

## Proverbs 3:13-26

### The School of Life How Wisdom Leads to the Good Life

**Introduction:** If it is your first time joining us - welcome. We have dedicated this year to Biblical Literacy; meaning we as a church are reading the Bible for ourselves to know first hand what it teaches and in order to be shaped by the story of God. In our current series - The school of Life - we have been focusing on the reality of pain and suffering in life and how we can learn to live full lives even in a world of pain and hardship. This morning we're moving on to look specifically at - How Wisdom Leads to the Good Life.

This is a question that people have asked since the dawn of time - What is the good life, and how do I obtain it? A hugely important question because it's fairly easy to live your life - and many in our time are doing that - simply living; maybe they are successful (according to one or another narrative), they are progressive; they seem to be going somewhere, and very quickly. But the question is not how do we live, BUT how do we live a life of quality? A life of goodness; a life of flourishing? A life that regardless of what is thrown at us we are able to look over our lives with a sense of contentment, joy, purpose, and meaning?

It might be surprising for some to know that this is the main question or storyline of the Bible - how to live well; how to flourish - the Blessed Life. The idea of Biblical wisdom only being these four or five books - Job, Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon is actually a new idea. The Jews considered the whole Hebrew Bible to be wisdom literature - **"Oh, how I love your law (Torah)! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts. I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word. I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me. How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! I gain understanding from your precepts, therefore I hate every wrong path. - Psalm 119:97-104**

When we think of Biblical wisdom we can relegate it to mean "spiritual wisdom" as opposed to practical wisdom, concerned with the soul and not the body, church and not business, catechism and not education, worship and not play - but nothing could be further from the truth. Solomon was the great king who asked God for wisdom to rule his people well - and God granted that to him and he was wise not just as a king or a spiritual leader but in every sphere of life - it says in 1 Kings 4:32-33 **"He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. From all nations people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom."** Solomon was a thriving Human Being!! A Flourishing One!

You see, Biblical wisdom pertains to every aspect of life in this world, because it is YHWH who formed the world in Wisdom.

*"The canonical scriptures are a veritable book of life, showing us God in relation to the most dramatic human crises (births, sicknesses, deaths, loves, losses, wars, falls, risks, disasters, failures, victories), the most elemental human emotions (joy, grief, love, hate, hope, fear, pain, anger, shame, awe) and the most basic human relationships (to parents, spouses, children, friends, neighbors, civil authorities, enemies, fellow-believers)...."*  
- J.I. Packer, *God has Spoken*

The purpose of this book - the Bible - is to train us in wisdom, understanding and Knowledge so that we will become wise ones - So that we become truly human - Ones who rule well over God's creation, ones who's lives exhibit the flourishing life of God.

And this really goes back to the purpose of the Bible that we discussed in the beginning of the year - The purpose of the Bible is to teach us, trains us so that we can live Godly lives and fulfill the covenant partnership that God created us for - lost at the Fall, but brought back on track by Jesus — so the earth can be filled with God's glory...

God wants flourishing for humanity - he created us for it - Where wisdom comes in is in how we accomplish that - what road we take - who's wisdom we use... The fear of the Lord or the self determination of the tree of the knowledge - both good and bad.

## So let's talk about How Biblical wisdom leads to the Good life

### 1. In the Beginning... Wisdom

1. The first pages of the Bible vividly paint this picture - that YHWH's wisdom leads to flourishing
  1. **“By wisdom the Lord laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place; by his knowledge the watery depths were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew.” - Proverbs 3:19-20**
2. Think about the vastness of God's creation - the majesty of it, it's intricacy in how everything works together to bring order, and life.
  1. It is by God's infinite wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and power that he forms the universe and makes a world teeming with life. He creates a flourishing garden to be the habitat for his image bearers.
  2. We know the story - In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth he placed the first humans in the Garden of Eden - there is peace, and this picture of flourishing - Mankind in harmony with God, Mankind in harmony with one another - naked and not ashamed - harmony with creation. **Here is the Good Life!** Humans in perfect relationship with God, one another, and creation. Without shame, without fear, without guilt - building God's world into something more with him and one another.
    1. The Man and the Woman are under the apprenticeship of YHWH (even seen early on with Adam naming the Animals), through his wisdom, understanding and knowledge they are to have dominion (Rule) over the land and the animals.. to fill the earth and bring into into submission; To spread out the borders of the Garden so that the whole earth becomes the flourishing garden city of God.
3. This is humanity's commission to fill the earth with God's goodness and blessing, with his reign and rule..to cause it to flourish and yet they have another option, for there are two trees in the midst of the garden -There is the Tree of Life AND the Tree of Knowledge - both good and bad. What will humans choose? Will they do what YHWH has called them to: will they take of the tree of life; will they come to YHWH for wisdom, understanding

