

Blake Gillen

Grace Bible Church - Equip

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A Search for Wisdom
Job 28

Watching a television show with Brianna where two people who worked for the government were trying to catch a bad guy. The bad guy strapped a bomb around one of the government workers wrist. The bomb was ticking down and the guys partner was talking to someone on the phone trying to figure out which wires to clip to try and make the bomb stop. It was very tense. I told Brianna if we were ever in that situation I would try my best to help her but I probably wouldn't work all that well under such pressure.

What scares you? Hebrew poetry scares me. Hebrew poetry is a genre of the Bible that is all over the Bible and yet it is a genre most of us aren't all that familiar with. Hebrew poetry is important to think through.

Over one third of the Bible is comprised of poetry. The entire book of Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Song of Songs and Lamentations are almost entirely poetic. According to a reliable theologian named Walter Kaiser, only seven books of the Old Testament lack poetry (Leviticus, Ruth, Ezra,

Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai and Malachi). Because poetry comprises such a large portion of Scripture it is important that we take some time to think through how to read it and how to interpret it.

How many of you have ever sat through a class on how to understand Hebrew Poetry? I've been a follower of Christ for 21 years and yesterday was the first time I really sat through a lesson on Hebrew poetry and what it is and how it works. I took classes in Hebrew in seminary and had classes on the Old Testament in seminary. I'm sure somewhere along the way someone taught me about Hebrew poetry but I can't really remember.

Hebrew poetry dominates the landscape of Scripture, therefore, we should probably consider how it works. One of the more helpful descriptions of poetry that I have heard was from a man named David Jackman. He taught a class called How to Handle Hebrew Poetry and in the class he said that "The genre does something because God has inspired it in this form. Poetry conveys ideas in vivid imagery, revealing a deeper understanding through its richness. In Hebrew poetry the words are drawing you in."

Another author writes that the authors of biblical poetry convey real thoughts, events, and emotions - that is, literal

truth, but they express this truth figuratively. Our job is to grapple with the figures and to strive to grasp the reality and the emotion that they poets are conveying by their figurative language"

The dictionary describes poetry as "elevated and imaginative language expressed in verse." Biblical poetry uses concepts in the most striking and engaging way. The poet expresses his viewpoint to develop a conversation with the reader. The goal is to draw us in to listen what he has to say. It's a persuasive device.

Let's be honest - most of us avoid this genre because we're not comfortable with it. Do you know what this book is? This is a book of poems that a former pastor named John Piper has written his wife over the last 42 years - from their engagement up until 2008 when the book was written. Holding this book makes me nervous. John Piper writes in the introduction, "Why poetry? Because poetry helps me intensify and express feelings that cannot be captured in ordinary language. In fact, my definition of poetry is - An effort to share a moving experience by using language that is chosen and structured differently than ordinary prose."

One of his poems goes like this:

Our God has made another way
To put His glory on display
His goodness shines with brightest rays
When we delight in all His ways
His glory overflows its rim
When we are satisfied with Him
His radiance will fill the earth
When people revel in His worth
The beauty of God's holy fire
Burns brightest in the hearts desire

I am a Christian Hedonist
Because I know that if I kissed
My wife simply because its right
And not because it's my delight
It would not honor her so well.
With pleasure I will praise Noel
And I will magnify my wife
By making her my joy in life

So may this blazing, God like flame
Ignite in us for His great name

A holy passion, zeal and fire
That magnify Him with desire
I hail Him as my joy in life
And take from his pure hand my wife.

What is John Piper doing in that poem besides convicted every man in this room? He's sharing his heart with his wife and drawing out her heart. He's expressing his feelings toward her. He could have just said, "Hey Noel, I love God and I love you. Let's make disciples." But his poem draws that out in powerful ways. That's the way poetry works.

I think the following true story will challenge and help us with why we should not and cannot ignore the poetry of the Bible. The true story is told of a missionary that traveled to southern Ethiopia. He provided the people with a new translation of the New Testament they could understand. However, the native people bought very few copies of the new translation. The translators had worked hard on the translation to get it right but very few people wanted it.

The translators began translating the Psalms in addition to the New Testament. They translated the Psalms and then added the Psalms to the New Testament translation. The people were much more excited about the new edition. Why?

