

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Six)

What is Wisdom?

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At the beginning of my previous sermon I mentioned that Ecclesiastes is grouped with a number of other books of the Bible as “Wisdom Literature.” In two previous sermons I addressed the subjects of “work” that shows up in chapter 2, and “time” that shows up in chapter 3, because those subjects played a large role in the lessons contained in chapters 2 and 3. I am going to spend some time in this sermon to clarify the term “wisdom” as it is used in the Old Testament generally, but most especially in the books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes.

That term is used 23 times in the book of Job, 51 times in the book of Proverbs, and 28 times in the book of Ecclesiastes. If we would divide that out by chapters, we would find that it is used at least twice in each chapter in both Job and Ecclesiastes, and a little bit less in the book of Proverbs, which is all about wisdom, and yet is used less per chapter there than it is in the other two books. I bet you did not know that. I did not until I counted it out.

Eight different Hebrew words are translated into the one English term “wisdom,” and most of the time in these three books the same Hebrew word is used. To better understand their usage, please know that the terms, as they stand by themselves, simply as Hebrew words, do not imply any direct connection whatever to God. The key word there is the word “direct.” I believe that God always wants us to look beyond a mere literal meaning and always consider the term’s highest possible value whatever the context or circumstance the term is used in.

Now since eight different words are used, that should indicate to you that the term “wisdom” does not always mean precisely the same thing. It often simply implies a high degree of intelligence, or the best path to choose where there might be several choices a person might make. It might simply imply the right answer to a difficult problem that analysis has allowed one to reach, that all by themselves spiritually they do not imply either godliness or carnality. They are neutral terms, but always they imply a skill or a goal or a way that is good, positive, and practical, but conversely among us humans, rare.

I personally believe that the safest or best overall definition of wisdom’s biblical usage is “skill for living.” Notice that the definition used uses the term “skill,” indicating that wisdom is something acquired. Is that not the way you have gotten any skill? You

acquired it through practice. You acquired it by facing a lot of different circumstances and having to make choices. You were not born with it. It is important to understand that you were not born with it, and it does not magically appear. The term “skill” indicates proficiency, expertness, or technique that results from training.

You ought to be able to get the drift that wisdom’s connection with God has to do with us becoming skilled in our experiences with Him by the training that He is giving to us. So to understand the term as it is being used in the Bible, one must first understand the context in which the term appears. We have to read the context and then go back and meditate on it. “What does He mean by this?” It may indicate a number of different things.

Thus, in Ecclesiastes in which Solomon is almost always speaking of things from an “under the sun” perspective, the term “wisdom” may have no direct spiritual connection to God whatever. Do you get that? Do not forget that. It *may* indicate that. It has to be thought through. It does not mean that every time you see the word “wisdom” in the book of Ecclesiastes that it did not come from God. It *might* have. This would indicate a conclusion, a choice, a way that does not require special spiritual revelation from God that one could otherwise not know.

Incidentally, this bit of knowledge is one of the factors that make Ecclesiastes in a practical way so valuable to Christians. In other words, much of the wisdom there, in a sense, is carnal wisdom, and it is practical to anybody who wants to use it. They do not have to absolutely have a connection to God to receive the wisdom that is there and make good use of it. Businessmen often have been known to keep a book of Proverbs on their desk, looking for advice. They are no more converted than a cat, but they can pick up the information that is there and say, “Hey! That’s good business sense that I should use.” They do not need any particular connection with God. They just need to be proficient enough intellectually to read it, make a note or a carnal application of it, and say, “Hey! That works.”

One of the major factors in the foreground of what is written in Ecclesiastes is that life is difficult and that it is confusing. The book starts that way. It is confusing like a labyrinth. So, which way should we go in making our choices?—because we do not often have all the factors needed for making a decision. Should I go this way or that? If you were going through a hedge labyrinth, you come to a curve or an angle there, you might say, “Should I go this way, or that?”

