

# Explore the Bible: Pursuing Wisdom

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- *The Explore the Bible Lesson for July 12 focuses on Proverbs 8:6-21.*

It's a cliché, almost cartoonish image: the hero has gone on an extensive quest to seek out instruction from a legendary master. Perhaps the hero has had to climb a great mountain, navigate a dark cave, or go through some other extensive series of trials in order to gain an audience with this legendary master.

This cliché from the world of fiction is based on a cultural trope that true wisdom, mastery, knowledge and enlightenment come at the end of a long quest. You have to invest serious time, effort and even money into an extensive process of finding that which you seek.

In some ways, the Bible presents a similar story. Wisdom is not simply dumped on you all at once; it requires a process of discernment and growth. But unlike how much of popular culture depicts the quest for wisdom, the Bible does not present wisdom as something constantly being held just out of grasp. Rather, the Bible presents wisdom as a gift God will happily give us. All we must do is ask.

Proverbs 8 presents divine wisdom through the literary device of *personification*. Proverbs presents Wisdom as a woman prepared to offer instruction and guidance for those who will seek her diligently.

## The Integrity of Wisdom

Lady Wisdom claims that everything she says is true. She speaks no lies or

wickedness. Those who listen to what she has to say will not be led astray (8:6-9).

For those of us living in an era of misinformation and fake news, the promises of Lady Wisdom come as an encouragement. While disinformation and outright lies have been a fixture of human experience since our fall into sin, the advent of the internet and social media seems to have cranked falsehood production into overdrive.

Everywhere you look, someone is putting forward information claiming to be “the truth,” whether it’s media figures, conspiracy theorist internet forums, or random dudes recording YouTube videos in their trucks. Combing through this 24-hour deluge of information is exhausting and nerve-wracking. What is true? What is false? Who can I trust?

While the book of Proverbs cannot promise an easy or quick solution to this quandary, chapter 8 sounds a note of hope. Lady Wisdom, who is God’s wisdom personified, stands as a bastion of truth in a world beset by half-truths and lies. God alone is the perfect and infallible source of truth, and those who seek truth from him will not be led astray.

## **The Superiority of Wisdom**

The next two verses make a brief but profound statement: “Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her” (8:10-11).

Here Lady Wisdom contrasts her own value with the value of money and precious stones. This contrast may not land for some people. The accrual of wealth is a major driving force in much of modern society, and many folks are willing to let truth slide just a bit—or outright lie—in order to maximize their profits.

But Lady Wisdom makes clear that truth and wisdom, which come from God, are far superior to any earthly wealth. God's truth and wisdom will endure for eternity. But earthly wealth will not last.

## **The Characteristics of Wisdom**

Verses 12 through 21 highlight the various characteristics of Lady Wisdom. Many of these have been covered either in previous lessons or in this lesson today. However, one point in particular is especially relevant: Lady Wisdom provides "decrees that are just" to rulers who seek her (8:15) and provides guidance to "princes... and nobles—all who rule on the earth" (8:16).

While it always is important for human authorities to seek wisdom, such a matter may seem especially pressing in our current cultural moment in the United States. The Supreme Court has recently handed down some controversial decisions. We are approaching an election in November while our current president is very polarizing. The world is in the midst of a deadly pandemic, which our leaders have struggled to address. Racial injustice and the resulting tensions currently burn hot.

Christians are not obligated to give unquestioning support to our political leaders, especially in a democratic society where we have direct control over the political process. Christians are, however, obligated to pray for our leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

One prayer we can offer on behalf of "all who rule on the earth," especially on behalf of those who are responsible for us specifically, is a prayer for wisdom. Even leaders whom we consider to be wicked and foolish are not exempt. If we think a ruler is wicked, we can pray for his or her repentance. If we think a ruler is foolish, we can pray that God would grant him or her wisdom.

But even as we pray in this way for our leaders, we can take hope knowing

there is one over them all, a King of kings and Lord of lords who is in control: Jesus Christ. We can take hope knowing that every last one of his decrees is just, and we can take hope knowing that one day he will return to set all things right.

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