

# Thirty Truths to Wisdom (Part 1)

*Thirty Truths to Wisdom*

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I invite you to open your Bibles to the book of Proverbs 22, and we're going to begin in verse 17. We're going to look at this section of Proverbs for probably the next three weeks, and then we'll be back in the gospel of John in John 8. One of the things that has been on my heart as a pastor is that you grow in Christian maturity. You grow in Christian maturity. Paul said in Colossians 1:28, he said, "Him we proclaim," Christ we proclaim, "warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we might present everyone mature in Christ." So implied in what Paul said is that when you become a believer, when you become a Christian, you start a process of growth and the end of that process is what we would call maturity. For example, Paul said to the Corinthians, he said, "You're still babes in Christ. You're still infants in Christ. I would like to give you solid food, but you're still needing to drink milk. You're not ready." And so there's this process of Christian growth where the believer needs to grow into maturity.

I was driving around with my kids over the holidays and they asked me a great question. They said, "Dad, what is a mature Christian?" What is a mature Christian and I felt in that question a desire to be a mature Christian. They wanted to be a mature Christian. So here I am, I'm driving my truck and I'm thinking, "Man, that's a great question." I said, "Well, a mature Christian is somebody that's read their Bible cover to cover. A mature Christian is a man or woman of the book and they know the book and they've studied the book." So that's one of the marks of a of a mature Christian. And I thought, you know, Paul addresses believers to use their spiritual gifts in the life of the church, so another mark of a mature Christian is that a mature Christian is a church man or a church woman, that they are members of a church, that they are using their spiritual gifts in the life of the church, that they love the Lord's people, they fellowship with other believers. And then I was thinking, but it's not just those things. It's not just reading your Bible, not just being

in the church and serving. It's also Jesus said, "Teach them to obey all that I have commanded you." It's also an element of obedience, right? That it's an ethic. It's demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, and so forth. It's displaying these fruits. And then I kept thinking, but it's also the sense where you arrive at the place where you are a self-functioning Christian, and what that is called is wisdom, where you become a wise person.

A mature Christian is a wise man or a wise woman and, of course, Christ, Paul says, is the essence of wisdom. Paul says in Colossians 2:3, he says, in him "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." So if you want to think about what it means to be mature, what it means to be Christ-like, it means to be wise like Christ is wise. It means to display who he is. And how do you know what Christ displayed? How do you know what wisdom he exhibited? Well, one of the ways is to go to the Proverbs because this is what Jesus read, this is what Jesus studied. If you want to know what Jesus, how he lived his life, you know we have the gospels which gives us many of these pictures, but in conversation and in basic decisions, go read the Proverbs because Jesus embodies these truths. Jesus lived these truths out perfectly.

So if you look at Proverbs 22:17, Solomon begins this section and Solomon is going to give us just right here, this section is called the 30 words of wisdom, and in the first few verses Solomon is going to introduce it and he's going to introduce it by explaining to us by giving us four basic principles of what wisdom is, four truths about wisdom. Look at verse 17. He says, "Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise." What Solomon is saying here is that wisdom is outside of you and therefore you must seek it out. Obviously, this was not true of Christ. Christ is the essence of wisdom, but for us it is outside of us. We must seek it out. What that means is this, is that wisdom is not naturally intuitive. You are not born a wise person. Proverbs 22:15 says, "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child." Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful and desperately sick; Who can understand it?"

So you're not born wise. Nobody is. Nobody is. Therefore, you will not find wisdom by looking within yourself. You hear that, "All you got to do is just, you know, look down in your heart and all you need is right there." Well, Earth to you, it's not right there. It's not right there. You won't find wisdom in the self-help section of the bookstore. You certainly won't find wisdom in Hollywood. You can't take a class on wisdom at Duke or state or UNC or Wake Tech. You need to find wisdom outside yourself. If you read the book of Job, Job says in Job 28, he says where can you find wisdom? You go and dig into the depths of the earth, you won't find wisdom there. You go to the bottom of the sea, you won't find wisdom there. You go and find all the greatest treasures in the world, you won't find wisdom there. He says, this is Job 28:21, "it is hidden from the eyes of all living And concealed from the birds of the earth." But then he says, "God understands the way to it and he knows its place."

