

## I. Intro

A. In his book, *How Will You Measure Your Life?*, Clayton Christenson, a popular professor at Harvard Business School, opens with an observation. He explains that because he lived in Cambridge and was able to attend all of the HBS reunions, he began to notice that many of the returning alumni had lives that were quite unpleasant. To be more specific, he noted that while many had been financially successful – sometimes accumulating tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars – their personal lives were a mess. They had often burned through several marriages, were estranged from their children and didn't have any good friends.<sup>1</sup>

1. In his book, which is not a Christian book – he writes as a Mormon and has two co-authors, James Allworth, who describes himself as an atheist, and Karen Dillow who says she falls somewhere between the two – he explains how he encouraged students to apply the principles of strategic planning that they were learning to more successfully run corporations, to their lives.

B. I would like to suggest:

1. That professor Christenson is focused on wisdom. He is surrounded by lots of high IQs who lack the insight and discipline they need to live a life that works. In fact, I'd go so far as to argue that there is some overlap between what he writes in this business book and what we find in the Book of Proverbs.

2. We live in a culture where success is defined by words like: fast, new, big, or power, money and fame. God uses words like: peace, joy and self-control. We live in a world where sound bites rule and everyone is quite confident that they are right.<sup>2</sup> The Book of Proverbs celebrates those that are thoughtful, reflective and humble.

II. By way of quick overview:

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<sup>1</sup> Over the years I've watched the fates of my HBS classmates from 1979 unfold; I've seen more and more of them come to reunions unhappy, divorced, and alienated from their children. I can guarantee you that not a single one of them graduated with the deliberate strategy of getting divorced and raising children who would become estranged from them. And yet a shocking number of them implemented that strategy. The reason? They didn't keep the purpose of their lives front and center as they decided how to spend their time, talents, and energy.

<sup>2</sup> In Prov. 30:1-6 Agur – an otherwise unknown wise man who contributes some of the Proverbs of the book – raises and answers a problem that should trouble everyone who studies Proverbs: namely, how foolish we all really are. We do not understand other people (2a); we do not learn wisdom (3a); we are ignorant of our Holy God (3b). In one of the final chapters of the Book we see that the more Agur sought wisdom and understanding the more he realized the depths of his ignorance and foolishness.

A. Last week we launched this series with the idea that we want to cultivate our inner life. I argued that God loves you – whoever you are – and he wants you to lean in. And this really, really matters. In the grand scheme of things, your relationship with God defines all.<sup>3</sup> I went on to claim that the current moment – which has upsides as well as downsides – is not only a bit of a circus (with all kind of noise and distractions), but it’s increasingly so loud and powerful that it’s hard to ignore.<sup>4</sup> It tends to take us along with it. Which means, we have to be more proactive than we were in the past or we get carried along, we become part of the crowd, we are swept downstream.<sup>5</sup> We are not swimming in a lake, it’s a river with a current that grows stronger by the day. What we need to be who we are called to be is a vital, dynamic, growing relationship with God – one strong enough to shape our inner world so that we are shaping the world around us not simply responding.

B. This is growing out of Proverbs – this collection of advice that is a huge gift, it’s the ideal human-development curriculum, which is delivered in pithy little riddles and located in the middle of the Bible.

C. If you read the Deep book you know that the Proverbs are not proverbs, at least not in the way the word is traditionally used. And they are more challenging to understand than many people appreciate. But there is some very helpful counsel here. And this series rests on the idea that one of the best ways to develop depth is to follow the path God lays out. The Book of Proverbs is a curriculum for a life that works.

D. For the record, there are other ways to grow deep, most notably, to suffer. So, you can sign up for that if you’d like.

III. Now, before we jump ahead, let me hit the pause button to note a very important point: I am aiming my comments principally at those who are Christ-followers.

A. And what you are hearing is a lot about works. Our effort. That is because that is what you get in the Old Testament. What I am saying is all true but not the full story. So let me say three quick things about grace.

