

August 25, 2019 by Steve Brandon



Search for Wisdom

Proverbs 2

1. You will Find Wisdom (verses 1-6).

2. Wisdom will Guard You (verses 7-22).

Forrest Fenn was born in 1930. He served in the Air Force, where he was awarded the Silver Star for his service in the Vietnam War. After retiring from the Air Force, he moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he and his wife owned and operated an art gallery, Fenn Galleries. Over the years, this gallery did quite well and made Forrest Fenn a wealthy man. But wealth does not insure health.

In 1988, Forrest Fenn was diagnosed with kidney cancer. In the summer of that year, he had his right kidney removed. He thought he was going to die. So he thought of a plan to make his death glorious.

He would stuff a treasure chest with glittering valuables, write a clue-laden poem that would point to its location, and then march out to his favorite spot on earth to take some pills and lie in eternal repose with the gold, like a doomed conquistador in an Indiana Jones movie. All he needed was someone to write and publish the book in which he'd place the poem.^[1]

Only, there were two problems. First, he couldn't get a publisher to go along with the idea. Second, the radiation treatments he received for his cancer worked, and so his death was not imminent.

But still, he held on to the treasure idea. He purchased an ornate bronze lockbox and spent years filling it with "gold coins, sapphires (from Sri Lanka), ancient Chinese carved-jade faces, and Alaskan gold nuggets the size of chicken eggs."^[2] He kept his chest in a vault in his home, covered with a red bandanna. From time to time, he would show off his treasure to his friends and tell them how it would make a great buried treasure.

Sometime in 2010, when Forrest Fenn was 80 years old, he slipped away from his home for a few days, headed north of Santa Fe into the wilds of the Rockies, parked his car, and hid his treasure. Because the treasure weighed 42 pounds, it took him two trips to carry everything to the spot.

He then self-published his memoir, *The Thrill of the Chase*. In the book was the poem he wrote giving clues as to the location of the treasure.

As I have gone alone in there
And with my treasures bold,
I can keep my secret where,
And hint of riches new and old.

Begin it where warm waters halt
And take it in the canyon down,
Not far, but too far to walk.
Put in below the home of Brown.

From there it's no place for the meek,
The end is ever drawing nigh;
There'll be no paddle up your creek,
Just heavy loads and water high.

If you've been wise and found the blaze,
Look quickly down, your quest to cease,
But tarry scant with marvel gaze,
Just take the chest and go in peace.

So why is it that I must go
And leave my trove for all to seek?
The answers I already know,
I've done it tired, and now I'm weak.

So hear me all and listen good,
Your effort will be worth the cold.
If you are brave and in the wood
I give you title to the gold.

This poem launched a frenzy of people on a treasure hunt. It has been estimated that some 350,000 people from all over the world have

sought the treasure. Most have done so as a hobby, because there is such a low barrier to entry. You do not even need to purchase Fenn's memoir to search for the treasure. You simply need the poem as your clue, then go to the Rockies and take a hike with your eyes open.

For some, this is easy, as they live close to the Rockies. It simply costs a day of time and a tank of gas. But for others, the hunt comes at more of a cost, especially those who live far away. Some have taken their vacation in the Rockies, going out every day in search of the treasure, spending money on plane tickets, hotels, and restaurants.

Since the poem was released, Forrest Fenn has leaked some additional clues as to the location of his treasure. The chest is above 5,000 feet in elevation but below 10,200 feet. It is in the Rocky Mountains, but not in Idaho or Utah. It is more than 8.25 miles north of Santa Fe, New Mexico. It is wet. It is not at the top of a mountain, not in a cemetery, not in a mine shaft, and not in a building or structure.

These extra clues have caused even more treasure hunters to join the hunt. Some have even given up their jobs to make hunting for this treasure their full-time occupation. Cottage industries have arisen. Websites are devoted to giving information about the treasure. Tourism in Santa Fe is up, as people make trips to go on their treasure hunt. In fact, last month an event called "Fennboree" was hosted at a state park in Santa Fe, where organized activities and games took place.^[3]

But not all has been fun and games. Four people have died in search of the treasure, which has caused local officials to warn the public of the danger, and has prompted a top police commander in the state of New Mexico to urge Fenn to call off the hunt. Forrest Fenn has said that the hunt will continue.