So the answer is, is that all true wisdom – and hear me very carefully – is only found in God. You won't find wisdom anywhere else. Anywhere else. And that's why Solomon, you remember, God came to Solomon and he said, "I'll give you long life. I'll give you a

great kingdom. I'll give you great wealth. What do you want? Name it." And Solomon said, "Forget that. What I want is wisdom. I want wisdom." And God granted him wisdom. He said, "Because you asked this, I'm going to give you these other things as well, but you have asked for the greatest thing." James says this, James 1:5, "if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." So what this means is, is that you must humble yourself and say, "I need to know divine truth, and I know that I don't have that truth, that it comes from God." And it's revealed to us, by the way, in a book. That's what's great about the Bible.

Second, look at what he says in the second part of verse 17, and he says, "and apply your heart to my knowledge." Apply your heart to my knowledge. This tells us more about what wisdom is. Second, wisdom is the applied knowledge of God. Wisdom is the applied knowledge of God. Now you can have knowledge and not wisdom. There are a lot of foolish geniuses in the world that know a lot of facts, that have a lot of knowledge, but they have no wisdom. No wisdom. But it does take knowledge to have wisdom. So you can have knowledge without wisdom, but you cannot have wisdom without knowledge. To have wisdom, you must have a knowledge of three basic things. Three basic things. First, you must have a knowledge of God. You must know that God is Triune, that God is sovereign, that God is the Creator, that God is providentially governing the world. You must know that God is Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, that he is the Redeemer that came into this world to save sinners, that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity who comes and dwells in the believer. Second, you have to know yourself. You have to know that you are created by God, in God's image for the purpose of honoring and glorifying God, but that you are born a sinner, that you have transgressed God's law and are in need of a Savior, and the only way to be saved is in Christ through faith. You have to know that about yourself and you have to have a knowledge of the world. Remember the song, "This is my Father's world"? Do you believe that? That this is God's world, that he created it, that there's a purpose for this world? Yes, it's fallen, but God has not left the world. It's not like we're the deists and we believe that God wound the world on a clock and has stepped away. No, God has entered into this world as the God-man in order to save it, in order to renew it, and he's going to create a new heavens and a new earth. God has not stepped away. There is a coming again of the Son of God at the end of history in which the new heavens and the new earth will be made. Wisdom is knowing those things but then living in light of those realities. It's called a biblical worldview, that you live your life in the world based on this revelation that God has given. That is wisdom.

Look at verse 18. He says, "if you understand that and if you apply it in your heart, if you do this, it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, if all of them are ready on your lips." What Solomon is saying is, third, wisdom leads to the blessed life. Wisdom leads to the blessed life. What he's saying here, he says if you keep it within you, if all of them are ready on your lips. He's saying that you've internalized this truth, that this truth has become a part of you. It's ready on your lips because you're ready to teach it to others. You know, that's one of the tests of how you know if you've learned something is that not only are you able to think about it, but you're able to go and explain it to somebody else.

That's what he means that it's on your lips, that you've internalized it and you're ready to teach somebody else about it. And Solomon says that if you do that, you will become wise and have a pleasant life.

That word, Hebrew word pleasant, Hebrew word naim, it means a sweet song on a harp. You could translate it delight or blessedness. David says in Psalm 16:11, "You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures," are blessing, are sweetness, "forevermore." That's the Christian life. That's what wisdom brings, and if you have that, then you can have that blessing and that sweetness and that pleasure regardless of your circumstances. Do you hear me? Our world says that you have to have the nice things, the nice job, the nice spouse, the perfect kids, and if all of those things are nice and in order, then I can be happy. The Christian says what I need is to know God and to have this wisdom and then I'm happy, I'm blessed regardless of the circumstances that I'm in. That's what Paul said when he said, you know that letter jacket, verse, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"? Do you remember that? Do you know what he's talking about there? He's talking about being content in every circumstance he found himself in. "Whether poor or rich, whether in happiness or in trouble," Paul says, "I have found the art of being content, and you know what it is? It's to know God. I've counted everything as rubbish except for knowing him. Everything else is like poop compared to knowing Christ," is what he says. That is the essence of Christianity is you come to know God and you come to know wisdom, and then regardless of the circumstances, it doesn't matter. You live on the right side of God. I can stomach a lot of things, but what I can't stomach is being on the wrong side of God and that's what David found, that's what Solomon found, and he says that's the pleasure, that's the good life, right there.

