

UNEDITED DRAFT

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus,

I am really excited about what we are talking about today. We are talking about WISDOM. Now if you're a seasoned Christian, and you didn't have a bulletin today, and I told you our Bible text was about wisdom, you could probably guess that it was from the book of Proverbs. Proverbs was written by the wisest man that ever lived, besides Jesus. His name was Solomon. He lived about 3,000 years ago. He was the son of the great king, David. When he became king, God offered to give Solomon whatever he asked for. And Solomon chose to ask for discernment, for wisdom, in leading and governing God's people. And God gave him an extraordinary measure of wisdom. So some of it is recorded in the book we know as Proverbs.

When we think of the book of Proverbs, we probably think of the short, pithy statements that are packed into a sentence or two. And that is true of a large portion of the book. However, the first 9 chapters of Proverbs are really a description of wisdom, and why it is so important to have it. 9 whole chapters dedicated to convincing the reader why the rest of the book is absolutely essential for your life. THEN comes the 2 line wisdom teachings.

If the only Bible you get is in church, then you probably are not very familiar with those proverbs. That's because they are extraordinarily hard to preach on because they are so short and also covering widely disparate aspects of a Christian's life. It really is a book for personal study. Or even better, it's a book for family devotions, just taking 1 – 3 proverbs at a sitting and discussing them as a family.

These nuggets of wisdom are the frozen concentrate of the Bible. You really can't read through 20 of them and grasp it all. It's like hard candy. You need to let it dissolve slowly.

Every morning, the teachers and I get together before school starts and we have a little devotion. Last year, we read through the book of Proverbs. Even in that setting it was very difficult. We covered 8 – 10 verses each morning, and that was really too much. It really needs to be consumed 2 or 3 verses at a time, so that the full meaning can be contemplated and applied to life.

Now why am I spending so much time introducing you to the book of Proverbs? It's because I want to make you so interested in this book that starting this week you will begin your own personal (or family) study of the book. Listen: the time we spend together on a Sunday morning *is not enough* for you to have a close and growing relationship with your God. If my wife and I sat down together for one hour *per week* and communicate, and that was it, our relationship would not be close or growing. And the same is true with God. You need daily contact and communication with him. You need to be listening to him in his Word, and responding to him in prayer. There is no other way to have a strong faith.

Okay, let's get into this study about wisdom. First we need to define it. I found this interesting comment on wisdom in Psychology Today: **“It can be difficult to define Wisdom, but people generally recognize it when they encounter it. Psychologists pretty much agree it involves an integration of knowledge, experience, and deep understanding that incorporates tolerance for the uncertainties of life as well as its ups and downs. There's an awareness of how things play out over time, and it confers a sense of balance.”**

Wise people generally share an optimism that life's problems can be solved and experience a certain amount of calm in facing difficult decisions. Intelligence—if only anyone could figure out exactly what it is—may be necessary for wisdom, but it definitely isn't sufficient; an ability to see the big picture, a sense of proportion, and considerable introspection also contribute to its development.

So, there you have it a simple and memorable definition of wisdom. Maybe not! A more memorable definition comes from Old Testament scholar, Gerhard Von Rad: **Wisdom is competence with regard to the realities of life.**

So let's start with that definition and we're going to build on that a bit by the end of our time together today.

Now Solomon talks about wisdom as if she were a real person who beckons you to come to her. We're going to focus on Proverbs 9:1-6, but he does this in other places in the book as well. Listen:

Proverbs 9:1-6 Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars. She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her maids, and she calls from the highest point of the city. "Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who lack judgment. "Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding.

So, Solomon personifies wisdom here, and throughout Proverbs, by depicting Wisdom as a woman. Now why would he personify wisdom as a woman? All the women here think they know. Wisdom obviously couldn't be a man! Actually, that's not it. He personifies wisdom as a woman because wisdom is not something to be acquired and be done with. If you want wisdom, it requires an ongoing relationship. It requires an investment of time. If a man would like to find a wife, it's not something he acquires and then moves on to other pursuits. His wife becomes a partner and a companion, and someone who is with him through all of life's ups and downs. And so is wisdom. Wisdom and its pursuit becomes a life-long habit, not a one-off acquisition.

So in these particular verses, wisdom is depicted as having riches and influence. Her house is hewn out of seven pillars – strong and ornate. With wisdom there is the food found only at rich banquets. She has many servants. Wisdom gives life.

