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Series: Proverbs: Living Wisely in a Fallen World
Message: The Character of the Wise

Transcribed Message
February 23, 2020

The newly appointed captain of a navy ship set sail, and that night as he looked out over the place where they were, he saw a light coming his way. He told the signalman to send a signal that says turn 10° South. Alter your course. Almost immediately upon sending a signal, another came back to them and it said alter your course 10° North. It got under his skin a little bit and he told the signalman to send another message and say alter your course 10° South. I'm a captain. Immediately there was a response that said alter your course 10° North. I'm Seaman third class Jones. Now he was infuriated. He sent a third message and said alter your course 10° South. I am a battleship. The message came back. Alter your course 10° North. I am a lighthouse.

Wherever we are in life, whatever our status, whatever our position might be, whether we are old or young, whether we're married or single, the pressing question I think for our life is: Is this book and the wisdom of God in fact that lighthouse in our life? Is it the absolute authority that we put ourselves under? Is it this truth that is guiding us every day of our life? If there is an overriding message or theme that we take away from Proverbs, I think I couldn't do any better than that than to say this book which gives us the wisdom of God is intended to do that for us. It's intended to be that lighthouse for us in the midst of this dark and perverse world. The reason is so very clear and that's what we look at this morning. The only way to live life as God intends for us to live it. Not one of a number of ways, but the only way to do that is to have God at the center of it all and to have His truth at the center of it all and for us to be submitting our lives daily to that Word and to that truth.

We're going to take the first half of our time this morning to do a quick review of the book and then we're going to jump in to a very important quality at the end of our study. So let's look first of all and review this wonderful book that is so insightful, so

helpful. We begin by looking at the purpose of the book, which we're told right away in chapter 1 verses 2 and 3 by Solomon that it is to know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing in righteousness and justice and equity. He wants us to know wisdom. To know wisdom is to step into moral discernment. We have said that this word "wisdom" in the Old Testament is used in a variety of different ways. It can be used for instance of the craftsman of the tabernacle. They were said to have been given wisdom by God, which was simply a way of saying that they were going to be very skilled in what they were going to do. It can mean that somebody is clever and shrewd. It can refer to somebody's intellect and their intelligence. But when you come to the book of Proverbs, this word "wisdom" speaks of this matter of moral discernment. That's why Solomon is writing. He wants us to be able to tell right from wrong. He wants us to know good and bad. He wants us to know better from best. He wants us to be people who are morally discerning, who have the ability to live life with skill.

When we talk about living life with skill, we have said that it is nothing less than seeing ourselves and seeing life as God sees it. There isn't anything better than that, to see yourself and see life as God sees it. That is to be in a place of moral discernment. To see the truth for what it is in the midst of a world that is deceived, that lives under deception, and oftentimes it appears simply in willful ignorance of the wisdom of God. How many parents haven't had a hundred conversations with a child, with an adolescent, with a teenager, maybe with a young adult, in which they're pressing the parents and they're saying why not? Why can't I? There is nothing wrong with this. Everybody else is doing it. The parent's responsibility at that point is to step in with moral discernment and say that's why God has given you a parent. That's why I'm here. This is the wisdom of God about this matter. This is moral discernment to guide you. In Proverbs, it's God who is acting if you will as our parent. He is giving us all of this so that we can submit to this counsel and we can live a life that is honoring to Him.

Secondly, it is to cultivate a Biblical worldview. It is not just a matter of moral discernment, it's a matter of a Biblical worldview. I think in verse 2 it is to understand words of insight. When we first started this series we said in 1 Chronicles 3 that when Solomon was asked by God what do you want, Solomon said I want to have the ability

to govern your people so that they know what is right and what's wrong. I want to be a man of moral discernment. I want to have a Biblical worldview if you will for all of the things that are to come my way because Solomon said who could possibly do this apart from God. Solomon acknowledged that and asked for that at the very beginning. Solomon wants to get us to think. That shouldn't be that high of a bar to get us to think. It should not be too high of a standard. It shouldn't be that radical or that difficult to get us to think about the issues of life that we're pressed into. But tragically too many Christians don't have a Biblical worldview. They don't know how to apply the wisdom of God to the issues of life because they don't know the Word of God. They don't know the wisdom of God. How can you possibly have a Biblical worldview if you don't know the very things that he talks about beginning at verse 3? "To receive instruction in wise dealing in righteous, justice and equity, to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth; let the wise hear and increase in learning and the one who understands obtain guidance."