Proverbs 22:19. He says, "That your trust may be in the LORD, I have made them known to you today, even to you." And so here he says this is really what the essence of wisdom is. Wisdom, fourth, is trusting and fearing God. The essence of wisdom is to trust and fear God. That's the path of wisdom. So listen very carefully: you do not even begin on the path of wisdom until you become a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. At the moment that you repent of your sins and trust Christ, that is when you begin on the path of fearing God. Proverbs 9:10, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." That's the beginning. That is the beginning.

So you cannot have wisdom outside of Christ. Remember, we said Christ is the essence of what? Wisdom. You cannot have wisdom outside of Christ. Implication. I talk to people all the time and they want wisdom regarding a specific issue in their life. They want to face issues in their marriage, issues in their job, maybe it's depression, it could be a number of things that they want to understand, they want wisdom regarding that specific issue. I always begin with that person in the same place. Do you know where I begin? With Christ. With Christ because until they come to Christ and are born again, they cannot begin on the road to wisdom. Remember what Jesus said? He said, "Until you are born again, you cannot even see the kingdom of God." That's what he told Nicodemus. He said, "This is the beginning, you must be born again. Stop. Do not pass go until you come to know Christ and are born again. Then and only then may you see

the kingdom of God." Paul said 1 Corinthians 2, do you remember he said spiritual things are not discerned to unspiritual people. Unspiritual people do not understand spiritual things. They are undiscerned to them.

So we must begin with fearing the Lord, trusting him. That's the beginning of the Christian life. Remember earlier in Proverbs, Proverbs 3, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." That is the beginning, that you begin the Christian life and the Christian life is a life where you constantly trust God. When Solomon says in all your ways acknowledge him, that means in everything that you do, you submit to God. You submit to God's Lordship over your life. In everything that you do, that there's not one compartment over here that says, "You know, I'm going to keep this relationship thing outside of the Lordship of God." In all your ways you acknowledge him and when you do that, then he directs your path. So that's that's the path of wisdom, living that life of unshaking trust in God. That's the good path. That's trusting the Lord, that you trust him, trust that he will direct your steps and you leave the outcome to him.

You look at the life of Joseph, for example. Joseph acknowledged God in his father's house when he had the printed coat. He acknowledged God when he was thrown into the pit. He acknowledged God when he was in Potiphar's house. Remember, then he was thrown into prison. In prison, he acknowledged God. Then he was interpreting dreams. Pharaoh says, "Is there anybody that can interpret dreams?" They bring him into the palace. He comes into the palace. Remember what he did with Pharaoh? Pharaoh says, "Can you interpret dreams?" He said, "No, but I know who can." He acknowledged God. He acknowledged God in the palace, and then he acknowledged God as the Prime Minister. Joseph's circumstances changed but what didn't change is his trust in the Lord to direct his steps.

Look at verse 20. He says, "Have I not written for you thirty sayings of counsel and knowledge, to make you know what is right and true, that you may give a true answer to those who sent you?" So Solomon says, "Look, I'm going to give you these sayings." Thirty sayings is how it's interpreted, you could translate that word thirty as the chief or most important sayings. So he's saying, "Look, I'm giving you these distilled nuggets of truth, these pieces, these thirty pieces of wisdom that if you can understand these, you will be a wise person."

Now if you've studied the book of Proverbs, you'll know that this is, like I said earlier, a separate section of the book. Proverbs chapters 1 through 9, you read chapters 1 through 9, those are sometimes called the call of wisdom, and it contrasts wisdom versus folly. Then beginning in chapter 10 all the way up to 22:16 is the application of wisdom where Solomon goes through, that's where you see, you know, these really kind of disconnected Proverbs one right after the the other. Now this section is the section of the thirty. This is Proverbs 22:17 to 24:22 and this is where he is going to go through these thirty sayings and this is what I want to go through with you over the next three weeks.

So let's look at these. We're going to go through the sayings all the way through chapter 22 this morning. So let's look at these sayings. So all of that is prologue. Everything that we've done is prologue. That's Solomon saying, "This is what wisdom is. Now I'm going to explain to you in these thirty sayings what wisdom looks like." Alright? So here's the first saying. 1. Do not take advantage of the poor. Look at verse 22. He says,

22 Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate, 23 for the LORD will plead their cause and rob of life those who rob them.

