

Take hold of real life: wisdom

Lesson **Proverbs 8**

<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs%208>

We have been talking about the results of leading a real life. What is a real life? A real life is one in which your body, mind, and soul are whole and integrated. A real life is one in which you are fully connected to God and community. In a real life you know your purpose, and you're living it out. You get a real life by centering your life on God, and practicing the six marks of discipleship (which are daily prayer, weekly worship, daily Bible reading, service, relating, and sacrificial giving or tithing).

We all know that the more you put into something, the more you get out of it. That's especially true when the "it" is your relationship with God. Why? Because God is trying to bless you abundantly. God wants to give you everything. We block God's gifts; we reject them by focusing on everything but God. But when you take hold of real life, the more you do what you need to do to open yourself up to God's blessings, the more God is able to give you what God wants you to have, and what your deepest God-created self needs to have. God will gift you with the fulfillment of your deepest needs. God will gift you with a real life.

Among the gifts God wants to give you are eternity and wholeness. We have talked about those these last two weeks. God wants you to be part of eternity, to have eternal life – not just a great existence now, but a abundant life beyond this obvious one, both after death and during this life. And, God wants you to be whole – your body, mind, and soul integrated and flowing with the power of the Holy Spirit, your self fully and inextricably connected with both God and God's people.

The third gift that God wants to give you is wisdom. In the book we read from today, known as Proverbs, Wisdom is portrayed as an ancient, vibrant woman, exuberant with love for God and God's creation. You might think of Wisdom as the mothering aspect of God: temperate, practical, insightful, nurturing, connected, creative, and joyous. When we see wisdom in God or in others, that's what we see: temperance, practicality, insight, nurture, connectedness, creativity, and joy.

I have trouble remembering all those characteristics of wisdom, so I tend to think about it this way: Wisdom is the gift of living fully in the present with a eternal view.

Perhaps you have noticed, as I have, that we are not really encouraged in daily life to be wise women and men, in the Biblical sense of Wisdom. In the common culture, we do not encourage most of the qualities associated with wisdom. In the US, particularly, where we've contracted the social version of ADD, living with an eternal view is pretty hard. And living fully in the present with an eternal view is clearly countercultural.

What do we mean by wisdom, by living fully in the present with an eternal view? Imagine that human society is a structure. A building, or a bridge, or a cathedral. Imagine that we are all bricks in that society – part of the building, or bridge, or cathedral.

What are the qualities of bricks? Solid. Strong. Separate. Similar.

Bricks are also dense. Bricks are dumb. Bricks crumble over time. Bricks have to be connected to each other by mortar – by something external to them. Those of us who have lived in earthquake country know something else about bricks: the first time the earth underneath them really shakes, down come the bricks.

We are encouraged to be bricks — solid and dependable, sure, but also limited to being part of a short-term structure like a family or a business. If brick aspire, it is to be part of common buildings — to be part of stores and houses and recording studios. Bricks are dense. Bricks are dumb. They are crumbly, conventional, limited.

Compare that kind of brick to a new kind of brick, developed by Professor Chang Liu at the University of Illinois. Professor Liu's new kind of brick is filled with electronic sensors. These sensors monitor things like vibrations and movement in the building, which are signals of its structural health. The smart bricks work together within the whole, recognize threats, and share that information with a larger monitoring system.

Imagine how firefighters might have responded differently to Loma Prieta or to the World Trade Center disaster if they could have known about the buildings' structural integrity. They might have changed their tactics and saved more lives. Or imagine how you might care for your home differently if it could tell you that a pest was infiltrating it, or dry rot was setting in.

A smart brick looks like any other brick, and fits into the whole like any other brick. But instead of it being a passive part of a structure, merely taking up space, the smart brick is in constant connection and communication with both the other bricks and with something bigger than it is. That "something bigger" can assist both the brick and the structure itself. Smart bricks, deployed and active throughout a building, could provide a holistic-yet-present-time understanding of the strength of the whole.

You see where I'm going with this? Does a smart brick sound anything like a follower of the Way of Jesus, living a real life? When we are fully engaged with Christ and community, living in the present but with an eternal view, the structure changes. We change the whole, just by our presence. When we are smart bricks, we are connected with God, who is the creator and sustainer of both us as individuals and the world. We are connected with others, and because we are living in the present, but with an eternal view — a God's-eye, holistic view — we can change the world.

Notice that a smart brick is still a brick, and a person gifted with Wisdom is still a person. A regular person. Wisdom doesn't give her gifts only to a special kind of person. Wisdom pours her gifts into anyone who is willing to accept them. God will give you everything God wants you to have if you are willing and open to accepting God's gifts. And wisdom is one of the natural outcomes of living connected to Christ and community, and being shaped by the marks of discipleship — prayer, worship, reading scripture, service, relating, and giving.

That's why we can find smart bricks throughout the human cathedral. We can find wisdom poured out into auto mechanics, grandmothers, school teachers, counselors, students, entrepreneurs. We find

- § auto mechanics who analyze their customers' concerns as much as their cars;
- § grandmothers who consistently guide their grandchildren to the love of God;
- § school teachers who instruct and inspire; counselors who touch not only the mind but the spirit;
- § attorneys whose passion for justice exceeds their desire for billable hours;
- § students who resist peer pressure and practice right living;
- § entrepreneurs who find they can do well by doing good.

Wisdom isn't just for the old or for the educated or for the specially designed. Wisdom is the gift you get by living fully in the present with an eternal view. When we have wisdom, we become smart bricks in God's human cathedral, sensitive to changes and vibrations in the structure, connected to the other bricks, and communicating with the God who shapes and sustains the whole.

To put it another way, "Wisdom includes sanctified 'street smarts.' Wisdom starts in heaven, but works at street level, where we bump shoulders with others. It isn't satisfied with information retrieval, [nor is it simply social shrewdness]. Wisdom is concerned with how we relate to people, to the world and to God."¹

The first step to becoming a smart brick, to gaining the gifts of Wisdom, is realizing that you, like Lady Wisdom of the book of Proverbs, are created by God, in God's image, for God's delight. You are made to be part of a whole. You are loved, as a cherished daughter or son of a loving motherfather God. The second step to Wisdom is living in that createdness, connected to the Creator and to the other creations. You do that by doing what Jesus did, by following the way of Jesus. You open yourself to God and God's creation through practicing the marks of discipleship. By following the way of Jesus, and practicing regular prayer, worship, Bible reading, service, relatedness, and giving/tithing, you open yourself to the whole and holy life God wants for God's children. Even you.

Not everyone will be a monk, or a king, or famous, or wealthy. Not everyone is a prophet or a parent. But everyone is a daughter, a son, of God, and everyone can develop wisdom, and everyone can follow the way of Jesus. Every single one of us can grow in the depth of our connectedness, and build relationships of trust, devotion, honesty, and respect. Every one of us has a purpose.

We can be dumb bricks in a conventional building, or we can be part of a human cathedral. Every one of us smart bricks is needed, and wanted, in the cathedral that glorifies God and saves the world.

With Wisdom, with God, we can build a better world.

One brick at a time.

Amen.

¹ -Edmund P. Clowney in Tabletalk, March 1995.