

7 SOURCES OF WISDOM



Introduction

Wisdom Is The Principle Thing

1. Solomon says, “Wisdom is the principal thing [the most excellent of all possessions; cp. Proverbs 8:11; Job 28:18]; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting [whatever the cost], get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7). Indeed, “Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding” (Proverbs 3:13).

“For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight” (Ecclesiastes 2:26).

Understanding Wisdom

2. “Wisdom is a practical thing. Wisdom is not philosophic speculation... Wisdom is wisdom for life” (Barclay). In addition, wisdom is inherently connected with a right attitude towards God and His word (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; 15:33). “The wisdom he speaks of here is not merely information or simply education... The wisdom spoken of here is the ability to judge and evaluate sorrow and joy from God's standpoint, to view from God's perspective what comfort and pain mean, understanding wealth and poverty on a divine level” (Draper). “Wisdom is the ability to put into practice the principles and instructions given us in the revelation of God's word” (Roberts).

Wisdom Must Be Pursued

3. If we desire wisdom, then we must “get” or *pursue* it. Solomon makes this clear: “My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you **incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding**; Yes, if you **cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding**, if you **seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures**; then you will understand the fear of Yahweh, and find the knowledge of God. For Yahweh gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints” (Proverbs 2:1-8).

There are some people that have never pursued wisdom and, indeed, they are unable to explain how one pursues wisdom. Yet they still think of themselves as wise!

“Why is there in the hand of a fool the purchase price of wisdom, since he has no heart for it?” (Proverbs 17:16). Indeed, “... fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7b).

Wisdom Must Be Guarded And Maintained

4. Whatever is left unprotected will be stolen. Wisdom can be gained, but it can also be lost. If we protect our money and possessions, then we ought all the more to watch over the wisdom we obtain. Speaking of wisdom and discretion, Solomon says, “My son, let them not depart from your eyes - Keep¹ sound wisdom and discretion” (Proverbs 3:21).

Discovering The Sources Of Wisdom

5. For those that are serious about pursuing wisdom, our aim in this lesson is to highlight several *sources* of wisdom. There may be many sources of wisdom, but I could only discover seven.

Note: as you gain wisdom (from whatever source) I recommend you document it in a journal for future reference.

7 SOURCES OF WISDOM

1. Ask God (James 1:5).
2. Study The Scriptures (Psalms 19:7).
3. Find A Mentor (Proverbs 20:5).
4. Be Observant: There Are Lessons To Be Learnt From People And Events (Psalms 107:1-42).
5. Your Own Experiences (Philippians 4:11-13).
6. Trials And Afflictions (James 1:2-5).
7. The Natural World (Proverbs 30:24-28).

¹ “A verb meaning to guard, to keep, to observe, to preserve, to hide. The word refers to people's maintaining things entrusted to them...” (CWSD).

7 SOURCES OF WISDOM

1. Ask God

There is a demonic wisdom that comes from below and a divine wisdom that comes from above (**James 3:13-18**). God is the ultimate source of *true* wisdom.

- a. Before we can ask God for wisdom we must fear Him: “The *fear* of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (**Proverbs 9:10; Psalms 111:10**). “The fear of Yahweh...” This describes that reverential attitude or holy fear which one observes towards God. This “fear” is not abject fear but filial fear. It is that combined love and reverence one has for his heavenly Father. It is the same kind of fear that a child has for his father. A child of God that truly loves and reverences his heavenly Father seeks to please Him (**2 Corinthians 5:9**) and fears to displease Him.

“Serve Yahweh with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (**Psalms 2:11**).

- b. One that fears the Lord and seeks wisdom may ask of God, the only true source of wisdom. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (**James 1:5**). God gives wisdom to all *liberally* (“simply, openly, frankly, sincerely” – Thayer), and *without reproach* (i.e., without rebuking or finding fault). We need not wonder if God will grant our request because it is a promise: “... it *will* be given to him” (cp. **Matthew 7:7, 11**).

“For Yahweh gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding” (**Proverbs 2:6**).

