

Getting Wisdom

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Prov. 4:7 *Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.*

We sometimes look at this verse and think that the Lord is telling us to get two different attributes - wisdom and understanding. But let's read this another way, so that we can understand what He is really telling us. A good way to illustrate what He is really telling us is to say something we all understand that is a kind of parallel statement. So, here it is, "If you are walking down the aisle of the super market and you come to the eggs, if you will pick yourself up a dozen of those eggs, when you get home you will have those little round white shells, but you will also have inside them some egg yolk and some egg white, to boot." Now, let wisdom be the little white shells, and understanding be the egg yolk and egg white and you have an analogy here of what the Lord is saying. That is, when you get wisdom...with all that getting of wisdom, you get understanding.

Here in America, we are a materialistic people. We want to "get stuff" like everybody else who lives here. We grow up in an environment that encourages getting stuff. We develop many of our human values within the framework of the American dream of getting stuff. Without our really being aware of it, we build a kind of caste system around the relative ownership of stuff. That is, we call people who have a lot of stuff "rich people," we call people who get by and have sufficient stuff to enjoy some comforts "middle-class Americans," and we call people who live from hand to mouth, or are on government assistance "poor people," or "the underprivileged." So, because of how our society looks at things, we have unconsciously built a caste system that hinges on the ownership of stuff.

Now, I don't want to be accused of criticizing the getting of stuff. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon writes about getting stuff and doing the right thing by enjoying that stuff. But, I only want to make a point about the fact that we engage most of our lives in "getting." Now, the secondary subject of our text is getting. But, the focus of this verse is not on getting material things, but on getting wisdom and by getting that wisdom getting also understanding.

As soon as someone starts talking about wisdom, some of us probably get glassy-eyed because we don't feel like we know what wisdom is, so therefore we can't figure out how to get it if we don't know what it is. So, today, we want to take a look at wisdom and trust the Holy Spirit to help us understand what it is, so that we can know how to get some, and how to handle it when we do.

I have said in sermons in the past that wisdom is about the proper interpretation of knowledge. Now, while this is a kind of crude definition, I don't think it gets to the heart of getting wisdom and being able to make it work for us. So, let's go a step further. To do that we want to turn to the 8th chapter of Proverbs and look at an overview of wisdom.

I. **Prov. 8:1-2** Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? 2 She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths.

- If somebody stood on a rooftop down on the square in Paris or Camden and began to yell out messages and you came by, you would probably think or say, “Look at that person, listen to him yelling out all those statements. He sure is making it obvious what he wants!” In other words, he would be pretty obvious just due to the fact that he was making himself heard and seen. Now, apply that to this verse. Doesn’t it tell us that wisdom is not hidden in some corner ; doesn’t it tell us that she has not been struck dumb so she cannot yell out?
- First, then, as I’ve already shown, the **Lord does not hide wisdom**. Rather, it is right out in the open and pretty vocal (metaphorically speaking), but men often look right at it and fail to see it; they come within sound of her voice, but don’t really hear her.
 - I am deaf to high frequency sounds. I can’t hear warblers singing in the trees. I have trouble hearing the consonants in your speech. Human beings in their natural state are deaf to the frequency of God’s messages of wisdom.
 - Second, **at every path that splits** and goes two ways; one way toward error and foolishness, and the other toward wisdom and correctness, **wisdom advertises itself** (“She standeth...by the way **in the places of the paths**”). But, again, men often look right at it, make choices that are wrong and go right down the path of foolishness.
 - Now, these two facts should put each of us on the alert to be aware that **when we come to a crossroads** about making a decision, **wisdom will be standing there revealing herself** to any brain that bothers to do an assessment.

II. **Prov. 8:3** She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors.

- If you think about this verse, you should notice that it identifies 3 sites that wisdom advertises. These sites I believe are meant to represent any and all situations in our lives, but let’s look at the types: In Hebrew culture they would identify 1) the point at which people went from one type of experience to another (at the gates), 2) the business or personal activity conducted in a changed situation, or in social or business interactions generally (at the entry of the city - this suggests a busy thoroughfare), and 3) in the home (coming in at the doors).
- Without making this complicated, I think the Lord tells us here that wisdom speaks out to men even in places where circumstances change, where there is a lot of interaction with other people, and in the conduct both coming into, being inside of, and leaving our homes.

