Today we are starting a new sermon series learning from the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs is a profound book with so many lessons about life. It teaches about wisdom, justice, foolishness, pride, friendship, diligence, humility, patience, kindness, honesty, and more. For this, this Summer, we are going to learn what it says about these subjects in our Summer Series: Life Lessons from Proverbs through Disney’s Magic. In this series, we will delve into the lessons Proverbs presents and link them with classic Disney movies that portray these subjects in an impactful and emotional manner.

Today, we focus on wisdom, a concept that became incredibly important to me after facing certain challenges in my ministry. There was a time when I thought I knew more about being a pastor than I actually did. I was not prideful or arrogant, just naïve. As a young pastor, I held an idealistic and somewhat naive understanding of my role and the nature of people. I was driven to bring about change and trusted people that were not good, but reality soon taught me some hard lessons. These experiences taught me a deep respect for wisdom and its guiding influence on effective communication, proactive listening, self-awareness, and healthy relationships. This realization was my first encounter with the true value of wisdom.

Let’s begin with the question: What is wisdom? Proverbs 8 portrays wisdom as a woman who calls people to learn her ways and find life,

“Does not wisdom call
    and understanding raise her voice?
On the heights, beside the way,
    at the crossroads she takes her stand;
beside the gates in front of the town,
    at the entrance of the portals she cries out:
“To you, O people, I call,
    and my cry is to all who live.
O simple ones, learn prudence;
    acquire intelligence, you who lack it.
Hear, for I will speak noble things,
    and from my lips will come what is right,
for my mouth will utter truth;
    wickedness is an abomination to my lips.” Proverbs 8: 1-7

In this text, Lady Wisdom, as she is often called, presents herself as a noble figure, calling out at the city gates and at every corner of the streets, extending an invitation to everyone who lacks understanding to learn from her words. Can you picture this? Maybe you can think of your grandmother or mother giving you advice. How many times did you actually listen to them before you got in trouble?

Also, even more profound and insightful, is that that wisdom was with God before the creation of the world, “The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth,” (Proverbs 8:22-31) suggesting that wisdom is foundational to the order of the universe. To me, this means that wisdom was the first manifestation of God, without it, there is nothing. It also means that wisdom is a godly characteristic that cares about and gives life.

That is why the book of Proverbs says that wisdom is priceless and better than gold, silver, and precious stones,

“Take my instruction instead of silver
    and knowledge rather than choice gold,
for wisdom is better than jewels,
    and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.” Proverbs 8:10-11

“All that you may desire cannot compare with her.” That is an amazing and powerful statement. When you gather all this together, it is easy to see that Wisdom is creative and life-giving and, alongside life and love, is a precious gift from God to us to live a good life.

Can you believe it? This priceless gift is available and accessible to all who seek it. The question is, are we getting it? The book of Proverbs speaks of three kinds of people when it comes to this: the wise, the foolish, and the simple. You may be asking, which one am I: the wise, the foolish, or the simple? According to Proverbs, the wise are those moving towards God, changing their life based on Scripture’s teachings (Prov. 1:5). Is this you? The foolish distance themselves from God, unwilling to change (Prov. 1:7). Is this you? The simple are those yet to fully develop due to youth, inexperience, or incapacity (Prov. 1:4). Is this you?

So, one of the challenging questions for us today is: who are we? The wise, the foolish, or the simple? This will be the first step in becoming wiser, knowing who we are, and being honest about it. As I said before, when I thought I knew better, I did not; I was more of a simple with a dash of foolishness. What about you?

The movie Lion King provides insight into this. Here is a brief synopsis of the movie (if this is a spoiler to you, I am sorry, but you had almost 30 years to watch it).

