

Lesson 1

The Appeal of Wisdom

Key verses: Proverbs 3:1-4; 1:20-33; 8:1-11; 9:1-6; 8:22-36

The invitation to take hold of the wisdom that comes from above is universal. It is expressed in two ways in the book of Proverbs. First, we read of a father inviting his son to take heed to his words (4:20). Second, we read of wisdom personified extending the invitation for all to come, learn, and become wise (8:1, 4-6).

The Father's Appeal

Read: Proverbs 3:1-4

The father's instructed his son to "*not forget*" his teaching implies that his son had already been taught (3:1). The father is simply *reminding* his son of what he has instructed previously. The father's invitation then is for the son to *hear* and *accept* his teaching, *retain* his teaching ("*not forget*"), and *apply* his teaching ("*keep my commandments*").

But why should the son listen to his father's instruction? He should listen, not just because of the authority his father has over him, but because he will benefit from heeding his father's command (3:2). The children of Israel were told, "*Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you on the land which the Lord your God gives you*" (Deuteronomy 5:16). Similarly, the wise man tells his son that by *accepting*, *retaining*, and *applying* his teaching, he will be blessed for many years. This, of course, is *generally*, not *absolutely*, true.

The father again tells his son to *retain* his instructions (3:3). He can do this in two ways. To "*bind them around your neck*" suggests an outward manifestation of the son's retention of his father's teaching (actions, words). To "*write them on the tablet of your heart*" describes how his father's instructions were to govern his inward being (thoughts, motives). The point is that the wisdom the father imparts to his son, and the wisdom found throughout the book of Proverbs, is for the *whole* man (actions, words, thoughts, and motives).

The father mentions a twofold benefit of following his words of wisdom (3:4). First, his son would “*find favor...in the sight of God.*” As previously noted, a healthy “*fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*” (1:7) and “*wisdom*” (9:10). One must follow after divine wisdom to be pleasing to God. Second, his son would be of “*good repute in the sight of...man.*” The application of the wisdom imparted by this father and discussed throughout the book of Proverbs is practical and can be easily seen and will be respected by others.

Wisdom’s Appeal

Read: Proverbs 1:20-33

This is the first of three passages we will be considering in which the wise man personifies wisdom and describes her *appealing* to man to take heed to her.

The fact that Wisdom is being described as shouting and crying out in the *street*, in the *square*, at the head of the *noisy streets*, and at the *entry gates* to the city (1:20-21) is meant to show us that the call of Wisdom is made *publicly* and *openly* to all. Yet there is no mention of a crowd gathering around, eager to learn from the one proclaiming wisdom; only an inattentive refusal to receive wisdom (1:24-25). The lesson is that though Wisdom calls to all, not all will obtain wisdom. Therefore, if one does not grow in wisdom, it is because he has *rejected* wisdom, not because wisdom was inaccessible to him. We have already noticed the father imparting wisdom to his son (3:1-4). What if there is no father to impart wisdom? What if the father is unwilling or unable to teach his son? Though the son in such situations would certainly be at a disadvantage, there is still wisdom to be gained as it is calling out to all, openly and freely.

Incredibly, there are many people who prefer life without wisdom (1:22) – at least the *divine* wisdom that is being offered to them here. They “*love being simple-minded*” and “*hate knowledge.*” We often hear the phrase, “*ignorance is bliss.*” To those who are willingly foolish and naive, this is their motto. They know just enough about the wisdom that invites them that they have convinced themselves that they want no part of it. Instead they “*delight themselves in scoffing,*” preferring to ridicule and mock rather than learn and grow. But why would so many people prefer simple-mindedness and foolishness over the wisdom that comes from above?

For one to abandon his foolishness in order to take hold of wisdom, he must first receive *reproof* (1:23). He must be shown how he is in error so that he can make correction and follow what is right. This key component in gaining wisdom – *reproof*

– is uncomfortable and undesirable to many. People do not want to have their faults pointed out to them and be told that they must now do something differently. This is why many reject divine wisdom. As we will discuss more in depth later in this study, we can infer from this passage that we must be willing to listen to reproof, admit wrong, and make corrections in our lives. If we are willing to do these things, Wisdom says she *will* pour out her spirit on us and make her words known to us. If we apply ourselves to wisdom with the proper attitude, we *will* be able to acquire it.

God never forces anyone to hear, learn, obey, or grow. We must *choose* to do those things. In the same way, the wisdom that comes down from above will not be forced upon us (1:24-25). Wisdom will *call*, but we can *refuse*. We are free to *choose* to pay no attention to the appeal of Wisdom. But there will be consequences.

Wisdom is said to “*laugh*” and “*mock*” when trouble comes to those who refused to listen (1:26-27). To us, this may seem a little harsh. But it is no more harsh than the fool’s rejection of the appeal that was made to him by Wisdom. Also, it is important to note that this *calamity* is spoken of as a certainty. The text does not say Wisdom will mock *if* dread and distress come; it says that Wisdom will mock *when* dread and distress come. There are negative consequences that come as a result of one rejecting Wisdom. The timing and severity of these consequences will vary, but the fact that they *will* come is a certainty.

When the consequences for rejecting Wisdom come, Wisdom will not be found by those who will suddenly be interested in acquiring it (1:28-30). We might wonder: if Wisdom was previously crying out, why will she refuse to answer when these people start calling on her and diligently seeking her? The reason is because “*they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord.*” They rejected the *counsel* and *reproof* of wisdom. We might then wonder: does God not allow one who had previously rejected Him and His wisdom to repent? Of course He does (cf. Ezekiel 18:32; 2 Peter 3:9). But even if one repents, he will still have to face the negative consequences of the choices he made prior to his repentance. Therefore, since these individuals rejected the wisdom that could have prevented their calamity, even a penitent heart would not deliver them from the *physical consequences* of their prior decisions. Acquiring wisdom is a process. If we forsake the appeal of Wisdom until we need wisdom, it will be too late. We must grow in wisdom *now* in order to prepare for the future.

When calamity comes, those who rejected Wisdom will have to suffer the consequences of their rejection (1:31-32). The seed that they sowed in foolishness will bear fruit. Those who rejected Wisdom will eat of this fruit (experience the negative consequences of their choices) and be *satiated*. This means they would be

filled to the point of disgust, just as when one becomes sick from eating too much of an unhealthy food. The “*waywardness of the naive*” brings about death, reminding us again that ignorance is *not* bliss. The *complacency*, or *prosperity* (KJV), of fools brings destruction. As long as they are content in their foolishness and naivete, they will develop no desire to seek after wisdom.

But just as there are negative consequences for rejecting Wisdom, there is also a reward for accepting Wisdom (1:33). More of the benefits of wisdom will be discussed later in the study. But here Solomon tells us that those who listen to the words of Wisdom will enjoy *security* and *peace* from the threat of calamity that would be against those who rejected Wisdom.