- c. Three examples of prayers regarding wisdom: (i) David prayed for wisdom (**Psalms 119:34**)², (ii) Solomon asked God for wisdom (**2 Chronicles 1:7-10**), (iii) Paul prayed for God to grant wisdom to the brethren at Colossae (**Colossians 1:9**).

2. Study The Scriptures

God is the source of all true wisdom and one of the ways He imparts wisdom is through His word.

- a. We can gain wisdom, in general, by reading, studying, and meditating on God’s word (**Deuteronomy 4:5-6**). “The law of Yahweh is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of Yahweh is sure, making wise the simple” (**Psalms 19:7**). The scriptures provide *everything* that we need to be complete, which would include wisdom (**2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:2-3**).
- b. The Old Testament especially has many valuable lessons for acquiring wisdom (**Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11**).
- c. If we are specifically focusing on wisdom, the book of Proverbs is the best place to begin: “The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: to know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, Justice, judgment, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion - A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, to understand a proverb and an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles” (**Proverbs 1:1-6**).

3. Find A Mentor

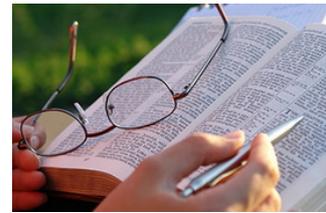
We can gain much wisdom by sitting at the feet of the wise.

- a. Keeping company with evil people will corrupt our minds (**1 Corinthians 15:33**), but walking with wise men will make us wise. “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed” (**Proverbs 13:20**).



How God Gives Wisdom

“We are sure that God will not change the physical conditions of any man’s brain... Hence the passage means to ask God to help us in our efforts to use our faculties in acquiring useful knowledge” (Zerr).



A friend accepts you the way you are. A mentor loves you too much to leave you the way you are.

² The word in this verse is “understanding”, but note what the Pulpit Commentary says: “Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy Law; i.e., make me fully to understand thy Law, and then I shall assuredly keep it. If I fail now, it is from lack of wisdom, not of will.”

b. Keeping company with wise people is a source of wisdom, but it is also good to seek out an uncommon wise man that is able to impart wisdom – a mentor.

7 Qualities Of A Mentor

1. He is trustworthy.
2. He has wisdom and life experience.
3. He believes and has confidence in you.
4. He listens to you and is interested in your success.
5. He shares in your victories *and* defeats.
6. He cares enough to tell you the truth.
7. He invests in your future.

1) A wise person (the mentor) is encouraged to pass on his knowledge (to the protégé): “Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a just man, and he will increase in learning” (Proverbs 9:9). The teachings of the wise are a source of life to those who follow them: “The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death” (Proverbs 13:14). Indeed “Wisdom is found on the lips of him who has understanding, but a rod is for the back of him who is devoid of understanding” (Proverbs 10:13).

2) Those seeking wisdom are encouraged to seek out a mentor and draw out their wisdom: “Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out” (Proverbs 20:5). “Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days” (Proverbs 19:20).

c. Mentors and protégés: (i) Moses and Joshua (Deuteronomy 31:7-8), (ii) Eli and Samuel (1 Samuel 1:21-28; 2:11), (iii) Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 1:7-18; 2:17-3:16), (iv) Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2:1-6), (v) Jesus and the apostles, (vi) Peter and Barnabas (Galatians 2:11-13), (vii) Paul and Timothy (2 Timothy 2:1-2).

“And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4; cp. Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:1-2).

“The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things - that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed” (Titus 2:3-5).

A mentor transfers wisdom through relationship (Proverbs 13:20).

A mentor will require your pursuit. He does not need what you know; you need what he knows.

A mentor is more interested in your success than your afflictions. His focus is not the celebration of you, but the correction of you.

A friend accepts you the way you are. A mentor loves you too much to leave you the way you are.

