

Wisdom from the Proverbs

The Foundation of Wisdom—The fear of the Lord

Introduction: In almost every prayer Martha and I pray together I ask the Lord to give us wisdom; yet sometimes I don't feel so wise. Maybe you feel the same way?

Where can we go to get the wisdom we need for day to day decision-making. One great place is the book of Proverbs. This OT books especially offers practical advice about how to apply godly principles to life's circumstances. It offers good advice or counsel about life's relationships and responsibilities. The goal of this collection is clearly made known in the first paragraph—to enable the reader:

*To know wisdom and instruction,
To discern the sayings of understanding,
To receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity;
To give prudence to the naive, to the youth knowledge and discretion.*

Surely everyone wants to be considered wise; but often people live in folly. How can we attain the wisdom that results in proper and prosperous living? Solomon begins the book by telling us the starting point of all wisdom:

The Fear of God—the foundation of all wisdom.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 1:7).

By “the Lord” Solomon does not mean just any deity. The expression is the common one for the God of Israel. Though there are many deities, it is the God of the Bible that this proverb concerns.

The “fear” of the Lord refers to the respect and yes, even trepidation that comes from the acknowledgement of God's being and character. Solomon affirms that acknowledging God is not enough; he must be respected for who He is.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of “wisdom.” Wisdom is in this genre of literature not so much about intellect as it is about attitude. It is that understanding of God's nature and God's law that results in a proper response to life's circumstances. In a word, wisdom is the skill to apply the knowledge of truth to life's circumstances.

The fear of the Lord is the “beginning” of wisdom. Solomon is saying that the fear of the Lord is the “first and controlling principle, rather than a stage which one leaves behind” (Kidner). The idea is not, “I'll start with God and then I'll be headed in the right direction to follow my own wisdom afterward”; but instead, “I'll start with respect for God and never stop respecting Him, so that I'll attain the wisdom He gives!”

But why should we fear Him?

We should fear Him because of who He is and what He has done and is doing!

Proverbs has a lot to say about the Lord. The verses in Proverbs about Him establish a basis for godly reverence toward Him. We should fear because:

He made everything

The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens. (Prov. 3:19)

He has a plan for this world that cannot be overruled by man.

The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil. (Prov. 16:4)

There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against the LORD. (Prov. 21:30)

Many are the plans in a man's heart, but the counsel of the LORD, it will stand. (Prov. 19:21)

He sees what we do

The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good. (Prov. 15:3)

He can discern our character

The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests hearts. (Prov. 17:3)

Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD, how much more the hearts of men! (Prov. 15:11)

He can hear and answer our prayers

The LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous. (Prov. 15:29)

He can provide our needs

The LORD will not allow the righteous to hunger, but He will thrust aside the craving of the wicked. (Prov. 10:3)

He can overturn our plans for good or evil

The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps. (Prov. 16:9)

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD. (Prov. 16:33)

He will judge the righteousness of our deeds.

Every man's way is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the hearts. (Prov. 21:2)

The LORD will tear down the house of the proud, but He will establish the boundary of the widow. (Prov. 15:25)

We have every reason to fear the Lord because of these things; but

We should also fear Him because of the blessings it brings!

Fearing the Lord helps us discover true wealth instead of the vexation of materialism.

Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and turmoil with it. (Prov. 15:16)

Fearing the Lord leads to the discovery of the great thing—the Lord Himself.

Then you will discern the fear of the Lord, and discover the knowledge of God. (Prov. 2:5)

Fearing the Lord enables us to receive God's forgiveness and avoid the consequences of sin.

By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the Lord one keeps away from evil. (Prov. 16:6)

Fearing the Lord leads to inner peace.

The fear of the Lord leads to life, so that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil. (Prov. 19:23)

Fearing the Lord leads to a long life.

The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened. (Prov. 10:27)

Fearing the Lord brings a feeling of security.

In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence, and his children will have refuge. (Prov. 14:26)

Conclusion: So you want to be wise? You want to know what will help you live life well? To be blessed by the creator?

Do not let your heart envy sinners, but live in the fear of the Lord always (Prov. 23:17).