

Understanding

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] Okay, so we're looking, last week we looked at, and this week we'll take a break next week because it's a family service and the next two Sundays, God willing, we'll be looking at Proverbs chapter 20, a little break from our series in Romans, so we're looking at this various verses from this chapter in Proverbs, and the theme this Sunday is on the, the series is called A Wedge of Wisdom, and the sermon title for this week is Understanding. So what I want to, well I'll say a little bit more in a minute, but what I want to stress at the beginning is that this series on wisdom is not a, it's not a how-to series, it's not a moralistic series, it's in if you do this, this, and this, you'll be wise. The Bible's not like that, and salvation is not like that in the sense that if we jump through certain hoops of wisdom or obedience, then we'll be right with God. We know that's not the case, don't we? Like that. It's not moralism that somehow if we're good people and if we pat ourselves in the back by doing the right things, we'll be right with God. That's not the gospel, and it's not what Proverbs is intended to be, but rather it's a series, and Proverbs is a book which helps us to identify the characteristics that should mark people who already trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, who trust in God, who believe and follow God, and who have come to faith in Jesus, because grace should transform us, should change us from the inside out. So when we look at Proverbs, what we're looking at, we're looking at the marks of what it looks like to be being changed to be like God. You see what I mean? You see the difference between the two things. So if the Spirit of God is in us, our lives should be being transformed as we follow Jesus to be more like what God wants us to be like. So in other words, you could put over the book of Proverbs a sign that says, in the very common sense, Holy Spirit at work. So our lives as we follow and trust in Jesus Christ should be becoming more like the kind of people that are described in Proverbs.

There's a series on the telly, I never watched it, but it's called Who Do You Think You Are? And it's really a series about people's genealogies, they're forebears, and there's a celebrity one, well, maybe they're all celebrity, I'm not sure, but they're saying like celebrity, who do you think you are? Where you look into your past and you find out about your identity and your family history and it kind of helps you to understand where you've come from and what you're like. Well, it's sort of like that is what I'm trying to get across in terms of Proverbs. When we look at Proverbs, it should point us to our foundations, it should point us to our, what we should look like as believers as we're changing. It should reflect what it means to be adopted into the family of God and should reflect God's grace in our lives. It's changing who we are and changing what we think. So last week, we looked at three negative things, three things that wise people would avoid, that is the wisdom of God should avoid in their lives, that is, we read it again in the passage, alcohol leading as a stray, the destructiveness of quarreling and the blight of laziness. Laziness where we feel entitled to the things that God gives us or where we have a disordered love, we're loving the wrong things to give us an easy life. This week, we're looking at positive things. So three negative things last week, three positive things this week, four negative things the next time, and then four positive things to finish off with. And that should cover most of the verses in this chapter, okay? So it's three positive things today, very simple ones. Understanding others, understanding ourselves and understanding life stages. So it's about understanding today. And the more soaked we are in God's grace, the more dependent we are daily on Jesus as believers, the more evidence there will be of us understanding other people, understanding ourselves, and understanding life stages. So understanding others is the first thing that I'm going to speak about. Verse 5 of Proverbs 20, the fifth proverb there says, the purpose of a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw out. So someone who understands other people will draw wisdom from them and will also draw out what's in their hearts, okay? So that's really the import of that verse. It's about understanding other people.

Wisdom helps us to understand other people. So often in our lives, we're not really interested in other people. We're not interested in their motives. We're not interested sometimes in understanding what makes them tick, what drives people on. So what we often do is we make snap judgments. We come to easy conclusions and we are quick to condemn others because we haven't bothered and aren't interested in finding out about them. We categorize people so quickly, put them into boxes, then we reject them. And that's the easy thing for us to do. Oh, they're right wing. Oh, they're left wing. Oh, they're theologically liberal or they're conservative, or they're gay, or they're straight. They think like me. They don't think like me. And so we've immediately, without seeking to understand people, seeking to understand the depth of their hearts and their motives, we make judgments. Grace changes that in us because we know that Christ knows our deepest motives and our distorted loves and our sinful hearts, yet He still is interested and still rescues, still redeems, and still is committed to transforming us. That is the greatest love, isn't it? That is the greatest revelation of love. And so as Christians who have received grace from God, therefore we think twice before we come to judgments about other people. If we claim to understand grace and the gospel and what Jesus has done for us, but we care less about other people in terms of who they are and why they think differently from us, then we need to look again at the work of grace in our hearts. Last Tuesday, the Bible verse that was in the Bible reading was, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. And we can only do that when we begin to have a concern and an understanding for our enemies and for those who persecute us. So there's a great sense in which wisdom helps us to at least begin to understand other people. And that for us takes time, understanding other people takes time. The purpose of a man's heart is like deep water. And that's simply saying that it's not easy to get into the heart and mind and thinking and psyche and motive of other people. The deep waters, that sense of the unknown, isn't it? That it takes time and trust for other people to reveal their own hearts.