and knowledge - in how to fulfill this commission? Or will they strike out on their own and seek knowledge, maturity, meaning, and purpose, right and wrong apart from God, apart from his authority? Will they choose to listen and obey the voice of God, seeing all that he has done for them.. or will they try and have the kingdom without the king?

1. Now here is a super interesting thing that we might have missed - A serpent comes along and he is described as "Arum" - Sly, crafty or prudent (a different sort of wisdom) - The "*arum*" serpent invites humanity to question the ordering, to find out knowledge for themselves. He offers and suggest wisdom apart from God - A dna different version of the Good life - to take of the tree of knowledge - both Good and Bad - to be autonomous to choose to rule themselves. There is even a flattering invitation: the ability to be "like God." Humanity is led astray by the words of the serpent, and reaches for wisdom apart from God: the ability to order the world as they see fit.

1. Humanity's grasp for wisdom reveals itself as foolish: it's results are not life and flourishing - the good ordering of God's creation, BUT death, toil in work and home, broken relationship with God and others and loss of the garden.

4. The rest of the Old Testament is the continuing foolish decisions of humanity as they move further away from Eden and the good life contained there. God remains faithful to his purpose for mankind to flourish under under his care and promises that one day One will come who crush the serpent and bring them back to the garden.

1. The narrative tension of the Old Testament is set: "How will we get back to the garden and the good life?"

## **2. The Beginning of Wisdom - Enter the wisdom Literature**

1. **"The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth— Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and**

**their riddles. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (1:1–7)**

2. Proverbs is often seen as a compilation of pithy, helpful statements for living in a wise way. And although these are in the book, this view misses out on the larger role Proverbs plays in the Bible. Giving answer to the question: **“Can we get back to the Garden? How can we live a good life?”**
3. As seen in the introduction of Proverbs, the book is for the sake of knowing wisdom. In the Bible wisdom (Hokmah) is less concerned with “intellect” or simply judgement, rather wisdom refers more to skill and *applied* knowledge of living in the world.
4. Wisdom throughout Proverbs is regularly paralleled with understanding, instruction, insight, prudence, knowledge, etc.
  1. Worth noting is Proverbs repeated use of the words *wisdom*, *understanding*, and *knowledge* together and depicted as “tools” of creation within the larger canon of the Old Testament...
    1. According to Proverbs 3:19-20 it is by Wisdom, understanding and knowledge that God built the Land - The Garden of Eden
    2. According to Exodus 31:3; 35:30-31 it is by Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge given by the Spirit of YHWH that Bezalel builds the Tabernacle - The Garden Tent of God
    3. According to 1 Kings 7:13-14 Hiram is full of Wisdom, Understanding, and Knowledge to build the YHWH’s Temple in Jerusalem - Again, a throwback to the Garden - in imagery and YHWH’s dwelling place.
    4. Here’s the piece that brings it all together - Proverbs 24:3-4 By Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge - you can build your home/ Life..
      1. Like Bezalel and Hiram with the Tabernacle/Temple “replacement gardens,” God invites you to trust or *fear* him and build your home, or life, with wisdom. So, wisdom is depicted as the tools to build a good life.
      2. The Genesis 1-2 Proverbs connection and ideal is this - YHWH the Great Gardener and Architect of life - can train you in wisdom, understanding, and knowledge so that your own personal life will be a kind of mini garden, and Eden, of flourishing and fulness.
        1. This is what Psalm one is talking about - The one who delights in and meditates on Torah - God’s wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge - day and night - will be

like a flourishing tree planted by the rivers of water - this is the Edenic vision!!