4. Be Observant: There Are Lessons To Be Learnt From People And Events

With our eyes and ears we observe many things each day in which there are valuable lessons.

a. Observe people and gain wisdom:

- 1) What wisdom can we gain from studying the lives of the following people? (i) Solomon’s falling away (1 Kings 11:1-8) – Bad company corrupt good habits, (ii) Nabal’s foolish conduct (1 Samuel 25:1-36) – A fool will perish in his folly, and (iii) Jacob’s deceit (Genesis 25:36) – A deceiver will be deceived (what you sow you shall reap).
- 2) We interact with people everyday and you can gain nuggets of wisdom by carefully observing their conduct. For example, a brother in a wheelchair is always complaining to businesses in the High Street (lack of wheelchair access, obstructions on the pavement, counters to high, etc). His complaints may be legitimate, but he has earned a reputation as a grumpy old complainer, and people don’t like him. His attitude and conduct eroded his influence and hindered the gospel. You can figure out the nugget of wisdom for yourself.



The Widow’s Mite

Many were putting into the treasury, but Jesus noticed a widow that put in all she had on which to live (Mark 12:41-44). What wisdom can we gain from this observation?

b. Consider events and gain wisdom:

- 1) Psalm 107 recounts the providences of God to persons in distress, the various changes and circumstances in the world, the afflictions of God's people and their deliverances, and the wonderful works of God in nature (Psalms 107:1-42). A wise person will observe these and lay them up in his mind and make a right use and proper improvement of them (Psalms 107:43).

- 2) (i) Jesus highlighted an incident from which they could learn a lesson and gain wisdom: “[the incident] Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? [the lesson] I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:4-5). (ii) When David sought to transport the Ark it was Uzzah that lost his life (1 Chronicles 13:1-10). David learnt lessons from this event... the ark had not been transported according to God’s instructions, and so he made sure he did so the second time (1 Chronicles 15:1-29). We, too, can learn lessons and gain wisdom from those events.
- 3) We see events on the daily news and we experience events in our lives. As we ponder such events, we can learn lessons and gain wisdom.
- c. We make many observations, but how often do we learn the lessons? Where lessons are learned, do we remember them? To learn and forget is as good as never learning. This is why I encourage myself and others to document the wisdom gained from observations.

A Nugget Of Wisdom Gained From Observing Joseph’s Life

God gave Joseph two dreams in which his parents and brothers were bowing down to him (Genesis 37:1-10). Instead of keeping these dreams to himself, he boasted of them to his family and suffered the consequences (Genesis 37:12-36). What nugget of wisdom can we gain from this? Think before you speak and don’t boast about things that you know will stir up anger, jealousy, and envy in others.

5. Your Own Experiences

We experience many things throughout our lives and there are valuable lessons and wisdom in all of them.

- a. Throughout our lives we can gain wisdom from our experiences. We can acquire wisdom from both joyful and painful experiences. Some wisdom is acquired through one off events, and some wisdom is acquired through a series of events in retrospect. The truth is, that some people refuse to gain wisdom from being told (by a mentor), they have to find out for themselves through experience (sometimes painful).
- b. (i) When it was time for Jacob to leave Haran, his uncle Laban didn’t want him to leave: “And Laban said to him, Please stay, if I have found favor in your eyes, for **I have learned by experience** that Yahweh has blessed me for your sake” (Genesis 30:27). (ii) Having experienced being cleansed of leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-14), Naaman returned to Elisha, saying, “Indeed, **now I know** [he learnt from experience] that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel” (2 Kings 5:15). (iii) Paul stated, “Not that I speak in regard to need, for **I have learned** in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things **I have learned** both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:11-13).
- c. Learning through experience is a part of life; it is the way of things. But many of the painful experiences we have are unavoidable! Painful experiences often result because of poor judgment and a refusal to seek counsel and advice (pride!). Perhaps enough painful experiences will make us wise and cause us to seek counsel and advice (Proverbs 1:5; 15:22).



“So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalms 90:12).

“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise” (Proverbs 12:15).

6. Trials And Afflictions

Trials and afflictions are certainly not pleasant, and yet we can rejoice in the wisdom they give us.

- a. Experiences in general are a source of wisdom, but trials and afflictions specifically are a cause for rejoicing! We do not rejoice in the suffering itself, but in the lessons and wisdom to be gained, and the development of character that such produce. Also, it brings us into closer fellowship with Christ:



“Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, **and the fellowship of His sufferings**, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:8-11).

