

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for Jan. 4: The beginning of wisdom is a fear of the Lord 122203

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The beginning of wisdom is a fear of the Lord

- ◆ *Proverbs 1:1-19*

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We live by proverbs. One man speaks to his son, "If the shoe fits, wear it." A businessman says, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." A coach says, "Don't count your chickens before they hatch." A police detective says, "Where there's smoke there's fire." In Texas, a wise person says, "Don't squat with your spurs on."

We live by proverbial wisdom-short sayings that provide meaning for everyday circumstances like raising children, running a business to make money, trying to keep a team from overconfidence during a winning streak, solving crimes or the plain use of common sense. Proverbial wisdom,

biblically, moves beyond common sense to insight for living gained from a personal knowledge of God. The Book of Proverbs supplies practical wisdom from God for daily living in real circumstances.

Knowledge of God

Wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7). Fools despise wisdom and instruction. The starting line for wisdom is the fear of God. When God says, “Let's go!” He invites the follower of Christ to gain a personal knowledge of God's ways.



What two kinds of knowledge does Proverbs offer? One, the writer mentions a wisdom that comes from above (James 1:5; 3:17-18). Two, he also identifies instruction that leads to good and godly choices in the daily realities of life like work, marriage, school, relationships, and in private thoughts and personal actions.

J.I. Packer, in his classic work, “Knowing God” asks, “What were we made for? To know God.” Packer also adds, “Knowing God is a relationship calculated to thrill a person's heart.”

When a person knows God, he or she will perceive truth in understanding of God's ways and also will receive instruction (Proverbs 1:2-3). The writer of Proverbs considers the person who is wise in God's wisdom as one who will listen to God and the counsel of others (v. 5). The wise person grows and learns. The wise person sees God at work in his or her heart, in the lives of others and in the world. As poet Gerard Manley Hopkins says, “The world is charged with the grandeur of God.” The wise person acknowledges and sees God's grandeur in daily life.

Wisdom excels

Who will the wise person listen to and hear? Obviously, the echo of Proverbs is that God speaks and his people listen. Wisdom is not philosophical chin stroking and ponderous thoughts about deep things in life. Rather, wisdom inspires godly action. Sons and daughters listen to their God-honoring parents (v. 8). A listening heart responds to life in ways that honor God. Wisdom adorns the head with grace and creates an inner beauty (v. 9). The Greek Septuagint labels such adornment as a “stephanos crown,” or “the victor's crown of grace.” God's grace produces both the wisdom and the victory.

Still, the writer of Proverbs is not spinning homespun wisdom; he yearns for people to follow God in his ways. To know God requires two key intentional actions in life: (1) the ability not to cast off or abandon wise instruction from godly people and (2) the discipline to hear, understand, discern and apply wisdom to every facet of daily life.

As one street-wise person said, “God did not make no junk, but you can't junk the wisdom of God if you will become all God wants!” Wisdom excels the world's wisdom in that it possesses a depth and richness that shapes the heart, soul and mind, unifying them for one purpose, that is, to glorify God. What actions glorify God? God is glorified when people practice justice, make good choices and treat people honestly and with dignity (v. 3).

Wisdom adorns and adapts

Wisdom adorns the soul like a crown or a golden chain around the neck (v. 9). Wisdom also adapts to circumstances and situations that arise in daily life. Sinners may entice you with bait to grab their every plan hook-line-and-sinker (v. 10). Sinners may stand at the gate and invite you to join their

sins like murder or theft (vv. 10-12). Sinners may talk a game of joining the party (v. 14).

Wisdom prepares the heart for such a moment. God's instruction changes the heart. God's wisdom supplies the soul with strength. God's grace adorns the mind with spiritual knowledge. When sinners call, wisdom works God's power and plan, thus giving the servant of God the ample supply for facing and resisting sin's temptation.

Sinners say, "Come! Look! Sin!" Sinners advertise more than they can deliver. God in his supply of wisdom says, "Do not walk with sinners or in their paths" (v. 15). God's wisdom urges the servant of God to flee temptation and sin (v. 16). God's wisdom warns of the hidden trap into which sin can lead a person.

The trap is like a hunter's trap for catching birds (v. 17). God says, "Flee, fly, but do not frolic with temptation, sin, or sinners who aim to trap you and devour you like a bird!" Wisdom warns but also reminds the listener, "To refuse God's wisdom is to invite personal pain, trouble difficult to escape (like a trap), and a soul diminished in the abundant life Christ offers" (vv. 18-19). Ultimately, Jesus came to give you an abundant life filled with his wisdom.

Questions for discussion

- ◆ What proverbs do you find yourself quoting?
- ◆ Who personifies wisdom for you?