

TREASURE HUNTING FOR WISDOM

Pursuing and Prizing the Gift of Godly Wisdom

Proverbs 8:1-36

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TREASURE HUNT ADVENTURES

Treasure hunting offers an enticing adventure to explore and discover possible untold riches. Historical accounts, legendary stories and epic movies often romanticize treasure hunters to stir up our imagination of grand exploration, daredevil excursions and indescribable discoveries that lead to fame and fortune. Many hope to find that rare treasure at garage sale, or receive an invaluable family heirloom or discover an overlooked priceless prize that brings the promise of prosperity. In reality, the prospect of treasure hunting or archeological discovery is a laborious and tedious work. It often requires more time and resources than the “prize” actually yields. It might take years of research, many failed expeditions and immense disappointment before any treasure is realized. But the lure of fortune and success continue to fuel the imagination for treasure hunting.

Comparatively, Scripture offers a prize that transcends all treasure on earth. It presents the promise of discovery for a reward that is guaranteed to the person who pursues it diligently. Its value is described, its worth is extolled and its return is unmatched. Those who seek it will find it, and its rich reward will continue to increase in quality and quantity for every possessor. This supreme treasure offered in Scripture is **WISDOM**. More specifically it is **GODLY WISDOM** that is spiritually from above. (James 3:17) The theme of Proverbs is primarily **WISDOM**, and like an exquisite diamond it has multiple facets that reflect the glory of God and its beauty displayed in both creation and mankind. It is a prize for any to receive and a treasure for us to unearth. Within it is the secret to a life pleasing to God, while rejecting it is a sure pathway to harm and death. Wisdom breeds skillful success in relationships, personal morality, responsibilities, financial decisions, parenting principles and aging gracefully. When other qualities and skills diminish, wisdom can increase with age and maturity. It is divinely decreed, established in the created order, governs the physical laws of nature and forms the spiritual doctrines for mankind. Wisdom is that elite attribute of God that He generously gifts to anyone who humbly asks, persistently seeks and decisively loves the Giver of this brilliant treasure.

SOLOMON'S GIFT

Since Solomon is the primary writer regarding wisdom, it is helpful to consider the context of his gift and his subsequent use of it. It is easy to view Solomon with a skeptical eye toward wisdom and his experiences. Reading the account in 1 Kings 3, it appears that Solomon was simply “gifted” wisdom through a divine request that required no effort on his part. It seems like Solomon was simply given wisdom, as if he had received a magic wish from a cosmic genie! But a careful examination of the passages leading up to Solomon's encounter with God, reveal the character and nature he already possessed prior to receiving this divine blessing.

According to 1 Kings 2:1-9, Solomon was already recognized as a young man of wisdom by his father David. Prior to David's death, he installed Solomon as Israel's next king according to God's promise. He instructed Solomon to "*keep the charge of the Lord your God*" and twice reminded him to act "*according to your wisdom... for you are a wise man.*" By the time the Lord appeared to Solomon and offered His request, Solomon was recognized as a young man of wisdom who "*loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father.*" (1 Kings 3:3) Solomon then wisely asks the Lord for "*an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil*" (3:9), which pleased the Lord and brought greater blessing on Solomon than he even asked for!

How was Solomon able to distinguish himself as wise, young man? I believe it came through the godly instruction of his parents, David and Bathsheba. In Solomon's own testimony throughout Proverbs, he consistently instructs his children to listen and keep the biblical teaching of both father AND mother. (Pro.1:8-9) I believe this is a testament to the faithful, godly instruction Solomon received from both his parents as well as a reflection of his heart's desire to love God's word and wisdom in his life. Although the entirety of Solomon's life did not always reflect godly moral living, it does not diminish the truth he received, believed, instructed and practiced throughout most of his life. Like David, Solomon's failure did not disqualify him from continuing to grow in godly wisdom nor instruct others how to acquire and please God through wisdom.

