

Ecclesiastes: What is Wisdom?

Oct. 21, 2018

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: One Thing by Hillsong

(Here is a psalm/song to help your group as you worship.)

I tasted the world seen more than enough
It's promises fleeting
Of water and wine I emptied the cup
And found myself wanting

But there is a well that never runs dry
The water of life the blood of the vine

{Corus}
Cause all I know is
Everything I have means nothing
Jesus if you are not my one thing
Everything I need right now
All I need is You right now

Just one thing I ask and this I will seek
If only to know You

To be where You are and go where you lead
My God I will follow

The things of this world I've counted as loss
I lay it all down to take up this cross

{Corus}

And I'll sing
Whoa whoa
I want nothing but know You
And to be with You my God

And I'll sing
Whoa whoa
And with everything within me
I will worship You my God

Icebreaker

Who is the wisest person you know and what do you think makes them so wise?

Text for Discussion: Ecclesiastes 7:8-14, 23-24, 8:14-17

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

Wisdom for a Christian is having a personal relationship with God, walking in His love for so long that we make it our aim to please Him in all we do. Proverbs tells us wisdom has immeasurable value (8:11, 16:16, 4:7), so we must pursue it regardless of the cost. But what is wisdom? The Bible's definition is quite different from our modern, cultural understanding. Today, we place ultimate authority in our personal determination of how we should live... whereas the Bible says God's word has authority over our lives, trusting Him above ourselves.

Biblical wisdom goes beyond being ethical; it's making the right choice even when moral laws are unclear. This is the practical part of wisdom: to be patient and show self-control, to take the long view of things, to be slow to anger, to not hold a grudge, to use our emotions appropriately. Wise people are learning how to be present – with others, with God, and with themselves. It's so easy to become nostalgic, romanticizing the past, but such feelings steal the present from us. We must look beyond these longings, recognizing they're merely a reminder of God's faithfulness and presence.

“The fear of the Lord is wisdom” (Job 28:28), knowing our place and living in awe of God's transcendent holiness. Yet, our majestic God humbles Himself to share His life and glory with us. How could we not live in fearful awe of such loving, freeing sacrifice? *“Since Jesus went through everything we're going through and more, learn to think like Him. Think of our sufferings as a weaning from that old sinful habit of always*

expecting to get our own way. Then we'll be able to live out our days free to pursue what God wants instead of being tyrannized by what we want" (1 Peter 4:1-2, MSG).

What are the limits of wisdom? If it's true we don't even know what's going on in the mind of the person next to us, how can we ever expect to understand the mind of God? How can we question His ways? No matter how far we advance, we will never be able to fathom the meaning of life on our own – no matter how fervent our search or successful our efforts. Wisdom therefore recognizes the limits of wisdom, learns its place, and finds peace in the truth that our good God is in control.

Wisdom is both a gift from God (Prov 2:6) and something we're told to pursue (Prov 4:7). The Bible assures us that if we seek wisdom, we will find it. The question is whether we truly want God's wisdom. Too often, we fail to see our need for it, clinging to the belief that we can navigate life on our own. But if we do want to pursue Jesus's wisdom, what are some practical steps?

Identify our idols. We can believe in God but not actually trust Him, for if we still look to something else to find contentment or significance, then that is our real god. So we must do the hard work of identifying the idols of our heart... and keep doing it. Other loyalties will continually try to take over our lives.

Submit to God. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight" (Prov 3:5). Where God has made it clear what to do, obey Him. Where God's will is unclear, show prayerful patience and seek to honor Him.

See your pain as a gift. Wisdom isn't something we can learn second-hand; it comes through pain. This isn't a reason to despair. We must think of suffering as a weaning from the old, sinful habit of always expecting to get our own way. Our Savior is the One who makes the Fear of the Lord full of wonder – offering the peace of knowing that God not only sees us, but deeply cares about what happens to us.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

How does knowing and having a relationship with Christ make one truly wise?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

- What is the difference between human intelligence and God's wisdom?
- How is God's wisdom both a gift and an obligation?
 - In what areas of life do you see your need of God's wisdom?
 - To what measures should we seek true wisdom?
 - How does identifying our idols help us in obtaining wisdom?
- Why are we not to remember fondly "the good ole days"? What does this nostalgia take from us?
- Do we have the power to "straighten" out what God has done? See 7:13 and 8:17.
 - In what areas of life do we tend to want to help Him out?
- How does knowing and having a relationship with Christ make one truly wise?
 - How does true wisdom help us navigate the complex realities of life?
- What are your thoughts when you read Ecclesiastes 9:7?

Prayer

Lord, I'm such a foolish person, so inclined to trust myself and the gifts you've given me rather than trust in you. Help me to settle down in complete dependence upon you and receive the strength that comes from the wisdom that you give. Thank you Jesus that you are wisdom personified, the wisdom that holds all things together, including me. Amen

Experiment of the week

(A suggestion for engagement in following the way of Jesus this week)

Tim Keller says one of the main ways to grow in wisdom is to identify your idols. You can believe in God but still trust in something or someone else for your significance and happiness, which is therefore your real God. Spend some time reflecting on those things that you may have trusted in more than God. Confess and repent before Him. Share with the group how this may have helped you grow in wisdom from God and the effect it has had on your appearance and sense of wellbeing (8:1).