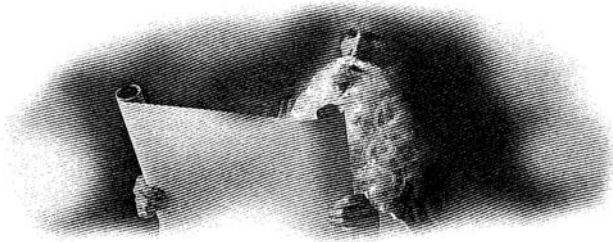


The Call of Wisdom



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Proverbs 1–3, Gen. 1:1, Exod. 19:16, 20:20, Prov. 11:30, 13:12, 15:4.*

Memory Text: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (*Proverbs 1:7, NKJV*).

From Eden onward, the root of human tragedy lies in wrong choices. “Man lost all because he chose to listen to the deceiver rather than to Him who is Truth, who alone has understanding. By the mingling of evil with good, his mind had become confused.” —Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 25.

The book of Proverbs is all about helping us to make right choices, to choose the way of God and not that of the deceiver. The father or the mother, speaking to their son, not only warns him against wrong choices but also encourages him to make the right ones. This is so important because the choices we make are literally matters of life and death.

The first three chapters of Proverbs illustrate this method of education. After having explained the purpose of the book: “to know wisdom” (*Prov. 1:2*), and having laid down the motto of the book: “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (*Prov. 1:7; compare 9:10*), the author moves back and forth from warning us against listening to foolishness, to urging us to respond to the call of heavenly wisdom.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 3.

The Beginning of Wisdom

In Proverbs 1:1–6, the title “the proverbs of Solomon the son of David” (*Prov. 1:1*) establishes a link between this proverb and 1 Kings 3:5–14. In Kings (as in the book of Proverbs), Solomon is presented as a son seeking wisdom from God. In addition to both referring to Solomon as “the son of David,” the two texts share significant common wording: “understand,” “wisdom,” “judgment.” Not only do these parallels confirm Solomon as the one behind the composition of the book, they also show that Proverbs is dealing with the human quest for wisdom from God.

Read Proverbs 1:7. What is wisdom? What is “the fear of the LORD”? How do these two concepts relate to each other?

“Wisdom” here is defined as a religious experience. It is related to the fear of the Lord. This important concept of the Hebrew religion is key to Proverbs. Not only does it occur repeatedly, but it also frames the entire book (*Prov. 1:7, 31:30*).

The fear of the Lord has nothing to do with the superstitious and childish fear of divine punishment. Instead, it should be understood as the acute consciousness of God’s personal presence at all times and everywhere. The fear of the Lord had characterized the people’s reaction to God’s revelation at Sinai (*Exod. 19:16, 20:20*), just as it explained their commitment to be faithful and to love God in response to His covenant with them (*Deut. 10:12*).

In short, to fear God means to be faithful to God and to love Him.

The phrase “the fear of the LORD is the *beginning* of . . . wisdom” means that wisdom originates in this “fear.” The Hebrew word for “beginning” (*reshit*) points to the first word introducing the Creation story (*Gen. 1:1*). The first lesson of wisdom, then, deals with understanding that God is our Creator, the One who gives us life and breath, and that He is always present—a God of love, and justice, and redemption (*John 3:16, Ps. 89:14, Heb. 9:12*).

We are told to love God and also to fear Him. How do these two concepts relate to your own experience with the Lord?

True Education

Read Proverbs 1:8–19. What two contrasting ways of “education” are presented in these verses? What’s the basic message here, not just for parents, but for everyone who fears the Lord?

Education is, first of all, a family matter, and true education comes, first and foremost, from the parents. In these verses, this education is called “instruction” and even “law.” The Hebrew word for law, *torah*, means “direction.” The parents are to point their children in the right direction. In contrast, the other type of “education” is not identified, not given a name. It is simply acknowledged as the voice of sinners, which leads in the wrong direction.

Also, the words “my son,” not to be taken in a gender exclusive sense, are repeated many times, emphasizing parental instruction. Each parent—“your father,” “your mother” (*NKJV*)—is clearly identified in the singular and is personally involved, while the other camp is an anonymous plural, “sinners.”

“In His wisdom the Lord has decreed that the family shall be the greatest of all educational agencies. It is in the home that the education of the child is to begin. Here is his first school. Here, with his parents as instructors, he is to learn the lessons that are to guide him throughout life. . . . The educational influences of the home are a decided power for good or for evil. . . . If the child is not instructed aright here, Satan will educate him through agencies of his choosing.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 182.