People could identify with the Psalmists. The Psalms teach connect with real life. The people living in Ethiopia could identify with the pain, the despair and the doubt the Psalmists were working through. They connected with the emotions of the Psalms. The way the Psalmist come right out and explain what is bothering them and how to work through it.

Imagine being asked to pray in public in the church and praying Psalm 88:14, "O Lord, why do you reject my soul? Why do you hide your face from me?" What would people think if you prayed that way in public? You probably would not be asked to pray again. People would wonder if you're even a Christian for feeling such things. But who hasn't felt that way at times and had to work through \ such feelings in private or with other trusted friends.

In a book called Grasping God's Word, author's Scott Duvall and Daniel Hays write, "The Christian church today sometimes tends to minimize the emotional dimension of the Christian spiritual life. We believe this stunts the believers grow as badly as minimizing the intellectual dimension does. The poetry of the old testament actually focuses on our emotional response to God as well as on our emotional response to those who are hostile to God and his people. The poetry of the old testament connects with us down deep, both in joy and in despair. It resounds in our hearts and stirs us up

spiritually and emotionally. We should not minimize it. We should drink of it deeply."

How do we identify Hebrew poetry? I'll just give you three words that might be helpful to consider.

- a. Brevity - Biblical poetry uses a minimum number of words. The words are chosen carefully for their impact and their power. Narrative texts frequently have longer descriptive sentences, but poetic texts are comprised of short, compact lines, with a few words. Psalm 25:4, "Show me your ways, O Lord, Teach me your paths." In that verse in Hebrew the first line has three words and the second line has two words. Even in English you can catch the feel for a shorter amount of words being used. Contrast that with prose of Genesis 12:10, "Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine with severe."
- b. Brakes - Biblical Poetry taps the breaks a lot. I had the privilege of going with a friend to Midwestern Seminary Chapel today to hear Alistair Begg preach and we were driving home on a two lane road and there was a car stopped in the middle of the road in front of us and we weren't slowing down and so I told him, "Hey, you might want to slow down." Biblical poetry stops and changes directions a lot.

We call this parallelism. You have to train your eye to read line by line rather than sentence by sentence.

c. Beauty - Biblical poetry uses figurative imagery. Again, they do not write essays, they paint pictures. The authors are conveying real thoughts, events, and emotions to us - that is, literal truth, but they express this truth figuratively. Let me read a few lines so you get the feel for this.

Psalm 42:1, "As the deer pants for the streams of water so my soul pants for you O God." Isaiah 1:18, "Though your sins are as scarlet they shall be white as snow." Proverbs 11:22, "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman that lacks discretion." Do you see how the brevity of those verses and the word pictures draw you in and help you remember?

What is one of the benefits of thinking this through? I have this saying that you can't apply what you can't remember. Reading biblical poetry forces us to slow down and to marinate on the Scriptures and its written in such a way that it draws us in and it sticks with us.

As we return to our study of Job it is important that we think through the role Hebrew Poetry plays in this book. If you look

at your Bible at Job 1-2. Job 1-2 is called prose. It's the prologue to the book and it is clear and straightforward. Job 3 all the way through Job 37 is poetry. The main body of Job is all Hebrew Poetry. The poetry section uses rich, figurative language of Hebrew Parallelism, the skillful way of stating the same truth in different ways, with striking illustrative imagery.

Job 28 is a poem on wisdom.

- 28:1** “Surely there is a mine for silver
And a place where they refine gold.
- 2** “Iron is taken from the dust,
And copper is smelted from rock.
- 3** “*Man* puts an end to darkness,
And to the farthest limit he searches out
The rock in gloom and deep shadow.
- 4** “He sinks a shaft far from habitation,
Forgotten by the foot;
They hang and swing to and fro far from men.
- 5** “The earth, from it comes food,
And underneath it is turned up as fire.
- 6** “Its rocks are the source of sapphires,
And its dust *contains* gold.
- 7** “The path no bird of prey knows,
Nor has the falcon’s eye caught sight of it.
- 8** “The proud beasts have not trodden it,
Nor has the *fierce* lion passed over it.
- 9** “He puts his hand on the flint;
He overturns the mountains at the base.

