

## Seeking God through the Word

### *Proverbs 2*

Have you ever heard of the genre Alternative History? Its fiction based on history that considers what might have happened if certain historical events happened differently. And so, for instance, what if Lincoln had not been assassinated, or what if Great Britain would have signed a peace treaty with Hitler? How might have history played out differently if such things had happened. I've read a couple of these kinds of books and the "what ifs" of it are fascinating.

Here's a personal one that I've been reflecting on this week. What if seeking God through the Scriptures had never become part of my life? How might my history have played out differently?

My freshman year in college I went to a Christmas Conference put on by Cru (then Campus Crusade) in Fort Worth and in one of the talks there was a challenge to do what they called a 31 Day Experiment. There was a Bible reading guide provided and the challenge was to read the Bible every day for 31 one days in a row. I took up that challenge and finished that 31 Day Challenge . . . in about 45 days ☺. Even though I didn't get to it every day, it birthed in me a spiritual practice that has been part of my life now for almost 40 years . . . seeking God through His word. But what if I had never picked up that habit? How might my life be different today?

Paul, in writing to his disciple, Timothy, in 2 Timothy 3:15-17 says this about God's Word and what it does in our lives.

*<sup>15</sup> and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

*<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

This is what God's word has been doing in my life for 40 years. I have no doubt that an alternative history of my life that didn't include this practice, would be very different. What wrong paths have I avoided? What good things have I pursued because God's word has been training me in righteousness? And what joy have I experienced because of this? I have no doubt that God's word has made a huge difference in my life.

Last week Steve shared that during the six weeks leading up to Easter (i.e., Lent), we are going to enter a time that we are calling **A Season of Seeking**. And he shared that between now and then we would like you to do three things: (1) Decide **that** you will seek God; (2) Decide **how** you will seek God; and (3) Discern **why** you will seek God.

Last week Steve taught from 2 Chronicles 7:14 where we saw God's promise is that if we will seek Him we will find Him. And so now, over the next three weeks we will talk about ways that God has given us to seek Him – through the Word, through fasting, and through prayer. These

sermons are going to focus on **how** you can seek Him. But they will also help you decide **that** you will seek Him as well as **why**. Today, we are talking about seeking God through the Word.

We are going to look at Proverbs 2. As many of you know, in the early chapters of Proverbs the author uses the image of a Father instructing his son in the ways of wisdom. Proverbs 1:8 says:

*<sup>8</sup> Hear, my son, your father's instruction  
And do not forsake your mother's teaching;*

The father and mother know that the son will have the best life if he will seek wisdom; wisdom that is found in their instruction and teaching. For us, such wisdom is the instruction and teaching in the Bible. In chapter 2 of Proverbs, the father instructs his son on the **effort** needed to find wisdom, as well as the **benefits** of that wisdom.

This is what we are going to look at today – the effort needed to seek God through the Scriptures as well as the benefits for those who do. And so let's look first at how . . .

## I. Effort is Essential in Finding God's Wisdom in the Scriptures (vv. 1-11)

The father says:

*<sup>1</sup> My son, if you receive my words  
and treasure up my commandments with you,  
<sup>2</sup> making your ear attentive to wisdom  
and inclining your heart to understanding;  
<sup>3</sup> yes, if you call out for insight  
and raise your voice for understanding,  
<sup>4</sup> if you seek it like silver  
and search for it as for hidden treasures,*

In verse 5, we get to the “then,” but before we look at that just notice all the words of effort: *Receive. Treasure up. Make your ear attentive. Inclining your heart. Call out. Raise your voice. Seek it. Search for it.*

Effort! Seeking! You get a sense of growing effort here, right? Calling out for insight. The picture here is like a child that is seeking her parent and calling out, “Mom, Mom!” But when there is no response, she raises her voice louder and calls again. She intensifies her seeking for her mom. That's the picture here. The father describes the kind of effort needed as something akin to what we would do if we searching for something valuable like silver or hidden treasure.

As you think about the picture of this earnest, consistent seeking for wisdom that is portrayed here, how does your own seeking for God's wisdom compare? Are you receiving, treasuring up, making your ear attentive? Do you incline your heart? Do you call out and raise your voice for it? Do you seek and search for it like treasure? What does your effort look like?

The father is encouraging effort. And he says that the effort will be worth it because if the son seeks, he will find. He will find wisdom. He will find God! In verses 5 and 9 you see the word, *then* repeated. The father shares what the son will find if he seeks. And so, the father says, if you will seek:

*<sup>5</sup> then you will understand the fear of the LORD  
and find the knowledge of God.*

The seeking is all about finding God. And if you find God, you find wisdom. Verse 6:

*<sup>6</sup> For the LORD gives wisdom;  
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;  
<sup>7</sup> he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;  
he is a shield to those who walk in integrity,  
<sup>8</sup> guarding the paths of justice  
and watching over the way of his saints.*

Wisdom is found by effort, but it is also a gracious gift of God. *The LORD* is the One who *gives wisdom. From his mouth come knowledge and understanding.*

In verse 9, we find the second *then*. If you seek . . .

