

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,  
on Sunday, September 4, 1994 by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

### **PROVERBS 4:7-8**

"Getting wisdom is the most important thing you can do. Whatever else you get, get insight! Love wisdom and she will make you great." (Good News)

### **PEARLS FROM THE PROVERBS**

#### **(1) Wise Up**

If God were to offer you one wish, what would you ask for? You might say, "I'd like to win the lottery so that I could give a million dollars to the Church Building Fund!" Or maybe you would like a pain-free, disease-free body; or a year's supply of Haagen Daas ice cream.

One man in the Bible got that opportunity. His name was Solomon. His father was David; and Solomon was the third *King* of Israel. God said, "Solomon, I've been watching your life; and you can have one thing. What do you want? Fame, pleasure, power, possessions?" And Solomon said, "I want wisdom."

God was so pleased that He said, "Not only will I give you wisdom: I'm going to give you tons of other things you didn't even ask for." And Solomon became the wisest man of his day. He wrote a book called "The Book of Proverbs", which we're going to look at for the next several weeks. The theme of Proverbs is "Getting a grip on life." It looks at things such as money and power and family, career and friends, success and conflict and failure, and aging. And we're going to look at some of these major themes in the book.

Solomon said that the key to really having it all is to "wise up." In Proverbs 4:7-8 (GN) he said, "Getting wisdom is the most important thing you can do. Whatever else you get, get insight! Love wisdom and she will make you great!"

Now, what is wisdom? It's not knowledge. We're in a knowledge explosion in today's world. There's a lot of information, but you can be an educated fool. You can have a lot of college degrees and yet not have any sense. Just watch some of the talk shows! Can you have a high I.Q. and not be wise? You certainly can. Wisdom is not I.Q.; it's not intellect; it's not even common sense. It's much more than that.

Let me tell you what wisdom is: Wisdom is seeing and responding to life from God's perspective. "Seeing" and "responding" -- an attitude and an action. It is a skill that you can develop with God's help. The problem is that we don't usually respond to life from God's perspective. In fact, Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end, it leads to death." Have you ever heard anyone say, "Well, I just go with my natural inclinations. I just do what I feel impelled to do." The Bible says that is foolish because our natural inclinations are normally wrong. "There is a way that seems right, but it leads to death."

Have you ever, on vacation, taken a dirt road up into the mountains, and after half an hour you suddenly realize it's going nowhere? A lot of people are going nowhere fast in life because they're not wise. Wisdom is seeing and responding to life from God's viewpoint.

What will wisdom do for me? Well, let's read Prov. 3:16-18 (GN), "Wisdom is more valuable than precious jewels; nothing you could want can compare with it. Wisdom offers you long life as well as wealth and honor. Wisdom can make your life pleasant and lead you safely through it. Those who become wise are happy."

What can wisdom do for you? A lot more than you think. When I read those verses I say to myself, "Those are the things we spend our lives trying to get -- long life, wealth, honor, pleasure, security and happiness." Do you know anyone who wants those six things? God says they're all wrapped up in learning to be wise. But you say, "How could that be, Pastor?"

- How can God promise me a longer life if I'm wise? Now, I know we've got to be careful not to *give* the impression that every godly person will live to old age. I've known many wonderful Christians whom God allowed to contract cancer and die in their forties. But generally speaking, when you're wise, it reduces the stress in your life. You have healthier habits. You get involved in fewer accidents because you do wise things. So, for the most part, you live longer. I read an insurance company actuarial statement once that said that people who become church members and attend every week, live on an average 6-7 years longer than the rest of the population. Don't you feel healthy just sitting there?!

- It talks about wealth. How do you like having God as your financial planner? When God speaks, everybody listens!

- It talks about honor. How does wisdom bring honor? It's simple. You just don't put your foot in your mouth as often! You know the right thing to do in each situation as it comes along.

- Pleasure. The fact is, folks -- living according to God's wisdom makes life easier. You say, "Why?" Because most of the problems we have in life we bring on ourselves from unwise decisions. When you're wise, it eliminates a lot of the problems you bring on yourself. So, life gets easier and more pleasant when you're wise.

- Security. It says that wisdom will make your life safe. Wisdom gives you a sense of self-confidence and peace of mind. Why? Because all of a sudden, you're in control of the situation. Things don't control you; but you control things when you're wise.

- Solomon says that those who become wise become happy. Solomon asked for wisdom, and God said, "Guess what, Solomon? Everything else you could ever want is wrapped up in wisdom. You asked for the right thing. These six benefits are all part of the wisdom package."

What I really want to do this morning is to tell you that the key to life is to get God's wisdom; because when you get it, it brings all these other good things along with it -- long life, wealth, honor, pleasure, security and happiness.

