

## **Introduction** – When Wisdom Walks In the Room

Not too long ago I was preparing for ministry as a pastor, and I made a friend who was in the same circumstance. Neither of us knew what kind of situation we may end up in, and since we weren't currently pastoring a church, it was easy to "talk shop". We would go back and forth about how we would do things, and why, and what we each thought was best, but he always seemed to have the best of me. I admired him – his thoughts seemed to be much more worked out than mine. He seemed much more confident, and I assumed he would do really well in the future, even in difficult circumstances.

Perhaps 6 months into our friendship we both attended a church planter's conference in Denver, and it brought in church planters from all across the United States. When we walked into the hotel lobby with our bags I saw a gigantic guy sitting down looking at his phone. My friend told me he was a prominent church planter that was a board member of our denomination.

After a day's worth of seminars and meals, we all went back to the hotel and hung out in the lobby late into the night with a group of pastors. My friend sat next to that church planter. He started out talking jovially and confident, but the more that church planter would talk, the quiet my friend would get...until he stopped talking altogether and just listened curiously... almost in reverence for this church planter's wisdom...sitting their like a sponge trying to grab every word.

And then it struck me how much smaller he was than that church planter (not that physical size matters)...and then it made me think how much younger he was too....and it was almost as if he became smaller and younger the longer he sat there, until he seemed to be just a child in this church planter's presence.

## **When God Walks In the Room**

When wisdom walks into the room, it doesn't matter who's who and what we were all boasting about a minute earlier. When wisdom walks into the room, all the chatter comes to a hush and it seems we all become smaller and younger and simpler the longer we sit in the presence of wisdom.

And this is what happens to all humanity when God walks in the room. [Isaiah 46:9-10, ...I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come...](#)

God is all-knowing and most wise, but his knowledge and wisdom is in a different category than ours altogether. God's wisdom means he knows all things as they truly are...he knows the reasons everything began and the future results of every outcome.

If we were to think about receiving God's wisdom, we might think we would know where every road of life began and where every road of life leads. But this is not the case. Remember from the introduction to this sermon series: God is qualitatively different from us in every way, therefore, it is impossible to know anything (let alone everything) as God knows it. So what happens when we receive God's wisdom is not that we will know where every road of life began and where every road of life will lead, but rather, we will learn to drive well on the road we happen to be on.

[blank] So stand in awe of God's glory and draw near to him with curiosity, hoping to catch a glimpse of his wisdom...and remain curious the rest of your life, for as we will see, just when you think you have it, you will be duped...because life is much more complex than we often give it credit for...and such is the wisdom of God.

You may learn one facet of God's wisdom, and just when you think you have it, life dupes you and whatever progress of wisdom you thought you attained vanishes. So God's wisdom for us goes further still, layer by layer, depth upon depth, until we come to the end of our lives to (ironically) *forsake* all hope of mastering life, and instead find contentment in being considered a fool by the world so long as we know God and are known by him.

### **Three Voices of Wisdom**

The road of your life may have its straight-a-ways. It may boast a nice view from time to time. But it will certainly have its ascents and descents and twists and turns. Sometimes the road of your life will be smooth pavement, other times dirt, other times rubble. Worst of all, sometimes it may seem there is no more road at all – each way you turn there is nothing, and you don't know whether you should wander or just sit down.

So to teach us wisdom God has not given us one book to learn from but three. *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes*, and *Job* work together to teach us multiple dimensions of God's wisdom. **Main Idea:** Because God teaches us wisdom in multiple dimensions through his Word, we can find success (though life is fractured), experience joy (though life is vain), and know true comfort (though life ends).

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**Proverbs:** Life is usually conditional, so live curious of God's design and you will find success.

To find success we need to turn to the wisdom of *Proverbs*.

Though some people believe, "There's no rhyme or reason to life and success comes by freeing yourself of the so-called 'constructs' of the past," the wisdom of *Proverbs* shows us that despite the corruption of sin and the fallenness of man, God – in his common grace toward whole world – is upholding his creational design such that life still basically works the way he intended it at creation. Far from perfect? Oh yes. But still functional. Success does not always come as expected, but there are certain principles of life that lead one to success

under normal circumstances. And because the eternal God who created the world designed the structures of life which uphold it, the wisdom we find in *Proverbs* is truly timeless.

