

THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR FAITH



A Study of Proverbs

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about the author

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how to use this study

Each lesson in this *The Cornerstone of Our Faith* study has four major parts.

Every lesson begins with an introductory section called **The Foundation**. In this section, the author will give background material to help prepare your mind and heart for God's Word.

The second part of each lesson is called **The Cornerstone**. This section is always the heart of every lesson. The Bible is explored in detail to help us understand the text. Those who are accustomed to hearing African-American preaching can hear this section "preach." God's Word is powerfully presented so that all can understand.

The next section of each study is critical for the Word to fulfill its intended purpose. It is called **The Inscription**. Just as people take note of inscriptions on cornerstones or monuments, each lesson is written so as to drive home a point worth remembering and a principle worth following. It offers the encouragement to change attitudes or behaviors to align better with God's Word. To *know* the Bible is one thing; to *do* it is another.

Every lesson ends with a series of thought-provoking **Discussion Questions** that help you explore God's Word on a personal and a congregational level. These questions provide opportunities for group discussion and participation. Teachers can tell by the responses whether their students have really come to grips with the lesson.

introduction

The book of Proverbs is a collection of the wisdom of the ages. Proverbs are usually described as short sayings that sum up a much larger life principle. Though many people have knowledge in a variety of fields, few have the wisdom to guide that knowledge. Wisdom is the practical use of knowledge in our day-to-day lives. Wisdom steers us away from the traps that the foolish easily stumble into. God's wisdom steers us toward a path that often leads to health, peace, and financial stability. These timeless nuggets of wisdom are a gift from God to those who choose to apply their principles.

The Gift of Wisdom

Proverbs 1:7; 4:7



Wisdom Literature in the Bible

The Old Testament contains three books classified as wisdom literature: the book of Proverbs, the book of Ecclesiastes, and the book of Job. Unlike the Pentateuch (the first five books in the Old Testament) and prophetic literature (Isaiah to Malachi), which focus on the history of Israel and her covenant relationship with God, wisdom literature celebrated wisdom as a “divine gift, not just a human ability based on superior intelligence, serious study, or long years of experience” (Bernhard Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, p. 572). The lessons in this book focus on the book of Proverbs.

The Background of God’s Wisdom

Solomon succeeded his father, David, as the king of Israel. Sitting on the throne as Israel’s third king, Solomon knew that he needed something of substance to give God’s people spiritual guidance and direction. Therefore, he asked God for wisdom. “So give your servant,” Solomon prayed, “a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?” (1 Kings 3:9).

Scripture says that Solomon's request "pleased" the Lord because the king did not ask for longevity, revenge on his foes, or material wealth (1 Kings 3:10, 11). Two lessons can be learned from Solomon's prayer. First, Solomon's prayer was unselfish. He did not request things for himself; he wanted a blessing so that he could benefit others. Second, God has the power to grant us what we ask for—and more (Ephesians 3:20, 21).



The Blessing of God's Wisdom

God answered Solomon's prayer. When two prostitutes went before King Solomon, each claiming to be the mother of a certain child, he displayed God's wisdom by determining which woman was actually telling the truth (1 Kings 3:16-27). Scripture then declares, "When all Israel heard of the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had the wisdom from God to administer justice" (1 Kings 3:28).

Endowed with divine wisdom, Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs and sang 1,005 songs (1 Kings 4:32). Scholar Thomas H. Olbricht has observed, "In the Old Testament, wisdom is the art of picking your way through life with a minimum of bumps and bruises. It is practical knowledge about rules governing the world and the relationship between people." "God gave Solomon a mind for wisdom," added Olbricht, "and he acquired it through his own observation and struggle" (Olbricht, *He Loves Forever: The Message of the Old Testament*, 153, 155). Solomon acquired wisdom from personal experience.

King Solomon, for instance, said much about women. He referenced the "wayward woman" (Proverbs 6:24), the "wise woman" (Proverbs 14:1), a "quarrelsome wife" (Proverbs

21:9), and a “woman who fears the LORD” (Proverbs 31:30). How did Solomon know so much about many different women? He had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:3), and wisdom from God.



The Benefits of God’s Wisdom

There is a stark difference between knowledge and wisdom. On the one hand, knowledge comes from man. It is the accumulation of knowledge of facts that people acquire from books.

On the other hand, wisdom comes from God. The apostle Paul said that wisdom is a spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:8). James 1:5 states, “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.” Someone has noted, “One can have knowledge without wisdom, but one cannot have wisdom without knowledge.” Our world places high value on knowledge, but our priority must be the pursuit of God’s wisdom.

The writer James further explained that there are two kinds of wisdom: demonic wisdom and divine wisdom. “Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (James 3:13-18, NASB).

The book of Proverbs attests to five benefits of God's wisdom. First, the wisdom of God leads to happiness (Proverbs 3:13). Second, it is more valuable than silver and gold (Proverbs 3:14, 15). Third, it is a key to longevity (Proverbs 3:16). Fourth, God's wisdom leads to peace (Proverbs 3:17). Fifth, wisdom is the path to life and happiness (Proverbs 3:18). No wonder Solomon expressed that "The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding" (Proverbs 4:7).

Questions for Discussion

1. How many proverbs did Solomon speak?
2. How many songs did Solomon sing?
3. How was Solomon's prayer for wisdom unselfish?
4. What are the three books in the Old Testament classified as wisdom literature?
5. Explain the difference between knowledge and wisdom.
6. Explain the five benefits of God's wisdom.
7. List the characteristics of demonic wisdom.
8. List the characteristics of divine wisdom.
9. Why does Solomon say so much about women in the book of Proverbs?
10. If you had a choice between longevity of life, revenge on enemies, material riches, or God's wisdom, which would you choose? Why?