORD,  
And discover the knowledge of God.  
6 For the LORD gives wisdom;  
From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.

If you fervently seek wisdom, you will find God Himself. You will "discern the fear of the Lord." In other words, you'll have more conviction about the rightness of bowing the knee to God in reverence and submission. You'll relate to God according to reality – according to who He really is.

The fear of the Lord is not only "the beginning of wisdom"; it is also the byproduct of wisdom. We grow in our fear of the Lord when we seek wisdom with all our heart. Our seeking wisdom and our fear of the Lord feed off of one another. When we grow in wisdom, we grow in our ability and desire to submit to God.

Notice that wisdom is a gift from the Lord (verse 6). There are certain types of knowledge and skill we can attain basically through our own effort (although even then "common grace" enables us), but wisdom does not fall in that category.

As you listen to this message, you may be wondering, "If a passion for seeking wisdom and the fear of the Lord feed off of each other, what do I do if I don't really have either one? How do I get off of dead center?" I don't have a formula for you, but I do find it striking how boldly the book of Proverbs tells us to take charge of our hearts and minds:

- we are to "incline our hearts" to learn wisdom
- "apply our minds" to knowledge (22:17)
- "direct our hearts" in the way (23:19)

- “apply our hearts” to discipline (23:12).
- In chapter 1, Lady Wisdom warned the fools that they “did not choose the fear of the Lord” (1:29).

Proverbs makes clear that we aren’t as helpless as we sometimes think. By the grace of God, we have the capacity to exercise our wills and choose to seek wisdom as an act of faith. Those who have accepted Jesus’ payment for sin are indwelt by the Holy Spirit who writes the word of God on our hearts.

I love what Lloyd-Jones says about “spiritual depression” (another way to talk about this lethargic attitude toward seeking wisdom). He says that sometimes “you have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself” (Spiritual Depression, p. 21). You have to tell yourself what to do: “Get out of bed, brew some coffee and seek God. Quit making excuses. It’s time to grow up! Wisdom is crying out to you; you cry out to her. Seek God as if your life depended on it (because it does).” Why not tell yourself some version of that little speech tomorrow morning?

The rest of the chapter tells us that our lives really do depend upon seeking and finding wisdom. The rest of chapter 2 tells us that:

***God’s wisdom delivers us from dangers and keeps us on paths of life.*** (Proverbs 2:7-22) If we don’t seek wisdom, we will go through this life vulnerable to all types of threats and dangers. Verses 7 through 11 speak about the protection that wisdom brings.

7 He stores up sound wisdom for the upright;  
He is a shield to those who walk in integrity,  
8 Guarding the paths of justice,  
And He preserves the way of His godly ones.  
9 Then you will discern righteousness and justice  
And equity and every good course.

These are the three terms the author mentions in 1:3: righteousness, justice, and equity.

10 For wisdom will enter your heart,  
And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;  
11 Discretion will guard you,  
Understanding will watch over you,

This father understood that he couldn’t follow his son around the rest of his life, telling him what to do in every situation, protecting him from dangers. But he understood that ***wisdom can!*** If only his son would remain teachable and seek wisdom, that wisdom would enter his heart and accompany him wherever he went; discretion would guard him; understanding would watch over him. If only his son grew in the fear of the Lord (if he were rightly related to YHWH), then he would be protected no matter what where he went or who he encountered.

Beginning in verse 12, the father gives two examples of the type of deliverance his son could expect from wisdom. First, wisdom would give **deliverance from the evil man** (vv. 12-15):

12 To deliver you from the way of evil,  
From the man who speaks perverse things;  
13 From those who leave the paths of uprightness,  
To walk in the ways of darkness;  
14 Who delight in doing evil,  
And rejoice in the perversity of evil;  
15 Whose paths are crooked,  
And who are devious in their ways;

There are people who seek to do evil every bit as whole-heartedly as the godly seek to good. They delight in doing evil just as much as God's people delight in doing God's will. This father understands that his son needs to be delivered from such people. And so he warns his son that such people exist and that wisdom can deliver him from their influence. Without the protection of wisdom, his son will leave the straight paths of wisdom and walk down the crooked paths of wickedness. If his boy walks down that path, all bets are off; he is vulnerable to all types of suffering and heartache.

