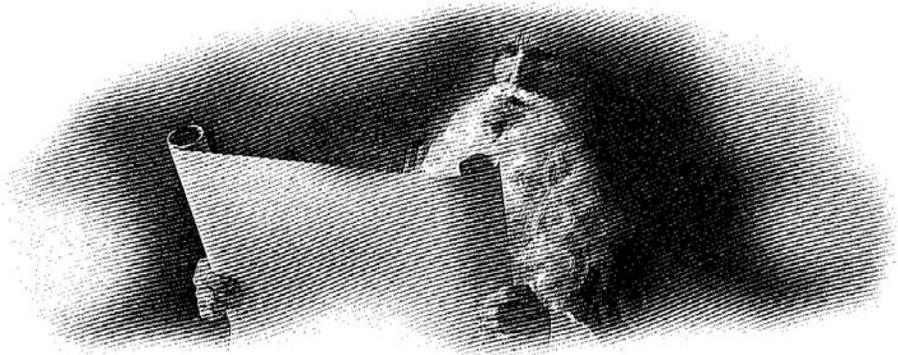


The Call (Duty) of Wisdom



SABBATH—DECEMBER 27

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Proverbs 1–3; Genesis 1:1; Exodus 19:16; Exodus 20:20; Proverbs 11:30; Proverbs 13:12; Proverbs 15:4.

MEMORY VERSE: “If you really want to gain knowledge, you must begin by having respect for the LORD. But foolish people hate wisdom and training” (Proverbs 1:7, NIV).

SINCE THE GARDEN OF EDEN, BAD CHOICES HAVE CAUSED MUCH HUMAN TRAGEDY. “Man lost all because he chose to listen to the deceiver [Satan; the father of lies] rather than to God, who is Truth. God alone has understanding. By mixing evil with good, man’s mind had become confused.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 25.

The book of Proverbs is all about helping us to make right choices. It also helps us to choose the way of God and not Satan’s way. A father or mother speaks to his or her son to warn him against wrong choices and to encourage him to make the right ones. This is so important because the choices we make mean life or death.

The first three chapters of Proverbs show this method of education. The author of Proverbs explains the purpose of the book: “to know wisdom” (Proverbs 1:2). He also shows the motto of the book: “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7; compare¹ Proverbs 9:10). Then the author warns us against listening to foolishness and encourages us to accept wise advice from God.

DEFINITIONS

1. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM (Proverbs 1:7)

In Proverbs 1:1–6, the title “the proverbs of Solomon the son of David” (Proverbs 1:1) establishes a connection between this proverb and 1 Kings 3:5–14. In Kings (as in the book of Proverbs), Solomon is pictured as a son looking for wisdom from God. These verses show Solomon as “the son of David.” But they also share important common words: *understand, wisdom, judgment*. These verses show proof that Solomon is the main author of the book. They also show that Proverbs is dealing with the human search for wisdom from God.

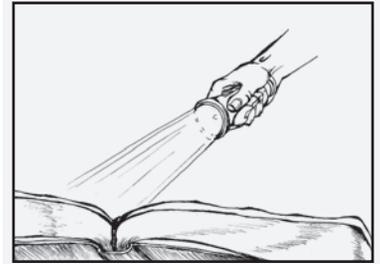
Read Proverbs 1:7. What is wisdom? What is “the fear of the LORD”? How are these two ideas connected to each other?

In Proverbs, “wisdom” is described as a *religious* experience. It is connected with the fear of the Lord. This idea of the Hebrew religion is an important part of Proverbs. This idea appears often in the book. It also is the main theme of the entire book (Proverbs 1:7; Proverbs 31:30).

The fear of the Lord has nothing to do with the fear of the unknown and faith in magic or luck. It is not the childish fear of God’s punishment. Instead, it means that people should be aware of God’s personal presence at all times and everywhere. The fear of the Lord was shown in how the people responded when God showed Himself to them at Sinai (Exodus 19:16; Exodus 20:20). The people’s desire to be faithful and to love God in answer to His covenant (promise; agreement) with them (Deuteronomy 10:12) was a result of their “fear of the LORD.” In short, to fear God means to be faithful to God and to love Him.

The wording “the fear of the LORD is the *beginning* of . . . wisdom” means that wisdom starts with this “fear.” The Hebrew word for “beginning” (*reshit*) points to the first word in the Creation story (Genesis 1:1). The first lesson of wisdom deals with understanding that God is our Creator. He is the One who gives us life and breath. And He is always present—a God of love, justice, and redemption² (John 3:16; Psalm 89:14; Hebrews 9:12).

We are told to love God and also to fear Him. In what ways has your own experience with the Lord shown how these two ideas connect?



Proverbs deals with the human search for wisdom from God.



