

The Answer to All This Mess

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Proverbs 8. Now as you're turning to Proverbs 8, I know we have guests and visitors with us and I want to encourage you just to join us in a journey. For the past two years, we have been walking through the Scriptures typically one to two chapters a day, and we're gonna continue for about another year to where we take in the entirety of the Bible in a very slow and strategic pace, and today we find ourselves in the book of Proverbs, and as you look out on the world today, there's probably no better place in the Bible that we need to be than the book of Proverbs. It is the book of the Bible that gives us everyday advice that is soaked and covered in what we're gonna talk about today, wisdom.

Now the book of Proverbs is unique. The first 10 chapters, they are very narrative, they tell a story, you can kind of follow the theme. By the time you get to chapter 11, there's all these just random thoughts and concepts that are kind of put together in this Proverbs of anthology, so to speak. But today as we turn to Proverbs 8, it's an entire chapter defining for us, explaining to us, and urging us to embrace wisdom. Now this is gonna be important because you would have to agree with me that when we look at the world today, we find ourselves in a mess, do we not? I mean, we've got a mess. We've got a global pandemic that is entering its fifth month. We've got social unrest. We've got economic instability. And to top all that off, the kids are going back to school this week and all the parents said, "Amen." That's right.

It's a mess and so what we've got to address today is what's the answer to all this mess? There is an answer and we're gonna discover today that Proverbs 8 tells us that if we will gain wisdom, it doesn't matter what the issue is, it doesn't matter what the subject matter is, it doesn't matter what the turmoil is, we can have answers for it. By the way, back in Proverbs 4:7 it says this one thing you need to get more than anything else, you need to get wisdom. Now here in Proverbs 8, beginning in verse 1, I'm just gonna read the first 21 verses. It describes for us what that journey would look like. It says,

1 Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? 2 She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths. 3 She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors. 4 Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man. 5 O

ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart. 6 Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things. 7 For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips. 8 All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them. 9 They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge. 10 Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. 11 For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it. 12 I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions. 13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate. 14 Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength. 15 By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. 16 By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth. 17 I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me. 18 Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness. 19 My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver. 20 I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: 21 That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.

Now we read those verses and that is something that every one of us wants for our life, this ability to walk in a path of wisdom, this ability to reject the things that have no intrinsic value in life. But if we're gonna talk about wisdom which is the answer to all this mess, the first thing we've got to ask ourselves is what is it? What is wisdom? Now allow me to define wisdom in the Meyers' International Dictionary, okay? Wisdom is knowing what to do with what you've got. That's what wisdom is. You see, oftentimes in our culture, we equate wisdom with knowledge, or we equate wisdom with education, and two things I want to dismiss this morning is this: that one's age and educational level does not necessarily communicate how much wisdom they possess. Wisdom means I have the information, I have the facts, I have the data, and now that I have what I have, I actually know what to do with it.

We've all met people who have more degrees than they know what to do with and don't know what anything to do with what they've got. They can recite the statistics, the studies, whatever it may be, and every conversation or every pundit that comes from them is simply a just discourse on the information but there's no answers, there's no solutions, there's no this is what you do. On the other hand, I've met plenty of folks who had no formal education but when you went to them for advice, they knew exactly the right words to share. They didn't have a whole lot of knowledge, they didn't have a whole lot of data, but what they had they knew what to do with it.

You see, wisdom cannot be necessarily equated with our educational level nor our age. How many times do we say, "Well, they're just a wise old soul." That's a terminology in our culture but I've met folks with a whole lot of gray hair that didn't have a whole lot of wisdom. They may have had years but they didn't know what to do with what they had.

And I've met folks who don't have a single gray hair on their head who know what to do with the information that they've got. In fact, so I think from the very beginning let's dismiss, this isn't, when we talk about wisdom, this isn't only about older people with a whole lot of education, it's about anybody who follows what we read here in Proverbs 8.

