

The Work of Seeking Wisdom

Proverbs 2

Last week I listened to an audio book called, *On Desperate Ground*, which tells the story of one of the greatest battles of the Korean War. The Battle of Chosin Reservoir was located along a critical supply route for the American forces as they advanced into North Korea.

One of the advance companies, Fox Company, was assigned to secure a high point around the reservoir to protect the supply route. After a 7-mile trip up the valley in open air trucks they hauled their supplies to the top of what became known as Fox Hill. They were exhausted and cold. The temperature had slipped below zero. This was November in the mountains. It was 5 pm and daylight was almost gone. All the troops wanted to do at that point was spend some time in warming tents, drink some hot coffee and eat some C rations. The sense of urgency among the troops was low because there had been no indications that the Chinese were anywhere near. But instead of warming tents and coffee, their commander, Captain Barber, ordered the men to form a perimeter along the hill and to start digging fox holes immediately. There would be no warming tents nor fires that night. Many of the men cursed the order. These preparations seemed unnecessary considering the perception of little threat. But the men followed the order. They formed a perimeter, and they dug their fox holes. It was brutal and exhausting work digging into the frozen, rock-hard ground.

That very night, shortly after midnight, the Communist Chinese forces attacked. For six hours they attacked, wave after wave. Around dawn of that first of many days of fighting, the fighting began to subside, and though Fox Company lost several men, they held Fox Hill. One of the men, who the night before complained about what seemed to be unnecessary precautions of digging in admitted that if Captain Barber had not taken the precautions that he did in setting up the perimeter and having the men dig in, they would have been wiped out. Captain Barber exhibited military wisdom in having the men prepare in the way he did. It would have been foolish to do anything else.

As we walk through this life, we too face dangers – spiritual, emotional, relational dangers. Whether we are aware of such dangers or not, they are real and they threaten our well being. But here's the good news, we are not left alone to navigate these dangers. God offers us wisdom that can protect us and guide us through this life.

We are in the midst of a sermon series called *Becoming Wise: A Matter of Life and Death*. Wisdom offers us many things, which we are going to see in the coming weeks. But one thing that Scripture teaches is that wisdom is a lot like a fox hole; it offers protection from dangers. And just like digging a fox hole takes a lot of work, so too it takes work to seek wisdom.

Today, we are looking at Proverbs 2. As we saw last week, in the early chapters of Proverbs the author uses the image of a father and mother instructing their son in the ways of wisdom. In this chapter, the father instructs his son on the **work** needed to find wisdom, as well as the

protection that the son will find if he will seek wisdom. And so let's look at the first half of Proverbs 2. In verses 1-11, it describes the work of seeking wisdom.

I. The Work of Seeking Wisdom (vv. 1-11)

The father says:

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

Notice all of the words that point towards effort: *Receive. Treasure up. Making your ear attentive. Inclining your heart. Call out. Raise your voice. Seek it. Search for it.* God is offering something incredibly valuable. Wisdom. But to find it takes work. The father describes the effort needed as something similar to what we would do if we are searching for something of great value.

Most of us have lost our phone at some point, right? When that happened, what did you do? Some of us might say “glory” and enjoy being disconnected for a while, but most of us will not be able to rest until we find it, right? We look high and low. We look under the couch cushions; we check to see if it slid beside the car seat; we retrace our steps; we ask others to help us look, we ask them to call our number. We simply will not stop looking until we find . . . because it is valuable to us.

Wisdom is valuable. And because it is, the father is encouraging his son to work hard to seek it – a relentless, consistent, pursuit of wisdom. And he says that the effort will be worth it because **if** the son seeks, **then** he will find. In verse 5 and again in verse 9 you see the word, *then*, repeated. The father describes the promise that is held out to any who will diligently seek for wisdom.

*⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;
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 watching over the way of his saints.*

If the son will seek wisdom, then he will *understand the fear of the LORD*. He will *find the knowledge of God*. The search for wisdom is really about finding God. As Steve mentioned last week, *the fear of the LORD* involves relating to him as he really is. If we have the fear of the Lord, we will move towards him and we will pay attention to him. We will reverence him and respect him. We will obey him.

The search for wisdom is about coming to this place with God. And when we do, verse 6 says that the *LORD gives wisdom* and that *from his mouth come knowledge and understanding*. We seek wisdom to find God, but in finding and coming to the knowledge of God, we experience God giving us wisdom as a gift.

In verse 8, we see the idea of a path, right? The father talks about *paths of justice*, and *the way of the saints*. The father is making it clear that if his son seeks, he will find wisdom that puts him on a path where he will experience the Lord as *a shield* (v. 7) and as one who guards and watches over (v. 8). Protection.

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

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

If you seek wisdom, you will gain understanding about *righteousness and justice and equity*. You will understand *every good path*. If you seek wisdom, it *will come into your heart*. It will come into the very core of who you are. It will give you understanding, and discretion that will *watch over you and guard you*.

We desperately need this. There is so much foolishness in our world. It is subtle. It is deceptive. It is all around us. And it is so easy to get sucked into it. But if we seek wisdom, wisdom will help us understand what is right and just and equitable. It will help us recognize *every good path*. And all of this will be *pleasant to your soul*.

As you think about how wisdom is described here, who wouldn't want this? This wisdom that leads to the fear of the Lord, and knowledge of God, that gives us understanding, and serves to guide us, and protect us, and that is ultimately well-pleasing to one's soul, who wouldn't want this? The father is saying, if we will do the work to seek it, we will find wisdom.

As you consider the picture of this earnest, consistent seeking for wisdom that is portrayed here, how does your own seeking for 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?