I remember back in 1987 philosopher Alan Bloom wrote a book called the *Closing of the American Mind*. A lot of you weren't even born in 1987, but this man who made no claim to faith in terms of his worldview, wrote this book. The subtitle of that book was *How Higher Education Has Failed and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*. What do you think is going on 33 years later if in 1987 a philosopher could say of higher education in America that it is failing and impoverishing the souls of today's students? And we keep sending our best and our brightest into these places and then we're surprised when they come out and they're impoverished in their soul. They have no idea what a Biblical worldview is. He wants us to engage the issues of our day from a Biblical perspective.

David Wells in the 90s wrote from the Christian perspective about this very thing. He said in one of his books titled *No Place for Truth* Christians don't want to think. His follow-up book to that was *God in the Wasteland*. What happens when the church abdicates its rightful place of stepping into the wisdom of God and developing moral discernment for the issues of life and having a Biblical worldview? The answer to that question is all around us. It's all through the church. It seems that even in the church we're trying to get more "woke" than we could ever imagine. At some point we need to

wake up to the fact and the reality that we're not going to find any of those answers apart from this book and in particular this wonderful expression of God's wisdom.

I've spoken for many, many years about my appreciation of a man like Francis Schaeffer who did that in my mind. He took the truth of God's Word and the issues of our day and he brought them together. Os Guinness has done that. I think today Albert Mohler, Tim Keller, Elizabeth Elliott are people who understand and are discerning and give to us the wisdom of God for the issues of our day. Verse 5 speaks to that. "Let the wise hear and increase in learning and the one who understands obtain guidance." That's for all of us.

Now the theme of the book was chapter 1 verse 7: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." For the rest of the book, we find two people two very different people. They couldn't be more strong in their contrast as to how they look at life and how they live life. The first are those who fear God and walk in the way of the wise. If you think of Proverbs as being the foundation for moral discernment and the foundation for a Biblical worldview, then Proverbs 1:7 is like the cornerstone. It's the marker that gets everything aligned and going as it's intended. Proverbs 1:7 is that for us. The wise person fears the Lord. The wise person has a reverence and awe of God. The wise person understands that there is a sovereign Lord who governs the universe and all things within it and literally fears the Lord, reverences this God and walks in obedience to His Lordship.

On the other hand, we have somebody who despises the wisdom of God. It's called the way of the fool. We see it all through Proverbs. They see the truth. They hear the truth. They turn from the truth. They reject the truth and don't want anything to do with the truth. Remember in Proverbs, we talked about this word "fool" being on a continuum. You have those who are foolish in that they are naïve. They're just unlearned at this point. But you also have on the other end of that spectrum of the fool those who are arrogant, defiant, and who stand against and oppose the wisdom of God and the moral discernment that this wisdom brings and this Biblical worldview that is pressed upon us when we give ourselves over to this truth.

The outline of the book unfolds those two characteristics. The first nine chapters is the teaching of parents to their children. I love this section of Proverbs. You have 10

different messages in which you see the passion and the heart of these parents for their children. Each of them begins as we note in verse 8: "Hear, my son, your father's instruction and do not perceive your mother's teaching." Or it could be hear, my daughter, your father's instruction and forsake not your mother's teaching. That's what is going on here. We have these 10 messages in which they are pleading with their children and they're giving this exhortation to godliness. You can just hear in the words of these parents the passion, the concern, the desire they have for their children. They know what the world is like. They know the world their children are stepping into. They couldn't bring any more energy, any more commitment, any more passion than you can imagine in these opening nine chapters as we went through them.

The context of the setting of these is the home. It's the home. The church can supplement. The church better be supplementing, but it's only supplementing. It's not up to the church to raise your children. It is not possible for the church to step into all of the areas of life that your children need the guidance of this wisdom. A Christian school can't do that. They can supplement, but we know from Proverbs that these parents understand that it is in the home where the heart makes up its mind. It's the home that has this impact on the lives of these children. Verse 1 of chapter 2 is representative: "My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding; if you see like silver and search for hidden treasures." And he just goes on and on to press into his child's life and heart and mind the great value of the wisdom of God and of the Word of God. It is that responsibility that God gives parents.

Where does that begin? It begins with every parent knowing this Word themselves. It doesn't matter how much farther ahead you are than your children. Maybe you say I'm very young in the faith myself. Well, just stay a step ahead. When it's your responsibility as a parent to step into and to appropriate this truth so that you can pass it on to your children, to live out this Word that is to be transformative in the lives of your children because we're looking for heart change in the lives of our kids. We're not looking for external conformity. We're not wanting our kids just to look good to other people's. If that's what we're doing, then we should stop now because it's the heart that