The question is -- How do I get God's wisdom?

Well, let's take a little survey: How many of you think wisdom comes:

- by reading the National Enquirer?
- by watching Roseanne? Or Oprah?
- by buying a New Age crystal?
- by listening to Geraldo Rivera or Phil Donahue?
- by reading "Dear Abby"?

Folks, there's only one reliable source of wisdom and that is God's Word: So,

**Step 1. You read God's Word.** Solomon begins his book by telling us the purpose of the whole book. It says, "Solomon wrote these proverbs to teach his people how to live -- how to act in every circumstance." (Prov. 1:2 LB) In verse 3 (GN) it says that these proverbs "can teach you how to live intelligently." How many of you would like to know how to act in every circumstance? How many of you would like to always live intelligently? What he's saying here is that the Bible can save you a lot of money on your counseling bill! Do you know that 50 percent of all those who go to counselors are baby-boomers? Why? Because they're looking for something.

When it comes right down to it, there are really only two sources of wisdom in life -- the Word or the world. You will get your insights on life from one of two places -- what God says, or what the world says. The fact is, the world will tell you all sorts of contradictory things. I could take all the founders of modern psychology -- Freud and Jung and Adler, Rogers and Wm. James -- and every one of them would disagree with each other in significant areas. Why? Because as Paul says, the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight (1 Cor. 3:19).

But you have the basic and utterly reliable source of wisdom here in God's word. Let me ask you -- How many of you believe everything you hear on television, especially the commercials? How many of you believe everything you read in the newspaper, especially if it is The Washington Post? How many of you believe everything you read in the Bible? Now let me ask you this -- Why do we spend more time listening to and reading things we don't believe than those we do? It just doesn't make sense. Hear God's Word, read it, study it, memorize it, and meditate upon it, because this is "the owner's manual" for life. When in doubt, read the instructions. And if you want to be wise, you've got to get into this book. But it takes more than reading this book. Over the years I have known people who could quote Scripture till the cows come home, and yet they were neurotic, and sometimes their moral standards weren't all they might be. It requires more than Bible knowledge. That's why I have to take Step 2.

**Step 2. I do what the Bible says.** Notice what Solomon says in chapter 7:1-2 (GN), "...never forget what I tell you to do. Do what I say, and you will live. Be as careful to follow my teaching as you are to protect your eyes." "Do what I say, and you will live. Be careful to follow it." What is he saying? He's saying that this book is worthless to you if it just gathers dust on a bookshelf. Indeed, it's worthless to you if you just read it. It's worthless to you if you don't apply it to your life.

Notice the two things he says:

(a) "Never forget what I tell you to do." That means "remember" -- memorize it. When was the last time you memorized a verse from the Bible? When a serious problem confronts you, it is a great thing to have God's Word stored away in your memory. Usually you can remember a verse or a passage that applies to your situation and helps you deal with your problem. Commit it to memory. (b) Then he said, "Commit it to action." "Do what I say, and you will live." That's how you become wise -- You read God's Word, and memorize it, and then you do what it says.

Let's say you were going on an airplane trip from Los Angeles to London. Many of these flights are now routed over the North Pole. Suppose that up in the Arctic Circle the plane crashes. Miraculously you survive; but just before it crashes, the stewardess has passed out to everybody a little booklet on how to survive in a blizzard! Now, you have survived the crash, as by a miracle, and you're there in the Arctic Circle, and you have a book on how to survive in that perilous part of the planet. Now, you could have read that booklet from cover to cover, and underlined it, and mastered its contents, and still freeze to death! You've got to do what it tells you to do!

Notice James 1:22, "Don't merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." Folks, if you want the secret of an effective life in one sentence, that's it -- Do what the Bible says. It's really very simple. A lot of church attenders across this country are deceiving themselves. They think they're making it because they go to church and drink in the words of some attractive preacher each Lord's Day; or perhaps listen to the message on television. But if it goes in one ear and out the other; and it is forgotten within a few hours, it is worse than useless because they have not applied the teaching of the Word to their lives; and it does them no good at work on Monday morning. I have got to practice what I hear and read from the Word. That is what helps me become a wise person. So, I read God's Word, and I do what it says; and then,

**Step 3: I get to know God.** As we have seen, Solomon begins his book by saying, "Folks, the basic thing in life is to get wisdom. And you get it by reading and memorizing God's Word, doing what it says, and getting to know God." We must develop a relationship with the Lord. Look at Prov. 1:7 (LB), how does a person become wise? (That's a good question.) The first step is to trust and reverence the Lord." Solomon is simply saying, "It's foolish to try to live your life ignoring the One Who made you. You were created for a purpose, and your Creator has a plan for your life. And it's ridiculous to try to live your life and ignore the One Who made you."