This truth points to perhaps the major reason why, at the end of the writing of Ecclesiastes, Solomon says this: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter.” And

what *is* the conclusion that Solomon gives at the end of the book of Ecclesiastes? He says, “Fear God, and keep His commandments.” Why would he say that? Because regardless of whether the people got very much out of the entire writing of the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon gives them a safe guidance in every situation. “Fear God, and keep His commandments. You’re going to be safe in going in that direction.” He is not saying that it will not cause any trouble at all, he is saying that at least you will not be irritating God in what you decide to do because you chose to do it His way. So that is a safe conclusion. It is right. It is good. It is righteous as well.

Because the Bible clearly shows that we are to live by faith, and this requires that we are often looking at life without all the factors we might need for a totally wise decision, therefore wisdom is always to obey what we *do* know is right. We may not have a perfect answer, we may not have perfect clarity that this is right, or that is right, but always if we simply choose to do what we know is right even though it may not perfectly fit the situation we are in, puzzling over, you cannot go wrong by choosing to obey God.

At the end of the book, Solomon is saying to always take the safe way of keeping God’s law, and then move on. Without directly using the term, what is he saying to those of us who are to live by faith? That verse is saying: Trust God. Even though you do not have all the facts, obey what you *do* know, and you trust Him in those areas that you do not see clearly yet. You simply have set your will that when you do not know clearly, you are still going to obey what you do know, and that way you are going to be as safe as you possibly can.

So this will always pay off in making life profitable. Is that not what Solomon asks at the very beginning of the book? “Is there any profit in all the toil we are doing?” He is looking at this like he is a businessman or a king, and he wants profit from life, and we should too.

Some might argue that you are in a quandary, you do not know exactly what to do, and yet you do nothing except you obey what you do know, that that is the same as doing nothing. No, it is not. It is not the same as doing nothing. This is because of something that is true but we may not think about it, and that is, faith *is* a spiritual work. In fact, that work—faith—is the foundation of all spiritual works connected to the true God.

Let us go to John 6, verse 28. Let us begin with verse 27 so that we get the understanding of work. Work is something we do. It is active.

John 6:27-29 Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you,

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because God the Father has set His seal on Him.” Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”

We look for definitions all over the place in the Bible; “Sin *is* the transgression of the law.” “Love *is* the keeping of the law.” “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”

Faith *is* a work, and Hebrews 11:1 shows that faith is the foundation of *all* works. That is how important it is. Now some of the Bible revelation regarding wisdom is not only very interesting, it is very necessary to understand this major factor making life perplexing. We are to live by trusting God. That is a hard thing to do in many circumstances. We trust Him even though we do not have complete answers, or we do not have a whole packet of information that we would like to have at any given time.

What we are going to do is take a fairly detailed look at three chapters almost entirely devoted to wisdom’s necessity, wisdom’s value, and wisdom’s rarity. One of the factors these chapters provide us with is some insight into why Solomon perceived life as being so difficult. We will do this in this order. This in a way is kind of a misleading statement. First we will look with some detail at Proverbs 8. When I wrote that down, I said, no, we are going to really start somewhere else, because, even before we do that, we are going to look at a couple of contexts ever so briefly because they show us some very important ground rules regarding the accumulation of wisdom.

As we begin here, remember wisdom’s definition: Wisdom is skill for/or at living. Some people are skilled at playing the piano, or the clarinet, or the saxophone, or playing baseball, or football, or basketball, or whatever; you name it. They become skilled with that. God wants us to be skilled at *living*, to understand life’s nuances, and to choose to make the right decisions, because if we do that it is going to create something far more beautiful than music, far more beautiful than something mechanical, far more beautiful than a spectacular play on a ball field, or up on a stage, because we will be demonstrating skill at living, and not many people on earth are able to do that. One person did it perfectly: Jesus Christ. He was perfectly skilled at life, and of course the job that God gave Him to do.

Let us go to Proverbs 1:20. We are going to read 13 or 14 verses right off the top because there are a number of things here, beginning with verse 20, that we need to consider regarding Proverbs.

Proverbs 1:20-33 Wisdom calls aloud outside; she raises her voice in the open squares. She cries out in the chief concourses, at the openings of the gates in the city She speaks her words: “How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge. Turn at my rebuke; surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you. 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. “Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, they would have none of my counsel and despised my every rebuke. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies. For the turning away of the simple will slay them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; but whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil.”

