

Proverbs and Godly Wisdom

prepared by David W. Chadwell

www.davidchadwell.com

Lesson One An Introduction

More is questionable than is known about the Old Testament book Christians call Proverbs. Usually Christians from Western cultures approach a Bible book by analyzing the book—author, date of writing, objective of the book, and outline of the book, etc. Most American Christians enjoy studying a biblical book that readily lends its information to an approach that heavily utilizes Western-style logic (as compared to Eastern thinking).

Proverbs forces American Christians to understand several things:

(1) The Bible was not written by Americans by the dictates of American thought and Western logic. Without that understanding, a study of Proverbs with its invaluable insights will be often focused on “how” and “why” something was said instead of “what was the writer’s point?”

(2) Proverbs is a decidedly Jewish book written for Jewish thought and a Jewish worldview. In its presentation of material, some things must be understood.

a. It uses Jewish literary styles. Remember, any English translation a person uses is a *translation*. A student of the Bible likely will benefit from utilizing several English translations in any in-depth study of these sayings.

b. This writing assumes three things: (1) It assumes that those who read or hear these sayings place their confidence in God. (2) It assumes that faith in God forms the way the reader looks at life. (3) It assumes the reader understands the value of human experience.

c. This writing uses personification, comparison, and the common experiences of life to declare its points. Often the declaration of a proverb’s point could be declared (by us) by saying, “Look around you and be honest about what you see.” Or, “Can you not see this truth in the experiences of others? Must you make their same mistake?”

d. The focus of Proverbs is on relationships, not on procedures. For example, though the sacrificial system is extremely important in Israel, this book is not about the sacrificial system. More than one thing is important to being God’s people. More is involved than doing one thing correctly. Being people who belong to God in their actions is important to God—not just offering the correct sacrifices in the correct way on the proper altar in the right place.

e. In Proverbs, God reveals truth through human experience. God can and does reveal truth in a variety of ways. Revelation was not confined to some unusual form and experience that involved a divine declaration that stated something not known previously.

f. The person who belongs to God looks at life and physical existence in ways that the person who does not belong to God does not look at life and physical existence. Wisdom in physical life involves seeing physical existence as God sees it. The person who belongs to God “sees” physical existence through “God’s eyes and values.” While physical existence surely involves the “here and now,” it involves much more than the “here and now.” How the person lives “here and now” is a commentary on his/her faith in and reliance on God.

Some suggestions as you study some of Proverbs in this series.

(a) Approach these sayings as a person who does not “know it all.” Too much confidence in what we know is as barrier to learning. Contribute insights, but also listen to the insights of others.

(b) Think. These proverbs were given to make you think. Make personal application.

(c) Grow in personal understanding. A part of being wise is the ability to expand your thoughts through understanding the realities of life.

(d) Realize there is an important difference between knowing something as a fact and knowing something as an insight into life.

(e) See that living wisely in this world involves more than living for physical existence.

(f) Look for the distinction between being wise and being foolish. Do not regard yourself as “the exception to the reality.”

(g) Grasp the fact that learning is an important avenue to wisdom, but understand that wisdom is much more than knowing.

(h) Realize the connection between what you say (or do not say) and being wise.

(i) Understand that while poverty in itself is not a virtue, being poor can powerfully affect the production of godly attitudes.

(j) Understand the importance of people-to-people relationships in godliness.

For Thought and Discussion

1. How do American Christians usually approach the study of a book in the Bible?
2. Proverbs forces us to do what two things?
3. Can you suggest another?
4. What three things are assumed by Proverbs?
5. What are some of the things that Proverbs uses to teach its lessons?

6. What is the focus of Proverbs? Give an example.
7. How does God reveal truth in the message of Proverbs?
8. Discuss the comparison produced by the way a godly person looks at life.
9. Give 10 suggestions in this lesson about how you study Proverbs.
10. Can you give more?
11. To think about: What do you think will be your greatest challenge in studying Proverbs?

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Lesson Two

“There Must Be a Starting Point”

Text: Proverbs 1:7

Everyone faces the same problem. The answers will be different, but the problem is the same. The person from a very primitive society faces the problem. The person from an advanced society faces the problem. If the person is part of the poverty sector, a part of the business sector, a part of the academic sector, a part of any age group, or a part of any economic group, the person faces the problem. What is this problem? It is the necessary challenge of determining the line that separates what is wise behavior from what is foolish behavior.

To be certain, that decision involves many things: survival, economics, coping with others, defining advancement, defining reality, goals, personal ambitions, etc. It demands the person ask and answer some challenging questions such as: “What is the objective of physical existence?” or, “Is there an existence after death?”

Commonly, the answers one gives to such challenging questions determine the basis for deciding what is wise and what is foolish. There are two difficulties with such challenging questions. (1) Few, very few, people answer those questions “once and for all time.” (2) The answers given with conviction and determination are still subject to being changed.

Why do the answers to such challenging questions have to be given more than once? Why are those answers subject to change? The experience of physical existence changes, and each person must cope with the changes. Illustrations: (1) When I was 21 and married for less than one year, I bought our first insurance policy. The amount was the incredible sum of \$10,000 which then would provide for Joyce for much of her life. Today, that amount would not take care of a person for a year—that is less than \$1,000 a month now if the entire amount was spent in one year! (2) Life is radically different in being married with no children, being married with three children at home, and being married for almost 50 years when all our children are over 40 years old. (3) Life in the 20s and life in the 60s differs in numerous basic ways.

Change often attacks and alters our answers to the basic questions concerning physical existence. If you doubt it, consider that one of the rapidly-escalating age groups in which AIDS is relentlessly advancing in America is this--older people above retirement age who are widows and widowers, who live promiscuous lives. If you asked these men and women 30 years ago to predict seriously when they would be promiscuous, how many of them do you think would have predicted they EVER would be promiscuous in ANY circumstance?

Regardless of age or economic circumstance, the values of the person who believes in and trusts God will differ from the values of the person who does not believe in nor trust the concept of God. The nature of that belief and the depth of that trust commonly determine the basis of the answers to the challenging questions.

Proverbs was delivered to the Israelite people as a part of their scripture. It is composed of insights into the behavior of a godly person. It directs readers and listeners into an understanding of wise and foolish behavior for those who place their trusting faith in God. Those facts suggest two things: (1) The readers/hearers believed in God. At least some who read or heard did not understand the connection between a person’s behavior and his/her faith

in God. (2) That faith in God does not automatically produce wisdom and wise behavior. In order for one generation to pass to another generation an understanding of wise behavior, there must be *learning*. Just because a person has faith in God does not mean the person automatically understands what is wise and foolish.