Well, this morning, I am calling you all to join in a treasure hunt. It is not a hunt for a financial treasure. It is a hunt for a spiritual treasure. It is a hunt for wisdom. My message this morning is entitled "Search for Wisdom," and it comes from Proverbs, chapter 2. If you haven't done so already, I invite you to open your Bibles to Proverbs, chapter 2, found on page 528 of the Bible in the chair in front of you. Let's read our text:

Proverbs 2:1-22

My son, if you receive my words
and treasure up my commandments with you,
making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to understanding;
yes, if you call out for insight
and raise your voice for understanding,
if you seek it like silver
and search for it as for hidden treasures,
then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;
he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
he is a shield to those who walk in integrity,
guarding the paths of justice
and watching over the way of his saints.
Then you will understand righteousness and justice
and equity, every good path;
for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
discretion will watch over you,
understanding will guard you,
delivering you from the way of evil,
from men of perverted speech,
who forsake the paths of uprightness
to walk in the ways of darkness,
who rejoice in doing evil
and delight in the perverseness of evil,
men whose paths are crooked,
and who are devious in their ways.
So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman,
from the adulteress with her smooth words,
who forsakes the companion of her youth
and forgets the covenant of her God;
for her house sinks down to death,
and her paths to the departed;
none who go to her come back,
nor do they regain the paths of life.
So you will walk in the way of the good
and keep to the paths of the righteous.
For the upright will inhabit the land,
and those with integrity will remain in it,
but the wicked will be cut off from the land,
and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.

I trust that you can see the treasure language there in verse 4.

Proverbs 2:4

if you seek it like silver
and search for it as for hidden treasures,

The “it” in verse 4 refers to wisdom. Solomon is calling his son to search for wisdom as he would for buried treasure. As much as people are looking for Forrest Fenn’s treasure, so should we be seeking for wisdom. We should pursue it. We should be talking with others about wisdom. We should be learning from the wise. We should be reading about it. We should be seeking to put it into practice. We should make some financial investment in wisdom. We should make some time investment in wisdom. In other words, wisdom should be valuable enough to us that we are searching for it like hidden treasure.

Now, verse 4 begins with the word “if,” and this is not the first time in the chapter that this word has appeared. Everything in verses 1-4 is governed by it.

Proverbs 2:1-4

My son, if you receive my words
and treasure up my commandments with you,
making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to understanding;
yes, if you call out for insight
and raise your voice for understanding,
if you seek it like silver
and search for it as for hidden treasures,

In other words, if you accept what Solomon has been saying: to listen to your parents (1:8-9), to beware of your peers (1:10-19), to listen to wisdom’s call (1:20-33). If you do this, and if you treasure his words in your heart, internalize his wisdom, think on it, meditate on it, value it. If your ear is listening, and your heart is leaning, and your mouth is longing, and you are crying out to the LORD for wisdom, praying to him, passionately pleading that he would give you wisdom. If you are seeking for wisdom like people are seeking for Forrest Fenn’s treasure, then the promise comes in verse 5.

1. You will Find Wisdom (verses 1-6).

That is what verse 5 says.

Proverbs 2:5

then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.

The promise of verse 5 is that wisdom is available to all who seek it. Unlike Fenn’s treasure, which will only be found by one person and may not even be found at all for a hundred years, wisdom is a treasure that may be found by all. It is simply conditioned upon your effort at seeking it out. If you seek for wisdom with all your heart, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. The fear of the LORD, the knowledge of God, this is wisdom.

Remember the key to Proverbs? “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7). And Proverbs 9:10 puts it this way: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”

If you seek for wisdom with passion and pursuit, you will find it. It is worth noting that in Proverbs, pursuing wisdom is very much like pursuing God himself. Wisdom is almost a personification of God. When you receive wisdom, you receive many blessings. These are merely foreshadows of eternal blessings. When you understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God, you find God himself.

This invitation sounds much like other invitations in the Bible. When the Jews were in exile in Babylon, the LORD extended his hand of good will to them and said that he would restore them into the land:

Jeremiah 29:12-14

Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you.

The people of Israel seeking the LORD with all their heart, and they will find the LORD. This invitation in Proverbs also sounds like Peter’s invitation on the Day of Pentecost. Quoting from the prophet Joel, he says, “And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). Saved from your sin. Saved from the wrath of God. This is the gospel: that we, who cannot save ourselves, cry out for mercy, and God saves us from our sin.

Here in Proverbs, we see the same invitation: cry out for wisdom!

So the question to all of us is really quite simple. Are you seeking wisdom? Are you pursuing wisdom? What about this week? Did you seek wisdom? What did you read? What did you study? What did you listen to? What did you watch? Who did you talk to? Did you seek to practice what you learned? That is what wisdom is: taking what you know and applying it to your life. Did you face any difficult decisions this week? Did you pray to the LORD? Did you ask others for counsel? That is what it means to seek wisdom. It means that it is on our heart and on our mind, and we are sifting the decisions of our lives through its grid.