The portion of that chapter begins with wisdom being personified as an appealing woman, making her appeal to mankind generally. Certainly this ought to be something that we would at least understand with the “appealing to a man.” What is more appealing to a man than an attractive woman? Really, in the sense of the section here, there is nothing more attractive than wisdom. In fact, maybe in our life there is nothing more attractive than God’s wisdom, because it is the key to opening up other things that we need for life.

The first major truth from God regarding wisdom is this: Wisdom is not hidden. In what we just read there, especially the first five or six verses, beginning in verse 20, he makes very clear that we should understand God is saying that wisdom is readily available. It is not something hidden. That should begin to help us understand that if it is readily available, what is wrong with us that we do not see it more clearly? I will get to that in just a minute. It is a simple thing.

We are going to go to the book of Romans. This will provide a clear answer to why God says what He says in Romans 1:18-20—why would God be so upset, that He inspired the apostle Paul to say:

Romans 1:18-19 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all

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ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.

It is clear. God's testimony counts more than anybody else's. The fact that we exist should be clear to everybody. This wisdom is that God exists, that God is real, that God is the Creator, that God is doing a work in and through people. To know those things and act upon them is wisdom. You cannot get any clearer than that. That is why God is so upset, that mankind is willfully turning its back on the wisdom that is available right in the creation. All they have to do is look at it, but they will not admit that there is a Creator that put this all together. What do they do? They come up with crazy ideas about how these nonsensical things came to life all by themselves and put themselves into a beautiful arrangement, and "pop!" out came a cat. No. Maybe first, because it was all water, it had to be a fish or some kind of amphibian. Not at all!

The wisdom that God is talking about here is available to anybody, and so, when we put this together with Romans 1, you can understand why God is so upset, and He, in a sense, is condemning these people, not to the Lake of Fire or anything, but He is condemning their spiritual understanding as being nonsensical, because He says, "I'm so logically in charge of everything that's going on. I did it, and yet you're denying it." So what would you call their denial of this wisdom? It is absolute foolishness. They are scorning something that is true beyond a shadow of a doubt.

As we go further into chapter 1 is that term "scorn." The first thing here we need to understand regarding wisdom is that it is not hidden. It is there. That perfectly dovetails then with Romans 1:18. Verse 19 makes it very clear.

Romans 1:19-20 Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

In verse 20 God is metaphorically saying (if we understand what it says in Proverbs 1) that wisdom (she) is shouting at us in order to get our attention about the Creator God. So at this level of what we are talking about right now, wisdom is not difficult to achieve at all. It is there. It is lying all over the place. Wisdom is available virtually everywhere we look and operate our lives. It might be in the open-market places, in the streets, in the courts, in the halls of justice, in school, whatever. It is there.

Why do we not pay attention? It is because we have not been taught from childhood to respect it, and thus we consistently and purposely do not look for it. How many ten year old kids do you know that are searching for wisdom? They are searching out, "How do I get on the ball team?" There is nothing wrong with that all by itself, but where are the parents guiding, directing, and teaching their children that wisdom is truly important?

This is not complex at all, but it does require attention by the parents to direct their children in searching for wisdom. This has very much to do with why things are the way they are out there in the world. It is manipulation of Satan the Devil. He has deceived their parents into not focusing on the right things in childrearing. By doing this sort of thing he has prepared a group of people for the end-time to be slaughtered.

Do you understand what I am saying? So we do not follow through with our responsibility, and in many causes this has happened to us because we were not prepared either, and if it were not for what God did in mercifully intervening in our lives, we might not do it at all, and we would be part of the herd out there, which in my commentaries I have been calling "the nones." These people are totally unprepared to live anything Christian. They do not even believe God exists. Now because parents do not do that, the children are distracted by other interests which God then interprets in Proverbs 1 as scorning, just ignoring it. They do not even look for it in anyway.

What they are scorning is the more valuable wisdom for the less valuable, whatever it happens to be in life. It could be playing soccer. It could be playing basketball. It could be any one of these. There is nothing sinful about any of those. It is just that life becomes unbalanced from God's point of view.