Proverbs 1:7 said knowledge begins with the fear of the Lord. This fear is not the fear of terror, nor is it the conviction that the Lord is a teddy bear who creates a buddy-buddy relationship with all who place their faith in Him. It is a profound reverence that honestly sees self “for whom I am” and honestly sees God “for Whom He is.”

If you wish to see the kind of fear the writer speaks about, consider Isaiah 6:1-8. The sight of the Lord filled Isaiah with a sense of unworthiness prior to his awareness of forgiveness. Notice the awareness of forgiveness produced the desire to serve. Note two things: (1) The fear was not a terror that wanted to get as far away from God as possible. (2) The reverence expressed itself by a desire to serve.

Fools do not want to acquire wisdom; they do not wish to be taught. Why? Acquiring wisdom and being taught would require changes in personal behavior, and they do not wish to change in any way.

The *beginning (ground zero)* of knowledge is holding an honest, profound reverence that changes through learning and results in service. People governed by foolishness want nothing to do with such knowledge.

For Thought and Discussion

1. Everyone faces what? What is the problem?
2. Some challenging questions to be asked and answered are what? They determine what?
3. What are two difficulties with such questions?
4. Change often attacks and alters what? Why?
5. The values of a believer who trusts God will differ from what?
6. Proverbs directs readers/listeners into what understanding? What two facts does that understanding suggest?
7. Discuss the “fear” in Proverbs 1:7. Include Isaiah 6:1-8 in your discussion.
8. Why do fools not wish to acquire understanding or be taught?

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Lesson Three

The Real Victim of Bad Advice

Text: Proverbs 1:8-19

An age-old problem: no one wishes to listen to his/her parents. This reading is addressed to “my son.” In much of history, young men had an exposure to life and life’s circumstances that was often denied young women. The course of young women was established by marital responsibilities and caring for children and the home. A young lady’s choices were limited from the moment of birth. However, most young men had the freedom to roam, the freedom of exposure, and choices to make.

Doubtlessly, many young women chaffed at the strict restrictions placed on them, and many young men rebelled at the “stupidity” of their parents who failed to realize the “richness” of life’s calls or the “joys” of life’s opportunities. As the young of most ages, they saw only the “upside” of life’s challenges, and never the consequences of following the call of personal desires. The young had not lived long enough to appreciate the value of experience.

The section begins with a plea to listen to the father’s instructions and heed the mother’s teachings. That which they most longed for came from what the young regarded as the most unlikely source: their parents’ guidance. Parents understood more about life than the young imagined! It was the parents’ insights that would put a wreath on their heads and jewelry around their necks! The dazzling effect of the victor’s wreath and a neck adorned with coveted jewelry was found in their parents’ words and thoughts, not in experiencing life’s calls.

“Caution, youth! Look at the persons who seek to appeal to your desires! Are they really concerned about you having a good, fulfilling experience, or are they only concerned about their opportunity to use you? Will you think you are saying “yes” to your desires only to discover (too late) that your naïveté was used to achieve their purpose? Be very careful about those you give consent to!”

“They say to you, ‘Come with us and you will have your heart’s desire through preying on those who are too stupid to recognize dangerous circumstances.’ Sure, they have done nothing to us, but they are not even afraid of a possible ambush. Besides, they have plenty—they will only get more! If they are hurt or die, it is their fault!”

“Think of what you will get! You will be instantly wealthy beyond your dreams! You can buy anything you want! Your house will be full of things you only dream about now!”

“We will take care of you! You can trust us! There is no way we would let you go in need! Besides, there will not be any need. Your days of wanting, needing, and dreaming about having are over.”

An alarmed father warns his son, “Be careful! You are about to make a mistake that will cause you endless regret! Instead of going with them, run from them. Look at what these people do. The evil that sheds blood is a call that they cannot resist. They do stupid things that cannot possibly work, and they seem not to notice or care. As a result, they make themselves the victim—they ambush themselves. They think imposing violence on others is the answer to everything—all their personal ambitions. Any person who turns to violence brings unnecessary hurt to himself. As a result, his own acts of violence will cost him his life.”

There are four things that are obvious in the foolish perspective then that are still obvious now.

1. The distrust of experience.
2. There exists a quick way to obtain one's physical desires.
3. Materialism is the answer to all a person's physical desires and wants.
4. The key to being successful in material pursuits is violence—using force to take from those whose weakness makes them vulnerable.

“There is not enough time to allow experience to teach us. Life is too short to allow experience to teach. There is a quicker way to obtain than yielding to experience. Physically having what you want when you want it is the core of existence. Material satisfaction is the only genuine satisfaction in life. To think otherwise is to deceive your self. Take what you want in the quickest way possible. If violence is necessary, use it—violence is your friend, not your enemy. Impose your will on another if you consider it necessary!”

For Thought and Discussion

1. What is an age-old problem?
2. To whom was this reading addressed?
3. What was denied young women?
4. Most young men had the freedom to what?
5. How does this reading begin?
6. What was the unlikely source that guided the young in life?
7. What would parents' insights provide the young?
8. What caution was given?
9. What would the evil say to the young?
10. What did the evil people want the young to think about?
11. What promise did the evil people make to the young?
12. What four things were obvious in the perspective of the foolish that are still obvious?

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Lesson Four The Call of Wisdom Proverbs 1:20-33

In this reading, wisdom is personified. Wisdom is spoken of as though wisdom is a person taking action. Wisdom is presented as a real, aggressively determined person who has an agenda that seeks to benefit people. Wisdom seeks to interact with all people as it pursues their best interests. It is not merely a concept, or sensible thoughts, or a way to look at life. It is a tangible force that aggressively seeks to show people the best way to live, the way that averts what people dread, the way that avoids the consequences that ruins life and makes people victims.

In verses 20-22, note these things. Wisdom is not hidden. First, people do not have to discover where wisdom resides (as in some mysterious, undisclosed place). Second, when people find wisdom, they do not have to convince wisdom to reveal its secrets. Third, people do not have to wonder, "Have we truly understood wisdom's message?" Nothing is secretive about wisdom's residence or wisdom's message. Wisdom is not people-dependent in revealing its message.

Note the ways that wisdom seeks to reveal itself. First, it shouts—it does not whisper to a select few. It is not hidden—it shouts in the streets. Anyone can hear wisdom and benefit from its wisdom. Wisdom revealed itself in the street. In today's words, its message is "public domain."