Read: Proverbs 8:1-11

“*Does not wisdom call, and understanding lift up her voice?*” (8:1). This question is rhetorical. Of course Wisdom calls and lifts her voice. As we have already noticed, this call is made *publicly*, indicating that it is open to all (cf. 1:20-21).

Further emphasizing the need for all to take heed, we see that the wisdom that comes from above is intended for “*the sons of men*” (8:4). God expects people to gain wisdom and has made it so that all are able to do so. It is designed to give prudence and wisdom to those who are naive and foolish (8:5). Calling these ones *naive* and *foolish* is not meant to be an insult. Certainly all people, at some point in their lives, have a time when they are naive and foolish simply because they have not yet learned what they need to know. The point is that we should not *remain* in a state of naivete and foolishness.

The wisdom that comes from above is different from the wisdom of the world (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:20-21). Because man is fallible, the wisdom of the world is fallible. Paul would later write, “*For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God*” (1 Corinthians 3:19). In contrast, because God is *infallible*, the wisdom that comes from above is *perfect*. As Wisdom describes her teaching (8:6-8), we see a *perfect* message that has come from an *infallible* being. Wisdom speaks of things which are *noble* and *right* (8:6). The word translated *noble* or *excellent* (KJV) is used elsewhere to describe those in positions of civil or military power. It indicates that the words of Wisdom are *superior* over the worldly wisdom that is contrary to it. The lips of Wisdom speak *truth* and not *wickedness* (8:7). The teachings of Wisdom are wholly *righteous*, containing no hint of any error or foolishness (8:8).

Though the sayings of Wisdom as being wholly noble, right, true, and righteous (8:6-8), not everyone is going to accept the wisdom that comes from above as being these things. Many follow the wisdom of the world, believing it is more noble, right, true, and righteous than the wisdom that comes from above. Why do some reject godly wisdom for worldly wisdom? It is because they do not understand or have knowledge (8:9). One who truly understands and appreciates the difference between the two types of wisdom will always choose to follow after the wisdom that comes from above. Those who follow the wisdom of the world either do not *know* the wisdom that comes from God, or they have not put forth enough of an effort to *understand* it.

We will discuss more later in the study about the value of wisdom. The idea is introduced to us here (8:10-11). Those things which man values in this life – silver, gold, jewels, and any other desirable possession – cannot compare with the wisdom that comes from above. Therefore, Wisdom calls us to listen to her *instruction* and gain the *knowledge* that will lead one to acquire wisdom.

Read: Proverbs 9:1-6

The final passage we will notice that describes Wisdom's appeal presents a picture of wisdom making preparations to host a feast and inviting others to attend.

The fact that Wisdom has built a house (9:1), as opposed to pitching a tent, indicates that it is firmly established. The *seven* pillars (9:1) indicate *completeness*, that it is lacking in nothing. Preparations are made for this feast (9:2), and the invitations are sent (9:3). The call for men to attend the feast is done “*from the tops of the heights of the city,*” again, indicates a *public* invitation that is made to *all* (cf. 1:20-21; 8:2-3).

The invitation is directed to those who are *naive* and who *lack understanding* (9:4-6). Of course, all who lack wisdom from above need to answer this call. But one must be *humble* enough to recognize the fact that he is *naive* and lacking in understanding. Those who are rebellious or arrogant, though they are in need of godly wisdom, will not answer the call because they do not believe that they need it. We must be able to acknowledge our shortcomings and humbly seek after this wisdom. After one humbly receives wise instruction, he must repent (*forsake his folly*) and do the will of God (*proceed in the way of understanding*). It will not do any good for one to *learn* of the right way, then fail to give up his wickedness and follow

after what is right. *Acquiring* wisdom must necessarily result in one *applying* wisdom. Most of the book of Proverbs is devoted to this *application* of wisdom.

The Timeless Nature of Wisdom

After considering the *appeal* of wisdom – both from a father and from Wisdom itself – it is important to consider whether or not this same wisdom is good for us today. The wisdom we are considering in the book of Proverbs is not *worldly* wisdom but wisdom that comes from above. As Solomon explains in the following passage, godly wisdom will *never* become obsolete or irrelevant. For this reason, Wisdom also appeals to us.

Read: Proverbs 8:22-36

Wisdom is timeless. It existed before, during, and after the Creation. The wise man explains in this passage why this is important.

Wisdom reminds us that the wisdom we are considering is not the worldly wisdom of man (8:22). Therefore, the wisdom that we are to pursue is older than the world itself. It belongs to God, not to man; so we must look to God and to what He has revealed in order to acquire this wisdom.

There are three periods of time mentioned in verse 23. First, there is the time *before* Creation (“*from everlasting*”). Second, there is the time *of* the Creation (“*from the beginning*”). Finally, there is the time in which man has inhabited the earth (“*from the earliest times of the earth*”) – which has been since the sixth day at the end of the Creation week, right before God “*completed His work*” and “*rested on the seventh day*” (Genesis 1:26-2:2). This means that divine wisdom predates any human society or culture. Man often takes pride in how the culture in which he is a part has grown and progressed throughout generations, gaining collective wisdom along the way. Much of this wisdom, though, is *worldly* wisdom. *Godly* wisdom came before all of this, and so it is independent of human reasoning. Therefore, what may be considered “*common sense*” or some enlightened realization by a particular society – even our modern society – is not necessarily true or wise. True wisdom existed since before Creation, during the Creation, and from the beginning of man. In the following verses, Solomon expands on these time periods.

Before “*the beginning*” when “*God created the heavens and the earth*” (Genesis 1:1), God “*brought forth*” wisdom (8:24-25). This Wisdom that calls us to “*listen*” (8:32) is older than time. Therefore, we should not expect it to change with time.

Wisdom existed with God prior to Creation, then was used by God in creating the heavens and the earth (8:27-29). All that was created and continues to be sustained by His providence is a testament to the wisdom of God.

Wisdom is closely connected to God's work in Creation, being "*beside Him,*" with Him "*daily,*" and "*always before Him*" (8:30). This suggests that for us to possess true wisdom, we must acknowledge God as the Creator. To reject Him as the Creator is to reject the wisdom that existed "*beside Him, as a master workman.*" At the end, we learn that Wisdom's "*delight [is] with the sons of men*" (8:31, KJV). This wisdom exists for our benefit. The creation and subsequent providence, which are grounded in wisdom, are for our good. The divine message of wisdom that is revealed from above is for our good as well. As we continue this study, we will see many ways in which wisdom benefits those who follow after it.

Similar to what we have already noticed, Wisdom invites all to *listen, heed,* and become wise (8:32-33). Following this type of instruction must invariably lead to obedience. If we keep the ways of wisdom, we will be blessed. Conversely, if we neglect the ways of wisdom, then not only can we not expect the blessings, but we can expect negative consequences for this neglect. Not only must we gain wisdom, but we must regularly be reminded of the things which we have been taught so that, as the Hebrew writer stated, "*we do not drift away from it*" (Hebrews 2:1).

