

LEARN WISDOM'S BENEFITS

Proverbs 2:1-3:8

In a sense, the Book of Proverbs is a textbook for parents to use to teach their children the basics of how to live successful lives and avoid getting into trouble that could ruin their lives. As a consequence, the guiding principles of what to do and what to avoid are simplified so that they can be easily remembered. One of the tools Solomon used was the personification of Wisdom and Folly. These were presented as alternatives of companions that a young person could choose to be associated with. Many of the principles taught are presented as contrasts of the way of wisdom and the way of foolishness.

A good sales person knows that one of the best ways to get someone to buy what he or she is selling is to present the benefits. Then the product or service will essentially sell itself. So, what are the benefits of following after and being associated with Wisdom? The list of benefits starts with security and protection. They include discernment and guidance, right relationships and wholeness. From this list we could come up with Maslow's hierarchy of needs that gives insight into what motivates human behavior.

The first chapter of Proverbs concluded with the introduction of the personified character of Wisdom. The last verse is an appeal from Wisdom to listen to her message which yields the benefits of security and freedom from the dread of evil.

The Pursuit of Wisdom – 2:1-5

¹ My son, if you will receive my words And treasure my commandments within you, ² Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding; ³ For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; ⁴ If you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures; ⁵ Then you will discern the fear of the LORD And discover the knowledge of God. Proverbs 2:1-5 (NASB95)

It is true that many things “just happen.” Many people are floating or drifting through life and just taking whatever happens and coping with it. Is that a desirable way to live and will that produce a desirable outcome for a person's life? What comes to your mind if a person is described as a “drifter?” It is not very positive.

Solomon's message to young people (as well as to us) is that we need to seek wisdom and pursue it. It starts with receiving (literally accepting and taking possession of) the advice of those who already have an association with wisdom. This acceptance and taking possession will be for naught if the words of the wise are not valued. Most of us have a lot of stuff that we have as our possessions but not all of these things are of equally valued.

The way to put value on sage advice is to give it attention by listening carefully and getting our inner most being involved by letting such information influence what we actually do. If we just hear good advice or a wise saying and don't give it any serious thought about how to actually put it into practice, then it is like so many of our physical possessions that just set on a shelf and gather dust. Such things are of little or no practical value other than decoration.

How does all this come about? Is this something that “just happens?” Not according to Solomon. It needs to be a goal or objective in our lives. Some people collect things as a hobby. It may be something like Hummels, or rare stamps, or first edition books. When these collectors go places, they are likely to be on the lookout for whatever it is they collect. They may even ask businesses if they have whatever they are looking for. The same kind of focus is needed in our pursuit of wisdom. If we are determined to be wise, then we will be likely to look for it and even ask others to share their wisdom with you. This is what “crying out for discernment” and “speaking out for understanding” is all about.

In describing the Kingdom of God, Jesus used the picture presented in verse five as a way to help people understand what is meant by the kingdom and how we are to seek it. It is like something valuable that is to be discovered by looking for it as a priority in life. The benefit of pursuing wisdom by deliberate purpose is that we will be able to understand or have a proper perspective of how we are to relate to God (in reverence) because we will come to know His character (discover the knowledge of God). If we put this in context of what Jesus said and was recorded in John 17:3 (*Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent*), then we find a gospel-like message in these Old Testament verses.

The Source and Benefit – 2:6-8

⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth *come* knowledge and understanding. ⁷ He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; *He is* a shield to those who walk in integrity, ⁸ Guarding the paths of justice, And He preserves the way of His godly ones. Proverbs 2:6-8 (NASB95)

If we were looking for antiques, then we would not waste our time looking for them in Costco or Wal-Mart. It helps to know where to look by knowing the source. Solomon has saved us a lot of time by pointing out the Source of wisdom. It comes from Jehovah. In a parallel statement in the second part of verse six we discover how He gives wisdom. God's words provide knowledge and understanding which are related to the idea of wisdom which could be said to be the proper application of knowledge that comes from understanding the principles of life.

In God's word we find substance (literally abiding success or victory) that is stored for those who are righteous. We have learned from Hebrews 11:1 that faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. In God's word we find the essence of faith that is a shield for those who have integrity that is true to Godly principles. This shield of faith will keep us on the right paths in life and provides protection for those who will exercise their integrity by being faithful to those precepts that God has stored up for us in His word.

Practical Protection in Life – 2:9-19

⁹ Then you will discern righteousness and justice And equity *and* every good course. ¹⁰ For wisdom will enter your heart And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; ¹¹ Discretion will guard you, Understanding will watch over you, ¹² To deliver you from the way of evil, From the man who speaks perverse things; ¹³ From those who leave the paths of uprightness To walk in the ways of darkness; ¹⁴ Who delight in doing evil And rejoice in the perversity of evil; ¹⁵ Whose paths are crooked, And who are devious in their ways; ¹⁶ To deliver you from the strange woman, From the adulteress who flatters with her words; ¹⁷ That leaves the companion of her youth And forgets the covenant of her God; ¹⁸ For her house sinks down to death And her tracks *lead* to the dead; ¹⁹ None who go to her return again, Nor do they reach the paths of life. Proverbs 2:9-15 (NASB95)

The outcome of accepting and owning the wisdom that God gives us in His word will make a significant difference in our lives. If we walk in the truth of the first four verses of this chapter, then we benefit from knowing God. That knowledge is accomplished by that which God gives us in His word (verses 6-8). The second benefit of accepting and owning the wisdom that God gives is that we will be able to recognize what is righteous and just. In other words we will know how to treat people fairly and choose a proper and right course of action for things in which we are involved.