Also note where wisdom shouted. To appreciate wisdom's shouts in a town, think of an ancient Israelite city, not a modern city of today. First, wisdom shouts in the square. The square was typically an ancient city's market place. Since there was no canning, or refrigeration, or freezing, everyday life included going to the square to get food for the day. It was a noisy place, but it was the city's heart. (The marketplace figured prominently in Jesus' and Paul's teachings/work—see Matthew 11:16-19; 20:1-7; 23:6, 7; Mark 7:4; 12:38-40; Luke 7:31-35; Acts 16:19; and 17:17.) Numerous public things occurred in the market place.

Second, wisdom shouted at the heads of primary streets. They also were noisy places, but a place where many people passed. Again, wisdom's message is not concealed.

Third, wisdom took its message to the gates of the city. This was the typical place where the people went to express grievances, receive justice, or transact business, etc. (consider Genesis 23:17, 18; 34:20-24; Exodus 32:26; Deuteronomy 21:18, 19; 22:15; 22:24; 25:7; Joshua 20:4; Ruth 4:1-6; 2 Samuel 15:1-6; etc). In our words, wisdom went "where the action was." Again, there was nothing secretive about wisdom's message.

Wisdom sought three types of people. It called to the naïve who over-simplified life. It called to the negative who pursued their fulfillment by being continually negative. It called to people who despised knowledge—nothing could vary from their view or thoughts.

Wisdom's message was simple. "Do not be afraid of my corrections! I am not a dangerous enemy who threatens your well-being! I wish to give you a gift that will bless your life. I will give you my spirit—your life will be guided by me! You will know (an understanding knowledge) my words. The outcome will not be rote, mindless compliance with a standard you do not understand."

The result: Wisdom called in highly visible places, but the naïve, the negative, and those who despised knowledge refused to listen. Wisdom went the second mile; it reached for those who needed its help. However, the naïve, the negative, and the “content to remain ignorant” totally rejected wisdom. They wanted nothing to do with wisdom’s guidance.

A rejection of wisdom resulted in consequences. Wisdom’s guidance is not forever available. When the consequences for rejecting wisdom began arriving, it was too late to say, “Now I see what you were talking about—I will change my ways! Please remove the consequences of my evil motives/behavior.”

Wisdom said, “When the disaster of your bad decisions arrive (decisions based on your rejection of me), I will laugh at you. When you become the victim of your distress and anxiety, when your terror is like being trapped in a ruinous storm, I will mock you. Though before I called for you and reached out to you, now I will hide from you.”

“What happened to you was your decision, the results of your acts, and your fault. You rejected knowledge. You refused to respect the Lord—which is the beginning of knowledge. You refused to learn what was wrong in your life so you could accept my guidance. That was your decision/choice, and it was deliberate.”

“Now you must eat the fruit of your own choices. You will have to be satisfied with the results of your own decisions. The naïve’s chosen direction will bring them death. Those who loved ignorance will be destroyed by their dedication to “status quo.”

“Only those who listened will escape the dread of evil results by learning to live securely.”

For Thought and Discussion

1. Discuss wisdom being portrayed as a person.
2. Discuss the fact that wisdom was not hidden.
3. Discuss wisdom’s call to the naïve, the negative, and those who hated knowledge.
4. Discuss wisdom’s message.
5. Discuss the results of rejecting wisdom.
6. Give examples that illustrate when it is too late to avoid the consequences of rejecting wisdom.
7. Discuss the results of listening to wisdom.

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Lesson Five

Wisdom's Protection

Text: Proverbs 2:1-22

Chapter 2 may begin with the voice of a wise father calling to his son, or wisdom (pictured as a person) calling to young men who wisdom wishes to make “my son.” Who is calling—the concerned father or wisdom personified—has little if any impact on the message that followed.

The message began with a basic understanding: if a person is blessed by wisdom, he must want to be blessed by wisdom. The wise person will not accidentally be wise. Wisdom's commandments are treasured. Wisdom is listened to because the person wants an internal understanding. The person wants to distinguish between good and evil. The person is motivated to seek for wisdom as people seek for money (silver) or a hidden treasure.

There are five benefits given for seeking wisdom with such passion and determination. (1) Wisdom will teach you “the fear of the Lord” which is the key to discovering knowledge [verse 5]. (2) Wisdom will enable a person to recognize righteousness, justice, equity, and good directions [verse 9]. (3) Wisdom will protect a person from evil's way [verse 12]. (4) Wisdom will protect a person from the adulteress [verse 16]. (5) Wisdom will enable a person to walk the route of good men [verse 20].

People who spent their childhood with parents who championed the values of godliness commonly look at life and the world differently—even if as adults they choose not to be Christians—than people who were not exposed to such values. Often the writer refers to this situation as the “duh factor.” If a person was deliberately dishonest, or deliberately deceitful, or deliberately thoughtless, or deliberately irresponsible, or deliberately selfish, etc. I want to say to that person (but rarely do), “And you expected what to happen?”

Amazingly, when people face the consequences of their decisions and acts, they often do not make the simplest connections between the consequences they face and the decisions they made or their past behavior. It is as though the consequences are some mysterious happening that have no justification for existing. Often such people say, “Why is this happening? How could this happen to me?” Never assume a person understands why “wisdom” is “wise,” not arbitrary.

The fear of the Lord and its knowledge acknowledges that God is the source of knowledge of life. An understanding of how to treat people and how to show respect in human relationships has its source in God. A knowledge of God improves human relationships. People who know and understand God (not just a system of religion) know how to act with discretion. Genuine godliness does not produce people who do not know the importance of keeping a confidence, who do not discern the value of being trustworthy. The words of a person who is not trustworthy are like a ricocheting bullet that wounds the innocent.

God places special value on those who are persons of integrity. He preserves such people. (It does not say such people never suffer—consider persons like Moses, Samuel, David, and the prophets who were preserved by God, but suffered.)

Wisdom is valuable because it is internal and thus results in the satisfying fulfillment of the person. It uses the discretion and understanding of the person as a protection.

Among wisdom's protection is deliverance from perverse people who walk in the ways of evil. These people feel no loyalty to righteousness. They find their joy in doing evil. They follow devious ways and deceitful, hard to follow paths.

Proverbs has a special desire to protect young men from adulteress women. That desire can be seen in statements such as 5:3-6, 20-23; 6:24-35; 7:5-27; or 9:13-18. In this reading the adulteress is a flatterer, a covenant breaker, and death who makes it impossible to recover life. She makes a young man think he is something he is not, and she destroys his future. He will either be enslaved to his foolish behavior, haunted by his dread, or killed by a jealous husband.

However, wisdom will instruct the person in an enduring righteousness that will allow the person to live continuously as an Israelite in the land God gave them. Because the wicked are ignorant of God's ways, they are temporary residents, not established citizens.