To be blessed we must *listen* to the words of Wisdom (8:34-35). Furthermore, we must exhibit patience and a willingness to wait daily upon Wisdom's instruction. Wisdom will never be obtained overnight. Therefore, we must diligently study so that we can have her teachings firmly planted in our minds. If we do this and follow after this wisdom, then we will find life and the Lord's favor.

While there are certainly benefits to following Wisdom, there are also negative consequences for rejecting her (8:36). When we forsake the wisdom that comes from above, we bring harm to ourselves and demonstrate that we "*love death.*"

Questions on Lesson 1

1. Who/what are the two primary sources of the invitation for one to obtain wisdom?
2. What reasons does the father give for following after wisdom in 3:2, 4?
3. What is significant about the description of Wisdom shouting in the street, in the square, and at the gate (1:20-21)?
4. Why does Wisdom laugh at the calamity of the foolish (1:24-27)?
5. In what way is wisdom better than jewels, gold, and silver (8:10-11)?
6. Who is the source of wisdom and how long has wisdom existed (8:22)?
7. What is identified as the benefit of obtaining wisdom in 8:35?

Lesson 2

The Appreciation of Wisdom

Key verses: Proverbs 23:23; 3:13-26; 2:10-22; 3:5-8; 13:15

We have already considered passages discussing the *appeal* of wisdom. But why should we answer this call? There are many invitations that may be offered that are disregarded by those who are invited. Why should we listen to the *appeal of wisdom*? It is because of the great value of wisdom, the rewards that come from following wisdom, and the perils that we face when we reject wisdom.

All of these are pointed out to us in the book of Proverbs. When God offers His wisdom which was with Him from the beginning (8:22), He does not expect us to accept it without explaining *why* we should accept it. So let us consider the reasons why we should *appreciate* wisdom so we will heed the *appeal* of wisdom.

The Value of Wisdom

The first reason why we should *appreciate* wisdom is the inherent *value* of wisdom. But before we can consider the value of wisdom, we must begin with the starting point for pursuing wisdom – truth.

“Buy truth, and do not sell it, get wisdom and instruction and understanding” (23:23).

We must first recognize that *truth* is more valuable than anything of a material nature which we could buy or sell. We should not understand truth to mean something subjective that will change from one person, time, region, or circumstance to another. Truth is the objective standard that has been revealed from God. It is the *word* of God (cf. Psalm 119:160; John 17:17).

Truth – the revealed word of God – is the starting point that leads to wisdom. The wise man also mentions *instruction* and *understanding* as coming from truth. This tells us three things about truth (the word of God):

1. It leads to divine wisdom.
2. It is the basis for all instruction in matters that pertain to God.
3. It can be understood.

Those who look for wisdom apart from the truth of God's word are seeking the wrong kind of wisdom. Those who use a standard of authority other than the truth of God's word for their religious practices and doctrines are in error. Those who believe that the truth of God's word cannot be understood are mistaken.

Truth leads to instruction. Instruction leads to understanding. Then understanding leads to wisdom. When man produces a product to be sold, the fair market value of it is always worth *more* than the sum total of the raw materials used to make it. Truth – God's word – is valuable. The psalmist described the words of God as being “*more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb*” (Psalm 19:10). How much more valuable is the wisdom that comes from a proper understanding and practice of the truth. The following passages help us to understand just how valuable the wisdom that comes from above is.

Read: Proverbs 8:10-11, 18-19; 16:16

The first two passages have Wisdom speaking (8:10-11, 18-19), and the third contains a statement from the wise man about wisdom (16:16). The point is clear: wisdom is far more valuable than any riches of this world. Throughout history, gold, silver, and jewels have had a great value associated with them. It is natural, then, to see these as having great worth. But no matter how valuable these are, they “*cannot compare*” with divine wisdom. If we are to gain wisdom, we must value it so highly that we will not let even gold, silver, or jewels distract us from its pursuit.

The Rewards of Wisdom

Wisdom is not valuable simply because it has been arbitrarily declared to be valuable. It is valuable because of the rewards that come for following after it.

Read: Proverbs 3:13-26

The one who finds wisdom and gains understanding is *blessed* (3:13). But how so? The wise man explains how wisdom causes one to be blessed.

As we have already noticed, wisdom is of far greater value than the material things of this life. Of all the things we might desire, wisdom will prove to be far more valuable as a long-term investment (3:14-15). Elsewhere, in contrasting the wise and the foolish, the wise man writes, “*A man will be **satisfied** with good by the fruit of his words, and the deeds of a man's hands will return to him*” (12:14). We will be

satisfied when we apply ourselves to wisdom and reap its fruits. Therefore, we should pursue it.

One of the benefits of wisdom, generally, is *long life* (3:16), as our lives are not cut short through foolish choices and activities. When we pursue the things that lead to wisdom – righteousness, humility, and the fear of the Lord – we find “*riches, honor and life*” (22:4; cf. 21:21). A few chapters later, Wisdom says, “*For by me your days will be multiplied, and years of life will be added to you*” (9:11). Riches and honor are also often byproducts of one’s *acquisition* and *application* of wisdom. Wisdom says she will “*endow those who love me with wealth, that I may fill their treasuries*” (8:21; cf. 24:3-4).

Following after wisdom leads to pleasant and peaceful paths for life (3:17). Later, Solomon writes, “*The path of life leads upward for the wise that he may keep away from Sheol below*” (15:24). *Upward* is in the direction of heaven and the dwelling place of God. Therefore, the wisdom that comes from above shows us the way to reach God in heaven.

In the beginning, man’s access to the tree of life was lost because of sin (Genesis 3:22-24). Wisdom is now “*a tree of life*” for those who follow after her (3:18) because, as we noticed in the previous verse, divine wisdom leads us back to heaven where the tree of life (eternal life) can be found (cf. Revelation 22:2). Elsewhere, the wise man writes, “*The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life*” (11:30). That which is produced by a life of righteousness, guided by the wisdom that comes from above, is eternal life.

The created world reflects the wisdom of God (3:19-20). This echoes the point that was made in Lesson 1 titled *The Timeless Nature of Wisdom* (pp. 12-13). Wisdom existed with God from before the Creation and was used by Him in creating the heavens and earth (8:22-29).

The father appeals to his son to keep hold of godly wisdom and understanding (3:21). It is not enough for his son to just listen and learn; he also needs to *retain* what he learned. He is encouraging his son to be clothed with wisdom and discretion (3:22). These teachings are to be “*a graceful wreath to [his] head and ornaments about [his] neck*” (1:9). In speaking of Wisdom, the father tells his son: “*Prize her, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a garland of grace; she will present you with a crown of beauty*” (4:8-9). As one is *clothed* with wisdom and discretion, he obtains *life* for his soul (cf. 12:28).

