



Lesson 2 June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020

## The Value of Wisdom

MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL

Study Scripture – Proverbs 2:1-11

Background Scripture – Genesis 39; Proverbs 2

### Key Verse:

*“The LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.”*

**Proverbs 2:6**

### INTRODUCTION

Let us focus on what Proverbs 2 is all about. But first let us get some background to the Book. We will see how God gives information to us.

Note also that though the instructions are addressed to the “son” they also are meant for “daughters”. The Book makes clear that mothers have a great role also in teaching their children. Sons are told to listen to their mother’s advices.

The Book of Proverbs is the third of the five books in the Old Testament that are often called “wisdom literature.” (The group also includes Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon). When most people think of proverbs in general (not just the biblical ones), they probably call to mind concise statements of truth that are good, general advice for navigating life. “Haste makes waste” and “He who hesitates is lost” are generally true statements, but one can see how these statements might contradict each other.

The Book is named after its principal contributor, Solomon and got its title from the proverbs it contains. The whole book is a book of proverbs and wise sayings, so the title is appropriate. Other authors are also mentioned:

1. There are the thirty sayings of the wise (22:17-24:22) and the further sayings of the wise (24:23-34).
2. In addition, we are told that the men of Hezekiah, apparently scribes, were responsible for copying the section from 25:1-29:27.
3. Augur, son of Jakeh, was responsible for 30:1-33,
4. while King Lemuel wrote 31:1-9.
5. The author of the epilogue (31:10-31) is unknown, unless it too originated in the teachings of King Lemuel's mother.

One writer observed five purposes of the book in the five purposes clauses in chapter 1: 2 - 6:

"To know wisdom and instruction" (teaching and correction, v. 2a)

"To discern the sayings of instruction" (v. 2b)

"To receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice, and equity" (v. 3)

"To give prudence to the naïve, to the youth knowledge and discretion" (shrewdness, circumspection, v. 4)

"To understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles" (v. 6).

"The overall purpose of all these sections [all the sections of the book] is the inculcation of certain cardinal social virtues, such as industry, thrift, discretion, truthfulness, honesty, chastity, kindness, forgiveness, warning against the corresponding vices, and praise of wisdom as the guiding principle of life.

As we look at the purposes of the Book of Proverbs we have to bear in mind that this was advice of a father to a son. This is therefore practical advice on the real, practical issues of life. Note therefore that this advice is designed to help non-Christians as well as Christians for it talks about life as both groups will encounter it. Both groups will find that they are helped by the wisdom in the Book of Proverbs.

Remember that wisdom calls out in the streets, not in the religious community. It is clearly therefore telling us that this is a Book for the world.

Note also that as this father put his arm around his son and talks to him about life this is the beginning of the process of how parents are to help their children to grow up to be adults and mature. The father wants the son to listen to him, be receptive to his words and taking into himself, into his heart, the truths of God.

Parents especially fathers are therefore being told how to work yourself out of a job. For clearly, as the child listens carefully, matures because he or she understands the father's teachings, God will take over completely often without the human intermediary, and the father will have to step out of the way as the Holy Spirit steps up His work and becomes the Guide and teacher.

As we look at a parental priorities do not underestimate the difficulties in carrying out its responsibility. Scripture tells us that folly is bound up in the heart of a child for he or she is by nature part of a fallen race. There is in every child a twist toward evil and this fact must be recognized and met with discipline, training, and correction so that the child understands the limits of life and discover the nature of evil.

We cannot therefore stress too much that love must come into this entire picture and complement the use of discipline, training, and correction. One writer therefore advises and every parent often needs to be reminded of this:

**"That is, as Scripture tells us, every child must be brought up according to *his own way*. Every child is different. God has written a mystery into every child, and the parent must discover that "way". Love does that-- love which gives attention to the child, notes what he likes and dislikes, he reacts, what his disposition and temperament is, and encourages and accept him-- love him.**

**That is not an easy task".**

Note also that Proverbs 2 stresses the protective power of wisdom. It is arranged in a very interesting way to teach that. One writer, Bruce Waltke tells us:



**“Proverbs 2 is a unit to itself. The ‘alphabetic’ poem is a single sentence consisting of 22 verses, matching the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, probably to suggest it's completeness”.**

This book claims to offer wisdom (Heb. *hokmah*) to the reader. The words "wise" and "wisdom" occur about one hundred and twenty-five times in Proverbs. It is this wisdom that the Apostle Paul commanded Christians to walk in (Eph. 5:15).