In verse six, we learned that God gives wisdom and in verse ten we learn that the wisdom He gives us is to become a part of our very makeup. As that transformation occurs, then we can expect to enjoy learning and growing in our knowledge and understanding. Many people do not spend much time or effort learning new things or deepening their understanding since it is seen

as a chore rather than something they like to do.

As we increase in our knowledge and understanding that is firmly grounded in the principles of God's kingdom, then being able to apply that wisdom will keep us out of problems and difficult experiences in two areas. The first is from men who are perverse and the second is from women who have no sense of common morality.

By doing what we know to be right and just and kind and generous will save a lot of grief and eliminate to the need to apologize and make restitution. It is a lot easier to **stay** out of trouble rather than **get** out of trouble. This is not to say that we will never have trouble or problems. There are enough such situations that we cannot avoid in the course of living, but we do not need to create our own troubles and problems by inappropriate actions.

We only have to look around at what happens to people who ignore God's way and His commandments. Their lives become immensely complicated and convoluted and literally ruined by poor choices. Many times those who wind up in such situations did not delight in learning knowledge and acquiring understanding but delighted in doing what was absolutely wrong. They found pleasure in perversity. They might do things simply because those things were prohibited.

The personified contrast to Lady Wisdom is Ms. Folly and she is no lady! The picture that Solomon painted of this person is that she is a person of mystery that is outside of the main stream of common decency. She is a person who will tell you what she thinks you want to hear (flattery) and someone with no loyalty to that which has been proven to be right. Those who follow Folly are literally lost and are as good as dead by living such a lifestyle.

There is a way to avoid doing such things to ourselves and that is to listen and heed the words of wisdom or knowledge and understanding that will guard our way and direct us into a lifestyle that perversity is not even a temptation. This is where we are headed as we let wisdom take up residence in our hearts and as the Holy Spirit does His transforming work in our lives. This is what Paul admonished the readers of Romans to do in chapter twelve of that letter where he wrote the following: Be transformed by the renewing of your minds that you may know (experience) that which is good and perfect which is a reasonable expectation for a person who has the Spirit of God dwelling in them.

Contrast of Wisdom and Folly – 2:20-22

²⁰ So you will walk in the way of good men And keep to the paths of the righteous. ²¹ For the upright will live in the land And the blameless will remain in it; ²² But the wicked will be cut off from the land And the treacherous will be uprooted from it. Proverbs 2:20-22 (NASB95)

To put these verses into their context we look back to verse eleven where we see that “Discretion will guard you, Understanding will watch over you.” Not only are we delivered from perverse men and wanton women, but we are led to live lives that produce behaviors that are proven to be pleasing to God. Solomon called such behavior the “way of good men” and the “paths of righteousness.” These three verses could be summary statements for the message (chapter 28 of Deuteronomy) that Moses delivered to the Israelites as they were preparing to enter the Promised Land. Basically, this message is “If we obey we are blessed and if we rebel then we experience failure.”

Our Response and Reward – 3:1-8

¹ My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; ² For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you. ³ Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴ So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man. ⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He

will make your paths straight. ⁷Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. ⁸It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones. Proverbs 3:1-8 (NASB95)

In Chapter two we examined the general benefits of walking in the way of wisdom and avoiding the pathways of folly. In this chapter we find some specific responsibilities and related rewards. The first responsibility is related to being diligent to remember the basic principles of righteous living. What can we do to keep from forgetting the things we have learned? In today vernacular we might say that we need to take these ideas “to heart.” In other words we need to incorporate the ideas into the way we process information and put them in practice when the opportunities arise. If we needed a “wise saying” to sum up this concept, it might be “use it or lose it.”

The long-term reward is that the peace of mind that comes from having done the right things and avoiding the stress of feelings of guilt that comes along with wrong choices. Such peace of mind is beneficial to our emotional and physical health and results in living longer. We all have physical vulnerabilities resulting from our genetic makeup and stress can exacerbate the effects of these.

Solomon emphasized two important aspects of Godly principles that we must not neglect. The first is kindness and the second is truth. These are so important to having good interpersonal relationships that we need to take extra precautions to hold tightly to these virtues. The word picture he presents is to tie truth and kindness around your neck. If something is tied around our necks, then the removal of whatever it is would certainly get our attention or might literally cut off our breath. We could make an argument that operating from principles of truth and kindness is as important as our next breath.

The other word picture is that of writing these virtues or qualities on the tablet of our hearts. This is the same as saying these characteristics are to be an integral part of our very being. We should not have to make a decision of whether or not we are going to be kind or if we are going to tell the truth.

The long-term rewards in this case are favor and a good reputation in the eyes of God and people who know us. This is the status that Job had. He was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. It doesn't get a lot better than that.

In addition to remembering, we must not go down the pathway of deciding for ourselves what is right and what is wrong. As Christians, we have the Holy Spirit and the word of God to provide all the guidance we need. The result is the reward of a “straight path” in life. Life is complicated enough without our making it worse by getting off the road of righteousness and getting lost in the woods or wilderness where there are no markers and road signs.

The final warning we see is to avoid pride that would cause us to think that we might know a way that is better than what God has given us. If we honor and respect God, we will show that by obedience to His commandments and by walking in His ways. The rewards are healing and refreshment to us physically, emotionally, and spiritually.