Perhaps it comes down to this: do you treasure wisdom? Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). If

you treasure wisdom, your heart will seek after it. Why do you think so many people have gone after Forrest Fenn's treasure? Because that treasure is in their heart, and so they go to great extents to get it. So also will those who seek for wisdom.

I am so thankful that the treasure of wisdom is within the grasp of us all. If you but seek wisdom, you will find it.

Now, in verse 6, we see the reason why Solomon can make such a guarantee.

Proverbs 2:6

For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;

The reason why Solomon can guarantee that all who seek diligently for wisdom will find it is because the LORD is the one who gives it. Solomon experienced this himself. When the LORD came to Solomon in a dream by night, asking him, "What shall I give you?" Solomon said:

1 Kings 3:9

"Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people."

Solomon was seeking wisdom. It pleased the LORD that he made such a request, and the LORD gave him wisdom.

1 Kings 3:11-12

And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you."

Solomon knew very well that it was the LORD who gave him wisdom and understanding, that it didn't come from himself but from the LORD:

Proverbs 2:6

For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;

This is why James says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him" (James 1:5). When we lack wisdom, we need to seek the wisdom-giver. God gives wisdom to all who ask, if they but ask with diligence and earnestness and zeal and passion, as verses 1-4 indicate.

Now, last week we saw in chapter 1 when the LORD does not give wisdom.

Proverbs 1:28

Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;
they will seek me diligently but will not find me.

It is only after wisdom has been available but refused, only after wisdom has stretched out her hand but was ignored, that diligent seeking will not find it. That is why it is important for us to seek wisdom today, before the time is gone.

So, church family, search for wisdom. You will find it. That is the promise of verses 1-6. And now, the benefits come in the rest of the chapter, verses 7-22.

It is good to know these benefits, because that is why people seek treasure in the first place. Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and then covered up. He went and sold everything he had and bought that field so he could have the treasure. It is a picture of the gospel. What God has done in Christ is so valuable, so worth it, that when you understand it, you are willing to forsake all and follow. The benefits of the gospel are eternal life, knowledge of God, fellowship with him, forgiveness of sins, a clear conscience, and living joy in God. These are the spiritual benefits we receive in the gospel: every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14).

When we see those benefits, we will be willing to fulfill all the conditions of verses 1-4 and pursue after the Lord.

In the case of Forrest Fenn's treasure, people see the obvious benefits: the millions of dollars, the buying power, the potential. And so, with eye on the prize, they seek their treasure. Wisdom comes with benefits as well, and they are laid out in verses 7-22. They all come under one head: protection.

2. Wisdom will Guard You (verses 7-22).

Look at verses 7-11.

Proverbs 2:7-11

he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
he is a shield to those who walk in integrity,
guarding the paths of justice
and watching over the way of his saints.

Then you will understand righteousness and justice
and equity, every good path;
for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
discretion will watch over you,
understanding will guard you,

This is a continuation from verse 6. The LORD gives wisdom and understanding, and he stores it up in the heart of the righteous. He protects those who walk in integrity. He guards our paths. He watches over the way of his saints. In other words, the LORD guards and protects those who seek for wisdom.

In our world today, the security business is huge. We have alarms and cameras to protect our homes. Some communities are gated. Many have guns in their homes to protect against intruders. But the best security system in the world is the LORD, who protects those who seek for wisdom.

Note how he does this. Verse 7 says that he “stores up sound wisdom for the upright.” That is, wisdom enters deep within your soul, so that when the dangers of life come upon you, from the wisdom in your heart flows the understanding to discern the situation. Should you go forward? Should you flee? Should you seek help? Should you ask counsel? When wisdom is in your heart, and when knowledge is pleasant to your soul, you will understand the good path (verse 9) and you will walk in it. Such are the benefits of wisdom. It will “watch over you” (verse 11). It will “guard you” (verse 11).

The world is a dangerous place. It is physically dangerous, which is why we need security systems. But it is also morally dangerous, which is why we need God’s wisdom to guard us. The moral danger is the greater danger. Physical danger only affects this life. Moral danger affects eternity. Jesus said, “Do not fear him who kills the body, but fear him who can cast your soul into hell” (Matthew 10:28). Do not fear mere men; all they can do is kill you. Fear God, who holds your eternal soul. Wisdom, if you find it, will protect you.

Do you prize God’s protection? Do you want this shield? Do you want God to watch over you? If you do not see the value of what wisdom brings, you will have no desire to pursue it. This is like the million dollars in Fenn’s treasure chest. The benefits must be understood and prized before you will go to the effort of seeking them. Understand the moral dangers that are out there, and understand how God and wisdom can protect you from them.