One of the benefits of wisdom is the security and stability that one enjoys in life (3:23), as opposed to the volatile and uncertain life of one who rejects divine wisdom. “*He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out*” (10:9).

Verse 24 mentions two benefits of wisdom. First, wisdom offers *security* (cf. 3:23). Second, following after divine wisdom allows one to have a good conscience, thus making his sleep *sweet*.

Even though one may be walking according to God’s wisdom, there will be enemies that will rise up. However, if we follow after wisdom, we should take courage (3:25-26). There is *strength* in wisdom. “*A wise man is strong, and a man of knowledge increases power*” (24:5). “*A wise man scales the city of the mighty and brings down the stronghold in which they trust*” (21:22). Why is there such strength in wisdom? It is because this wisdom comes from the Lord. He is our *confidence*. As long as we stand with Him, we can be assured of triumph.

Read: Proverbs 2:10-22

Wisdom not only provides us with blessings for following it, but it also delivers us from evil. This is, of course, if we store up wisdom. Just before the passage above, the wise man says, “*He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity*” (2:7). The protection that comes with wisdom can only be realized if we pursue it. So these verses that talk about wisdom delivering us from evil assume that we have first *acquired* it. We will discuss the *acquisition* of wisdom later in the study. But understanding these benefits of wisdom shows us *why* we should work to acquire it.

A superficial knowledge of the instructions of the wise will not deliver us from anything. Wisdom must enter our hearts and souls if we want it to guard and watch over us (2:10-11). Therefore, we must be “*attentive to wisdom*” (2:2) and retain it in our innermost being. Only then can we expect wisdom to deliver us from evil and prevent us from doing things we will later regret.

In delivering us “*from the way of evil,*” wisdom is designed to protect us from the influence of those who would lead us in this way (2:12-15). The first of these that the wise man mentions is “*the man who speaks perverse things.*” This man will try to lead us into sin by false teaching, lies, or verbal attacks. Second, there are “*those who leave the paths of uprightness.*” They take pleasure in doing evil and will deviously try to lead others to follow after them. We are not to follow them or fall prey to them.

Wisdom also helps to deliver us from the dangers of the “*strange woman*,” or the “*adulteress*” (2:16-19). Much more attention is given to her later in the book of Proverbs (5:1-14; 6:24-35; 7:1-27; 9:13-18), and we will consider her more in a different part of our study. But we are told here that by following wisdom, we can avoid the ruin and damnation that comes from following the adulteress.

If we avoid the “*way of evil*” (2:12) and those who would lead us down that path, naturally we should expect to “*walk in the way of good men*” (2:20). We are going to keep company with one group of people – either the righteous or the wicked. Wisdom and righteousness are inseparable from one another. As wisdom delivers us from evil, it leads us in “*the paths of the righteous*.”

The wise man reminds us at the end of this section of God’s blessings and punishment (2:21-22). Those who through the instructions of wisdom live uprightly will be blessed. Those who reject wisdom and pursue wickedness will be rooted up.

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“Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained, but happy is he who keeps the law” (29:18).

The *vision* to which the wise man refers is the *revelation* (NKJV) that comes down from above, instructing us in godly wisdom. Without God’s instructions, man is “*unrestrained*.” Without His standard, there is no real standard for man to follow. While many foolishly believe that the absence of a divine standard is desirable, following the “*way which seems right to a man*” only leads to “*death*” (14:12; 16:25). One is “*happy*,” or blessed, if he “*keeps the law*” that has been delivered by divine revelation. Pursuing God’s wisdom is for our benefit. Therefore, we must *trust God* and not ourselves and follow Him in all things.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones” (3:5-8).

The Perils of Wickedness

After considering the value of wisdom, the rewards of wisdom, and the deliverance from evil that wisdom provides, we will next consider the *perils of*

wickedness to further reinforce what we have already learned: embracing and following the wisdom that comes from above is for our good.

The *perils of wickedness* can be divided into three categories: hardship in life, lack of hope for the future, and the inevitability of judgment.

“Good understanding produces favor, but the way of the treacherous is hard” (13:15).

The first peril of wickedness is *hardship in life*. People often complain about the way of God being difficult to follow. In one sense it is (cf. Matthew 7:13-14), but the path of wickedness contains hardships that can be avoided if one will simply follow what is right. The hardships that come as a result of one rejecting God's wisdom are unnecessary and avoidable.

One of the lies of sin is to convince us that we are still in control, rather than sin becoming master over us. But sins (*iniquities*) capture, or bind, us (5:22-23). Paul later wrote, *“Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?”* (Romans 6:16). When we pursue sin, rather than righteousness or divine wisdom, we become *slaves* of sin. The end result is that we *“die for lack of instruction.”* This shows us that God's *instruction* teaches us to repudiate sin. Many believe that sin is tolerable because it cannot cause a child of God to be lost. This idea is false. The word of God plainly teaches us to avoid sin (cf. Titus 2:12). Therefore, if one ignores this instruction and chooses to live without it, he will be captured by his iniquities, which will ultimately result in death – either physical death (as is Solomon's primary point) or, as we extend the application, spiritual death (Romans 6:23).

Related passages: Proverbs 6:12-15; 9:12; 18:3; 19:2-3; 21:27; 28:17.

“Do not fret because of evildoers or be envious of the wicked; for there will be no future for the evil man; the lamp of the wicked will be put out” (24:19-20).

The second peril of wickedness is a *lack of hope for the future*. Any “benefit” that comes from following wickedness and worldly wisdom is only temporary. The Hebrew writer talked about Moses who forsook *“the passing pleasures of sin”* (Hebrews 11:25). While sin may seem appealing, it is certainly *passing*. There are no long-term benefits for sin.

After noting the fact that the wicked have no future to which they can look forward, Solomon tells us not to fret (worry) over them or envy them (24:19-20). It can be easy to worry and envy when we are too short-sighted to look at matters that extend past this life. Even if we see the wicked prosper in this life, we should not fret over them or envy them. No amount of prosperity in this life can compare to the great worth of the reward promised to those who will be faithful to the Lord (Matthew 16:26).

Related passages: Proverbs 11:29; 21:16; 22:8; 29:16.

“Judgments are prepared for scoffers, and blows for the back of fools” (19:29).

The third peril of wickedness is the *inevitability of judgment*. Judgment comes in various forms. One can be judged through the word of God as he is reproved by it (Hebrews 4:12). One can be judged in that he suffers the physical consequences of his error. One may also be judged by civil authorities when his wickedness is manifested in his violation of a just law. Finally, one stands to face God in judgment and receive punishment if his deeds are evil.