Unlike western poetry which often feature meter and rhyme words, Hebrew wisdom literature rhymes ideas or thoughts, a style generally called parallelism. This is where two or more lines of text make the same point by using synonyms or near synonyms.

Proverbs are a distinctive genre (type of literature). The Hebrew word translated "proverb" (*masal*) essentially means a comparison. However, through usage it came to mean any profound pronouncement, including maxims, observations, sermons (e.g., Ch. 5), even wisecracks (Ezek. 18:2), and revelations from God (Ps. 49:4). Etymologically, the English word means "in place of (i.e., for) words." A proverb is usually a succinct statement that stands in place of a long explanation and expresses a truth about reality. Proverbs express ideas commonly accepted as true.

The proverb, understood broadly, is a short, pithy saying that offers advice or an observation on the world. One definition is as a 'short familiar saying, expressing some well-known truth or common fact of experience,' and another definition - a proverb is a 'short sentence founded on long experience.

As mentioned above, the English word "proverb" is a translation of the Hebrew word *masal*, meaning resemblance. Proverbs are statements that paint a small word picture of what life is like or should be like. A proverb is a snapshot of life. However, as with every snapshot, a proverb does not always represent what life always looks like. One picture does not capture everything. A good proverb, like a good snapshot, captures what is typical. There are exceptions to the proverbs. They are not always true, but they are usually true. They represent life accurately, but not completely.

Christians sometimes take the proverbs to be promises. Some are promises as well as proverbs, when the proverb expresses a truth that is *always* consistent, but it is important to be able to distinguish a proverb from a promise. Promises are straightforward statements of assurance that guarantee that stated effects will inevitably follow. Some promises are conditional, and others are unconditional. Proverbs and promises are really different forms of expression, and different types of literature.

Some mistakenly treat the proverbs as promises; as 100% strict laws or infallible promises when they should be understood as universal but not inflexible principles. The proverbs in Solomon's collection are not promises made by God, but are guides which are to direct people in living successful and productive lives. For example Proverbs 3:5-6 is a proverb and it also expresses what God promises elsewhere in His Word (Gal. 5:16). This means that interpreting the proverbs accurately requires some knowledge of what God has promised elsewhere in



Scripture. One relevant question that should be asked is "is this a promise elsewhere in Scripture?" If so, the proverb expresses an observation that is consistently true. We might say that some proverbs have a higher degree of accuracy than others.

The proverbs do not claim to be one hundred percent reliable. They only claim to be a safe guide to what usually happens. They are snapshots of life, not statements claiming to reflect what life always looks like; they are a safe guide, because they express what usually happens in life.

**“Proverbs itself makes this clear. A proverb is not a magical formula, bringing wisdom and blessing by incantation: ‘Like a lame man's leg, which hangs useless, is a proverb in the mouth of fools. (Proverbs 26:7)’”.**

The Book of Proverbs is a unique collection of statements in its theological teaching as it is concerned with practical wisdom, how to live successfully in the sight of God, more than ideas about God and the work of salvation. Importantly, true wisdom is inextricably linked to God's revelation;

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; (Prov. 1:7).*

The fear of the Lord is the controlling principle, the foundation, on which one must build a life of wisdom. It is "the first step to the attainment of knowledge."

Note also as we read that the home is where all of this is to begin. Parents have the priority and responsibility for their children's upbringing above all other persons. They must accordingly prepare themselves. They have the responsibility to teach and so we will look at what the Scripture says about the child and what every parent ought to know.

Chapter two is a discussion almost like a sermon that sets forth the blessings that wisdom brings. It encourages "earnest striving after wisdom as the way to the fear of God and to virtue. Today's lesson continues the appeal from the father to the son (Prov.1:8, 10, 15). Though the son could find many other enticing treasures to seek, the father impresses on the young man the superiority of finding wisdom.

As you read remember the very interesting comment of one scholar who says that the chapter tells us of three will different walks. The first is walking with God. The second is walking with the wicked. The third is walking with the righteous.

We therefore encourage you to choose the first, and the third. Life is very dangerous and it is wise to do what is smart and pay attention to what God and His Scriptures says.

## THE TEXT

Verse 1. *My son, if thou wilt receive my words. And hide my commandments with thee. ... if thou wilt ...* the father offers a conditional invitation. *If the son* will accept his father's words, then a certain reward will follow (Proverbs 2:5). The second clause (below) clarifies what it means to *receive* these words. If the son will not listen to his father, he cannot expect to receive these blessings.