5. The question is - will we fear the Lord? Will we live in awe and wonder at his goodness, provision and care for us and respond in gratitude (As Adam and Eve failed to do) - Will we believe that he is our Father who loves us and wants flourishing for our lives? Will we measure God's love and faithfulness by our circumstance or by the cross?? Will we seek Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge that comes from him, or will we strike out on our own?

### 3. The Two Trees

1. What the Book of Proverbs and the Wisdom literature in general is doing is taking us right back to the Garden - putting us in Eve's shoes as it were - it's as if we ourselves, each day, are standing before the two trees - **the Tree of Life** - dependence on God, obedience to God - faith and trust in God - that he loves us, created us, knows what is best and will bring true flourishing - OR **the Tree of Knowledge** - both good and bad - self governance and determination - autonomy - freedom.
  1. Many think the Bible is all about God controlling us - but this is such a warped view - God wasn't keeping Adam and Eve from knowledge and the good life - he was preserving them for it. God wants us to grow in wisdom so that it becomes a true part of us - in order that we can be the covenant image partners that he has created us to be.. God wants us to become fully human under his apprenticeship. He wants to make us truly wise - to rule on his behalf and make the world a garden. Let me just say - this takes a life time of cultivation. It is not instant gratification. It doesn't come through a one time read through scripture (Psalm 1)
    1. Trust in the slow work of God
    2. And I say this because I know that many christians treat scripture the way we treat the latest app, diet, workout, self-help book, etc
    3. Many in our culture want a kind of "App" or "plug and play" wisdom for life - read this book, listen to this podcast, "Marie Kondo" - your life and POOF - the good life - you've arrived. But Wisdom and the good life is not a commodity that you pick up and plug in - it is cultivated character according to

one way of wisdom or another - the wisdom you choose to cultivate either leads to flourishing or to decay and death.

1. It is interesting to me that the wisdom that the Serpent offered was instantaneous - **“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.”**
2. Church - we search for apps, and books, and podcast and this and that to change our lives - These modern divinations - these secret, esoteric, allusive offers of wisdom - but they will not and cannot deliver on their promises of the good life. And what happens each time is a kind of death as your eyes are opened - the heart ache and disappointment, disillusionment sets in and the good life once again evades you - The tragedy of all tragedies is that all day long - the Holy Spirit (Wisdom cries aloud Proverbs 8:1-3) — and is offering to us a cultivation of the wisdom, understanding and knowledge of YHWH that does in fact lead to the good life - to flourishing.
  1. Will you take him at his word? Will you come under his apprenticeship? Will you begin to cultivate this flourishing life that he created and redeemed you for?
  2. Here is the last thing that I’ll say - As I said in the beginning the Good Life - is something that humanity has been searching for since the dawn of time - people are tirelessly going after wisdom that is not wisdom, paths and philosophies that cannot deliver on the Good Life. We the church have the Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge that leads to flourishing and the good life.
  3. Every human being on earth was created by God and for God and when we display his character and his kingdom it is effectual, it has impact - people feel the tugging of their hearts toward God and either move toward him or away from him. We, Jesus’ people, have the thing that every human being longs for - True Flourishing. The Life

of the Christian - is the greatest witness to the watching world. When we live by God's wisdom it displays the flourishing that all of humanity is looking for - I cannot tell you how many times I have talked with people at coffee shops, pubs, parks ect. that see something in me and in my family - It's not me, it's the flourishing life of God that they see. Will we hide that from the world, by neglecting to become who are? Will we fail to enter that flourishing our selves by compromising and taking from the tree of Knowledge rather than the tree of life?

**Closing prayer:** Great Gardener you offer to train us in your wisdom, understanding and knowledge so that our lives will be these mini gardens, these microcosms of Eden, of flourishing and fulness. Lord - we have rebelled and failed again and again to believe you, to obey you — we have sown unfaithfulness, unrighteousness and injustice. we have tried to forge our own paths to the good life - we have tried to build Eden with worldly wisdom and virtues - Forgive us O LORD and restore us again - bring us back to your wisdom, under your discipleship - may your words be cherished by us - so that we might be what you created, and purchased us by your blood, to be. A new and flourishing humanity in covenant partnership with you. In the Name of Jesus our Savior and King we pray - Amen.