Beginning in verse 12, Solomon gives two examples of how this works. First,

1. Wisdom will guard you against the evil man.

Proverbs 2:12-15

delivering you from the way of evil,
from men of perverted speech,
who forsake the paths of uprightness
to walk in the ways of darkness,
who rejoice in doing evil
and delight in the perverseness of evil,
men whose paths are crooked,
and who are devious in their ways.

There are plenty of men like this in the world: men who delight in evil, walk in the ways of darkness, and love it so (verse 14). Did you notice the language of verse 14? “Who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil.” In many ways, this is where the battle is fought. It is fought in your affections.

Verse 10 speaks about knowledge being pleasant to your soul. Verse 14 speaks about evil being enjoyed by those who are wicked. Which pleasure will you pursue? The pleasures that come with sin and her ways, or the pleasures that come with wisdom and her ways? The pleasures of sin are in the flesh, and fade quickly. The pleasures of wisdom are in the spirit, and they may be a harder way to walk sometimes, but they give long-term rewards. That is the mark of wisdom: it does not live in the pleasure of the moment, but sees the long-term results and walks accordingly. Wisdom will give you the understanding to see these things.

For instance, consider a few Proverbs. “Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished” (Proverbs 16:5). Wisdom will see this, will recognize the proud man, will understand his end, and want no part of it.

Proverbs 22:24-25

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

Wisdom will discern the angry man. Wisdom will understand that associating with such a man will lead you to anger as well. Wisdom understands the strife and the sin that comes with the angry man, and wisdom will flee such a one. Ultimately, wisdom, if you seek it and find it, will guard you from the evil man.

But Solomon brings up another danger: the danger of the evil woman.

2. Wisdom will guard you against the evil woman.

Proverbs 2:16-19

So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman,
from the adulteress with her smooth words,
who forsakes the companion of her youth
and forgets the covenant of her God;
for her house sinks down to death,
and her paths to the departed;
none who go to her come back,
nor do they regain the paths of life.

This woman is described as “the forbidden woman,” the adulteress who has forsaken her own marriage and gone after other men. Wisdom is the ability to see the endgame. You pursue that woman, and you are on a death march, that form of punishment where prisoners of war are forced to march to their internment camp, facing starvation and dehydration, humiliation and torture, and where those who cannot keep up the pace are executed. This is the endgame for those who go after the forbidden woman. Verse 18 says that her house sinks down to death. Verse 19 says that none who go to her ever come back again.

This was illustrated this past week in the news, when some 27 men were charged in connection with illegal sex trades at two lingerie shops. Their names and faces were published on the front page of our newspaper. They included a former CEO, a bank president, an elected official, a youth soccer coach, some doctors, and other prominent business leaders. Their lives will never be the same. Their lives will be destroyed, because they did not see the end of their actions. They did not see where the “forbidden woman” would take them.

Wisdom will keep you from the paths of the forbidden woman. It will keep you from starting down those paths in the first place. Because none of these men began there. They ended there. There were many steps to get there, and wisdom will deliver you from the wrong path.

The forbidden woman of Proverbs 2 is not only found at an illegal business. She may be someone at work who begins to pay attention to you, pulling at you, drawing you away. It may not even be illegal, but it is immoral and wrong. We will see in Proverbs 7 the promises this woman makes: smooth speech, seductive words, every enticement. And yet, as Proverbs 7 says, like a lamb led to slaughter, like an ox going to the knife, he who follows her does not know it will cost him his life. Most of these men never began with something so dramatic. It starts with subtle compromises, often online, and progresses from there. Wisdom delivers you not just from the end of that path, but from the very beginning of it.

The conclusion comes in verses 20-22.

Proverbs 2:20-22

So you will walk in the way of the good
and keep to the paths of the righteous.
For the upright will inhabit the land,
and those with integrity will remain in it,
but the wicked will be cut off from the land,
and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.

This is a common theme throughout Proverbs. The righteous will know blessing and long life. The wicked will die young. “The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short” (Proverbs 10:27).

It is really quite simple. What sort of life do you want? Do you want to know the blessings of security and long-lasting joy? The one who walks in wisdom can walk with a clear conscience before other people, knowing that God’s blessing is upon his life. The wicked, on the other hand, live a paranoid life, shaking at every rustling leaf. If you want a life of insecurity and strife, walk in wickedness. But if you want to know God’s blessing, seek wisdom.

So seek for wisdom. Be a treasure hunter. Many today are seeking for Forrest Fenn’s treasure. Are you seeking for the treasure of wisdom?

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on August 25, 2019 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] “The Everlasting Forrest Fenn,” *California Sunday Magazine*, July 5, 2015, <https://stories.californiasunday.com/2015-07-05/the-everlasting-forrest-fenn/>.

[2] Ibid.

[3] This “Fenboree” event was held July 5-7, 2019.