*And hide my commandments with thee.*



Sometimes we *hide* objects to protect them from being used or harmed. The hiding of Scripture is for the purpose of having those items available to use whenever needed to provide the wisdom that only God's Word can supply. Hiding the father's *commandments* will ensure that the son can refer to them at any time and so find his way in any situation. *Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee;* (Psalm 119:11).

It is important therefore to recognize that the commandments are to be treasured inside you and made your own. Nobody can know it for you. We are all obliged to make the words of God ours and so keep it within us.

If the word of God is in your heart you will work from what is in your heart. In doing so we will come to always delight to do the will of God the Father.

*Verse 2. So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom.*

The thought begun in Proverbs 2:1 continues. To *incline* one's *ear* creates an image of actively listening to whoever is speaking (Proverbs 4:20; 5:13). In other Scriptures, the same Hebrew word is used to ask the Lord to "attend" to the praying person (Psalms 17:1; 86:6; 142:6). Other passages tell how God's people failed to "hear" His teaching and for that reason came under His judgment (Zechariah 1:4). Here the son is encouraged to listen closely so that he will miss nothing that *wisdom* has to say.

*And apply thine heart to understanding.*

Becoming wise involves more than just one's ears. The *heart* must be included as well. Biblically, the heart describes our ability to reason, think, and consider spiritual matters (Exodus 7:13; 8:15). Each person must "keep [his or her] heart with all diligence" (Proverbs 4:23). Both *wisdom* and *understanding* have already been cited as part of the purpose for which the proverbs have been compiled (1:2, 3, 5).

*Verse 3. Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding.*

The son is now challenged to engage his *voice* in the pursuit of *knowledge* and understanding. His crying out will represent an intensifying search; the son is to be consumed with a desire for wisdom.

Again, Solomon uses a couple of vivid metaphors or a figure of speech with images to represent some truth to describe the necessary quest *for understanding*. We are to bellow for it, raising our voices and clamoring for it. Previously, Wisdom was pictured as crying out in the public arenas (Proverbs 1:20–23). She longs to be heard, and she is looking for those who are desperate to follow after her (James 1:5). Now it is we who are to call out for her.

Even though Wisdom wants people to adopt her (1:20-33) she is hard to obtain. Wisdom is not a power inherent in man, but something that God gives. The person who wants her has to work hard for her. If understanding does not come easily, one should work harder to obtain it. He or she must start with revelation, and study it diligently, in order to obtain spiritual rather than merely academic wisdom.

It is therefore now helpful to note the steps that one writer outlines for us:

**Receive.**

**Treasure.**

**Incline.**



**Apply.**

**Cry out, lift up the voice.**

**Seek, search.**

Verse 4. *If thou sleekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures.*

To illustrate how passionate the son's desire for wisdom must become, a comparison is introduced: he must become as earnest in his quest for wisdom as many are for the material wealth of *silver* and hidden *treasures* (Matt. 13:44–46). The word is used to refer to refined silver, an immensely valuable object, in comparison to the raw silver metal.

Indeed, the drive for material wealth often drains the desire for wisdom. Jesus warns us to “beware of covetousness” (Luke 12:15) and tells a parable to illustrate how the obsession with material wealth and success can blind us to the things of God (12:16–21). People “trust in uncertain riches” (1 Timothy 6:17) when their trust should be in God. He is the source of wealth that riches cannot provide wisdom.

Job uses a similar comparison when he describes man's quest for wisdom (Job 28:1–11).

The chapter concludes with a declaration that echoes Solomon's words:

*“Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding”* (28:28; Proverbs 9:10).

We also are to go on a treasure hunt for wisdom, seeking and searching. Wisdom is available but must be sought. We are not born wise. Wisdom is not intuitive; in fact, the wisdom of God is sometimes counter intuitive because it goes against our impulses of self-preservation, self-importance, and greed. Remember that when we “know” God we are in personal intimate relationship with Him.

Verse 5. *Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD. And find the knowledge of God.*

This verse gives the conclusion (note the word *then*) to the previous four verses. There the interest in obtaining wisdom has been described with increasing desire. If the son will dedicate himself fully to the search for wisdom, he will come to *understand the fear of the Lord*.

