

Part 4: Finding the Path of Wisdom

Tyler Velin | Proverbs 2:1-22

October 4, 2020

We are working through a series on the book of Proverbs and we are discussing the theme of not just wisdom, but God's wisdom. I'm assuming that for many of us wisdom is attractive for all sorts of reasons, but one reason would have to be the ability to choose what is good and not what is dangerous.

But have you ever been in a situation where you know what not to do, but you wrestle with what you should do? This dilemma makes me think of the scene in the movie Princess Bride where two men are given two cups to choose from, one of which is supposed to contain poison.

The character Vizzini, surveys the cups and says to the hero: "Now, a clever man would put the poison into his own goblet, because he would know that only a great fool would reach for what he was given. I'm not a great fool, so I can clearly not choose the wine in front of you. But you must have known that I was not a great fool; you would have counted on it, so I clearly cannot choose the wine in front of me."

The author of Proverbs spent the majority of chapter one showing us all of the dangers of the poisoned cups. We know which ones not to drink, but how do we begin to choose which cup we will drink? Which decisions we will make? Or to use the metaphor we will see today, which path will we take?

Today the father in Proverbs continues his lecture by encouraging us as his children that God's wisdom does give us what we need to know to make wise and good decisions. He does this by showing clearly the wonder of wisdom's path. The big picture we are going to see today is: **The grace of wisdom leads us on safe paths and delivers us from danger.**

This passage has some really practical steps in it when it comes to how we walk in wisdom and what that looks like. We are going to see three key ways in which we will choose the good cup: First we will see that **The wise long for God**, then in the middle of this passage we are going to see that **The wise trust in God**, and lastly we will see that **The wise obey God**.

The book of Proverbs opened up with the slogan of the whole book: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, fools despise wisdom and instruction." That's Proverbs 1:7. But what followed this statement was a flurry of examples of how easy it is to not fear the Lord. It kind of leaves us, or at least it should, with the question: "What does it take to get this fear of the Lord?"

Proverbs 2 now begins to answer this question in verses 1-6 and here we see our first point: **The Wise Long for God.**

Read with me **Proverbs 2:1-6.**

So what do we see in this text? We see that none of us are born with the fear of the Lord. While the fear of the Lord is a huge idea, we've kind of boiled it down to a working definition that the fear of the Lord is a reverent reliance upon God.

And this text show us that we aren't born with that kind of relationship towards God. The actions words of this text show that no one passively and instinctively knows God like this. There's a gap between where our hearts begin and where this passage wants our hearts to end.

What might stand out to you are all the action words that seems to make up for this distance. But do you realize that this gap is not initially bridge by our unaided actions, but instead by God's grace. Did you see where it all started? "My son if you receive my words."

The quest for the fear of the Lord starts by God's grace of giving us his words. Without these words we cannot respond rightly but when God speaks he graciously gives us everything we need to respond.

Last week we were introduced to some foolish people who tried to seek God apart from grace. They sought him diligently, they looked for him intentionally but they never found him. Why? Because they looked for God everywhere except where God had already spoke to them.

But look at what the seekers in Proverbs 2 are really responding to: **Proverbs 2:1,6.**

If we really want to find wisdom, if we really want to fear the Lord, it starts by responding to all that God has spoken to us in his word. What is the content of the word and the commandments that is being assumed here? The Old Testament law.

That sounds less than exciting because we think of the law in terms of sterile commands. But what did the law and the commandments remind them of? That at one point we were God's people, but sin caused us to run from him. In their sin, Israel found themselves enslaved, but God kept his promise and brought them out of slavery. And as a wonderful gift God gave his children the law for two reasons: 1. That they might know which actions would again lead them out of safety and into slavery. And 2. That they might love God and experience his relational nearness by following him. The law was a reminder that God alone saves and that God alone can deliver you from slavery and bring into the immense satisfaction of knowing him.

The New Testament authors make it clear that Jesus is the fullness of this salvation the law promised. Paul calls the law, the commands of God in the Old Testament, a babysitter who watched over us till Christ came. The promise of deliverance now comes not through the grace of the law, but the greater grace of Jesus (Rom 8). John 1 says that Jesus was the true word of God which took on flesh to save us.

The summary of God's word to us is that we are desperately sinful and under punishment but God has promised to do something about it through Jesus Christ his son.

Now what do you do when you receive that message?

Look again at how this text is calling you to respond to the message received: **Proverbs 2:1-5.**

We see all these action words. What's literally being said is grasp my words, store up the commands, turn your ear, extend your heart, call out, yell, seek it, search for because if you do, then you will find the fear of the Lord.

When the Christian sees that in Jesus God has removed your punishment of sin by dying in your place and bringing you back into the wonderful relationship with God, they long at whatever cost to be nearer and nearer to that God.