The best argument on behalf of family education is its results. These are the inner qualities of character, which are like ornaments on the head and around the neck. In the Middle Eastern culture, precious collars and bracelets were passed on from parents to children as a heritage of value. Education matters more, though, than material riches. The time spent with our children will be of much greater value for them than the time spent at our businesses. Also, the reference to the neck and the head, which is the individual’s face, suggests that education will shape his or her personality. In the way of fools or sinners, only the feet (*Prov. 1:15*) are mentioned, as if the wayward son had lost his identity.

How can we learn to resist the temptations that culture, society, friends, or even family might throw our way?

The Call of Wisdom

Read Proverbs 1:20, 21. How is wisdom presented here? What are we being told?

While the sinners “lie in wait” and “lurk secretly” (*Prov. 1:11, 18, NKJV*), wisdom “calls aloud outside” (*vs. 20, NKJV*), “cries out in the chief concourses” (*vs. 21, NKJV*), and “speaks her words” (*vs. 21, NKJV*). Wisdom is here personified, and her offer is given to the man and the woman on the street. It is for everyone in the real business of life. Amid the noise and rancor of so many products and so many sellers, the call of wisdom must be loud; otherwise, she would not be heard against the clamor of so many other voices.

Read Proverbs 1:22–32. What is the result of rejecting wisdom?

The reason that people reject wisdom has nothing to do with wisdom itself and everything to do with the character of those who reject her. These are described as arrogant and disdainful (*Prov. 1:25; compare vs. 30*), as if they know better. The implication is that wisdom is for the naive and the simple. And yet those who reject wisdom are simple and naive; they are fools who “hate knowledge” (*Prov. 1:22, NKJV; compare vs. 29*).

Those who reject wisdom will reap the fruit of their rejection. Having refused to choose the fear of the Lord, they will have to be content with themselves: they will be “full with their own fancies” (*Prov. 1:31, NKJV*). When we reject wisdom from above, we often end up with the fables and lies that we fabricate for ourselves, or the fables and lies that others fabricate for us and that we so readily accept. In this way, we replace God with idols. Ironically, those who despise religion, mocking those they judge as simple and naive, often are superstitious in their own way, placing value on the most fleeting and useless of things that, in the end, can never satisfy the most basic needs of the heart.

Read Proverbs 1:33. Given the context in what came before, what promise and hope are found here for us? How is this promise manifested in our own experience?

The Benefit of Wisdom

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

Three times the discourse is introduced with the conjunction “if,” marking three stages in the progression of education. The first “if” introduces the passive stage of listening; that is, simply being receptive and attentive to the words of wisdom (*Prov. 2:1, 2*). The second “if” introduces the active response of crying and asking for wisdom (*vs. 3*). The third “if” introduces passionate involvement in seeking and searching for wisdom as we would for “hidden treasures” (*vs. 4*).

Read Proverbs 2:6–9. What are the conditions for understanding righteousness? What is God’s responsibility in the acquisition of wisdom?

Note that the phrase “the LORD gives” in verse 6 (*NKJV*) responds to the phrase “you will . . . find the knowledge of God” in verse 5 (*NIV*). Wisdom, like salvation, is a gift from God. As much as the first paragraph described the human process, this paragraph describes the divine work: He gives wisdom; He stores wisdom; and He guards and preserves 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 marks the final stage of conversion. Not only will we enjoy the knowledge of the Lord, but it will be a pleasant experience to our souls (*Prov. 2:10, NKJV*). We will also be protected from the way of evil (*vs. 12*) and from the seduction of evil (*vs. 16*), and we will walk in the path of righteousness (*vs. 20*).

Read Proverbs 2:13, 17. What is the first step of wickedness, and where does it lead?

Though we are sinners, we don’t have to fall into evil. The ones depicted as on the wrong path must have first left the right path. Wickedness then is understood first of all as a lack of faithfulness. Sin begins subtly and innocently, but before long the sinner not only does wickedly but also enjoys it.

What should it tell you about yourself if, heaven forbid, you enjoy doing evil? Or even worse, if you don’t even deem it evil anymore?

Do Not Forget!

Read Proverbs 3:7. What is the trap of being wise in one's own eyes?