Oftentimes in Hebrew poetry, things are stated in parallel where two statements have either the same exact meaning or slightly nuanced meaning, but it's very similar, and here you have two prohibitions, "Do not rob the poor because he is poor," or second, "Do not crush the afflicted at the gate," and then you have two consequences in verse 23, "for the Lord will plead their cause," one, and second, he will "rob of life those who rob them." There's a temptation to rob the poor because they cannot defend themselves, and there's a temptation to step on those who are not able to defend themselves in the gate. The gate was the place of judgment. The gate was the place of where you conducted business. There's a temptation to step on those, he says, that are afflicted. You could translate that word, those who are bent over, those who are bent low, those who are humbled in life, and what Solomon says is you must not do that. You must act righteously. You must treat your fellow man with respect.

There's a type of pride and elitism that we're all prone to, if we're honest, that every human is prone to that says, that speaks in your heart that says, "I'm better than somebody else, that I'm better than somebody else, and therefore I can treat somebody else like I am better than them." And left unaddressed, that mentality leads to disaster. Do the names Harvey Weinstein ring a bell or Epstein? Do you know those names? People that preyed on other people that they didn't think could stick up for themselves? Bill Cosby, there's another great name, a successful person took advantage of other people. You start to think that people exist to serve you rather than that you exist to serve God and your fellow man.

Proverbs 14:31 says, "Whoever opposes a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him." And Solomon says what you need to know is this, that you might take advantage of somebody that you think that you can take advantage of because they can't fend for themselves, but what you need to know is this, is that God sees and that ultimately God will vindicate them. He says, the Lord will plead the cause of the victim. In other words, the Lord is their advocate, he's their jury, and he's the ultimate judge and he will plead the cause of the victim. Psalm 12:5 says, "Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan," God says, "I will now arise. I will place him in the safety for which he longs."

So ultimately you have to know that we live our lives before the eyes of God and God sees everything. You might think that you got away with an unjust act, but you didn't. God sees. And maybe an unjust act was committed against you. You need to know this:

God sees. Remember Edmond Dantes in "The Count of Monte Cristo," unjustly thrown into prison, sitting there in prison, do you remember what he wrote on the wall? "God will bring justice." And remember Paul said, Romans 12, "Vengeance is mine declareth the Lord." Vengeance is the Lord's. Think of the long game, nobody in the end gets away with it either in this life or the next. Often in this life. The Hound of Heaven will find you. And Solomon says that, "Look, you rob the poor, God is going to rob you." God is going to rob you. Matthew Henry says, "He that robs the poor will be found in the end a murderer of himself," because you are ultimately bringing condemnation on your own head.

The Christian, to the contrary to that mentality, Paul says Romans 12:16, he says, "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty," do not be prideful, so repudiate that idea that you're better than somebody else. We're all wretches in need of grace. He says, "but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight." Jesus said, the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." The way up is to serve. Do you remember in the upper room, Jesus took a towel and a basin and washed the disciples' feet. Do you know what the difference between you and the convict in prison is? Mercy. Mercy. Grace. Grace.

So there's no ounce for pride in the Christian life, or to think that we're better than other people. Next, second saying. Look at verse 24. He says,

24 Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, 25 lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.

What he's saying is this: choose your friends carefully. Choose your friends carefully. Jesus before he chose the 12 and he chose Judas knowing that Judas would betray him, but before he chose the 12, he prayed all night, went up on a hill and prayed all night and then he chose the 12. Choose your friends, your associates, your business workers, choose the people that you surround yourself very carefully. I often say show me your friends and show me the books that you're currently reading and I'll show you the person that you're going to be because you will be influenced by the people that are surrounding you. You might say, "I'm going to be their influence. I'm going to influence them." They're going to influence you. It always happens. And if someone is given to anger, if someone is given to wrath where they have outbursts of anger and they act irrationally and they cause problems, that will wear off on you. That will wear off on you and they will bring you down. They will influence you and you will learn their ways.

