
My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. 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 watching over the way of his saints.

(Proverbs 2:1–8)

Introduction

When I was a kid, there was a series of highly popular role-playing video games, known collectively as the *Quest* games: *Dragon Quest*; *King's Quest*; *Space Quest*; *Police Quest*; *Hero's Quest* (*Quest for Glory*); etc. The player would take the role of the protagonist, who was required to complete various tasks in order to reach a certain goal.

In *King's Quest*, for example, the player assumed the role of Sir Graham, who must save the kingdom of Daventry and ultimately ascend to the throne as king. In *Space Quest*, the player was Roger Wilco, a member of the cleaning crew aboard a scientific spaceship that was hijacked by a sinister alien race. Roger must escape the ship, complete a series of tasks on a nearby planet, and then return to the ship to self-destruct a powerful weapon, destroying the ship and its alien invaders.

In each game, the player is introduced to the character and given an end goal. Along the way, he must complete tasks and missions in pursuit of that goal. The quest is complete only once the player has put in the hard yards and reached the stated goal.

Proverbs 2 can be titled “Wisdom Quest.” In this chapter, we are reminded that wisdom is the reader’s goal—the treasure for which he must search. But, as with any quest, the treasure does not thrust itself upon the quester apart from hard work. Yes, Yahweh is a God who gives wisdom generously to all who ask (James 1:5), but this chapter reveals that this does not happen by osmosis, but through the hard work of mining for it.

Searching for Wisdom

When Christians are faced with difficult decisions, one of the promises that they often turn to is that found in James 1:5: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” That is a glorious promise, and one to which we should cling tenaciously.

Proverbs 2, however, shows that the promise of wisdom is *conditional*. “The LORD gives wisdom” (v. 6), yes, but he does so “if” those seeking wisdom do certain things (vv. 1, 3, 4). Only “then” (vv. 5, 9) can the quester enjoy the treasure he seeks.

According to vv. 1–5, wisdom is given to two kinds of people.

The Receptive

First, wisdom is given to those who are receptive: “My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding” (vv. 1–2).

The father’s plea to his son here is to “receive my words” —to be receptive to the wisdom he has to offer. “My words,” “my commandments,” “wisdom” and “understanding” are all synonyms for the wisdom that the father is promoting. This wisdom is promised to those who will “receive” it. How do you make yourself receptive to wisdom? Our text suggests three ways.

First, the receptive must *love* wisdom: They must “treasure” it. The idea behind “treasure” is that of *hoarding* something. Hoarding is considered by therapists to be a clinical condition. Some cases of hoarding are bizarre, like the Florida woman who kept her mother’s remains in a storage unit for sixteen years until she was able to transport the remains back to Alabama where her mother was born. (As it turns out, the storage unit was eventually repossessed for unpaid rental fees, at which time the remains were discovered. The deceased’s granddaughter ultimately took the responsibility to bury the remains.)

If you’ve met a hoarder, you know the mentality. They just *must* keep such-and-such a useless item “because you never know when someone might need it.” Most people can see the folly in hoarding, but Solomon urges his son to hoard wisdom—because he never knows when he might need it! As “the LORD stores up sound wisdom for the upright” (v. 7), so the quester must hoard wisdom for himself.

The wisdom that we glean from Scripture is not always wisdom that is immediately applied. Part of the goal of immersing yourself in God’s wisdom is so that you can hoard it for when you need it. In the *Quest* video games, the player finds items along the way. He must keep those items in his inventory, because certain tasks will require certain items, which are often found much earlier in the game. Likewise, we encounter many situations in life that require divine wisdom. One of the missions in *Wisdom Quest* is to store up nuggets of wisdom so that they are available to the quester when he needs them.

Second, the receptive must *listen to* wisdom: They must be “attentive” to it. They must be eager to listen to those who are wise. It is easy for us to think that we have all the answers

and that there is no need for us to listen to others. (This is perhaps a particular challenge when we are younger!) Solomon suggests that that is the way of folly. Those who desire God's wisdom must be willing to hear it from others. We must attune our ears when others speak to listen for nuggets of wisdom. We must, to quote James again, be "quick to hear, slow to speak" (James 1:19).