Back now to Proverbs 1 again.

Proverbs still goes further in His rebuke by saying that He has called to us, but we (mankind) have rejected His wisdom without regard, and He is saying in there that mankind has blatantly ignored Him. It is all there. So what God is doing here, if He is the lawyer, if He is the prosecuting attorney, He has everybody backed in the corner already. You are guilty. I am guilty, because we have not followed through, because, by God's own testimony, wisdom is readily available to anybody who will set his mind and heart to look for it. It is there. In many cases it is just a matter of obtaining information and analyzing it, and coming to the right conclusion.

What is going to be the result of that? In verse 26 He says, "I also will laugh at your calamity." Therefore, He will permit the calamity that we have brought upon ourselves through our attitudes and conduct to come down upon us. We hated this kind of

knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord, and so a second major truth arises. This becomes more important as we move through the sermon, and that is this: Wisdom and the fear of the Lord are inextricably bound together. We begin to understand, and begin to see clearly that they are bound to each other, and that the fear of the Lord, we will begin to see, is necessary for the accumulation of the kind of wisdom God wants us to have.

He wants us to have the kind of wisdom He is talking about here in chapter one, which is stuff that is readily available. He wants us to have that, but as we are going to see later on, there is wisdom that is *not* so readily available, and if we are following *this* kind of wisdom that is readily available, it is very likely we are going to turn our attention to God, and we are going to give God the fear that He should have, and He will give us this other kind of wisdom.

Proverbs 1:31-33 “Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies. For the turning away of the simple will slay them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; but whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil.”

Now there arises the third major truth in these 13 or 14 verses. The first one was that wisdom is readily available. *Easily* available. The second one is that wisdom and the fear of the Lord are bound together. They go together like bread and peanut butter and jelly. The third one is this, and this is rather sobering. Both wisdom and foolishness share a reality, a truth, and this truth is that each—wisdom and foolishness—produce fruit according to their nature. They *both* produce fruit. That is the reality, but each will produce fruit according to its nature. That is the second part of the reality.

Let us make it even clearer. Wisdom produces life. Foolishness works to produce death, and thus this chapter ends with a sobering warning to all reading and thinking people, that whatever one sows, one will reap. If we sow to wisdom, we will tend to produce life in the conduct of our lives. If we sow to foolishness, we are committing slow suicide.

The context that was established in Proverbs one, beginning in verse 20, continues right on through into chapter two, and so we are going to read the first seven verses of chapter two.

Proverbs 2:1-7 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

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voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord 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.

I am going to read verse 23 of Proverbs 1 again.

Proverbs 1:23 Turn at my rebuke; surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.

What is He saying there? He is calling upon these people who are rejecting His wisdom to repent. He is calling on mankind to repent of his ways. If that is done (and this connects over to chapter 2), He promises that He will pour out His Spirit, and when we add in what is in those seven verses, the fruit of that will be this: If they repent, and if they begin to really look into wisdom and begin to apply it, that will show that the fear of the Lord is there. The fruit will be understanding, discernment, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord, all in addition to wisdom!

I will tell you, if there is true repentance, and people begin to turn that way, that is quite a bounty of skill for living. What this does is it clarifies beyond the shadow of a doubt, that even upon repentance, wisdom simply does not magically appear, because what do verses one through seven tell us? They tell us that wisdom must be *sought* after. In other words, the practical advice is, "Repent, and then seek God." We just do not sit there. We begin to analyze our life in relation to the commands to the law of God and begin to apply them in our life.

Repentance is not just a matter of feeling sorry, it is a matter of feeling sorry and *doing* something *because* we feel sorry, and if this is done in relation to God, we are doing it because He says so. That is important to Him. It is not something we are just doing because we want to be rich or something, or we want to be well-known. We are doing it to please Him, and He is becoming a part of our life. So this clarifies the "beyond the shadow-of-a-doubt." Even upon repentance, wisdom does not simply magically appear. It must be sought after.

Proverbs 2:2-4 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 . . .