And by the way, this is true of a potential spouse. If he's getting angry now, you think he's going to stop being angry once you get married? Proverbs 29:22, "A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes many transgressions." If he's getting angry now, run. Same for a woman, woman given to anger. Solomon says it's better to live in a desert land than with a quarrelsome and fretful woman. So if she's given to anger and quarrels now, run. You remember David in Psalm 1, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of

scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree firmly planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season. Its leaf does not wither, in all that he does he prospers." You don't walk with the wicked. David in the 101st Psalm, which many think was the coronation Psalm that David gave to Solomon, David said this, this is Psalm 101:4, he said, "A perverse heart shall be far from me; I will know nothing of evil." "If I think a guy is given to anger and has a perverse heart, I don't even allow him in my court. He's done. I disassociate from him." That's wisdom. That's wisdom.

One of my favorite books is Lonesome Dove and one of the main characters in that book is a Texas Ranger named Jake Spoon, and the two primary characters are Ranger Captain Augustus McCrae and Woodrow Call, and Spoon was a younger guy who rode with them for many years, but when Lonesome Dove picks up, Spoon is influenced by these bandits. They basically peer pressure him to ride with them. So Spoon leaves Call and McCrae and goes rides with these cattle rustlers, these bandits, and they start shooting farmers and cowboys across the plains. Well, the other Texas Rangers start seeing these dead bodies on the plains and they start following the rustlers and they finally catch up with them and catch them, and lo and behold, they find Jake Spoon riding with them. And they get ropes and they tie him up to a tree, and they tie the rustlers up to the tree, and they say, "Jake, did you kill any of these guys?" He said, "No, I was just riding with them." Said, "Look, if you ride with an outlaw, you die with an outlaw because you took part in this by associating with these people." And that's the truth, they will bring you down and so you have to have wisdom. This is why Paul says don't be unequally yoked. Business transactions in your business, in your work, you want to think very carefully about who you are associating with, especially in your most intimate levels.

Third saying, look at verse 26. He says,

26 Be not one of those who give pledges, who put up security for debts. 27  
If you have nothing with which to pay, why should your bed be taken  
from under you?

So what he's saying is this: be shrewd with money. Be shrewd with money. Specifically, what he's talking about here is being the security for somebody else's loan. So somebody comes to you and says, "I need money," and you basically sign off as you are the security in advance for them to get the money, and what Solomon is saying is don't enter into a financial arrangement with anyone who does not have a good track record with money because ultimately you are going to be the one, then, that's left on the hook. And he said, in that way the bed can be taken out from underneath you. Proverbs 17:18 says, "One who lacks sense gives a pledge and puts up security in the presence of his neighbor." Proverbs 11:15, "Whoever puts up security for a stranger will surely suffer harm, but he who hates striking hands in pledge is secure."

So you ask this question, you know, why do people get into bad financial arrangements? How does this happen? Often it happens because you have a friend or a family member that comes and says, "This is a great idea. I just don't have the money for it, but I know



you do and, trust me, this is going to pay off big. You just got to front the money and it'll all work out." Nine out of 10 times, that is not going to work out and you are going to be left holding the rope. I've heard good and godly financial men say with family members, you don't lend money to family members, you give money to family members. If a family member comes and says, "I need money and I need a loan," look, if you don't have the money for a loan, don't give it to them, but if you have the money as a gift, you can give it to them. That way they're not on the hook for the money and you're having to go and ask them for it. But you do not want to enter into financial situations where the rug can be pulled out from underneath you. That's what Solomon is saying and, by the way, wise people normally don't enter into investments or situations like gambling where there is a sure bet that you're going to lose money. Wise people don't do that. Jesus wouldn't do that. Paul didn't do that. The apostles didn't do that. Wise people are very careful with who they give money to and when.

Fourth saying, and this is very simple. This is very simple. Don't steal from anyone. Look at verse 28.

28 Do not move the ancient landmark that your fathers have set.

In ancient Israel, remember they came into the land and they divvied up the land into 12 portions for all of the tribes and they divided then those portions within the tribes amongst clans and families, and that land was marked out, it was delineated with these property markers and six times in scripture, including here, the Bible warns against stealing land by moving property markers. Now listen: a person who doesn't have the basic integrity to not steal from his neighbor by moving a property marker is a fool. If you steal from your neighbor, you are a fool. And here's why: if you steal because stealing is almost always premeditated, where there's that moment you say, "Man, I probably shouldn't take that," and then you take it anyway, when you do that, you are living as a practical atheist. You are living as if God does not see. You are living a life saying, "Well, God really doesn't exist. All that really exists is this material world and so I'm going to take what I see for mine."

