

Part 28: How (and Why) to Apply Wisdom

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We have reached a transition point in our study of the book of Proverbs this morning. So far we have encountered two distinct sections in our book and today we begin a third.

In Solomon's prologue we encountered his philosophy of wisdom. Chapters 1-9 showed us that wisdom is ultimately the fear of the Lord—relying on his perspective on the world and his prescription for the joyful and good life.

But then in Chapter 10, we encounter the Proverbs of Solomon where Solomon shifts from the philosophical to the practical. Here we encounter the snare drum of wisdom constantly beating individual anecdotes into our hearts. But at the center of this section, in chapter 16, is the spine of wisdom which shows that behind our need for wisdom, and our heart's desire, is the God who is King and made everything for his purpose.

Today we begin what is often called, "The Words of the Wise." In this portion Solomon returns to his prologue voice by speaking to us as if we are his student. He is introducing us once more to the wisdom which will follow. But you'll notice that today there is an eager excitement he possesses in his words. More than anything Solomon wants to prepare you not just to hear the wisdom which follows, but to apply it to your life and so be changed by it.

It is one thing for us to hear wisdom, but it is quite another thing to apply wisdom. In preparing our hearts today we are going to see two main points. First, we are going to look at **The Secret of Applying Wisdom**. In a world where it seems you can find wisdom everywhere what makes the Bible so distinct and how can it benefit us?

Then secondly, we are going to see **Three Rewards of Applying Wisdom**, where Solomon will share with us three wonderful graces which are ours for the taking if only we would apply God's word to our hearts.

To begin let us start by reading our passage together this morning: **Proverbs 22:17-21**.

So here we have our first point today, **The Secret of Applying Wisdom**. And as we spend time in this portion of scripture we will notice that there are two interrelated tips Solomon holds out for us.

Both of them meet nicely in the middle of this text. There are five verses here all of which are calling us to hear and to apply wisdom. But in the middle of this text is the piece of meat which Solomon wants us to chew on and that is verse 19 where he ties the giving of wisdom, and our application of it, to the Lord: **Proverbs 22:19**.

Whatever wisdom is given, whatever knowledge you are gaining, whatever words you are hearing is directly related to Yahweh, the God of the Bible. This is the first secret today: if you want to apply wisdom you must first **Have a God who speaks**.

It is Solomon who is writing to us here, it is Solomon who is taking the role of the proverbial father to us. Yet the wisdom of Solomon is not just the wisdom of Solomon, the wisdom of Solomon is the wisdom of God!

Do you know the story of how Solomon got his wisdom? Solomon was young when he became King. And in his youth he had this encounter with God: **1 Kings 3:5-14, 4:29-30**.

God gave Solomon wisdom as a gracious gift. Why? For the sake of Solomon's people, for the sake of God's people.

When Solomon is saying in verse 19, "You, even you, today, right now I'm giving you wisdom," what he's really doing is inviting you into a relationship with the God who speaks; a God who wants to be known.

I once knew someone who worked hard to find an apprenticeship in a trade field. It was one of those areas where unless you can find someone willing to train you, you couldn't really get into the industry. Well, this guy found someone, but the problem with his master was that he didn't want to share any of his knowledge.

He was pretty much used as human tool shelf who would just hand tools to the master when asked. The heart of the master limited the man's wisdom by not be willing to share much of it, and by not providing any chance for him to actually apply it.

This is not how the God of the Bible works. No one approached God and asked him to share himself or his wisdom with us. This is the wonder of worshipping a God who is Three in One, the Trinity. God in eternity past existed as Father, Son and Spirit and before the foundation of the world was ever laid, God was sharing himself and his wisdom amongst the Triune relationships.

But then this eternally satisfied, always sharing God did something astounding. He created the world and shared himself and his wisdom with humans made in his own image. And what is the first thing God did for his creation when he made them? He gave them wisdom so that they might be invited into his joyful work: **Genesis 2:15-17**.