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<sup>3</sup> Your personal relationship with Jesus Christ is THE most important thing in your life. When we're in our rhythm we're at our best. When we're not we spend a lot more energy for a lot less miles. You've got to lean into what draws you closer to the Lord. Andy Stanley

<sup>4</sup> In her book, *The Cultivated Life*, Susan Phillips describes our culture as “a circus-like environment of fragmented attention and fractured relationships in which we strain to perform or passively view the spectacle of other people performing. Our times and their technological innovations contain possibilities for spiritual practices that were unimaginable until recently. Alongside their possibilities are obstacles. Driving to work, we listen to podcast prayers, our attention fragmenting as we simultaneously attune to the sound of traffic and possibly eye a GPS or a smart phone’s incoming messages. (Phillips, *The Cultivated Life*, p. 19f).

<sup>5</sup> We all want to be happy, though we do not agree on what brings the greatest happiness. The longing to be happy is not wrong, though evil consists in trying to find happiness in ways that displease and dishonor God. We might imagine a world in which doing the right thing would come at the expense of ultimate happiness. But that is not the world in which we live. We are not expected to act in ways contrary to our best interest, though there may be short term pain. John Piper writes, “We do not live in a world where we must choose between our eternal happiness and God’s glory! God has created this world and its moral laws in such a way that the more we choose to glorify God, the happier we will be.” (John Piper, “Get Wisdom,” *Desiring God*, May 24, 1981).

1. When it comes to grace there are those who know they do not get it; some who think they get it but do not; some who can give you a theologically correct answer but still do not get it; and then a relatively small number who get it and marvel. The news is simply too good to be true.
- B. Point one: We become Christ-followers on the basis of a gift from God. We do not earn his love or eternal life by being good.
1. Here is the spectrum. Most of you could give this part of the sermon. There are a handful of points:
    - a) We are all spiritual beings, located somewhere on this spectrum – everyone’s soul has been formed or malformed by all manner of factors.
    - b) We cannot get to negative five or positive five in this life, but when we die we head one way or the other.
    - c) We start in negative numbers because of our broken nature.
    - d) Crossing over may feel like a process, but there is a moment in time when it happens.
    - e) We cross over into positive numbers on the basis of Christ’s work.
      - (1) Eph. 2: For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.
      - (2) We do not earn God’s love.
    - f) Many step over the line and stall. This series is focused on helping you move towards five – helping you go deeper..
- C. Point two: Moving towards +5 is a partnership.
1. We cannot do it on our own and God will not do it on his own. Ultimately we do what we can and rely on the grace of God to change our heart.
  2. By the way, this past week I stumbled upon a somewhat related diagram that helps explain this a bit. It looks like this: Diagram
- D. The last point here is – I will be doing two lectures later in this series. They are designed for those of you for whom this is new or confusing or you disagree.
1. The first talk will be about Jesus. I will make the case as to why I think it’s wise to bet on Jesus.
  2. The second talk is on grace – which many of you do not get.
- E. OK, with all of that set up, today’s topic is wisdom.
1. In Proverbs 4:7 we are told to “get wisdom.” That passage reads:
    - a) The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Cherish her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. She will give you a garland to grace your head and present you with a glorious crown.
  2. “Get wisdom” is a command. Imperative mode. Picture lots of exclamation marks after it.

3. As it turns out:
  - a) Wisdom is big topic in Proverbs – which itself is part of the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrew Scriptures;
  - b) And in Proverbs wisdom means something quite specific. So we need to start here to ensure that when I use the word wisdom we are all talking about the same thing.

IV. There are five things we need to understand about wisdom

A. First: Wisdom is practical.

1. In fact, when it comes to wisdom, it's not what you know, it's what you do. Forest Gump said, "Stupid is as stupid does." He had a low IQ, but his mother helped him understand that he if he made good choices he wasn't stupid. The same works in reverse: "Wisdom is as wisdom does." High IQs and Ivy League degrees suggest that you are smart.<sup>6</sup> But there are a lot of smart fools. Biblically speaking, we do not become wise by knowing things.<sup>7</sup> In fact, you could memorize the entire book of Proverbs – a book written to help people be wise – and still be a fool unless you apply it.
2. And by the way, you'd have quite a bit of company, because there are lots of high IQ fools out there.<sup>8</sup> No doubt you know a few.
3. A few years ago one of our boys decided to memorize pi to 100 spaces. I have no idea why. Since I stopped doing story problems for math classes more than 30 years ago I have not had any reason to know what pi is, and if I do, I'm sure 3.14 will be good enough. Knowing pi to 100 spots is quirky not wise.