To be wise in one's own eyes will lead to the illusion that one does not need God to be wise. This is a hopeless situation. "There is more hope for a fool than for them" (*Prov. 26:12, NIV*). Again, wisdom is described as a religious commitment. To be wise means to keep God's commandments (*Prov. 3:1*), to display "mercy and truth" (*vs. 3*), and to "trust in the LORD" (*vs. 5*). Wisdom implies an intimate relationship with God. Note the repeated reference to the heart (*vs. 1, 3, 5*), the seat of our personal response to God's influence. (The heart was already 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 associated with life and health (*Prov. 3:2, 8, 16, 18, 22*). One of the most suggestive images is the "tree of life" (*vs. 18*), a promise repeated several times in the book (*Prov. 11:30, 13:12, 15:4*). This metaphor alludes to the Garden of Eden. This promise does not mean that the *acquisition* of wisdom will provide eternal life; instead, the idea is that the quality of life with God, which our first parents enjoyed in Eden, can to some measure be recovered. When we live with God, we get some inkling, some hints, of Eden; even better, we learn to hope in the promised recovery of this lost kingdom (*see Daniel 7:18*).

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

The sudden reference to the Creation story seems to be out of place in this context. Yet the use of wisdom at Creation reinforces the argument of verse 18, which associates wisdom with the tree of life. If God used wisdom to create the heavens and the earth, wisdom is not a trivial matter. The scope of wisdom is cosmic, going beyond the limits of our earthly existence. Wisdom concerns our eternal life, as well. This lesson is implied in the reference to the tree of life, reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. This perspective is also contained in the promise that concludes our passage: "The wise shall inherit glory" (*Prov. 3:35*).

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Hidden Treasure,” pp. 111–114, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “A Blessing in the Home,” p. 334, in *Messages to Young People*; “Study of Physiology,” pp. 197, 198, in *Education*; Ellen G. White Comments, p. 1156, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3.

“The youth need to understand the deep truth underlying the Bible statement that with God ‘is the fountain of life.’ Psalm 36:9. Not only is He the originator of all, but He is the life of everything that lives. It is His life that we receive in the sunshine, in the pure, sweet air, in the food which builds up our bodies and sustains our strength. It is by His life that we exist, hour by hour, moment by moment. Except as perverted by sin, all His gifts tend to life, to health and joy.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 197, 198.

“Many cherish the impression that devotion to God is detrimental to health and to cheerful happiness in the social relations of life. But those who walk in the path of wisdom and holiness find that ‘godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.’ They are alive to the enjoyment of life’s real pleasures.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 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 doesn’t know personally, or at least know about, some very knowledgeable people who seem to have no wisdom?
- 2 Dwell more on the idea of “the fear of the LORD.” If “there is no fear in love” (1 John 4:18), how can we fear the Lord and still love Him? How do we reconcile the tension between justice and love in “the fear of the LORD”?
- 3 Why is being “wise in one’s own eyes” such a dangerous state to be in, especially when we consider how corrupt the human heart is, and how easy it is for us to rationalize just about any behavior we want? Think of those who have rationalized the worst of behaviors. How can we make sure we don’t do the same thing?

From Humptulips to Aleknagik

Life was hard in the western Washington town of Humptulips during the 1930s. Located on the Humptulips River on the Olympic Peninsula, the town had seen better days for the commercial fishermen trying to earn a living.

One family, the Moodys, found life so difficult in Humptulips that they decided to follow Mrs. Moody's brother to Alaska, where, according to the brother, the fishing was good, and there was money to be made. The family of six packed up and traveled the 2,500 miles from Humptulips to the Canadian border, then on through British Columbia and the Yukon before heading west to the frontier town of Dillingham, Alaska. From Dillingham, they headed up the Wood River, finally arriving on the remote shores of Lake Aleknagik.

Although *Aleknagik* is a Yupik word meaning "wrong way home," the Moody family found a good place to settle beside the lake, where they built a small log cabin. Mr. Moody and the eldest son took their large fishing boat down into Bristol Bay, home of the world's largest source of red salmon, while Mrs. Moody cared for the three younger children at home.

Sadly, just a few months after settling into their new home, tragedy struck the Moody family. As the father and eldest son headed up the river from Dillingham, somehow both men ended up in the fast current and drowned, leaving the mother to raise the two younger sons and a daughter.

Being a family of faith, the mother continued to gather the children for worship, and on Sabbath they met with the uncle and his family. During the week, Mrs. Moody carried out the work of the family fishing business with the help of her two younger sons, Lloyd, 14, and Roland, 13.

"We grew up fast," remembers Roland. "We had a mother and little sister to help."

In order to help their family survive, Lloyd and Roland had little time for school as they worked as commercial fishermen near their home. By the time they left their teens, the young men had not yet finished at the rural public school. Early each morning, Roland, who was now 20, built a fire in the school's woodstove so the place would be warm when the students arrived.

During those early mornings, Roland not only warmed up the classroom—he also took the opportunity to get to know the school's beautiful young teacher, Miss Jackie. By the end of the year, they were married and set up a home beside Lake Aleknagik.

Continued next week