Proverbs 1:32 says that the “*the complacency of fools destroys them.*” If we are complacent about seeking wisdom, we are in danger. We are like troops just wanting to drink coffee in a warming tent rather than digging fox holes. There is nothing complacent in the picture we see here in chapter 2. Are you seeking wisdom?

As we come to the second half of Proverbs 2, the father focuses on the benefits of wisdom. The benefits have already been hinted at, but in the second part of Proverbs 2 he makes it explicitly clear that one of the benefits of wisdom is that it protects.

II. The Benefits of Wisdom - Protection (vv. 12-22)

The structure of Proverbs 2 is that if you seek, then you will find, and in finding wisdom there is the benefit of protection. In 12-15, and then in 16-19, the father talks about two categories of danger from which wisdom protects. Both of these sections begin with the word, “deliver”, or in some translations, “save.” Seeking wisdom is so critical because it protects us from danger.

In the first, the father talks about a group of men who leave the path of wisdom. In the second one, he talks about the seductive woman who tempts the youth to leave the path of wisdom. Both of these scenarios are metaphors of evil.

Look at verse 12:

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

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*. They are walking a different path. They are walking on a path of foolishness. They are *walk[ing] 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*. Wisdom delivers from this. This picture is a metaphor for evil and foolishness, but make no mistake, there are people around us just like this, from whom wisdom can protect.

In the second category of danger that the father addresses, he addresses the lure of sexual sin. Last week, Steve mentioned how sexual sin is one of the areas that is repeatedly addressed in the book of Proverbs. The danger of sexual sin is pervasive in our world. But if you seek wisdom, it will come into your heart, and . . .

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

The picture here is of an adulterous woman calling out and seeking to lure people in. Obviously, men do the same thing. But in this picture, it 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. Certainly, this is a clear warning against sexual sin of all kinds. But we should also understand that this woman is a metaphor for any kind of unfaithfulness to God and the dangers of that unfaithfulness.

And what the father is saying is that if the son will do the hard work of seeking wisdom, he will be protected from sexual sins and from unfaithfulness to God. Instead, the father says, what his son will experience is life because wisdom will help him stay on the good path. Look at verse 20. If you seek wisdom, it will enter your heart and . . .

*²⁰ So you will walk in the way of the good
and keep to the paths of the righteous.
²¹ For the upright will inhabit the land,
and those with integrity will remain in it,
²² 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*. 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 protect us from danger and provide a stable life for us.

It takes work to seek God's wisdom. But the effort is worth it. You will find wisdom. It will enter your heart. And that wisdom will protect you. It will keep you on a path that is stable and secure. Whatever price you pay to seek wisdom, which is really about seeking God, no matter how much effort it takes, you will not regret it.

As we come to the end of our time, I want to talk a little about how we actually can do the work of seeking wisdom. I want to give you four thoughts on this. First, **be in God's word regularly**. God has graciously revealed wisdom to us in the Scriptures. You simply will not become wise if God's Word is not taking root in your life and shaping how you think. We become wise as we day-by-day, year-by-year, seek God through the Scriptures and allow the wisdom of His Word to shape us.

As Steve mentioned last week, Proverbs was written to make us wise. And so, spend time reading and pondering Proverbs. Our encouragement is that you would do this during this sermon series. You might want to read one chapter every day. But of course, all of Scripture was written to make us wise and so be in God's Word regularly.

Secondly, **ask God for wisdom**. James 1:5 says:

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

We all lack wisdom, right? And so, this is an invitation to all of us to go boldly to God and ask for it. And He promises to give it to us. Ask God for wisdom.

Third, **surround yourself with wise people**. Proverbs 13:20 says:

²⁰ Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

The people we spend time with will influence us. Obviously, as we go about our lives, in our jobs, in our neighborhoods, at school, these all require us to be around all kinds of people. But who are you walking with? Who are your companions? Are they wise or fools? Seriously, you need to think deeply about the people you are hanging with.

It has been some years now since his passing, but a number of you remember Gene Hoerman. Gene was one of these guys that men simply wanted to spend time with. In his old age and growing frailty, his eyes sparkled with joy. He was kind. He was gracious. He was wise. I used to love spending time with Gene, because I gained wisdom by spending time with him. As one who had traveled further down the road with Jesus, he could experientially give testimony to the wisdom of God's ways.

Who are the Gene Hoermans in your life? If you are younger and living at home, even though your parents aren't perfect, they are a source of wisdom. Listen to them.

One of the reasons we encourage everyone to get connected to a group is that it is one way in which we can surround ourselves with others who are seeking to grow in wisdom. If you are living a spiritually disconnected life, the chances of finding yourself on a foolish path is much higher. We need each other. Life groups are one way to find mentors and others who are seeking to walk a wise path.

Finally, **get to know Jesus**. If you were with us this summer you might remember this verse from Colossians 2:3, which says of Jesus:

³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

If we want to become wise, we simply must get to know Jesus. He is wisest person who has ever lived. And so, spend time talking with Him. Spend time reading the Gospels and noticing how he lived. Pay attention to his teachings. Jesus is the ultimate mentor when it comes to being wise. Get to know Jesus.

This morning we are celebrating communion. Jesus told us to do this often in order to remember him. In this celebration we remember that Jesus' body was broken, and his blood was shed that we might be forgiven for our sin and find spiritual life in him. As we eat the bread and drink the cup, we are reminded that not only does God offer us protection in this life, he offers us ultimate protection. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus protects us from ultimate danger – spiritual separation from God. As we celebrate this meal this morning, give thanks for this protection. And if have never called out to Jesus to save you, to forgive you, that is the invitation to you during these moments. It is the wisest thing you could ever do.