

Lifecraft from God – The Way of Wisdom

Charles Kennedy led the liberal democrats to their biggest ever number of seats in Westminster, was able to raise a laugh at politics on the program 'Have I got news for you', yet died this week suddenly from a haemorrhage directly linked to his battle with alcohol.

Listening to the news this week it has been full of tributes not to his achievements but to his character. He was remembered for his loyalty, sense of generosity and humour. His ability to stick to his principles without wavering.

What I found interesting is that the qualities he is remembered for are more about character than achievement. This week on Radio 4's thought for the day the speaker talked about Charles and quoted New York Times columnist David Brookes who has written about character. How we are known more for who we are than what we do. Charles Kennedy was of course a blend of great character qualities with at least one notable weakness in his alcohol habit.

In the New Testament book of James. *'The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere'*

The passage describes what wisdom is in terms of character. Wisdom is not just about making wise decisions but wise attitudes, wise ways of relating to people and wise habits that shape your character.

This is the first in a series of talks taken from the book of Proverbs in the Bible. If you look through Proverbs there are many character qualities that are encouraged – humility, generosity, self-control, diligence, justice. Gaining these are not just about making wise choices that affect our life in terms of jobs and external things. If we gain wisdom it shapes our character, it shapes who we are.

In my work as a GP I get why wisdom and character are important. Think how many of my patients would be in a better place if they had wisdom and the ability to apply it. Some of them have unwise behaviours which affect their health. Others have made relationship choices or responses to significant events in their life that have caused or made an illness worse.

It's not just my patients that need wisdom – I do! My job would be helped by wisdom – wisdom to know how to use my time, wisdom to know how to use limited NHS resources and wisdom to know which patients have something serious going on that needs help. Wise words to say to the dying, caring and hurting people. Perhaps you can see that wisdom in being a good GP is not just about knowledge and making wise choices, but about the inward character of the GP and how they respond under pressure.

You may need wisdom in your job, how you bring up your children, how you relate to people, or about a big decision you have ahead of you.

Have you found yourself ever typing the answer to big questions in your life into google? I have! Perhaps we need to think about where we seek wisdom.

Proverbs and Wisdom

As Christians we look to the Bible which is a collection of mini books. In the Hebrew Scriptures, known as the Old Testament there is a particular section of the library called wisdom literature.

Proverbs is one of the wisdom books. It was written thousands of years ago yet it has practical applications to how we live our lives today. We still seek wisdom today, and there is truth to be found in Proverbs to help us.

Today I want to look at Wisdom in Proverbs. What are Proverbs? What is wisdom? How do we get it?

Let's start at the beginning of Proverbs (Chapter 1)

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

² *for gaining wisdom and instruction;*

for understanding words of insight;

³ *for receiving instruction in prudent behaviour,*

doing what is right and just and fair;

⁴ *for giving prudence to those who are simple,^[a]*

knowledge and discretion to the young –

⁵ *let the wise listen and add to their learning,*

and let the discerning get guidance –

⁶ *for understanding proverbs and parables,*

the sayings and riddles of the wise.^[b]

Read what is written here – this is a book that is written to help us get wisdom. It is written for the young to help them start out on wisdom (v4), and to the wise to add more wisdom (v5). That sounds really useful!

But hang on – have a look at verse 6 – it says ‘the sayings and riddles of the wise’. Why have they written a sayings or poetry about how to get wise?

Proverbs consists of lots of poetic verses. These would have been mostly handed down through families without being written down. Proverbs started off not as a book but some verses that were remembered and said over and over again. They were meant to be memorable.

We have English proverbs – memorable sayings that get passed down. ‘Look before you leap’ ‘a problem shared is a problem halved’

We also see modern Proverbs on posters, of said by your parents, teachers, and church leaders. ‘Catch it, bin it, kill it’ was the slogan to help beat the flu epidemic. David Flowers says ‘spend less than you earn’. Alison Flowers says we have to ‘obey God and

trust him for the outcome' Can you spot anymore? Memorable, poetic truths that bring some wisdom.

