

The Mind of the Messiah

You're driving in an unfamiliar town, and you're lost. Worse, it is night time, and rain is pouring. It is one of those storms where your wiper blades are going as fast as they can go, but there is just too much water coming down. You can barely see where you are going.

How are you going to navigate?

Approach number one: Get out the car, try to see a bit further, go up and examine the street signs, and bit-by-bit, street by street, draw your own map, and try to figure out where you are.

Approach number two: Pretend you are not lost and just keep the car moving. As long you keep going and forget the problem of being lost, you feel better. Pretend there really is no town outside the car.

Approach number three: Get out your map book, switch on your GPS system, and see where you are. Follow instructions.

Those three approaches are how most people approach life. Life often feels a bit like that car ride. There are just thousands upon thousands of facts, experiences and sense impressions that come upon us every day. A lot of people decide the only way to make sense of life is by getting out the car and examining life. They try to test everything and figure everything out. The problem with that is it takes a long time, and you are a very small human in a very big universe. By the time you have mapped two streets on your little map, you are soaking wet, and no closer to figuring out where you are.

Other people pretend there really is no life to figure out. They pretend that the only reality is the reality inside the car, that is, inside their minds. So they just keep the car going, trying to aim not to crash into anyone, but not convinced that there is anything like truth or reality outside of themselves.

The third approach is the right approach. It is to go to God, and get His map book of life, get His GPS, the view from above, and switch it on. When God tells you where you are, that's exactly where you are. When God tells you how to navigate, He is never wrong. The best way to navigate is with the view from above, and the best way to live life is with the view from above.

Another word for 'the view from above' is the word *wisdom*. Wisdom is getting God's view of life and using it to navigate. Wisdom is when you ask God, where am I, why am I here, what am I here for, where am I going, what must I do? And when you get God's mind, when you think God's thoughts – you have wisdom.

To put it in a New Testament sense, wisdom is the mind of Christ. It is the mind of the Messiah. It is thinking like Christ does. And if you think like Christ does, how will that affect your behaviour? It is bound to change it. In other words, wisdom and Christlikeness are inseparable, just two different words for the same thing: getting the mind of Christ, getting God's view on all things, and navigating accordingly.

The amazing thing then, is to see how few professing believers are interested in gaining that kind of knowledge. Now it is not as if those believers don't have to face the same things in life. They also have to figure out if honesty is better than lies, if adultery is worth the risk, if you should live life towards God or towards yourself, how you should treat money, how hard you should work, how you should respond to correction, how you should treat your parents, how you should raise your children, how you should treat your wife, what you should do in conflict situations, what kind of character is needed in this life, and what to expect as you travel along. They have to face all the same challenges that everyone else has to. And yet, even though God has given us His view from above on how to live, how to face these things, you find many a professing believer seemingly showing no interest. They don't consult the map book or switch on the GPS; they get out the car and start drawing their own maps.

Then you have to stop and ask, is it because those believers aren't interested in knowing how to handle life? Maybe here and there you find someone so apathetic that they no longer care what they do. However, most people want to make the most of life.

Is it because such believers are simply too busy to find out what God has to say about how to handle life? It may look that way, but on closer inspection, here is what you find: every person seeks knowledge about life. It is just that all too many believers do not trust that God's Word is the map for life. They buy books on child-training from CNA. They talk to people at work about how hard one should work. They watch TV programmes that instruct on marriage and romance, on self-image, on family living. They talk to professionals about financial planning. And in some of those cases, there might be some useful information. My point is, nearly all of us look for information and knowledge about life. The real question is, where do we go first, and where do we go most often? The painful truth is, the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are strangers to many Christians. If there is one section of your Bible that should look worn, dog-eared and heavily finger-printed, it is Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

In the end you have to conclude that many Christians don't really trust God's map book, and don't believe His view from above is the correct view.

The person who believes that life is impossible to live apart from God is the person who is going to seek God's mind. In other words, the person who believes the rest of Ecclesiastes – that life does not work apart from a reverent and fervent relationship with God, is going to want wisdom.

The person who has come to fear God is seeking wisdom. You accept that you don't have the answers, and that you can't come to them by yourself. You believe that God knows best and has always known best. So you humbly open His Word, and start looking.

Through these chapters, Solomon is going to describe how the person who is God-fearing prefers and loves and seeks wisdom. He is going to make a case for having a wisdom-seeking life. To do that, he is going to do two things. First, he is going to give you an honest appraisal of the benefits and limits of wisdom. Second, he is going to inspire you to seek wisdom with his own example.

I. The Benefits and Limitations of Wisdom

Wisdom Protects You

Ecclesiastes 7:11-12:11 *Wisdom is good with an inheritance, And profitable to those who see the sun. 12 For wisdom is a defence as money is a defence, But the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.*

Wisdom is as good as an inheritance. If your father leaves you wisdom, he leaves you with a treasure. It will profit you. It will protect you according to verse 12. It is a defence, and it gives and preserves life.

