

Wisdom... that is seeing the world as God's sees it enables us to delight and rejoice, even in and with sinful people like you and me. Wisdom, it is for everyone. Wisdom is to view the world through the God who is revealed in Christ. Wisdom reminds us of what are valuable and right actions. Wisdom restores our joy in this world and in others.

So how do we get wisdom? James writes it this way. If anyone lacks wisdom, they should ask God, who would give generously to all without finding fault. God wants to grant us wisdom if we will simply receive it. Notice here in Proverbs 8, Wisdom says it comes by listening, watching daily and waiting at my doorway. In other words, wisdom comes by the daily discipline of turning and listening to God.

In fact, wisdom says this is a choice we must make. Do you want life and the favor of God... ask for wisdom. If you fail to do so, you harm yourself and you love death not life. In other words, choosing to follow God's wisdom is the difference between real life and a false life.

The Lord grants us wisdom to live a life that really matters. That matters not just now, but for eternity.

Our prayer must be the prayer of Harry Emerson Fosdick's hymn "Grant us wisdom, Grant Us Courage for the Facing of this Hour."



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God, Give Us Wisdom

Proverbs 8

TRINITY PULPIT

In 1930 the powerful prayer hymn "God of Grace and God of Glory" was penned by Harry Emerson Fosdick. Fosdick was both highly acclaimed and also controversial in his day. He was a gifted preacher and leader. In 1903 Fosdick was ordained as a Baptist minister and served as a pastor of a church in New Jersey. During World War I he served as a chaplain. After the war, he became the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of New York City. However there was a very prominent and wealthy Baptist by the name of John D. Rockefeller who wanted Fosdick to come and be the pastor of the Park Avenue Baptist Church. Fosdick refused, in part because of Rockefeller's wealth and in part because Park Avenue Baptist Church was too swank. Rockefeller didn't give up, though, and finally persuaded Fosdick to be the pastor of a new church that he would build in a more modest area near Harlem -- Riverside Church. After gaining a number of concessions, Fosdick finally agreed. On the first day of worship in the new church, this hymn was sung as the processional hymn.

This hymn is a prayer -- a prayer for God to bestow power upon the church -- and wisdom -- and courage "for the facing of this hour." The question is, what was this hour? The hour that Fosdick and the congregation faced was the great depression. Fosdick would preach a message of care for the poor from one of the wealthiest pulpits and would preach a message of hope and action in a time when there seemed to be no hope. If you listen closely to the words of the hymn it is obvious what issues faced the church. There was war. The hymn asks God to cure His children from warring madness. There was selfishness. The hymn cries out shame our wanton selfish gladness rich in things and poor in soul. There was the real sense of evil. Evil that took the form of fear and bound the church from action.

In this difficult hour, Fosdick penned those repeating words in the hymn "Grant us wisdom and Grant us courage for the facing of this hour."

I think it is true that every hour the church is in need of wisdom and courage. Fosdick's day was different than our day and yet, the prayer remains the same "grant us wisdom and grant us courage for the facing of this hour." The hymn itself recognizes a need. We need wisdom and courage. The hymn recognizes a source. The source of wisdom and courage is God. The hymn is engaged in the everydayness of the world. Grant wisdom and courage for this hour. In other words, we need wisdom and courage for our daily living.

In Proverbs 8 we find these words about wisdom. "Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice?" The Proverbs are mainly attributed to Solomon, but there are other authors here as well. The Proverbs are known as a wisdom book. It is for us to know wisdom and to apply wisdom in our lives. Proverbs 8 describes wisdom in a unique way.

When we think of wisdom we might think of intelligence. Intelligence meaning the knowledge of material or facts or information. However, wisdom is much more than the knowledge of information. There of course is the new measurement of intelligence we call EQ instead of IQ. EQ is someone's emotional intelligence. The ability for someone to "feel" and "understand self and others through emotional intelligence." However, Biblical wisdom is all of this and so much more. Wisdom that comes from God is just that "Godly wisdom."

Here in Proverbs 8, Wisdom is personified as Sophia. The term is a feminine term and we are reminded that although God does not have gender as we think gender, the names and verbs used to describe God do have gender indications. The Holy Spirit, along with wisdom, is normally a feminine gender word in Hebrew and Aramaic. However, the word for Spirit in Greek is gender neutral. Many times the Bible will use masculine pronouns to describe the Spirit, even when the word for Spirit is a feminine noun. Interestingly, here in Proverbs the feminine noun and pronoun is used to describe the personification of Wisdom.