For Thought and Discussion

1. Chapter 2 may begin how? Regardless of who speaks, the speaker has little impact on what?
2. The message begins with what basic understanding?
3. What are the five benefits of seeking wisdom with determination?
4. Contrast adults who had parents who championed the values of godliness with adults who did not have such parents.
5. Explain the "duh factor."
6. What should never be assumed?
7. The knowledge that comes from "the fear of the Lord" acknowledges what?
8. The words of people who are not trustworthy are like what?
9. Do people of godly integrity suffer? Explain your answer.
10. Why is wisdom valuable? What is one of the ways wisdom protects the wise?
11. Why is the adulteress such a danger to the young man?
12. Wisdom instructed people in what?

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Lesson Six

The Challenges for Those Who Would Be Wise

Text: Proverbs 3:1-12

That which is worthy of acquiring almost always is costly. That which is easily acquired is rarely worth the cost of acquiring. The person who expects to receive something worthwhile for no investment is ripe for an act of deception. Do not invite disaster into your life by thinking the truly valuable things in life will be yours at no cost.

Though people are determined to find bargains, most understand the following. In business: There are no free lunches—everyone wants something. In education: The person who buys a degree knows the same after acquiring the degree as he/she knew before obtaining the degree. In real estate: A million dollar farm that cannot find a buyer (sell) for more than \$100,000 is a \$100,000 farm (regardless of what is called).

Most people realize that acquiring anything involves determined effort. Most are not surprised when the person who does nothing experiences a collapsing enterprise. Most are not confused when the irresponsible person produces the results of irresponsibility. Most are not shocked when an obviously lazy person experiences only sorrow for self.

Wisdom requires a serious investment. It takes more than wishing to have wisdom. Being wise involves more than saying, “I am wise!” The person who seriously seeks wisdom pays the price for becoming wise.

The text of this lesson points to some of the prices of wisdom. (1) Do not forget the Lord’s teachings [verse 1]. (2) Do not be separated from kindness and truth [verse 3]. (3) Do not lean on your own understanding [verse 5]. (4) Do not be wise in your own eyes [verse 7]. (5) Do not reject the Lord’s discipline [verse 11].

Or, stated in positive terms: (1) Remember the Lord’s commandments [verse 1]. (2) Find favor in God’s and man’s sight [verse 4]. (3) Place absolute trust in the Lord [verse 5]. (4) Fear the Lord and turn from evil [verse 7]. (5) The Lord reproves those He loves [verse 12].

Consider the results of accepting this challenge. In # 1, such behavior will lengthen life and bring the person peace. In # 2, both God and people will hold you in high regard. In #3, God, Himself, will determine the direction of the person’s life. In #4, while no one “enjoys” being wrong, everyone is “wrong” about many things. God cares enough about those who follow Him to want them to understand better ways to live. Thus, God cares enough about His followers to correct them in order to enable them to avoid the consequences of their errors.

Consider some observations. Observation #1: These are not “conversion” insights, but “guidance” insights for those who are among the converted. The perspective of this study is that these insights primarily were given to Israel to benefit the Israelites as they sought to be God’s people. It was too simple for them to say, “Look at me—I am an Israelite! I am a citizen of Israel—look at my father, mother, and past! I am a part of Israel and that makes me a part of God’s chosen people! I am something you cannot be because I was born an Israelite to Israelite parents. Therefore, I have ‘it made’ with God!”

Surely that attitude can exist among Christians today. “We are a part of God’s people, the church! Just as God delivered Old Testament Israel from slavery, gave them a land, and made them a people, look at all God did for us in Jesus Christ. I come from a long line of Christians who did many things for God. I have it made because I am “in” the church and because of my personal history in Christianity.”

The writer of Proverbs said, “Realize that who you are and your history does not make you wise. Your relationship with God makes you wise. Much more is involved in being a wise person led by God than simply declaring who you are and trusting your history.”

Observation #2: The investment in becoming God’s wise follower involves a major life investment. God must be your first priority in life. Therefore, there are some things you will not do. You will not forget God’s teachings, nor separate yourself from kindness and truth, nor trust only yourself, nor consider yourself independently wise, nor reject the Lord’s correction. Instead, you will remember God’s commandments; you will seek both divine and human favor; you will place your primary trust in God; evil will be your continual enemy as God is your source of strength; and you welcome God’s correction.

Observation #3: In the matter of godly wisdom, nothing has changed.

For Thought and Discussion

1. Discuss this: People do not acquire something for nothing.
2. Illustrate what most people understand.
3. Most people realize what?
4. Discuss this: Wisdom requires a serious investment.
5. In negative terms, what are five prices of wisdom?
6. In positive terms, what are five prices of wisdom?
7. What are the results of accepting the challenge to seek wisdom?
8. List the three observations.
9. Discuss what the complacent Israelite might say.
10. Discuss how Christians can produce the same attitude.

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Lesson Seven

Reasons for Pursuing Godly Wisdom

Text: Proverbs 3:13-26

The nature of one's life is to pursue something. It is rare to find a person who pursues nothing. Common pursuits include a sporting interest (golf, football, basketball, baseball, fishing, hunting, auto racing, personal challenges, camping, etc.), music, reading, marriage, parenting, extended family, cooking, academic achievements, surviving, etc. Most everyone is "into" something! Most everyone does the necessary to get to the something. The man or woman who finds no appeal in anything is extremely rare! Even if we cannot do, we imagine doing. If there is no opportunity for actually doing, there is always "wishing, imagining, and dreaming about."

Today's reading discusses the blessings that come to the person who pursues godly wisdom. Pursuing wisdom produces a gain of understanding. The godly wisdom discussed is not a pursuit of merely knowing. It is more than a pursuit of "fact finding."

Godly wisdom cannot be separated from understanding. It is focused on understanding how to behave in life. One cannot be "wise" and refuse to understand how to behave as he/she lives life, nor can one understand how to behave as he/she lives life and refuse to be "wise." To say the least, the two are inseparable companions. To pursue wisdom is to pursue an understanding of how to live, and to pursue an understanding of how to live is to pursue wisdom.

This text states three blessings that occur when a person seeks wisdom. The three are these:

- (1) The person locates something valuable.
- (2) The person locates the pleasant existence.
- (3) The person will stay in touch with things that will never become unimportant.

How tragic to spend life acquiring what was considered valuable only to discover late in life that there is little value in what you acquired. How tragic never to discover the pleasant existence. How tragic to use most or all of life "out of touch" with the important.

