



gracefellowship

Series: Letters to My Children
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Title: The Voice of Wisdom
Passage: Proverbs 1

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 1:1-7

What would it be like for you to get a letter from your parents? Some of you lost your parents years ago and would love to hear from them again. Some of you would dread what your parents might say to you in a letter- you might not even open it! Throughout this series you are going to see videos like the one we just watched of people writing letters to their children. If you're a parent or an Aunt or Uncle, or maybe you sponsor a Compassion Child somewhere in the world, I'd encourage you to write a letter to someone you love to share with them the hopes and dreams you have for them to know and follow Jesus.

Growing up we probably all went through that stage when we thought our parents didn't have a clue about anything! Do you remember your 16-year-old self thinking, "My parents are idiots! They don't know anything about life!"? We all found it hard to listen to what our parents had to say because we thought we knew better. Then somewhere around the age of 25 you came to the realization that it's possible your parents weren't all that dumb after all!

The first seven chapters of the book of Proverbs each begin like a letter that Solomon has written to his son. But as God has preserved this piece of wisdom literature over the centuries, the opening chapters of Proverbs are supposed to be received as a letter God has written to us. We are God's children and He has written some things down He wants to pass along to you- things that will help you live the best possible life you can as you strive to follow Him. But sometimes we treat God like we treated our parents when we were 16: what does God know? I know better than God how to live my life. I don't need to listen to Him. And God, as a loving Father, gives you freedom to choose whether you will listen to Him and live in obedience to Him, or whether you will go your own way. But because He loves us, He wrote a letter instructing us how to live in a way that will bring life.

The major question facing you in the book is: will I listen to the voice of wisdom or will I pursue a life of folly?

Here's the first thing I want us to understand as we read this letter: There is something for all of us here. Earlier in the service we read the first 7 verses together and we were told some important things.

1. This book helps us gain wisdom and understanding. Some of the mysteries in life come into clearer focus as we read and apply what God has written to us.
2. The wisdom in this book can change our behavior- learning to do what is just and right and fair.
3. For the simple: you can gain prudence- the ability to live with caution and not be taken advantage of.
4. For the young: you can gain knowledge and discretion.
5. For the wise: you can still add to your learning. We never come to the place where we abandon the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom.
6. For the discerning: you can get guidance for your future.

Then Solomon tells us one of the primary messages of the Christian faith: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction." When we talk about the fear of the Lord we are not saying we should be afraid of God. This is a way of communicating reverence and submission to the God of the Universe. We hold Him in awe and respect, and this is the foundation of walking in knowledge of God.

So, there is something for all of us in this book. In fact, I'm going to give you homework this week! Especially if you are in one of our Life Groups that uses the sermons for discussion material, I want all of us to read Proverbs chapter 1 every day this week and each time you read it write down one observation you have from the passage. You'll be amazed as you read it over and over again what begins to stand out and how it speaks to your life.

Look at Proverbs 1:8-9

:: Proverbs 1:8-9

8 Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.

9 They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.

Solomon is writing his son, but because all Scripture is breathed by God, this is a letter from our heavenly Father to us. It could just as easily say, "Listen, my son/daughter, to your Father's instruction..." God has something He wants to say to you. Are you listening? We are living in the information age, but certainly not the age of wisdom! You can get all kinds of information. At your fingertips is more information than any generation in history has had access to. But having information doesn't mean we act in wisdom.

God wants His children to have a full life guided by wisdom that is timeless. Let's look at what Solomon wrote to his son and then see what God is saying to us today.

:: Proverbs 1:10-19

10 My son, if sinful men entice you, do not give in to them.

11 If they say, "Come along with us; let's lie in wait for innocent blood, let's ambush some harmless soul;

12 let's swallow them alive, like the grave, and whole, like those who go down to the pit;

13 we will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder;

14 cast lots with us; we will all share the loot" –

15 my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths;

16 for their feet rush into evil, they are swift to shed blood.

17 How useless to spread a net where every bird can see it!

18 These men lie in wait for their own blood; they ambush only themselves!

19 Such are the paths of all who go after ill-gotten gain; it takes away the life of those who get it.

I can only hope that none of you have friends calling you saying, "Let's go out and ambush and kill people!" Probably none of you are dealing with that scenario. But all of us have to make decisions about the kinds of people we have in our life.

Here's what I think we could take away from this passage:

You need to be careful about who you let into your inner circle.

In the NT we are told in 2 Corinthians 6 not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Most often that phrase gets associated with marriage. If you're a Christian you shouldn't marry a non-Christian. But it goes much deeper than that. We need to be careful about the friendships we have and the business associates we partner with.

Here's something I have told my kids for years:

Your friends determine the direction and the quality of your life.

Who you allow to be in your inner circle will play a huge role in how you live your life. Think of some American proverbs: **(Images on Screen)**

- It's hard to soar with the eagles when you hang around a bunch of turkeys!
- If you lay with the dogs you're going to get fleas!

Here's how the Bible describes things:

:: 1 Corinthians 15:33

33 Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.”

Does that mean we should avoid all relationships with non-believers? No! In fact, on the night Jesus died on the cross He prayed for the disciples and for all who would follow Him in the future. Part of His prayer to the Father was not that God would take us out of the world, but that He would protect us from the influence of the world. Jesus prayed that His followers would be a light to this world and would be a positive influence that brought people to God instead of being negatively influenced away from God.

