

Wisdom in Discerning the Truth

Series: Wisdom for Life (Proverbs)

Brad Bailey – July 21, 2018

“The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.” - Proverbs18:17

1. Open-Mindedness is a vital part of a process... but not the _____.
2. Recognize how first impressions...and initial understanding... can be _____ .
3. Recognize the tendency to shape a perspective that is _____.
4. Wisdom will _____ allow the opportunity to challenge an initial perspective.

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INTRO...

Would you like to be known as a judgmental person?

Most of us don't. In fact it has become nearly a defining virtue of our current times: Like we have to say "Hey ...I don't like to judge anybody..."often followed by ... "but did you see what that guy did?"

I find **we in our current culture** seem a **bit in conflict**. We denounce any form of judging... while every form of public communication is almost nothing but judging.

I believe God calls out to us today.

This morning we are **continuing in our Summer Series** entitled **Wisdom for Life... in which we are engaging areas of wisdom as communicated to us in the Biblical Book of Proverbs.**

First week... there is a difference between knowledge and wisdom.

As many have noted...we live in a time in which we have an overload of knowledge...information...but may be at a loss for wisdom.

Wisdom is an understanding of how life really works...and what is needed.

Much wisdom has to do with **how relating to others works.**

Last week... words...can speak life...and death.

So the **wise person** will **care about what they say.**

Today... we are going to continue to allow God to speak to us about wisdom in relating to others.

I want to **encourage each of us** to **open ourselves to what God** may want to do in us...and in particular... in relationships...ways in which we have allowed judging others or being judged to develop.

In Proverbs 18th chapter... this theme runs... several statements that speak to how we relate to developing a fair understanding...including a fair understanding on one another.

Proverbs 18:2 (NIV)

A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions.

The Hebrew word that is translated *opinion* in the ESV is *leb* - which simply means, "heart", "mind", or "the inner person." In other words, verse 2 of Proverbs 18 ascribes to the fool the quality of neglecting and despising objective truth in favor of believing what he wants to believe. His *opinion* may or (most likely) may not be based on any kind of fact or evidence. More likely, the fool's "opinion" is a conclusion that is convenient to his own inner, self-serving feelings and desires.

Verse 13 of Proverbs 18 reinforces this wisdom and points to the damage it causes, saying,
Proverbs 18:13 (NIV)
He who answers before listening-- that is his folly and his shame.

The worst things I have said... came from **allowing my opinion to speak ahead of enough understanding.**

What comes out is ignorance... and it comes **not caring enough** about our **words...but ultimately by a lack of caring for understanding.**

The contrast — and remedy — is given in Proverbs 18:15.

Proverbs 18:15 (NIV)

The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.

That word *discerning* describes the skill of examining... the deliberate, close examination of all the available facts.

Verse 17 brings the point home...

“The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.” – Proverbs 18:17

All the concerns for judging wisely lead to the need to recognize... we tend to be drawn to conclusions before hearing the whole picture. [1]

[Showed humorous Cat Commercial for Ameriquest Mortgage -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4SpQqP2zuU>]

We can have humorous moments where we rather quickly discover the real picture of what was going on.

But there “jumping to conclusions” is often not such a simple matter.

One thing that our tendency is not... it’s not good for true understanding.

A few months ago... I got one of those special letter in the mail... a summons for jury duty. End of the first day... I got called onto a huge pool of jurors. There was little chance I would end up on this jury. Jury selection continued into the next day...and I was the last juror selected.

That was the beginning of a few days ... in which you develop some fun comradery ...

One thing became very clear... why? The issue being judged seemed totally without merit for the resources of time.

When the time came... this group was going to have no patience for deliberating. I wouldn't want to have to be the foreman of this jury.

I was made the foreman.

While everyone was frustrated by lack of significance in this case...it became clear that everyone was equally surprised by how hoard it was to discern.

Why? Because what was initially presented ... became less clear.....

And the whole process of becoming a juror was defined by the continual question: “”

That was the mandate. It is essential to the pursuit of justice...is the need to hear all the evidence. Simple enough? Actually...it's not. Wisdom calls out...and warns us...

On a personal level...we can tend to make conclusions before developing real understanding.

Without knowing it... we declare "Case closed!" after hearing only one side of the story — perhaps the side of a friend... or someone familiar... or someone who we identify as on our side of issues.

