

# Divine Wisdom




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Prov. 8:1–21, Matt. 16:26, Prov. 8:22–31, Gen. 1:31, Prov. 8:32–36, 9:1–18.*

**Memory Text:** “The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old” (*Proverbs 8:22, NKJV*).

At this stage in Proverbs, wisdom reappears (*see Prov. 1:20, 21*), and it’s clear from the texts for this week that wisdom is truth—the Truth as it exists in God, the Source and Foundation of all truth.

This accent on the “absolute” character of truth contrasts with some contemporary thinking, especially in the West, in which truth is seen as relative, contingent, cultural, with one person’s truth being different from someone else’s.

But this concept is not biblical. My truth should be the same as yours, simply because “truth” is universal. It does not belong to anyone in particular but to all humanity, whether or not all humanity recognizes it.

Interestingly enough, Pilate’s famous question to Jesus, “What is truth?” (*John 18:38*), came in response to Jesus’ statement, “ ‘Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice’ ” (*vs. 37, NKJV*). Truth, absolute truth, exists, and it even speaks to us; what matters for us is whether or not we will listen to, and obey, what it is saying.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 24.

## Wisdom Cries Out

**Read Proverbs 8:1–21 (NKJV).** According to these verses, what is the value of wisdom?

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Wisdom is so important that it must reach everyone. God created all human life, and Christ died for each one of us. So wisdom, the knowledge of God, and the salvation He offers, is for every human being.

Look at the words used to describe wisdom's vocal presence: "cry out," "lift up her voice," "call," "voice," "speak," "opening . . . lips," "mouth," "lips," "words." However one understands these metaphors, what is clear is that wisdom is to be communicated; it is to be heard by all who will listen. After all, as we saw last week, what wisdom says is a matter of life and death.

Eight times wisdom talks about the truthfulness of her words. The description of wisdom here, interestingly enough, parallels the portrayal of the Lord in Deuteronomy 32:4. This parallel, of course, should not be surprising, because God, as the Creator of all things (*see John 1:1–3*), is the Foundation of all truth.

**Read Proverbs 8:10, 11.** What do these verses say about wisdom?

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So many people have lived, and still live, in ignorance, in folly, and in darkness. Many live with no hope at all or with false hopes. What makes this sad state of affairs even sadder is that wisdom and truth are so wonderful, filled with hope and promise for a better life now and the surety of eternal life in a new heaven and a new earth, all thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus. All the wealth in the world means nothing (*see Eccles. 2:11–13*) in contrast to the knowledge of God.

**Read Matthew 16:26 and ask yourself how well your life reflects the crucial truth of these words.**

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## Wisdom and Creation

**Read** Proverbs 8:22–31. How is wisdom related to Creation?

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In these texts, wisdom is mysteriously related to the Lord as the Creator. This poem shares many common words with the Creation account in Genesis 1 and 2, and even reflects its literary structure, organized around the three basic elements of heaven, water, and earth. The intention of this parallel is to emphasize the primary credential of wisdom: if God Himself used wisdom to create, if wisdom is the oldest tool, older than the universe itself and fundamental to its existence, we should all the more use wisdom in everything we do in life.

There is also a strong emphasis on the divine origin of wisdom. The first word of the poem is the LORD, *Yahweh*, who is said to have “begotten” (second word) wisdom. The Hebrew word *qanah*, translated as “possessed” by the NKJV, has the connotation of “begetting” rather than “creating” (*see Deut. 32:6, Gen. 4:1*). The next word is the technical word that is associated with the Genesis Creation, *reshit* (“beginning”), which is found in the first verse of Genesis: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”

Yet the word *beginning* in Proverbs 8:22 is used somewhat differently from the way it is used in Genesis 1. In Genesis 1:1, the word is related to the Creation itself, while in Proverbs 8:22, the word is related to God Himself, to His way (*derek*), which means His nature. Thus, wisdom is part of the very nature of God Himself.

Wisdom, therefore, is situated in time even before the creation of the universe. The existence of wisdom, at that time when only God was present, traces the antiquity of wisdom “from everlasting.”