IN EXAMINING PROVERBS 8, WE WANT TO FOLLOW SOLOMON'S PROPOSAL TO PURSUE GODLY WISDOM IN ORDER TO POSSESS THIS ETERNALLY, UNMATCHED TREASURED PRIZE.

I. PROPOSAL TO ACQUIRE GODLY WISDOM [8:1-11]

^{ESV} **PROVERBS 8:1** *Does not wisdom call? Does not understanding raise her voice? ² On the heights beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; ³ beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud... ¹⁰ Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold, ¹¹ for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.*

LADY WISDOM

Solomon personifies the attribute of wisdom as a lady. He began his appealing proposal to hear wisdom's cry in 1:20-33. He further expands this image as he closes the opening section in chapters 8-9. *Why is wisdom presented as a woman?* This is partially due to the fact that the Hebrew term, *hokmah*, is a feminine noun. But Solomon's primary idea is making wisdom *attractive*, since her teaching and instruction are "*a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.*" (1:8-9) Solomon's aim is to make wisdom the most desirable and attractive quality for anyone. Lady Wisdom is contrasted to the woman Folly who "*is loud; she is seductive and knows nothing.*" (9:13) Previously in chapters 5-7, Solomon warns about the seducing, adulterous woman who preys on the simple minded and leads many astray with her empty promises and lustful enticements. He counters this tempting woman with the more virtuous, noble and secure Lady Wisdom herself.

*“Wisdom is not a glamorous girl but a venerable lady.”*¹ Lady Wisdom is not hiding in secret. She is prominent in the main crossroads of life, she is vocal with words of truth, and she is straightforward in what she has to offer: *prudence, knowledge, and discretion*. She embodies everything that is right, true and just in God’s design, and her rewards transcend anything material on this earth. In America, we venerate *Lady Liberty* as she stands off shore of NYC welcoming potential immigrants to a new home and hope of freedom. The Statue of Liberty has been a beacon of freedom and a timeless symbol of what America offers to those who arrive. Better than what *Lady Liberty* can offer, Lady Wisdom’s message consists of far more worthy things and never fails on its promises to reward those who love her and pursue her!

II. PURSUIT TO OBTAIN GODLY WISDOM [8:12-21]

PROVERBS 8:17 *I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.*

SPIRITUAL MINERS

Even though wisdom is visible and accessible, she requires diligent pursuit in order to obtain and realize her true worth. By contrast, today spiritual enlightenment and mysticism have resurfaced as ways to obtain higher knowledge, secret wisdom that just *happens* to you. The idea of receiving “secret knowledge” isn’t new, but its repackaged in a way that is alluring as mysterious, secretive and somehow mystically received through self-awareness and self-achievement. It attempts to bypass a process of careful study, acute discernment and attentive effort in exchange for quick gain. In many other churches this deceptive mysticism is realized through emotional experiences, biblical reinterpretation and exploiting the naïve and simple for personal gain.

True pursuit to obtain godly wisdom is more accurately depicted as spiritual mining. Solomon uses language and imagery to convey that in order to obtain wisdom’s valuable prize (8:18-21) it comes through genuine effort. Previously in 2:1-6 Solomon laid out the precise process for mining the depths of godly wisdom: *intensive study, research, memorization, prayer, and further study*. While wisdom requires effort, it repays that effort exceedingly. The process cannot be shortcut; it is two-thirds study and prayerful petition. God works through this means, He doesn’t simply make wisdom appear in your head; it requires both prayer and work. **(James 1:5)**

*We must not miss this point. It is a clarion call to our spineless, gelatinous, and ultimately Godless generation. Knowledge of God is the result of diligent, prayerful, systematic, earnest, demanding, pedal-to-the-metal study of His words. We may say it categorically, on the basis of Scripture: anyone who will not study God’s words will not know God—except as Judge.*²

¹ Lane, Eric. *Proverbs: Everyday Wisdom for Everyone*. Christian Focus Publications, 2000, p. 78.