Are your ears attuned to the voice of wisdom? Do you always have to speak in order to disperse wisdom, or are you eager to receive wisdom from others? Do you surround yourself with those who are wise and are able to speak wisdom to you? Do you recognise that *everyone* who has the Spirit of God has some level of wise insight? Are you willing to hear wisdom from them?

Third, the receptive must *live by* wisdom, "inclining [their] heart" to it. They must not casually listen to counsel given to them and then quickly forget or ignore it. Instead, they must apply themselves to it. They must work hard to ensure that they live by the wisdom they have received.

When others speak wisdom into your life, do you live by it? Do you act on the wise counsel that others give you, or do you hear it and then quickly forget it? Are you like the proverbial man who looks into the mirror, but then forgets what he looks like as soon as he walks away? Do you allow the wisdom of others to *actually* change the way you behave?

In summary, it is imperative that those who would receive divine wisdom place themselves in a position to receive it. They must so value divine wisdom that they seek to hear it and live by it.

The greatest example of this attitude was the Lord Jesus Christ. We see this in the account of twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went

down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man.

(Luke 2:41–52)

We all know that “Jesus increased in wisdom.” But let’s not forget the process by which he did so.

His parents made the annual trip to Jerusalem at Passover. That particular year, he was left behind when they returned home. They realised along the way that he was not with them and returned to Jerusalem to search for him. And where did they find him? In his quest for the wisdom he so treasured, he was found where wisdom could be found: “in the temple.” Specifically, he was found “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.” As a twelve-year-old boy, he wasn’t there primarily to teach, but to learn. He was listening and asking questions – making his ear attentive to wisdom. And when he heard it, he inclined his heart to obey it. He returned with his parents to Nazareth “and was submissive to them” – one area of wisdom that the Bible directly addresses (see Proverbs 13:1; 19:27; 23:22–25; etc.). Because of his commitment to wisdom, he “increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man.”

To love wisdom, to listen to wisdom, and to live by wisdom is to display character that is consistently Christlike.

The Resolved

Second, wisdom is granted by God to those who are deliberately resolved to acquire it: “Yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God” (vv. 3–5).

As noted above, wisdom is not given by osmosis. We must be diligently and deliberately resolved to search for it. There are two ways here that display diligent resolve to search for wisdom.

First, we must ask for wisdom in prayer: “call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding.” Prayer is crucial to biblical wisdom—but prayer can be hard work! If we are not deliberate and intentional about prayer, it probably will not happen. If you wait until you have nothing “better” to do than pray, you likely will not pray much. Something “better” will always present itself. You must be deliberate in setting aside other things in order to devote yourself to prayer.

According to Acts 6, the apostles recognised that they could not allow the important work of serving tables to distract them from prayer, and so they appointed others to serve tables in order to free them up for prayer. They did not consider the daily distribution to be unimportant. It needed to be done. But they also would not leave aside prayer in order to do the daily distribution. They prioritised prayer and so made plans for the important work of the daily distribution to be done while they focused on prayer.

There are sometimes things—even good and noble things—that we must say no to in order to devote ourselves to the more important work of prayer. Do you need sleep? You need prayer more! Do you need an exercise routine? You need prayer more! Do you need to get an early start on the overwhelming tasks that are set before you today? You need prayer more! If you do not prioritise prayer, you will not receive the wisdom of God.

Second, we must search for wisdom in God’s word: “seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures.” Wisdom, like “silver” and like “hidden treasures,” must be mined. And the mine from which wisdom is primarily extracted is the word of God.

We can pray all day for wisdom, but if we do not dig into the scriptures to search for it, we will not find it. We cannot expect God to fill our head with truth if we are not willing to read truth. Like mining for silver, this is no easy task, but it is a task to which we must give ourselves if we will receive the wisdom of God.

Those who are not committed to the hard work of mining wisdom will live foolishly. But for those who *are* committed to this hard work, there is a wonderful promise: “You will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.”

Once again, we see this hard work exemplified in the Lord Jesus Christ. He would often “withdraw to desolate places and pray” (Luke 5:16). After a tiring day of healing people, Jesus awoke “very early in the morning, while it was still dark” and “went out to a desolate place” where he “prayed” (Mark 1:35). After a time of teaching, he took leave of his disciples and “went up on the mountain to pray” (Mark 6:46).