So, wisdom does not originate *in* us, but rather is revealed *to* us; it is something that we learn, something that is taught to us; it is not what we generate out of ourselves. Surely, to walk in our own light is to walk in darkness. We are told that Jesus is “the true Light which gives light to every man” (*John 1:9, NKJV*). Every man needs it too.

## Rejoicing in Creation

In Genesis 1, we see that each step of the Creation concludes with the same refrain: “God saw that it was good” (*see Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31*). The last step (*vs. 31*) goes even further: “It was *very* good.” The Hebrew word for “good” contains the idea of enjoyment, and it also implies relationship. At the end of the whole Creation week, God pauses to fully enjoy His creation (*Gen. 2:1–3*). The time of this pause, the Sabbath, is blessed. Likewise, our poem concludes with wisdom’s enjoying the Creation.

**Read Proverbs 8:30, 31. Why was wisdom rejoicing?**

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Wisdom’s rejoicing reflects God’s rejoicing at Creation. This rejoicing not only happens “daily” at each step of Creation but also crowns the work of Creation, when the creation (of life on earth) itself was completed.

In Proverbs 8, we find the reason for wisdom’s rejoicing: “My delight was with the sons of men” (*vs. 31, NKJV*). At the end of the Creation week, on Sabbath, God entered into a relationship with humans. The immediate application of this divine pause and rejoicing, after the work of the week, has implications for the human experience of Sabbath: “Following the pattern of the Creator, he too may look back upon his finished work with joy, pleasure, and satisfaction. In this way man may rejoice not only in God’s creation but also in his responsible rulership, not exploitation, over creation.”—Gerhard F. Hasel, in Kenneth A. Strand, *The Sabbath in Scripture and History* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), p. 23.

**Read Colossians 1:15–17, 2:3, Revelation 3:14, and John 1:1–14. What do these verses tell us about Jesus’ role in the Creation itself? Why is His role as Creator so important in understanding His role as our Redeemer?**

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## Wisdom's Appeal

The last few verses of this proverb return to the personal—to the practical application of what it means to have wisdom. By contrast, the intellectual knowledge about wisdom's preexistence, about wisdom's presence at Creation, is certainly deep. But in the Bible, truth must always at some point come down to the human level and how we respond to what we have been given in Jesus.

**Read Proverbs 8:32–36.** What life-and-death message is given here?

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The Hebrew word translated as “blessed” (*NKJV*) means “happy” (see *RSV*). In this passage, the word “blessed” is attached to two propositions. The first one describes an action: “Blessed are those who keep my ways” (*vs. 32, NKJV*). The same language is used in Psalm 119:1, 2, in regard to the law: “Blessed are the undefiled . . . who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies” (*NKJV*).

The second one describes an attitude: “Blessed is the man who listens to me” (*vs. 34, NKJV*). In both cases, the requirement implies a continuous effort. It is not enough to have discovered the right way; we have to “keep it.” It is not enough to hear the word of God; we have to “watch daily” and follow what we know. As Jesus put it: “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it” (*Luke 11:28, NKJV*).

“Is this the happiness desirable which is to be found in the path of disobedience and transgression of physical and moral law? Christ's life points out the true source of happiness and how it is to be attained. . . . If they would be happy indeed, they should cheerfully seek to be found at the post of duty, doing the work which devolves upon them with fidelity, conforming their hearts and lives to the perfect pattern.” —Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 162.

**Happiness can be an elusive thing; the more we strive for it, the harder it seems for us to attain it. Why should faithfulness to God, as opposed to the pursuit of happiness, be our first priority? Besides, which is more likely to produce happiness (and why): seeking it, or seeking first the kingdom of God?**

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## Either/Or

Following wisdom's appeal, the inspired author of Proverbs 9 urges his audience to make a choice now between two lifestyles: wisdom or folly. The first and last six verses (*vss. 1–6, 13–18*) are symmetrical and bring out the contrast between the opposite camps.

**Compare** Proverbs 9:1–6 and Proverbs 9:13–18. What is the difference between wisdom and folly?

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1. Wisdom is efficient and is involved in Creation: seven verbs are used to describe her actions there (*vss. 1–3*). The seven pillars she has hewn (*vs. 1*) allude to the seven days of Creation. Folly, in contrast, sits and does nothing, just pretending to be someone when in fact “she is simple, and knows nothing” (*vs. 13, NKJV*).