- 10** “He hews out channels through the rocks,
And his eye sees anything precious.
- 11** “He dams up the streams from flowing,
And what is hidden he brings out to the light.
- 12** “But where can wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?
- 13** “Man does not know its value,
Nor is it found in the land of the living.
- 14** “The deep says, ‘It is not in me’;
And the sea says, ‘It is not with me.’
- 15** “Pure gold cannot be given in exchange for it,
Nor can silver be weighed as its price.
- 16** “It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir,
In precious onyx, or sapphire.
- 17** “Gold or glass cannot equal it,
Nor can it be exchanged for articles of fine gold.
- 18** “Coral and crystal are not to be mentioned;
And the acquisition of wisdom is above *that of* pearls.
- 19** “The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it,
Nor can it be valued in pure gold.
- 20** “Where then does wisdom come from?
And where is the place of understanding?
- 21** “Thus it is hidden from the eyes of all living
And concealed from the birds of the sky.
- 22** “Abaddon and Death say,
‘With our ears we have heard a report of it.’
- 23** “God understands its way,
And He knows its place.
- 24** “For He looks to the ends of the earth
And sees everything under the heavens.
- 25** “When He imparted weight to the wind
And meted out the waters by measure,

- 26** When He set a limit for the rain
And a course for the thunderbolt,
27 Then He saw it and declared it;
He established it and also searched it out.
28 “And to man He said, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that
is wisdom;
And to depart from evil is understanding.’ ”

The first question that we might want to ask after reading this through a second time is, "How do we know this is poetry?" Poetry is characterized by terseness (brevity), a high degree of structure (They tap the breaks and move us in certain directions quickly) and figurative imagery (Beauty). Job 28 contains each of those things. Each line has a minimum amount of words. It is written line by line instead of sentence by sentence. You can go back and read Job 1 and it reads a lot different than Job 28. And it is packed with figurative imagery.

What's the image? The image in verses 1-11 is mining for treasures. What does the search Job describes in Job 28 : 1-11 have to do with what we've learned up to this point? What have Job and his friends been doing for the past 24 chapters beginning in chapter 4? They've been searching. Searching for wisdom. Searching for answers to Job's trials.

At the end of Job 3, after losing his possessions, his children and his health Job finally asks why? He stops praising God and he starts questioning God. Job's friends show up (Eliphaz, Zophar and Bildad) and they think they know why. They try and explain to Job why he is suffering but their explanations only make the problem worse. They've been on a search for wisdom for most of the book of Job and they can't find it.

Job 28 is an interlude - It's a full time out in the book of Job. It's a chapter that is a poem about searching for wisdom. How do we know that's the point of the chapter? Because look at Job 28:12, " "But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?" Look down at Job 28:20, "Where then does wisdom come from? And where is the place of understanding?" Those are the only two questions in this chapter.

In the first 11 verses Job paints a picture to draw us in to what man can do - Man can mine. The first 11 verses paint a picture of the latest technology that had just come out in Job's day. What landing on the moon was to us, mining for hidden treasures was to the people of Job's day. It was incredibly hard work that led to some incredible discoveries. The description of ancient mining to which the author treats us is quite unique, the oldest and most graphic source of

knowledge of ancient mining. Mines were worked to obtain silver, gold, iron and copper.

Again, that was a very impressive feat for the people of Job's day. Humans were able to do things animals cannot do. Man can obtain treasures through hard work. Man, can use his engineering skills to discover hidden treasures but there is something man cannot find on his own. Verses 1-11 lead us up the hill to what man cannot do in verse 12, "“But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?"

Man, in spite of his engineering skills (28:1–11), cannot discover or purchase wisdom. God's wisdom cannot be sought in the first 11 verses and it cannot be bought in verses 13-22.

Job 28:13-22

- 13** “Man does not know its value,
Nor is it found in the land of the living.
- 14** “The deep says, ‘It is not in me’;
And the sea says, ‘It is not with me.’
- 15** “Pure gold cannot be given in exchange for it,
Nor can silver be weighed as its price.
- 16** “It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir,
In precious onyx, or sapphire.
- 17** “Gold or glass cannot equal it,
Nor can it be exchanged for articles of fine gold.

- 18** “Coral and crystal are not to be mentioned;
And the acquisition of wisdom is above *that of* pearls.
- 19** “The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it,
Nor can it be valued in pure gold.
- 20** “Where then does wisdom come from?
And where is the place of understanding?
- 21** “Thus it is hidden from the eyes of all living
And concealed from the birds of the sky.
- 22** “Abaddon and Death say,
‘With our ears we have heard a report of it.’