But wisdom demands that in gathering knowledge and examining facts, we always wait to form a conclusion until we hear both sides of the story.

So let's consider the wisdom of these words.

1. Open-Mindedness is a vital part of a process... but not the end itself.

What does wisdom seek? It is seeking to make a good decision.

Towards that end... one should keep their perspective open... but that openness is part of a process... a process of exploring the more complete picture.

Today we speak of being open-minded in ways that can be both healthy...and also be avoidant of responsibility.

Some may **philosophically want to dismiss truth...no absolutes...**

Some may just want to **avoid conflict...**

Notice that it calls for both open-mindedness...but as part of a responsibility to seek truth...not avoid it.

Open-Mindedness is **not an endless abdication of position**

Wisdom is about **how life really works...and life requires that we must make decisions based on our best discernment of truth.**

I have found real freedom to say... “I could be wrong”... but I have to make decisions and I will take responsibility for them...until shown otherwise. [2]

In an ultimate way, we may remain open-minded...but only as decision making beings.

So how?

2. Recognize how first impressions ...and initial understanding ... can be misguiding.

“The first to present his case seems right...” – Proverbs 18:17

For various reasons...we tend to become connected to what we hear first...more than what is established by some process of verifying those initial ideas.

Perhaps... it's a matter

- Emotional attachment.. perhaps it's a friend who shares their side of a story.
- Just because it's easier... agreeing with what we first hear is easier than giving it more thought.

We are naturally drawn to what we initially hear.

There is a word of wisdom here for each of us... both as presenters...and sometimes as those being presented to...those who must discern.

This principle includes the formal presentation... such as a legal trial.

But also the informal...someone sharing about what happened and how it should be viewed. But what is presented can be even more informal than that.

It can involve whatever information we draw from our perceptions. Even just outward appearances. This what we call the power of “First impressions.”

As we encounter people...we are constantly forming “first impressions.”

In fact... it's **part of our nature** to do so. **We have a phenomenal** ability to bring masses of information together to assess who someone is.

But **the strength can also lead to a tragic problem**. If we don't keep the system open... it will prove how misguides we can be...which is exactly what God is calling us to.

The problem is that we form impressions **SO FAST**...and **GIVE THEM TOO MUCH POWER**.

How fast? **Thirty milliseconds** of exposure to someone's face is all it takes to provide sufficient information **for your brain to form an impression** of them. (That's 30 thousands of a second)

Ever heard the term: **“Don't judge a book by it's cover.”**

Well... we do every single day ...in fact many times every day.

Research in psychology has shown that we do not easily change our mind and tend to pay most attention to information that endorses our belief while overlooking evidence that challenges it.

We tend to allow first impressions to guide us more than facts. [3]

What we form becomes a bias... whether positive...or negative.

Some describe this bias as an... **Anchoring Bias** - The tendency to rely too heavily, or "anchor", on one trait or piece of information when making decisions (usually the first piece of information acquired on that subject)

Some describe a **Confirmation bias** - a tendency to search for information that supports our preconceptions and to ignore or distort contradictory evidence.

This can bias law enforcement to focus on the wrong suspects... teachers to over- or underrate a student's real performance... banks to make or not make loans appropriately.... Employers to make mistakes in hiring.

And it **causes each of us to stop seeing people clearly.**

We tend to believe what we initially hear or perceive... before allowing it to be challenged.

Jesus said ...**John 7:24 (CEV)**

Don't judge by appearances. Judge by what is right.

So we have to recognize the challenge between the power of ...**Sequence** (the power of what we initially form) **vs substance** (the more full facts)

...But there is another dynamic which plays into this. What can we presume about the one side who presents their case first?

Do we tend to present everything fair and fully? NO. This word of wisdom points out that one side without another... is likely going to be bent in it's favor.

And this leads to the third point we can identify.

3. Recognize the tendency to shape a perspective that is favorable to oneself.

We all will want to present what is favorable to us. Some people may be more objective than others... some may have more freedom to examine themselves more freely. But we all have a level of self-protection.

We all learn to make excuses early on. The dog ate our homework. We meant to return the phone call but got sidetracked. If we are in a dispute with a friend or a coworker, we **naturally bend**

the facts in our own direction, subtly **shading the truth** to make our case look stronger than it really is.

