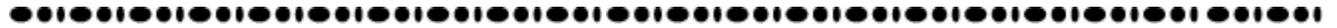


Week One

WHISPERED WISDOM



THE WISE AND THE FOOLISH

There are countless distinctions between the wise and the foolish. The Scriptures offer plenty of examples. Common sense helps as well.

The foolish spend. The wise save.

The foolish vent. The wise offer thought-filled words.

The foolish demand immediate gratification. The wise embrace the demands of delayed gratification.

The distinctions are not absolute, but the list could go on, and most can observe a mixture of both wisdom and foolishness in their own lives. One more observation will serve this discussion. It begins with a question.

How do the foolish and the wise handle information they believe to be important?

Much could be said to address this question. Here's a simple thought...

The foolish scream. The wise whisper.

Whisper?

Yes, think about it for a moment. The foolish rant and rave when they think they have something terribly important to say. Yes, the wise may do so when the situation is urgent, when there's a state of emergency, but the wise know the power of a whisper. The wise know when to lower their voice, lean in close, and say something succinctly and with whispered passion.

There's a phrase, a saying, a proverb central in Scripture and central to the Scripture's message. It's not often quoted, but the world would be a better place if we all carefully considered it. It's a simple and memorable phrase, as many proverbs are, and it contains a secret no doubt the author hoped would be whispered from generation to generation.

The first three words alone are cause for pause. These three words start with a phrase that beckons us to lean in and listen attentively.

Read it slowly.

Read it quietly.

Lean in close and hear a few words of whispered wisdom from a wise old sage...

Above all else... (Proverbs 4:23).

That's a powerful introduction.

It's worthy of reflection before considering the conclusion of the statement.

Consider this...

This phrase can be used only once. This statement, this introduction, if used more than once, is abused, and Scripture does not abuse it. The phrase may be familiar to you or it may be new. You may know how the statement is completed. If so, pretend for a moment you've never heard it. Let the phrase bounce around in your mind incomplete, and wonder how the sentence will be finished.

Above all else...

What would be Scripture's wisest counsel?

Above all else...

...enjoy your life.

...monitor your health.

...manage your money.

...work hard.

Above all else...

...eat dessert.

...rest well.

...choose friends wisely.

...change the oil in your car.

Above all else...

...eat vegetables.

...marry well.

...smell the roses.

...learn Spanish

Above all else...

There are so many, many good things to say. What's the best thing? What's the thing that floats to the top of the list because it's worthy of the introduction "Above all else..."

It must be a cause and not an effect.

It must be something that touches everything.

It must be at the epicenter of life.

It cannot be peripheral.

It must be central.

It must be real.

It must be something that truly matters above all else.

It must be something to consider very carefully and take very seriously.

What is *above all else*?

Lean in.

Read slowly.

Maybe even read it aloud...in a quiet whisper.

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life (Proverbs 4:23).

What a fascinating observation.

THE EPICENTER

All we do flows from the epicenter of our lives, the wellspring of our lives, our hearts. For good and for ill, our hearts drive us. Years after Solomon's whispered wisdom, Christ offered a similar observation. When speaking of good and evil, he said, "*Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks*" (Luke 6:45).

...the mouth speaks.

Without question, we could play with those words a bit.

Out of the overflow of the heart...

...the trigger is pulled.

...the gift is given.

...the fist swings.

...the corporate ladder is climbed.

Out of the overflow of the heart...

...the car is purchased.

...the friendship is broken.

...the generosity is lavished.

...the gossip speaks.

Out of the overflow of the heart...

...the check is written.

...the song is sung.

...the drink is embraced.

...the job is quit.

Out of the overflow of the heart...

...everything happens.

...good things happen.

...bad things happen.

...life happens.

Why?

It all comes back to the heart, to the epicenter of our lives.

James noticed it. He said as much when he wrote in his letter, “*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight*” (James 4:1-2, TNIV). What’s he saying? It’s an observation. He simply notices the same thing both Solomon and Christ noticed, that fights and quarrels are driven by desires, by hearts.