III. **Prov. v 8:4** Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice *is* to the sons of man.

- Here, I think the Lord tells humanity that His wisdom is aimed at every person...not just believers
 - We do know that, despite this, wisdom of the kind that God offers (and this is the only true wisdom) is despised by the fool. It’s just not one of the things they have any incentive to get: **Prov. 17:16** Wherefore *is there* a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing *he hath* no heart *to it*?
- But, the Lord calls upon humanity to take a good look at wisdom anyway: **Prov. 8:5** O ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart.
 - In our text verse, understanding is the Hebrew word *bîynâh* (*bee-naw'*) which refers to knowing the complete meaning of something, including possible consequences and end

results of choices made; while here, it is the Hebrew word is *bîyn* (*bene*) which refers to being able to distinguish or mentally separate - that is, the simple and the fool is charged by the Lord to recognize wisdom and be able to distinguish it from non-wisdom.

- This statement from the Lord supports what I said about **v. 4** (Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice *is* to the sons of man)
- Now that we have looked at the various ways wisdom advertises and disseminates itself, let's look at the characteristics of the things identified as wisdom

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Last week we examined a few points about wisdom as revealed here in our text. We examined the fact that wisdom actually speaks with a loud voice and offers itself for use in a variety of life experiences. We saw that wisdom is one of God's attributes that brings a message to all men, and challenges mankind to consider what it is and acknowledge that it is good.

Now, we are going to look at some additional features of wisdom as we turn first to **verse 6**. **IV. Prov. 8:6** Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things.

- The voice of wisdom speaks about excellent things - how do we understand this?
- Advice, or messages in our mind advising faulty, mediocre, compromising things is not from the voice of wisdom
 - Illustrate: You are driving down the interstate and you have a flat. You are several miles from an exit ramp. You have a spare in the trunk, a jack and the tools to change the tire, but the first thought you may sometimes have is to limp on down to that exit. But there is another voice inside you that says, "If you drive all the way to the exit ramp, you will ruin your \$200 rim and you might get that wheel hot enough to ruin the brake parts or the wheel bearing. So, which of these thoughts is wisdom...thinking in terms that people who are not afraid of a little work would think, of course!
- Next, the voice of wisdom will speak right things - The great thing about how the Lord has set up the universe is that there are right things and there are wrong things. Now, while I will readily say that some things which might be right most of the time could be wrong at other times, and vice versa, this is where wisdom comes in (to understand enough of the variables to be able to make the RIGHT choice).
- So, how do we explain wisdom in regard to the right and the wrong? I'll give you an extreme example, then a more conservative one:
 - You walk into a very dark room and there are no lights to turn on, but you have a box of matches in your pocket. As you think about how to see in the dark you smell a very strong smell of gasoline. Getting your self some light to keep from banging in to something is sensible...wise. But is lighting a match in a gasoline soaked room wise? In this case, you perceive all the variables needed in order to act wisely. Although getting yourself some light is a wise action, lighting a match to do it is a silly action in this case. That is wisdom in action.
 - Now for a more conservative, and actually a more demanding, illustration: You just saw a great item at the store you were shopping at. You want it pretty badly, but if you buy it, you won't have enough money for either your tithe on Sunday, or your car payment the first of next week. There will be a first rush to thought that says, "Aww, I can skip my tithe this

week, but I've got to make my car payment." Both of these statements are true, but are they both the voice of wisdom? Further, is the line of thought that suggests that you can skip your title to buy some "stuff" the voice of wisdom? The answer to both is "no."

- The voice of wisdom will speak **right things**.

V. What other things identify wisdom? **Prov. 8:7** For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness *is* an abomination to my lips.

- This verse teaches us that when we are looking for words of wisdom, the path of wisdom, decisions born of wisdom, conclusions made from wisdom, even paths of behavior, they will be only truth. So, if something has any taint of lies in it, then whatever wisdom might be in the mixture is corrupted by the lies.
 - Let's notice also that the Lord here makes a division between two items; first there is truth, then the opposite of that is wickedness. In other words, we usually think that the opposite of truth is lies (and it is), but here scripture makes those lies to be wickedness.
- So, in this verse we learn that wisdom is always composed of truth. This gives us a real solid attribute of wisdom which we can understand.

VI. **Prov. 8:8** All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; *there is* nothing froward or perverse in them.