*<sup>9</sup> Then you will understand righteousness and justice  
and equity, every good path;  
<sup>10</sup> for wisdom will come into your heart,  
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;  
<sup>11</sup> discretion will watch over you,  
understanding will guard you,*

If you seek God, *wisdom will come into your heart*. It will come into the very core of who you are. We desperately need this. There is so much foolishness in our world. It is subtle. It is deceptive. And it is so easy to get sucked into it. But if we seek God, we will find wisdom that will help us understand what is right and just and equitable. It will help us recognize what is truly the good path. All of this will be *pleasant to your soul*.

The father is making an appeal to his son. "Seek wisdom! Make every effort to find wisdom." That wisdom is found in the father's words and commandments. As I mentioned before, for us the source of wisdom that God has provided for us is His word, the Bible. This is where we find wisdom. And as the father makes clear, **effort is essential in finding God's wisdom in the Scriptures**. But if you do seek you will find. And what you will find will be so good and satisfying.

Now, as we come to the second half of Proverbs 2, the father focuses on the benefits of wisdom. We have already seen some of the benefits, but in this section he make it clear that . . .

## II. The Effort to Find Wisdom is Worth It (vv. 12-22)

It is worth it because wisdom protects and provides. First, he explains the destructive things it protects us from (12-19), and secondly, the good things that it provides us (20-22). And so first, he says when wisdom enters our heart it will deliver us from evil. In both verse 12 and verse 16 you see the word *deliver* or in some translations “save.” Look at verse 12. Here is what wisdom will do.

*<sup>12</sup>delivering you from the way of evil,  
from men of perverted speech,  
<sup>13</sup>who forsake the paths of uprightness  
to walk in the ways of darkness,  
<sup>14</sup>who rejoice in doing evil  
and delight in the perverseness of evil,  
<sup>15</sup>men whose paths are crooked,  
and who are devious in their ways.*

The father talks about evil men. In the next section he will talk about an adulterous woman (v. 15ff). Both the men and the woman are metaphors of evil. And so, if you find wisdom it will deliver you from *the way of evil, from men of perverted speech*. These are men, who the father says, *forsake the paths of righteousness*. Instead, they *walk in the ways of darkness*. Their moral compass is so mixed up that they *rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil*. The paths of these men are *crooked*. Wisdom delivers from this.

Wisdom also delivers from the adulterous woman. If you seek wisdom, it will come into your heart, and . . .

*<sup>16</sup>So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman,  
from the adulteress with her smooth words,  
<sup>17</sup>who forsakes the companion of her youth  
and forgets the covenant of her God;  
<sup>18</sup>for her house sinks down to death,  
and her paths to the departed;  
<sup>19</sup>none who go to her come back,  
nor do they regain the paths of life.*

The adulterous woman portrays sin as seductive and tempting; as something that lures us in. And once lured in, there is death. *Her house sinks down to death*. To go to this woman is to leave the path that leads to life. Wisdom protects from this. The point the father is making is that if the son seeks wisdom, it will protect him from the devastating consequences of sin.

I mentioned at the start that I’ve wondered what my alternative history would be if the Scriptures had not been part of my story. These verses sort of pull back the curtain of what might have been. Leaving the path of uprightness. Walking in the ways of darkness. Rejoicing in doing

evil. Walking a path that leads to death. Not seeing clearly what is right and wrong. Now, don't get me wrong. I haven't always followed God's wisdom as revealed in Scripture like I should. But by the grace of God and with effort, God's wisdom has been coming into my heart for 40 years guiding and leading me away from the kind of destruction portrayed in these verses.

Some of you would say that this is not your alternative history. You have not been seeking wisdom and so much of what the father describes here IS your history. Your life hasn't been oriented around God's word and so wisdom has not entered your heart. As a result, these verses capture what you have experienced. Wandering from the good path and all that that means. The good news for you is that today our gracious heavenly Father invites you to seek Him. And He promises that if you seek you will find him. He is the Prodigal Father with his arms always wide open to you. It is never too late to seek wisdom! In fact that was the whole point of the passage Steve looked at last week. If anyone who has been walking the wrong path will turn, humble himself, repent and seek God, God will let that one find Him. It is never too late to start seeking God. You might be 75 years old. It is not too late!

And so, wisdom protects from the damaging effects of sin. But the father also goes on to say that it also leads to life. It helps us stay on the good path. Look at verse 20. If you seek wisdom, it will enter your heart and . . .