Consider how the writer emphasized the value of godly wisdom. There is more profit in this wisdom than can be found in the value of silver or (refined) gold. This wisdom is more precious than jewels. It holds long life in the right hand, and riches and honor in the left hand.

Ask "the man on the street" what is the key to finding the valuable? He is likely to say, "Obtaining!" Surely—agreement thus far! Then ask, "Obtaining what?" The answers will include wealth in some form, or position in some situation, or power over others. Perhaps the suggestion is money because money can obtain position or power or both. Perhaps the suggestion is to have something valuable that no one else has. Perhaps the suggestion is to have or do anything you want at anytime you want anywhere you want.

Uh-oh! Little or no agreement on the "what!"

It is interesting to note that people who acquired incredible "life-changing" sums of money quickly are often worse off a few months later. It is also interesting to discover how empty and unhappy many are who acquired their dreams. People get weary of living in the fish bowl of the

public eye. Having often makes one a target. When the uncommon becomes common, all that is “super-sized” is their boredom. “Dreaming” is replaced with “having,” and “having” is often not nearly as fulfilling as occasionally experiencing.

How often have you thought that the solution to your problems was money? Or knowing the right people? Or being in the position to tell others what to do—and they did it? Or having the power to make your desired things happen?

Questions: Why do so many who have their desired things also have such undesirable lives? If having “the solution” does not make misery an impossible experience, how is it the solution?

If those in Christ aspire to what those out of Christ have, what message does that send about being godly?

Wisdom produces an existence that embraces peace, that clings to the tree of life, and that results in happiness (not the attempted escape of indulgence). Why? Simple! They belong to the Creator God who made it all.

The results: (1) They are secure. (2) They are directed by God. (3) They can sleep without fear. (4) They do not live in dread of the wicked because their confidence is in God.

This is not because the wicked do not exist. It is because they have a superior life based on a superior behavior. That life is based on the Creator God. It produces beneficial relationships. When undesired circumstances come, the relationships and the Creator God remain.

For Thought and Discussion

1. Read 1 Samuel 25:2-35; alertly consider 25:31-33. How does today’s reading relate to that?
2. It is the nature of life to do what?
3. Godly wisdom cannot be separated from what?
4. In today’s text, what are the three blessings of pursuing godly wisdom?
5. The profit in godly wisdom surpasses what things?
6. What realizations/experiences are interesting?
7. Godly wisdom produces an existence that does what?
8. What are the results of obtaining godly wisdom? Explain why that does not mean the wicked do not exist.

PROVERBS AND GODLY WISDOM

Lesson Eight

Things Godly Wisdom Does Not Do

Text: Proverbs 3:27-35

Virtually every cause or movement is composed of positive and negative instructions. It is not unusual for a cause or movement to be defined primarily by what it does not do. Seemingly, people like to define responsibility by the negative. They like to produce the impression that a person can be a part of a cause or movement by doing nothing if they avoid the correct things.

Consider two illustrations. Illustration # 1: people often wish to prove they are good because of what they do not do. "Because I avoid doing these things, I am good. I do not actually do anything positive, but my goodness is demonstrated in the fact that I avoid the correct things. I may not do anything, but I avoid the 'bad' things." Thus the person is "good" if the person does nothing, but in doing nothing he/she avoids the correct "bad" things.

In illustration #2 carefully note the contrast. In the Ten Commandments (this is taken from Exodus 20:1-17), most of the commands are stated in the negative. Four commands are about Israel's relationship with God, and six commands are about the Israelites' relationship with each other. The "do not" is prominent. Yet, the "do not" commands are not instructions to do nothing, but instructions to redirect behavior.

Consider the instructions about relationship with God. They were not to honor other forms of deity. They were not to make idols. They were not to use God's name in order to achieve deception. They were not to work on the seventh day or Sabbath.

Why? God was one, not many. Only He had delivered them from Egypt. He was so distinct from physical creation that nothing in creation could represent Him. An important way to acknowledge His superiority over the creation was to refuse to use His name in an attempt to deceive. (Their form of a guarantee was to use an oath that called upon something greater than self to verify truth.) They would not work on the seventh day because God rested on the seventh day after creation. Thus a completely different perception of deity resulted in a completely different behavior in honoring deity.

In their relationship with each other, they would care for their parents; they would not murder, commit adultery, steal, lie about a neighbor, or covet anything in a neighbor's possession. The prohibitions could be fulfilled only through respect for fellow Israelites. Thus a completely different way of perceiving people should result in a completely different behavior toward people. Other people were not to be viewed as "my" opportunity.

The point: How one did not behave determined how he/she would behave. The negative stressed the positive. Avoid the negative by doing the positive. Example: Settle disputes respectfully—murder IS NOT an option!

In today's text, godly wisdom DOES NOT:

1. Withhold doing good when the person is capable of doing the good.
2. Delay in helping your neighbor.
3. Devise harm to your neighbor who trusts you to do good.
4. Be contentious without cause.

5. Envy people of violence.

What will that mean?

1. You will do good promptly as ability presents opportunity.
2. People who count on you have reason to understand you are trustworthy.
3. You are open in your actions—you are not dangerous to others.
4. You seek peace rather than contention.
5. You let the right people influence you—people who challenge you to be your best.

Why?

1. God is close to the upright, not the untrustworthy.
2. God blesses the righteous, but curses the wicked.
3. God gives grace to the person who suffers, but has no confidence in those who live in doubt.
4. Honor is the inheritance of the wise; however fools delight in dishonor (they do not understand they shame themselves).

Remember being godly is both positive and negative. The fact you do not behave wickedly means you behave in a godly manner.

For Thought and Discussion

1. Virtually every cause or movement is composed of what?
2. How do “good” people often wish to prove they are “good?”
3. In the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17), how many were about relationship with God? About relationship with people?
4. What *understandings* were the basis of Israel’s relationship with God?
5. How was Israel to treat other Israelites?
6. What was the point in the Ten Commandments?
7. In today’s text, godly wisdom did not do what things? What did that mean?
8. Give four reasons for godly wisdom behaving in that manner.
9. What are you challenged to remember?
10. What fact should you remind yourself of?

PROVERBS AND GODLY WISDOM

Lesson Nine

The Contrast: Godly Wisdom and Evil

Text: Proverbs 4:10-19

We are familiar with the fact that life might be viewed as a series of choices. Some choices are significant (for example: is this act moral or immoral?), and some choices are insignificant (for example: should I have strawberry or cherry flavoring?) For those who are serious about following God's ways, one of the significant choices involves choosing righteousness and rejecting evil.

