



Wisdom for God's People

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Biblical wisdom involves the skill of faithful living in the world God has made.

What is wisdom? Some people point to knowledge and information. Others may think of wisdom as life experience. A few might recall pithy one-liners similar to what you find in fortune cookies. But how does the Bible talk about wisdom?

Wisdom is not less than knowledge, but it is certainly more than knowledge. Wisdom isn't so much about knowing *that*; it's more about knowing *how*. Wise people know how to live faithfully in the world. They know how to tame their tongue, delay gratification, control their appetites and desires, and how to suffer well. As Christians, we are constantly presented with situations in which wisdom is required.

 What comes to mind when you hear the word *wisdom*?

 What are some situations you are facing right now in which wisdom is needed?

Voices from the Church

"As the Psalms focus on *man* in relationship to *God*, the Proverbs focus on *man* in relationship to *man*. But the relationships one bears to other men are always against the backdrop of one's relationship to God, which affects these lesser ones at all points."¹

—Jay Adams

In this session, we look at the Proverbs to see how God has given us His Word to instruct us in how to walk in wisdom. We will see how wisdom is rooted in the fear of the Lord, how it leads us to trust in God, and how it offers us practical guidance in everyday matters of life. We'll also see that wisdom points us to Jesus Christ, and wisdom in the life of the Christian will lead us to point others to Him as well.

1. Wisdom is rooted in the fear of God (Prov. 1:1-7).

¹ *The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:*

² *To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight,*

³ *to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity;*

⁴ *to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth—*

⁵ *Let the wise hear and increase in learning,
and the one who understands obtain guidance,*

⁶ *to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles.*

⁷ *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

Notice first how being wise is related to receiving information. Wisdom involves *understanding, words of insight, instruction, learning, and knowledge*. As previously stated, wisdom is more than information, but it is certainly not less. Knowing how to live is dependent on ideas, sayings, and teachings.

So wisdom isn't just something that "comes to us," like a special intuition; it is a gift from God that is granted through His Word (which includes Proverbs—31 chapters of information). God wants us to hear, learn, and obey. He intends to instruct, guide, and exhort His people with knowledge and insight.



How will a Christian's receiving of instruction differ from an unbeliever's?

Wisdom, in the biblical sense, is not available to someone who does not fear the Lord or walk in His ways. In other words, we cannot expect God to give us wisdom without also expecting Him to ask for our full obedience. It can't work any other way. We go to Him first. We desire Him first. Only then does God pour out His wisdom on us. We must fear Him, which doesn't mean we cower in fear before Him but that we learn to revere Him and regard Him above all things. No one is more valuable, no possession more precious to us, than the Lord.

There's a difference between worldly wisdom and biblical wisdom. Although people in our society may have some level of wisdom, according to the world, Solomon would make a distinction between the world's wisdom and *true* God-given wisdom. Biblical wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord, and this is a central theme in Proverbs, and in the Bible as a whole. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight" (Prov. 9:10, cf. Ps. 111:10). Wisdom is rooted in fear of the Lord.



Voices from Church History

"Except a man fear the Lord, he is unable to renounce sin."²

—Ambrose (circa 340-397)



Why is fearing the Lord essential to become wise?



Why is it impossible for people to be truly wise without fearing God and walking in His ways?

2. Wisdom leads us to faith in God (Prov. 3:1-12).

It's popular in our day to hear people say, "You just have to believe in yourself!" In one sense, a measure of self-confidence is something good and healthy. But "just believing in yourself" as a way of life is the way of foolishness. True wisdom leads us not to faith in ourselves but in God.

- ¹ *My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments,*
² *for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.*
³ *Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you;*
bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart.
⁴ *So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.*
⁵ *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.*
⁶ *In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.*
⁷ *Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.*
⁸ *It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.*
⁹ *Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce;*
¹⁰ *then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.*
¹¹ *My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof,*
¹² *for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.*

If we had to summarize Solomon's main point in this passage, we might say: "Put your faith in the Lord, not in yourself." Wisdom is rooted in the fear of the Lord, and our fear of God must translate into a rock solid faith in God.

Faith in God means we throw off self-reliance (vv. 5-8).

We are not to trust in ourselves and think that we have mastered life. Leaning on our experience and insight naturally tempers our ability and urgency to trust in the Lord. On the other hand, the more we trust in the Lord, the less we will trust in ourselves. We will discover that as we trust in the Lord, He directs our paths and leads us into joy and peace.



Write down a few areas of life in which you are tempted to rely on yourself. What would shifting your reliance from self to the Lord look like in these cases?

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

9. God Is Omniscient

Scripture teaches that God is all-knowing. He is the One who "is perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:16), and this knowledge extends to all things past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. His knowledge is complete, and as He is outside of time, He has known from all eternity whatever will come to pass. In response to God's omniscience, we admit our finite knowledge and trust His decisions as wise and good.

Faith in God means we let Him manage our money (vv. 9-10).