If you know what happened next, you know that Adam and Eve didn't keep God's wisdom, they sinned and death followed. But God continued to speak and this is the hope for all of us who have ignored God. Look at how the Psalmist puts it **Psalms 115:5-9**. If you want wisdom, you already know that you must find it outside of yourself, and here is the God who speaks, and behind that speech is the assurance of your trust in God.

Don't you hear Solomon leading us back to God's wisdom? Look at all the words of invitation: incline your ear, apply your heart, I'm making them known to you today, even to you, I've written you thirty sayings, I'm making known to you what is right and true, I'm giving you answers for those who ask.

To desire wisdom in this world is to desire the God who speaks, to apply wisdom is to humbly submit ourselves in trust to the Lord.

If you doubt this, consider the crown jewel of God's spoken wisdom to us. **Hebrews 1:1-3a**.

Because God has shown his wisdom to us ultimately in Jesus Christ, where he solved the problem of our sin, we can then turn back into God's wisdom and find the same joy Solomon here finds.

Do you see why God shares himself with us in this text? If you wonder what is at the heart of God's communication, of God inviting us back to him through his wisdom in Jesus Christ consider Proverbs 22:18, "for it will be pleasant for you."

Solomon is pounding the table in excitement to bring us into a wisdom which trusts God because he wants you to have joy! Incredible joy that comes from knowing that the God who speaks and living our lives in submission to his Son and his wisdom.

That's the first secret of wisdom—realize there is one source and it is the God who graciously shares his wisdom with us so that we might participate in his relational work.

But now that we know wisdom is out there because God has graciously given it to us, what do we do with it?

This is Solomon's second point this morning: ***Have wisdom ready within you***

Read with me again, **Proverbs 22:17-19**.

So Solomon is about to give us wisdom, that is wisdom from God. But what do we do with this wisdom?

We don't just hear it with our ears, but Solomon says you apply it to your heart. What does that look like?

My wife and I are different people when it comes to studying. My wife generally takes a longer time to read, study and memorize. She is often frustrated with me because I will spend a fraction of the time and pass the same text or memorize our same Bible verse.

However, this leads to a problem. Despite the speed at which I was able to gain that information, my brain forgets it a day later. My wife, and her labor on the other hand, remembers it much longer than I.

Many of us approach God's wisdom like we are cramming for an exam. We know we need to read the information, we know we need to understand what the words and sentences mean when they are put together. But often as soon as we finish reading, we hit the stop watch, say done, and move on with our lives. To have read scripture, to have confessed the gospel is to have passed the test and now we need to turn somewhere else to find the wisdom we really want to apply.

But if you want to apply this wisdom to your life, you cannot treat it like an exam you are cramming for. Look at what Solomon says in **Proverbs 22:18**.

How will wisdom become pleasant to you? If you keep them within you. That Hebrew word for "within" is anatomical meaning your gut, or literally your womb. If you want God's wisdom to actually be of delight to you, you've got to get it inside of you, you've got to chew it, swallow it, let it sit in you.

But more than that, if you want that pleasantness of wisdom he says it needs to be ready on your lips.

That's to say wisdom is not only internalized, but when it's internalized it's often utilized.

It comes back out.

There is one show which my wife and I re-watch over and over again. We've seen the whole series multiple times. So much so you can rarely have either of us at a social event where we won't find some conversation or experience which reminds us of a scene from the show. It is ready on our lips, we don't really have to try to view life and find the parallels between the two.

Do you have anything like that in your life?

Well here, Solomon is calling us to have that kind of relationship with the pleasantness of God's wisdom.

Last summer we sat down as a staff and discussed what series we should do next with our church. We landed on Proverbs because in light of everything going on in our church and in our world we decided we needed help with wisdom.

It is an immense privilege to preach God's word and spend hours in study on whatever book we are preaching through. But more than any book I think I've ever preached, I have found myself longing for this relationship with the book of Proverbs.