² Phillips, Dan. *God’s Wisdom in Proverbs: Hearing God’s Voice in Scripture*. Kress Biblical Resources, 2011, p. 124.

At the heart of obtaining godly wisdom is the repeated refrain: *the fear of the Lord* (8:13). This is the spiritual miners primary tool for extracting the sound wisdom that governs rulers and princes, and is available to any who seek to reap the fruitful reward of righteousness, justice and an eternal inheritance.

III. PREEMINENT POSITION OF GODLY WISDOM [8:22-31]

PROVERBS 8:22 *The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. ²³ Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth... ³⁰ then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, ³¹ rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.*

WISDOM'S ETERNAL PAST

Why should you pursue this type of wisdom compared to all other available wisdom? Since wisdom is the skillful application of knowledge, there are many areas of life where wisdom is gained either through craft or philosophy. What sets this wisdom apart from other types of wisdom? Here Solomon poetically explains that wisdom's source is none other than God Himself. Wisdom itself is not god, but a quality of God's nature that has been infused into all of His creation! The idea is that wisdom *came from*³ God and was *given by* God at the very beginning of creation.

WISDOM'S CREATION PRESENCE

God's wisdom is weaved into the very fabric of the universe. The power of God's words to speak creation into existence display the magnitude of His wisdom that is uncovered in science, exploration and observation. From the ocean's depths to the Moon's gravitational pull on the sea, the majesty of how the world functions and operates reflect God's all-wise order in laws of nature and beyond. In every step of creation wisdom was like an enthusiastic child rejoicing in God's amazing work and power displayed within and throughout.

WISDOM'S GLORIOUS FUTURE

The focal point of creation was the Earth and mankind. The answers to the universe aren't found in *outer space*, they are right here displayed in the world and the children of man. The principles of God's wisdom that were built into the very structure of creation are the same principles that will continue to guide God's purposes into eternity. To ignore this all glorifying, wisdom infused, awe inspiring, mankind redeeming masterpiece of God is the height of ignorance and foolishness!

³ נָתַן **vb. get, acquire** — **1.** *get, acquire* (all poet.): **a.** of God as originating, creating. **b.** of acquiring wisdom, knowledge. The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament.

IV. PRIZE OF RECEIVING GODLY WISDOM [8:12-36]

PROVERBS 8:35 *For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD,³⁶ but he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death."*

LIFE AND DEATH

Solomon concludes his elaborate description of Lady Wisdom with his familiar call, *"And now, O sons, listen to me: blessed are those who keep my ways."* (8:32) His final appeal to his children⁴ is a summary of their choice towards godly wisdom. This call of blessing and cursing, life and death is the same God gave Israel through Moses in his final sermon throughout Deuteronomy. (30:11-20) Godly wisdom is not difficult to acquire, it is not beyond your reach to obtain, it holds priority over all other forms of wisdom, and its reward is matchless in its guarantee. To refuse it and fail to acquire it means personal ruin, reveals who you truly worship, and always results in eternal death.

CHRIST THE WISDOM OF GOD

Where does godly wisdom lead you? Like David, Solomon knew that this wisdom not only comes from God but leads directly back to Him. Solomon's failure later in life was attempting to live with this great gift without submission in the fear of the Lord. His impressive deeds and elaborate lifestyle led him to depression and hopelessness. He allowed this supreme gift "go to his head" boasting in his works and seeking satisfaction in anything apart from God. It wasn't until the end of his life that he returned in humility and reverence remembering that true wisdom is found in the Lord alone. (Eccl.12:13:14)

The apostle Paul expressed the same understanding explaining how godly wisdom comes from God and leads you to Christ. In a playful reversal of contrasting the wisdom of the world with the wisdom of God, Paul states in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31:

"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God...²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe...²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men...²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,³¹ so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

May you pursue God's gift of wisdom offered to you as a most treasured prize that leads you to eternal life found only in Jesus Christ!

⁴ The phrase "my sons/O sons" is used at least 17x through chapters 1-9