There are many who would argue that Wisdom

then is just another term to describe the Holy Spirit. Others would even suggest that it is a description of Christ, the second person of the Trinity. However, even here in Proverbs 8 this concept breaks down as Wisdom describes herself as the first of God's works. We believe God is expressed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and they are all an equal and eternal expression of God. Thus, neither Jesus nor the Spirit is a "work" of God. So, what are we to make of Wisdom?

It might be good to let the Bible speak for itself. Normally that is the best approach. Wisdom in Proverbs 8 is described in this manner. It is the first work of God. Before anything else in all of creation was created, God brought forth Wisdom. Wisdom then, we are told, became a co-creator with God. Wisdom also rejoiced in God's good creation.

The world was formed through God and God's wisdom, which is something that God brought forth. The point here, of course, is that there is nothing that existed before God. God chooses to even create wisdom. Everything originates with God. This Wisdom becomes essential for God's good creation and the joy of living.

If I were going to give you a simple definition for Wisdom, I would put it this way... Wisdom is knowing God, the character of God, and submission to God. Wisdom is rejoicing in what God is doing. Wisdom is to join God in what God is doing. What is promised by Wisdom in Proverbs 8?

First, we notice that Wisdom is available to all who will ask for it. Notice how the passage begins. Wisdom calls out. Understanding raises her voice. On the heights along the way where the paths meet, she takes her stand; beside the gates leading to the city at the entrance she cries aloud." In Proverbs 1 this idea is also found "she raises her voice in public squares; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out and in the gateways of the city she makes her speech."

What we are being told is that Wisdom is for everyone and Wisdom is for everyday living. Wisdom is not found in the Temple, or the Courts, or the just the place of instruction. It is not just in certain classrooms or for certain people who might even be described as privileged.

The promise is that Wisdom cries out to all people who will hear and listen. Wisdom is not just for certain setting but in the noisy streets, at the gates as you come and go through the day. Wisdom is for all people and for everyday life.

In fact, one writer puts it this way "we do not find wisdom as much as we respond to wisdom." Now to be sure there are several passages in Proverbs that calls us to seek wisdom. In the book of James we are told to ask God for wisdom and God will give it generously. So,

although there is a sense of seeking the idea is that it is not like a lost and found game or a game where God is hiding. Just the opposite, Wisdom calls out for us. We simply must respond and ask for it.

If Wisdom is a response to God, then how do we begin? In Proverbs 9:10 we are told that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom. Here, the fear of the Lord does not mean fear as we think of being afraid. The term means of course reverence, respect, and honor and indicates a turning to someone who is greater than us.

Wisdom begins when we begin to see the world as God sees the world. Much has been made in recent years around the term worldview. The argument is that everyone has a worldview, whether they know it or not. That is we all operate with some sort of conceived values about the world.

I like this definition of a worldview. A worldview is the framework from which we view reality and make sense of life and the world. "[It's] any ideology, philosophy, theology, movement or religion that provides an overarching approach to understanding God, the world and man's relations to God and the world," says David Noebel, author of Understanding the Times.

Whether conscious or subconscious, every person has some type of worldview. A personal worldview is a combination of all you believe to be true, and what you believe becomes the driving force behind every emotion, decision and action. Therefore, it affects your response to every area of life: from philosophy to science, theology and anthropology to economics, law, politics, art and social order — everything.

What, then is a Biblical or Christian worldview? It is to live life with the understanding that God is God and thus, all things must be understood through the perspective that God is God and we are God's creation. Thus, Wisdom begins at this point. We discover the Wisdom God has for us when we begin to view the world through the God that is revealed in the Bible through Jesus Christ. This is where Wisdom begins.

In his sermon "In the Beginning God" Randall Lolley comments "Genesis says "In the beginning God" and (New) man says "No, in the beginning me" Dr. Lolley goes on to write "As our own god you and I are a misconception."

Wisdom is for anyone and everyone and it begins when we turn to God. Wisdom comes to us when we begin to see the world created by God, belonging to God and headed ultimately to God.

Wisdom begins with a worldview where God is God.

Wisdom offers understanding. Wisdom calls out and understanding raises her voice. How does wisdom give us understanding? Here are the claims that Wisdom

makes in Proverbs 8. Wisdom gives us understanding of what truly is valuable in life.