Allow me to illustrate. 1 Kings 3. A man comes on the scene by the name of Solomon. Solomon not only was the one who the Lord used to give us the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, etc., but he is also known as the wisest individual in the world. The history of the world. One of the most famous scenes that displays this is in 1 Kings 3. Let me remind you that at this point Solomon was very young of age. He also had not experienced all of the education that the book of Ecclesiastes talks about. One day two women come into his court. They are distraught, to say the least. These two women, each of them respectively had their own child. In the middle of the night, one of the ladies accidentally rolls over the child and suffocates it, so now we have two moms and only one baby and everybody's fighting over the baby. They come in, they're upset, tears are flying, "Whatta we do? Whatta we do?" Solomon asked a very simple question. He says, "What do you think we ought to do with the baby?" One of the moms speaks up and says, "I think the only fair thing to do is to cut it in half, give her half, give me half." The other woman says, "Oh no, no, no, no, give her the baby." And Solomon says, "I figured this one out. Ma'am, you're the momma to that baby, because the real momma would rather have somebody else raise it than lose it."

Now you realize he didn't have a whole lot of information, right? There had not been a study done of that night, there had not been a forensic report, the authorities had not been called, but he knew what to do with what he had. And my friends, right now when it comes to the issues of our day, we don't have a whole lot of information sometimes, do we? Sometimes we have conflicting information and so we need to know what do we do with what we have.

The second thing we've got to address is this: where do we get it? Where do we locate this wisdom? Where do we find it? Three things you need to do and the first thing is this: just look out, just look out amongst humanity. Here's the great news, notice how this Proverb starts, it's not hidden from us. It says that wisdom screams from the mountains, it screams from the hills. In fact, James 1 says this: if you pray for wisdom, God promises you he will give it to you. This isn't like your car keys two minutes before you've got to get in the car to get to work that you can't find because you don't know where you put them. Wisdom is available. It screams to us and desires for us to participate.

Here's the thing that's interesting. Notice verse 7 and 8, it says, "But my mouth," this is wisdom, "shall speak truth and wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are righteousness; there's nothing froward or perverse in them." If you want to seek out those who are wise, if you want wisdom spoken into your life, you need to seek out people who possess wisdom. That's where you find it. It's in communication. It's in interaction. You cannot Google search wisdom. I'm sorry. You have to get it from somebody else.

I want you to notice who qualifies or, shall I say, does not qualify to be the distributor of wisdom. It says if their life is full of wickedness, don't pay attention to them. If their mouth is froward, if they speak lies, don't listen to them. You do realize that means that the loudest voices in our culture are not the communicators of wisdom because oftentimes their lives are of wickedness, their decisions are a lack of righteousness, and lies are on every other statement they make. Now they may possess knowledge, they may actually possess information, but wisdom, they should not be sought after to know what to do with the information you've got because according to this, when you're seeking out wisdom to hear it, the vessel that God uses is a vessel of righteousness, godliness, and one that speaks the truth.

Now some of you are thinking, "Well, Jeff, you said wisdom is found everywhere. You can find it, it screams at us, and there's not a whole lot of those people around." You're absolutely right but they are there, we'll talk about that in just a moment.

So you've got to look out, find those who have righteous, godly lives and hear what they have to say about the matter. The second thing you need to do is look in. Beginning in verse 9, it talks about that these are all plain to those who love them and there's this discourse about how the wisdom is better than rubies and all the things that may be desired. I want you to notice verse 13 and 14, "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate. Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength." Let me communicate what this passage is saying, that if we want to truly have wisdom in our life, the answer to all this mess, we don't just need to look out to those who can distribute it, we need to be willing to receive it when we get it. In other words, we cannot have a deceitful heart, we cannot have a froward heart. Allow me to put it in a statement that I have said more times than I probably should have but I'll keep saying it because it is an expression of my spiritual gift of sarcasm: do not let the facts get in the way of your personal agenda. In other words, if you truly desire wisdom, you cannot come to it with your personal agenda and make the information fit what you want it to be. To truly be an individual that possesses wisdom, you've got to be able to seek out this is what is truth, this is a vessel of righteousness, it may not be what I want to hear, it may not look the way I want it to look, it may not sound the way I want it to sound, but nonetheless it meets the qualifications that God has laid forth.

You look out, you look in, then you've got to look up. Notice what it says in verse 15, "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth." Interesting the positions that the Lord mentions that we are to look up to and see how are these guys doing it? What are the decisions they're making? How are they speaking to the matters that are at hand? And here's where you and I have a difficult time. We've got to somehow separate ourselves from our Western civilization and our Americana for just a moment. When we see the word "kings" and "princes" and "judges," we tend to filter that through our culture. We can't help but do it, right? Here's the problem, is most of the people, that's a strong word, a whole lot of people that possess positions of authority in our culture are not righteous, holy, truth speaking people and it's because we elected them. That outta just settle down for a few moments. One of the

problems we've got is we tend to elect people who are just like us. They have our desires and our agendas. They have to as their goal, our goals.