Paul says that's not how the Christian lives. He says 2 Corinthians 4:18. We do not "look to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient," or temporal, "but the things that are unseen are eternal." The fool looks at the world and says, "This is all that there is." The wise person looks at this world and says, "God created this world and this is what he's given me to steward, and if God wants me to have more, he's going to give me more because I steward what I have in an excellent way." And it used to be that in this country people understood this. In this country in America people understood this.

When I showed up at Texas A&M University, A&M was founded as a land grant school like many schools across the country in the 1870s. I think it was 1876 A&M was founded. The honor code at A&M was do not lie, cheat or steal, nor tolerate those who do. Don't you love that? Do not lie, cheat or steal nor tolerate those who do. It won't be

tolerated because you cannot function in any setting without basic integrity. You cannot function.

In the Old West, what guys would do is they would steal cattle and you remember you would brand your cattle so it would mark and you would know which cattle were yours, what cattle rustlers would do is they would develop a brand that would incorporate your brand. So they would take your brand and maybe just put a circle around it and connect some lines or draw a line through it so that way they could steal your cattle and just change your brand a little bit and then now it was their cattle. But you know what? If they caught you doing that, guess what the penalty was? It was a capital offense. They hung you for stealing cattle. For stealing horses. In Israel, in ancient Israel, if you stole somebody's cow, the penalty was that you owed it back five times. You stole an ox, you owed that person and they caught you, you owed five cows back. Same with any animal. If you stole a person, it was the death penalty. It was capital punishment if you kidnapped somebody.

And so the wise person understands that they must live with absolute integrity before God. They don't take anybody's money. They don't take anyone's ideas. They're trusted to not skim a dollar off the top where they work. When Abraham Lincoln as a young man was, he worked as a store clerk, and once a lady overpaid him just a few pennies and he closed his shop down and took those pennies and went and found her and gave them back. He he said, "I will not continue to operate this store while I have something that is rightfully not mine. I will return it." And that's the the mindset of the Christian is, that's the mindset of the wise is what we have we have because we earned it, because God gave it to us, everything is a gift from him, and nothing that we possess belongs to someone else.

All right, fifth saying, fifth and finally for today. Verse 29,

29 Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men.

What Solomon is saying here is that the wise are excellent at something. The wise are excellent at something. This word skillful is a Hebrew word that means quick, prompt or swift. The picture is that you are so good at something that you have mastered something so well that you can do it quickly. You ever see guys that are putting on a roof and they're so good at it they can just put shingle down after shingle after shingle after shingle. A lot of guys in construction are like this, you know, they they focus on one thing, drywalling or painting or whatever it is, and they have mastered the art of that one thing. And they didn't wake up one day and just become a great painter. It was a skill that was developed with a lot of hard work. And they've developed it, and they've honed it, and they've crafted it to now they're to the point where they're able to do it with excellence. They're able to do it with skill. They're able to do it quickly. And that's the idea that Solomon is painting is that you own something, that you've developed something, that you are skilled in that work.

People used to wonder how Spurgeon, Spurgeon would write both of his sermons on Saturday night that he would preach on Sunday, like at 7:00 PM, and people were always like, "How is this guy writing?" You know, they would publish these sermons, send them all over the world. People were stunned listening to these messages. "How did he write them on Saturday night?" My goodness, I wonder about that answer. Answer: skill. Skill. I started reading the Puritans as a young kid, he started preaching when he was 17 years old. He had developed that and honed that over years.

I was watching a documentary maybe you saw this about the Redeem Team. The Redeem Team. That was not the Dream Team. Remember, the Dream Team was with Michael and Larry Bird and Magic and all those guys. The Redeem Team was the group that was carried by LeBron James and Kobe Bryant, really by Kobe Bryant. I'll explain what I mean by that. But it was showing how the Redeem Team, they were trying to redeem America's legacy because America had lost just in outlandish fashion the 2004 Summer Olympics, and in 2008 they were going back to try and redeem the record. And it showed their practices. They went to Las Vegas as a team to practice and the entire team, with the exception of Kobe Bryant, went out one night to party and they're out till like 4 in the morning, and then at 4:00 in the morning there's literally a camera following them as they come back into the hotel at 4:00 in the morning and guess who they see at 4:00 in the morning? Kobe. He's just getting up to go start his workout. And they said, "Man, we're coming back for the night and he's getting started at this point." He'd won MVP's. He'd won championships. He was, I mean, arguably the best player in the world. They said, "No. I got to develop myself. I got to work. I got to keep working. I got to stay disciplined in honing this craft." Do you know what happened the next morning? The rest of the team was up at 4 AM with Kobe. You see, Kobe said, "Watch this. Watch how I work and develop this skill," and that's what brought the team together.