And for us to reveal our hearts to other people, because our hearts are deep waters. And so very often we have presumed on other people's motives and categorized them, but time sometimes exposes our mistakes and the wrong judgments we've made and the miscalculation we have made on the hearts and minds and motives of other people. So it takes time to understand and relate to other people with the wisdom of God. And we really, I'm relating that to other people, but it relates to ourselves as well, because if we fail to give people a glimpse into our own hearts, then it's very difficult for them to make our right judgment about us and about our motives. If we keep our distance, if we don't give people time to know what we are like and what we think and what the motives are in our hearts, then it's very difficult to share wisdom and there therefore is no understanding on both sides. Now, that's why here we advocate the centrality of community and discipleship and the commitment of grace within the church. It's because we don't preach a sociological model, nor do we preach a novel approach of modern 21st century Western humanity. This is the ancient wisdom of God that is taken from the heart of His, have His own heart of His own mind in the proverbs of God. This is the wisdom of grace as it's unfolded in our lives. The understanding and understanding of others, drawing knowledge out of others is graceful and is God's wisdom for us, because that understanding leads therefore to openness. A man of understanding, a man of wisdom, will draw out the depths in the hearts of other people and that understanding leads to openness, okay? Draws purpose out. That's hugely significant. That's hugely important in our lives that there's this understanding, both that is willing to give wise advice and to receive it, to know what's in the hearts and motives of others and also to therefore take counsel from others. That's what discipleship is. It's about the willingness to listen to, to expose our needs and our motives and our longing for wisdom and understanding and being willing to receive and learn from the wisdom of others. But it's very difficult to do that one, if we remain closed, or two, if we are not in a trustworthy relationship enough to be able to receive advice. You know, I'm not going to give anybody advice, not that I've got much advice to give, but I would, none of us are really wanting to give advice if we think it's unwanted. Or if more than that, if we think that if we do give wisdom and seek to share our experience with someone, if that person takes the huff or loses their temper or defriends you, not that I'm on Facebook, but you know what I mean, if you're kind of in your life, defriended, because there's not that openness, because there's not that trust and because there's not that willingness to learn and to share learning. It works both ways. It works

both in the ways of receiving and giving wisdom. And so the Christ likeness, the God likeness in our lives is reflected in this proverb, which is that we are people of understanding who recognize that everyone is deep, some are deeper than others, and that knowledge is gently and wisely drawn out of people as we take time with them, as we don't make snap judgments, and as we recognize how much time Jesus takes with us to mature us in our Christian lives. So understanding others, that's the first thing. The second thing in terms of understanding, which maybe should be the first one, I'm not quite sure why I put in that order, but the second one is understanding ourselves. And there's two verses here that are important in Proverbs chapter 20. Verse nine says, I have made my heart pure, I am clean from my sin. So here the person who is wise knows that they are not right and perfect and good. There's that knowledge within them. And then the second verse is from verse 24, which is slightly harder, which I'll speak about in a minute.

[13 : 20] A man's steps are from the Lord. How then can a man understand his way? So both these verses, if the first verse that we looked at refers to understanding others, these verses refer to understanding ourselves. And of course, that's crucial if we are to be wise. If we are to be wise with the wisdom of God, and if we are to know what it is to be like God, we know what we are like. The wise person is someone who is able to say, I can't say I've made my heart pure, I am clean from my sin. Because we know that we need a Savior. We know we need a Redeemer. We've know that and we've experienced that. We understand our own hearts. We understand our need of redemption and life and rescue and hope on a daily basis. Not just a one-off fact that happened 25 years ago, a Billy Graham meeting or a church meeting or some other meeting that happened a long time ago, but it was a real event that continues to be a reality in our lives. We know what we're like.

Therefore, we're slow to judge others because we're a way of our own motives, therefore. And the silent duplicity and the darkness that is often within our own hearts. So in the sense, our understanding of others is tempered by our understanding of ourselves. It changes the outlook we have on others. Because when we understand ourselves before God, then we recognize the heart of other people are similar. And until that time, we are the standard. We make the judgments, we justify ourselves, we compare ourselves with others, and very often at their expense, until we see ourselves as God sees us. God's wisdom helps us to see ourselves as God sees us, to see our hearts, that none of our hearts are clean without Christ, none of our hearts are pure. hugely significant on a day-to-day basis as we seek to live lives of understanding. We are unworthy, but not worthless.