Modern day sayings are also all over Facebook, twitter and Instagram – usually written with a nice picture behind them, cluttering up your newsfeed. Think of proverbs as a very old newsfeed of wise sayings – but this one is breathed by God.

I encourage you to have a look a proverbs over June and July and have a read for yourself.

During this series to help you we will be tweeting one proverb a day... if you don't have twitter have a look on the bottom of our new website each day.

The main theme of Proverbs is wisdom.

So what is wisdom? Wisdom is not about being very intelligent or having a fancy degree. It is about making wise choices and building our character.

Think about a complex skill like flying an aeroplane. It is taught over many years, and at the beginning there will be time spent poring over instruction manuals and flow charts. Time spent watching other pilots fly. Eventually the lessons come together and a pilot is trained.

On January 15th 2009 an American airline pilot called Chelsey Sullenberger took off from an airport in New York when a large flock of Geese flew into both engines disabling them. The pilot suddenly had to make some very rapid decisions about what to do to save the lives of the 154 people on board. He did not have time to think through everything consciously and turn to the instruction manuals. He had to use his experience to make a judgement. He landed on the Hudson River and everyone was saved. He said "One way of looking at this might be that for 42 years, I've been making small, regular deposits in this bank of experience, education and training. And on January 15 the balance was sufficient so that I could make a very large withdrawal."

He made wise decisions through habits built through years of practice.

To become wise takes effort, just like becoming an airline pilot. We need to learn from others. But as we become wise we change within and become different. Our character is shaped. Then when we face something as big as the situation that airline pilot faced we respond instinctively. Inwardly we have changed, and when challenged we respond in a Godly way. It is about formation of character.

So we have looked started to think about proverbs and that it may have something to help us with life and making wise choices and building character- where to we start? How do we get wise?

Where do I start getting Wisdom?

1. Turn towards God

It says in Proverbs 2v6

*'For the Lord gives wisdom;
From his mouth come knowledge and understanding'*

We learn in this verse that Wisdom comes from God. It is a gift from God.

God takes the initiative. God gives wisdom. Without God we cannot have any wisdom.

But we need to turn towards God to receive that gift.

God needs us to respond and asks us to pursue wisdom and seek after it.

It is a double sided coin or a paradox – God gives wisdom, yet he calls us to seek after wisdom

In Proverbs 9v10

It says *'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'*

What is the 'fear of the Lord?' On first glance that sounds quite confusing. Does it mean that we are to be scared of God, as if he is 'out to get us'? This 'fear' is not us cowering in a corner as if God is an angry tyrant.

It is the reaction we have when we realise that God is God and we are not. An utter humble respect for Gods power, creativity, power, justice and love. Some translations use the word 'awe' rather than fear, and you may find it helpful to think that way. Fear, Awe, respect or even worship.

I think fear of the Lord is about turning our life towards God.

Are we walking turning towards God or away from him? Are we turning towards God so that our decisions, our relationships and what we do with our time are all lived in that perspective?

As we worship we sometimes realise that we have not been turned to God completely.

When I am outside somewhere like the Lake District and I see the majesty of the mountains God has made I have a fresh understanding of his power and my place within it. I turn more towards God.

But I also find myself realising that only God is all powerful as I cope with the uncertainties of the health of my father with dementia and my mother across the other side of the country caring for him.

Do you seek wisdom for the things you are facing? Maybe the challenge is for you to turn towards God to put those things in his perspective.

2. Walk with the wise

Proverbs 13v20 says *'Become wise by walking with the wise, hang out with fools and watch your life fall to pieces'* (The Message)

When I was 18 a lady in my church in Bristol who was a house group leader and a mother of 2 young children asked to become my 'prayer partner'. I was surprised that she wanted to spend her valuable time with me. For a year we would meet up every few weeks and pray for things that were happening in my life as I did my A levels and left for university. She treated me as an adult and came along side me. She shared what was going on in her life so I could see her putting her faith into practice. I talked about some of the challenges I faced as I lived my life in school, at home and looking towards leaving home. Walking with the wise was good for me.

Now I see that happening in church as others are mentoring my children who are 17 and 15. They are acting as a sounding board, praying for them and passing on wisdom. Walking with the wise is good for the young people.