As you go along in life, you see some of the devastating consequences of unwise decisions: financial decisions that the Bible warned against, or sexual decisions that the Bible warned against, amongst others. I have sometimes sat listening to the story of someone's life and just grieved because it is a story of one bad decision followed by another bad decision to make up for the first one; followed by all sorts of bad decisions to counter the consequences of the previous bad decisions, and the whole thing is a car wreck now. You can't tell the steering wheel from the back seat.

Solomon says the person who soaks himself in wisdom protects himself. The person who is a frequent caller at the home of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes has better insurance, better medical aid,

better seatbelts, crash-helmets, security fences than all the world can provide.

Wisdom Strengthens You

Ecclesiastes 7:19-20 *Wisdom strengthens the wise More than ten rulers of the city. ²⁰ ¶ For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.*

Ecclesiastes 9:17-18 *Words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard Rather than the shout of a ruler of fools. ¹⁸ Wisdom is better than weapons of war; But one sinner destroys much good."*

The wisdom of God gives you more internal strength than all the political clout of members of the cabinet. Do you remember Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the book of Daniel?

Nebuchadnezzar sets up this massive image and he calls to Babylon all the rulers and satraps and lords to bow down to it. Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego remain standing. Remember those guys were probably in their late teens, maybe early twenties. When they refuse to bow, they are dragged before the king, the most powerful king in the world, who demands that they bow down. What was their response?

Daniel 3:16-18 *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ "If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸ "But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."*

Only wisdom can give that kind of strength. The kind of strength that 33 year old Jesus had when replying to Pharisees who asked him by what authority He did miracles, or if it was lawful to pay taxes, or the answers He gave before Pilate.

Wisdom Honours You

Ecclesiastes 8:1 *Who is like a wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, And the sternness of his face is changed.*

Wisdom causes someone to have a face that seems to reflect the very beauty of God Himself. When Stephen testified, the Bible says his face was like that of an angel. His wisdom could not be refuted, and he seemed to reflect the attitude and ways of Christ Himself. There is hardly a greater honour than to reflect Jesus Christ in your very countenance.

Wisdom is better than foolishness

Ecclesiastes 2:13-14 *Then I saw that wisdom excels folly As light excels darkness. ¹⁴ The wise man's eyes are in his head, But the fool walks in darkness. Yet I myself perceived That the same event happens to them all.*

Fools lack direction and orientation.

Ecclesiastes 10:1-3 *Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment, And cause it to give off a foul odor; So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor. ² A wise man's heart is at his right hand, But a fool's heart at his left. ³ Even when a fool walks along the way, He lacks wisdom, And he shows everyone that he is a fool.*

Foolishness ruins a wise reputation. Foolishness reveals itself.

Ecclesiastes 7:5-6 *It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise Than for a man to hear the song of fools. ⁶ For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, So is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity.*

Fools do not take life seriously and provide little real joy. Their laughter is loud and short-lived, but provides little heat to warm the heart.

Ecclesiastes 10:11-15 *A serpent may bite when it is not charmed; The babbler is no different. ¹² The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, But the lips of a fool shall swallow him up; ¹³ The words of his mouth begin with foolishness, And the end of his talk is raving madness. ¹⁴ A fool also multiplies words. No man*

knows what is to be; Who can tell him what will be after him? ¹⁵ The labor of fools wearies them, For they do not even know how to go to the city!

Fools speak foolish words. A fool is not merely an ignorant person. A fool is someone who is in a position to know the truth and turns away from it. Solomon says that the life of wisdom is far, far better than the life of rebellion against the truth.

On the other hand, God is very frank about the limitations of wisdom. In a sin-cursed world, there are some things that Christlikeness will not do, and is not meant to do. If you expect that getting the mind of Christ will do what it won't, then you will no doubt be disappointed when it doesn't happen.

Wisdom won't necessarily benefit you in worldly ways.

Ecclesiastes 9:13-16 *This wisdom I have also seen under the sun, and it seemed great to me: ¹⁴ There was a little city with few men in it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great snares around it. ¹⁵ Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that same poor man. ¹⁶ Then I said: "Wisdom is better than strength. Nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, And his words are not heard.*

When last did you see someone interviewed on Oprah for her Christ likeness? When last was there a YOU magazine with the cover article about the wisdom of a particular Christian? The world does not honour wisdom with awards, fame, power, popularity. They don't name streets or towns after believers simply because they were Christlike. In fact, most Christlike people who have walked the face of this earth are forgotten and unknown. There is no promise of recognition by the world for wisdom.

Wisdom won't make you immortal.

Ecclesiastes 2:14-15 *The wise man's eyes are in his head, But the fool walks in darkness. Yet I myself perceived That the same event happens to them all. ¹⁵ So I said in my heart, "As it happens to the fool, It also happens to me, And why was I then more wise?" Then I said in my heart, "This also is vanity."*

As Christlike as you may become, you must still face death, if Christ does not return before then. Wisdom does not spare you from the appointment that all men must keep.

Wisdom can be warped.