Paul noticed it. He noted something surprising though. Would you not think that a person giving money to the poor does so in love for the poor? Maybe. Maybe not. Paul observed as much in his letter to the Corinthians, “*If I give all I possess to the poor...but do not have love, I gain nothing*” (1 Corinthians 13:3, TNIV). That’s odd. If a person gives everything to the poor is there not love? We know better. Maybe it’s a photo op. Maybe it’s to impress the social circles. Maybe it’s something else, but whatever it is, there’s no question it’s driven by the heart. It just may or may not be a heart for the poor. It very well may be love of power and the drive to get elected. It always looks good on the front page, above the fold, to be face to face with the neediest of people wearing rolled-up shirt sleeves. Photos like that get votes.

Why love the poor when they can be used to get what we really love?

Which gives rise to an incredibly important question and another that must be held at bay and addressed later.

SHOULD BE

There’s a gravitational pull to a question that must patiently wait in the wings. It’s the question of “should.” What *should* be in my heart? Church circles are dangerously good at the *should* questions. We know we *should* have a heart for certain things. That’s good. We need that and will get to it in due course.

But let’s talk reality.

Rather than asking what *should* be in our hearts, let’s find out first what’s already there. What *is* in my heart?

No pretending.

No censoring.

No qualifying.

What *is* in my heart? When the layers are peeled back, what do I discover? Could there be a more important exercise than to address this question? The heart is the wellspring of life. Out of the overflow of our hearts our mouths speak. Should we not know what’s in there?

In a moment this experience will take us to a simple question.

You’ll be encouraged to linger at this question a bit.

The question is coming.

Here’s a preview: What do you want?

It’s coming, but not quite yet.

First, let’s have a little fun.

ROCK STAR

I want to be a rock star.

I want to be on stage, scream *Hello, Chicago!* and hear the roar of the thousands upon thousands awed by my presence.

I will, of course, use my rock-star status for good in the world. I will raise money for war-torn countries and go before Congress with appeals for the poor. I will entertain the troops serving in foreign lands. I will write songs that move people and cause them to think.

But I must admit...I love that crowd...I want people to camp out all night to get a ticket to my concert...I want to be revered and held in awe...I want to hear the chant...see the throngs of people...and be discussed on the radio.

Sick, you say? Not so fast.

Let's be honest.

Let's be uncensored.

Let's be true to our innermost desires.

Rock star? Not really. I can't sing or scream or jump around like that. I don't look good in tight clothes and wouldn't wear them if I could.

But I wouldn't mind rock-star status at the office.

I work in a cube. I do my job. It's done on time and done well. Does anybody notice? Does anybody care?

Rarely.

No, I'm not the rock-star type, but this world requiring hours of work with nobody noticing isn't the answer either. I'd like to be a rock star around the office. I'd like people to care what I have to say in the meeting. I'd like to get a response when I seek people out above me. Better yet, I'd like for there to not be anyone above me. I'd like to be "The Man." I've never been The Man. I've always had to work for The Man. And The Man doesn't seem to notice me. The Man notices when I screw-up. The Man doesn't notice when I do well. The Man couldn't care less about me. Rock-star status...that'd work.

But maybe not.

I really don't want to work. I really don't want to be a rock star or have rock-star status at the office. It may have intrigued me at one time. Not today. I got over it. I've had blips and bleeps of rock-star status, and I don't really want that anymore. What do I want?

I want to take a nap.

I want a hammock between two palm trees and a little drink in the sand below me that once was frozen and now is melted because I've been lulled to sleep by the sound of the waves.

Forget the rock star stuff, literal or metaphorical, and just give me rest.

I'm tired, and I'm tired of being tired. I just want to take a long nap and be at peace with the world and have the world at peace with me. I just want everybody to leave me alone.

But not everybody.

I'd like to be alone now and then, but I never want to be lonely, and there's a very important difference. Crowded rooms can be lonely. Office complexes can be lonely. Families can be lonely.

WHISPERED WISDOM

Churches can be lonely. Yes, I'd like some space, and I'd like to be alone here and there, but never lonely. I never, ever intended that.