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<sup>6</sup> In his book, *Why Smart People Can Be So Stupid* (Yale, 2002), Dr. Sternberg delineates four reasons why smart people often make a mess of their lives: 1) they are self-centered; 2) they think they understand everything; 3) they act as if they have both insight and power; 4) they think they are immune to consequences. Sternberg suggests that they need more understanding and perhaps a course on ethics. The Bible would suggest such people need to repent.

<sup>7</sup> This is a point I tried to make to the 14 year old who lives in our house. One day, on a whim, he decided to memorize pi to 75 places past the decimal point. Which led Sheri and I to ask, "Why?" Since I stopped doing story problems in high school I don't think I've ever needed to know pi. And if it ever do, I'm sure 3.14 will be just fine. And secondly to marvel that anyone who could memorize pi to 75 places could consistently forget to put the milk away.

<sup>8</sup> When I was in college there was a math teacher who would have been well served to trade about 100 IQ points for some common sense. My very first day, very first class he made an odd, comical entrance into class, proceeded to erase the board with his hand and then, as he was talking he inadvertently wiped chalk all over his face. I was the only one who laughed. About four months later I watched him crash his car into a telephone pole. There had been a huge ice storm. People were literally ice skating on the streets and sidewalks. And it was proving nearly impossible to walk across campus to class. No one was driving, when all the sudden here comes a car, clearly out of control. And as it slides by us we see this professor behind the wheel with a look of terror on his face. And we watch as he crashes into a telephone pole. He was the text book example of the absent-minded professor. His specialty was a field of math that has no known value – he prided himself in being impractical. By some measures, he was brilliant. He published many books. But he lacked the common sense everyone else had, which said, "Don't try to drive a car after an ice storm. And if you do, don't drive fast."

4. The definition I am giving you for wisdom is: godly character in action. It is not sage religious advice, it is not intellectual acumen that leaves application as an option for overachievers. Biblical wisdom is character in action in the face of life's most real needs: no action, no wisdom.<sup>9</sup>

5. This focus on the practical is quite Jewish. The Greeks were known for their philosophy – the word is a combination of *phileo* – one of the Greek words for love, and *sophia* – which means wisdom. The Greeks loved talking about ideas and concepts. They took a lot of pride in the writings of Plato and Socrates. But for them, knowledge was abstract, esoteric and conceptual. The Hebrews were different.<sup>10</sup> They were practical. For them, wisdom was concrete. It was all about life skills.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the Hebrew word for wisdom (*chakam*) means “skillful living.”<sup>12</sup>

B. Point number two: Wisdom is moral.

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<sup>9</sup> The definition is from Mark Labberton, Fuller.Edu/TNN, Spring 2011. These other statements concerning wisdom deserve reflection: 1) To have wisdom is to have competence in how life really works. Timothy Keller; 2) You only know as much as you do. Francis of Assisi.; 3) Wisdom is the power to see and the inclination to choose the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it. J.I. Packer; 4) A wise man learns by the experience of others. An ordinary man learns by his own experience. A fool learns by nobody's experience; 5) In seeking wisdom thou art wise; in imagining that thou has attained it thou art a fool. Rabbi Ben Azai

<sup>10</sup> When you dig into the biblical text conversations about wisdom can become complicated pretty quickly because there are a number of different Greek and Hebrew words in play here – and different translation teams use different English terms (wisdom, knowledge, understanding) to distinguish them, but they do not always use the same terms. Therefore, some scholars argue “wisdom and knowledge are different” while the Biblical text may use them synonymously. My point here is simply: the Greeks were theoretical and the Jews were practical.

<sup>11</sup> I remember years ago hearing that the Greeks were smarter and had the superior culture, but the Romans were better warriors so we ended up with the Roman Empire, which was all Greek culture but Roman leaders.