Wisdom invites *all* to come to her. So if you know anyone who is foolish, someone who has made some regrettable decisions, someone who lacks core competency for some of the realities of life – if that someone might be you – understand that wisdom is calling out to you. It doesn't matter if you are young or old. It doesn't matter if you've lived in foolishness and without wisdom up to this point. It doesn't matter if you are rich or poor, married or single. It doesn't matter how much education you have or have not received. Wisdom is inviting you to sit down with her and eat and drink with her. She's inviting you to walk in the way of understanding... that is to make wisdom your life-long companion and close friend.

Enough of this abstract stuff. What does this look like? How do we walk in wisdom and grow in wisdom and live with wisdom? Consider this:

What if wisdom really *is* a person? That would make this so much more concrete and simple, wouldn't it? What if wisdom is a person and if you have a relationship with this person you will have wisdom. Now stick with me on this. Listen to some verses Proverbs 8. Wisdom again is speaking and she says:

Proverbs 8:22-31 "The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began. When there were no oceans, I was given birth, when there were no springs abounding with water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth, before he

made the earth or its fields or any of the dust of the world. I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind. Wisdom predates the creation of the world and is eternal. Wisdom participates in Creation. Wisdom delights in mankind...

Now listen to these verses and see if you hear a similarity:

John 1:1-2 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. V.14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”

Colossians 1:17 [Jesus] is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Hebrews 1:2 In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

John 10:30 I and the Father are one.

Back to our own text, wisdom invites to come and eat and drink. And she promises to give life. Jesus said in today’s Gospel lesson (John 6:48, 54), **“I am the bread of life. This bread is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world... Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”**

And finally: 1 Corinthians 1:18ff “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ... We preach Christ crucified: Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

The pattern had always been this: a rabbi claimed he had learned wisdom and could teach it. He would gain students and they would learn what he had learned, and they would have wisdom too. They claimed to be able show the path the follow for wisdom and life. But a very different kind of rabbi came along. His followers wanted to know wisdom, and the right way, and to have life. And that rabbi didn’t say, “I will show you the way that will give wisdom and life.” Instead he said, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** (John 14.) Jesus claims to BE wisdom. True wisdom can only be had in Christ alone. If you have Christ, you have wisdom.

Wisdom is found in the eternal Word. The eternal Word is Jesus. Wisdom is found in Christ.

The only way for us to **have competence with the realities of life** is to know and believe God’s Word, and the Word made flesh, Jesus.

You see, there are realities of life that are beyond our ability to perceive. That which is spiritual, eternal, life after death, conscience, love, and more... these are realities that have proven elusive for human beings to grasp much less become competent in! But what if God revealed these realities of life so we could gain competency in them? We would gain true wisdom. And that’s exactly what he does!

So there are especially two hidden realities that God reveals that give us real wisdom.

So here it is: We are incompetent with the realities of life, (we are foolish) if we fail to perceive the reality that we are sinful by nature, corrupt and utterly helpless to save ourselves. We are not in control and we are ultimately powerless: powerless, not just over forces of nature, not just over undesirable circumstances that may come into our lives, not just over other people... but we are not in control even of our own selves, our own morality and conduct. And this is easy to prove.

How many times have you disappointed yourself in life? How is that even possible?! If you were fully in control of yourself, it would be impossible. But you are not. Your will is infused with evil, and you are not capable of controlling it. This is a reality that is very difficult for us to see. But God opens our eyes to this reality, and by it we gain wisdom.

And then there is a second great reality the Word reveals to us. And it is that God provides the solution to our guilt. God gives light to the darkness. God seeks those who are lost. God give life to the spiritually dead. God rescues those in imminent danger of eternal separation from him. All of this comes through the Word made flesh, Christ Jesus. He is our perfect substitute. He is the perfect sacrifice for our sin and guilt. He is the one gives life and light. He is the one who restores us to the Father. He is the one who makes us fit for eternal life with God in heaven.

So you see, Jesus is the central character of the book of Proverbs. He is wisdom. With that little bit of insight, the book takes on new meaning. Now if you're relatively new to the Christian faith, you'd do well to get to know Jesus better first by reading one of the four Gospels. Then with a thorough knowledge of Jesus, and keeping him in the forefront of your mind, slowly work your way through the book of Proverbs.

So dear friends, pursue wisdom! By that I do not mean pursue knowledge or technology or morality. It means pursue Jesus. And to do that, you'll have to fully engage in God's Word. Meditate on it day and night. For only God through his Word reveals what is real about us; and real about his love. Only in the Word do you discover *the* Word made flesh, Jesus. At the heart and core of wisdom, then, you find Jesus. The truly wise person knows Jesus, believes in Christ crucified, and follows him. All other paths are foolishness.

Follow Jesus and listen to his word carefully, and you will be **fully competent in regard to the true realities of life**. That is, you will be wise! Pursue wisdom! **"Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding."** Amen.