Introduction:

A. For almost two years now we have closed every service with the same admonition - to remember your daily Bible reading. We started this Bible reading schedule for obvious reasons; if I’m going to be a follower of Jesus and live a life pleasing to God, I’ve got to read my Bible. Of course, saying that points to our deeper purpose in this effort. We are not simply trying to encourage all of us to read the Bible more. Our goal is to learn God’s will for our lives; to be changed by what we read; to become that person God wants us to be.

B. This year our reading has taken us through the Old Testament wisdom literature (Job - The Song of Solomon). Because our goal is to be changed by what we read, we have made it our focus this fall to highlight the practical value of these books. Some of this is pretty obvious. Our read through Proverbs confronted us in almost every verse with some simple, yet valuable life lesson (15:1; 16:18). But the lessons do not stop here. As we dig deeper, we discover so much more in the wisdom literature that we can use. In fact, I want to suggest that, as we look closer, we discover that these books teach us a lot about God. They help us better understand who He is and how we should respond to Him. I want you to see that with me.

C. I want to take each of the five books and ask you to notice one important thing that is revealed about God.

Job: God doesn’t fit in my box.

A. Let me explain.
1. Most of this book records a conversation that Job has with three of his friends after all these bad things happen to Him (chpts. 1-2).
2. His friends come to comfort him, but they end up rebuking him. They are convinced that Job must have done something bad and that he was being punished by God (4:7-9). They began insisting that he come clean and repent (22:21-22).
3. They had a rather simplistic view of God and His relationship with man. If good things are happening to you, then that must mean that you have been good and God is rewarding you. But if bad things happen to you, then you must be doing something wrong and God is punishing you.
4. Of course, they are wrong. Job is a good man (1:1). The bad things that happened to him were not a punishment from God. He was being assaulted by Satan (2:7). They had a simplistic view of God; He didn’t fit in their little box.

B. People make the same mistake all the time. Some have their faith.
1. If they believe they are trying to serve God, then they expect good things to happen all the time.
2. When something bad happens, they get angry with God and wonder why He’s withholding His blessings.
3. What they do not appreciate is that our relationship with God is not that simple; God does not fit in that box. There are other factors involved. There is the problem of Satan and His assaults. There is the problem of freewill that allows others to do evil things that harm us; and allows me to harm myself by doing foolish things. We often chose to ignore those realities and just get mad at God. It’s not that simple.

C. What should we take away from this picture of God in Job? I think it should make us more cautious about blaming God and getting angry with Him when things go wrong. I think Job challenges us to work a little harder and dig a little deeper to understand our relationship with God.

Psalms: God is awesome and worthy of my praise.

A. It is not possible to read Psalms without being impressed with how awesome God is (Psalm 33:6; 8:3-4; 46:1; 145:18-19).

B. But there is something related to this that we learn from the Psalms. We learn how we should respond to this awesome God (Psalm 95:1-2; 46:2-3).
1. How should we respond to this God? We should be thankful. We should trust Him. We should worship Him with joy; sing His praises.
2. As we’ve made our way through Psalms, we’ve seen this idea again and again. Keep watching for it.

C. What should we take away from this picture of God in Psalms? The applications are numerous, but consider this. Psalms should prod and motivate us about our worship.
1. It just should not be possible to gather to worship such an awesome God and mindlessly go through the rituals.
2. Our worship should flow from a heart of gratitude and faith and should be offered with passion and zeal. A great God like this deserves genuine, passionate worship.
3. Will you think about that? Don’t allow yourself to come into this place and go through these things we do without (1) making yourself consider how awesome God is and (2) letting the sense of awe and gratitude give life to everything we say and do.

Proverbs: God is wise; I should listen to Him.

A. We often think of Proverbs as Solomon’s wisdom shared with us.
1. Solomon did write many of the Proverbs (1:1) and He was very wise.
2. But keep in mind that, like all books of the Bible, Proverbs is inspired by God. Ultimately, all of these great, very practical lessons found in the book do not come from Solomon, but from God.
3. We discover a God who is wise, who is sharing His wisdom with us in a very practical way to help us live a happy life here on earth.
B. So what should we take away from this picture of a very wise God in Proverbs?
   1. The lesson is so obvious, so simple, that it hardly needs to be stated: I should listen to Him (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10-11).
   2. While that seems so obvious, sometimes we need help with this. Far too often we find ourselves defaulting to our own thinking rather than trusting the wisdom of God (22:15; 22:7; 20:1; 13:1).
   3. It's not enough to simply recite the mantra of disciples ("I listen to God."). This God we meet in the wisdom literature is wise. I should listen.

Ecclesiastes: Life is pointless without God.

A. From one angle, Ecclesiastes appears to be a very negative, pessimistic book.
   1. It points out that, no matter what we might accomplish (power, fame, possessions), there are some harsh realities that make all these things ultimately pointless - vanity. We are still going to die (2:14-17). Everything we possess will be left to others (2:18-20). Given enough time, everyone will forget me (2:16).
   2. Before you accuse Solomon of being cynical, realize that this is not a pessimistic view of life; THIS IS LIFE! Steve Jobs died a couple of weeks ago. From the world’s perspective, he had it all (money; power; fame). His passing was mourned by people all over the world. He had what most people are seeking; what most will never achieve. But all his money and power did not exempt him from these realities - he died; his possessions will be given to others and he will be forgotten.
   3. If we take that same path - if we try to find a sense of meaning and purpose by pursuing fame or fortune in this life, we will be disappointed.

B. Ecclesiastes is the record of Solomon's quest for meaning.
   1. He wanted to know what made a man's life matter. He pursued this question from every angle. When he completed his question, he came to this conclusion (12:13-14).
   2. In Ecclesiastes we encounter that God who makes life matter - who gives us a genuine sense of meaning and purpose.

C. So what are we to learn from this book about God?
   1. I must have Him in my life...or my life will not matter. I’m going to drill a lot of holes trying to find meaning...and I’m going to keep coming up empty.
   2. There is a God-shaped void in every man’s heart that only He can fill.
   3. We need to return to this book periodically to keep our hearts set in the right direction.

Song of Solomon: God loves me.

A. What can we learn about God in the Song of Solomon?
   1. It's a book about sexual love between a husband and wife. The Lord is only mentioned once in passing (8:6).
   2. But remember this: This book we written to help us form and maintain a meaningful bond with our spouse. It helps us maintain the romance and passion that God intended to be an ongoing part of marriage. He's trying to help us experience that abiding happiness and joy that marriage is designed to provide.

B. What kind of God does that?
   1. This kind of concern and counsel could only come from a God who loves His creation; who desires our good, our joy; who wants us to be happy.
   2. If nothing else, the Song of Solomon reminds us that we serve a God who loves us. This God has offered guidance and direction so that we could experience true joy and peace in all of life’s relationships.

Conclusion:
He is also a God who wants us to experience an eternity of joy with Him in Heaven. He’s given us guidance and direction to help us get there. Are you listening?

- David A. Banning