This desire isn't rooted in a stoic duty or a romantic fear, but actually in a delight and desire. Did you see those heart words of storing up like treasure, seeking for God's salvation like silver, searching for it as hidden treasure?

God's word is meant to draw us closer to God in both duty and delight.

My wife and I have often talked about the lies we believe when our hearts don't feel this longing for God through his word. We often think that if scripture isn't doing its job to bring us closer to God then we should withdrawal ourselves from his word until we have a right affection for him.

But do you see how silly this idea is? Imagine if you were standing in a frozen wasteland and you found a fire. When you get in range of that fire you are warmed by its grace. But if you stop right when the heat hits you, there will come a point where your body will adjust to the heat and won't feel as warm anymore.

Now in that moment, when you begin to feel cold, how many of you look at that fire and decide the best option is to go back out into the cold so that you can come back and appreciate the heat? None of us! Instead what do we do? We move closer in to the fire. We with dangerous delight draw near.

Now if you feel convicted by your lack of relational fear of this God, here's the grace of this text, you can do it right now! Don't make the same mistake the fools made in chapter one, which is to be convicted by to resolve that conviction by your own effort. Instead respond to God's grace by drawing nearer to him through the grace offered in Jesus. If you start here, look at what God promises: **Proverbs 2:4-5**.

God will give you that fear!

Now this might sound trite and simplistic, but to have this fear is to have something profound happen. It places the whole of our lives under this wonderful reality of God and his plan to save us in Jesus. This new heat begins to change the way we view everything in this life.

To actually have this fear is to have your whole life reoriented, and to humbly submit yourself in every way to his wisdom and his words.

The father in this text so desperately wants you to have this right relationship with God because he knows this experience of finding the fear of God gives you wisdom for life's hard decisions. Look at what he says next: **Proverbs 2:6-7**.

Have you ever purchased a gift so great for someone that you struggle to keep that gift secret? Well that's the relationship God has towards all the gifts of wisdom he wants to give to his people.

He is storing up this wonderful insight for life desiring to shower Christians in it. He wants you to know the wonderfully profound ways in which this restored relationship with God actually changes our lives and gives us the skills we need to live.

And here the father introduces a metaphor which is carried throughout the rest of the chapter. That's the metaphor of walking on the path of wisdom. What does it look like to walk on this new path? **The Wise Trust in God**.

Read with me the wonderful reality which is painted in **Proverbs 2:7-11**.

Now the ESV translates the Hebrew noun in verse eight as "saints." Meaning those who are set apart by God. But what that word carries behind it is not only that they are set apart, but how they are set apart.

There's a very important Hebrew word and it's the word, "hesed." "Hesed" is God's covenant love. It's not just knowing that God is love, but knowing where you can faithfully place yourself to find God's protected and permanent love. The word here for "saints" is related to that word "hesed" and it means they are covenant partners in God's covenantal love. They are loyal to God because God has been loyal in his love to them. They are recipients of God's covenant love. To come to God by his word, is to be made a saint by God's covenant love for you in Jesus Christ.

And if you are a partner in this wonderful covenant by grace then this God does far more than love you at one moment in time, but he watches over your path.

We live in a world where security systems and digital doorbells offer the promise that someone is always watching over your things, but here the God of covenant love is watching over the path of his saints.

God promises to guard, to shield, and to watch over us. But have you considered that this passage actually tells us how he does that? What does it look like to actually trust in God in a moment?

That's really important isn't it?

Because if we are not careful we can understand this guiding and shielding love in a way that leads to passivity or in a way that leads to obsession.

We can, simply say: "God is watching over me," live our lives with little to no thought in our decisions. We passively trust God that whatever happens he's in control but we forget to remember that we also are responsible. It's the bumper lane bowling philosophy of life.

But then there's the other side where we understand our responsibility and we see that God has given us wisdom and expects us to make wise decisions. So when we encounter a moment of decision, we are not passive, but instead we want to think through every possible situation and every possible end so that we can know exhaustively and comprehensively what is the right and proper way forward. But this sort of obsession forgets the fact that you are not all wise and all knowing, God is. If you think that wisdom only comes when you can properly predict all the things, then you will be crushed by the weight of all your decisions.

But this text actually hold up a third way and that way is rooted in the transforming work that wisdom does in our hearts: **Proverbs 2:9-11**.

By God's grace, wisdom actually comes into our hearts and begins to change us. Wisdom doesn't solve all the problems of the mind, but it relieves the tension of the heart. And in this the knowledge of God will become pleasant, friendly to you. It is a real comfort.

This third way of walking in safety is not passive assumption or anxious obsession, but instead faithful reflection. How does God watch over us? By giving us discretion. How does God guard us? By giving us understanding.