<sup>12</sup> Part of the reason for the differences between the two stems from their different starting points. For the Greeks wisdom grew out of philosophical reflection. They questioned the existence of God, so they started with their own ideas before eventually arguing for an impersonal Unmoved Mover behind everything. Hebrew wisdom – i.e., that which is found in the Bible – starts with the self-revelation of the God who created all things. In “What is Biblical Wisdom?” (*TableTalk*, ??), the issue is explained this way: “By questioning the existence of God and by fashioning a god out of their own intellects, the Greeks always operated in the realm of idolatry, however sophisticated they might have been in expressing it. Hebrew wisdom operated wholly in the realm of worship. Why is Hebrew wisdom so practical? Because the fundamental questions have already been answered in God's revelation. Why is biblical wisdom so concrete and concerned with daily affairs? Because God created all things and is interested in every aspect of our lives. Why is Hebrew wisdom adorned in a semi-poetic style? Because the writers of this wisdom literature were confident about their position in God's world, and thus were enabled to celebrate it in beauty. Proverbs 1:7 says that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. The Greeks never even got to this beginning point...” Wisdom is quite different from knowledge. Pay attention because I am about to try to lose you. In your English Bible the terms knowledge and wisdom are often used interchangeably. There are a number of different Hebrew words in play here. The translators are doing their best. It's tricky because some of this is poetry. Just know this, understanding and wisdom are quite different. If you know but do not do you are not wise, you are a fool.

1. Having argued that wisdom is a practical skill, you might imagine the term implying something close to street smarts. That is understandable, but it doesn't go far enough. Someone who is wise almost certainly has street smarts, common sense. They can read the room. But biblical wisdom also means, "Be good. Pursue holiness."
2. The Proverbs are not simply advice that might be ascertained by people trying to get ahead. It's counsel that reflects a life that works in light of who God is and who we ultimately are.
3. From God's perspective, you would never call someone who is rebelling against God – or even someone simply trying to ignore God – wise, because what they are doing is the high-water mark of foolish. It is the ultimate in self-destructive, short-term foolish thinking.
4. Please remember, sin is stupid. It's always a bad plan, if for no other reason than this: one bad decision usually leads to another. We are going to regret it. God is not a cranky prude looking down from heaven trying to find someone having fun so he can say, "Stop that!" He is a loving, gracious Father trying to protect those he loves. And so when he sees someone doing something stupid he says, "That's going to bite you. That's the wrong path. It's going to lead to trouble."
5. The idea that wisdom is moral is hinted at in the refrain, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," which occurs over and over in Proverbs. The word "fear" here is a challenge to translate. Most commentators say it's best to think of fear in this context as "awe." But while that works in some passages, it doesn't in others. I've wrestled with this for a while. A few months ago I was hit with a blinding case of the obvious: it all depends upon our relationship with God. If we are forgiven, then awe is the right word. If we are not then terror is actually the right word, because we are facing judgment from a just judge.<sup>13</sup>
6. Let me put it this way. If you are in Christ – if you have been reconciled to God – then the right response is love and awe mixed together – a sense of his favor that is occasionally overwhelmed by how amazing that is, given his power and majesty. This was how things unfolded with the disciples. Remember the report of the storm on the Sea of Galilee? The disciples wake Jesus up because they fear the storm. They are scared that they are going to die. But as soon as he calms the storm they are scared of him. "Who is this man that even the wind and the waves obey him?" If we are in Christ then there should be glimpses of his power, but they are quickly balanced by his love. The right emotion is – in the words of John Donne – a "fear of which I may not be afraid."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Matthew 10:28

<sup>14</sup> If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, then the fear of the Lord is never to be feared. In fact, it is to be desired. And yet, the Bible says, "perfect love casts out all fear." How can these two be reconciled? The answer is, there are two kinds of fear. One kind of fear causes us to shrink away from God in dread. This has nothing to do with enjoying or glorifying God. But it is the appropriate response if we are not in Christ. In fact, if we are guilty

- C. Number Three: Wisdom wins.
1. Wisdom is practical; wisdom is moral. Number Three: Wisdom wins. Wise living usually leads to positive outcomes.
  2. As I mentioned last week, the Book of Proverbs recognizes four types of people. To illustrate this I'm back with a chart. **(Insert Wisdom Chart).**
    - a) One: The naïve or simple.<sup>15</sup> They do not understand the consequences. They are not wicked, just clueless. Think – small children.
    - b) Two: The fool, who has aged out, is beyond the crossroad and embracing folly. They have made decisions against wisdom. (I'm not talking about the occasional stupid or foolish decision. We all have those. This is a pattern).
      - (1) Prov. 1 says they delight in ignorance;
      - (2) In Prov. 7 we see that the simple person is duped by the seductress. They were not looking for trouble. The fool, on the other hand, knows exactly what is happening. He is out there waiting.
      - (3) Prov. 15 says they scorn the advice of others and trust their own insight
    - c) Three is the mocker. This is a fool who is working to drag others with him.<sup>16</sup>
    - d) Finally, number four is the wise. The person who is clearly looking to embody godly character in very practical ways.
  3. There are a few things to see here
    - a) Based on how many proverbs are written for fools, there are a lot of them. There are more fools than there are wise or mockers.
    - b) There are levels of foolishness, but all told, Solomon is not very optimistic that once we head down this path that we'll have the drive or grit or discipline to turn things around.
      - (1) In Prov. 27:22 we see that he holds out little hope for fools.<sup>17</sup> That reads:

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before God then it's safe to say that we do not fear him enough, after all, we face a fearful judgment (Heb. 10:27). If we are in Christ then fear (awe) is mixed with love because of what he has done for us. Bruce Waltke writes: "The true fear of God is a child-like fear. Some of the Puritans called it a *filial* fear. It is a combination of holy respect and glowing love. To fear God is to have a heart that is sensitive to both his Godness and His graciousness. It means to experience great awe and deep joy simultaneously when one begins to understand who God really is and what He has done for us.... Scripture portrays the fear of the Lord and the love of the Lord as companion emotions."

<sup>15</sup> See Pr. 7:6-27

<sup>16</sup> Dan Allender, Tremper Longman and Henry Cloud make distinctions between those who are wise, those who are foolish and those who are plain evil. Allender argues that the difference between a fool and someone who is evil is one of degrees. "In many respects, an evil person is simply a more severe fool. Who has progressed to a level of foolishness that is deeply severed from human emotion or goodness." (Bob Merritt, *Get Wise*, Baker, 2014). P. 95.

- (a) Though you grind a fool in a mortar,  
grinding them like grain with a pestle,  
you will not remove their folly from them.
- (2) You want to turn from foolishness as soon as you can,  
because every day you live that life, the harder it is to become  
wise.
- (3) Please note: I am not saying you cannot change. You can.  
People do all the time. People have success breaking out of  
addiction, overcoming bad habits, turning from evil to do good. It  
is very, very hard and most do not do it. But it can be done.<sup>18</sup>
- c) As I mentioned last week, we tend to give a pass to the naïve, but  
when you read Proverbs you realize that Solomon is desperately trying to  
communicate their need to “get wisdom” as quickly as possible. Because  
without it they are at great risk to get hurt. The fate of the simple and the  
fate of the fool is the same. It will not end well for either of them.
- (1) If you want life to work, “get wisdom.” Study the Book,  
study life, learn from others. There is a path that works and among  
the basic dictums are: don’t lie, don’t have an affair, don’t envy,  
get your temper under control, avoid debt, don’t gossip, stop  
sleeping in and on and on it goes.
- D. Number Four: Wisdom requires long-term thinking.
1. Wisdom is practical and moral; wisdom wins (it works). Number four:  
wisdom requires long-term thinking. And by this I do not mean, if you are wise  
you will save for retirement. I mean, if you are wise you will live today in light of  
the next 10,000 years (and beyond).
  2. We saw this last week with Psalm 90, Moses prayer in which he asks God  
to “teach him to number his days so that he could develop a heart of wisdom.” We  
saw this with this week’s art, which again uses the *memento mori* as a device to  
remind us, we have to face our death and think beyond it.

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<sup>17</sup> In “Simpletons, Fools and Mockers,” Jonathan Wilson, a professor of Religious Studies at Westmont College, writes: The book of Proverbs, our primary guide in this study, holds very little hope for fools. Once the simple have taken that fateful, deliberate step into the way of folly, little, if anything, can be done to restore them (27:22). And this is even more true of the mocker. But, staying with another insight from Proverbs, this doesn’t mean we should simply ignore the fool or the mocker, having given up on them. For Proverbs, the instruction and correction of the fool and mocker have little effect in their lives, but it does instruct the simple.

<sup>18</sup> Henry Cloud writes, “People stop bad patterns every day; they turn their affairs around every day; they move out of bad relationships every day; they overcome addictions every day; they get on better paths every day. (Merritt, p. 77).

