

Family Bible Series for Nov. 20: Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom

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Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom

- Job 28:12-19; 23-28

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Regardless of the question, there is sure to be no shortage of answers offered. This is true whether the discussion is about the strengths and weaknesses of the local sports team or the deeper issues of the meaning of life itself.

Human history is littered with a host of religions and philosophies that have sought to answer life's most challenging and universal questions. The search clearly was important to the writers of the biblical texts and especially to the writer of the book of Job.

This writer was careful to lay out a number of answers which the conventional wisdom of his day gave to answer the question of why there is

suffering in the world, especially among apparently good people. These answers relied heavily on human reason, tradition and sense of justice. In the pages of Job, each of these is shown not to apply in Job's situation, and the writer seeks to demonstrate that truthful answers to these questions are found only as one turns to God and earnestly seeks God's wisdom.



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Job 28:12-14

What is wisdom? How is it related to knowledge? Can a person have one without the other? Many today might well think that there is a close relationship between knowledge and wisdom. Yet Job teaches the quest for knowledge and understanding of the world does not necessarily lead one to the attainment of wisdom.

In Job 28:1-11, he briefly describes the efforts of humanity to understand the world and refers to several discoveries and accomplishments to which those efforts have led. Humanity has discovered how to light their way in darkness by using fire. Human beings have discovered how to get precious metals and gemstones out of the earth. They have learned how to control the flow of rivers by building dams and channels. They have reached into the ground where even the birds and beasts of the earth have never been in order to level the ground for houses and gardens.

Yet according to verse 12, all of these efforts have not led humanity any closer to the place where real wisdom resides. Thus, Job concludes that

wisdom is indeed very hard to find. It is so difficult to find, humanity does not even know how to place a proper value on it. It does not exist within the land of the living nor in the mythical world of the great abyss. While it is perhaps one of the things that humanity has most eagerly sought, it also is the rarest of all commodities and one which humanity cannot attain just by seeking it.

One can certainly see this today. Even though humanity has acquired a vast knowledge of the cosmos, the answers to fundamental questions of daily life such as how we can live in a world free of war, injustice and hunger have evaded us.

Job 28:15-19

Not only is wisdom hard to find, but it also is impossible to assign a value to it. Job offers a catalog of all of the things humanity considers most valuable. The writer here points to an inherent characteristic of humanity. If our personal physical or mental efforts fail to bring us wisdom, we attempt to buy it.

This particularly is true in the United States, where almost everything seems to be for sale. If there is something that you want, so we are told, all you need to do is offer the right price, and it can be yours, whatever “it” happens to be. Yet here, pure gold and gems are presented as pale and completely insufficient to exchange for wisdom. No amount of money can be offered as a purchase price. Wisdom simply is not for sale.

Job 28:23-28

So the question is, “Where and how can one obtain wisdom” (vv. 20-22)? If

it does not reside in the physical world and cannot be attained through human efforts or financial exchange, is humanity forced to live a life in a futile quest? In verses 23-28, Job very clearly says, “No, wisdom is available to humanity, but only as a gift of God.”

Only God has a broad enough view of creation to see the place where wisdom resides. God indeed has used wisdom in creation. The reality and nature of wisdom is seen in the most common aspects of daily life, such as the wind and rain. In wisdom, God controlled the depth of the seas and established the natural patterns of weather. Because of the greatness of God’s demonstration of wisdom in creation, only through a reverent fear of God can humanity begin to understand the meaning of wisdom.

Only when humanity gives up their evil nature that exalts achievement and wealth will humanity attain real understanding. Solomon may have understood this. In 1 Kings 3, God offered Solomon anything he wished for. He could have asked for infinite wealth or guaranteed military success as a means of being a great king. Yet knowing he could work to attain these, he asked for that which he could not obtain on his own.

Through the exercise of the divine gift of wisdom, Solomon was able to govern his people effectively and obtain great wealth and success. May we all learn this lesson from Job and Solomon; “the fear of the Lord of the beginning of wisdom.”

Discussion questions

- What is your definition of “wisdom”?
- Other than those mentioned in Job 28, what ways do we often seek wisdom?

- In what specific areas of life do you need wisdom? How are you trying to obtain it?

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