

The Summer Soul: Proverbs

8-13-17

Text: Proverbs 1:1-7



Reflection questions... [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

“How would you define ‘wisdom’? If wisdom is, as we are suggesting, ‘the life well-lived’, what does the good life look like, from your perspective?”

“What are the components of living a ‘skillful’ life? How do you understand the connection between our heart (desires), our choices, and the outcome of our lives?”

“What if God essentially desires the same things we desire? What if he is actually the one who knows best how those desires are to be satisfied? What if he really orchestrated all of life for our enjoyment? (1 Timothy 6:17)”

“Would you be more willing to consider God’s wisdom if you knew that he had actually built your fulfillment into his designs? How might that assumption alter the way you feel about surrender and make you more likely to trust his plans for life over yours?”

“In what areas of your life do your good intentions keep getting trumped by your desires? What if you were to courageously risk trusting the goodness of God? Do you hear Lady Wisdom’s voice as an invitation or an accusation?”

“Where in your life (e.g. vocation, relationships, etc.) could you use a healthy dose of wisdom? Perhaps the best starting place is simply to ‘ask God’ (James 1:5)?” Perhaps it would be good to share these areas of need with one another and ask collectively.

Teaching Notes...

The Book of Proverbs is a part of a grouping of writings known as “*Wisdom literature*” (Protestant Canon [collection of books accepted as genuine]: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job). The idea or pursuit of wisdom was not something that was confined to Hebrew tradition, but found all throughout ancient civilizations.

Primarily, the ancient writings, both biblical and extrabiblical, were concerned with the questions: “*How do I live well? What does it mean to live humanly?*”

Proverbs: lady wisdom; ancient; tested and proven; obedient. Persistent in her appeals, but frequently ignored. Her conclusions are based on observations made in the *“uncontrolled environment of life”*. She has all of the supporting data and any number of personal examples of the devastating effects of the life that chooses to ignore her.

Job: he has accommodated wisdom and ended up “playing the fool”. He is the one who seemingly “did it the right way”, yet had a front row seat to a life filled with excruciating personal crisis and pain. He wants answers. *“Is this what we should expect when we do it the ‘right way’?”*

Experienced; honest; humbled. He is the one who eventually realizes the limits of his own perspectives, and the assumptions he makes about God and life, and says, *“I take back everything I said!”* (Job 42)

Ecclesiastes: middle-aged; narcissistic; capable; adventuresome; pre-occupied; lost it all in the market of 2008, but gained it all back... and more; harried; cynical; a bit depressed... **Seattle**.

Each needs to be heard. Each needs to be considered in order to get a more robust, comprehensive understanding of wisdom.

The Proverbs are this immensely practical catalogue of short, simple statements which are generally accepted as the way life works. “Proverbial”.

For as profoundly helpful as they are, the Proverbs seem like Christianity’s version of the fortune cookie: mass produced, good advice, but rather simplistic and uninspired.

Wisdom deals with life “as we know it”.

Life as we experience it. Proverbs takes faith out of the realm of the mystical and ethereal and keeps us grounded in the ordinariness of faith: marriage, parenting, money, sex, justice, the way we speak, truth, etc. The stuff of life.

It is the language of the “streets”, the environment in which God is present and active. It is not allocated to the educational system, nor the platform at church. It is offered in the very streets where you live and work and play meet over a nitro cold brew.

Wisdom literature offers us a glimpse of what we were meant to be and the kind of life that we were meant to experience.

Wisdom just IS. Wisdom is a universal principle that is woven into every fiber of the universe. You can either work within/alongside its governing principles or you can choose to resist it, but either decision will result in a “life”. It will be consequential.

Wisdom says (as challenging as it is to hear in our self-reliant culture) that reality is never subject to your own interpretations and assumptions. Reality never adjusts itself to accommodate our ignorance!

The Story refers to essentially (2) approaches to life: “wisdom” and “folly” (foolishness).

“Fear of the Lord is the beginning (headwaters; source) of wisdom...” Proverbs 9:10.

“Fear of the Lord” is the stock biblical phrase for the awareness of and responsiveness to the revealing of God in your life. It means that the resources for living “skillfully” are not found in our own intuition. We are not self-explanatory. It’s what distinguishes the biblical offering of wisdom from other ancient writings.

So, the wise person is the one who recognizes God as “central” and who is learning to defer to him on all matters of life.

“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God...’” Psalm 14:1.

The fool sees himself/herself as their own point-of-reference. Essentially, it’s a life that’s being formed and informed from the wrong premise. Because it is initiated from the wrong source, what follows, will inevitably be skewed.

Wisdom says you can’t take life seriously and dismiss God. Such a posture derails your pursuit of the life-well-lived.

Wisdom is never theoretical or abstract. Wisdom only exists when people think and act according to truth.

The word for *wisdom* most often used in the OT is Chokmah and it is used to describe someone who is *skilled* or proficient in their area of expertise.

Wisdom is living “skillfully” (lit. *“flowing together with life”*). It’s knowing how to take the information, the revelation, the experience available to you, and respond in such a way as to have the fullest experience of life.

Wisdom is never the inevitable result of having accumulated a mountain of school debt. You can have gathered a wealth of information and still be a fool.

Here’s the beauty of this whole thing: **God did not create a world where we have to choose between his glory and our delight!**

We assume that the fulfillment that we desire is about being deprived of what we really want, but perhaps not being fully aware of our desires prevents us from the very fulfillment we desire? Got it?

“The Lord formed me from the beginning, before he created anything else. I was appointed in ages past, at the very first, before the earth began. I was the architect at his side. I was his constant delight, rejoicing always in his presence. And how happy I was with the world that he created; how I rejoiced with the human family” (8:22-23; 30-31).

Architecture is the “art or practice of design”. The architect meets with the builder and gets a sense of their vision for the structure, then designs something which will functionally serve the intent and purpose of the structure; something which will help the builder realize their dream.

Wisdom allows us to come to terms, not only with the wholeness for which we were designed, but with the grace to confront our brokenness.

“Listen as Wisdom calls out. My gifts are better than gold...” (8:1, 19)

Lady Wisdom assumes that she will not be your default option. Wisdom attempts to interrupt and correct the trajectory of our lives. The bible calls it “repentance”.

The OT appeal to “*Get wisdom, get life*”, is now offered in the NT as, “*Come to me and I will give you life*” (Matthew 11; John 10).

Paul says that Jesus *is* the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30); that “... *in him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” (Colossians 2). Other ancient wisdom writers had surmised about life, pointed toward life. Jesus said, “*I am the life*” (John 14).

What becomes apparent is that Jesus is always challenging our definition of life and the self-defeating means we often use to pursue it.

“Whoever loses his life, for my sake, will find it” (Matthew 10:39).

It’s almost as if Jesus knew that the challenge had to be ‘sharp’ and clear. He knew that following him would feel risky, but he also knew that simply adding him to an already overwhelmed and over-extended way of life would be deceitful and detrimental.

Know that God’s intention is not to “eliminate” your capacity for desire, but to re-direct your desires so that they are now pursuing the right things. The things that lead to life.