I want it. I have seen its beauty. In the past year on a national level our church has had to deal with racial tensions reaching boiling points, the most tumultuous political cycle in recent history and a global pandemic. On a local level our church has had to deal with mask mandates, temporary homelessness, building projects and fundraising and church discipline issues.

And each week as I have been in the book of Proverbs I have found that God wants to help us navigate the messes of sin in this world. But more than that every time I realize that what might be wise is often what might be messiest, I am drawn to the cross of Jesus Christ where God solved the problem of the mess of sin in my own life in full.

I'm reminded that if God was faithful to me there in Jesus, then certainly he will be faithful to me here as well.

Brothers and sisters, are you willing to dive into the whole of God's word and place it deep in your gut. Will you do the work necessary to know it and have it ready on your lips?

Solomon is about to give us wisdom and he wants us not just to read it, but to work it deeply into our hearts.

So how do we begin to work this wisdom into our hearts? I'll give two examples quickly, first we first begin to see Jesus Christ as the crown jewel of God's wisdom.

Just as a toddler knows the shape of their favorite pacifier, just as a runner knows the comfort of their favorite shoe, just as you know the warmth of your closest friend, and know that none other will do, do you know the wisdom of Jesus Christ with such intimacy?

Can you recite to yourself the wisdom of the gospel? That when the world wars against your comfort, you remind yourself of the comfort of Jesus. When the devil attacks your standing before God, do you hide yourself in the righteousness of Jesus which makes us children of God?

If you can't trust God in Jesus Christ then there's no business trying to trust God anywhere else. If you do trust God in Jesus Christ, then it's only natural to trust him with everything else!

But secondly, we need to draw God's word deeper inside of us. In God's word, especially in the book of Proverbs, God has given us wisdom. What do your habits of Bible study look like? How can you move past cramming God's word in like you need to pass a test, verses eating God's word like it's honey?

If you struggle with either of these two issues I encourage you today to ask someone in this room for help! Meet with someone and ask for help. Read the Bible with someone and process it together!

Now our hearts are naturally bent towards legalism. Which means that many of us may feel burdened already with the idea that we have to work wisdom deeper into our lives. But what we actually see in this text is a continuation of the joys of worshiping a sharing God.

Even as Solomon is preparing us to apply our lives to his wisdom he holds out for us thee wonderful, soul delighting rewards in this process. This is our second point today: **Three Rewards of Applying Wisdom.**

First of all, as we have already touched on briefly, if we do the work of applying wisdom, ***Wisdom will become pleasant to you.***

Again, look back at **Proverbs 22:17-18.**

What you'll notice is that (and this is where the gospel is different than the prosperity gospel) Solomon doesn't say, listen to my knowledge and apply it and life will be pleasant for you. Instead he says "it" will be pleasant for you.

What is the "it"? The word and knowledge of God which we are going to apply to our hearts, our guts, and our lips.

Someone was talking to me the other day about wine collections. They said that most serious collectors have a wine in their cellar that is just a "show wine." In other words you don't actually drink it, you just bring it out and show it to people to impress them.

I wonder how many of us treat God's wisdom like this. We want to be wise, and we want others to think we are wise, so we learn to present the label of wisdom to others while never actually tasting it ourselves.

But the reality is, if we only keep the gospel for the sake of others without actually consuming it ourselves the gospel is never actually present to us. At least not in an internal way.

If you want God's word to become pleasant to you, you have to pop the cork and drink it for yourself.

There are things that God's word tells Christians to do which seem counter intuitive to our flesh, confessing our sins to others, giving sacrificially of our time and our finances, being content with less, being slow to speak. But the joy is that when we actually begin to practice what grace illuminates to our hearts we find that it is so deeply pleasing to us.

God's wisdom becomes pleasant not by sitting on our shelf but by dancing on our tongues.