Look at verses 10-11. Choose my instruction instead of silver and knowledge rather than pure gold. For wisdom is more precious than rubies and nothing you desire can compare to her. It echoes Jesus words of "what does it gain a person to gain the whole world and forfeit their soul in the process?" What is the most important pursuit in our lives? Is it the things of this world or to know God? Wisdom reminds us of what is valuable.

Wisdom gives us understanding to what is right and what is wrong when it comes to attitudes and actions. Wisdom dwells with prudence, knowledge and discretion. These are interesting words. The words prudence can mean, in bad sense, craftiness, but here it is used to describe sensible behavior. If you were here a few weeks ago we talked about how self-control of the Holy Spirit is sensible behavior. It describes a person who is not just ruled by passion and emotion, but by sound judgment and actions follow. The term discretion can also have an evil meaning in the Hebrew and can mean evil plans. However, here the word indicates careful behavior and clear thinking. The idea is that the person with wisdom lives a life that is careful and not reckless.

It is interesting that our culture is selling a whole other view of living. Who wants to live a "careful life"? That does not sound to exciting. The truth is we are tempted by a lie that says a reckless life is what brings happiness and meaning to life.

The term reckless actually means miss. The idea is the same place where we get the concept of the word sin. The term that means to miss the mark. Reckless living is missing the life God has for us. The lure of our culture is not to live a sensible, thoughtful life but to live being controlled by our passions, emotions, feelings, physical desires and not being controlled by the Holy Spirit. If we remember the story of the Prodigal Son who left his father and took his fortune and went to far off country we are told that he lived as he pleased and wasted his life on reckless living. Missing the mark. Becoming destitute, Jesus says of the young man he came to his senses. In other words, instead of reckless living he chose thoughtful living. He began to make choices not based on his own desires, but what he knew about the character of his loving and generous father.

Wisdom gives us understanding to what is valuable and what is worthy of our lives.

Here is one last great quality of Wisdom. Wisdom also gives us joy. The temptation is happiness and joy is found in the reckless living or living without Godly

wisdom. However, Wisdom claims something incredible in Proverbs 8. Wisdom says as a craftsman beside God "I was filled with delight day after day rejoicing in His presence, rejoicing in His whole world and delighting in mankind."

Wisdom is telling us that joy, real joy, is not found in the false promise of a reckless life. Real joy is found in participating in what God is doing. There are two words in these verses. There is rejoicing and there is delight. A life lived with Godly wisdom is filled with joy and delight. The rejoicing word is sometimes translated celebrating and delight is sometimes described as laughter. However, it is not childish laughter or celebration. It is laughter and celebration that erupts in our lives with the knowledge that we are participating in what God is doing. Not only do we find joy and delight in knowing we are being pleasing to God, but notice we also find a renewed joy and delight in God's creation. When we view God's creation with wisdom, we realize what an incredible gift it is to us. We find unspeakable joy in the sun, moon, stars, mountains, and oceans. We do not worship them and they do not become our gods, but instead they point us to a good and creating God and thus we rejoice and are delighted.

Even more so, we delight in humanity. Most of us would say, "I am with you wisdom until that moment. I can delight in creation but people. People make me crazy. People test my patience. Some people anger me. Some people just annoy me. Some people hate me and although I don't want to say hate in church, right now if you ask me once I get to the car, I will happily tell you of my hatred." Wisdom gives us the joy and delight in humanity? How can that be?

It is true because wisdom, Godly wisdom, teaches us to see others as God sees all of us. All of this language of creation is important in Proverbs 8. It calls us back to the place before sinful rebellion. It calls us back to why God created us all in the first place. We were created to rejoice and delight in God and God in us. Sin or disobedience has extinguished and silenced the rejoicing and laughing. However, wisdom takes us back to how things were intended to be. Wisdom takes us to the place where the relationship with God and humanity can once again be filled with rejoicing and delight. When God looks on us, God sees that intent and knows what once was and what can be. That is why out of love God sent Jesus to us. To reconcile us once and for all. God sent Jesus to restore the rejoicing and delight. God sees each person for who they can be in Christ. They can be a new creation and thus, be as it was in creation a relationship of joy and delight.

WISDOM IS TELLING US THAT JOY, REAL JOY, IS NOT FOUND IN THE FALSE PROMISE OF A RECKLESS LIFE. REAL JOY IS FOUND IN PARTICIPATING IN WHAT GOD IS DOING.