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Title: The God Kind of Wisdom (“The Edge” Series)

Text: Proverbs 8:4-36

I’m working on a series of sorts from Proverbs over the next few weeks. I’m calling it “The Edge”. This series is about giving yourself an edge in everything you do. It’s about doing certain things and developing certain habits and attitudes and priorities that give you an edge as you face the challenges that life brings your way. And life does bring its challenges. By the way, by reading one chapter of Proverbs a day, you can read the whole book in a month.

The first edge we’ll talk about is the foundational edge. It’s the core of your value system and it pretty much drives the decisions you make. When a football coach puts together his game plan, he decides in advance what he will do in the various possible game day situations. I’m rather confident to say that the Seahawks, Vikings, Packers or Redskins coaches will not likely go outside of their playbook today. When it’s third and two, they’ve got a set of options in place. When it’s third and seven, there’s another set of options in place. When it’s third and twenty-three, there’s another set of options to go by. Coaches make much of these decisions in advance so that as soon as the whistle blows on one play, and he has about five seconds to call the next play, he already has a good idea of what he wants to do.

Just like coaches develop a game plan from the playbook week after week after week, we need to develop our own game plan from our own playbook that we can follow day after day after day. Now, I’m hoping that you already know or have guessed what that playbook is. It’s the WORD OF GOD! If you want to have an edge – a clear-cut advantage – in all you do, then you need to build your life on BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES. The Bible tells us what we need to know about how to live well. It tells us how to deal with adversity and conflict, how to handle our money, what our priorities should be, how to navigate our relationships, how to approach work, what kind of friends to choose and what kind of friend to be, how to manage our emotions. Most importantly, the Bible tells us how to experience a right relationship with God.

I can’t think of any passage in the Bible that guarantees us an easy life. But the Bible does tell us how to have a GREAT life, a MEANINGFUL life, a BLESSED life – a life filled with love and joy and happiness. Where I have made my decisions according to the Word of God, my life has worked well – even when circumstances around me were falling apart. I can’t think of one time where the Bible has directed me wrong – many times it wasn’t the easiest path but it was never the wrong path. I can also tell you that each time I have abandoned God’s game plan for my life, I have found myself constantly facing greater difficulties.

So today I want to talk about making the decision to build your life on BIBLICAL principles. If you’ve made the lifetime commitment to follow Christ, you also need to make the rest-of-your-lifetime decision to build your life on Biblical principles. It’s what James calls being a DOER of the Word. That should be the goal of every believer. What if I were to tell you that there is one specific quality that determines, more than anything else, whether or not you succeed in life? It determines your level of long-term happiness, your ability to deal with adversity, your ability to earn money and use it, your ability to create meaningful relationships and your ability to experience deep and abiding joy. What if I were to tell you that there is this one quality on which all the good things of life turn – and this one quality is yours for the asking? What would you say? Would you say, “Tell me more”? That’s what I’m hoping, because that’s what I’m about to do. Before I tell you what it is, I’d like for us to look at a paraphrase of today’s scripture text. (Read the text in the New Living Translation.) An interesting thing about this passage is that the FIRST PERSON of this passage – the “I” of the passage is NOT a PERSON. Let’s see how soon you can figure out who the “I” is of this passage.

The quality I’m talking about is WISDOM. Scripture tells us that it’s ours for the asking. It’s available to every believer. James said, *“If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking”* (James 1:5). The bottom line is that without wisdom, life simply doesn’t work. If you don’t have wisdom to make good decisions, you’ll end up making bad decisions. But it doesn’t have to be that way. God wants to give you all the wisdom you need, every step of the way through life. So this morning we will look at what is sometimes referred to as the “Wisdom Chapter” – Proverbs 8. In these verses, wisdom is personified through the words of Solomon: he writes as though wisdom is speaking directly to us. The chapter begins with these words – *“Listen as Wisdom calls out! Hear as understanding raises her voice!”* And then in verse four, wisdom says – *“I call to you, to all of you! I raise my voice to all people.”* There are a number of things that we can learn about wisdom in this chapter. Today I want to talk about what wisdom looks like, what it can do for you and where it comes from.

- 1. WHAT WISDOM LOOKS LIKE.** The first thing I want you to see is...**A. Wisdom is easy to understand.** It doesn’t consist of vague and mysterious riddles that few can decipher. Biblical wisdom is down to earth and practical.