It bears noting that this is the third time the phrase “fear of the Lord” has been used in the first two chapters of Proverbs. It first appears in the opening verses of the book, introducing the reader to the “beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7). The second time is when Wisdom herself cries out and urges passersby to heed her voice and not be among those who reject the fear of the Lord (1:20–29).

*And find the knowledge of God.*

Having understood the fear of the Lord, the son will discover the key to *knowledge* (Proverbs 1:7). Wisdom and knowledge are not, biblically speaking, found through mastery of a body of facts or data. They are found in a relationship with the Lord that acknowledges Him as their source. Neither wisdom nor knowledge is an end in itself; the Lord himself is the end of the quest.

The “fear of the Lord” emphasizes awe, and the “knowledge of God” stresses intimacy. Wisdom both begins with fear of God (1:7; 9:10) and leads to it.

“If you want wisdom, you must listen to God attentively (Matt. 13:9), obey Him humbly (John 7:17), ask Him sincerely (James 1:5), and seek Him diligently (Isa. 55:6-7), the way a miner searches for silver and gold.



In another sense, however, the quest has only begun. There are always new adventures and insights to receive as one learns to trust the Lord with all one's heart and acknowledge Him in all one's ways (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

Verse 6. *For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.* God's *wisdom* results in fulfillment by leading people to develop the qualities emphasized as being necessary for a good life.

*Knowledge and understanding* signify far more than intellectual prowess (Proverbs 2:5); apart from God, these are often used for violent, destructive purposes. Both knowledge and understanding have to do with learning God's character and recognizing what He desires. The reference to the *mouth* of the Lord highlights His spoken and written Word as the source of wisdom. (Psalm 119:72 offers a similar comparison.) God's inspiring our Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) gives them authority that mere humans writing on their own cannot achieve, no matter how wise. Jesus countered one of the devil's temptations with the words, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*" (Matthew 4:4).

Certainly, we need physical sustenance. But without knowledge from God, we are spiritually starving to death.

The searcher for wisdom will find what God gives when he or she searches divine revelation. One must strive for the goal, but also realize that wisdom remains a divine gift.

Verse 7. *He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous.*

The idea of laying up may bring to mind Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount about laying up treasures in Heaven (Matthew 6:20). Whereas Jesus will call His disciples to lay up for themselves, here the Lord himself is the one who lays up *sound wisdom* as a treasure *for the righteous* (compare Psalm 84:11).

Note carefully there is **sound wisdom** and wisdom that is not complete. There are thinkers, advisers, psychologists, life coaches who often like to give advice on matters of life. Some of these advices seem to be reasonably good but when they all leave out dependence on the guidance and wisdom of God and trusting Him for healing, for forgiveness, and renewal then there is only a partial benefit. Advice with full benefits comes only from God.

These are riches that one can draw from at any age and stage of life. One never outgrows the need for the Lord's wisdom. But a person must be willing to admit that need and express a humble dependence on what the Lord has provided in His Word.

*He is a buckler to them that walk uprightly.*

A *buckler* is a shield (Genesis 15:1). It is usually buckled around the arm of the soldier to provide a means of defense against a sword, a spear, or an arrow. The soldier is then able to use his free hand to carry his own weapon into battle.

The Hebrew word translated *uprightly* may in noun form be rendered "integrity" (1 Kings 9:4). Such a person is not half-hearted or superficial regarding devotion to wisdom. The individual has set foot on a path from which he or she does not intend to deviate (Proverbs 4:25–27). The knowledge of how to live comes with the knowledge of God (v. 7). The success in view is correct behaviour

Verse 8. *He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints.*

To keep in this context means that the Lord watches over *the paths of judgment*. The word *judgment* refers to God's righteous standards and is often equivalent to our modern word



*justice*, and that is the case here. The Lord never abandons *the way of his saints*; He guides and keeps them in His care in every circumstance. Numerous assurances provide strength and endurance to God's people who suffer because of the brokenness of the world (Psalm 91:1–4; Isaiah 40:31; Hebrews 13:5, 6).

The word *saints* is often associated with holiness or being set apart in some way (1 Samuel 2:9; Psalm 97:10). Here it signifies those who are distinguished by their commitment to live by the wisdom that comes only from the Lord (Joshua 24:15; Acts 14:23; 1 Peter 4:19).

Lovers of wisdom are godly (Heb. *hasidim*, loyal sons of the covenant).

Solomon knew that God-given wisdom would help his countrymen in their everyday affairs. Such wisdom would invite God to be their protection. What does God want wisdom to teach you?