One valuable lesson I learned in the military was, "Don't wait to learn from your mistakes when you can just learn from the mistakes of others." In *Proverbs* we learn two paths of life, the path of the wise and the path of the fool. The topics covered in the book of *Proverbs* span over a wide range, from business and finance, to ethics and morals, to family relationships, to sex and marriage, how to win friends, when to keep quiet, and much more.

The wisdom of *Proverbs* says, "Life is usually conditional, so live curious of God's design and you will find success."

Life may seem mad at times, but there is a method to the madness. And when people who were once frustrated by life begin to find peace and success and happiness, it is often because they've discovered something of this creational fabric for how God designed the world to work (whether or not they realize they are living according to biblical principles). They stopped, considered life, and made adjustments.

Now it is easy to read *Proverbs* as if it were law and promise: "If you do this, then this will happen", but *Proverbs* is not in that business exactly. Rather it is meant to help us develop a godly intuition for different situations in life so that we might know the difference between a wise choice and a foolish choice according to the particular circumstance in front of us at that time. e.g. *Proverbs* 26 <sup>4</sup>[Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you yourself will be just like him.](#) <sup>5</sup>[Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.](#) You won't always find a simple solution, but wisdom will lead you to choose a good path for that moment.

- **Invitation to Wisdom**

*Do you believe your life is controlled by "random misfortune"? and as you do...do you keep blaming everyone and everything except yourself? The wisdom of *Proverbs* gives us a dose of humility. When reading *Proverbs* we come to realize, "All this time I considered myself to be the wise one in this world, but when I meditated on God's wisdom in *Proverbs*, I saw more often than not I was the fool he was speaking about."*

Never think you know it all about anything. "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (Pr 16:18). Instead, observe life curious of God's design and you will find success because God's wisdom is what makes the world go 'round.

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**Ecclesiastes:** Life is sometimes inexplicable, so enjoy your life as a gift from God.

[The Wisdom of *Ecclesiastes*]: But God's wisdom for us goes deeper still...for how many stories are there of people who assumed to have "mastered" life, and gained great

prominence and wealth and notoriety, only to lose it all because they couldn't maintain their personal relationships...being left alone they realized how much more there was to life than success. Or how many have we seen who were righteous and got what the wicked deserved, or were wicked and got what the righteous deserved (Eccl. 8:14)?

When Ecclesiastes hears Proverbs talking about how life works, it replies, "Yes...life is usually conditional but it is sometimes inexplicable..." Sometimes the pains of life seem pointless and make no sense. The main word of Ecclesiastes is הַבָּל, which is often translated "vanity," and it happened to be the name of Adam and Eve's son, Abel. Able gave the proper offering to God, and thus deserved blessing and life. Yet Abel was murdered because of Cain's jealousy.

Eccl 7:15, [In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: the righteous perishing in their righteousness, and the wicked living long in their wickedness.](#)

This is vanity. This is futility. This is absurd. It makes no sense. This type of outcome in life completely stuns us, leaving us without any idea how to respond. We may have found success, but life is sometimes inexplicable, so we need the wisdom of God to know how to experience joy.

[blank] [story] lying with crying kids in bed, stuck, as a dad of two young kids, I often think of my "gift" in life as sitting alone in my rocking chair eating a my croissant and reading a book. But the author of *Ecclesiastes* comes beside me to say no, actually, the things keeping you away from that gift is the real gift. You've heard it said, "Life is a gift." But it's even more specific than that. "The life you *have* is a gift."

[...to accept your lot and be happy in your toil –this is a gift of God](#) (Eccl 5:19). Life is sometimes inexplicable, so enjoy your lot in life for *that itself* is a gift from God.