Studying is not the easiest thing in the world for me. I like to read, but study is not just reading. Study is digging in and trying to analyze what you are reading and make application of it in your own life. My habitual thing is that I like to read, get the information, and go on. I am an information bug, but that does not necessarily do a thing for my character at all. It might be done just for vanity because I know the answer to something. Do you see the difference? There is a difference.

What God wants us to do is repent, dig in, and evaluate ourselves. He wants us to change ourselves. That is where wisdom's value comes in, because *that* life will begin to glorify Him. There is a big difference involved in that. The seeking after knowledge can, if wrongly done, be nothing more than a vanity. That is all.

I am giving you insight into me, see, because I am an inveterate reader, but I am not always inveterate looking into myself for problems. I want to have the answers, but do I really want to change myself so that God is glorified? Eh! I would rather get up and fix the car. Do you know why? I enjoy that. I am comfortable with it. I am comfortable with doing something mechanical.

Before I was a local church elder in Pittsburgh, somebody asked me, "When do you prepare your sermonettes?" I said to the person, "When I'm working on my car." That was the truth. Or I told him, "A lot of times it's when I'm cutting the grass." Why? Those are things I can do without thinking. I have done them so often that I go right through doing them. But you see, if I really have to analyze something in regard to myself, that might be painful.

The best thing for us to do is to try to do them both at the same time. There is nothing wrong with organizing your sermonettes while you are cutting the grass or working on your automobile, because those are things you can do blind. The important thing is what comes out of it. To me it is just a means toward an end. I keep my hands busy so my mind can think, because if I do not do that, my mind starts wandering all over the place looking for something mechanical to do rather than doing the work of analytic thinking about a sermon subject.

Do you get the idea here? That is the kind of thing God is talking about here. The labor that God wants us to do is given in verse 2. It says, "So that you incline your ear to wisdom." Now what does "incline" mean to you?

In Pittsburgh there is an attraction that people go to, and everybody just calls it “the incline,” or they call it “the Duquesne incline, “ or “the Fort Pitt incline.” They are cars, or whatever, that you can get into, and you can go from the bottom of the hill to the top of the hill by way of “the incline.” Thus you avoid the five-miles-around trip. You just go right up the incline to the top of the hill. We did not get to go up there while we were in Pittsburgh recently. But the incline goes up the side of the hill. The incline is leaning in the direction that it is travelling, whether up or down.

“Incline” indicates an attitude, because that is what an attitude is. An attitude is an inclination. It is a leaning of the mind in a certain direction, and when something is leaning in a certain direction, it is very likely that it is going to fall in that direction. It is not going to fall in the opposite direction. The direction we want it to fall in is toward wisdom, and so God’s advice to us is that when we are searching for wisdom, we have to work to incline our mind to accept it, and the way we show God that it *is* inclined is that we accept the correction that we are seeing in His Word. We apply it to ourselves and make the correction in *our* life, not somebody else’s.

I will use something that Richard used in his sermon a month ago. What is an inclination? What is an attitude? You see, it is nothing more than a perspective. It is the way that we look at something. Now do we look at God and His Word in such a way that we willingly accept what He says in correction of us? We eventually have to come to the place in our life where things work best when we use the instruction that God gives us, which is always wisdom. Under any circumstance, it is always wisdom.

We are inclined, we are leaning. Our perspective is to put it to use in the way that God says. Very important to having a good relationship with God. In order to do this requires a foundation of humility—that we see ourselves in the right position before God and His truth, and we will then soberly identify the faults in our thinking, and therefore our life, and then apply the correction to ourselves.

Let us go to Proverbs 9. I just want to pick out a couple of things he says here.

Proverbs 9:8 Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you.

Let us apply that to ourselves. That is wisdom.

Proverbs 13:13 He who despises the word will be destroyed, but he who fears the commandment will be rewarded.

That is wisdom there as well.

Proverbs 15:31-32 The ear that hears the rebukes of life will abide among the wise. He who disdains instruction despises his own soul, but he who heeds rebuke gets understanding.

Ecclesiastes 7:5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools.

All of these pertain to the right use of God's Word.

We not only have to incline our ear to wisdom, we also have to apply our heart to understanding.

Proverbs 2:2 So that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding.