3. Solomon uses a variety of Hebrew words for wisdom. One of them is used to describe Satan.<sup>19</sup> It is a term that is elsewhere translated crafty. What it ultimately means is “looks ahead.” Which is something we see throughout Proverbs.<sup>20</sup>

- a) We’re told to work hard now so we’ll be well positioned for eternity.
- b) Failure to plan for the future is one of the hallmarks of the fool.<sup>21</sup>

V. Wisdom has other aspects or requirements.

A. It requires that we seek God. In fact, at one level, wisdom is a gift from God, which is why we are told to pray for it. (James 1:5)

- 1. Please note what I am not saying. I am not saying:
  - a) That the only thing we need to be wise is spiritual insight. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” it is not the end.
  - b) I am not suggesting that the only things we need to know come from the Bible.
  - c) And I am certainly not saying that the only things that are true come out of this book.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> One of the words Solomon uses for wisdom is *’orma*, which means shrewdness or discretion. It was the term used to describe our enemy back in Gen. 3:1, “Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the other animals the Lord had made.” This implies something sneaky, but it’s not an inherently bad word. Its true meaning is the ability to look ahead. To make plans. If you’re forming plans for the good of others then this is a good word. If you are working out how to rob a bank, then it’s not. But it highlights the importance of long term thinking.

<sup>20</sup> This is one of the reasons why there is often wisdom in the advice of seniors. They have learned from the mistakes of their short-term thinking and now see things differently. Of course, not all old people are wise. You do not get wise simply by getting old. You have to be paying attention. But one of the things we gain over time is perspective. And perspective allows us to see that some of what we used to think was wrong – that some of what we thought was important really wasn’t and some things we didn’t pay attention to were important. I don’t want to imply that we are wise just because we are old or foolish just because we are young. But there is a correlation there and it’s one more reason we should hesitate to drink too deeply from our culture, because it is enamored with youth.

<sup>21</sup> When I was working as a management consultant back in the 90s one of the things that eventually became obvious was that all of the information was in the hands of the 20 year olds. They were the ones who knew how to work the computers. The people who understood the business – who had some mileage on them, who had weathered some cycles and who had some perspective on how to treat people and how today’s decisions would play out over time – they didn’t understand computers and consequently were often left out of the loop. Maybe even let go. Which meant that what you had was people who had all sort of information and technical skills and maybe some level of smarts, but most likely no wisdom. And I think you could make a case that some of the problems we have in the business world today is because of this – e.g., the focus on quarterly earnings to the demise of long term growth; the breakdown of the social contract between employers and employees.

<sup>22</sup> John Piper writes about this in a helpful way in his sermon, *Get Wisdom*. “But something more has to be said about the nature of this wisdom. It is not enough to say it is a humble hearing and doing of God’s Word, because God’s Word does not address itself specifically to every human dilemma. A famous example from Solomon’s life will illustrate (1 Kings 3:16–28). One day two prostitutes came to King Solomon. One of them said, “My lord, this woman and I live in the same house, and we each gave birth to a son last week. And one night while she was asleep, she rolled over on her son and smothered it. So she got up at midnight and took my living son from me while I slept

2. But, it is clear that you cannot be wise without God. You can know a lot. You can have a high IQ. But – when we dig into Proverbs it's clear, knowing God is where wisdom starts.<sup>23</sup>

B. As we study Proverbs we also see that wisdom requires:

1. that we are self-aware;
2. that we accept advice;
3. that we keep growing.<sup>24</sup>

VI. I could go on. Wisdom is such a big topic.

A. Wisdom is what you need to be happy.<sup>25</sup>

B. Jesus is wisdom personified.

and left me with her dead son. When I woke in the morning and looked closely, I could tell it was not my son." But the other woman said, "No, the living child is mine, and the dead child is yours." And so they argued before the king. Then the king said, "You both say the living child is yours. I will settle the matter; bring me a sword." So a sword was brought and the king said, "Divide the living child in two and give half to the one woman and half to the other." But the woman whose son was alive yearned for her son and said, "No, my lord, give her the child and by no means slay it." And the other said: "It shall be neither mine nor yours, divide it." Then the king said, "Give the living child to the first woman. She is its mother." The story concludes with this observation: "And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to render justice" (1 Kings 3:28). There was no biblical command to tell Solomon what to do when two harlots claim the same baby. Therefore, wisdom must go beyond knowing and doing the Word of God. Wisdom must include a sensitive, mature judgment or discernment of how the fear of the Lord should work itself out in all the circumstances not specifically dealt with in the Bible. There has to be what Paul calls in Romans 12:2 a "renewing of the mind" which is then able to examine and approve the will of God. He calls this a "spiritual wisdom" in Colossians 1:9, "We have not ceased to pray for you, that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all *spiritual wisdom and understanding*." Of course the wisdom which follows God's Word and the wisdom which discerns the way to act when there is no clear word from God are not separate. It is precisely by saturating our minds and hearts with God's Word that we gain the spiritual wisdom to guide us in all situations.