- Here we learn that wisdom speaks about natural, moral, and legal rightness, and there is nothing twisted or convoluted, nor anything distorted in it.
- You can always know that what you are thinking, the decision you make, the path you decide on is wisdom if you are not having to excuse yourself because of some law, whether a law of the land, or a natural or moral law that you know exists.
 - One of the most common phrases I hear in government is, "That depends." When a person gives you that answer, and you ask why, they will often go into an endless spiel explaining, "Well, under these conditions, it is this, while under these conditions, it is this, then if such and such a thing happens, then it changes to this, etc., etc." This kind of answer fits what our verse means here by "froward."
- In regard to rightness, wisdom is not convoluted...that is, it does not have to stack condition on top of condition to have an answer.
 - A good illustration of the difference between what represents wisdom and what represents foolishness can be found in the current economic storm we are in because of Obamacare: wisdom can be represented by the straightforward relationship you once had with making your medical decisions. You looked at a medical insurance plan, and if you could afford one, you made the choice from a list you selected, you paid your money to the insurance company, and they gave you coverage. You went to the doctor when you needed to and an insurance claim was filed. The insurance paid their part, and you paid your part.
 - Now, under Obamacare, you don't have a choice about medical insurance. The law says you will buy it, so you go to a site and pick a medical provider from among those the government has selected, you sign up under their conditions, you get a doctor that they allow you have, you pay the premium that they demand, and the government now inserts itself between you and your doctor, between you and your access to medical care. You pay the government to stand between you and your doctor, you jump through a bunch of hoops, follow a twisted path to get medical service, that may or may not be allowed to you because

government has the last say-so about it.

➤ Does everyone see the difference between the straight path that was once between you and the medical service you need when you decided things vs. the convoluted, distorted, obstructed, twisted path toward medical help now set in place by government? This is a good illustration of the difference between what wisdom looks like and what foolishness looks like.

➤ I think the biggest problem we have in trying to use this characteristic of wisdom to measure whether we are on the right path or not has to do with being able to understand clearly, or identify correctly, what is gold and what is fool's gold.

➤ And the medical arrangements you had before vs. Obamacare is like looking at gold on the one hand and fool's gold on the other. Some people believe to this hour that the government run health care is gold. But it is fool's gold. This is much the way it is between wisdom and folly. When we get to the place to be able to see the different consequences of what we do and follow a decision or action pattern to its logical conclusion, we will have discovered some wisdom.

VII. **Prov. 8:9** They (all the messages of wisdom) *are* all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge.

- This is a simple statement about the outcome for a person who “gets it” and is able to tell the difference between wisdom and folly.

VIII. **Prov. 8:10** Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold.

Prov. 8:11 For wisdom *is* better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.

- I want you to notice that wisdom speaking here warns us away from being side-tracked in our pursuit after knowledge by distractions about getting stuff.
 - All through the history of man, people have been driven off-course by getting caught up in materialism, riches, or just the desire to get stuff.

IX. **Prov. 8:12** I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions.

- When a person has wisdom, it influences their decisions and actions; one of the ways it does is to instill discretion...here called “prudence.”
 - Notice that the very way this phrase is worded tells us that the relationship between wisdom and prudence is inseparable...they live together.
 - Discretion is a word we use when we are talking about using good sense in making decisions. When we use that word we also mean that folks don't just jump into things; they weigh, they analyze, they make their move based on whether something is productive or beneficial, not on whether there is some appeal to it, or not on whether somebody else sells them on the idea.
 - Now, notice also that wisdom gives a person the capacity to recognize and see through con games (find out knowledge of witty inventions).

X. Conclusion: so what do we know about wisdom?

- We know it advertises itself as being available in all life circumstances

- We know that it is composed of things that are excellent, not faulty, mediocre, compromising things
- We know that wisdom speaks of right things. That is, using wisdom leads us to the right answer, the right decision, the right outcome
- We know that wisdom always presents truth, not deception, not lies
- We know that wisdom shows itself in natural, moral, and legal rightness; there are no twisted paths when we follow wisdom
- We know that wisdom is a plain path, clearly understood by those who get it
- We know that people can get sidetracked by other pursuits and lose sight of the valuable pursuit of wisdom
- We know that wisdom and prudence (or discretion) go hand in hand