Again, remember that wisdom is skill for living. It is perhaps the greatest pursuit in life, and it deserves our passionate dedication. But Paul says that love is the greatest thing in life, does he not? Is there a contradiction here? No. There is no conflict with wisdom, because love *is* wisdom. It is that simple.

Whatever God commands and we follow it, that is wisdom. If we follow that instruction what can come out of it is this: A careless attitude toward wisdom will not work. Anybody who thinks that they are going to sleep through this class and expect to pass is not going to pass. That will not come to pass. God is making the instruction very clear. This is not John Ritenbaugh. This is God's Word. Incline yourself to that.

We will not turn to this, but several times in the book of Proverbs God says that He hates sluggards. He contrasts that with the ants and their zeal. Basically, what He is saying here in chapter 2 is that we have to use that kind of zeal that we see in ants in the seeking of wisdom. So study is laborious work.

Let me connect something else to this out of the New Testament. God shows in II Thessalonians 3:10 that those who do not work do not eat the fruits spread on His table. That is His rule, not mine. If they do not work, they do not eat. Study is hard work.

One more thought regarding this pursuit for wisdom is something that we must join.

Proverbs 2:6 For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.

The key phrase there is “the Lord gives wisdom.” God is showing us *He* gives wisdom. We must understand, that despite all our efforts in diligently seeking after wisdom and in giving up the time in analyzing ourselves and making needful changes, wisdom is still not something that we earn. God gives it. It is a merciful grace that He gives.

Now why does He give us this grace? Because it *is* grace. It is a gift from Him. The answer, in one sense, is very simple. It is because He loves us. It is that simple. He has a love for us that He does not have toward others. We are His kids, and He has a special regard for us. He gives us things that we need for life for glorifying Him that He does not give to others even though they may put forth the effort. Right now He is preparing *these* people for His purpose, and He is going to prepare them at some other time, and so He simply withholds it.

We are part of something in which our Father is the Boss, and He treats those in His family in special regard that He does not give to those who are not part of His family yet. He then gives us this grace by enabling us to use it, to not only understand it, not only to see the lacks that are in us, but to actually see how to use it. Nobody is ever going to be able to honestly claim before God that they saved themselves. He gives us His grace, and we are kept humble, and acknowledge the fact that even though we make the effort, He still must give it.

There is another reason why He gives it. The gifts keep right on flowing once we get to be part of this chain.

Proverbs 2:6-11 For the Lord 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. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path. When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you.

In the end, because God has given it, and we use it, then we begin making wise decisions about what to do with our life, and those wise decisions begin to become a protection for us. Otherwise, if we did not have it, we would be making the same mistakes as do the unconverted people in the world. So what does He do? He gives it in order to save us. When we use His Word, His Word begins to be a shield because it preserves us. It preserves our lives.

Proverbs 8:1-5 Does not wisdom cry out, and understanding lift up her voice? She takes her stand on the top of the high hill, beside the way, where the paths meet. She cries out by the gates, at the entry of the city, at the entrance of the doors: "To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. O you simple ones, understand prudence, and you fools, be of an understanding heart.

This chapter's main purpose is to encourage us in the pursuit of wisdom by showing us how valuable it is when used in one's life. We did not go into chapter 7, and I did that on purpose, but that chapter provides a contrast to the instruction in chapter 8 by exhorting us against getting involved with the whorish woman.

You read chapter 7, and then you read chapter 8, and you find there is a major difference between the two, and thus chapter 8 is strongly contrasting the fruits of each woman's involvement in our life. One relationship is poisonous and deadly, and the other is uplifting and life-giving. The one leads, step by step, into a slavish entrapment; the other to a vitalizing contentment. So verse 4 then addresses the entire economic span of society, where it says, "To you, O men, I call." So wisdom is crying out to every aspect of society. Nobody is left out.

In verse 5 He contrasts those in chapter 7, and God shows that He knows the thoughtlessness, that they will not give their attention to His advice; but nonetheless, in Proverbs 8:6-7, He encourages them to listen and to heed, because what comes forth from His mouth is far more valuable than silver, gold, or rubies. Those are the things we tend to think as being valuable, but God is saying in this chapter that wisdom is more valuable than any of those things.

