

ACQUIRING WISDOM

“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7 NKJV).

Introduction

1. Knowledge, wisdom, and insight:

- a. Knowledge is the accumulation of facts and data that you have learned about or experienced. It’s being aware of something, and having information. Knowledge is really about facts and ideas that we acquire through study, research, investigation, observation, or experience.
- b. Wisdom is the ability to discern and judge which aspects of that knowledge are true, right, lasting, and applicable to your life. It’s the ability to apply that knowledge to the greater scheme of life. It’s also deeper; knowing the meaning or reason; about knowing why something is, and what it means to your life.
- c. Insight is the deepest level of knowing and the most meaningful to your life. Insight is a deeper and clearer perception of life, of knowledge, and of wisdom. It’s grasping the underlying nature of knowledge, and the essence of wisdom. Insight is a truer understanding of your life and the bigger picture of how things intertwine.

James 1:5
If any of you lack wisdom,
let him ask of God, that
giveth to all men liberally,
and upbraideth not; and it
shall be given him

Knowledge is information, wisdom is the understanding and application of that knowledge, and insight is the awareness of the underlying essence of a truth.

“You can have knowledge without wisdom, but you cannot have wisdom without knowledge” (R.C. Sproul).

2. This lesson will focus on *how* to acquire wisdom.

I. WHAT IS WISDOM?

1. Basically, wisdom is the beneficial application of knowledge in everyday life. However, the scriptures describe two very different types of wisdom from two opposing sources:

“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (James 3:13-17 NKJV).

2. Whether one is wise or not is revealed in one’s thoughts, words, and deeds. One’s conduct, especially, is a measure of a man’s wisdom. But there are two types of wisdom: divine wisdom and demonic wisdom.

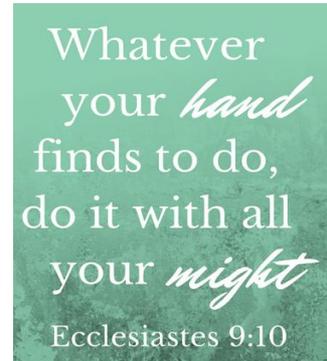
- a. Divine wisdom. James says, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” This is a person whose life is governed by the principles in the word of God.
- b. Demonic wisdom. One who has bitter envy and self-seeking in their hearts will be revealed in their ungodly conduct that is known by the presence of confusion and every evil thing. This is a person whose life is governed by the principles of the world.

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2 NKJV).

3. Do you desire to be filled with wisdom from above? How is such wisdom acquired? One might say, “You just have to ask God and He will give you wisdom!” True, we ought to ask God, but there is a saying that is true in this instance: “God helps those who help themselves”.

II. ACQUIRING GODLY WISDOM

1. Many pray for wisdom but are unwilling to do what is necessary to acquire it when they discover it requires a great deal of effort. (i) I was studying with a man who seemed to show little interest in working and so I reminded him of what the scriptures taught (2 Thessalonians 3:10) and he replied, “But I pray every day and ask God to bless me with a job”. I asked him what effort he was actually making to find a job and he said, “Well I pray”! (ii) A lady with whom I was studying told me that she was praying for the salvation of several members of her family, and with a tone of disappointment in her voice, she said, “The Lord hasn’t sent His Spirit upon them yet”. So I asked, “Have you actually tried preaching the gospel to those family members?” She replied, “No because I’m waiting on the Lord to send His Spirit upon them”! Wrong attitudes and erroneous concepts are often reasons for unanswered prayers.



- a. If we pray for a job, then we must make the effort to look for a job; and if we pray for the salvation of loved ones, then we must make the effort to preach the gospel to them.
- b. Likewise, if we pray for wisdom (James 1:5), then we must make the effort to obtain it (Proverbs 4:7; Ecclesiastes 7:25).
2. It takes **time** and **effort** to become truly wise because it comes as a result of learning from the decisions we make. In order to gain the godly wisdom we need, there are seven things we can do:

- a. **FEAR.** “The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10). The “fear” mentioned here is not of that kind where one might, for example, be in fear of reprisal or punishment, but a filial fear; the kind of fear or *reverence* one has for his father. “This fear is produced by God’s Word (Psalms 119:38; Proverbs 2:5) and makes a person receptive to wisdom and knowledge (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10)” (CWSD). This describes the good man to whom God gives wisdom (Ecclesiastes 2:26).

A proper reverence for God makes one receptive to wisdom.

