



Applied Faith Men's Bible Study

South Hills Baptist Church

7350 Granbury Rd.

Fort Worth, TX 76123

Proverbs, Wisdom and Knowledge

Lesson #1

Proverbs 8

Question: "What is wisdom? What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge?"

Answer: Wisdom and knowledge, both recurring themes in the Bible, are related but not synonymous. The dictionary defines wisdom as "the ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting." Knowledge, on the other hand, is "information gained through experience, reasoning, or acquaintance." Knowledge can exist without wisdom, but not the other way around. One can be knowledgeable without being wise. Knowledge is knowing how to use a gun; wisdom is knowing when to use it and when to keep it holstered.

God wants us to have knowledge of Him and what He expects of us. **In order to obey Him, we have to have knowledge of the**

commands. But as equally important as having knowledge is having wisdom. Knowing facts about God and the Bible is not all there is to wisdom. Wisdom is a gift from God. James 1:5 states, “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.” God blesses us with wisdom in order for us to glorify Him and use the knowledge we have of Him.

The book of Proverbs is perhaps the best place in the Bible to learn of biblical wisdom. Proverbs 1:7 speaks of both biblical knowledge and wisdom: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, / but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” To fear the Lord is to start on the path to knowledge, and God can then begin to provide us with wisdom through Christ, who the Bible says is wisdom itself: “It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Knowledge is what is gathered over time through study of the Scriptures. It can be said that wisdom, in turn, acts properly upon that knowledge. **Wisdom is the fitting application of knowledge.** Knowledge understands the light has turned red; wisdom applies the brakes. Knowledge sees the quicksand; wisdom walks around it. **Knowledge memorizes the Ten Commandments; wisdom obeys them. Knowledge learns of God; wisdom loves Him.**

I believe all men have this in common: that they want to be happy. They do not all agree on what brings the greatest happiness, but they do all long to have it. And this longing is not bad. It is good. Evil consists in trying to find happiness in ways that displease and dishonor God. Goodness consists in finding happiness in ways that please and honor God. We can conceive of a world in which we might be called upon to do right at the expense of our ultimate happiness. But that is

not the world in which we live. God has established this world in such a way that doing good through faith in Christ always leads to greater happiness eventually. We do not live in a world where we must choose between our eternal happiness and God's glory! God has created this world and its moral laws in such a way that the more we choose to glorify God, the happier we will be.

God Made Us to Be Eternally Happy

Of course this does not mean that there is no discipline, no self-denial. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:34, 35). But it is clear from Jesus' words that self-denial is a means to saving our lives. This means simply that we must stop seeking our happiness in one way and start seeking it in another. Therefore what sets Christians off from the world is not that we have given up on the universal quest for happiness, but that we now seek our happiness from a different source and in different ways. We have learned from Jesus, who "for the joy set before him endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2), that the joy we seek may require that we choose to suffer for Christ's sake. Yet we must never become self-pitying because "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18). Nor can we ever become proud since we know that "suffering produces patience, and patience produces approvedness, and approvedness produces hope" (Romans 5:3, 4)—hope that God will restore our happiness one hundredfold (Mark 10:30). So you can't boast in your sufferings since they are all bringing about our greater happiness in God.

So I take it to be a great and wonderful and liberating truth that God made us to be eternally happy. And I find great help in viewing the Bible as God's guidebook to joy. We ought to view the Bible as a divine prescription for how to be cured of all unhappiness. The medicine it prescribes is not always sweet, but the cure it brings is infinite and eternal joy at God's right hand (Psalm 16:11).

The point of this message this morning is that we should "get wisdom." We should bend all our efforts to become wiser tomorrow than we are today. Formal education is only one stage in the process of becoming a wise person. So much of life has been professionalized and institutionalized that we easily slip into the notion that it is the responsibility of some profession or some institution to impart to us wisdom. You can see this tendency in the fact that continuing education in many spheres is thought of entirely in terms of taking courses from professionals in institutions.