*<sup>20</sup> So you will walk in the way of the good  
and keep to the paths of the righteous.  
<sup>21</sup> For the upright will inhabit the land,  
and those with integrity will remain in it,  
<sup>22</sup> but the wicked will be cut off from the land,  
and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.*

If you find wisdom it will lead you to *walk in the way of the good*. This probably means to walk in the way of good people. If you find wisdom, it will help you *keep to the paths of the righteous*. You will *inhabit the land*, which is a metaphor for stability and blessing. There will be a kind of solid footing in your life. If we find wisdom, it will provide life for us. Wisdom both protects and provides.

It takes great effort to seek God's wisdom. But the effort is worth it. You will find wisdom. It will enter your heart. And wisdom will protect you. It will keep you on a path that is stable and secure. It will lead to blessings in your life. Whatever price you pay to seek God, no matter how much effort it takes, you will not regret it. The wisdom that you will find in seeking God will enter your heart and lead and guide you to that which truly brings life, joy, fruitfulness.

I want to come back to the three decisions we are asking you to wrestle with. We are asking you to decide **that** you will seek God, **how** you will seek God, and to discern **why** you will seek God.

Proverbs 2 speaks to these decisions, right? **Why** seek God is all over this passage. If you seek God's wisdom it will come into your heart and guide your life. And that wisdom will help keep

you off the crooked path that leads to destruction and instead keep you on the straight path that leads to life. Use this passage to Discern why you will seek God. Get clear about this!

Now, in terms of deciding **how** you will seek God, this passage makes it clear that understanding God's teachings and instruction is a critical piece of seeking Him. Seeking God through His word will always be a central component to how anyone seeks God. And so, I want to offer some thoughts about how you might seek God through the Scriptures. When we get to the Season of Seeking, we will give you a plan for those six weeks, but what about now? What might it look like to begin seeking God through the Scriptures?

First, **make it a daily rhythm**. Unless I'm fasting, I eat food every day. Every day I want the nourishment that food provides for my body. Why wouldn't I want that same thing spiritually? Time in the word is all about seeking to nurture a growing relationship with God. It is about coming to Him for wisdom that will guide your life. Seek God daily through His word. Decide that this will be part of your how. Daily.

And then **make sure you have a plan**. Think through the what, when, and where. If I have no plan for WHAT I'm going to read in the Bible, my motivation tends to wain quickly. But with a plan I'm motivated. And so, know what you are going to read in the Bible. If you have no plan right now, let me give you a couple of suggestions:

- Read through one of the Gospels. We are seeking to walk as disciples of Jesus, right? And the Gospel are a great place to start because they are all about Jesus. We are going to be in Luke for the Season of Seeking and so maybe pick Matthew, Mark, or John. Each day, read one chapter. Read it slowly and carefully. One thing I like to do as I read is to write down in a journal one of the verses that sticks out to me and then journal some of my prayers and reflections over that verse.
- You could do the same thing in Proverbs. Read one each day.
- Or you could read a chapter a day out of one of Paul's letters like Ephesians or Galatians.

Another part of your plan is **when and where**. When will you be in God's word? For me it is at 6 am every morning. I'm up at 5:30, I shower, and eat, and then I sit down with my cup of coffee to spend time in God's word. Here's the thing, if I'm going to do this, I have to pay attention to when I go to bed. I can't regularly stay up late and get to my 6 am time with God. And so, part of my plan is being disciplined to get to bed on time.

For you, first thing in the morning might not be best. Find the time when you are going to be most alert. Maybe for you that is over lunch or before bed. It doesn't matter. Just determine the time and stick with it.

And then figure out WHERE you are going to seek God. For me it is at my desk in my home office. If I tried to do the same thing at my desk at church, it would not be a conducive space. I would see the tasks that need to get done. I would be quickly restless feeling the need to get to work. And so, find a place that helps you quiet your heart and focus.

And so, decide HOW you are going to seek God through the Scriptures. In the next two weeks we are going to talk about how fasting and prayer can be part of your “how.”

Finally, decide THAT you will seek God. The How doesn't matter if you haven't decided THAT you will seek Him. Today, we are celebrating the Lord's Table. In eating the bread and drinking the cup, we are reminded that Jesus came into this world to save us from our sin. Ephesians 2 tells us that we were dead in our trespasses and sin. It tells that we walked in sin. It tells us that we were by nature children of wrath. In other words, we were facing God's anger for our sin. The path that we were on led to hell. But Ephesians 2 also tells us that because God is rich in mercy His grace appeared. He loved us and made us alive with Christ. By grace we have been saved. The Lord's Table reminds us that in Christ's death and resurrection our eternal history has been changed. Why would we not seek a God that loves us like this?

My encouragement in these moments is to meditate on Christ's costly sacrifice for you and let that strengthen your resolve to seek him. Use these moments to decide that you will indeed seek him. Before we eat the bread and drink the cup, I'm going to give you a few moments to talk to God. Ask God to help you decide that you will seek Him.