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## Wisdom Leads to God

About 400 years before Jesus was born, a man named Socrates was put on trial in the city of Athens. Socrates had been charged with corrupting the youth of his city by putting ideas into their heads which were contrary to the accepted way of thinking. He was found guilty, and he was given the choice of one of two punishments: he could be exiled to a distant place for the rest of his life, or he could choose the death sentence. Socrates chose to die, and he was given a poison which killed him. Either punishment, exile or death, was considered to be justified because his accusers believed that Socrates, in filling the minds of the young people of his city with “unacceptable” ideas, was endangering the fabric of society. Removing him from the city prevented him from spreading his “unhealthy” ideas.

Socrates was a philosopher, literally, a “lover of wisdom.” He sought to understand himself and the world around him. As a philosopher he wanted to know more because he wanted to live as best he could in this world. Gaining wisdom would enable him to do that, and he used this desire as his defense at his trial. Plato, one of Socrates’ students, records for us that at his trial, to defend himself, Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” What he meant by that is that if we go through life never asking questions, our lives will be meaningless and empty. In asking questions (and Socrates is famous for asking questions), we gain a deeper understanding of life. If we don’t ask questions and seek the answers, according to Socrates, we will miss out on a lot of life.

Scripture would agree with Socrates, in some aspects. The Bible contains a significant amount of wisdom literature: Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, and numerous “wise” sayings throughout the other books. The wisdom that Solomon imparts in the book of Proverbs, for example, was gained not only through a special blessing from God but from years of studying the world around him. Scripture teaches us that wisdom is “more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her” (Proverbs 8:11). Wisdom is more than just knowing facts; it is about how to apply those facts so that we can live well. According to both Socrates and Scripture, there is nothing more important than obtaining wisdom. If we spend money on anything, it should be wisdom.

Wisdom is gained by asking questions about life. Knowledge is also gained by asking questions, and those questions have to do with “what” and “how.” What is that? How does this work? Wisdom is gained by asking the question, “Why?” Why are things the way they are? Without knowledge, of course, there cannot be wisdom, for knowledge is the basis of wisdom. But mere knowledge does not result in wisdom until we ask the question, “Why?” Perhaps Socrates was accused of misleading the youth because he encouraged them to ask the question “Why?” and when they did, the authorities of the city of Athens felt challenged. When asked the question, “Why?” it can seem as if the one who is asking is asking us to adopt new ideas. The truth, however, is that we are being challenged to examine if what we currently are doing is truly wise or if it is something that might actually be unproductive or harmful.

Cattle don’t ask, “Why?” something that those who feed cattle can be thankful for. If a cow asked, “Why is the farmer feeding me such good food and in such generous quantities?” she might lose her appetite.

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The farmer is not feeding the cow because he loves her or wants what is ultimately the best for the cow; he is feeding the cow because he wants what is best for himself. We can be thankful that cows live unexamined lives, to use the words of Socrates or else feedlot owners might have a rebellion on their hands.

It is not hard to imagine how others may use us for their purposes if we do not think about that important question, “Why?” We do not want to be like cows who blindly live life without a real understanding of our purpose. We may feel happy, but we might not like the consequences.

In asking “Why?” Solomon gained wisdom about life. He discovered that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” The phrase “fear of the Lord,” does not mean that we are terrified of him but, rather, that we have a healthy respect shown toward a powerful God who holds our lives in his hands. Asking, “Why?” of things should lead us to understand that there is a God who is sovereign over this world and to whom we owe our lives and futures. Simply asking the question, “Why do I exist?” must lead us to conclude that we exist because an outside force of some sort has acted in such a way to give us existence. We are not self-creating, and, if we ask enough questions, we will discover that we are not self-sustaining either. Asking “Why?” enough times will lead us to conclude that there must be someone outside of us who is bigger than us. It could be that the reason that so many people don’t acknowledge the existence and rightful authority of God is that they didn’t ask “Why?” enough times. Solomon, it appears, did, and he concluded that if we go back far enough with our “Why’s?” we will find that the beginning is God.

We can say quite confidently that God has given us an inquisitive nature that leads us to ask, “What?” and “How?” We like to acquire knowledge. But we need to take that another step and ask, “Why?” trusting that when we do, we will also discover wisdom, and in discovering wisdom, we will be confronted with God.

The unexamined life, then, might not be worth living, but it can also be said that the unexamined life will be devoid of the understanding that there is a God who has made us and who sustains us. When we ask enough questions, we will arrive at the certainty that God exists. We are often told that creation is a book which reveals to us some of the attributes of God. It should not surprise us, then, that if we keep asking questions, we will eventually come to see God. God seems to have built that very thing into creation.

Socrates was right: the unexamined life is not worth living. It got him into trouble with the city, and he lost his life because he kept asking questions. It is true that if we ask “Why?” enough times, we may threaten the beliefs and practices of others, and they may find that threatening. It is also true, we can be sure, that if we continue to ask, “Why?” we will eventually end up arriving at the one answer, “Because God. . .” We should not be surprised because, as Scripture teaches, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Asking us why gets us back to the beginning.

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