

How Would My Life Be Different?

Proverbs 2

I'd like to begin by asking you to identify an area of your life in which you need wisdom. In other words, in what ways do you need to live your life better and more skillfully?

One person might say, "I need wisdom in my speech. I'm always saying things that I regret." Another person might say, "I need wisdom related to my sexuality. I continually experience guilt and confusion in that area of my life." Another person might say, "I really need wisdom when it comes to how I use my time. It seems like I waste an incredible amount of time with things that don't matter." Can you identify an area of your life in which you need to live more skillfully?

Can you imagine how your life would be different if you actually had that wisdom? The person who needs wisdom in his/her speech might say, "If I had wisdom in my speech, I'd have deeper, more satisfying relationships. Instead of pushing people away with my words, I'd draw them closer. My words would be a source of life to people." The person who needs wisdom in relation to sexuality might say, "If I had wisdom in my sexuality I wouldn't have to spend so much time dealing with guilt and shame. I wouldn't be treading water spiritually; I'd be able to make positive gains in other areas of my life." The person who needs wisdom in the use of his/her time might say, "If I were wise in the way I use my time, I'd finally get around to doing the things I've always wanted to do. I'd have a sense of peace before God because I've been a good steward of the day, weeks, and months He has given me." Can you imagine how your life would be different if you had wisdom in specific areas of your life?

I am asking these questions because Proverbs 2 rather boldly promises that if we genuinely seek wisdom, we will find it. And if we find wisdom our lives will be different. We will avoid all sorts of heartache and difficulties and we will experience peace and security in our lives.

Please turn with me to Proverbs 2, a chapter in which a father challenges his son to seek wisdom. As we go through this chapter, keep in mind the area of your life in which you need wisdom. Listen for what God might say to you about how available that wisdom really is and about how your life will be different when you have that wisdom.

[In Hebrew, Proverbs 2 is one long sentence even though our translations break this chapter up into several sentences to make it readable. Just as there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, there are 22 verses in Proverbs 2. This chapter is not an acrostic (i.e., each verse does not begin with a letter of the alphabet), but it does seem to be the author's way of saying, "This chapter is a comprehensive statement about wisdom – everything you need to know 'from A to Z.'"]

God gives us wisdom when we seek it with a whole heart. (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.

2:1 My son, if you will receive my sayings,
And treasure my commandments within you,

To treasure something is to value it above all else. If your house (or apartment) 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. That object would be the thing you treasure – the thing 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 leave it behind. In chapter 1 we saw an example of the type of thing the father might have in mind: the command/teaching to avoid people who would entice him into a life of crime.

Verses 2 through 4 describe 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) describes a teachable attitude and an intentional effort to learn. The teachable person understands that s/he has blind spots and deficiencies and therefore *needs* to learn from others. The father wants his son to desire wisdom so fervently that he “cries out” and “lifts his voice” for discernment and understanding. Do you remember what Lady Wisdom was doing in chapter one? She 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. The son should lift up his voice and cry out for wisdom. The son should seek after wisdom as for silver or for hidden treasure. In other words, he should pursue wisdom in a serious, intentional way.

We seek/pursue the things we really, really want. We expend time, energy, and money pursuing the things that we really want. You can probably think of things that you’ve sacrificed for because you considered it to be valuable. We typically invest enormous amounts of time and money and energy on education; we seek out knowledge and skills. We put everything else on hold because we believe that it’s worth it in the long run. Athletes who want to be good at what they do, arrange their entire lives around a regimen of training. We expend great amounts of time, energy, and money in leisure pursuits.

I think it’s beyond debate that we *can* seek after things that we deem to be valuable. The question is whether or not we really think wisdom is that valuable. Proverbs is arguing that *wisdom really is that valuable*. We should seek wisdom as if it were a treasure.

God promises nothing to the person who has a “take-it-or-leave-it” attitude toward wisdom. But look what the person who wants wisdom more than anything else can expect:

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.

In these verses God promises rather directly to give wisdom to those who seek it with a whole heart. We learn here that the fear of the Lord is not only “the beginning of wisdom”; it is also the *byproduct* of wisdom. The two really feed off of one another. If you seek after wisdom like hidden treasure, “you will discern the fear of the Lord.” In other words, if you seek wisdom, you’ll have more conviction and insight about aligning your life with God and His ways. You’ll discover the knowledge of God; when you understand who He really is, you’ll relate to Him accordingly.

Notice that wisdom is a gift from the Lord (verse 6). There are certain types of knowledge and skill almost anybody can attain through effort (although even then “common grace” is what enables a person to learn), but wisdom does not fall in that category. We seek after wisdom with all our heart, but ultimately wisdom is a gift from God. ***God gives wisdom when we seek it with a whole heart.***

I’ve asked you to identify an area of your life in which you need wisdom. The thing I want to impress upon you is that ***God will give you wisdom*** in that area of your life when you seek it with a whole heart. He really will. You may have a hard time believing this. You may have tried to change some area of your life in the past only to be disappointed and discouraged. To avoid being disappointed again, you might try to protect yourself by thinking, “My life will never be different. God will never give me the type of wisdom that changes my life. . .”

If you carry around that type of disappointment or even cynicism about your life ever being different, hear the simple promise of Proverbs 2: ***God will give you wisdom when you seek it with a whole heart.*** And if you have wisdom – genuine wisdom from God – your life will be different. Allow that promise to enter your heart and give you faith. One of the reasons we study the Word is to stimulate faith. Allow this Scripture to stimulate your faith.