Interestingly enough when we see the story of Solomon’s family play out we find that his son didn’t listen to this bit of wisdom about the friends he kept. In the book of 1 Kings we find out that after Solomon died his son, Rehoboam, became king. Rehoboam was challenged to make changes during his reign that would lighten the load of the people of Israel. He first went to the Elders who served under his father, Solomon, and asked their advice. The Elders told him if he would lighten the load of work building projects to bring rest to the people they would love him and serve him. Then Rehoboam asked his friends he grew up with, who he made advisors in his kingdom, what they thought. Their advice was to be even more harsh than Solomon and to basically enslave their own people, making their lives miserable in order to show his power. Who do you think Rehoboam listened to? He listened to his buddies! He rejected the advice of the older generation and took the counsel of his friends. The result was tragic. The people of Israel rejected Rehoboam as King and he was forced to flee for his life and the Kingdom of Israel was split.

The son of the wisest man who ever lived was a fool. He did not heed his father’s instruction and he didn’t develop a life guided by wisdom.

It takes us back to the things we talked about in our last series: whose voice are you listening to? There is a lot of knowledge out there- but not all of it is godly knowledge. There are a lot of voices telling you how to live and think. When you hold those voices up to the Word of God, are they speaking truth? We need to surround ourselves with people who will speak truth to us and point us to Jesus. We need to listen to the voice of wisdom as she calls out and instructs us; her voice leads to life.

In fact, that’s what we see in the second half of this chapter: wisdom calls out to all who will listen, but rebukes anyone who rejects her. Solomon personifies wisdom as a woman. It’s a way of giving wisdom characteristics we can identify with and understand. In the NT Jesus talked about being the bread of life, or he called himself a gate and a door. That didn’t mean Jesus thought he was a loaf of bread! It was a way of personifying something to help us understand how to think of Jesus and our relationship with Him.

As we read this letter from God to us we see wisdom begin to speak.

:: Proverbs 1:20-23

20 Out in the open wisdom calls aloud, she raises her voice in the public square;

21 on top of the wall she cries out, at the city gate she makes her speech:

22 “How long will you who are simple love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge?

23 Repent at my rebuke! Then I will pour out my thoughts to you, I will make known to you my teachings.

I want us to notice a huge difference here that is being communicated to us. When we were looking at being enticed by sinful people to join their ways, it was all done in private: let's lie in wait...let's ambush people. Sin loves to operate in secret and hide in the dark. But notice where wisdom calls from...

- Out in the open wisdom calls aloud
- She raises her voice in the public square
- On top of the wall she cries out
- At the city gate she makes her speech

Wisdom is out in the open, where people are shopping and conducting business (public square) and in the seat of authority for the making judgments (city gates).

Evil and wickedness want to stay in the dark and entice people away from a full life. Wisdom calls us to get everything into the light and repent of our wrongdoing. That last verse said, “Repent at my rebuke! Then I will pour out my thoughts to you, I will make known to you my teachings.”

Repentance to wisdom's rebuke opens the door to receive wisdom's instruction.

If you're living with things in your life right now that you're trying to keep hidden in the dark, you need to repent and bring them out into the light. If there are things you would be embarrassed about if your wife or kids found out you were doing at home, or your boss discovered you were doing at work, it's time to repent of those actions and listen to the voice of wisdom. She will instruct you in how to live moving forward so you experience the life God designed for you. Just because the world says what you are doing is acceptable and good doesn't mean it's wise or right in the eyes of God. But it's not too late to turn from your sin and come back to God.

However, if you do refuse to listen to God and accept His ways, there is a warning for you.

There are consequences to rejecting wisdom.

:: Proverbs 1:24-31

**24 But since you refuse to listen when I call and no one pays attention when I stretch out my hand,
25 since you disregard all my advice and do not accept my rebuke,
26 I in turn will laugh when disaster strikes you; I will mock when calamity overtakes you—
27 when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you.
28 “Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me,
29 since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD.
30 Since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke,
31 they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.**

Remember, God will not force you to choose Him. But there are consequences for rejecting the truth about God. When wisdom calls out to us and we reject the counsel of God and refuse to turn to Him, He allows sin to grow in our hearts and take us to our own destruction.

Romans 1 talks about this as clearly as any passage in the Bible.

:: Romans 1:18-32

**18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness,
19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.
20 For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.
21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.
22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools
23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.
24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.
25 They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.
26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones.**

27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.
28 Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.
29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,
30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;
31 they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.
32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

As Christians we are meant to avoid evil. Wisdom helps us do that. When we listen to the voice of wisdom we can discern right from wrong and choose the ways of Jesus more often than not. Disciples of Jesus are not perfect- we don't claim to be. But we do strive to live in wisdom putting sin to death.

The last thing I want to share with you today comes from the final two verses of Proverbs 1.

:: Proverbs 1:32-33

32 For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them;
33 but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm."

There are people in our world who get angry because they believe a good God could never send people to hell. The truth is, God doesn't send anyone to hell. People choose hell by rejecting the love of God. Being wayward against God and being complacent toward God brings death and destruction. If you didn't want God in life, He isn't going to force you to be with Him in eternity. Rebellion against God leads to death and destruction. And that's your choice.

But wisdom says, "Whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease."
God wants to put his protective covering over you. Will you choose His love?