“On the lips of the discerning, wisdom is found, but a rod is for the back of him who lacks understanding” (10:13). The *rod* is a symbol of corrective discipline and is used throughout the book of Proverbs (13:24; 14:3; 22:15; 23:13-14; 26:3; 29:15). One who is *discerning* and displays *wisdom* does not need such correction. One who rejects wisdom and instruction must receive the *rod* in order to convince him to repent. This corrective discipline, when administered appropriately, is a sign that one has been judged as having transgressed the standard of righteousness.

Related passages: Proverbs 17:11; 19:19; 26:1, 8.

Those who foolishly follow the path of wickedness will suffer for it. There will be hardships in life. They will have no hope for the future. Those who are wicked stand to face divine judgment – both in this life and beyond – for their wickedness. In the end, it is far better for one to walk in wisdom than to walk after his own way.

To further emphasize the need for us to *appreciate* wisdom, we will turn our attention now to various passages in the book of Proverbs that highlight the contrast between the righteous and the wicked. We can divide these into two categories: *physical* consequences and *spiritual* consequences. The charts on the next two pages contain a list of these. As we consider the following passages, there will be a few that may have application to *both* physical and spiritual consequences; but

for our study they have been placed in one category or the other.

Contrast Between the Righteous and the Wicked | *Physical Consequences*

Passage	Righteous	Wicked	Related
10:16	Wages of righteousness is life	Income of wicked is punishment	13:21; 15:6
10:24-25	Desire of righteous will be granted	What wicked fears will come upon	
11:3-8	Integrity of upright will guide them	Crookedness of treacherous will destroy them	28:18
	Righteousness delivers from death	Riches do not profit in day of wrath	
	Righteousness of blameless, smooth his way	Wicked will fall by his own wickedness	13:6; 29:6
	Righteousness of upright delivers him	Treacherous will be caught by their own greed	12:12
	Righteous delivered from trouble	The wicked takes his place	27:12
11:17-19	Merciful man does himself good	Cruel man does himself harm	
	He who sows righteousness gets true reward	Wicked earns deceptive wages	21:20
	Steadfast of righteousness will attain to life	He who pursues evil will bring about his death	
12:7-8	House of the righteous will stand	Wicked are overthrown and are no more	14:11
	Man will be praised according to his insight	One of perverse mind will be despised	
13:9	Light of the righteous rejoices	Lamp of the wicked goes out	
13:13-15	One who fears commandment will be rewarded	One who despises the word will be in debt to it	
	Good understanding produces favor	Way of the treacherous is hard	11:27; 12:21; 22:5
13:17	Faithful envoy brings healing	Wicked messenger falls into adversity	
13:25	Righteous has enough to satisfy appetite	Stomach of wicked is in need	14:14

Passage	Righteous	Wicked	Related
24:16	Righteous man falls 7 times, rises again	Wicked stumble in time of calamity	
28:25-26	He who trusts in the Lord will prosper	Arrogant man stirs up strife	
	He who walks wisely will be delivered	He who trusts in his own heart is a fool	

Contrast Between the Righteous and the Wicked | *Spiritual Consequences*

Passage	Righteous	Wicked	Related
3:33-35	The Lord blesses the dwelling of the righteous	The curse of the Lord is on the house of the wicked	12:2
	God gives grace to the afflicted	He scoffs at the scoffers	
	The wise will inherit honor	Fools display dishonor	
10:27-30	Fear of the Lord prolongs life	Years of the wicked will be shortened	
	Hope of the righteous is gladness	Expectation of the wicked perishes	14:32; 19:16
	Way of the Lord is a stronghold to the upright	But it is ruin to the workers of iniquity	
	The righteous will never be shaken	The wicked will not dwell in the land	12:3
11:20-21	The blameless in their walk are the Lord's delight	The perverse in heart are an abomination to Him	
	Descendants of the righteous will be delivered	The evil man will not go unpunished	
14:9	Among the upright there is good will	Fools mock at sin	
14:22	Kindness and truth will be to those who devise good	Those who devise evil will go astray	
28:1	The righteous are bold as a lion	The wicked flee when no one is pursuing	
28:10	The blameless will inherit good	He who leads the upright astray will fall into his own pit	

Questions on Lesson 2

1. What do we get when we buy the truth (23:23)?
2. From what does wisdom deliver us (2:12-19)?
3. What is the “*vision*” without which “*the people are unrestrained*” (29:18)?
4. Explain the phrase, “*the way of the treacherous is hard*” (13:15).
5. What are the wages of the righteous and the wicked (10:16)? What New Testament passage is similar to this?
6. Why do fools mock at sin (14:9)?
7. Why are the righteous able to be “*bold as a lion*” (28:1)?

Lesson 3

The Acquisition of Wisdom

Key verses: Proverbs 1:7; 4:20-27; 10-13; 2:6-10; 3:5-7, 11-12

Now that we have considered the *appeal* of wisdom and can now *appreciate* the reasons why we should pursue wisdom, we turn our attention to *acquiring* wisdom. Once we know we need wisdom, how do we obtain it?

The Proper Approach to Acquiring Wisdom

In order to gain wisdom, we must have the right foundation. This means we start in the right *place* and have the right *mindset*, right *outlook*, and right *teachers*.

The *place* in which we must start if we hope to acquire wisdom is *in the fear of the Lord*. “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*” (1:7). “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*” (9:10). Without fearing God, there is no reason to listen to His instruction or follow after His wisdom. There is no motivation to do anything but what *we* desire. But if we fear the Lord, we will be motivated by what *He* desires.

The *mindset* we must possess starts with having good sense. This means that one *appreciates* wisdom and is willing to do what is necessary to acquire it. This is the opposite of the fool who disregards wisdom and does not want to do what is necessary to obtain it. Solomon asks, “*Why is there a price in the hand of a fool to buy wisdom, when he has no sense?*” (17:16). If one has “*no sense*,” there is nothing he can give in order to gain wisdom. And even if he were able to somehow “*buy wisdom*,” he would not know what to do with it once he had it. One must “*apply [his] mind to...knowledge*” (22:17; cf. 23:12) if he expects to grow in wisdom.

The *outlook* that we must have is one that expects continued growth throughout a lifetime. Our goal in obtaining wisdom will not be fully realized in young adulthood. Is it possible for a young man to have obtained a certain degree of wisdom in various aspects of life? Certainly. But we must be of the mind that we will continue to grow in wisdom at every stage in life. “*The glory of young men is their strength, and the honor of old men is their gray hair*” (20:29). The “*gray hair*” symbolizes *wisdom* that one has gained through a lifetime of experience. “*A gray head is a crown of glory; it is found in the way of righteousness*” (16:31). While young men might glory in their strength, they must be making efforts to grow in wisdom, even in their

youth, so that when old age comes, they may be wise as God wants them to be.