To fear God means to be faithful to God and to love Him.

DEFINITIONS

2. redemption—the act of saving someone by paying the price of his or her life. Jesus paid for our salvation by dying on the cross in our place.

TRUE EDUCATION (Proverbs 1:8–19)

Read Proverbs 1:8–19. What two different ways of “education” are given in these verses? What is the basic message for parents and everyone who fears the Lord?



True education comes from parents.

Education is a family matter. And true education comes from the parents. In these verses, this education is called “instruction [teaching]” and even “law.” The Hebrew word for law, *torah*, means “direction.” The parents are to show their children the right direction. But the other kind of “education” is not given a name. It is just accepted as the voice of sinners, which leads in the wrong direction.

The words *my son* are not always meant to be taken to mean a male. Also this wording is used many times. Using it again and again shows that the instruction comes from a parent. The words—*your father, your mother* (NKJV)—are clearly meant to show that each parent is involved in instructing the child. But the other group of people who give bad instruction is made up of “sinners.”

“In His wisdom the Lord has shown that the family shall be the greatest of all schools. It is in the home that the education of the child is to begin. Here is his first school. Here, with his parents as teachers, the child is to learn the lessons that are to guide him throughout life. . . . The educational influences of the home are the best tools for good or for evil. . . . If the child is not taught in the right way, Satan will educate him through his own methods.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, page 182.

The best argument for family education is its results. These are the important building blocks for character (thoughts; feelings; actions). The results are like jewels on the head and around the neck. In Middle Eastern countries, valuable collars and bracelets were passed on from parents to children as expensive gifts. But education means more than worldly riches. The time spent with our children will be of much greater value for them than the time spent at our businesses. Also, the neck and the head suggest that education will influence a person’s personality. In the way of fools or sinners, only the feet (Proverbs 1:15) are spoken of, as if the wandering son has lost his way.

How can we learn to say No to the temptations that culture, society, friends, and even family might throw in our way?

THE CALL OF WISDOM (Proverbs 1:20, 21)

Read Proverbs 1:20, 21. How is wisdom shown here? What does this tell us?

The sinners may “lie in wait [to do evil]” and “lurk [hide] secretly” (Proverbs 1:11, 18, NKJV). But wisdom “calls aloud outside” (Proverbs 1:20, NKJV), “cries out in the chief concourses [main streets]” (Proverbs 1:21, NKJV), and “speaks [shouts] her words” (Proverbs 1:21, NKJV). Wisdom is described as a person. Wisdom’s offer is given to the man and the woman on the street. It is for everyone in the real business of life. Among the loud noises of so many products and so many sellers, the call of wisdom must be very loud. If not, she would not be heard against the loud noises of so many other voices.

Read Proverbs 1:22–32. What happens if a person refuses to accept wisdom?

The reason that people refuse to accept wisdom has nothing to do with wisdom itself. Instead, it deals with the character of those who refuse to accept her. These people are described as being uncaring and stubborn (Proverbs 1:25; compare with verse 30). The suggestion is that the foolish need wisdom. And those who refuse to accept wisdom are really foolish. They are fools who “hate knowledge” (Proverbs 1:22, NKJV; compare with verse 29).

Those who refuse to accept wisdom will reap, or “pay” the price of their choice. Those who have refused to choose the fear of the Lord will have to be satisfied with themselves. They will “choke on the fruit of what [they] have planned” (Proverbs 1:31, NIV). When we refuse to accept wisdom from God, we often end up with the lies that we make for ourselves, or the lies that others make for us that we so easily believe. In this way, we replace God with idols. Oddly, there are those who hate religion and laugh at those they judge as “simple-minded.” But they deceive themselves and put value on the most useless of things. And, in the end, these things can never satisfy the most basic needs of the heart.

Read Proverbs 1:33. What promise and hope are found here for us? How is this promise made clearer in our own experience?



Those who choose their own wisdom over God’s will choke on the fruit of what they have planned.

THE BENEFIT (PROFIT) OF WISDOM (Proverbs 2:10–22)

Read Proverbs 2:1–5. What are the conditions for understanding the “fear of the LORD”? What choices do we need to make here?

The verses contain “if” three times. This shows three steps of education. The first “if” shows the inactive step of listening. This means receiving and paying attention to the words of wisdom (Proverbs 2:1, 2). The second “if” shows the active action of crying and asking for wisdom (Proverbs 2:3). The third “if” shows serious action in looking for wisdom as we would for “hidden treasures” (Proverbs 2:4).

Read Proverbs 2:6–9. What are the conditions for understanding righteousness (holiness)? What is God’s responsibility in helping people get wisdom?