the Holy Spirit wants. It is the transformation of the mind that God's wisdom and truth is pressing into, not just so that we look a certain way to other people. Fathers and mothers, your children are learning about God from you. They're learning about God from you. They're watching your life every day. They're drawing conclusions about this God that you talk about, whether occasionally or often. They're watching you to see what the impact is on your life. They're looking at you, husbands and wives, moms and dads, and they're drawing conclusions about marriage. They're learning from you what this thing called marriage looks like. My question to myself and to all of us is do I want my kids to be a husband like I am? Do I want my kids to be a dad like I am? Nobody's perfect and we're all strugglers, but there's a big difference between acknowledging that we're not perfect and giving no evidence of even trying. What kind of conclusions are your daughters drawing, mom, from your life as a wife, as a mother? You see, the home is where life makes up its mind. The church. They're learning about the church from you. What they hear you say, how you talk about it, how often you're here. There is a great article by the way at the welcome booth. A great article entitled "Church Should be your Excuse for Missing Everything Else". Yeah, and I'll just step into it. If you give yourself and your family to sports the way our culture wants you to, you won't be here very much. Don't try to persuade your kids as to how important Jesus is in your life when you don't obey the very things that He calls us to do. Don't try to convince your kids of the passion you have for church and for the body life and the transformation that God wants to do in this place week to week if you're never here. They're learning something from you about what you value and the list goes on.

Chapters 10 through 31 is the teaching of the king. The teaching of the king to the people. You see that in chapter 10 and verse 1. These are the things that we think of when we think of Proverbs. "A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother." When we think of Proverbs we often think of these short, picturesque, pithy, easy to remember and understand statements. They are fundamental and foundational truths for all kinds of things in life. That first Sunday we looked at all the topics that are covered in Proverbs. There was a whole page full of them. We didn't cover all of them but we did a whole bunch of them. That is what

Proverbs does. It's the king stepping in to the lives of the people and he's saying this is the wisdom of God about these things.

The context and the setting is the palace. You have the personal side of it in the home and then you have the public side of it in the palace. Proverbs touches both of those. Where we work, where we play, where we go to school. In all of those things, this wisdom of God, this moral discernment, this ability and capacity to see what is right and what's wrong, what's good and what's bad, what's even better and best, and to develop this Biblical worldview. It is all there for us.

All of it has as its intended goal character development in our lives. I'm going to take the last 10 or so minutes and we're going to look at a character quality from Proverbs as we wrap up. This character quality I think is one that stands out and it's the one that I think carries the day. Let's look at this one essential character quality of the wise. It is humility. It's humility. It's nothing less than a radical reorientation for how it is that I am to look at life. It has been said that pride is our greatest enemy and humility is our greatest friend. Think about that. Pride is our greatest enemy and humility is our greatest friend. The message of the Bible speaks to that. The book of Proverbs speaks to that. Jesus spoke to that. He said whoever exalts himself is going to be humbled. Whoever humbles himself is going to be exalted. He said the greatest among you is the servant of all. Peter said God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. If there was only one verse in the Bible about humility that verse by itself would scare me. God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. That's the theme of this book of Proverbs. Proverbs 1:7 – the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

That is a proud heart. Don't correct me. I know it all, just ask me and I'll tell you. Proverbs 22:4 – “The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life.” The fear of the Lord is a spirit of humility, not the spirit of our times. The spirit of our times is anything but that. That's why this is a radical transformation and a radical reorientation. In Proverbs it's the Lord who is the beginning point, not ourselves. We're living in a culture that is consumed with self. Everything it seems that we look at in our world and our culture today is looked at through the lens of self. How do I benefit? What are my rights in this? What do I get out of this? What about me? Proverbs sets the

cornerstone. It realigns and reorients us to a whole different way of looking at life. We are called not to be consumed with self. We're called to be consumed with Christ. That's who we are to be consumed by.

Why does it matter? Proverbs 28 and verse 14 answers that for us: "Blessed is the one who fears the Lord always but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity." I want you to notice that verse notice the word fear. "Blessed is the one who fears the Lord always..." That's a different word for fear than we have in Proverbs 1:7. Here this word is much more intense in its meaning and it literally is the idea of someone shaking, of someone who is trembling. It is the exact opposite of someone who has got some kind of a flippant attitude, kind of a who cares type of spirit, who is hard hearted. This is a person who certainly is in reverence and awe of God to the point this word says of just trembling before Him when we consider who He is. Blessed he says. Blessed in that verse. Blessed is the one. It is speaking of what happens in our life when we welcome these truths into our life. In Proverbs 29 and verse 23 says, "One's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor." Then in 18:12: "Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor." Why does it matter? Listen. Here is a prayer that God will never refuse. Father, keep me in your humility. Keep me low before you where I belong. We pray that prayer every day. God will honor that prayer in our life. Humility is the safest place that any of us can be. This is a radical reorientation because we do not naturally even see our pride. Proverbs 16:2 says all the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes. That is to say we can look at ourselves and we can say I don't think I have a problem with pride. I think I've got this. It's the Lord then, the rest of the verse says, who discerns the heart. It's the Lord who weighs the heart. It's like the guy who said you have no idea what a poor opinion I have of myself and how little I deserve it.