But behind the pleasantness of wisdom applied is the promise that ***Wisdom will deepen your trust in God.***

Look at **Proverbs 22:18-19.**

Why does wisdom become pleasant to us? Why does Solomon offer you the promise of delight today, even you, even you who feels you have no hope at finding joy in this world? He does so in order that you might trust in the Lord.

Here is the wonderful beauty of how Solomon has set up this text so far. If you want to trust God more, enjoy him more.

That's the equation he's set up: listen to my words so that they will be pleasant with you so that your trust may be in the Lord.

God wins your trust by delighting your soul. He wins your trust by calling you to hard places and showing in those moments that he and he alone is sufficient to satisfy you.

This is also the pervasive joy of Christian wisdom. We can find tips for wise living everywhere, we can find science which makes sense of our reality. We can find ancient societies which have wisdom principles which sound the same as Solomon's but behind all of these truths is not a hope in wisdom itself, or science, or metaphysics. Behind all the revealed wisdom our creation is a call to come and trust the God of creation! Look at **Psalms 19:1-2.**

Anytime the sun rises in the morning you are reminded that God is faithful to do it again tomorrow. Does this trust in God cause you, for the sake of your joy, want to trust God more and more in the calls he gives to Jesus and to Christlikeness? Because at the bottom of every wise decision is the joy of finding God faithful.

Lastly, in applying wisdom we find that ***Wisdom instructs you and answers others.***

Proverbs 22:20-21.

Life in a broken world is not easy. Life in a broken world presents us with all sorts of difficult decisions. But as we practice and apply God's wisdom, we become better and better and discerning what is wise and what is true.

The more you walk in wisdom, the more intuitive trusting God becomes in your life. Just like learning how to ride a bike, the more comfortable you become, the easier it is to trust that leaning into the curves won't send you tumbling to the ground like you once thought it would. It will be hard and take

more effort to start seeing life through the fear of the Lord, but as we begin to do it we grow in our ability to see and act in what is right and true.

And as we live that out we are then able to answer those who sent us.

Solomon here is assuming that the person he is teaching is one who has been sent to him. It was common in this time for wisdom to be challenged by an examination of sorts.

We saw Solomon examined himself by the queen of Sheba. Egypt had a document very similar to these 30 Words of the Wise, but the Queen had heard that Solomon's wisdom was even better than that.

Here's the scene in **1 Kings 10:1-5**.

She came to question and left breathless.

In Jesus' ministry a group of John the Baptist's followers came to Jesus and they wondered if he was the Messiah. They were unsure if the shape of Jesus' ministry was the shape of ministry they were waiting for. It didn't match their expectations.

Not long after this examination Jesus said this to those who challenged him again: **Matthew 12:42**.

In other words, Jesus said that if the Queen of Sheba saw Solomon's glory and was left breathless, how much more should we be left breathless at the wisdom of Jesus which is greater than that of Solomon.

But just as those in Jesus' day didn't see his true identity, there will be people in our world who do not understand your life.

They will question why you live the way you live, and wisdom will give you a true answer to them.

Your life will show the watching world that everything Jesus promised, the very pleasure of God, is true, it is real, it is available today if only you too would incline your ear and hear the words of the wise.

This is where Proverbs started too isn't it? Look back at **Proverbs 1:2-3**.

What did we see here? We see that wisdom is received in order that wisdom might be given to the simple.

What we get from God in the wisdom of Jesus and in wise living is something meant to be shared with others as a witness to what is available for them too.

It is as Peter says in **1 Peter 3:13-15**.

Living out wisdom not only blesses us, but it stands as a witness to others. As God has shared his wisdom with us in the gospel, we then turn and share that same wisdom with those who are around us.

We have the privilege of speaking as Solomon did, "I have made this known to you today, even to you!"

The joy of applying wisdom is that we get to enjoy the pleasantness of the God who invites us into himself and we get to invite others into it as well.