As you think about your life and your circumstances, you can probably identify people who (in the present or in the past) would love nothing more than to include you in sinful behavior. We don't merely need more willpower; we need to be "delivered" from such people and their influence. We need something within us that is stronger than the temptations we face. We need wisdom.

In addition to "evil men," this father knows that his son needs **deliverance from the covenant-breaking woman**. (vv. 16-19) In a patriarchal society such as ancient Israel, a father warning his son against the covenant-breaking woman was an obvious way to communicate these need to avoid immorality. The application, of course, is much broader. I warned my daughters against the adulterous man. Listen to why the son needs to seek and find wisdom:

16 To deliver you from the strange woman,  
From the adulteress who flatters with her words;  
17 That leaves the companion of her youth,  
And forgets the covenant of her God;  
18 For her house sinks down to death,  
And her tracks lead to the dead;  
19 None who go to her return again,  
Nor do they reach the paths of life.

The term translated in the NAS as "strange woman" can have a number of different connotations. Some versions translate the term as "wayward wife" (NIV) or even "foreigner." The core idea here is that she is out of place; she is not where she is supposed to be relationally. She has abandoned the husband of her youth; she has

abandoned her God (broken covenant with Him). She is on the path of death. If this boy follows her down that path, he too will experience death instead of life.

Again, this father can't always be in the backseat to make sure his son doesn't drive to the wrong part of town; he can't walk five paces behind his son and monitor what he does; he can't get in his head and tell him where to look and what to think. **But wisdom can.** If only he will seek wisdom, she will enter his heart and guard his life.

**Conclusion. (2:20-22)** Notice the summary of the blessings of wisdom in verses 20-22:

20 So you will walk in the way of good men,  
And keep to the paths of the righteous.  
21 For the upright will live in the land,  
And the blameless will remain in it;  
22 But the wicked will be cut off from the land,  
And the treacherous will be uprooted from it.

The stakes couldn't be higher: wisdom will keep us on the paths of righteousness (instead of the path of wickedness); those with wisdom will live in the land instead of being uprooted/cut off from the land (as in the Exile). Wisdom will give security and everything that's really important in this life.

That being the case, it would be foolish to stumble through life thinking, "This is who I am. . . I guess I'll never change. . ." No, God gives wisdom to everybody who wants it badly enough to seek it whole-heartedly. And that wisdom will protect us from many dangers and will keep us on the path of life.

In what area of your life do you need wisdom? It could be speech (how you talk), temptation, money, relationships, marriage, attitude toward the poor, raising children, or any number of things. In light of Proverbs 2, are you willing to invest a modest amount of time this week - 2 hours - seeking wisdom in this area? In your heart I'd like you to answer "yes" or "no."

I want you to have a sense of urgency about this because, biblically speaking, the most important day of your life is today. Psalm 95, Hebrews 3, and Hebrews 4 say, "Today if you hear [God's] voice, do not harden your hearts. . ." If you hear God inviting you to seek wisdom today, decide to seek wisdom in some area of your life. Tomorrow is not guaranteed; and you may or may not listen to God's voice tomorrow. So today if you hear God inviting you to seek wisdom, purpose in your heart to do so.

I would view 2 hours as simply a downpayment, an initial investment. When you seek and find wisdom, it will be so sweet that you will find yourself coming back for more.

Seek wisdom through the Scriptures. If you need help identifying Scriptures that are relevant for the need in your life, ask somebody for help. See wisdom through prayer. Seek wisdom through spiritual conversations. Seek wisdom by practicing what you're

learning (Hebrews 5:14). God gladly gives wisdom to those who want it so badly that they seek for it with all their heart. And the wisdom God gives will protect us from all sorts of dangers and will keep us on the path of life.