The *teachers* from whom we must learn if we hope to gain wisdom must be wise themselves. “*He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm*” (13:20). We cannot expect to become wise in the ways of God if we surround ourselves with those who will influence us in foolish and wicked ways. The wise man asks, “*Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge, to make you know the certainty of the words of truth that you may correctly answer him who sent you?*” (22:20-21). The instruction from the wise man was designed to be taken and used by the one who was taught. We must have the right teachers – those who will instruct us of God's wisdom – if we hope to obtain this wisdom for ourselves. But what if one has no wise counselor to teach him? Is he then doomed to never being able to obtain wisdom? No, he can still obtain wisdom; but he must reject those who would direct him in foolish and wicked ways and follow the wise counsel found in the word of God.

And so, with the proper foundation, we have instructions to *acquire* wisdom.

Read: Proverbs 3:1-7; 4:20-27

The passages above emphasize the fact that wisdom is obtained through instruction that is passed from one to another – in this case, from a father to a son. We often talk about how wisdom comes with experience. This is true but not with experience *alone*. Wisdom is rooted in knowledge (3:1; 4:20). Knowledge is based upon what God has revealed (3:5-6). This knowledge of God's will must be bound about one's neck (3:3) and kept in one's heart (4:21), “*for from it flow the springs of life*” (4:23). With this knowledge, one turns from evil (3:7) and obeys the instructions of God (3:1).

Our determination to acquire wisdom must be wholehearted – trusting in God “*with all [our] heart*” and acknowledging Him “*in all [our] ways*” (3:5-6). We must remain focused, with our “*eyes [looking] directly ahead*” (4:25). We must be careful in our walk, watching “*the paths of [our] feet*” (4:26). We must be upright in all things – not turning “*to the right nor to the left*” and keeping ourselves “*from evil*” (4:27).

To Acquire Wisdom, We Must Listen

As wisdom is based upon instruction, it is therefore necessary for us to *listen* to wise counsel in order to acquire wisdom. So the wise father calls upon his son to *listen* to his words.

Read: Proverbs 4:10-13

Notice how the father tells his son to listen. “*Hear...and accept my sayings*” (4:10). “*Take hold of instruction*” (4:13). Elsewhere the wise man says, “*Listen, my son, and be wise*” (23:19), and “*Listen to your father who begot you*” (23:22). The goal in this listening is to *acquire* wisdom. “*Listen to counsel and accept discipline, that you may be wise the rest of your days*” (19:20).

This listening must be more than just *hearing* what is being taught. One may listen to a parent, teacher, or someone else who is trying to impart wisdom to him; but the words go “in one ear and out the other.” He does not pay attention. He does not remember. And he certainly does not observe what was taught. We need to practice *real listening* if we hope to obtain wisdom. So the father says, “*Give me your heart, my son, and let your eyes delight in my ways*” (23:26). We have already noticed how the “*springs of life*” flow from the heart (4:23). Therefore, the instruction that we allow to be written on our hearts is the instruction that will have the greatest effect on our lives. So our listening must not be superficial and soon to be forgotten. We must absorb the wise counsel we receive into our innermost being so that wisdom can spring forth from our hearts to be manifested in our lives.

As we listen, we must also listen with a view toward *observing* what we learn. This is important because of the consequences of failing to do so – many of which we have already considered. The wise man says, “*He is on the path of life who heeds instruction, but he who ignores reproof goes astray*” (10:17). The wise counsel we receive must be put into practice if we hope to gain the rewards of wisdom.

“*My son, observe the commandment of your father and do not forsake the teaching of your mother*” (6:20).

“*For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life*” (6:23).

This view toward observing what is taught is essential. Early in the book, Solomon writes, “*My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding... Then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God*” (2:1-5). Listening attentively, even to the point of *treasuring* commandments (and, by implication, striving to follow them), is necessary if we want to gain knowledge and grow in wisdom.

However, we must understand that there is a *right* way and a *wrong* way to listen. Let us first consider the *right* way to listen.

“Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory” (11:14).

Similar statements are made elsewhere in the book (15:22; 20:18; 24:6). It is dangerous to have “*no guidance.*” We need to have others to counsel us in the ways of divine wisdom. But Solomon does not just talk about one or two counselors to provide help but an “*abundance of counselors.*” It is good to seek guidance from multiple sources rather than putting complete trust in one man. After all, even our counselors may be mistaken from time to time. Therefore, it is helpful to receive instruction from several teachers. However, in doing this, we must heed the warning of Solomon: “*The naive believes everything, but the sensible man considers his steps*” (14:15). While an “*abundance of counselors*” can often be good, we must be careful not to believe everything we hear, lest we be like those of whom Paul later wrote who were “*carried about by every wind of doctrine*” (Ephesians 4:14). We must be careful that we accept godly wisdom and reject worldly wisdom (foolishness).

Related passages: Proverbs 12:15; 15:12; 16:20.

As there is a *right* way to listen, there is also a *wrong* way to listen. Let us notice a few passages that speak of this.

“The wise of heart will receive commands, but a babbling fool will be ruined” (10:8).

We have already noticed that the wise are willing to *listen*. The fool, however, is not interested in *listening* but in *talking*. Solomon later writes, “*A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind*” (18:2). Therefore, as a result of his unwillingness to listen, preferring to speak before he has understanding, he “*will be ruined.*”

“Wisdom is in the presence of the one who has understanding, but the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth” (17:24).

Again we see that understanding – which comes as the result of *listening* – leads to wisdom. Sometimes the fool is unwilling to listen because he is only interested in speaking (10:8; 18:2). Other times he may listen, but he does not listen well because he is distracted. His “*eyes...are on the ends of the earth,*” and he will not focus on the instruction that can lead to wisdom.

Related passages: Proverbs 23:9; 28:19.

To Acquire Wisdom, We Must Learn

Another step in *acquiring* wisdom is that we must *learn*. The knowledge that leads to understanding is available, both through the written word of God and the wise counsel that we receive from others. But the mere fact that knowledge is available does not mean we will automatically obtain it. We must *learn* it for ourselves.

If we are to *learn*, we must *seek to learn*. That is, we must have a desire to learn.

“The mind of the intelligent seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on folly” (15:14).

One who is *intelligent*, who will attain to wisdom, will not wait for knowledge to come to him. He will *seek knowledge*. We often talk about wisdom coming through experience. This is true, but it does not come by experience *alone*. We must seek after knowledge that has been revealed from God and not be like the fool who is content with *folly*.

Related passages: Proverbs 18:15; 21:12.

Having the desire to learn is essential. But some may wonder if they will actually be able to obtain wisdom or if the pursuit of wisdom will be an exercise of futility. While the pursuit of *worldly* wisdom is futile (Ecclesiastes 1:17-18; 2:12-17), we are assured that we *will* be able to learn and gain *divine* wisdom.

“For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice, and He preserves the way of His godly ones. Then you will discern righteousness and justice and equity and every good course. For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul” (2:6-10).