The implication seems to be that wisdom and understanding are something you purchase, rather than being a daily, lifelong process of growth. But what needs to be stressed is that we should never be content with the wisdom we attained through formal education, and we should not think that the only way to grow in our understanding is by taking more courses. When the wise man says in Proverbs 4:5, "Get wisdom, get insight," he does not mean, "Go to school, take more courses." That might be part of God's plan for you. But for most of us it is not. Yet the command comes to us all: "Get wisdom!" What does this mean? How shall we do it? And why is it so important?

What Is the Importance of Getting Wisdom?

Let's begin by asking why is it so important? We have already seen that all men seek happiness, and that this is not bad but good. Now the reason that getting wisdom is important is that it is the practical knowledge by which we gain this true and lasting happiness. Proverbs 3:13 says, "Happy is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gets understanding." Proverbs 24:13–14 says, "My son, eat honey, for it is good, and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste. Know that wisdom is such to your soul; if you find it, there will be a future, and your hope will not be cut off."

In other words, by means of wisdom you can make your way into a hope-filled future. It is the key to lasting happiness. Proverbs 19:8 says, "He who gets wisdom loves himself." In other words, do yourself a favor: Get wisdom! Get wisdom! **Proverbs 8:32–36 sums it all up beautifully. Here wisdom herself is speaking and she says, "And now, my sons, listen to me: happy are those who keep my ways . . . Happy is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. For he who finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord; but he who misses me injures himself; all who hate me love death." If we do not make it our aim to "get wisdom," we will suffer injury and finally death. Therefore, the command, "Get wisdom; get insight," is very important. As Proverbs 16:16 puts it, "To get wisdom is better than gold; to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver." It is a matter of life and death. The ultimate, eternal happiness that all people long for will only be found by those who first "get wisdom."**

The ultimate and eternal happiness is what wisdom will bring, because it should be emphasized that not all happiness comes from true wisdom. Proverbs 15:21 says, "Folly is a joy to him who has no

sense." Our thirst for happiness is insatiable in this world, and if we do not have the wisdom to seek it in God, then we will find whatever substitutes we can in the world. Terrorists may find it in shooting presidents and popes. Executives may find it in climbing the corporate ladder. Athletes in breaking world records. Scholars in publishing books. Gamblers may find it in Reno. Musicians in selling a million records. The sources where people seek happiness apart from God are countless: drink, drugs, sex, suntans, television, tubing, eating, talking, walking, etc., etc. But the happiness that these things bring is not true and lasting. It is not ultimate and eternal. It is not the joy for which we were made. And, therefore, it leaves us unsatisfied, frustrated, incomplete, knowing that there must be something more. But that ultimate and eternal happiness that we crave is only found by wisdom. Therefore it is supremely important that we "get wisdom."

What Is Wisdom?

Now what is it? What are the characteristics of the person who has it? The first characteristic you all know: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight" (Proverbs 9:10). The wisdom that leads to life and ultimate joy begins with knowing and fearing God. You may recall from two weeks ago in the message, "A Woman Who Fears the Lord Is to Be Praised," that fearing the Lord means fearing to run away from him. It means fearing to seek refuge, and joy, and hope anywhere other than in God. It means keeping before our eyes what a fearful prospect it is to stop trusting and depending on God to meet our needs. The fear of the Lord is, therefore, the beginning of wisdom not only in the sense that it is the first step in a wise way to live, but also in the sense that all the later

characteristics of wisdom flow from the fear of the Lord like a river flows from a spring.

Let's look at some examples. Proverbs 11:2 says, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace; but with the humble is wisdom." The wise person is characterized by humility. The person who is proud does not fear the Lord, who hates a haughty spirit, and therefore can't get to first base in wisdom. But the person who fears the Lord is humble, because he depends on God for everything and fears to take credit himself for what God does. Humility, in turn, is foundational for the other aspects of godly wisdom because humility is teachable and open to change and growth. The proud person does not like to admit his errors and his need for growth. But the humble person is open to counsel and reason, and ready to be corrected and follow truth.