This isn't the time or the place, I've seen it time and time and time again where people dismiss all aspects of the things of God just for what they want to get in the end. So why is this important? Because in biblical days, nobody elected a king, nobody elected a prince, and nobody elected a judge. You know who did? God did. In other words, it says look up to those who God has set aside for his purpose. Look to those who God has set. That is why I listen to more sermons than I do the news. Why? I want to hear from those who God has called. I want to hear from those that God has set aside. I want to hear from those who spend more time in their prayer closet than in front of a tv camera because that, my friends, is where we will glean wisdom.

What's the answer to all this mess? We've gotta look out, we've gotta look in, and we've gotta look up to those individuals that God has set aside that speak, "Thus saith the Lord," and not thus to get your vote. There's a big difference.

Now when you get to verse 22, everything changes, in fact, everything takes a kind of a shift, so to speak, because it says,

22 The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. 23 I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. 24 When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. 25 Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth:

As you read through the end of what we know as Proverbs 8, it becomes abundantly clear that this wisdom that we speak of has always existed. It is not something that we just found thanks to the latest revolution or reformation or whatever it may be. It has always been available. In fact, as you read it over and over again, one of the things you'll discover is the attributes, the qualifications, the descriptions of wisdom in the latter half of Proverbs 8 sound very similar to the person of Jesus Christ and that, my friends, is the answer to it all. Where do we need to look? We need to look out, in and up. I get it. But the most important question we need to ask is: who? Who do we need to look to? Who do we need to seek? Who is the answer to all of this mess?

Today we live in a world with research data information, we've got more stuff out there than we know what to do with, it is information overload, but it is a rare day, it's a rare day when someone says, "How about we consult Jesus Christ about this?" And so allow me to use the same paradigm that we've used for us seeking wisdom and see how Jesus Christ utilized that in his earthly ministry and how he did so might share with us the answer to it all.

Let's talk about looking out for just a moment. Is that not what Jesus Christ did? He came unto the earth and his earthly ministry begins particularly what we know as the Gospel accounts, and what did he look out on? He looked out and he saw a mess. He saw people

that were lying, cheating, stealing, and that's just the good things. He saw that humanity was deprived in every aspect, in fact, one night he's having somewhat of a dinner party at somebody's house, a man who was a publican, a man who had stolen from his own people on behalf of the rival government, a man who even the enemies of Jesus called a sinner and despicable at best. When called on the carpet, do you know what Jesus said? He looked out on those dinner guests, he looked out on humanity and he said, "For the Son of Man," that's speaking of himself, "came to seek and to save that which was lost." Do you know what Jesus told us by looking out? The problem that we've got, folks, may be described as a virus, it may be described as economics, it may be described as unrest, but at the core of it we've got a sin problem and Jesus looked out and said, "Do you know what? These folks may be cheating, these folks may be lying, these folks may be doing this, but at the end of the day they're all lost and they all need to be saved."

But then he looked in. You see, later on in his ministry, that was at the beginning, his disciples, his own disciples came to him and said, "Jesus, you keep talking about this cross, you keep talking about death, you keep talking about people that are gonna take your life. We've seen you multiply food, we've seen you walk on water, I mean, you are amazing. There is no way this is gonna happen." In fact, this started back in Matthew 16. Remember Simon Peter makes this great declaration, "You're the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus says, "Oh, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father which is in heaven. By the way, I'm gonna go to the cross." What does Simon Peter say? "Uh-uh, no, you're not, not if I have anything to do with it." What does Jesus say? "Get behind me, Satan." This was a battle, this was a struggle.

John 12. I mean, we are hours from the crucifixion. I mean, we are in the last days of his earthly ministry and what are the disciples doing? They're again trying to talk him out of this. "This is not a good idea." There in verse 27 of John 12, Jesus uses a phrase called "my hour." It's used all throughout the Gospel of John to specifically speak about what we know as the cross event. I want you to hear what Jesus says in verse 27. He said, "Why should I escape this hour, for this hour is why I came." In other words, he looked in and said, "It's not pretty, it's a mess, and most of you aren't even getting what I've been telling you for 3 ½ years, but it doesn't change the fact this is why I came, this is why I was born, this is why I live, this is why I rejected the enemy, and this is why in a few hours I'm gonna let them put stakes in my hands and in my feet."