I don't just want to be *around* people. I want to be *with* people.

I want to know people and have them know me.

I want to love people and have them love me.

I want to serve people and have them serve me.

I want to enjoy people and have them enjoy me.

Maybe that's why I want to be a rock star. It seems like people know them and they know people. It seems like people love them and they love people. It seems like people serve them and they serve people. It seems like people enjoy them and they enjoy people.

But that really can't be it.

That can't be it because the "rock stars" of the world often display, and readily admit, their insatiable hunger for more. Those who achieve rock-star status in their respective fields of interest are not *necessarily* the happiest bunch. Yes, some are, but not *necessarily*. Somewhere along the way there's a disconnect, there's dissonance; there's a disconnect and dissonance between the deep longing in a person's heart and the thing they're looking toward to satisfy that longing.

What's dissonance?

Dissonance is the result of clashing sounds. Dissonance is that state of chaos where longing for resolution is created. It's a longing for the clashing sounds to come together. It's a longing for resonance.

What's resonance?

Resonance is the result of sounds working together. Resonance is when one sound, one longing, matches another and they work together. They resonate.

Consider this...

Resonance is when our stated desires are a healthy expression of our true heart's desire. They work together. They resonate.

Dissonance is when our stated desires are an insufficient expression of the desires of our hearts. They clash. They create dissonance.

THE DESIRE UNDER THE DESIRE

What's with the desire to be a rock star? Is it really the desire to be on stage entertaining throngs of people? Is it really to gain rock-star status at the office because we want to be revered? This could be fun, but is that really what it's about?

Or is it a desire to have a life that matters, a life that counts, a life with purpose?

What's with the desire for a long nap on a quiet beach with a melted drink? We welcome these gifts, but we instinctively recognize the limitations as well. Relaxing getaways are one thing; perpetual escapism is another. We balk at a life of running from reality.

Or is it a longing for a well-rested soul at peace in the midst of life's realities?

There are desires that are highly identifiable: the beach, the car, the job, the status.

But slow down. Be careful. Don't be deceived.

These are often the buoys floating on top of the water.

Reach beneath the buoy...grab hold of the rope...take a deep breath...and begin the descent. Hand over hand, follow that rope to the bottom of your heart, and there you'll find it...there you'll find them.

The desires of your heart.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

How do we get beneath the surface?

How do we grab hold of the rope?

How do we go hand over hand to the bottom in search of the real desire?

Consider this...

Consider one powerful little word.

Consider a word that will take you one hand over the other deeper and deeper into your heart.

It's a simple word.

Here it is...

Why?

I want to be a rock star.

Why?

Because I want people to like me?

Why?

Because I want to feel important...to be important?

Why?

Because I don't want to waste my life?

Why?

Because I want a life that matters...a life that counts?

Why?

I don't know...because I want something lasting...something big...something real...something that isn't here today and gone tomorrow.

Why?

Because I'm on this quest...I don't even fully know what it is I'm looking for...but I'll know it when I see it...I'll know it...it's deep within me...I'm seeking it...I'm looking for it...I haven't found it yet...

Now we're getting somewhere...now we're below the surface. Have we hit bottom? Maybe. Maybe not. Either way, we're able to make a critical distinction.

Do I want to be a rock star, or is there something deeper driving me that being a rock star may or may not satisfy?

What is that deep thing?

What is that deep desire?

What is that insatiable hunger?

If the heart is the wellspring of life, it's best we get after these questions.

HEARTSTORMING

At this point, it would be far too easy to just read these pages, nod our heads with interest, and set them down. But we're not after easy. We want to morph. To morph, we must personalize this experience and get beneath the surface.

It's time to unload.

It's time to peel back the layers of our hearts.

It's time to consider what's really going on in there.

The pages that follow are the beginning of an exercise that will be woven in and out of the coming weeks. It is called *Heartstorming*. Heartstorming is not a fill-in-the-blank-with-all-the-right-answers exercise. It is an exercise where *real* trumps *right*.

Now we get personal.

Now we get uncensored.

Now we get vulnerable.

It gets a little dangerous at this point.