Let's look at this last point. What does humility look like? We know what it is. We know why it's important. How do we know if it's in our life? I'm going to give you three things. The first one is a humble person values the Word of God. Values the Word of God. Takes us right where we started in chapter 1 verse 7. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." Every time you open your Bible, we should be saying this is God speaking His truth to me. This is God speaking His truth to me. Even if I don't

understand it, I'm not going to dismiss it. Even if I do understand it but I don't like it, I'm going to submit to it. I read a great article this week about this very matter of reading God's Word and just a little thing you can think through as you open your Bible. It is called IOUS. You begin by saying simply incline my heart. This is our prayer. Incline my heart to Your testimonies and not my selfish gain. Open my eyes to see wondrous things. Unite my heart to fear Your name. satisfy us in the morning with Your steadfast love. So we have a heart for God's Word. We value God's Word. This is God speaking His truth into my life.

Secondly, if we have that, then most likely we're going to be teachable. Always teachable. So important. It is the Word that gives a life giving response. The Word gives a life-giving reproof. The Word gives life-giving correction. Like Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16, all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and it's profitable for teaching. It's profitable for reproof. It is profitable for correction in righteousness that the man and woman of God can be properly equipped. So if it's profitable in that, it teaches us. That's the whole point. Moral discernment. Biblical worldview. It is profitable in that it reproves us, that is it convicts us of sin. If you're opening your Bible every day and there's no reproof coming into your life...I don't know how to finish that sentence. If you're opening your Bible every day, there is going to be correction coming into your life. That's what the Holy Spirit does every day when we open our heart to this Word.

Who loves reproof? Who loves correction? The wise person. The wise person. The wise person welcomes reproof. The wise person welcomes correction. The wise person welcomes teaching. Every one of us is accountable. We're accountable to each other in the body of Christ. We're accountable within our families. We're accountable with close friends. There is accountability within the body of Christ. Somebody needs to be able to step into your life and tell you the truth. I hope that we all have that person in our life. But the Word of God is going to be at the head of that line. The Holy Spirit is going to be right there with that truth. If we have a humble heart and if we value the Word of God, then we're going to welcome that Word into our life. We are going to be teachable in our spirit.

Thirdly, we're going to be sensitive to sin. These things just all dovetail together. They all go together. You can't isolate one of these from the other. Proverbs 28:13 says

“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.” There's no cover-up in our relationship to God. How foolish would that be? He knows our thoughts before we think them. We might fool others but we can't fool God. So there's no point in even trying to fool each other. Let's be open and honest and transparent before each other. Let's be sensitive to sin. Let's confess our sin.

Here is the vital point. Let's confess our sin and not somebody else's. Listen to what Jonathan Edwards said: “Spiritual pride tends to speak of other person's sins with bitterness or with laughter and an error of contempt. But pure Christian humility rather tends either to be silent about these problems or to speak of them with grief and pity. Spiritual pride is very apt to suspect others, but a humble Christian is most guarded about himself. He is as suspicious of nothing in the world as he is of his own heart. The proud person is apt to find fault with other believers that they are low in grace and to be quick to note their deficiencies. But the humble Christian has so much to do at home and sees so much evil in his own heart and is so concerned about it that he is not apt to be very busy with other hearts. He is apt to esteem others in fact better than themselves.” Let me ask you. where are we going to find this kind of humility? Where are we going to find humility like this? We know the answer is in no one else other than the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ, who we have learned is the very embodiment of wisdom, is the one who shows to us and pictures for us humility. Jesus revealed it to us. He's the one who stepped down all the while we're trying to climb up. He's the one who was willing to go low all the while we're trying to find a way to get higher. He's the one who models for us what this humility looks like. He's the one, and this is the best part of all, He's the one who welcomes proud sinners and who offers us forgiveness and eternal life.

What do we take away? Wisdom is more than just knowing. It's living what we know. Let's be diligent to live what we have learned. Let's pray. Father God, in the quietness of these last moments of our time together, we pray for a powerful and strong work of Your Spirit, that we would be people of humility, that we would be people who are lovers of Your Word, that we would be people who are willing to listen and be teachable, and Father, that we would be quick to confess sin and to run from it. We

thank You that we have these moments to consider this great work of Christ on our behalf. So we pray that Your Spirit would speak personally and powerfully to each one of us. In Jesus's name, amen.