It is easy to understand. What is more valuable—eternal life that may be produced through wisdom, because God responds to it, or to have all the silver and gold like King Midas, and yet you die and leave it to somebody else? You see, that is the comparison we have to make, and to make a decision regarding that in our life.

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Proverbs 8:12-18 “I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge and discretion. The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate. Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding, I have strength. By me kings reign, and rulers decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, all the judges of the earth. I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me. Riches and honor are with me, enduring riches and righteousness.

The key to grasping this section is found in verses 17 and 18, where he says, “I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me. Riches and honor are with me, enduring riches and righteousness.”

These verses pronounce a direct blessing on those who are growing in and using wisdom. Each of those verses, except for verse 13, is a blessing. Regarding wisdom, the NIV translates Proverbs 3:17-18 this way:

Proverbs 3:17-18 [NIV] Her ways [wisdom’s ways] are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed.

Now back to verse 13 for just a moment.

Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the LORD [Here is another time that the “fear of the Lord” is made in mention along with wisdom.] is to hate evil; [There is another practical definition of wisdom.] Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.

Verse 13 is a reminder that God’s wisdom cannot be sought and gained without rejection of conduct that is unethical and therefore evil. The two go together. God responds to those who are making righteous application of His wisdom.

One reason why pride and arrogance, or haughtiness, are mentioned is that they are major generators of unethical conduct, and I have no doubt that they were the root causes of Satan’s rebellion against God. That is a primary example to us of his lack of wisdom that was but the twisted fruit of his sinful heart despite the great intelligence that existed in him.

Did you hear what I just said? The accumulation of wisdom is not dependent on being smart. It is not dependent on having a high I.Q. *It is dependent upon the relationship with God, because He gives it.* A person showing pride and arrogance is not going to be given the wisdom of God. It is that simple. Again, it points back to: He will deal with us on our level. We do not need a high I.Q. All we need to do is know right from wrong, and to do the right in order for God to be glorified.

From verse 12 on the theme shifted toward practical everyday uses of wisdom, especially as concerns giving sound advice to others (verse 14—"Counsel is Mine"). Whether they follow it is their problem, but because God is giving it to us, we at least can give it to others. What they do with it is their problem.

Beginning in verse 12 we have practical applications of the use of it. In addition to that series of verses, it especially concerns giving sound advice to others and overseeing and guiding the conduct of others. This most especially means our own family, but it would extend out even to rulership over cities or nations, and we might connect this to the Millennium. We are going to rule with wisdom in those responsibilities.

A special note might be in verse 18 where it says, "Riches and honor are with me, **enduring** riches and righteousness." That adjective "enduring" is modifying the terms riches and righteousness, indicating that these blessings are those that will not pass away. They endure. In other words, we are going to carry it right on through the Millennium.

If this does not touch you, I do not know what will. What he is saying here is that the blessings that come from seeking the wisdom of God extend all the way into eternity. They never stop giving their value. This is what sets off this wisdom from God's values from all other common-sense gifts of reason one may think of as being of some value. In other words, there are a lot of carnal people that have a lot of common sense, and that is good, but it does not have the added blessing that God can give, that lifts above the mere physical and carnal into the realm of that which is spiritual.

I am going to hurriedly go through Job 28. This is something you may need a bit of time to think about later on, but it is very good. It is so good I want to read the whole thing so that we get the feel of it here. You know a great deal about the book of Job.

Job 28:1-11 "Surely there is a mine for silver, and a place where gold is refined. Iron is taken from the earth, and copper is smelted from ore. Man puts an end to darkness, and searches every recess for ore in the darkness and the shadow of death. He breaks open a shaft away from people; in places

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forgotten by feet they hang far away from men; they swing to and fro. As for the earth, from it comes bread, but underneath it is turned up as by fire; its stones are the source of sapphires, and it contains gold dust. That path no bird knows, nor has the falcon's eye seen it. The proud lions have not trodden it, nor has the fierce lion passed over it. He puts his hand on the flint; he overturns the mountains at the roots. He cuts out channels in the rocks, and his eye sees every precious thing. He dams up the streams from trickling; what is hidden he brings forth to light.