What does this mean? It means that walking in wisdom is walking in a constant awareness that God always keeps his promises in the gospel. If God's wisdom is a reliance upon the God who saves us then walking in wisdom is considering every aspect of our lives through the lens of God salvation for us in Jesus.

Which means that the most practical question is not first, "What do I do?" But instead, "Whom do I trust?" Because if God has shown his faithfulness towards me in saving me through Jesus, then I no longer need to make decisions based in self-preservation or fear of man.

The path of righteousness and obedience might look at times dangerous, but when we consider the gospel we realize that God has already proven his trust worthiness. This path of wisdom doesn't always mean life is easy. In fact look at where this path might lead you: **Psalm 23:1-4**.

Life on this path might lead you to fearful places, but because we have seen the work of Jesus on the cross, that even when it seems everything is going wrong God is actively working for the good of his promise, we can still choose to rely on this God and continue to follow him.

Wisdom doesn't necessarily tell us what to do, but it tells us who we can trust. And when God's grace wins the battle of authority in our hearts, actions follow.

This is where we see our third point today: **The Wise Obey God**.

Not only does this wisdom give us an understanding of what it looks like to trust God's promise, but it also delivers us from the paths of danger.

This is seen in the deliverance from evil men and from the forbidden woman: **Proverbs 2:12-19**

My wife and I recently watched a documentary which presented a pretty depressing picture of how social media is destroying our world. They talked about the ways in which app designers are attacking the hardwired mechanisms of your brain with such accuracy that they are not only tempting you, but they are actually beginning to exercise control over behavior.

A handful of apostate developers talked about the ways in which we cannot escape the pull and effects of these compulsions, they are literally manipulating us to death.

Here the father in Proverbs highlights two threats with pervasive power: one threat is the evil men who want to turn you into a predator, consuming those around you for your own gain. The other is the tempting woman who wants to turn you into prey, pulling you down to the grave.

But this wisdom that God gives does something incredible it delivers us from these powerful forces. That word for deliver is literally to withdrawal. The fear of these tech-dissenters is that we might not be able to escape the power of social media. But here God's wisdom actually removes us from their power. It lifts us up and away from the paths which lead to death.

How does God deliver us from these? By changing our hearts in such a way that we see so clearly the foolishness of these two paths.

The great philosopher Dwight K. Schrute once said: "Whenever I'm about to do something, I think, 'Would an idiot do that?' And if they would, I do not do that thing."

Here God shows you the foolishness of forsaking the path of wisdom for the path of evil or lust, it's what only a fool would do.

That's what is assumed as the father closes this passage today: **Proverbs 2:20-22**.

It's obvious that you wouldn't go with evil men, it's obvious you won't be lead to the grave by the tempting woman, so instead what will you do? Walk in the way of the good, keep to the path of the righteous.

Brothers and sisters, do not think that in finding God's wisdom that we are not tempted. For wisdom is to us a shield and a guard. It assumes we are near to the evil man and the forbidden woman, but it also knows that because we have seen the promise of God in Jesus Christ, that we have been delivered from their effective power.

We no longer listen to the promise of others because we have seen the promise of God fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus went down to the grave for you. He took the death of these paths to deliver you from the debt of your sin and also to show you where all these paths lead: to death.

To walk in wisdom is to realize that it's only in following the path of God that we get the promise of life. The father here expresses this reality when he talks about "the land."

The land he's referring to is the Promised Land. The author of Hebrews expands this idea for all believers beyond a physical land to a spiritual one. Caught up in the reality of this land is the hope of heaven.

And those who follow the path of God, responding to his grace and relying upon his faithfulness, they will inherit this. They will get all the goodness forever. But those who forget God's goodness in Jesus Christ, those who do not fear the Lord, but fear the desires of the world or the opinions of man, they will not endure. That path doesn't lead to salvation it leads to judgment.

In 1869, John Wesley Powell led the first expedition through the Grand Canyon by means of the Colorado River. The river, unmapped, and unknown dictated the only way through the canyon.

The crew passed through dangerous rapids, and at times did the difficult work of having to slowly pack all the boats and equipment across the dangerous rocks on the side of the river. As the expedition moved on, three men refused to go on with General Powell, they felt the path too dangerous and the reward insufficient.

Two days later, General Powell and the remaining expedition reached the mouth of the Canyon and successfully received their reward. The other three men disappeared and were never seen again.

Choosing the path which leads to life is to choose the often hard and difficult path of righteousness in an unrighteous world. But the cross of Jesus is the sign we need to follow our leader with willing and

reverent obedience. We will not know at any point what lay behind each corner of our journey. But if we know the God who loves us, then we know for certain what stands at the end.

So let us long to be led by this King knowing that this path is the good path. Let us look to God's gracious word and see that in fearing and obeying this king, we receive the blessing of a wisdom which delivers and a grace which endures.