*Really? So you're telling me my friend who is always telling me to lighten up and kick back is right after all? ...Yea...pretty much. Here's why:...because looming over everyone of our lives is the reality of death. (This is the primary stream running through the book of Ecclesiastes). Yet this isn't a bad thing. No, not at all. In fact, Ecclesiastes speaks so much about death because perhaps the best way to radically improve your life is to live life in view of your death...to be humbly aware that death is on its way.*

Just think what happens to middle-aged people when the doctor calls them in and says, "You have less than 3 years left to live. There's nothing we can do. We recommend forgoing treatment altogether and enjoying what you have left." What happens to those people? It sobers them up, and their life completely changes. They start to see everything in new ways. They begin to live with gratitude for things they always used to overlook. They aren't nearly as frustrated by little things in life like before. They pick up that hobby that's been sitting

unfinished in the garage. They reach out to people that have always been on their mind but kept slipping away.

Here's some news for you and me who sit here today without giving our death a second thought. Among human beings, there is a 100% death rate. Every single one of us has this diagnosis. We're going to die. It's not worth getting treatment for it. So why not let that diagnosis sober us up a bit too, to help us live life more meaningfully...to help us just enjoy what you have left?

- **Invitation to Wisdom**

[blank] God's wisdom is beckoning us to see beyond life itself. Pursue a prosperous life according to God's design, but don't be idealistic and naive, for that will only make you bitter in the end. Enjoy the lot you have in life, because that itself is your gift from God.

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## **Job**

But we need to go further still, because though some find success in life and some are content in joy, others are robbed of both. To the third voice of wisdom, the book of *Job*.

Some believe, "The ebb and flow of life is kept stable by a universal force (e.g. karma). [So, you can essentially control life by maintaining that balance]. Like attracts like. If you put out positive energy ("good vibes"), it will come back to you. And if there is an outstanding balance, it will all be reconciled in the end." The wisdom of *Job* says, "Let me know how that works out for you..."

- **God's Wisdom**

By all accounts *Job* did everything right. We read this in the first five verses of the book. He was wise and prosperous, he raised his children well, *and* he feared the Lord. But it seemed his righteousness and wisdom only increased how troubled he became after calamity upon calamity struck him and everything was taken away. *Job's* story (and other's like his) show us that though life is usually conditional and sometimes inexplicable, it is always beyond our control.

Through the bulk of the book we read of *Job's* friends who each come to console him and offer advice. *Job* eventually gives his own reply and tries to make sense of his misery. But then the Lord walks in the room (so to speak) and all the chatter comes to a hush. Let me read some of it you (from *Job* 38-42): [blank]

Then the Lord spoke to *Job* out of the storm. He said: <sup>2</sup> "Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? <sup>3</sup> Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. <sup>4</sup> "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell

me, if you understand...<sup>18</sup> Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth? Tell me, if you know all this. <sup>19</sup> "What is the way to the abode of light? And where does darkness reside? <sup>20</sup> Can you take them to their places? Do you know the paths to their dwellings? <sup>21</sup> Surely you know, for you were already born! You have lived so many years!...<sup>30:19</sup> "Do you give the horse its strength or clothe its neck with a flowing mane? <sup>20</sup> Do you make it leap like a locust, striking terror with its proud snorting?...<sup>40:2</sup> "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!"

<sup>42:1</sup> Then Job replied to the Lord: <sup>2</sup> "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. <sup>3</sup> You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. <sup>4</sup> "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' <sup>5</sup> My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. <sup>6</sup> Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

In the end the Lord rebukes all of Job's counselors, but as for Job, he draws him near to himself, for although Job knew nothing of the Lord's glory, he feared the Lord and refused to accuse him of wrongdoing, and that was enough.

There is something of more value in life than merely finding a wisdom which leads us to prosperity, or a wisdom which leads us to joy; it is finding a wisdom that leads us to know God so that despite trials, loss – and even personal doubt – we can know the comfort of hiding in him.

Life is always beyond our control...so find your ultimate comfort in knowing God. The Psalmist of Psalm 73 had a similar experience to Job. Go back again another time and see what changed his perspective.

- **Summary**

Though each book of wisdom gives us something distinct, do you know what all three books explicitly tell us to do? *Fear the Lord*. The book of Proverbs says "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Pr 1:7)...[and] the beginning of wisdom (Pr 9:10)." Ecclesiastes says (essentially) [*During your life, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do...*] **Fear God and keep his commandments...**(Ecc 12:13-14). Job began his life with the fear of the Lord, he lived his life with the fear of the Lord, and in the end that is where he rested.

