

Discernment: It's what we really want

Proverbs 1:1-7
September 21, 2008

Intro:

- How many of us feel like we could use a little wisdom? With what sort of decisions or situations?

- The choices we make today. There are a lot!

Portfolio. Relationships. Jobs.

And the hard thing is, they seem to define us. Kind of like Albert Camus once said- Life is the sum of all your choices.

We begin a series of talks on making good choices, making them out of wisdom, and we're going to be looking at the book of Proverbs for some guidance. We'll be traversing all sorts of topics, from politics to sex to work and family.

Today, we begin our journey with the opening verses of the book, where it begins to whet our appetites and spell out some key basic points.

1. There is a life out there, one that God has designed, that is a life we all actually deeply want.

2. We can begin to experience this life if we can get some key things in order.

Let's explore this as we get started.

Real quick, though, before we jump in:

- Overall structure of the book is this: Ch. 1-9 (includes 14 segments), 10-31 (many individual statements, but still some groupings).

- This is the intro and so it will lay out the vision of the entire book, which I think is a vision of the life we all desire as well.

Read Text:

Two things: What is the life God is promising here in proverbs? How can we begin to experience it?

Four Ways to Describe the life God is promising here:

(As seen in the specific terms used in the passage)

A life lived well (v.2)

Both in skill and character

v.2- Wisdom (Hebrew *hokma*) is the general term that encompasses all other wisdom terms in the book. It refers to masterful understanding, skill, expertise. For example, it is used in other contexts for technical/artistic skills (Ex. 28:3, 31:16) and government (Ecc. 4:13, Jer. 50:35).

Instruction (Heb *musar*) is from the verb "admonish" or "correct." It points to a shaping of character.

"Understanding words of insight"- the words used speak of all the senses being used to gain understanding.

Ability to cope (v.3)

Give us the ability to respond to the world- the pressures, the injustice, etc.

v.3- Prudent behavior (Heb *haskel*)- from verb to act intelligently, to grasp the meaning of situation and make good decisions.

Right (Heb *sedeq*)- related to righteousness. Speaks of working for the good of all that is based in God's will for the world.

Just (Heb. *mispat*)- to restore what is right in a situation gone bad.

Fair (Heb. *mesarim*)- literally, comes from word that means to be straight (geometry). Not going astray from a morally fixed order.

Ability to make good plans (v.4-5)

Give us the ability to plan out certain aspects of life, whether we're young or old, new or seasoned in spirituality and life.

Simple- (Heb. *petaim*)- Naïve, but not foolish (that is another term). Capable of still being shaped for good or bad. Lacks sense, weak, easily seduced.

Young (Heb. *naar*)- those on the threshold of maturity, used of adolescents and those before the age of 30 (so Gen. 41:12), or those who are "immature."

v.4- Prudence (Heb. *orma*)- can have negative quality (cunning, Gen 3:1), but in Prov. used in positive way (eg. 8:12), referring to the ability to use effective and good tactics to achieve ones goals.

Knowledge- very general (sued of sex in Gen. 4:1), implies relationship with object known.

Discretion (Heb *mezimma*)- from meaning to think, plan, purpose. When used in negative way, means to plot, devise. When used positively, means discretion, resourcefulness.

v.5- Guidance (Heb *tahbulot*)- derived from word for rope and sea captain. Picture is of ropes guiding ship.

Ability to know God's plans (v.6)

Help understand the words of Proverbs, the Bible, God's will. Note v. 6.

Question: How many of you would like to experience this a little more? This is about living a life in a way that God intended it to be, a life well lived...

So how do we get started? Three Things...

Fear God

What this means- to put ourselves in the right position before him.

A few things to say about this:

This is, frankly, pretty humbling. I mean all of us, regardless of if we're Christian or not, have issues with putting ourselves in the right position with God. I mean one of the most basic ideas of Christianity is this: there is a God, and we are not Him. But so often we think the opposite! We run our lives, and make God follow us around. We all have, dare I say, a little Kanye in us. I mean, you remember the buzz about his Rolling Stone cover a few years back? (Show Image). Now, I have no personal relationship with Kanye, and so I don't know what all his motivations were for posing like this. I think a big part of it had to do with challenging the assumption of a white Jesus, which I think is something worth thinking about, along with a lot of what he had to say in his song Jesus Walks. But I think some, perhaps, has to do with a certain amount of ego, something we all deal with- we all have a little Kanye in us. But if we're to experience how God, we need to get in the right place before God.



The other thing I want to say about this idea of fear God is that we're not just talking about God in general- we are talking about the God of Israel. The word used here for Lord is word Yahweh, the actual name of the God of the Israelites. This is important to note because it sets Proverbs apart from the literature of the time. Many scholars will note, and rightly so, that a lot of the sayings of proverbs sound like the other wise sayings of the Egyptians or Sumerians of the time. And it's true to a certain extent. But there's a huge difference, one that can't be missed- this verse along with the 87 times the name Yhwh is used in Proverbs.

Know Jesus

Which leads us to the second main point I want to make about how we begin to experience this sort of living. Because it's not just about fearing this God of the Israelites, this God of the Bible, but it's more important about knowing Jesus, knowing the God incarnate man who walked this earth, the man who not only revealed God fully to us, but met us where we were, imperfection and all, to bring us into a relationship with God.

Now, how do we make this leap from Proverbs to Jesus? Easy- Jesus does it for us.

Some 2000 years ago when he walked this earth, he got in a discussion with people who wanted to see his miracles, but didn't want anything to do with him. After saying a few things to them, he said this: Matt 12:42

Jesus was referring to story involving Solomon, the author of this book, recorded in I Kings 10 where the queen of Sheba comes and marvels at Solomon's wisdom and grandeur, and ends up praising God! This queen will actually judge these people, because one greater than Solomon is here- Jesus. The wisest one, the one who shows us God and his ways fully, the one who embraces us.

Other passages Col. 2:3-4, 1 Cor. 1:24.

Don't be a fool

Which leads us to our third point about how to begin on this journey of life that we're describing here. And that's simply this: don't be a fool. Note how v. 7 ends by talking about the fool who despises, or counts as worthless, all that proverbs is about. We'll encounter this person throughout the book- this fool- and we'll discover that this person is the one who gets Theology 101 wrong- he's the person that really thinks his way is the best, and will not submit to God, Jesus, or anything like that. Let's beware, that we don't be that person.

Fear God, Know Jesus, and respond/don't be a fool.

Questions?

Challenge:

- Are you need some wisdom, guidance, discernment?
- Do you need to align yourself properly with God, with Jesus?

There are ways to do this, places to explore more of who Jesus is throughout the week- be sure to check out the yellow cards for the options. But there's nothing quite like making a commitment here, between you and Jesus, about this.

As the worship team is playing, if this is you, I want you to do one of two things: I want you to stand and engage with God as we worship. And I want you to come forward for some prayer,