- b. **PRAY.** We all have wisdom and we all lack wisdom! Wisdom is not a one-time-purchase; it must be pursued all the days of our life. Throughout our lives we will think, say, and do things that are unwise, but the more we pursue wisdom, the fewer foolish things we will think, say, and do (hopefully). So we all lack wisdom to some degree. Solomon recognised his need for wisdom and prayed for it (1 Kings 3:5-9). James says that if we lack wisdom, then we should ask God for it (James 1:5-6).

Wisdom is with the humble (Proverbs 11:2). It takes a humble spirit to kneel in prayer to God.

- c. **SEEK.** We have two choices: we can actively seek wisdom (Proverbs 2:1-8) or live without it and face the consequences (Proverbs 14:16; 22:3). The world offers many other things we can seek – wealth and power, friends and popularity, pre-eminence, prestige, beauty, etc. But Solomon says that nothing is more valuable than wisdom; nothing compares with it (Proverbs 8:11; 16:16). It is a gift God gives to those who diligently search for it like hidden treasure (Proverbs 2:4-7).

It is essential to have a sincere desire for wisdom because a scoffer who seeks it will not find it (Proverbs 14:6).

- d. **STUDY.** The Bible is God’s revelation to the spiritual man (1 Corinthians 2:6-16). It reveals His ways, plans, and purposes, and when we read and understand it (2 Corinthians 1:13; Ephesians 3:4; 5:17), His thoughts become a part of us and affect how we live (Galatians 5:25; Ephesians 4:20-24; Romans 12:1-2). In fact, the scriptures are sufficient for *all* our needs, including wisdom (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:2-4). If we desire to grow in wisdom, then we must devote ourselves to studying God’s word (2 Peter 2:1-3; Psalms 19:7; Proverbs 1:5; 10:14). The book of Proverbs is a good place to begin because it was written for the specific purpose of imparting wisdom (Proverbs 1:1-6).

“The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge” (Proverbs 18:15).

- e. **OBEDIENCE.** Merely having Biblical knowledge and understanding alone does not make us wise. God’s wisdom is reserved for those who *heed* His instructions by actively **obeying** and **applying** His truths to their lives (Proverbs 8:33-34). Obedience always brings blessings, but negative consequences occur if we ignore God and go our own way (Proverbs 10:8). Concerning the commandments of God, Moses admonished the Israelites, saying, “Therefore **be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom** and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’” (Deuteronomy 4:6). The psalmist wrote, “The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who **do** His commandments. His praise endures forever” (Psalms 111:10; 119:98; cp. 107:43).
- f. **OBSERVATION.** Our primary source of wisdom is the word of God, but we can gain some wisdom from observing the results of various lifestyles. For example, wise men are cautious and turn away from evil, but fools are arrogant and careless (Proverbs 14:16). We can even gain wisdom from nature. For example, ants teach us the importance of working diligently for our provisions because laziness leads to poverty (Proverbs 6:6-11). The Bible helps us understand God’s perspective and leads us to make wise choices that produce positive results.
- g. **ASSOCIATIONS.** Never underestimate the influence of friends: they can either help us grow in wisdom or cause us to suffer harm (Proverbs 13:20; cp. Psalms 119:63). If we associate with the wise and listen to their instruction, then we will become wise (Proverbs 13:20; 12:15; cp. 15:31; 19:20). So we should choose our friends carefully (Proverbs 12:26; cp. 1 Corinthians 15:33).

“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matthew 7:24).

“Great are Jehovah’s works of creation; they are studied by all who delight in them” (Psalms 111:2).

Conclusion

1. God is the one who gives true wisdom (Ecclesiastes 2:26; Daniel 2:20) and it is essential, therefore, to have a genuine fear or reverence of God (Psalms 111:10; Proverbs 9:10).
2. Since God alone is the giver of true wisdom, acquiring it naturally begins with asking God for wisdom in prayer (James 1:5-6). However, the Lord will not endow us with wisdom apart from an effort on our part to seek it (Proverbs 2:1-8); those who actively seek wisdom will find it, but those who fail to do so are the mockers who will not find it (Proverbs 14:6).
3. There is a certain degree of wisdom that comes from experience and observing the results of various lifestyles, but the main source of wisdom comes through the study of the scriptures (Proverbs 18:15). But simply acquiring knowledge does not make one wise – it is the application of that knowledge that makes one wise (Proverbs 8:33-34; Deuteronomy 4:6; Matthew 7:24).
4. If we truly desire wisdom, then let us devote ourselves to prayer, increasing knowledge, and the application of His word to our daily lives.