- b. James says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). While James says God will give us wisdom, he doesn’t explain *how* He does so. We can say, though, that God is not going to simply deposit wisdom into our minds. James has been discussing the benefits of trials, and it is when we overcome them that our character grows. It is then that he encourages one to ask God for wisdom. The implication is that God gives wisdom by permitting various experiences so that we can develop wisdom. “The rod and rebuke give wisdom...” (Proverbs 29:15).

“It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes” (Psalms 119:71).

- c. Learn from your pain and gain wisdom. The trials we experience are never wasted – they minister to our education, and to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude, and humility. Patiently enduring suffering builds character, purifies the heart, and births compassion, tenderness, and charity. It is through sorrow and suffering that we come into closer fellowship with the Lord. Remember Job and the suffering he endured. If you study the closing chapters of Job, then you will see that he and his friends gained much wisdom.

7. The Natural World

There is much wisdom to be drawn from the natural world.

- a. The psalmist says, “Yahweh’s works of creation are great, studied [investigated, carefully examined] by all who have pleasure in them” (Psalms 111:2). We ought to study God’s works of creation, but why? One reason is that they declare the glory of God (Psalms 19:1), and even reveal something of His eternal power and divine nature (Romans 1:20).
- b. Another reason to study the works of creation is that through our study of them we can gain insight and wisdom. Notice these examples:
- 1) The psalmist bids us, saying, “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise” (Proverbs 6:6; 30:25). The ant has been famous in all ages for its social habits, foresight, economy and industry. Collecting their food at the proper seasons, they bite off the ends of the grain to prevent it from germinating, and lay it up in cells till needed.
 - 2) Jesus says, “Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Matthew 6:26). Indeed, then, we ought not to be anxious for anything: “So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Matthew 6:28-29). A wise man, then, will not be anxious for anything (Philippians 4:6; Psalms 55:22) and focus his attention on seeking first the kingdom of God: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).
 - 3) The ants, rock badgers, locusts, and the spider are described as “exceedingly wise”. This being so, can we not learn something of their wisdom to apply to ourselves? “There are four things which are little on the earth, but they are exceedingly wise: the ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their food in the summer; the rock badgers are a feeble folk, yet they make their homes in the crags; the locusts have no king, yet they all advance in ranks; the spider skillfully grasps with its hands, and it is in kings' palaces” (Proverbs 30:24-28).
- c. Anyone pursuing wisdom will not fail to study God’s works and draw valuable nuggets of wisdom to apply to his life.

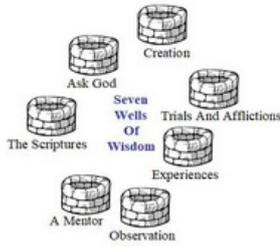


“Go to the ant, you sluggard!
Consider her ways and be
wise” (Proverbs 6:6).

“In his earliest days David... devoted himself to the study of God's two great books - nature and Scripture; and he had so thoroughly entered into the spirit of these two only volumes in his library that he was able with a devout criticism to compare and contrast them, magnifying the excellency of the Author as seen in both... He is wisest who reads both the world-book and the Word-book as two volumes of the same work, and feels concerning them, 'My Father wrote them both'” (C.H. Spurgeon).

Conclusion

1. The pursuit of wisdom is not a hobby, it is essential. Indeed, wisdom is “the principle thing” and we are commanded to “get wisdom” (**Proverbs 4:7**). Wisdom is inherently connected with a right attitude towards God and His word (**Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; 15:33**).
2. There are seven sources or wells from which we may draw wisdom...



... and each is a well from which scripture itself tells us to draw.

3. What if we refuse to pursue wisdom? Some may think they are already wise, but we are warned: “Do not be wise in your own eyes” (**Proverbs 3:7**), and, “Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him” (**Proverbs 26:12**). The consequences of refusing to pursue wisdom are calamity, terror, destruction, distress and anguish: “Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, Because you disdained all my counsel, And would have none of my rebuke, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, When your terror comes like a storm, And your destruction comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you” (**Proverbs 1:24-27**).

“Wisdom is the principal thing [the most excellent of all possessions; cp. **Proverbs 8:11; Job 28:18**]; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting [whatever the cost], get understanding” (**Proverbs 4:7**).