What is Job saying there? What in the world does any of that have to do with the book of Job? Do you know what he is saying in those first eleven verses? He says, "Look what man has done. They dig into the depths of the earth, and from the depths of the earth they bring forth sapphires and diamonds and emeralds, and all kinds of beautiful things there. They dam up rivers so that they create life. They do this, that, and the other thing." He even mentions there about bringing light into all the dark places. Did they use electricity? He is talking about even in the mines somehow or other people get light down there so that they can dig the sapphires and all that stuff out of there.

Now let us look at verse 12. Despite all this ingenuity, he says:

Job 28:12 But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?

He says man has this wonderful mind, and he has all this knowledge, and he has the powers within him to see what he can do to bring this wealth out of the earth, and yet wisdom is far more important than all of this wealth that they bring out of the earth, all of this gold and silver and everything.

Where do you dig in order to bring out wisdom? You see, by the time you get to here you are led to understand that nothing man does of and by himself, despite the wonderful spirit God has put in him so that he has all this intelligence, high IQs and everything, you cannot dig wisdom out of the earth. Here is the greatest wealth of all, and man, of and by himself, is deficient. He does not have it. Now apply that to the book of Job.

You know that all through this book he was arguing with his friends who were accusing him of having committed some really nasty sin, or he was doing it as a way of life, and Job said, "No! No! I haven't done that. I'm not guilty of that. I did this, that, and the other

thing. I've been an upright man."

What he was saying was basically true, but the question to Job was, "I don't have a problem here with any great sin, and I've worshipped God from my youth. He's the only God that I worship. I'm not an idolater, and yet, here I am having all of this trouble. Why?"

It did not seem fair to him how he was being treated by this God that he revered. He needed wisdom to try to figure this out. That is what the rest of the chapter is about.

I want you to think here that the key to understanding the significance of this chapter is this. Is it not in the book of Proverbs that God said a couple of times, "Wisdom is available anywhere. All you have got to do is look for it. It is there. Use it"? And here is Job, saying, "Where is it?" Job was not dumb, and I think he was a converted man who was going through all this. You see, the problem lay elsewhere, but he did want an honest answer as to what he needed to do. Of course we understand he did not get the answer until God Himself spoke, and then the wisdom began to sink in, and what did he do? He repented.

Let us read the end of this chapter.

Job 28:12-17 "But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man does not know its value, nor is it found in the land of the living. The deep says, 'It is not in me'; And the sea says, 'It is not with me.' It cannot be purchased for gold, nor can silver be weighed for its price. It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir, in precious onyx or sapphire. Neither gold nor crystal can equal it. . .

There is not anything on earth that is more valuable than the wisdom of God where one really has skill for living in a way that glorifies God.

Job 28:17-19 . . . nor can it be exchanged for jewelry of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral or quartz, for the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it, nor can it be valued in pure gold.

How much is a human life worth? You see, what he is heading toward without actually saying it we do not find it until the end of the book. The cost of wisdom is for us to give

our life to Jesus Christ. That is worth far more than any ruby, any gold, any diamond. How much are we willing to pay for eternal life, for living eternally with God? Remember, God gives wisdom to His children.

Job 28:20-28 “From where then does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of all living, and concealed from the birds of the air. Destruction and Death say, ‘We have heard a report about it with our ears.’ God understands its way, and He knows its place. For He looks to the ends of the earth, and sees under the whole heavens, to establish a weight for the wind, and apportion the waters by measure. When He made a law for the rain, and a path for the thunderbolt, then He saw wisdom and declared it; He prepared it, indeed, He searched it out. And to man He said, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.’”

Can you see the agreement with Solomon? Wisdom resides with God, and He alone gives the kind of wisdom that saves a person’s life. When did Job receive that wisdom? Way after this, in chapter 42 Job said, “I have heard of You by the hearing of my ear, but now my eye sees You, and I repent in dust and ashes.” He gave his life to God, and the wisdom came, because that level of wisdom only God can give. There is wisdom that is available to anybody upon observation, but that spiritual wisdom that resides with God, only He can give it.