He says we are to trust the Lord. That's the starting point for becoming wise. Let me ask you -- Who are you trusting this morning? What are you trusting to give you daily guidance -- the newspaper, *CNN News*, the horoscope, the stock market, your own natural instincts? "Well, I just feel that this is what I ought to do, and therefore, this is what I am going to do." The Bible says that's a dead end. It seems right, but it leads to all kinds of problems. I wonder how many of us have done things we thought were right, but they only led to dead ends.

When you've been fifty years in the ministry you wonder

why:

- people make foolish financial decisions;
- walk into marriages that were doomed from the start;
- cultivate habits they know will eventually kill them;
- take on more in their schedule than they can ever handle;
- buy things they don't need, with money they don't have, to impress people they don't even like;
- have an affair and think it won't matter;
- fail to prepare for death when they know it's inevitable;
- procrastinate in accepting Christ when He offers them tremendous benefits, and they know it.

Proverbs sums up all these questions with one answer—a lack of wisdom. When you lack wisdom, you make foolish decisions, and then you pay the price.

Look at Prov. 9:10 (LB), "For the reverence and fear of God are basic to all wisdom. Knowing God results in every other kind of understanding." Circle the word "fear." Someone says, "Pastor, I thought God loves me." He does. What does "fear" mean? It simply means, "Take God seriously." He's not the Big Brother upstairs; the Big Buddy in the skies. God is not your Co-Pilot. He's not "Co" anything. He's God, and He is the Sovereign.

Solomon says, "Knowing God results in every other kind of understanding." Do you know God? I'm not asking -- Do you know about God? But rather -- Do you know God? Knowing God means more than knowing facts about God. I know God exists. The devil knows that too, but you won't find him in heaven. I believe that Karl Marx existed, but I'm not a Communist. I believe that John Birch is alive, but I'm not a John Bircher. I believe in Jesus Christ, but I'm a Christian. Why? Because it's more than knowing about Him. I know Him. I have a personal relationship with Him. I have committed my life to Him. That's what it means to know God.

You say, how can I get to know God? That's what Jesus Christ came to do. It's very hard to relate to an invisible God -- this big "Force" in the sky. How do you relate to that? I need to see a God with flesh and bones and a beating, loving heart; and I want to know how He can help me in my situation. So approximately 2000 years ago God came to earth. You see, if God had wanted to communicate with birds He would have become a bird. But He wanted to communicate with human beings, so He became one, and that human being was called Jesus Christ. God came and lived on this earth for 33 years. His coming was such an amazing event that human history ever since has been divided into B.C. and A.D. Do you realize that every time you write out a check and insert the date, Jesus Christ is the reference point -- 1994 years from what? From the birth of Jesus, the God-Man. Even people who deny that He is God are *using* Him as a reference point because His coming was the most important event in human history. It was the hinge between two eternities -- eternity past and eternity future.

Isn't it interesting that after the Resurrection, every time the disciples thought about God, they saw the face of Jesus! As Paul says in Colossians 2:9 (LB), "For in Christ there is all of God in a human body." Doesn't that blow your mind?

Becoming a Christian and beginning to share in the wisdom that God offers depends upon whether or not you are willing to enter into a relationship of trust with Jesus.

Now let me go back and ask you the question I started out with: If God were to speak to you and say, "I've been watching your life, and I'm going to give you one request," what would you ask for? I hope that now you would ask for wisdom because nothing you could ever want can compare with it.

It offers you long life, true wealth and honor; it will make your life pleasant, will lead you safely through your earthly pilgrimage; and those who become wise are happy.

I want to challenge you this morning to make wisdom your goal for the rest of your life. Say to yourself, "I want to know God personally. So, I'm going to read and memorize and meditate upon His Word; and I'm going to act upon it and do everything it tells us to do; and I'm really going to get to know the One Who created me and redeemed me." Let this morning's text be branded upon your soul -- "Getting wisdom is the most important thing you can do. Whatever else you get, get insight! Love wisdom, and she will make you great." Proverbs has 31 chapters, one for each day in a month. Why not get into the habit of reading a chapter each day? Billy Graham says that for years he has read five Psalms and one chapter of Proverbs each day, thus completing each book every month. A chapter a day keeps the devil away!

Paul, in 1 Cor. 1:24 says that "Christ is... the wisdom of God." Do you want to know what wisdom is? Look at Jesus Christ. He personifies it. To commit your life to Him means to live wisely.

**AMEN.**