The more you hear folks talk about a Baylor education, the more likely it is that you’ll hear someone talking about wisdom and our hope that you’ll find it while you’re here. I hope, also, that wisdom will find you. Did you know that wisdom is searching for you? Wisdom, Living Wisdom, wants to be known... it exists to be known... and is after you. We hope you’ll let it find you while you’re at Baylor.

In the Bible the wisdom literature is located at the center of the book. That’s very important, don’t you think? It’s important that the community of faith, as it organized its library, put those wisdom writings at the center and winked at us all saying, “these are the most important and you’re likely to misread the other books if you don’t understand them.”

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon... these books are different than the others. The others are full of stories and full of covenants and laws and sermons and so on. This sacred stuff at the center is different and involves you (the reader or hearer) in a different way so that something happens to you.

Job is a saga that will wear you out. Read it the whole way through sometime. Something happens as you watch this good man move from certainty to doubt and despair and into deep mystery and maturity. It’s a long story about suffering and arguing with God and, in the end, finally in the end, being wise.

The Psalms are prayers of all kinds. There are prayers of gratitude and praise and complaint and confession and depression and defiance and trust and deeper trust. These paradoxical prayers are for praying... not so much for studying. They are prayers to be prayed over and over and over so that (for instance) after praying Psalm 23:1 for a day or a decade maybe you believe deeply that the Lord is indeed “your shepherd” and you don’t need to be in want. Something happens to you as you say these prayers. A Living Truth, swells in you.

The proverbs are sacred “stitches in time” kind of sayings, at least, that’s the way they seem on the surface. But anyone who practices the proverbs starts realizing that something happens as we go through these proverbial motions. There’s Truth beneath those truths and the writer makes that plain referring to wisdom, Sophia, in very personal, relational ways. “Love her and she will watch over you.” Wisdom is a someone.

Ecclesiastes is a long journal entry by a guy who woke up on the wrong side of the bed and is seeing everything darkly... and I do mean everything. The glass isn’t even half full for him as he uses the word meaningless over and again, concluding finally that “Everything is meaningless.”

He seems set on making us honest about things that are hard to face. We can’t be wise without being real. But deeper still, the writer seems to want to draw us into an argument about whether or not life is in vain. Something happens in us as the meaning in us stands
up to this curmudgeon and says, “No, life is not in vain... it’s packed with meaning.” Arriving at this hopeful place isn’t an easy thing.

Finally, there is that sexual love poem, “The Song of Solomon.” Remember, it’s in the wisdom section of the sacred library. It’s not a manual for doing well in the bedroom. It’s about how we know God, how intimate it is to know God, how relational, how utterly exciting and frustrating, and finally fulfilling. Something happens to us in this story of pursuit... of two hearts meant for one another... longing for one another. This is a knowing that only happens up close and heart to heart. You can’t know what matters most at arms length.

Do you see? Gaining wisdom isn’t like other learning. It happens to us. It’s loose, in the Bible and in the world and in you. It’s alive, it really is. Seriously... when you encounter wisdom, note how your body feels. Your “amen” to this kind of truth is something that isn’t just going on in the mind. “Deep is calling to deep,” as the Psalmist says.

You’re going to get knowledge while you’re at Baylor... a good bit of it. But wisdom will only come to those who engage in a different way. There is no course for it... but there is you, your real life and your open heart. There is you practicing... you praying... you seeking... you finding and you being found by Wisdom.

Burt Burleson is the University Chaplain