2. Although wisdom and folly call the same audience (*note the identical vss. 4 and 16*), what they provide is essentially different. Wisdom invites her guests to eat the bread and drink the drink that she has prepared (*vs. 5*). Folly offers nothing to eat or drink; she simply boasts about stolen provisions (*vs. 17*).

3. Wisdom calls us to forsake foolishness and, therefore, to live. Folly is more tolerant; she does not demand that we forsake anything, but the result is death. Those who follow wisdom will be advancing; they will “go in the way of understanding” (*vs. 6, NKJV*). Those who follow folly will be static, and they will “not know” (*vs. 18, NKJV*).

**Read** Proverbs 9:7–9. How do the wise man and the wicked man respond to the instruction of wisdom? What makes the wise man wiser than the wicked man?

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The key to wisdom is humility. The wise man is the man who is teachable and responds to instruction with an open mind. Wisdom comes only to the one who, like a child, feels the need to grow. This is why, in the most explicit manner, Jesus taught that “‘unless you . . . become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven’” (*Matt. 18:3, NKJV*).

**Further Study:** “The Sovereign of the universe was not alone in His work of beneficence. He had an associate—a co-worker who could appreciate His purposes, and could share His joy in giving happiness to created beings. ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.’ John 1:1, 2. Christ, the Word, the only begotten of God, was one with the eternal Father—one in nature, in character, in purpose—the only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God. . . . And the Son of God declares concerning Himself: ‘The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting. . . . When He appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.’ Proverbs 8:22–30.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 34.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why is belief in the Genesis Creation account the foundation of biblical wisdom? Why is the idea of evolution contrary to the Bible in every way?
- 2 Dwell more on the idea that true wisdom is something that we cannot generate of ourselves but that must be revealed to us. What are some examples of important truths that we would never know other than their being revealed by divine inspiration? For instance, how could we know about Christ’s death on the cross and what it offers were it not revealed? What about the seventh-day Sabbath or the Second Coming?
- 3 How does God’s work, as revealed in Genesis 1, testify to the fact that good cannot be mixed with evil? What implications does your answer have for the idea that one could, for instance, incorporate an evolutionary worldview into the Genesis Creation story?
- 4 How does God’s enjoyment of the creation help us to understand how we can have a deeper and richer Sabbath experience?

## “Being Ready for Whatever”

Travis didn't know what to do with his camper. At the age of 12, Logan\* was the toughest kid in the cabin and wanted to be in charge of everyone and everything. One night, Logan decided he wasn't going to bed, so Travis and his co-counselor came up with a plan.

“OK,” they told the obstinate camper, “you can stay up—as long as you read the Bible.” Logan agreed, but he didn't have a Bible; in fact, he had never read one. So the co-counselor loaned Logan his Bible, and by the light of the moon and a flashlight, the boy met the heroes of Genesis for the very first time.

The next morning Logan confided to his counselors, “I actually found some cool stories in there.” He was especially interested in the story of Joseph and asked many questions, wondering how Joseph was able to do all that he did.

“Although Logan still acted tough, you could see the gears starting to turn as he wondered what we were all about,” remembers Travis. “It was kind of cool to see the change that took place over the week.”

Most of the kids who come to Camp Polaris don't know the Bible's stories. Travis remembers a time when only one camper knew the story of David and Goliath. “We're ministering to kids who don't grow up in Christian homes, who don't read the Bible. It takes a lot of prayer to help reach these kids . . . to know how to reach them.”

Travis, a senior mechanical engineering student at Walla Walla University, started working at Camp Polaris in 2011. In addition to being a counselor, he has taught a variety of classes including wakeboarding and model rocketry.

“I've loved it every summer, that's why I keep going back,” he says. “It's been an absolute blast. On top of that, I've learned a lot about trusting in God, because you get situations where you don't know how to make it through the week, but you always do. Then in hindsight, you see that even the tough things were a positive. It definitely is about learning to trust God.”

“I think I'm a little more comfortable now with just being thrown into a situation. I've learned to be flexible and go with the flow, and to be ready for whatever—because you don't know what's going to happen next.”

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\* *Not his real name.*