But it requires work, it requires effort, and the Christian has the greatest motivation to work and it's this: we're not working for our own name, we're not working so that we can get pats on the back, we work to please God. Paul says Colossians 3:23, "Whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men." That's called the Protestant work ethic, that you do excellence because it's excellent in the sight of God, not just because you can get a dollar from it. And that's why Protestant mothers and people that excel in positions that maybe the world doesn't look at and say, yes, that's commendable, people that are in positions work hard because even though they might not be getting a pat on the back from the world, they know that God sees and they know that God has given them that responsibility and so they do it with excellence.

Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 9:10, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." So you do things excellently. You do things well. And Solomon says this, look look back at verse 29, he says, "If you do this, he will stand before kings. He will not stand before obscure men." If you are excellent at something, if you do well, you don't have to promote yourself, you don't have to try to posture yourself, you will rise to the top. The cream always rises to the top. The diamonds work their way up to the top of the terrain. You will be seen. You will excel. You will not stand before obscure men. And this is the way of excellence. This is what Jesus did. Jesus, when he spoke, people

marveled at what he said, even when he was 12 years old and in the temple. Everyone important in his day had to account for him. King Herod when he was born, the Sanhedrin, Caiaphas, Pilate, all of Jerusalem, all of Israel, everybody had to account for Jesus because he was excellent. He was excellent and they marveled at him.

One of the the Protestant Reformers in England was a man by the name of William Tyndale. Does that name ring a bell, William Tyndale? William Tyndale is the reason why we have the Bible in English. He went to school in Oxford early 1500's. He knew Latin, Greek, Hebrew. French, Italian. He was a master at languages and he used that skill, he dedicated himself to translating for the first time the Bible into the English language. They said when the King James was finally written, basically 85% of what was in the King James was what Tyndale had wrote. So Tyndale was why we have the Bible in English, but for that he was persecuted. He fled out of England, and Henry, King Henry VIII ultimately had him executed. But his life, he was known for being excellent at this one thing which was languages and translating the Bible.

So you have to ask, what's your thing? What are you excellent at? And in the kingdom it might not be what the world esteems. I was talking to my wife about this. You know, our world doesn't esteem motherhood but we need excellent mothers. There's a lot of things that the world doesn't esteem, but Christians see the value in light of the kingdom and they say, "We will be excellent at that. We will dedicate ourselves to that." Maybe it's to being a Sunday school teacher, a kids' Sunday school teacher. "I'm going to study my Bible. I'm going to learn it. I'm going to know it. I'm going to know the theology and I'm going to be the best second grade Sunday school teacher that these kids have ever known." Maybe it's that. It doesn't have to be big but apply yourself in what God has given you to do. And by the way, in the Christian life you never retire. You never retire. I talk to people all the time, "I'm retired now." Well, that means serve, you're in the Lord's army. So, it's time to get to work. We have lots of children to teach and lots of responsibilities here.

So this is wisdom. This is what wisdom looks like. This is what Jesus did. And like I said, it all begins with entering through the narrow gate with Christ.

Let's pray.

*Heavenly Father, we come to the throne of grace. We thank you, Lord, for how you've revealed wisdom to us and how Christ is the embodiment and the essence of wisdom, and that we can begin this journey of being wise, of knowing wisdom by coming to Christ in simple, childlike faith and then trusting you with all of our heart, leaning not on our own understanding, in all of our ways acknowledging you so that you might direct our steps. And we pray, Lord, that we would become mature Christians, wise Christians who embody these truths, where these truths become part of us and then we're able to impart them to other people, that we would be wise, that we would be mature, that we would be Christ-like, that we would be influenced by this book and not by the world. We ask all of this for your glory and your honor. Amen.*

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