The wisdom that we are considering is the wisdom that comes from above. Because it is from Almighty God, it is able to be distributed according to His will without hindrance. James later wrote, *“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5)*. This prayer that James mentioned is not answered miraculously

as it was with Solomon (1 Kings 3:5-12). Instead, it is answered as we follow the divinely prescribed way of obtaining wisdom, as the book of Proverbs discusses – through learning and practice of God's word. When we follow God's way of obtaining wisdom, we can be assured that we *will* grow in knowledge and acquire wisdom. Solomon says, “*You will discern,*” and, “*Wisdom will enter your heart.*” Wisdom says, “*I love those who love me; and those who diligently seek me will find me*” (8:17).

Related passages: Proverbs 9:9; 14:18, 33.

However, though there is a promise that we *will* learn if we seek to learn, the book of Proverbs also teaches us that there are some who *will not learn*. Let us notice the reasons for this.

“A scoffer seeks wisdom and finds none, but knowledge is easy to one who has understanding” (14:6).

This verse talks about one who “*seeks wisdom*” but “*finds none.*” Though we have already noticed how the *desire to learn* is essential (15:14; 18:15), the desire alone is not enough. One may claim to desire wisdom, and will therefore seek after it; but if he is a “*scoffer,*” he will have no regard for the instruction that would lead him to acquire wisdom. Therefore, though he seeks for it in some sense, he will not obtain wisdom.

“Like legs which are useless to the lame, so is a proverb in the mouth of fools” (26:7).

“Like a thorn which falls into the hand of a drunkard, so is a proverb in the mouth of fools” (26:9).

The proverb delivered by the wise counselor is able to help the one who has understanding. However, the fool, though he may know the proverb even to the point of being able to repeat it, will not get any benefit from it. It is not that he does not *know* it (it is in his mouth; he is able to speak it); it is that he does not *understand* it and cannot *apply* it properly. To him, the proverb is as legs to a lame man. Though he has them, he cannot use them properly, if at all. As he seeks wisdom, which is pleasant like a rose, he comes away without the rose, but with only the thorn stuck in his hand. Because he lacks understanding, he will not acquire wisdom; and the vain pursuit of it will only bring harm to himself.

Related passages: Proverbs 10:14; 14:8.

To Acquire Wisdom, We Must Be Humble

Humility is necessary in order to *acquire* wisdom. “*When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is wisdom*” (11:2). As wisdom comes from instruction and understanding, we must be humble enough to admit our own lack of wisdom and the need to pursue it. Without humility, we will not believe we need wisdom and will, therefore, ignore it.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil” (3:5-7).

When we possess *humility*, we will understand that there are answers we do not have and guidance that we need. Therefore, we will not “*lean on [our] own understanding*” or “*be wise in [our] own eyes.*” We will seek guidance and be open to instruction. However, it is important that we get the right guidance. So Solomon says we must put our trust *in the Lord*. Many today put their trust in parents, professors, or preachers to lead them in the paths of wisdom. While we may certainly be helped by the instruction of others (11:14; 15:22; 24:6), it is only when such instruction is in harmony with the wisdom that comes from above that it will do us any good. Therefore, our trust is not in others who might teach us but in the Lord.

Related passages: Proverbs 15:33; 28:13; 30:2-5.

As *humility* leads to wisdom and honor, *pride* leads to destruction.

“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling. It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud” (16:18-19).

Pride leads to one's downfall. Elsewhere, Solomon adds to this thought: “*But humility goes before honor*” (18:12; cf. 29:23). This is why he says, “*It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly.*” In the long term, it is better to be humble in order to later be exalted (cf. 1 Peter 5:5-6). However, most people tend to be shortsighted and look at the immediate “*spoil*” that is associated with “*the proud.*” So they arrogantly follow the path of instant gratification. Yet in the end, as they have rejected divine wisdom, they will stumble and ultimately be destroyed.

“There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (14:12).

The one who is puffed up with pride trusts in his own way. He rejects instruction because he does not believe that he needs it. He is unwilling to change his thinking or his direction. Jeremiah said, *“I know, O Lord, that a man's way is not in himself, nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps”* (Jeremiah 10:23). This is true for all men of all time. Without learning of God and His ways, we cannot find the way of life. When we reject the wisdom that comes from above, no matter what other direction we take, we will be on a path that leads to *death* (cf. 16:25).

“Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him” (26:12).

The one who is *“wise in his own eyes”* is the one who has rejected divine wisdom for the *“way which seems right”* to him (14:12; 16:25). He is contrasted with the *fool* in this passage. Therefore, we must understand the *“fool”* of this verse to be one who simply *lacks* wisdom, not one who has *rejected* wisdom. Because he only *lacks* wisdom, there is *hope* for him that if he can receive the right instruction, he can acquire wisdom. However, for one who is *“wise in his own eyes,”* in his arrogance he sees no need to listen, learn, or acquire godly wisdom, even though his deficiency of wisdom will be apparent to others. Solomon offers two examples to illustrate this point. *“The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can give a discreet answer”* (26:16). Though the impoverished and miserable condition of the sluggard is apparent to those who know him, in his arrogance he cannot see the need to change anything about his life. *“The rich man is wise in his own eyes, but the poor who has understanding sees through him”* (28:11). The rich man of this verse is not a righteous man who happens to be blessed with riches. He is a rich man who puts his trust in riches. This rich man may believe that he is fully self-sufficient and that his prosperity is a sign that he has more than enough wisdom on his own and needs no wisdom from God. Yet the poor man who has understanding (divine wisdom) will be able to see the folly of the rich man's arrogance.

Related passage: Proverbs 30:12-13.

To Acquire Wisdom, We Must Be Disciplined

A willingness to listen, desire to learn, and spirit of humility are essential for one to be able to *acquire* wisdom. But there is one more component that is necessary – *discipline*. The instruction which we *listen to, learn,* and receive in *humility* will get

us on the path of wisdom. *Discipline* keeps us on the right path once we are on it. If we ever stray from the path, *discipline* is what gets us back on track. So the wise man says, “*Apply your heart to discipline and your ears to words of knowledge*” (23:12).

“*My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord or loathe His reproof, for whom the Lord loves He reproofs, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights*” (3:11-12).

Discipline is not pleasant when it is being administered. The discipline of the Lord often comes to us today in the form of rebuke and correction from His word and the negative consequences that come as a result of our disobedience. We are not to *reject* or *loathe* it. The reason why the Lord disciplines us is not because He *hates* us, but because He *loves* us and wants to guide us to the way that is right. The Hebrew writer explained this passage when he discussed the suffering those brethren were experiencing at the hands of wicked men (Hebrews 12:5-10). We are disciplined because we have a loving Father in heaven who is committed to raising us properly. The Hebrew writer added: “*All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness*” (Hebrews 12:11). Ultimately, this discipline is for our good, even though it may not seem to be from a short-sighted perspective. This is why Solomon says elsewhere, “*A wise son accepts his father’s discipline, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke*” (13:1).