“My words are plain to anyone with understanding, clear to those with knowledge” (vs. 9). I was born and raised in a Christian home. Many of you knew my parents. The Bible was always the most important book in our home. So I’ve had the Bible read to me all my life, and I’ve had my own Bible since before I can remember. So from my earliest days of reading the Bible, I learned that it contains much more than stories about arks and giants and walls that come tumbling down. It spoke to me about things that mattered to me – even as a teenager. It talked to me about the attitude I need to have toward my parents, how I should approach my school work, how I should do my job, how I should speak to others, how I should choose my friends, and on and on. It was not a matter of reading the Bible and feeling like everything was over my head, though some of it was and still is. I believe it was Mark Twain that said, “It’s not what I don’t understand that concerns me most, but rather what I do understand.” So it became a matter of what am I doing with what I DO understand. For me, it was more a matter of trying to keep up with all that the Word was telling me to do. That’s because the Bible – even in the midst of all the stories, parables and history – is incredibly PRACTICAL. It has much advice that is rather easy to understand. Here’s another thing...**B. Wisdom looks a lot like common sense.** *“Common sense and success belong to me. Insight and strength are mine”* (vs. 14). The New Living Translation says *“common sense”*. Other translations say *“sound judgment”*. In other words, it just makes sense. Biblical wisdom is good, solid, reasonable thinking. Sometimes we try to get super spiritual and manufacture a kind of contrarian form of wisdom that flies in the face of common sense and sound judgment – and this kind of so-called wisdom rarely works in our favor. ILLUSTRATION: At one church I served, there was a young man who would show up at the church in the middle of the day for no apparent reason. He’d just walk off of his job and show up at church. He said something like, “God told me to come to the church.” I questioned him about it. I asked if that wouldn’t put his job in jeopardy. I asked what kind of testimony he was leaving with his boss. He blew me off. He didn’t have a job for very long either! ILLUSTRATION: Recently I heard of a young man who was unemployed, and his fiancé was unemployed, and he decided, in spite of his good & Godly counsel, that God was telling him to get married. Those close to him advised against it – his pastor, his parents and his friends. By every sound and sensible measure, it just wasn’t a good idea. But he got married anyway. And now...instead of being unable to care for one person, he’s unable to care for two people! How is that wisdom? Common sense and sound judgment would have said, “Don’t make the decision to get married – at least not yet. Wait until the time is right.” But he didn’t want to wait. He convinced himself that common sense is just another word for worldly wisdom, and that supernatural wisdom means that you can make impulsive decisions and God will bless them anyway. He discovered, a little too late, that this is not the case. Biblical wisdom is easy to understand and when you hear it, it just sounds right. It makes good sense. A third thing...**C. Wisdom is grounded in goodness.** Another way to say it is that wisdom is grounded in integrity. Wisdom never suggests that you cut corners. It never suggests that you play fast and loose with the facts. It never suggests that you take advantage of the other guy, or that you gossip, backbite and criticize. Wisdom will always move you in the direction of integrity, excellence and holiness. Verse 8 says, *“My advice is wholesome. There is nothing devious or crooked in it.”* Anytime you’re thinking about doing something that isn’t completely on the up and up, you can be sure that the voice you’re hearing is NOT the voice of BIBLICAL WISDOM. The Book of James says, *“But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere”* (3:17).

2. **WHAT WISDOM CAN DO FOR YOU.** First of all...**A. Wisdom helps you make better decisions.** *“I, Wisdom, live together with good judgment. I know where to discover knowledge and discernment”* (vs. 12). Have you ever known someone who made an off-the-wall decision based on a random verse of Scripture that really has nothing at all to do with their situation? ILLUSTRATION: A few years back, a certain man was considering quitting his job and starting a new business. There are a number of ways to go about making such a decision, and he chose what might have been the worst possible way: He blindly flipped open his Bible, put his finger in the middle of the page and read the first verse he saw. It said, *“Go, do all that is in thine heart, for the Lord is with thee”* (2 Samuel 7:3). What a confirmation, he thought. God is telling me to do this. What more evidence do I need? Now, the problem was that he didn’t have the money or the credit or the experience or the knowledge to run a business – but he did have a verse he had pulled out of the blue, and that was all he needed – so he thought. You probably won’t be surprised that things didn’t end well for the gentleman’s business venture. The pick-a-verse-at-random strategy rarely (if ever) works. The story is told of a man who attempted this strategy. He turned to Matthew 27:5 (KJV) and read *“And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.”* Then followed by turning to Luke 10:37 (KJV) and read *“...Then*

said Jesus unto him, 'Go, and do thou likewise.'" The fact is that you don't NEED random Bible verses to help you make good decisions. The Bible is already full of advice on how to make decisions in every area of your life: how to invest, how to plan, how to prepare, how to follow through, and on and on. Reading the Word on a daily basis will give you a solid foundation for making good decisions. Here's another thing...**B. Wisdom helps you develop financial stability.** *"Those who love me inherit wealth. I will fill their treasuries"* (vs. 21). Understand that "wealth" is a relative term. It's defined differently in different cultures. None of you here would probably think of yourself as wealthy. But let me take you to a third world country, and you would quickly change your mind. What Solomon is talking about here is financial stability and financial security. That's true wealth. ILLUSTRATION: This week I read a testimony of a missionary doing ministry in Brazil. He remarked how certain men in his church – Godly men – always seemed to have enough, financially speaking, in spite of the fact that Brazil is deemed by many as a poor country with an unstable economy. One day they took up an emergency offering for a family in need. One of the men, whose income is quite modest by our standards, gave the equivalent of about a month's pay. It was certainly more than most Americans could afford to give on the spur of the moment. How could he do it? For years he had managed his money according to Biblical principles. He tithed, lived within his means, didn't overextend himself with credit, put money in savings and invested as much as he could. Even though he had never made more than twenty-thousand dollars a year – and had raised a family on that salary – he had built a level of financial security and stability that many with a six-figure income can only dream of. The Bible is very specific about what our financial priorities should be. If you will seek Biblical wisdom in this matter, and if you will put this wisdom into practice, you will move toward financial stability in your life – no matter what happens with the economy. A third thing...**C. Wisdom helps you experience a fuller more meaningful life.** Solomon said, *"Listen to me, for all who follow my ways are joyful"* (vs. 32). And then in verse 35, *"For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the Lord."* Solomon is saying that those who choose to live by wisdom – God's wisdom – receive a special blessing and a special anointing from God. They receive favor from the Lord. That's because when you make your life decisions based on Biblical principles, God is able to bless you in a great way. I've been saying all this to **SELL** you on the idea of pursuing wisdom. I want you to know that wisdom is worth the price you pay to get it. Wisdom guides you through the situations of life. Without it, you're left to your own devices. And so the question becomes: How do you get wisdom?