I experience this in my own head... I form the perfect case that I can argue in my inner view.

In seeking to help conflict... and most notably in the reluctance to engage together... I have found **people deeply hurting... yet then reluctant to seek to meet** with the one they are in conflict with.

Why are we reluctant to have a more open discussion? Because the case we have developed in our mind might not be quite as simple and settled as we have come to think.

Proverbs 12:15

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to counsel.

Proverbs 21:2

All a man's ways seem right to him, but the LORD weighs the heart.

Wisdom understands that we will naturally view things favorably than factually...and wisdom will be willing to let the larger perspective come through others.

This is what our final point recognizes...

4. Wisdom will patiently allow the opportunity to challenge an initial perspective.

As the verse concludes...

*"The first to present his case seems right, **till another comes forward and questions him.**"* – Proverbs 18:17

Such a simple statement... but it **bears an enormous truth** that defines what is needed in every level of life.

This is what establishes the very **core of our system of justice.**

And God saw that it was sown into his people.

The Old Testament required diligent inquisition in all matters of hearsay ([Deut 13:12-18](#); [17:2-7](#)), and it would not accept the testimony of one man in any matter ([Deut 19:15](#)). [4]

Our justice system continues to value the need to verify what is true... to seek all sides and cross examine what is said to best establish what is true and therefore...what is right in judging one another.

But... what we value in the legal system...we may violate in our own personal lives and hearts.

We may not do so in overt ways...but in how often...

- Do we Judge someone before we know the whole story? (And think we are smart for doing so?)
- Do we allow ourselves to be drawn into someone's version of what someone else did... without keeping our understanding open...and without guarding our hearts from becoming settled?

Understanding involves patience....

"It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it."
- Aristotle

CLOSING

Time for some ministry... to open ourselves to what God may want to do in us...and in particular... in relationships...ways in which we have allowed judging others or being judged to develop.

So I want to ask us to consider...

Is there someone in my life in which I have not been caring about my words...and spoken harm...rather than life?

Am I tending to allow "first impressions" that fit my bias... more than seeking greater understanding?

Is there someone in my life in which I have judged without seeking a more complete understanding?

Time of PERSONAL PRAYER

Closing songs: Jesus Friend of Sinners / Kyrie Eleison

Resources: This simple message primarily develop from my own thoughts as few have expounded much on the simplicity of this verse. However, I did find and draw from one who expounded particularly well: Steve Watkins ("An Important Lesson from Proverbs 18" - 11/19/2014)

Notes:

1. Another word from Proverbs that reflects this..

Proverbs 14:15 (NET)

A naive person believes everything, but the shrewd person discerns his steps.

Proverbs 14:15 (NIV)

A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps.

2. Regarding the nature of open-mindedness...

Peter Kreeft (1986: 19) endorses such a view explicitly in his claim that “an open mind is therefore not an end in itself but a means to the end of finding truth” is simply “common sense”. He appeals here (against the suggestion that it might ever be a good in itself) to Chesterton’s claim that an open mind is like an open mouth in that it is good only to close down on something (viz.- truth). - Kreeft, P. (1986). *Back to Virtue*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

The following offers one view that helps qualify the virtue of open-mindedness...

Open-mindedness: “An open-minded person is characteristically (a) willing and (within limits) able (b) to transcend a default cognitive standpoint (c) in order to take up or take seriously the merits of (d) a distinct cognitive standpoint” (2011: 152).

As a general characterization of open-mindedness, this seems perfectly plausible. Though a general characterization of open-mindedness is insufficient, per se, in resolving our puzzle about open-mindedness and truth. This is because (as we saw) open-mindedness isn’t always intellectually virtuous; we need then an account that specifies when it is. Baehr (2011: 161) offers one:

Virtuous open-mindedness: “A person S’s engaging in the activity characteristic of open-mindedness under circumstances C is intellectually virtuous only if it is reasonable for S to believe that engaging in this activity in C may be helpful for reaching the truth...”

From –Baehr, J. (2011). *The Inquiring Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Cited in: *Open-mindedness and Truth* J. Adam Carter & Emma C. Gordon University of Edinburgh <https://philpapers.org/archive/CAROAT-6.pdf>

Jim Spiegel - Civil Public Discourse and the Virtue of Open-mindedness (March 9, 2018)...writes...