Related passages: Proverbs 15:32; 29:19.

Though discipline is necessary for one to learn, many do not see the point of trying to learn. The book of Proverbs contains a few passages that deal with the *benefit* of discipline and the end result of it.

“*Listen to counsel and accept discipline, that you may be wise the rest of your days*” (19:20).

The New American Standard translates the second part of this verse, “*that you may be wise the rest of your days.*” The King James Version is slightly different: “*That thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.*” The former emphasizes a progression of gaining wisdom while the latter emphasizes the goal of possessing wisdom in the end. In either case, discipline is about our *future*, rather than the present. In the future, the discipline that leads us to grow in knowledge from God will result in wisdom, understanding, and honor (12:1; 13:18).

“For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life” (6:23).

In the previous verses, we saw that *discipline* leads to wisdom (19:20), understanding (12:1), and honor (13:18). If these were not enough to convince one of the benefits of discipline, the wise man adds here that the path of discipline is *“the way of life.”* It will help us avoid trouble in this life (6:24-35), as well as in the next (7:22-27).

Related passages: Proverbs 15:5; 20:30.

Unfortunately, not all are willing to accept discipline as being for their good. Some will reject it. This has consequences.

“Grievous punishment is for him who forsakes the way; he who hates reproof will die” (15:10).

The way that is being forsaken is the way of *wisdom*. Those who reject God's standard and do not walk according to it will be punished. The goal of discipline (*“reproof”*) is correction so that the one who once rejected God's ways will return to them. One who *“hates reproof”* will continue on the path that leads away from life and, without an appropriate change of direction, will eventually face *death* – not physical death (which we must all face) but eternal separation from God.

Related passages: Proverbs 19:27; 26:3; 29:1.

* * *

The passages we have noticed so far on the topic of *discipline* have had to do with *receiving* discipline. But what if we are the ones needing to exercise discipline and reprove others? The book of Proverbs contains instructions that teach us how we are to administer discipline and warns us of how it will often be received.

“He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, and he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself. Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you, reprove a wise man and he will love you” (9:7-8).

The dishonor one receives when he corrects a scoffer is from the scoffer himself. He is not interested in learning the way of wisdom. He simply wants to do what seems right to him. Therefore, if one tries to correct him, *“he will hate you.”* Elsewhere it says, *“A scoffer does not love one who reproves him, he will not go to the*

wise" (15:12). Rather than responding with gratitude, as the wise man will, the scoffer will respond with *insults* directed toward the one attempting to correct him. One must have a thick skin if he is going to correct others, or else he will soon abandon his attempts.

Related passages: Proverbs 16:22; 17:10; 27:22.

"Strike a scoffer and the naive may become shrewd, but reprove one who has understanding and he will gain knowledge" (19:25).

From the earlier passages, it may seem as though the discipline of fools is pointless. If they will not listen and correct their ways, why bother trying to correct them at all? The answer is found in this verse. When a person "*strike[s] a scoffer,*" though one may be dishonored, insulted, and hated (9:7-8), others may be helped by one's efforts. Though the scoffer may not change, "*the naive*" who witness your efforts may learn the lesson that was intended for the one receiving the discipline. As a result, he may become *shrewd* or *wise* (cf. 21:11).

"He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue" (28:23).

This is another passage that reminds us that it is better to try to correct someone than not, even if we risk the insults and hatred that sometimes come from one who rejects discipline. Flattering the one who needs to change does nothing to help them. Rebuking him may result in insults and hatred (9:7-8). Or it could lead him to "*love you*" (9:8) as he learns the way of wisdom. "*Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed*" (27:5). Better to rebuke someone on the chance that he will repent than to flatter him and thus provide implicit encouragement for him to remain in his sin.

Questions on Lesson 3

1. What is the beginning of wisdom (9:10)? Why?
2. Why is listening necessary for one to obtain wisdom?
3. What does 9:9 say about the ongoing process of acquiring wisdom?
4. Why does the scoffer not find wisdom when he seeks for it (14:6)?
5. Why did Agur say he was “*more stupid than any man*” (30:2)?
6. Why does the Lord reprove His people (3:11-12; cf. Hebrews 12:5-11)?
7. Though reproofing a scoffer may seem futile (9:7-8), why is it still necessary (19:25)?

The Application of Wisdom

It is absolutely essential that we recognize the *appeal* of wisdom. Once we know that Wisdom is calling to us, we must learn to *appreciate* wisdom so that we have a reason to pay attention to her appeals. Understanding this, we then need to work toward *acquiring* wisdom. But all of this is futile if, after we do all to *acquire* it, we do not *apply* wisdom.

The bulk of the book of Proverbs, and the majority of our study, focuses on the *application* of wisdom. When God reveals His wisdom, man is not to pursue it merely out of intellectual curiosity. God expects us to put what we learn into practice.

“Every prudent man acts with knowledge, but a fool displays folly” (13:16).

A “*prudent man*” does not merely *possess* knowledge, though he certainly does possess it. He will do more than just *acquire* knowledge. He will *act with knowledge*. The things that he learns will be put on display in his life, just as folly is on display in the life of the fool.

“Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool, and so is wisdom to a man of understanding” (10:23).

The fool is said to *enjoy* practicing wickedness. It is like a sport to him. A contrast is made between the fool and the man of understanding. The fool enjoys “*doing wickedness*.” Though “*doing*” is not explicitly stated in regard to wisdom, the contrast implies it. Just as the fool enjoys “*doing wickedness*,” the man of understanding enjoys *doing* that which is wise.

“A plan in the heart of a man is like deep water, but a man of understanding draws it out” (20:5).

Water that is at the bottom of a deep well has the *potential* to do good, but only when one does what is necessary to draw it out is it actually helpful to him. In the same way, having plans and intentions to do good and act with wisdom only have the *potential* of doing good. One who has learned the truth has the capacity to act

with wisdom. But he must draw it out of his heart (mind) so that it is manifested in his actions. Only then will wisdom actually benefit the one who possesses it.

“Like a dog returns to its vomit is a fool who repeats his folly” (26:11).

One who will repeatedly go back to his sin and walk in foolishness is like the dog with its ignorant and disgusting behavior. There is no benefit for returning to one's foolish ways. If one had sense, he would be repulsed by the thought of returning to his folly. But the fool, like the dog who returns to its vomit, keeps going back to his sin. The instructions given in the book of Proverbs are not just for us to learn what is expected of us. They are written so that we might forsake our sin and follow after righteousness.

So as we seek to *apply* wisdom, there are several topics which we will discuss as we move through our study. We will not cover every in the book of Proverbs in our study. But we will examine the major topics as we learn more about the *application* of wisdom.

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