- 3. WHERE WISDOM COMES FROM.** I already hinted at the answer in the introduction, when I quoted from the book of James (1:5). The process of asking God for wisdom includes some specific steps that you need to take. The first step is to...**A. Put Wisdom at the top of your list.** When Solomon first became king, he said to God: *"I am like a little child who doesn't know his way around. And here I am in the midst of your own chosen people, a nation so great and numerous they cannot be counted! Give me an understanding heart so that I can govern your people well and know the difference between right and wrong."* The Bible says that the Lord was pleased that Solomon asked for wisdom. God said, *"Because you have asked for wisdom in governing my people with justice and have not asked for a long life or wealth or the death of your enemies – I will give you what you asked for! I will give you a wise and understanding heart such as no one else has had or ever will have! And I will also give you what you did not ask for – riches and fame!"* (1 Kings 3:11-13). God blessed Solomon for seeking wisdom. Of all the things that you could possibly want, of all the things you could possibly think you need – wisdom is incredibly important. Without wisdom, any other gift we receive will inevitably slip through our fingers. If you have money, but don't have the wisdom to manage it, it will soon be gone. If you have power without the wisdom to use it, you'll ultimately abuse it. If you're surrounded with great friends and a loving family, but don't have wisdom in developing relationships, you'll never fully appreciate the people God has placed in your life. In order for you to make proper use of everything that God wants to give you, wisdom needs to be a priority. Put it at the top of your list. Settle it in your heart: I need wisdom more than riches. That's why Solomon said, *"Choose my instruction rather than silver, and knowledge rather than pure gold"* (vs. 10). Here's the second thing you can do to grow in wisdom. **B. Put it on your daily calendar.** *"Those who search will surely find me"* (vs. 17). Earlier in the Book of Proverbs, Solomon says, *"Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. Cry out for insight and ask for understanding. Search for them as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures"* (2:3-4). Solomon says that it needs to be a daily pursuit: *"Joyful are those who listen to me, watching for me daily at my gates, waiting for me outside my home!"* (vs. 34). This is why a daily time alone with God is so important. When you spend time in the Word every day, you build a foundation – a playbook, so to speak – upon which you can base your decisions. Here's the third thing...**C. Put it**

into practice. Practice the principles of wisdom in every situation. Practice MAKING things right. Practice DOING things right. Wisdom says – *“I walk in righteousness, in paths of justice”* (vs. 20). Wisdom in action is righteousness in action. Wisdom in action is justice in action. So the question we need to ask ourselves throughout the day is: What good and righteous and justice-filled action can I take at this moment? We need to ask ourselves: Which wisdom principle applies to this situation, and how can I put it into practice? Here’s what I discovered. Every day provides opportunities to make wisdom-based decisions. What will I think about? What will I eat? What will I read or watch or listen to? What will I say to this person? What will I do in response to this situation? Wisdom, in many ways, is like a muscle. The more we use it, the stronger it becomes. To fully develop wisdom, we need to put it into practice at every opportunity.

- 4. Conclusion.** Earlier I talked about the playbook that coaches follow in game situations, and how the playbook helps them design a game plan each week of the season. The success of the game generally depends on how good the game plan is and how good the playbook is. It’s the same in life. Everyone has a game plan and everyone follows a playbook. The real question is: Which game plan? Which playbook? Followers of Jesus have the ultimate playbook in their hands. It guarantees a successful game plan – every time. When you build your life on the principles of God’s Word – not just once in a while, but over the long haul – your life is blessed beyond measure. If you want an edge in life, I would say to you the same thing a coach would say to a new recruit: Learn the playbook. Make it your lifelong pursuit to know the Word, so that you can become a DOER OF THE WORD. The quality of your life is a reflection of the quality of your wisdom. If you’re not where you want to be right now, then you need to become better acquainted with the playbook. You do this on a daily basis – spending time alone with God in His Word every day of your life – so that with every decision throughout every moment of the day, you can say: **What would God’s wisdom have me do in this situation?**