"In spite of man's technological abilities to mine precious stones and ores that lie beyond the sight of man, bird, and beast, he cannot find wisdom. Its value is unknown, its location has not been found in all "the land of the living" (the inhabited earth), in the deep waters beneath the earth, or in the sea. Not only can man not find wisdom, he cannot even purchase it with the precious metals he has found (28:15–19).

Job used almost a dozen different words for various metals, including three words that are found only here in the Old Testament ("pure gold," "glass," and "crystal"); the meanings of those three words are therefore difficult to know with precision. Verse 20 is almost identical with verse 12, and verses 21 and 22 are close in thought to verses 13 and 14. As the deep and the sea (28:14) were personified, saying that wisdom is not in them, so Abaddon (a synonym for Sheol; it is used three times by Job in his closing oration; cf. 26:6; 31:12)

and Death stated that they have heard rumors about wisdom, the implication being that they do not possess it and know little about it (28:22).

What's the point of this section? It's a vivid reminder that wisdom, which is far more valuable than precious metals and stones, cannot be bought at any price.

So what have we learned so far? God's wisdom cannot be sought. Treasures in the earth are sought and found but God's wisdom isn't. The first 24 chapters have proved that. God's wisdom cannot be bought. Divine wisdom is invaluable. Wisdom is costly and yet it is inaccessible to man.

God gives wisdom to those who fear Him - Job 28:23-28

- 23** “God understands its way,
And He knows its place.
- 24** “For He looks to the ends of the earth
And sees everything under the heavens.
- 25** “When He imparted weight to the wind
And meted out the waters by measure,
- 26** When He set a limit for the rain
And a course for the thunderbolt,
- 27** Then He saw it and declared it;
He established it and also searched it out.
- 28** “And to man He said, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;
And to depart from evil is understanding.’ ”

What man searches for and cannot find. What man cannot buy. That which man searches for and cannot find is what God Himself is, has and provides to those who fear His name. Only God is wise. Only God knows where to find wisdom. True wisdom consists in fearing the Lord.

How is God's wisdom put on display? Through creation. Job points us to a thunderstorm. Something you and I are very familiar with living here in Kansas. Throughout the Old Testament we see authors using creation as a demonstration of the wisdom of God:

Proverbs 3:19

By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place;

Jeremiah 10:12

But God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding.

Jeremiah 51:15

"He made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding."

Psalms 19:1-6

The heavens are telling of the glory of God;

- And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.
- 2** Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge.
- 3** There is no speech, nor are there words;
Their voice is not heard.
- 4** Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their utterances to the end of the world.
In them He has placed a tent for the sun,
- 5** Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber;
It rejoices as a strong man to run his course.
- 6** Its rising is from one end of the heavens,
And its circuit to the other end of them;
And there is nothing hidden from its heat.

Isaiah 40:25-26

- 25** “To whom then will you liken Me
That I would be *his* equal?” says the Holy One.
- 26** Lift up your eyes on high
And see who has created these *stars*,
The One who leads forth their host by number,
He calls them all by name;
Because of the greatness of His might and the strength
of *His* power,
Not one *of them* is missing.

Who compares with God? Answer - no one. God's wisdom is put on display in his creation of and control over the created order. Wisdom is the result of fearing God and reverencing Him. Reverence toward God is the primary quality that makes us wise. Steve Lawson, "Not until we stand in awe of the

greatness of God can we become truly wise. Likewise, wisdom involves shunning evil. Wisdom and evil cannot exist in the same heart; one displaces the other. This is the quality that characterized Job at the beginning."

This might be a time out in Job but Job is still trying to get something across to his friends. He extols the virtue of wisdom, desiring that his three friends might have spoken to him with such divine wisdom.

Let's close by thinking about this important concept of fearing the Lord. You might want to memorize Job 28:28, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." Fearing God is essential for pleasing God. Those who fear the Lord follow the Lord. How do you know if you fear God? Look at your life. What do you do with evil? Do you follow evil or do you free from evil? People who fear the Lord follow the Lord and following the Lord means fleeing from everything that is displeasing to Him.

I want to end with talking about how fearing the Lord is foundational to family life. Please turn in your Bible over to Psalm 128 and I just want to encourage you with a reminder of how fearing God and following God leads to a blessed life as it relates to your families:

Psalm 128

“How blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways. When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, you will be happy and it will be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house, your children like olive plants around your table. Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord. The Lord bless you from Zion, and may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. Indeed, may you see your children’s children. Peace be upon Israel!”