We are precious, but we are unclean. We are guilty, but we're forgiven in Christ, cleansed by Christ. And I think in respect to judging others or understanding others, I think those who shout the loudest, those who criticize the most, usually I've found to be people who either have the most to hide or who don't understand the cross and its implications in their own lives and their own hearts, because it tempers our understanding and what we are like. Not only what we're like, but the second verse speaks about an understanding ourselves, why we're here. Now, it's a really difficult verse. It relates to God's sovereignty in many ways. Verse 24, a man steps from the Lord, how then can a man understand his way? It's a huge area that sovereign God knows every step, past, present and future. He knows what we're going to do. He knows our hearts. He knows the future. Can't be surprised. Couldn't be worshiped if God doesn't know. If there's things he doesn't know that maybe we can know. But there's great mystery and truth in God being sovereign and knowing the path of our lives and what implication that has for our own freedom of choice and the decisions we make. But I think fundamentally, basically I think what this verse is saying is that your value, your purpose, your meaning, truly knowing yourself and why you're here is found in relationship with God, with the sovereign God through Jesus Christ. You know, in terms of understanding ourselves and our purpose in this universe and where we are and who we are and why we're here, we can only truly understand it as we understand that a sovereign and a great

God and finding wisdom in him and living in his love with all the mystery that's involved in that. And I recognize there is, there's things beyond our comprehension and our understanding. But trusting in him through that journey and recognizing the journey is a shadow of what is to come. I'll say a bit more about that this evening in our series on Songs for the Journey. But that does change everything, doesn't it? When we think of why we're here, it's in relation to this great God of love who has redeemed us and who takes every step and who knows every way we're going. And our fullness, our wholeness, our purpose, our meaning, our identity, our decisions, our work, our leisure, our relationships, our choices, they're all related to that as Christians. It's not just the kind of one hour fix on a Sunday that clicks into place, but it's that everything is related to that knowledge of God and also knowledge of what we are like in relation to him and our need for a redeemer. So as we understand ourselves, I think it helps us to understand others.

And the last thing, therefore, in this chapter that we're looking at in terms of understanding is understanding life stages. So wisdom, this knowledge of God in our lives, gives us a better understanding of others by grace, a growing and improving knowledge of our own hearts. So these are good things, aren't they, that we understand other people better in their motives, understand ourselves, but also I think understanding life stages. Verse 11 says, even a child makes himself known by his acts by whether his conduct is pure and upright. And then in verse 29 says, the glory of young men is their strength, but the splendor of old men is their gray hair.

[19 : 38] Remember, this is written probably to a young prince, a young male in the royal household, so it's in kind of masculine language, but it really applies to all of us. And the proverbs, again and again, not just here, but in other places, speak about the importance of understanding, the different stages and ages and times in life. And that is wisdom to do so, recognizing that within these stages of life, we have different needs, different learning capacity, and different demands that are made on us. And within the community of believers, there will be all kinds of different ages and stages, and it's wisdom to not stereotype and not to demand the same responses from children, from young people, from old people, and from the different needs that there are among us. That is God's wisdom. So there's a recognition that children are children here and throughout the Proverbs, indeed throughout the Bible, that children need direction and training and help and guidance. Proverbs 22 verse 6 speaks about that. They need time, they need that loving discipline, and they are at that early stage in their lives, and wisdom sees that. And wisdom doesn't treat children like little adults, it just treats them like children. And in church, we should treat our children like children, not like little adults. Wisdom sees the need to take time with our children, to take an interest in our children. As a Christian community, we should be supportive of our children. You have vowed to pray for and care for and be locust parenis, as it were, for the children when they are baptized. We have a loving concern, and we should be supportive of people going through that stage in their lives, both the children and their parents as they come through the church. It's not always great to see the raft of kids that go out with their helpers and teachers and parents, and it just is a visual illustration of the burden and responsibility we have for them as they grow up in this world. Wisdom is willing to be inconvenienced by the behavior and by the immaturity and the youngness of children, and we repeat teaching to them. We learn, we show by example, we give them grace because that is wisdom. We serve and we pray, and we love and we understand them. Children, and understanding that stage of wisdom is not decrying that, not rubbishing it, not saying, well, it's amped past that nonsense now, and I can't be bothered with. It's not like that, because God is not like that in Christ, and as believers, grace is transforming us to give us concern for the children, even if we don't have children ourselves, or even if we've passed that stage of having children, whatever stage of life we might be used for. Children are spoken of here, but also in this passage, so are youth and old people.