And then he looked up. You say, "He looked up?" Oh, he looked up to the King. In fact, in Luke 23, they put him on that cross. The thorns were on his head. The nails were in his hands and in his feet and all around him they were mocking him, they were making fun of him, they were harassing him. They're saying, "Oh, you saved others, save yourself." All those men who said, "Jesus, I'll never, I'll never leave you," they were nowhere to be found. Only one of them, John, was there. In Luke 23, I want you to hear what Jesus said. It says he looked up into heaven, you see, he's already looked out on our sin condition, he's already looked in and said, "I'm willing to take care of it," he looked up and listen to what he says, the first statement on the cross, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing." Now think about that for just a moment. Jesus Christ summed it up so clearly. The mess that we've got, oh, we need wisdom, don't get me wrong and we've

described on how to find it, but at the end of the day what we need is our sin problem addressed and he's the only one that can do it.

Now an important question for us is what's next? I want you to notice the last two verses of Proverbs 8. If you questioned the allusion of this last half about being Jesus Christ, that question is about to be answered. Verse 35,

35 For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD. 36 But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.

Is that not a summary of the ministry and the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Whoever believes in him, whoever loves him shall experience life. Whoever rejects should experience death. 1 John 5:12, I love this verse because it's all one syllable words, "He that has the Son hath life. He that has not the Son has not life." It's real simple, folks. We got ourselves in a mess. Our world is in a mess. Our culture is in a mess. We can make that more personal if need be. At the end of the day, we hear a lot of chatter, we hear a lot of volume, we hear a lot of this and we hear a lot of that but what we just read said at the end of the day what really needs to happen is we need the Lord to take care of our sin problem because if we don't take care of that, then none of this other stuff is ever gonna work itself out. So it's a real simple question: are we experiencing life or are we experiencing death? The answer is based on what we've done with Jesus.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. You know, maybe you're that individual today, maybe you're here in this room or maybe you're on the other side of the camera and maybe you've barely paid attention to the news of recent months or maybe you've been absolutely obsessed by it, it doesn't matter where you find yourselves, it's easy to recognize it's a mess out there, and maybe today you're that person who's never taken a step back and looked at your own sinful condition, maybe never taken a step back and realized that this is a problem that only God can solve, and maybe today the Lord led you through his word to realize your need for Jesus. Can I encourage you to do what Romans 10 says? "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." That's what we celebrated today, these three young people who came for baptism. There was a point before today that they called on the Lord to save them, today we just got the privilege of celebrating with them. Maybe you're that individual today, it doesn't matter your age or educational level, it doesn't matter whether you're with us here today for the first time or the thousandth time, if you're that person today would you do what Romans 10 says and just have a conversation with God? I know technically we would call it prayer, you don't have to do so out loud, you don't even have to recite the same words I might say. This is the cry of your heart but allow me to kind of guide you what that might sound like. If you're that person today, would you be willing to have this conversation with God? "Lord, today, God, I recognize that I've got a sin problem. Lord, I know all the world's in a mess but I've gotta focus on me for just a moment. God, I've done some things I shouldn't have done. God, I've said some things I shouldn't have said. God, I've thought some things I shouldn't have thought and I realize that your word says the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is everlasting life through Jesus Christ. God, that's why I'm

having this conversation with you. I recognize that I'm the problem and you're the answer and, God, today I want you to know I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf. And God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. And God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that when he was on that cross, he was bearing the punishment of my sin. And God, I believe that three days later when he rose from the grave, he made it possible for my sins to be forgiven, my soul to be saved, my eternal direction and destination to be altered forever. And God, today I don't have all the answers to the issues and the problems and the mess of this world, but I do know that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem. So today I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. The best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With your heads bowed and your eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today who had that conversation with the Lord. We'd love to celebrate with you. In just a moment we're gonna stand and sing together and you have the opportunity just to step out, step forward. We have a team of folks who would love to pray with you, pray for you, and just hear your story. Or maybe even in this room you're like those on the other side of the camera, the distance of today is your friend. We have a phone number that you can call, a phone number that you can text. There's people on the other line as we speak. We'd love the privilege of knowing and hearing what God's doing in your life.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision, thank you that in spite of our sinful condition, God, thank you in spite of the mess that we as humanity are so good at finding ourselves in, that you looked out and you were willing and desiring to forgive us and to save us. O God, help us today to look to you before we look to anybody or anything else for the answers of our life both here and forever. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.