

## THE WAY OF WISDOM: ANCIENT PATHS FOR THE NEW YEAR #2 Amy Orr-Ewing

- Where have you seen God at work in your life this week? (Share any brief examples and encouragements).
- Was there anything from Sunday's message which you found particularly inspiring or challenging?
- Was there anything else you particularly noticed?

**Proverbs 8v7-15, 27-30**

There are situations in life which are not covered by the 10 Commandments nor scientific data. We need wisdom - not information nor education nor facts nor theory. As Einstein said: *Wisdom is not a product of schooling but of a lifelong attempt to acquire it.*

Choosing wisdom is an active choice. It is more important than gold, silver or rubies (vv10, 11). Through wisdom we can know how things really are (v12); how things really happen (v14) and what to do (v15-16)

In Proverbs Wisdom begins with "I" and "me", later becomes "she" and "her" as the aim is not to master principles but to fall in love with wisdom. Prov 1-9 is an introduction before a whole series of one liners. Prov 10-15 show how things usually work (T Keller: conservative mindset) whilst Prov 16-31 show the exceptions (T Keller: liberal mindset). Outcomes: if we follow our own rules - misery; if we think we've cracked the code - misery. Proverbs covers both views of life

Prov 8v22-31 recounts creation story and reflects Gen 1-2. Wisdom says *"I was there when he set the heavens in place"* v27 Compare with Ancient Middle Eastern thought which viewed creation as illusion or accident whilst Ancient Near East showed battles between gods. Biblical view is creation is product of wisdom. In v30 Wisdom literally "frolicked with joy." Creation is a pattern of beauty and we are foolish if we choose to go against that pattern.

Proverbs refers to familiar OT stories to give them meaning, just as we can learn from Dickens about selfishness and poverty, or narcissism from Tolstoy. Likewise, films have plot lines we understand and can use as reference. Proverbs says "fall in love with Wisdom" see how the world is from the Beauty of Wisdom.

Prov 12v25 *Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.* Anxiety has become an increasing problem with a marked upturn from 2016. Various statistics were quoted in support. Historically, established institutions absorbed cultural anxiety but now those institutions are shaking so cannot absorb our anxiety.

Misogynist Andrew Tate has become a social media influencer promoting certainty through self-discipline and self-gratification. He's tapping into cultural anxiety but Wisdom says he's a fool. Anxiety weighs the heart. We, (the Church), need to wake up and promote positive words.

John's gospel begins by taking the creation idea of Prov 8 and relating it to Jesus. Jesus is Wisdom personified. Jesus is the Word (logos). We need wisdom, we need Jesus, we need to encounter him.

Solomon (writer of Proverbs) encouraged his readers to fall in love with Wisdom. John encouraged his readers to fall in love with Jesus. Jesus is the Word that lifts anxious hearts.

Alternative "wisdom" is health, wealth, prosperity, self-expression. Jesus invites us to deny self, trust him and live life in all its fulness. Let words of kindness cheer you - listen to Jesus.

- Reflect again on the characteristics of Wisdom in Prov 8v7-21. What are they? Which one is particularly apt for you? Why?
- CH Spurgeon said "Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal, and are all the greater fools for it." How do we become wise?
- What examples of "cultural anxiety" can we name in our own communities (work, home, church, school)?
- How can we begin to speak "kind words" into those situations?
- Suggestion: use Prov 8v22-31 to lead you into a time of praise and worship