We can't know God's wisdom as he knows it, but we can know *God* because he has made himself known. *So how is it that all you who are looking beyond life and all you who fear the Lord can come near to know this God and hide in him?*

This leads us right to Jesus, who is himself “the wisdom of God.”

[Christ in *Proverbs*]

The Apostle John writes that Jesus is God and was with God in the beginning creating the world, and when we hear *that*, we’re reminded of the wisdom of God in Proverbs 8 which created the world. In his life on earth, Jesus was the *embodiment* of God’s wisdom found in *Proverbs*. He displayed perfect wisdom in every circumstance. For example, sometimes he answered his accusers and put them in their place, while other times he remained silent and let them spout off in ignorance. In debates with the religious leaders of his day, they argued the law with perfect accuracy, yet Jesus could still expose the logical flaws hiding within their hearts. Truly “...one greater than Solomon is here...(Lk 11:31).”

[Christ in *Ecclesiastes*]

Likewise Jesus was the embodiment of God’s wisdom found in *Ecclesiastes*. Listen to how David Gibson puts it in his fantastic little book on *Ecclesiastes* titled, *Living Life Backward*.

“Jesus literally ate his way through the Gospels<sup>1</sup> The sheer number of times Jesus and food are mentioned together is quite staggering. The reason is that he is the ultimate Preacher, the true wise man; he is the embodiment and fulfillment of the vision of life that the Preacher in Ecclesiastes has been holding out to us – God’s good world is there to be enjoyed in relationship with others, and we eat and drink together now in anticipation of our feasting together then...” (116).

[Christ in *Job*]

...Yet...despite Jesus’ enteral wisdom displayed both in synagogue debates and joy-filled meals with his friends, he embodied the wisdom found in *Job*, for though he was spotless as a lamb he was shamed and ridiculed in public, he was betrayed by a friend, abandoned by the others, and the reward life gave him for all his toil was death on a cross.

But it is precisely at this point we see the wisdom of God displayed most glorious...for Jesus’ seemingly futile life was the means by which he would be vindicated by God, raised from the dead in glory, and redeem the fallen and fractured world he created. Jesus was sent by God for this very purpose...to take on a true humanity, endure life under the sun as everyone does, and suffer unjustly by dying on a cross in order to serve as a substitute in our place before the judgement of God.

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<sup>1</sup> David Ford as cited by David Gibson, *Living Life Backwards*, 116.

Jesus endured the futility of life in order to raise us up in newness of life. We all have sinned and willfully fallen short of God's glory, but in God's own love and grace, he sent Christ to take our place...and in his profound wisdom he commandeered the vanities of life to serve his saving purposes.

The Apostles of the New Testament tell us when we hide in Christ, we are filled with "...the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him..." (Eph 1:17, Col 1:9-10).

*What is this wisdom given to us in Christ?* It is foolishness in the eyes of the world, mind you – but this wisdom calls us to acknowledge our sin and rebellion against God and fall on his grace, to cling to a crucified Savior whose death is what saves, and to consider all our attempts at self-righteousness as garbage in comparison to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus (Php 2).

1 Corinthians 1:20-24, <sup>20</sup>Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup>For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup>Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, <sup>23</sup>but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup>but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

People *expect* me to believe this because I am a pastor and a preacher. But when people like you – non-clergy – the everyday mothers and fathers and painters and teachers – when *you* believe this and live for God and follow Jesus, I know that I am sending you out to look like a fool in the eyes of the world. But you can take heart in this gospel, for it is the wisdom of God.

Fix your eyes on Christ...who for your sake became as a fool before the world he created...fix your eyes on him, for God raised him from the dead and crowned him with glory. And though the world may likewise consider you a fool for following after someone like Jesus, take heart, for you will be raised with him too...and all the chatter will come to an eternal hush.

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose" (Jim Eliot). Behold the wisdom of God, and hide yourself in Christ.