That is not as simple a choice as it would initially appear. (a) It involves the level of one's commitment to be righteous. (b) It involves defining what is righteous. (c) It involves defining what is evil. (d) It involves continually contrasting righteousness and evil. Though that is not all involved, it quickly becomes obvious that distinguishing righteousness from evil AND committing to righteousness involves a lot of effort!

Why would a person bother to go to all that effort? If the person made all that effort, how would he/she know, "I am correct! I have made and do make the proper choices!"

The Proverb's answer is to be seen in the results of righteous choices and the results of wicked choices. The consequences produced by both produce a contrast. The contrast shows the importance of choosing righteousness over wickedness. (You are asked to do a difficult thing: Do not impose a Christian perspective on Proverbs' answer. Proverbs was written in the period of Israel in the Old Testament. Proverbs' concern was not focused on the afterlife existence, heaven, hell, and the judgment. It addresses how best to live "now" in this existence.)

Godly wisdom provided these benefits:

1. It increases the years of one's life. (Verse 10)
2. It makes one upright. (Verse 11)
3. It prevents stumbling even if one runs. (Verse 12)
4. It protects life. (Verse 13)

The path (ways, direction) of the wicked curses a person in the following ways:

1. The direction of the wicked threatens life. (Verse 15)
2. The wicked are enslaved to a wicked lifestyle—they cannot even sleep unless they do a wicked act. (Verse 16)
3. The wicked are nourished by wickedness and violence—that is the way they measure usefulness and significance. (Verse 17)
4. The obvious: To the wicked, life is significant ONLY if someone else suffers.

The contrast:

1. The path of the righteous is like the dawn offering the promise of increasing light.
2. The path of the wicked is like darkness that hides the obstacles that threaten misery and destruction.

First, one of the primary examples of the contrast between the godly life and the wicked life is light and darkness. Righteous living is light, and wicked living is darkness. In the worlds of the

Old Testament and the world of the New Testament, the light/darkness contrast was an excellent, striking example. The relevance of the example was obvious.

Most of us have lived in a world of light so long that we have forgotten the striking contrast between light and darkness. Most of our nights are bathed in light. One can work at night. A store can stay open all night. Much of our entertainment is at night. We can travel at night. If we seek safety at night, we go to a well-lighted place. Light is such a part of our darkness that a person often has to search for true darkness!

In the worlds of the Bible, life commonly stopped with darkness because people could not see in the darkness. Dangers were magnified!

Second, in righteousness (as in the dawn) there is hope, whereas in wickedness there is the hopelessness of the increasing inability to see (as in the growing darkness). In righteousness, just as in the dawn, there is the increasing promise of more light which means the improving ability to see (which meant the ability to do more and more without restriction).

The contrast between light and darkness made an excellent example for the contrast between righteous living and wicked living. May your life be an excellent example of the benefits and the hope found in righteous living!

For Thought and Discussion

1. We are familiar with what fact?
2. Give four reasons for this not being a simple choice.
3. What is the “why” question that should be asked?
4. Proverbs’ answer produces what?
5. What difficult thing are you asked to do?
6. What benefits does godly wisdom provide?
7. How does the path of the wicked curse people?
8. What is the basic contrast?
9. Discuss the primary example of contrast produced by light and darkness.
10. Discuss why the dawn was a good symbol of hope.

PROVERBS AND GODLY WISDOM

Lesson Ten

Adultery: A Special Threat to Godly Wisdom

Proverbs 5 and 7:6-27

Proverbs is written to the young male Israelite, pleading with him to choose a life devoted to godly wisdom and not to wickedness. Obviously, if adultery occurred (or occurs), it included the mindset and action of both a male and a female. For whatever reason, the writer pled with only the male to avoid the adulterous sexual union.

Other Old Testament writings consider the involvement of both the male and the female. Consider, for example, Deuteronomy 22:22-27. The penalty for adultery in Israel was to be death for both the man and the woman. However, if the woman was forced in a field, it was to be assumed she cried for help, and no one heard her. (Remember an Israelite couple was regarded as “married” to each other from the time of engagement, even though they were not sexually active. Also remember that it was not uncommon for marriage to occur at an early age.) Do note the assumption favored the woman.

In Proverbs, the young man was cautioned not to disregard godly wisdom when opportunity to yield to a strong impulse presented itself. Sexual desires can cause a young man to be extremely foolish. His strong sexual desire can cause him to consider only the pleasure of the moment. If he can be convinced to think only of the desires of the moment, he is likely to yield.

The situation in Proverbs involved a married woman who was deliberately sexually unfaithful to her husband, and who looked for a seduction. She was not deceived, seduced by a man, or in any way a victim of evil circumstances. She was not the symbol of all Israelite wives, but a symbol of the adulterous females.

In chapter 5 this woman was said to be quite persuasive in her speech, but she was disaster poised to bring ruin. The result of yielding to her seduction would be a bitterness that lingered, a “dying” that could not be avoided, and a sexual union with an unstable person (who was ignorant of her own instability).

The wise thing to do was avoid the situation. If the young man did not, he wasted his potential in his lineage, he wasted his future prosperity, and as he grew older, he would realize how stupid and thoughtless his reaction to this sexual opportunity was.

Please remember that Proverbs was writing about that situation thousands of years ago. Descendants were extremely important. To commit the act of adultery in Israel’s religious society was immediately dangerous and lastingly discrediting. Respect and prosperity were extremely difficult to find after such a foolish, discrediting act. Such consequences are uncommon in our society today. That does not make acts of fornication and adultery wise today, but the hurtful consequences have changed.

Chapter 7:6-23 was a description, given in Hebrew poetic language, by a witness as he watched a seduction take place. The witness reported on what he actually saw and on what he knew was taking place. He observed a young man without judgment walking near the place the adulteress lived. Evidently, the young man knew she lived near, and was looking for temptation. The young man approached the temptation of opportunity under his imagined cover

of early darkness (how often people foolishly think acts are hidden when those acts are obvious).

The adulteress saw opportunity and responded quickly. She was prepared and knew what she was doing. Though she was married, she was dressed as a prostitute. As she met her opportunity, she called attention to herself. She had spent her time looking for opportunity, and she knew just what to do and say. She brazenly took the initiative, making it obvious she was opportunity. Examine her concept of religion—she was religious and did (in her thinking) the appropriate religious things. (“The God responsibilities were cared for, so God was not an issue or a problem.”) Examine the way she appealed to his ego: “I have been looking for you—you are important to me.” Examine how she appealed to his imagination: “My bed is brightly colored and filled with wonderful smells.” (She wanted him to imagine heightened sensual pleasures.) Examine how she made him feel secure. She wanted him to know there was only opportunity and no danger—for her to devote herself to his pleasure the entire night was no problem! Her husband would be gone for a month, and he had plenty of money with him. He would not come home unexpectedly. (This might even be just the first of many opportunities—maybe future opportunity was being offered.)