So it speaks about youth in verse 29, that the glory of young men or young people is their strength, particularly, I think, young men and their physical strength, but there's a vitality, there's a strength in young people that is, it's pinnacle, it's zenith when they're young, and wisdom recognizes that, and wisdom channels that, and wisdom seeks to look to use that for God's glory, and recognizing it needs managed, it needs protected, it needs disciplined, it needs taught, and wisdom helps us to understand young people at that stage, whether they're just left school or whether they're teenagers, whether they're older than that, and you know, young people are getting younger, I mean, they're getting older all the time, I'm 54, I'm still young, no, I'm not, I'm not really, but they do say that the teenage years start earlier and finish later now, and I think that's probably true, but I think youth goes straight on, there's a kind of, there's a fusing between youth here and old age, I'm not quite sure, there's other passages that speak about stages, but youth is, wisdom engraft both in our lives and in our churches, we need to understand the impatience of youth, and we need to honor their energy and use their gifts, that the great wisdom, you know, and living is, you know, there's so many, there's so few rules in the Bible which is great, but there's lots of wisdom required, and wisdom with young people is about letting them loose, but not letting them go, isn't it?

How do we let the young people loose? How do we let them flourish and grow, but without letting them go and letting them make the mistakes maybe we made? Was that requires wisdom? That's what Jesus was good at doing, that's what Jesus could understand, and that's what the Holy Spirit enables us to do.

You pray for your, pray for the parents in this church whose kids are in primary school and going into high school as they come into that time when there's all kinds of tensions and difficulties, pray for them as they leave school and are in the church as they're looking for careers, pray for them as they have careers in their youth and are seeking wisdom to balance out their lives.

Wisdom helps us to give such people responsibility, but not burden them heavily so that they are stressed and broken. Wisdom will pick people up, will love them through failure and seeing how they can then learn from that and grow and take confidence, take weight, persevere, and live as they are for God's glory. Wisdom does that. It's foolishness to cast these things aside.

[25 : 40] It's the foolishness of self-centeredness and pride that says, I'm not interested in people at that stage in life. I'm past that stage. I'm not interested or concerned about children or young people or their failures and weaknesses. And it also speaks of old age in that verse, the same thing.

The glory of young men is their strength, the splendor of old men is their gray hair. I think that should say no hair in my case. But wisdom, doesn't wisdom, what it's saying there is there's a splendor in old age just as much as their strength and power in youth. These are important truths in a society which either end of the spectrum rejects life, doesn't it, is looking to rubbish life at the end of life because it's so cheap and expensive to value but so expensive to care for and the very most vulnerable stages it is not worth having because it's an inconvenience and we just abort life at that level. But the wisdom of God is recognizing and knowing an understanding not just ourselves, not just others, but as it all fuses together the different stages of life as well. Wisdom respects old age, recognizes experience and character and the life story of those who are in the evening of their days. Have you ever spoken to someone who you just thought was just an old person? There's just an old person and you've spoken to them and they've started telling you about their war experience or the loss that they've had or the color that has been in their lives, real, meaningful, wise, lives to share with us. Wisdom is about listening to them.

It's about loving them, it's having time for them, it's recognizing both about them and for themselves that there is a splendor in them growing old and there's a splendor for us in growing old as believers because in the covenant of grace we are being renewed day by day on the inside. We'll actually be becoming younger as it were and it's great to see that in people's lives and hearts and in all that they do. It's time to finish. So, but as we understand the difference to you, there are only examples but wisdom, the core of that is that wisdom doesn't decry the young or the old or the single or the married but is aware of tailoring grace to the specific strengths and weaknesses of each stage in life, understanding that there's motives that cause people to act and differently, being supportive and gracious so that whether your children, a child today, a parent, they're married, recording, single, a teenager, student, an empty nester, an elderly, a widow, going back to wisdom and seeking to understand ourselves, others and the stages of life so that we act with more grace and take God into all of these stages of our lives.

I think there's increasing evidence of living the Christian life and being transformed by grace when we can see that in our lives. We can see a loving concern for others because we understand ourselves better by grace and through salvation and the stages of life that are important to God in His book of common sense in the Proverbs that He says, these matter to me, they're important to me, understand them. There's various needs and stages that life goes through and it's important to understand them and to recognize our need of the Lord Jesus in all of these stages every day in our lives that it's folly, it's foolish, extreme foolishness to not put your trust in Jesus Christ because otherwise we will never understand, you'll never understand yourself, you will not understand or be concerned necessarily to understand others and you will not see the stages of life in the way that God wants us to recognize and see them either in the church or in our relationships.

Let's bow our heads briefly and pray, Lord God help us to understand you, understand your way, above all understand your grace, your free salvation that is offered to us because of what Jesus has done and help us to know that we can be filled with the Spirit and changed and be being transformed by the Spirit in our lives on a daily basis and may we not be stagnant or stale in our Christian lives but may we seek by your grace to become more like you, to show that wisdom and to avoid the folly and the foolishness that you expose and speak about in Proverbs and throughout the Bible.

[30 : 58] We know the beginning of wisdom being the worship and adoration and fear of the Lord through Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.