

## Proverbs 2

### Wisdom's Benefits

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Sunday, February 7, 2010

### Introduction

It occurred to me earlier this week that we are several weeks into our examination of Proverbs and we have not yet given a definition of wisdom. And so before we expound our text today, let's consider what wisdom *is*.

Now, we must consider wisdom in relation to two other related concepts, namely, knowledge and understanding.

Knowledge is the mind's apprehension of facts. It is the mind's awareness of, or familiarity with, individual bits of data. It is information stored in the mind. But this information stored in the mind is useless without understanding.

Understanding is the mind's perception of the *relationship* between the facts—the connection between one thing and another—how things fit together, how they are related to each other. But this understanding is useless without wisdom.

Wisdom is the application of knowledge and understanding to decision-making, so that the decision which is made results in the most favorable outcome. In other words, things turn out well.

Now it is precisely at this point that we are confronted with another vital aspect of wisdom, indeed the *most* vital aspect, namely knowing what "turning out well" means. "Turning out well" in what way? What criteria do we use to tell whether things have turned out well? What standard do we use to measure such things? Is it my personal comfort and happiness? If so, is it my personal comfort and happiness *now* or in the *future*?

Let's use an economic example. Let's say I take \$2,000 dollars and go out and buy a brand new flat screen TV just in time for March Madness, so I can watch KU win the national championship again for the second time in three years. I can watch it in *style* with a new TV. That would make me happy *now*. So if my personal happiness *now* is the criteria by which I determine whether a decision is wise, then by *that* criteria, it was a wise decision.

But is that the proper criteria? What happens next month, and the month after that, when I am unable, say, to make my house payment because I used it to buy a flat screen TV? I'm not going to be happy then, because the bank's not going to be happy with me. Maybe long-term happiness is better than short-term happiness?

And this is the key: wisdom always looks to the end. It always looks long-term. This is something that we will return to many times over as we go through Proverbs. Wisdom always looks to the end of the matter—not immediate results, but long-term results.

### **Psalm 73**

Wisdom always thinks long-term. Consider the disastrous results of thinking only about short-term happiness.

#### Illicit sexual relations

Think of two young people who do not wait for marriage before they hop in the sack. It seems good, it seems right at the moment. There is an immediate pleasure or happiness which is enjoyed, but at what cost? (Issues of trust later in their relationship; possibility of pregnancy without marriage; if one or both of them has been promiscuous, there is the possibility of venereal disease, there is a troubled conscience, there is the displeasure of God)—all for a few moments of fleeting pleasure right now

Or think of a man who breaks his marriage vows by committing adultery—because some other woman looks good to him right now, and he wants her now, and he never thinks about how what he does right now will have disastrous repercussions later (the potential to destroy his marriage, not

to mention the marriage of his lover; broken families; financial ruin; etc.)

Illicit use of drugs and alcohol

It will feel good *now*, with no thought of the long-term consequences; how one becomes addicted, and thus becomes a *slave* to this chemical substance; how it impairs your health and shortens your life, and how it reduces your mental function and often your physical vitality

Wisdom thinks long-term, and not only with respect to life in this world, but also with respect to eternity.

Once again, knowledge is the mind's apprehension of facts.

Understanding is the mind's perception of the *relationship* between the facts. And wisdom is the application of knowledge and understanding to decision-making, so that the decision which is made results in the most favorable outcome, *long-term*.

And what we discover in Proverbs is that wisdom is primarily ethical in nature. In other words, it has to do with righteousness. *Righteousness, long-term, yields the most favorable outcome because it meets with the favor of God.*

Got it? Okay, let's look at our text.

## Exposition of the Text

Verse one of chapter two begins a lengthy section in which Solomon speaks of the pursuit and the rewards of wisdom. The section runs through three chapters (2-4).

Chapter two, which is what we will seek to examine today, can be outlined as follows.

- 2:1-8      Wisdom is sure to be found by those who seek it
- 2:9-10    Wisdom enables one to understand righteousness
- 2:11-15   Wisdom is a defense against evil men
- 2:16-19   Wisdom is a defense against evil women
- 2:20-22   The upright will endure, but the wicked will be cut off

### **2:1-8 Wisdom is sure to be found by those who seek it**

The pursuit of wisdom is not a fruitless endeavor that will end in disappointment and frustration for those who seek it diligently. And this is the key. *Wisdom must be sought*, and it must be sought *diligently*. You don't find nuggets of gold just lying around on the surface of the ground. You have to dig for them.

Neither does the earth produce the fullness of its fruit when we just sit back and do nothing. We must plow the ground and plant it and fertilize it and cultivate it and water it. It takes a great deal of labor.

So too wisdom. It doesn't come to those who are unwilling to expend a good deal of effort to obtain it by searching, by inquiry, by study, by prayer and meditation, and by conversation with the wise.

Notice the conditionality of the promise of wisdom. It takes the form of an if/then proposition. My son, "If" you do these things (vv. 1-4), "then" you will come to know wisdom (vv. 5-8).

Notice also the verbs that compose the conditional aspects of the promise, that is, the terms that must be met before the promise is fulfilled. We find these in the first four verses.

Receive my words

Treasure up my commandments

Make your ear attentive to wisdom

Incline your heart to understanding

Call out for insight

Raise your voice for understanding

Seek it like silver

Search for it as for hidden treasures

Strenuous effort has to be exerted in order to obtain the prize. You cannot be casual in your pursuit of wisdom and expect to obtain it.

Notice also the variety of terms he uses for wisdom.

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Treasure up my commandments

Make your ear attentive to wisdom

Incline your heart to understanding

Call out for insight

Raise your voice for understanding

Seek it like silver

Search for it as for hidden treasures

These last two show the eagerness with which we should pursue wisdom. "If you seek it *like silver*, and search for it *as for hidden treasures*" (v. 4).

Let me ask you a question. What would you do if you came to learn that there was a rich deposit of gold that was yours for the taking buried in your backyard? If you are like most people, you would immediately begin to dream of what you could do with all that wealth, all the things you could buy with it. You could build the house you've always dreamed of. You could drive the car you've always wanted. You could travel to places you've always wanted to see. But if you never get out the shovel and actually start digging, all you're ever going to do is dream. "I've learned it's out here, somewhere. Where is it? Let me find it!" You would spare no labor in searching for it. You would dig until the sweat poured down your face. You would dig until your back ached. You would dig until your hands were blistered, all in the hope of finding this great treasure.

This is wisdom. Wisdom is yours for the having. It belongs to those who find it. It richly rewards all who have it. And it will be found by those who search for it.

Why then are not more people searching for it? Perhaps the problem is that people don't see the value of wisdom like they see the value of gold. Perhaps they don't see that there is as great a return on the labor expended in the seeking of wisdom as there is in the seeking of gold and silver. If the returns are thought to be small, what use is there to put forth great effort?

3:13-18

The first bit of wisdom is to know that wisdom is worthy of being gotten.

"The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight" (4:7).

But they must search diligently.

**2:9-10 Wisdom enables one to understand righteousness**

**2:11-15 Wisdom is a defense against evil men**

**2:16-19 Wisdom is a defense against evil women**

**2:20-22 The upright will endure, but the wicked will be cut off**