Humility, unlike pride, does not recoil when commanded to do something. And this is essential for the advancement of wisdom, because Moses taught us that wisdom consists in knowing and doing the commandments of God. Deuteronomy 4:5–6, "Behold I have taught you statutes and ordinances, as the Lord my God commanded me that you should do them . . . Keep them and do them; for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples." And Jesus said the same thing about his own words, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon a rock" (Matthew 7:24). A good definition of godly wisdom, therefore, would be: hearing and doing God's Word. God's Word is a divine prescription for how to be finally cured of all unhappiness. Wisdom is the practical knowledge of how to attain that happiness. Therefore, wisdom is hearing and doing the Word of God. But the only people who will do this are the people who are humbly relying on God for help and who fear to seek happiness anywhere but in him.

Therefore, the fear of the Lord is the beginning and spring of all true wisdom.

But something more has to be said about the nature of this wisdom. It is not enough to say it is a humble hearing and doing of God's Word, because God's Word does not address itself specifically to every human dilemma. A famous example from Solomon's life will illustrate (1 Kings 3:16–28). One day two prostitutes came to King Solomon. One of them said, "My lord, this woman and I live in the same house, and we each gave birth to a son last week. And one night while she was asleep, she rolled over on her son and smothered it. So she got up at midnight and took my living son from me while I slept and left me with her dead son. When I woke in the morning and looked closely, I could tell it was not my son." But the other woman said, "No, the living child is mine, and the dead child is yours." And so they argued before the king.

Then the king said, "You both say the living child is yours. I will settle the matter; bring me a sword." So a sword was brought and the king said, "Divide the living child in two and give half to the one woman and half to the other." But the woman whose son was alive yearned for her son and said, "No, my lord, give her the child and by no means slay it." And the other said: "It shall be neither mine nor yours, divide it." Then the king said, "Give the living child to the first woman. She is its mother." The story concludes with this observation: "And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to render justice" (1 Kings 3:28).

There was no biblical command to tell Solomon what to do when two harlots claim the same baby. Therefore, wisdom must go beyond knowing and doing the Word of God. Wisdom must include a sensitive,

mature judgment or discernment of how the fear of the Lord should work itself out in all the circumstances not specifically dealt with in the Bible. There has to be what Paul calls in Romans 12:2 a "renewing of the mind" which is then able to examine and approve the will of God. He calls this a "spiritual wisdom" in Colossians 1:9, "We have not ceased to pray for you, that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." Of course the wisdom which follows God's Word and the wisdom which discerns the way to act when there is no clear word from God are not separate. It is precisely by saturating our minds and hearts with God's Word that we gain the spiritual wisdom to guide us in all situations.

So in summary, when the Bible says, "Get wisdom," it is referring to that practical knowledge of how to attain true and lasting happiness. It begins with the fear of the Lord and consists in humbly hearing and doing God's will perceived both in Scripture and in the unique circumstances of the moment. Such wisdom is essential because the person who has it finds life and joy, but the person who doesn't finds death and misery. Therefore, "Get wisdom! Get wisdom!"

How Can We Get Wisdom?

Now finally I want to mention five biblical instructions for how to get this wisdom.

*First, desire wisdom with all your might. Proverbs 4:8 says, "Prize her highly and she will exalt you; she will honor you for your embrace." These are not cheap words. To prize something and to embrace someone are signs of intense desire and love. Wisdom must be valuable for us. We must be willing to sell all in order to buy it: "Seek it like silver, and search for it as for hidden treasure" (Proverbs 2:4). Blessed is

the graduate who walks through the commencement line more hungry for wisdom than when he entered school, for he shall be satisfied.

*Second, since wisdom is found in the Word of God, we must apply ourselves in study and meditation to know the Word and do it. "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." (Psalm 19:7). Therefore, we must devote ourselves to know and understand the testimonies of the Lord. And here I commend not only faithful Bible study, but also regular reading of great books on theology and biblical interpretation, books that distill the wisdom of the greatest students of the word over the past 1900 years.