<sup>23</sup> Things have shifted in the last thirty years. It used to be that those of us living in the West were among the very few who ever thought that you could be a well-educated person without any understanding of spiritual matters. The communist also thought this, but few others. Today this view has lost favor. We are more spiritual now.

<sup>24</sup> Gordon MacDonald once noted that words that sound wise when uttered by a 30 year old, sound trite when voiced by a 60 year old. We need to keep growing.

<sup>25</sup> Proverbs 3:13 reads, "Happy is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gets understanding." And Proverbs 24:13 reads, "My son, eat honey, for it is good, and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste. Know that wisdom is such to your soul; if you find it, there will be a future, and your hope will not be cut off." Although, do not think that all happiness comes from wisdom. Proverbs 15:21 says "Folly is joy to him who has no sense." Piper writes: Our thirst for happiness is insatiable in this world, and if we do not have the wisdom to seek it in God, then we will find whatever substitutes we can in the world. Terrorists may find it in shooting presidents and popes. Executives may find it in climbing the corporate ladder. Athletes in breaking world records. Scholars in publishing books. Gamblers may find it in Reno. Musicians in selling a million records. The sources where people seek happiness apart from God are countless: drink, drugs, sex, suntans, television, tubing, eating, talking, walking, etc., etc. But the happiness that these things bring is not true and lasting. It is not ultimate and eternal. It is not the joy for which we were made. And, therefore, it leaves us unsatisfied, frustrated, incomplete, knowing that there must be something more. But that ultimate and eternal happiness that we crave is only found by wisdom. Therefore it is supremely important that we "get wisdom."

1. As we read the Bible we eventually come to see that there is a link between wisdom in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New.<sup>26</sup> That Jesus is not only the wisest person to ever live, but that part of being wise is wrapped up in following him.
  2. This is such a key point that I will be doing a special lecture just on this in November.
- C. I could go on, but let me move us forward. There are three things I want to be sure you've got at this point:
1. Biblical wisdom is character in action; it is God's truth and character lived in context. It is not information gleaned from Google; it is not theoretical insights from arm-chair philosophers; it's not sage, religious advice. It is godly character lived in context.
  2. We need wisdom. We need to go deep and in one sense they are closely linked.
  3. This will take effort. Wisdom is rare because it's hard to come by. Given a choice between sin and wisdom we will default to sin unless we have developed safeguards or character or convictions that lead us down the right path. In an ultimate example of irony and tragedy, Solomon's son, Rehoboam, is a classic fool. The book of Proverbs was written for him, and yet he ignores the counsel it offers – he ignores the insights of the wise and follows the impulses of the young and it costs him everything.<sup>27</sup>
- D. So, how do we avoid making the same mistake? How do we grow wise? How do we go deep?
1. Well, we know what it's not. A while ago I attended a college reunion. Walked the halls with old classmates talking about what we did and – as a rule – how we wish we had it to do over again because while we spent time learning (some of us anyway), we didn't necessarily get wise.
  2. What do we do? The Bible highlights four things:

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<sup>26</sup> There are several reasons to suggest this: 1) Proverbs 1-9 presents us with two "women," one named "Folly" and the other named "Wisdom." Each of them has a house, and each of them invites us into her house to fellowship with her. Folly is painted as a harlot and an adulterer – her house is a whore house (compare to the Great Harlot of Revelation). Wisdom is presented as a mother and a bride and her house is a palace (compare to the Bride of Christ). In Proverbs 8, however, Wisdom takes on a more mysterious dimension. The feminine imagery falls away in Proverbs 8:22 and Wisdom is presented as existing with God before the creation of the world; 2) Proverbs 8:22 reads a lot like John 1:1; 3) In I Cor. 1:24, Paul refers to Jesus as the "wisdom of God." In *The Wisdom of God*, *TableTalk*, Sept. 25th, the writer states: It is probably stretching Proverbs 8 to see in it a direct reference to the Second Person of the Trinity, but we can say that the poetic picture in Proverbs 8 finds its greatest fulfillment in Him.