Ecclesiastes 7:16-18 *Do not be overly righteous, Nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourself? ¹⁷ Do not be overly wicked, Nor be foolish: Why should you die before your time? ¹⁸ It is good that you grasp this, And also not remove your hand from the other; For he who fears God will escape them all.*

Here Solomon is not telling us to try to find some kind of middle ground between good and evil, wisdom and foolishness. He does not say don't be overly wicked as if being moderately wicked is a good thing. He is talking about extremes. There are people who turn righteousness and wisdom into the self-righteousness of legalism, which instead of lightening the load, becomes burdensome. On the other hand, some simply turn to all-out sensuality. He says, don't do either. Don't abuse wisdom and turn it into stone tablets which are too heavy to carry.

Wisdom won't make you immortal; it can be abused; and the world won't honour you for it. But it profits and protects you, it strengthens you, it is far better than foolishness and it causes you to reflect the Lord.

Now with those kinds of benefits, people will no doubt be queuing up to get wisdom, right? Well, consider the usual patter, described in Proverbs 1:

Proverbs 1:20-33 *Wisdom calls aloud outside; She raises her voice in the open squares. ²¹ She cries out in the chief concourses, At the openings of the gates in the city She speaks her words: ²² "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorers delight in their scorning, And fools hate knowledge. ²³*

Turn at my rebuke; Surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you. ²⁴ Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, ²⁵ Because you disdained all my counsel, And would have none of my rebuke, ²⁶ I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, ²⁷ When your terror comes like a storm, And your destruction comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you. ²⁸ "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me. ²⁹ Because they hated knowledge And did not choose the fear of the LORD, ³⁰ They would have none of my counsel And despised my every rebuke. ³¹ Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, And be filled to the full with their own fancies. ³² For the turning away of the simple will slay them, And the complacency of fools will destroy them; ³³ But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, And will be secure, without fear of evil."

Instead of being like that, Solomon left us with an example:

II. The Example of Wisdom-Seeking Solomon

Ecclesiastes 7:23-25 *All this I have proved by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise"; But it was far from me. ²⁴ As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep, Who can find it out? ²⁵ I applied my heart to know, To search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things, To know the wickedness of folly, Even of foolishness and madness.*

Ecclesiastes 12:9-10 *And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs. ¹⁰ The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright -- words of truth.*

Solomon searched for wisdom, and we know he found it.

If you want wisdom, then God would have you seek it in the following ways.

1) Seek Wisdom in a Person, not merely in principles.

1 Corinthians 1:18-24 *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. ¹⁹ For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." ²⁰ Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. ²² For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

Where do we get wisdom? We find wisdom first and foremost by seeking to know the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the ultimate in wisdom. Wisdom is personified in Proverbs because ultimately we seek wisdom in a person. Our desire is to know Him. To know what pleases Him. To know what He desires. To know how He wants things done. To know what He values.

2) Seek Christ for Himself, not as a means to anything else.

Jesus is not some stepping stone to a more successful life, with you still squarely at the centre. Jesus Christ is the centre. If we think we can use Him, we deceive ourselves. He is not mocked. Christ is not a key to unlock something else. He Himself is the destination. You do not seek Christ so that you can get good advice to live your own life. You seek Christ because He is your life and you want to know how to make sense of it in Him.

3) Seek to know the mind of Christ until you find it.

If you are lost, you stare at that map until you have figured out where you are. If we are determined to get Christ's mind in our lives, we will seek out His mind until we find it.

Proverbs 4:5-7 *Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; Love her, and she will keep you. ⁷ Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding.*

Proverbs 2:1-7 *My son, if you receive my words, And treasure my commands within you, ² So that you incline your ear to wisdom, And apply your heart to understanding; ³ Yes, if you cry out for discernment, And lift up your voice for understanding, ⁴ If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; ⁵ Then you will understand the fear of the LORD, And find the knowledge of God. ⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding; ⁷ He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly;*

James 1:5 *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*

What do you think that kind of search looks like when it comes to Christ's view of marriage? Money? Work? Worship? Church? The body? The tongue? Priorities?

What kind of attitude towards the Word, prayer, seeking godly counsel would be a fulfillment of Proverbs 2?

There is a difference between wishing and willing. Wishing is when the desire for wisdom appeals to us, but it is not the strongest desire. The strongest desires are still for comfort, short-cuts, ease, and our own solutions. Willing is when the desire to know the mind of Christ becomes all-consuming, and you are willing to search out His mind on whatever matter until His thoughts become your thoughts. It emerges not only from a deep desire to know where we must go, but from a deep desire to know the mind of our Saviour.

So where are you today? Are you just keeping your foot on the accelerator, happy to keep moving through life without any thought of where you are actually going?

Are you getting out the car, desperately trying to figure it all out through investigation, but getting hopelessly wet and quite confused in the process?

Have you come to a settled conviction that Christ knows reality best, and that to know Him and His mind is to know where you are and where you're going, so much so that you are seeking to know Him? The fear of the Lord Jesus Christ is the beginning of wisdom.