Jesus was as much a man of the word as he was of prayer. He, of course, didn’t have his own leather-bound copy of the Bible to read every day, but his ability to quote Scripture by memory and apply biblical truth to any situation shows that he spent much time reflecting on God’s truth. He lived wisely because he mined deeply.

Securing Wisdom

Those who search for wisdom in the way described above are given a glorious promise: “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 watching over the way of his saints” (Proverbs 2:6–8).

Do you remember what James said? “God ... gives [wisdom] generously to all without reproach” (James 1:5). Solomon delivers the same promise here.

“The LORD gives wisdom” –not to those who do not search for it, but to those who are diligent to mine deeply for it. “Knowledge and understanding” ultimately come “from his mouth.” The wisdom that Solomon promotes is godly wisdom, not worldly wisdom. Godly wisdom and worldly wisdom are two very different things. Worldly wisdom is designed to promote selfish interests, or perhaps humanitarian interests. Godly wisdom promotes the glory of God.

“Knowledge and understanding” of God are more than an intellectual grasp of God’s character. To know and understand God is to obey God. As Allen Ross says, “Coupled with the fear of the Lord, this knowledge means that the disciple will follow God’s moral code; for to know God is to react ethically to his will, to follow his principles.” That is why Jesus was submissive to his parents –because of wisdom. Godly wisdom drove him to obedience, and as a child he obeyed his parents.

If you do not live obediently to God, it is because you are foolish. To live wisely is to walk according to God’s precepts; to live foolishly is to defy God’s authority.

The quester must seek divine wisdom from the only source of divine wisdom: God himself. It is the Lord who “stores up” the “sound wisdom” that the quester is seeking. As the quester is looking to hoard wisdom himself, he must go to the store where sound wisdom is hoarded in abundance: the Lord. But that sound wisdom is not stored there for just anyone, but for “the upright.” It is the wisdom that produces obedience that is stored up for those who seek it.

The wisdom that God stores up is wisdom that produces uprightness. To be “upright” is to “walk in integrity.” If your quest is not toward an “upright” life –a life of “integrity” – you have no promise of sound wisdom. The wisdom that Proverbs promotes is not wisdom to answer tough theoretical or theological questions. It is wisdom to live a life of integrity. If you will accept this quest, you must understand what the treasure is: wisdom that produces integrity (as God defines it).

Biblical wisdom cannot be divorced from biblical morality. Those who receive divine wisdom *will* live according to biblical ethics. The Bible is far *more* than a book of ethics, but it is not *less* than that. God does expect his people to live in a certain way –to *do* certain things and to *avoid* certain things –and wisdom is the key to understanding and obeying biblical ethics. As William Plumer said, “The greatest wisdom on this earth is holiness.”

The sound wisdom that God hoards is protective wisdom. God “is a shield to those who walk in integrity” and the sound wisdom that he offers “guard[s] the paths of justice and watch[es] over the way of his saints.” The promise here is not protection from physical harm. It is not a promise that your possessions will never be stolen or destroyed. Material prosperity is not in view here. The protection that is envisaged is laid out in the remainder of the chapter. It is protection from folly – the folly of our own heart (vv. 9–11), the folly of evil men (vv. 12–15), and the folly of the forbidden woman (vv. 16–19). Wisdom promises life to the righteous (vv. 20–21) and death to the foolish (v. 22).

Sound wisdom finds its highest expression in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Spurgeon wrote, “Every man who looks the gospel fairly in the face, and gives it the study it ought to have, will discover that it is no false gospel, but a gospel that is replete with wisdom, and full of the knowledge of Christ.” He poetically noted that there are shallows in the gospel where the lamb may wade, but also depths where Leviathan may swim. The wisdom of the gospel points to the depths of our sin, the danger of God’s wrath, and the deliverance offered in Christ.

It is through the foolishness of the cross that God destroys the wisdom of the wise. The preaching of the cross is the wisdom by which God saves those who believe. Christ crucified is therefore both the wisdom and the power of God. If you want true wisdom, it begins by embracing the gospel, repenting of your sins, and calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus to save you from death and deliver you to eternal life.

Only through the gospel can you “walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous” (v. 20). Without the gospel, you “will be cut off from the land, and ... rooted out of it” (v. 21). Will you believe the gospel, and so be delivered from death to eternal life?

AMEN