Now, I know what you are thinking: I don't have the time or the ability to get anywhere in books like that. So I want to show you something really encouraging. When this was shown to me about four years ago by my pastor, it changed my life. Most of us don't aspire very high in our reading because we don't feel like there is any hope. But listen to this. Suppose you read about 250 words a minute and that you resolve to devote just 15 minutes a day to serious theological reading to deepen your grasp of biblical truth. In one year (365 days) you would read for 5,475 minutes. Multiply that times 250 words per minute and you get 1,368,750 words per year. Now most books have between 300 and 400 words per page. So if we take 350 words per page and divide that into 1,368,750 words per year, we get 3,910 pages per year. This means that at 250 words a minute, 15 minutes a day, you could read about 20 average sized books a year!

When I heard that, I went home, analyzed my day, and set aside the 15 minutes just before supper to read Jonathan Edwards' big book, Original Sin. And I did it in a couple of months. Then I turned to something else. I was absolutely elated: reading that I thought never

could get done was now getting done in a 15 minute slot that would have been wasted anyway. Therefore, I encourage you, there is hope. Choose some classics that you've always wanted to read (St. Augustine's Confessions, or City of God; John Calvin's Institutes; Martin Luther's Commentary on Galatians, or Bondage of the Will; John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress; Jonathan Edwards' Religious Affections; etc.), and set aside 15 minutes, maybe just before you go to sleep, to read. You will not be the same person next year at this time. Your mind will be stretched, your heart enlarged, your zeal more fervent. Above all, you will have grown in wisdom. And it may not be long until someone says of you: "The words of his mouth are as deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a gushing spring" (Proverbs 18:4).

*The third thing we should do to get wisdom is pray. Solomon was not born a wise man. **He prayed for wisdom and God said, "Because you have asked this and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold now I do according to your word" (1 Kings 3:11).** And Daniel admitted that in himself he had no wisdom (Daniel 2:30), but he said, "To thee, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for thou hast given me wisdom and strength, and hast made known to me what we asked of thee" (2:23). And we have seen how Paul prayed that the churches might be given "spiritual wisdom" (Colossians 1:9) and that they might have "a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of God" (Ephesians 1:17). And finally, James puts it as clearly as we could wish: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God" (James 1:5). The wisdom that leads to true and lasting happiness is not natural or inborn. It is supernatural. It is a gift of God. Therefore, if we would "get wisdom," we must pray.

*The fourth biblical instruction for how to get wisdom is to think frequently of your death. Or to put it another way, think of the

shortness of this life and the infinite length of the next. **Psalm 90:12** says, "**So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.**" There is scarcely any thought that will purge our priorities of vain and worldly perceptions like the thought of our imminent death. Oh how cleansing it is to ponder the kind of life we would like to look back on when we come to die. There is great wisdom in such meditation. Therefore, think often of your dying.

*Finally, there is one last, absolutely essential thing to do if you would "get wisdom": you must come to Jesus. He said to the people of his day, "The queen of the south will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold something greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:42). What an understatement. Greater than Solomon indeed! Solomon spoke God's wisdom. Jesus is the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30). Others had spoken truth; he is the truth. Others had pointed the way to life; he is the way and the life (John 14:6). Others had given promises, but "all the promises of God find their yes in him" (2 Corinthians 1:20). Others had offered God's forgiveness; Jesus bought it by his death. Therefore, in him are "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). To know and love and follow this Jesus is to own the treasure of ultimate and eternal happiness. Therefore, the command, "Get wisdom," means first and foremost "Come to Jesus! Come to Jesus!" in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom.

Application/Activity

Each day read two Proverbs. Wednesday read Proverbs 1 and 2. Thursday read Proverbs 3 and 4 and so on. By next Tuesday you should have read 14 Proverbs. Make sure you highlight or underline, in each Proverb, what stands out to you as something you can apply to your life.