<sup>27</sup> A big part of the reason wisdom is uncommon is because it requires sacrifice and obedience – i.e., moral living requires short term pain. But it's the best path. We are never expected to act against our best interest. Rehoboam ignored wise counsel and was too stubborn to ever repent. In *Antiquities* (8.10.4), Josephus reports that Rehoboam remained "a proud and foolish man" who never recovered from the folly of his first political decision. The final word on him (2 Chr. 12:14) asserts, he did evil, for he did not set his heart to seek the Lord."

- a) I've already talked about one of them - reflecting on our death.<sup>28</sup>

VII. There are three more:

- A. First: Study, meditate on and then apply the Word of God.<sup>29</sup>
1. The Bible is our primary source for wisdom and we need a daily dose.
  2. In light of this one of the extras that we are offering is Going Deeper workshop coming up in a couple weeks. Sunday, Oct 11 at the Lake Forest campus, Monday, Oct. 12 at CR and HP. This workshop will be designed to help you learn how to cultivate a daily time with God.
- B. Second: Hang out with wise people.
1. Proverbs 13 reads: He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers hard.
  2. This past week I drove over to Christ Church Oak Brook – which is a bad trip to make at 4 in the afternoon. But I did it to get time with Mark Labberton, who has been a mentor for the last 20 years. Mark is now the President of a seminary on the West coast and he has been writing about wisdom for years. We need wise people in our life. I have driven two hours or more to get time with Mark probably 20 times or more over the last twenty years, because he helps me think and act in better ways.
  3. We all need that. And sometimes we have to go out of our way to get it. One of the other things we have done for this series is open up time for pastoral staff, elders and members of the Soul Care teams to sit and meet with whoever wants to meet to talk about life.
    - a) If you feel like maybe you are stuck and you'd like someone to listen to your story, listen to you reflect – all in confidence – but then offer a few observations or next steps. You can sign up XXX
  4. And of course one of the other ways this happens is when you make a decision to get into a small group and people really get to know you.
- C. Finally, Pray. The last way the Bible says we can gain wisdom is to ask God to give it to us.

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<sup>28</sup> Piper writes: “There is scarcely any thought that will purge our priorities of vain and worldly perceptions like the thought of our imminent death. O how cleansing it is to ponder the kind of life we would like to look back on when we come to die. There is great wisdom in such meditation. Therefore, think often of your dying.”

<sup>29</sup> In Psalm 19:7 we read: "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." And here I would advocate not just faithful Bible study, but also regular reading of great books.

1. Let's not overthink this. There are no big mysteries here. Everything we do is shaping us in some way – for good or for ill. If we drift along we get used to drifting along. We get in shape for bobbing along the top of the culture. Whatever we do makes doing more of the same tomorrow more likely. The whole premise of this series is, we have to develop some moral and spiritual muscle to be able to swim in the current we now find ourselves.
2. None of this is rocket science. We need more reflection and contemplation. We need to read The Book. We need to pray. And one of the things we need to pray for is wisdom.
3. Solomon was not born a wise man. He prayed for wisdom and God answered. The same with Daniel. And James opens his letter stating, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God."<sup>30</sup> The wisdom that leads to true and lasting happiness is not natural or inborn. It is supernatural. It is a gift of God. Therefore, if we would "get wisdom," we must pray.

VIII. Benediction: Phil 1:9.

IX. Next week we will look at the topic of discipline.

- A. In future weeks we will explore landmines that blow up our life and the kind of friendships that can lift us up. Next week we explore discipline
- B. If you want to grow wise, re-read the sermon before the small group.

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<sup>30</sup> See: 1) Re: Solomon, see I Kings 3:11 said, "Because you have asked this and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold now I do according to your word;" 2) Re: Daniel, see Daniel 2:30, "To thee, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for thou hast given me wisdom and strength, and hast made known to me what we asked of thee;" 3) See also Col. 1:9 & Eph. 1:17 for Paul. and " (2:23). And we have seen how Paul prayed that the churches might be given "spiritual wisdom" (Colossians 1:9) and that they might have "a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of God" (Ephesians 1:17).