Verse 9. *Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.*

As an individual follows the Lord's direction and receives His help in life, he or she gains experiential understanding of the qualities the Lord views as *good: righteousness, and judgment, and equity*. All three recall the stated purpose for the book (Proverbs 1:3).

Understanding these three virtues allows the people to pursue right and just relationships (Deuteronomy 1:16). Such a *path* is far different from the one that sinners entice people to travel, of which the son has already been warned (Proverbs 1:10–19).

This is another passage in which we can see the difference between Hebrew wisdom literature and that of other ancient nations. Solomon identified Yahweh as the source of wisdom. Only through relationship with Him can a person be truly wise and experience the blessings of wisdom.

Verse 10. *When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul.*

*Heart* and *soul* are difficult to distinguish in terms of what they specifically designate. In this poetic verse, they are intended to be parallel terms. The differences between the terms are less important than the similarities: both refer to the inner person, to his or her motivations.

*Wisdom* and *knowledge* must be internalized to the point that they impact the spiritual makeup of an individual. Accepting biblical wisdom is not solely a mental exercise, though the heart in Scripture is associated with the mind, as previously noted (Proverbs 2:2). One writer advises:

**Verses 10-11 asserts that Wisdom gives both pleasure and surefootedness in life. The more wisdom one learns, the more one desires and enjoys it. The protection wisdom gives, moreover, is that it keeps its follower from making decisions that will later bring only regret.** (Clarke).

Verse 11. *Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee.*

The promise of preserving and keeping the person who lives by godly wisdom uses the same verbs to describe the Lord's keeping and protecting His saints (see Proverbs 2:8). The father will find nothing more satisfying personally than to see his son walk in a way that marks him as one of those saints.

Proverbs 2:12–22 continues the father's description of the benefits of wisdom, especially in keeping the son from two individuals in particular. One is the "evil man" whose "paths" and "ways" travel in the opposite direction from the way of wisdom (2:12–15). The other is the "strange woman" whose words are seductive and flattering but whose path leads to certain death (2:16–19). The chapter concludes with another appeal to the son to "*walk in the way of*



*good men, and keep the paths of the righteous” (2:20) and with a contrast between the upright and wicked (2:21, 22).*

Solomon spoke of wisdom as the ultimate method for guarding freshness and preserving usefulness of spiritual food. Solomon explained how God-given wisdom preserves us for His purposes.

So think deeply on and ask yourself, how do you experience God’s preservation of the good in your life?

## **CONCLUSION**

The challenge in today’s Text to find wisdom is expressed in terms of an intense search, not just a casual or passing interest. One must cry out for knowledge and lift up his or her voice for understanding, not whisper. One must be as passionate for wisdom as many are for material wealth. An individual must seek for the Almighty himself, not the almighty dollar.

For some, however, the seeking spirit—the passion for wisdom and for the God who is its source—diminishes with time. In the Western World especially, we settle into routines and expectations at church and in our faith. We become comfortable with where we are spiritually. We lose the hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6). We often sadly lose our first love.

We may not be guilty of any blatant wrongdoing against God or against others, but neither do we maintain our sense of seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (6:33). Our cry for wisdom is reduced to a whimper.

Ultimately, addressing this matter requires that we undergo a serious self-examination. This is particularly so with regard to our relationship with God. Since “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7), then maintaining a strong bond with the Lord and a reverence for Him is pivotal to sustaining passion and growth. The spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible Study are called for by the writers inspired by God.

It is sometimes difficult to remember that parents owe it to their children that they are brought into the world to make their hands strong and capable. It is not the job of parents to live their lives vicariously through the lives of their children. The children are to have their own lives. God wants parents to bring up their children in the way of the Lord and then equip them to move on and learn more and more to become dependent on God and not on their parents.

It is easy to sing the song

**Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not to your own understanding.  
In all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he shall direct your paths.**

It might be difficult to do but we must thank our heavenly Father that in our relationship with Him He has treated us just as He wants us to treat our children.



Remember that He has made provision for your failures, the times when you don't understand Him properly and do the wrong things. The heavenly Father will treat your children in the same way as He has treated you.

So thank Him for what He has done and will do and for the great wisdom and guidance He has given to us, both parents and child.

Remember therefore that the faithful will not be uprooted. The upright will always be there and will be in the promised land of God THROUGHOUT ETERNITY.