In a few minutes we’re going to talk about how we pursue wisdom, but first let’s look at the rest of the chapter to see that our well-being really does depend upon seeking and finding wisdom. The rest of chapter 2 tells us that:

Wisdom alone can deliver us from the dangers we face in this life. (2:7-19) This passage emphasizes that if we don’t seek and find wisdom, we will go through this life incredibly vulnerable to all types of threats and dangers. Verses 7 through 11 speak about the protection that wisdom brings.

7 He [God] 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.

God will shield you, guard you, and preserve you. You will no longer be wide open to all the dangers and pitfalls of this life. In verses 10 and 11 the father says something rather striking about the way wisdom will deliver his son from the dangers of life:

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 wisdom can!*** He knew that if his son sought 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 aligned his life with God), then he would be protected no matter 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. As we look at these examples, consider how wisdom can protect you in the areas of your life you've identified.

Example #1: Deliverance from evil men. (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 Jesus' followers 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 he tells his son that wisdom can deliver him from their influence. Without the protection of wisdom, his son will leave the straight, bright path of wisdom and walk down the crooked, dark path of wickedness. If his boy walks down that path, all bets are off; he will be vulnerable to all types of suffering and heartache.

As you think about your life and your circumstances, you can probably identify people who would love to include you in their sinful behavior. The father in Proverbs 2 is wise enough to understand that 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. Wisdom will deliver us from evil men.

Look at the second example in verses 16-19. In addition to deliverance from "evil men," this father knows that his son needs:

Example #2: Deliverance from adulterous women. (vv. 16-19) As I mentioned last week, Israel was a patriarchal society. And so a father warning his son against the adulterous woman was an appropriate way to communicate the need to avoid immorality. The application, of course, is much broader. Parents also need to warn their daughters against the adulterous man. And when we take into account Jesus' teaching that sexual lust is adultery of the heart, we see that the application includes all types of sexual temptations and sins. 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;

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).

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.

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 to make sure he isn’t seduced by the adulterous woman; 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. Here is another life-and-death reason to seek wisdom: the pervasive sexual temptation that exists in our world and in our culture.

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 really matters in this life.

This chapter claims that if we seek and find wisdom, our lives will be different: we’ll be protected from all sorts of dangers and we’ll experience security. That being the case, doesn’t it make sense to seek wisdom fervently, with a whole heart? Wouldn’t it be foolish to ignore God’s offer to give us wisdom?

My challenge for this week is simply to seek wisdom very intentionally in a specific area of your life. Test out what we’ve been saying here. Let me give an example and some free advice . . . In my experience, seeking wisdom (which is ultimately the same thing as seeking God) involves three foundational things: 1) Scripture, 2) Prayer, and 3) other people. Scripture is where the wisdom is actually found. Prayer is our conversation with God – about our lives, about the contents of Scripture, requests for insight and grace, etc. Seeking God involves other people

because we need the insights and encouragement that others bring to our lives. We were never meant to seek God in isolation from others; God has designed the body of Christ so that we're interdependent.

Let's take the first example of the person who needs wisdom in his/her speech. **Scripture.** You go to the Scriptures to get a vision for how your life might be different if you have wisdom in your speech. There are many, many Scriptures from which to choose.

Proverbs 10:19 says:

19 When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable,
But he who restrains his lips is wise.

Sometimes we get in trouble because we talk too much. Sometimes we simply need to say less. That's wisdom. Such wisdom needs to enter our hearts and accompany us when we're at work, when we're talking with friends, when we're around the dinner table, when we're at church. Meditating on this Scripture would be very profitable. Ponder ways that you've seen the truth of this Scripture on display – in your life and in the lives of others. Imagine how your life would be different if you had the self-control needed to “restrain your lips”; imagine how much anxiety you'd avoid if you controlled your speech.

A complementary Scripture about our speech is found in Ephesians 4:29

29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

This verse has a lot to say, but notice that Paul advocates our words meeting the need of the moment and giving grace to those who hear. If we are wise, our words will be gifts to the people around us. Instead of being a liability, our words will be an asset. If this wisdom enters our hearts and accompanies us wherever we go, we'll continually consider, “What should I say that will meet the need of the moment? What gifts can I give with my words?”

Prayer. You pray. You cry out to God for wisdom (as we saw in verse 3) in relation to your speech. You confess ways in which your words have been hurtful or simply unwise. You talk with God about your habits of speech. “Listening prayer” can be especially strategic when you honestly want God to change your life. Eventually we need to quit talking and simply listen to what God might want to impress upon us. This may be a new habit for you. I would simply say that God can be trusted to impress upon us the things we need to hear – especially when we are saturating our minds with Scripture.

People. This is where we need to take seriously what Scripture says about the body of Christ. God has designed the body of Christ so that we need the insight, the gifts, the prayer, and the encouragement of others in the body of Christ. If you're seeking wisdom in relation to your speech, it would only make sense to involve others in that pursuit. You might simply ask a couple of people how they perceive your speech: Do you think I talk too much? Are my words like a gift to others? Do I encourage or discourage others when I talk? That insight could be hard to hear, but it could be invaluable. You might also ask those persons to pray for you and

offer any insights that come to them. If we really want wisdom in some area of our lives, these are the types of ways that we'll involve others in our pursuit.

Perhaps you'd like someone to pray for your pursuit of wisdom this morning. Simply come forward after the service and you'll find people who will pray with you about wisdom or some other area of need.

Again, the promise of Proverbs 2 is that if we seek wisdom with a whole heart, we will find it. And if we find wisdom our lives will be different. The best day to seek wisdom is today. The best week to seek wisdom is this week. Will you purpose to seek wisdom in at least one area of your life this day and this week?