Our natural responses to conflict are essentially fight or flight. We either withdraw from those with whom we disagree or we challenge them to show them where they are wrong. But neither approach is constructive because withdrawal kills dialogue and challenge makes people defensive. In neither case is civil discourse achieved.

I argue that the proper alternative is *open-minded engagement*. I affirm Jason Baehr’s definition of open-mindedness as a willingness to transcend one’s default cognitive standpoint on an issue (*The Inquiring Mind*, Oxford, 2011). A person who is open-minded in this sense displays a readiness to take seriously alternative perspectives and a willingness to welcome new evidence that could overturn their current beliefs. Although people generally admire those who display such open-mindedness, it is difficult to do so because our current belief set is comfortable, open-mindedness challenges our intellectual pride, and open-mindedness requires moral work, specifically development and application of the virtues of self-control and patience.

Obviously, we should not be open-minded about everything (e.g., being open to the idea that my spouse is actually an alien or that rape is morally acceptable). We should be foreclosed about many things. But regarding issues *where reasonable people disagree*, we should strive to keep an open mind. I argue that in such cases open-mindedness is an intellectual duty. This is because each of us has many false beliefs, as evident in the fact that we all disagree with many people who are at least as intelligent and responsible as we are. Other factors also guarantee that I have false beliefs about various issues, including the fallibility of my reasoning skills and

perceptual abilities, as well as the fact that I don't have the time or ability to thoroughly vet all of my beliefs.

Some other reasons to be open-minded are that this trait is critical for learning, and open-mindedness follows from the Golden Rule: I want others to seriously consider my truth claims and welcome the evidence I present to them, so I should do the same regarding others' truth claims and arguments.

So how does one become more open-minded? Here are three practical tips for transcending one's default perspectives: (1) intentionally build your moral imagination, (2) practice active listening—resolve to speak less than your conversation partner, and (3) be Socratic—develop the art of questioning (which can also expose problems in others' views).

3. Reference: The power of first impressions by [Eileen Munro](#); Feb 2008 at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09503159508411629?journalCode=cpra20>

Also..

From “13 Things You Should Know About First Impressions” - BY LUC RINALDI
<http://www.readersdigest.ca/health/relationships/13-things-you-should-know-about-first-impressions/view-all/>

You never get a second chance, the saying goes, to make a first impression. It turns out you may not even get that. Within 50 milliseconds of seeing someone's face, you unconsciously make decisions that will influence your interactions.

New research suggests that first impressions are so powerful that they are more important than fact.

A new study found that even when told whether a person was gay or straight, people identified a person's sexual orientation based on how they looked — even if it contradicted the facts presented to them.

“We judge books by their covers, and we can't help but do it,” said Nicholas Rule, Ph.D., of the University of Toronto. “With effort, we can overcome this to some extent, but we are continually tasked with needing to correct ourselves.”

“Furthermore, the less time we have to make our judgments, the more likely we are to go with our gut, even over fact,” he added.

“As soon as one sees another person, an impression is formed,” Rule said. “This happens so quickly — just a small fraction of a second — that what we see can sometimes dominate what we know.”

Face value: Neuroscience shows how first impressions work - By Sam Baran for [All In The Mind](#); Updated 22 Jul 2017

Thirty milliseconds of exposure to someone's face is all it takes to provide sufficient information for your brain to form an impression of them.

So says Face Value, a new book based on Princeton psychologist Alexander Todorov's research into the science of first impressions.

“We don't know where our first impressions come from or precisely what they mean, so we don't always appreciate their fragility. - Malcolm Gladwell (Malcolm Timothy Gladwell CM is an English-born Canadian journalist, author, and speaker. He has been a staff writer for The New Yorker since 1996.)

4. The Jews and Romans allowed the accused to defend himself before judgment was passed ([John 7:51](#); [Acts 25:16](#)). One of the great prerogatives of kings, or any person in authority, is to

make such inquisitions ([Pr 25:2](#)). Agrippa, Felix, and Festus wisely allowed Paul to defend himself against Tertullus and the Jews (Acts 24-26). Paul commended the Bereans for checking his preaching by scripture ([Acts 17:11](#)).