Note that the wording “the LORD gives” in verse 6 (NKJV) is connected with the words “you will find out how to know God” in verse 5 (NIRV). Wisdom, like salvation,³ is a gift from God. God gives wisdom. He stores wisdom. And He guards and protects the way of the wise.

Read Proverbs 2:10–22. What happens when wisdom has finally found a home in the heart?

“When wisdom enters your heart,” it shows the final step of conversion.⁴ We will enjoy the knowledge of the Lord and have a more pleasant experience in our souls (Proverbs 2:10, NKJV). We also will be protected from the way and influences of evil (Proverbs 2:12, 16). And we will walk in the path of righteousness (Proverbs 2: 20).

Read Proverbs 2:13, 17. What is the first step of being wicked? And where does it lead?

We are sinners. But we do not have to fall into evil. The ones who are shown to be on the wrong path must have first left the right path. Being wicked means a lack of faithfulness.

What should it tell you about yourself if you enjoy doing evil? Or even worse, if you do not even think of it as evil anymore?

DEFINITIONS

3. salvation—God’s plan for saving sinners from death; the gift of eternal life.

4. conversion—the process in which a person decides to change his or her life to a more spiritual one.

DO NOT FORGET! (Proverbs 3:7)**Read Proverbs 3:7. What is the trap of being wise in your own eyes?**

To be wise in one's own eyes will lead a person to think that he or she does not need God in order to be wise. But this is a hopeless situation and a lie. "There is more hope for a foolish person than for him [the one who thinks he does not need God]" (Proverbs 26:12, NIV). Again, wisdom is described as a religious duty. To be wise means to obey God's commandments (Proverbs 3:1), to show "mercy and truth" (Proverbs 3:3), and to "trust in the LORD" (Proverbs 3:5). Wisdom suggests a close relationship with God. Note that the heart is spoken of several times (Proverbs 3:1, 3, 5). The heart is the center of our personal answer to God's influence and calling. (The heart already was mentioned in Proverbs 2:10 as the place wisdom should enter.)

Read Proverbs 3:13–18. What reward comes with the gift of wisdom?

Wisdom is connected with life and health (Proverbs 3:2, 8, 16, 18, 22). One of the most suggestive examples is the "tree of life" (Proverbs 3:18). This is a promise brought up several times in the book (Proverbs 11:30; Proverbs 13:12; Proverbs 15:4). This example reminds us of the Garden of Eden. This promise does not mean that receiving wisdom will give eternal life. Instead, the idea means enjoying the good life with God. Our first parents Adam and Eve enjoyed this life in Eden. But it may be brought back in some way. When we live with God, we get some ideas of Eden. Even better, we learn to hope in the promised recovery of this lost kingdom (read Daniel 7:18).

Read Proverbs 3:19, 20. Why is the need for wisdom so important?

At first, the Creation story seems to be out of place in the setting of this chapter. But the use of wisdom at Creation supports the argument of verse 18. Verse 18 connects wisdom with the tree of life. If God used wisdom to create the heavens and earth, wisdom is not an unimportant matter. Wisdom goes above the limits of our earthly life. Wisdom is connected with our eternal life too.

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “Hidden Treasure,” pages 111–114, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “A Blessing in the Home,” page 334, in *Messages to Young People*; “Study of Physiology [How the Body Works],” pages 197, 198, in *Education*; Ellen G. White Comments, page 1156, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 3.

“The youth need to understand the deep truth connected with the Bible truth that with God ‘is the fountain [beginning] of life.’ Psalm 36:9. He is the author of all. But He also is the life of everything that lives. It is His life that we receive in the sunshine. His life gives us the pure, sweet air and the food that builds up our bodies and keeps up our strength. It is by His life that we live, hour by hour, moment by moment. If sin does not get in the way, all God’s gifts support life, health, and joy.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Education*, pages 197, 198.

“Many believe that faithfulness to God is harmful to health and to cheerful happiness in social life. But those who walk in the path of wisdom and holiness find that ‘godliness [holy living] is good for all things. It gives promise of the life that now is, and will be in heaven.’ They are alive to the enjoyment of life’s real pleasures.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 3, page 1156.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge? How can someone have a lot of knowledge and not wisdom? After all, who does not know some very knowledgeable people who seem to have no wisdom?
- ② Fear can have more than one meaning in the Bible. For example, we are told to have “the fear [respect; worship; love] of the LORD” in our hearts. We are also told “there is no fear [being afraid to believe or trust] in love” (1 John 4:18). Then how can we fear the Lord and still love Him?
- ③ Why is being “wise in one’s own eyes” very dangerous? This is very true when we consider how sinful the human heart is. We need to understand how easy it is for us to make “excuses” for just about any behavior we want. Think of those who have made excuses for the worst of behaviors. How can we make sure we do not do the same thing?