Solomon tells us that faith in God has to translate into trusting Him with our finances. This starts with giving. We are to honor Him with the first fruits of our income. We can debate the ins and outs of how much Christians ought to give and what percentage God expects of us. But let's be certain that we always consider money and giving in light of the cross. Solomon was talking about honoring God with our wealth before the cross. How much more should we honor God with our wealth as people who have seen and experienced the grace of God displayed through Jesus' death and resurrection! "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).



What does foolishness look like in financial matters? What does wisdom look like?

Faith in God means we suffer well (vv. 11-12).

Since God loves us, He must discipline us. Because He wants our growth, maturity, and holiness, He chooses to send trials and difficulties our way. Solomon compared this to a father who delights in his son. It is precisely because he delights in his son that he must discipline him. If my son runs into the street, knowing I commanded him not to, and if I did not take action to discipline him, what kind of father would I be?

God is the perfect Father. He knows exactly how to discipline us and bring about our good. Even though it feels like God is harming us, He is actually healing us. We must not despise this, knowing that discipline is medicine, not food. We don't enjoy medicine, but we know it kills off the bacteria and sickness that is robbing our health.



Voices from the Church

"To ask God to refrain from giving us 'discipline' would be to ask Him to love us less."³

—David K. Stabnow

Suffering and trials are a means to an end—our joy and sanctification. They expose the things that we so dearly cling to for joy and security, and they reveal our lack of faith in God. But faith in God means that we trust Him especially in the midst of trials and sorrows, believing that He is good and does good (Ps. 119:68).



What are some of the obstacles we face when it comes to faith in God?



How can we see difficulties not as obstacles but as opportunities for trusting in God?

3. Wisdom shows us how to live in the world God has made (Prov. 22:1-10).

¹ A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.

² The rich and the poor meet together; the LORD is the maker of them all.

³ The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it.

⁴ The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honor and life.

⁵ Thorns and snares are in the way of the crooked; whoever guards his soul will keep far from them.

⁶ Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

⁷ The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender.

⁸ Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of his fury will fail.

⁹ Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor.

¹⁰ Drive out a scoffer, and strife will go out, and quarreling and abuse will cease.

It is tempting to read the Lord's words, talk about them, but never actually do them. James warned us of the dangers of merely hearing the word when he said, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (Jas. 1:22).

Reading these words without doing them is self-deception. When Jesus gave the Great Commission, He said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them *to observe all that I have commanded you*” (Matt. 28:19-20, emphasis added). Jesus wants us to do what He said, not simply learn what He said. We often fall into a mind-set that suggests information automatically results in transformation. To be sure, we need information, but what Jesus wants us to do is obey the information we’ve been given.

In the proverbs above, what are some practical takeaways you see?	
Verse 1	<i>Example: Build your character, not just your bank account.</i>
Verse 2	
Verse 3	
Verse 4	
Verse 5	
Verse 6	
Verse 7	
Verse 8	
Verse 9	
Verse 10	

Now step back and look at this list. Think of all the areas that we covered and all the life issues we addressed. And that was in 10 verses! Wisdom comes crashing into every aspect of our lives—our finances, how we parent, our attitudes, and our posture toward the world. Wisdom leaves no stone unturned when it comes to our lives. God has spoken to us. The question is will we listen and obey. Will we actually do what He tells us to do?

The danger for many of us is to memorize these words, study them more in-depth, discuss them with one another, but never actually get around to doing them. These words, and all that God has said, must take root in our hearts and result in actual obedience to God. Only then can we really call others to embrace them and obey what God has said. Unless His truth pierces our hearts and brings about obedience, we will be ineffective and unfruitful as we call others to Him.

Voices from the Church

“Living in wisdom leads to evangelism...Compelled by Christ’s love and guided by Scripture’s wisdom, we seek to persuade people to trust in Christ. Wisdom looks to Christ and points others to Him as well.”⁴

—Jonathan Leeman



We sometimes make foolish mistakes, even when we know the wiser way. How does the gospel help us deal with our foolishness?

Conclusion

In Jesus, we see that wisdom isn’t merely information or insight; wisdom is a Person (1 Cor. 1:30). Jesus is God’s wisdom on full display. And this Person did something that looks like foolishness in the eyes of the world—He laid down His life for us. Now, because of His death and resurrection, we can know and follow this Jesus. We can fear Him. We can put all of our faith in Him. As we do, He makes us wise people who reflect His name and announce His gospel in the world.

CHRIST CONNECTION: Wisdom is the skill of living faithfully in God’s world, but all of us have sinned. Wisdom shows us how to live but cannot save us. For this reason, Jesus became God-given wisdom for us (1 Cor. 1:30) so that through His death and resurrection (which appear foolish to the world), we might be saved according to the wise plan of God.

HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: God calls us to follow the path of the wise and, like the Wisdom character in Proverbs, to call others to faithful and wise living through Jesus.

1. What are some opportunities in your life to use biblical wisdom to lead yourself and others on a wise path?

2. How might trusting God in the area of our finances help point others to the wisdom of faith in Jesus Christ?

3. What steps will you take to internalize God's Word and then act on His wisdom, especially for the sake of calling others to faith in Christ?

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