The movie follows the life of a young lion prince named Simba, the heir of his father, King Mufasa. Simba idolized his father and wanted to become a wise and just king like him. However, the kingdom is lost after Mufasa’s death when his evil brother, Scar, tricked Simba into believing he caused his father’s death, leading to his exile. Simba ran away and, for years, adopted a carefree lifestyle away from his responsibilities (Hakuna Matata!). It was only after Scar’s rule led the kingdom into despair that Simba, guided by Rafiki’s wisdom, realized he must embrace his destiny. So, he confronted his past, reclaimed his throne, and restored the kingdom.

Here is one of the critical scenes from the movie when Simba was a kid and still had his father: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwrSN5UJPak>

What a powerful scene. Mufasa was teaching a lesson to Simba about the consequences of disobeying his counsel. Mufasa had told Simba not to go to a certain place because it was dangerous, but Simba disregarded his father’s advice and almost died if not for his father’s intervention.

Mufasa was wise. He inherited wisdom from his parents and ancestors and had to face challenges of his own and make difficult decisions too. But each lesson passed onto him and each life experience, whether successes or mistakes, joys or sufferings, contributed to his wisdom over time. And now he is trying to pass it on to his son because he loves him.

But Scar was not like him, he was foolish. Though he was raised in the same household, he chose a different path. He was jealous and scheming. He willfully rejected wisdom and embraced greed and violence instead.

Here are pictures of the kingdom under Mufasa the Wise and Scar the Fool (on-screen).

So, what was Simba if Mufasa was the wise king and Scar the foolish brother? For a time, he was simple with a dash of foolishness. Was Simba greedy? No. Was he evil? No. He was simple because he had not lived long enough to understand people (animals), including himself, the world, and the things that matter most (like the “Circle of Life”). Simba lacked the wisdom to honor his father’s instruction, value his knowledge, welcome counsel, and stay away from bad company and places. Because he rejected his father’s wisdom, he ended up with the wrong people (animals), wrong places, false perceptions of himself, and the suffering of many, including the ones he loved.

Proverbs 22:3 speak of this when it says, “The prudent (wise) see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.”

This verse contrasts the prudent (or wise) with the simple, suggesting that those who are “simple” in their understanding or actions can end up suffering harm because they don’t perceive or respond appropriately to potential dangers. That was Simba.

What does all this mean to us? Here is where we are: Wisdom is a priceless treasure, timeless, and essential for our well-being and the well-being of those around us. Wisdom transcends the present, impacting not just today or tomorrow but generations to come. Wisdom is more critical than wealth, fame, and power. It is the ability to navigate life’s circumstances, adapt to changes, and flourish.

This means that any critical question or decision of life—whom to marry, what career to pursue, when to confront or hold back, when to share or withhold—requires wisdom. Smartness alone does not give the capacity to make such decisions. But wisdom enlightens us with the capacity to discern between right and wrong, better or best, and find the courage to assume our place in this life and know who God created us to be.

Simba rejected wisdom because he lacked the life experience to appreciate what his father was teaching him and did not understand who he was. When you have an inaccurate understanding of who you are, you will make decisions that will lead you astray from what is meant for you. You will choose the wrong people to hang around with, go to the wrong places, and think of others in the wrong ways (you will call friends enemies and enemies friends). We call this foolishness. This destroys everything.

What should we do then? The ultimate embodiment of God’s wisdom is Jesus Christ. If wisdom was with God before Creation, it was through Jesus that God brought everything into existence as it says in John 1:1-3, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.” The Word, Logos, is Jesus. In the same way we hear Wisdom extending an invitation to everyone in the book of Proverbs, so does Jesus extends his invitation to life to the whole world. He invites us to see ourselves as beloved children of God.

My friends, the secret to life is not power, wealth, or even happiness, but to find ourselves in God’s ‘Eternal Life.”

Here is the invitation and good news: Wisdom stems not from special knowledge or skill but from humility, a readiness to listen, learning from life experiences, and, most importantly, from fostering a relationship with Jesus. The invitation to wisdom (and life) is open to everyone.

How might you use this precious gift in your relationships, work, or personal challenges? Who would you be at the crossroads of life: the wise, the foolish, or the simple?

Wisdom is calling, would we listen to her?