The result: she convinced him to accept her offer. He, with assurance, followed her expecting a wonderful experience. He was like an ox led to the slaughter, a trapped stag waiting to be killed, and a bird unaware of the danger that surrounded it. He had no idea that his seduction would cost him his life.

The caution: If she betrayed her husband, she would betray him. He was not the first she destroyed, and he would not be the last. The wise course: avoid the temptation presented by the opportunity. Neither exaggerate nor test the strength of your godly commitment!

For Thought and Discussion

1. Discuss the focus of Proverb’s admonitions, especially in regard to adultery.
2. Discuss the relationship between godly wisdom and strong sexual desire.
3. In chapter 5, though the adulteress’ words were persuasive, discuss the consequences of yielding.
4. In the discussion of the act of seduction in chapter 7, discuss how the young man empowered temptation.
5. Discuss the adulteress of chapter 7 regarding her response to opportunity.
6. Discuss the things to be examined in the adulteress’ attitudes.
7. Discuss the result of the young man yielding to seduction.

PROVERBS AND GODLY WISDOM

Lesson Eleven

The Description of a Wicked Person

Text: Proverbs 6:12-19

We often assume the things we find distasteful are automatically distasteful to God. It is simple for us to conclude that our priorities are God's priorities, our values are God's values, and things that we find "unforgivably irritating" are "unforgivably irritating" to God.

If that were true, morally there would be little for people to learn. We merely would discuss among ourselves what was good and bad. Nothing would be good or bad on an intercultural basis. Something might be decided to be good in one culture and bad in another culture. There would be no moral values that were true for everyone regardless of what a culture decided.

It takes little thought to see the problems that would arise if that were true. To begin with, how can there be one God over all people, and there be no morality or ethical behavior for all people? Do you realize that if you are a Christian you base moral right and wrong and ethical behavior on values that are over 2000 years old? Why? Because of the revelation that came through Jesus Christ and the values God declared through him! Christians do not behave as they do because some contemporary human declared a set of values. Christians behave as they do because God revealed Himself through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Our challenge is not the challenge of creating values, but the challenge of learning values.

The basic values of righteous behavior in the Old Testament and the basic values of righteous behavior in the New Testament do not differ. Warning: those values were not popular then and they are not popular now!

First, you are asked to note the human values God found deeply objectionable as revealed in today's text.

1. A person who cannot be trusted in what he says.
2. Though he knows what is right, he stubbornly plans evil.
3. He loves to generate conflict.
4. The consequences of his behavior are too sudden to be avoided.

The seven things God finds deeply objectionable:

1. Arrogance, the "I'm better than you are" attitude.
2. Deceitfulness, the desire to lie even when it is unnecessary.
3. People who deliberately cause innocent people to endure disastrous suffering.
4. A person devoted internally to wicked endeavors.
5. People who enjoy watching evil.
6. People who are deceitful witnesses.
7. People who enjoy producing conflict between others who are close.

Second, you are asked, "Would those things compose your list of terrible things?" Likely not! In fact, some of those do not seem nearly as horrible as some things we can think of. The first thing called to your attention is this: God's list is more directed toward motives/attitudes, and your list probably would be more directed toward specific acts. We likely would list things like murder (what type?), adultery (by men, women, or both?), stealing (when, of what?), abuse

(children, women, men?), drunken injury to another (would circumstances matter?), etc. Make your list, and see how many things would not be covered in God's list.

The second thing called to your attention: God's list is justice-centered. Reverse God's list to positive expressions. The person is trustworthy. He values what is right. He encourages accord and peace. No one, not even the poorest, suffer as a result of his deeds. He is devoted to doing right. Seeing evil committed makes him sick! He is an honest witness. He is a good friend to have—never is there need to fear him!

The person God considers worthless is the person who does not value people, but uses others for his own purposes. In an exaggerated opinion of self, he is unworthy of trust. He is happy when he causes hurt to someone else. He uses his power to hurt, not help.

Is it not obvious why God finds this person so objectionable? He is the exact opposite of God! That which we most admire about God is His compassionate caring, His kindness, and His consideration toward all. No one is beneath Him or above Him. Though He is more powerful than we can imagine, He is never a threat to the man or woman devoted to righteousness. Since He is so unselfish toward us, He despises a human acting in selfishness toward others. He values the human who seeks to treat all as He treats all -- with kindness and consideration.

For Thought and Discussion

1. What do we often assume?
2. What would be true if that assumption were true? What would people do?
3. Why do Christians behave as they do?
4. What is true of God's basic values of righteous behavior?
5. List 10 human values that God finds deeply objectionable.
6. Would those 10 things be on your terrible list?
7. God's list is directed toward what? Human lists tend to be directed toward what?
8. God's list is centered in what?
9. Reverse God's list to positive expressions.
10. The person God considers worthless does not do what, but does what?
11. Discuss why God finds the people described in the text so objectionable.

PROVERBS AND GODLY WISDOM

Lesson Twelve

Godly Wisdom Has Incredible Objectives!

Text: Proverbs 8:1-21

What good does the “best” of anything do if it is inaccessible? Whether it is the “best solution” to a specific problem, the “best direction” to staying healthy, the “best insight” for a specific sickness, the “best route” in the challenges of being successful, or the “best guidance” for relationship challenges -- the “best” is of no benefit (no matter how good it is) if it is inaccessible or a mystery. Can you imagine someone shouting, “Good news! THE solution exists!” yet the person does not know what “THE solution” is or where it can be found?

Godly wisdom is not hidden! It is not inaccessible! True, it requires choices and decisions (as does everything). True, those choices and decisions involve prices (as does everything). However, the choices and decisions are known, and it is possible for anyone to pay the prices. The choices and prices primarily involve self without threatening others. Following godly wisdom is “doable” for the person who chooses to follow and will pay the price. Our challenges do not lie in godly wisdom being unknowable or inaccessible.

Some things you are challenged to note in Proverbs 8:1-5. First, you should note that godly wisdom took the initiative. It did not wait to be discovered—instead, it called. In the situation of the writer and those in need, godly wisdom was aggressive as it sought to benefit people.

Second, note that this godly wisdom not only called (took the initiative), but it did so in high-profile places. It was obvious and where people were! The heights beside the routes people traveled, intersections where routes crossed, the gates leading into fortified cities, and entrances to homes were common places that heard godly wisdom’s call. Remember that then people walked or (a few) rode donkeys; thus they had time and opportunity to hear.