The key word in this Psalm is the word blessed or blessing. **Blessing has to do with God’s particular favor on His people. This Psalm shows us how God’s blessing becomes a reality in our families.** The starting point for experiencing God’s blessings is to fear the Lord. What does it mean to fear the Lord? **Fear describes an attitude of submission to God and an openness to receive His word and to apply it to your daily life.**

James Montgomery Boice, “God must be taken seriously. He must not be trifled with. He must be, the center of everything we are, think, or aspire to do. He must be our starting point for every project, the strength we seek for every valuable endeavor, the one we earnestly desire to please and honor as our goal.”

The sad reality is that most people today don't fear the Lord. We see that everywhere. The apostle Paul summarizes the ultimate problem with sinful man in Romans 3:18 when he writes, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Sin in the human heart clouds the mind from the beauty and majesty of God. Sadly, because of sin no man seeks for God. We don't submit to Him naturally. It takes a work of sovereign grace for people to fear and follow the Lord.

The reason Christians are different is that we understand what happened at the cross. We understand our sin and the price Jesus Christ paid on the cross to redeem us from your sin. 1 Peter 1:17-19, "If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay *on earth*; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood of Christ*." The reason you fear and follow God is because of the precious blood of Christ, the death that He died, to redeem you from your sin.

Fearing and following God starts with a right understanding of our sin and the salvation God provides “The high cost of salvation—the beloved Son’s precious blood—now calls for you to live in reverent fear before God. Holy living is motivated by a God-fearing faith, which does not take lightly what was purchased at so great a cost.”

What is interesting in Psalm 128 is that the Psalmist begins with the blessings that come to everyone who fears the Lord and then he zooms in on the husband. He starts in verse 1 with the blessedness that comes to everyone who fears and follows the Lord and then he turns his attention in the next 5 verses to the man.

Why? Because God has ordered the family in such a way that blessings flow to the rest of the family primarily through the husband's walk with the Lord. **It's not really happy wife happy home. It's really holy husband happy home.** Psalm 128:2-5 shows us three ingredients of a God fearing husband:

1. He works hard

Psalm 128:2, “When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, you will be happy and it will be well with you.” Most commentators think Psalm 127 and Psalm 128 go

together. Psalm 127 reminds us that everything we do will be in vain unless the Lord is in it. The builders will build in vain; the watchmen will watch in vain; the family will be established in vain. God dispenses blessings as He pleases. Psalm 128 shows us that if we fear and obey God, nothing we do will be in vain.

Hard work and the enjoyment of its fruits is a gift from God. The ability to enjoy life and work and what comes from it is a gift from God. The man who fears God and walks in His ways has a good work ethic. That's implied in the man eating of the fruit of his hands. Christian husbands should be hard workers. Keep working hard for the glory of God and enjoy the fruit of your labor.

The second truth we learn about the God fearing man in this Psalm is that he:

2. He leads spiritually

Psalm 128:3-4, "Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house, your children like olive plants around your table. Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord." We have to be careful with Old Testament symbolism. This is an example of poetry. Calling your wife a fruitful vine might not be

encouraging to your wife. The wife like a fruitful vine and children like olive shoots around your table are symbolic pictures of abundant blessing.

The Psalmists point is that fearing and follow God leads to a blessed relationship at home:

The final way in which the man who fears God and follows God is blessed is by:

3. He leaves a legacy

Psalm 128:5-6, “The Lord bless you from Zion, And may you see the prosperity Of Jerusalem all the days of your life. Indeed, may you see your children’s children. Peace be upon Israel!” The final two blessings for the man who fears and follows God are personal blessings and national blessings. In the ancient Near East, the ultimate earthly blessing would be prosperity for one's nation, long life, healthy offspring, and peace. **These final final verses are a reminder that the godly man makes a positive impact on his own society and on his succeeding generations.**

We are living in a unique time in American history. We live in a day where man’s wisdom is replacing the wisdom of God’s Word. Look at both presidential

candidates. Neither is remotely close to having a biblical understanding of marriage. That's never good. When man does what is right in his own eyes everyone loses.

Christian husbands and Christian wives have the wonderful privilege of being used by God to make a difference in this world for Christ. To honor Christ means we will all suffer to some degree but that's ok. Fearing and following God leads to a blessed life here and great hope for eternal life.