We learn wisdom from those who have been around longer than us, or been through what we are going through, or wrestled with the stuff we are facing.

We gain wisdom from being around those who are turned to God and walking in the same direction towards him. In Leeds Vineyard in our House group there are those I walk with (sometimes literally go for a walk with,) they share wisdom on parenting, following Jesus, spending time and money.

Walking with the wise isn't all about relationships and physically being with people. I also learn loads from talks and podcasts and reading Christian books. I am learning from those who have thought about stuff and lived it who have good skills to pass it on either by speaking or writing. I listen to talks when I am at the gym (walking on the treadmill with the wise!)

How are you going to hang out with people to get more wisdom? Are you in a house group? Are you reading books or listening to podcasts?

3. Let Gods words sink in deep and change you

Proverbs 2 reading from the beginning says.

*My son, if you accept my words
and store up my commands within you,
Turning your ear to wisdom
and applying your heart to understanding—
Indeed, if you call out for insight*

*and cry aloud for understanding,
And if you look for it as for silver
and search for it as for hidden treasure,
Then you will understand the fear of the Lord
and find the knowledge of God.*

Look how the call here is to seek after wisdom as if looking for treasure, to call out for it, to put effort in.

But let's look practically about what that means – there are 2 phrases that jump out at me – 'store up my commands within you' and 'apply your heart to understanding' Store up my commands within you – his commands are Gods words – the Bible, his words spoken today, his wisdom.

Apply your heart to understanding – that means effort.

This passage is talking about not just knowing something wise, but recognising that it takes effort for it to be deposited deep within us.

I have a note book I write in (show notebook) It is what I think God may be saying to me. It may be a verse from a song we are singing in church, or a Bible verse. It may be something I think God has said through a talk or a prayer time. These are words to chew on and meditate on and allow them to sink into my heart.

One thing I've written in my notebook are the lyrics from a Rend Collective song called 'Boldly I approach'. It is about what God has done to allow me to approach him. There is such richness in the words that I need to listen to it again and again. I find I need to let some of these words and phrases seek deep into my heart so they make a difference to my life and get applied. I listen to it driving to and from work over and over again. As I listen to the words I am reminded that whatever has happened at work God still is with me.

There are many ways to reflect on life. Some people write things down in a journal, or make notes on a phone. Others have a person they are accountable to.

How do you remember what God is saying to you or what he is challenging you on? Can you remember what you have read in the Bible or heard at house group? Or do you hear it and then let it slip through your fingers and not do anything about it?

There seems to be a theme in proverbs about how it takes some effort to allow Gods wisdom to change our hearts. Then our character will be shaped and we will get wisdom.

Conclusion

Think back to desire for wisdom. I said at the beginning that in my work as a GP I can see how wisdom would make a difference to lots of life situations. I said how I would love to have more wisdom to know how to be a good GP. How to make wise choices and speak wise words and build a wise character.

What characteristics would people remember you for if your life was tragically cut short like Charles Kennedy? Is God challenging you to build a legacy of character?

God gives wisdom, He is seeking us out. God wants to give both you and me that gift of wisdom.

Would you like to receive his gift of wisdom today?

God calls us to turn towards him, and put him first in our lives.

Do you seek wisdom for specific things you are facing? Maybe God is challenging you to set your direction towards God to put those things in his perspective. Perhaps you have been walking in a slightly different direction and it is time to make a change.

God calls us to walk with each other, learning from the wise and encouraging each other.

How are you going to hang out with people to get more wisdom? Are you in a house group? Are you learning from wisdom perhaps by reading books or listening to talks? Is God calling you to commit again to walking with people and getting involved in their lives – so that we can share his wisdom and encourage each other?

God calls us to seek after wisdom and his words and let it change our hearts.

Has God been reminding to take time to listen to him? To write down what he is saying? To spend more time listening to his word?

Lord we thank you for your gift of wisdom.

We want to seek after that wisdom.

We want to turn towards you and put you first in our lives.

We want your help to walk with the wise,

We want to let your words change our hearts and shape our character.

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