Third, note that wisdom’s call was not restricted. It targeted everyone, not just a narrow audience. It called to the mature who should understand “what is what” in physical existence. Godly wisdom even called to those of simple thinking who were naïve about the realities of physical life.

What did godly wisdom say as it called out (Proverbs 8:6-11)?

- a) Godly wisdom spoke noble things that were concerned with what was right, and it did not deceive.
- b) It spoke truth, thus it was dependable.
- c) It spoke righteousness in the concern to direct people in a trustworthy direction.
- d) Its instruction was more valuable than the highest symbols of wealth—it offered a wealth that surpassed any form of earthly treasures.

Note some things that are fundamental to yielding to the instructions of godly wisdom.

- a) The person must believe there is a good and right way to live.
- b) The person must believe that life without deception or wicked behavior is possible.
- c) The person must believe that a straight, trustworthy direction exists.

- d) The person must believe that knowing and understanding this straight direction is possible.
- e) The person must believe that something more valuable than physical wealth exists.

What are the credentials of this godly wisdom?

- a) It lives continually with the ability to govern one's self.
- b) It understands that respecting God means despising evil (God and evil are opposites).
- c) It hates deception.
- d) Its ability to guide is based on realizing that understanding is power.
- e) "I am essential to the ability to reign in the greatest political authorities."
- f) "I return the love of those who love me." (It is not consumed with self.)
- g) "I grant enduring wealth." (Wickedness is not the route to enduring wealth.)
- h) "I possess a wealth that exceeds what is considered physically valuable."
- i) "Righteousness and justice form the direction I take."
- j) "Those who love me are endowed with treasures."

The values of these credentials are to be seen in the realization of how blessed we would be and feel if our lives were significantly touched by these values.

For Thought and Discussion

1. What good does the "best" do if what is true?
2. Godly wisdom is not what two things?
3. What two things does godly wisdom require?
4. Who can respond in those two ways?
5. In Proverbs 8:1-5, list the three things you are asked to note.
6. What four things did godly wisdom say as it called out?
7. List five fundamental beliefs a person must have to yield to the instructions of godly wisdom.
8. List the ten credentials of godly wisdom.
9. How is the value of these credentials seen?
10. How would you benefit from the presence of this force in your life?
11. How would you explain these benefits to someone who had never seen or experienced them?

PROVERBS AND GODLY WISDOM

Lesson Thirteen

The Contrast and Choice

Text: Proverbs 9:7-12

Ultimately, what transpires in our lives depends on the choices we make. I do not mean that “it is all up to us.” Without question, God can do incredible things in us (Ephesians 3:20, 21). Without question, evil can do incredible things in us (Ephesians 6:12). That which God does and that which evil does goes beyond anything we can do of ourselves. We just grant permission. Both empower us to go beyond what we are ordinarily capable of doing.

Yet, the deciding factor in what we do is the choices we make. Do we produce a favorable “climate/environment” for God or for evil? Either can take root in our lives. Either can use our lives for their purposes. Each is more than happy for us to decide for them. However, our choices determine the “climate/environment” we provide to determine if God or evil is the predominant force in our lives.

We can change the “climate/environment” within our lives. Read 2 Peter 2:20-22. A righteous person can escape a wicked existence and return to the wicked existence. It is the person’s choice! Read 1 John 1:5-10. If we wish to escape the hold and consequence of evil, God has us “covered.” The “turning” is what repentance is about. Commitment is not simple, but it is possible—for anyone. The choice of directions a person wishes to go is his/hers to make. Those choices determine who is ascendant in one’s life—God or Satan.

No matter how desirable something may be, no matter how simple a choice may seem, or no matter how ill-advised a decision might be, the person still—by choices made and decisions followed—determines which power directs his/her life. As powerful as relationship with God is, and as powerful as evil’s ability to use is, each person through choices/decisions determines who is in control—God or Satan.

In today’s text there is a contrast which magnifies the choice. Ultimately, each person is the person he/she has chosen to be. Yes, there are times the choices/decisions are complex with many components, and may have “at the moment” consequences. Yes, sometimes others may powerfully influence our choices. [That is why we need to surround ourselves with men and women who value righteousness, who honor righteous choices, and who encourage others to be righteous. Then in my weak moments, it is the righteous who encourage me, not the wicked. The admonition of 1 Corinthians 15:33 is both wise and chilling!] However, regardless of who is around me, I become who I chose to be.

Look at Proverbs 7-9. There are people who cannot be helped. It is not because help is not available. These people make the choice not to be helped! They do not want to repent. They have no desire to redirect their lives. The writer put the scoffer in that category.

The scoffer enjoys doubting. He enjoys showing contempt. He enjoys showing disrespect. He finds no pleasure in being challenged. He is so sure that “he knows everything important” that he hates anyone who even suggests he does not. Nothing can teach him because he is confident he already knows all that is worth knowing. Any effort to try to teach him only invites his attacks. Wise is the person who understands the scoffer’s love for ignorance!

Look at the contrast between the wise person and the scoffer. The wise person understands, “I do not know it all. Learning blesses me! If you teach me, I owe you! I consider one who dares to instruct me to be my friend. He/she only helps me to move closer to my goal!”

The pursuit of godly wisdom should be a “no-brainer” choice. Why? (1) Profoundly respecting God, the source of wisdom, is the beginning. The person must realize “God is greater than any human” to seriously pursue the ways of wisdom. (2) The person will add to the length of life by learning God’s ways (the scoffer ends up irritating everyone—dangerous!). (3) However, know this: whether wise man or scoffer, you decide who you are. Not only are you what you decided to be, but you will have to live with yourself—as long as you live.

Quiet moments for the righteous person are the tonic of refreshing reflection and thought. Quiet moments for the scoffer are pure misery!

Do you like alone time occasionally? Or, are you miserable if you are not distracted by the pursuit of “having fun?”

For Thought and Discussion

1. Ultimately, what transpires in our lives depends on what?
2. Do we produce what for God or for evil?
3. We can change what in our lives? What is repentance about?
4. What two things determine which power directs our lives?
5. There are times when our choices and decisions are what?
6. Why do we need to surround ourselves with righteous people who value righteousness?
7. Who cannot be helped?
8. Describe the scoffer. What is he sure of? Who will he attack?
9. What does the wise person understand?
10. Why should pursuing godly wisdom be a “no-brainer” choice?
11. What are quiet moments like for the righteous person?
12. What are quiet moments like for the scoffer?