

# The Gifts of Wisdom

Bible Background • JOB 1; 42; PROVERBS 8

Printed Text • PROVERBS 8:8–14, 17–21 | Devotional Reading • JOB 28:12–28

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson we will: RECOGNIZE the incomparable value of wisdom, APPRECIATE the difference between the rewards of wisdom and the rewards of mere wealth, and PURSUE godly wisdom rather than a substitute.

## In Focus

Today’s lesson at the fire academy was the blackout drill. The class of twenty cadets, dressed in full turnout gear with air bottles and breathing masks, stood before a training structure. They were ordered inside and found themselves in a room full of simulated smoke that was as dark as a moonless midnight.

“Masks off!” their instructor ordered.

The cadets all removed their air masks, frightened and confused in the dark as long seconds ticked by. It seemed like forever before the door opened and they stumbled out.

One cadet, Arnie, slumped onto the ground and complained to his buddy Melvin, “I just want to be an EMT! Why do I have to do this?”

“I’ve been doing this longer than you’ve been alive, son,” the instructor told him, quietly. “In this business, seconds count, and lives are at stake—including yours. That’s what I’m here for—to get you through your training so you can get the experience.”

Melvin told Arnie, “Twenty years ago, there was a five-alarm in the old piano factory on 28th Street. Nobody knew there were squatters inside, but he found them in the dark and single-handedly pulled three people out. He’s the best instructor in the academy.” Arnie realized there was too much he needed to learn.

Wisdom is more than just information. How can we take in what God has to teach us and find wisdom?

## Keep in Mind

“Choose my instruction rather than silver, and knowledge rather than pure gold. For wisdom is far more valuable than rubies. Nothing you desire can compare with it” (Proverbs 8:10–11, NLT).

## Words You Should Know

**A. Froward** (v. 8) *patal* (Heb.)—Twisted

**B. Wisdom** (v. 11) *khokmah* (Heb.)—The knowledge and determination to make choices based on principles of right living according to God’s law

## Say It Correctly

**Froward.** FROE-ward.

**Agrarian.** uh-GRAYR-ee-an.

## KJV

**Proverbs 8:8** All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them.  
9 They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge.  
10 Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold.  
11 For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.  
12 I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions.  
13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.  
14 Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength.  
17 I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.  
18 Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness.  
19 My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver.  
20 I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment:  
21 That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.

## NLT

**Proverbs 8:8** My advice is wholesome. There is nothing devious or crooked in it.  
9 My words are plain to anyone with understanding, clear to those with knowledge.  
10 Choose my instruction rather than silver, and knowledge rather than pure gold.  
11 For wisdom is far more valuable than rubies. Nothing you desire can compare with it.  
12 "I, Wisdom, live together with good judgment. I know where to discover knowledge and discernment.  
13 All who fear the LORD will hate evil. Therefore, I hate pride and arrogance, corruption and perverse speech.  
14 Common sense and success belong to me. Insight and strength are mine.  
17 I love all who love me. Those who search will surely find me.  
18 I have riches and honor, as well as enduring wealth and justice.  
19 My gifts are better than gold, even the purest gold, my wages better than sterling silver!  
20 I walk in righteousness, in paths of justice.  
21 Those who love me inherit wealth. I will fill their treasuries."

## The People, Places, and Times

**Lady Wisdom.** Her image is consistently positive. She is the one universal element without which everything else fails. Wisdom is not the shadowy female who frequents dark alleys in search of sexual gratification like the adulteress of Proverbs 7. She positions herself publicly beside the city gates where she can expect to attract a large audience. She affirms her integrity by stressing the truth, nobility, and righteousness of her words. Lady Wisdom boldly proclaims that her rewards are far more valuable than gold, silver, and jewels.

## Background

Wisdom is first personified (pictured as having human personality) in Proverbs 3:15–18. Chapters 8 and 9 pick up on this personification, picturing wisdom as a woman—a woman who speaks, witnesses her existence before all humanity, and offers wealth and prosperity to all who find her. Lady Wisdom helps us better understand God by taking one of His attributes and giving it personality and consciousness. Thus, we can better comprehend how wisdom is integrated into our everyday lives.

The proverbs in Proverbs 3 through 9 warn the youth against temptations such as violent crimes (1:10–19; 4:14–19); rash pledges (6:1–5); laziness (6:6–11); deceit (6:12–15); and sexual impurity (2:16–19; 5:3–20; 6:23–35; 7:4–27; 9:13–18). Temptations may seem easy to avoid, but they can creep in when we are caught off guard and cause us to fall into sin.

*When we are tempted, what can we do to resist?*

## At-A-Glance

1. The Pursuit of Wisdom (Proverbs 8:8–14)
2. The Promise of Wisdom (vv. 17–21)

## In Depth

### 1. The Pursuit of Wisdom (Proverbs 8:8–14)

Many of the proverbs are addressed to youth to warn against the many pitfalls in life. If you apply the practical messages of God's wisdom, your life will be rich. If you forsake them and follow your own wisdom and understanding, you will be on a path of destruction. Wisdom here is affirming that her teaching is honorable and trustworthy. Her teaching is easy to understand for all who desire to do what is right. Her truth is hidden only to those who are willfully ignorant. The plea to acquire wisdom and knowledge rather than silver and gold is a testament to wisdom's value. Prosperity, power, prestige, and possessions are paltry when compared to the worth of wisdom. The wealth of the world is temporary, but the rewards of wisdom are eternal. A principle here is that wisdom is of greater value than any material wealth and is actually the way to acquire true wealth spiritually and naturally. Furthermore, when we pursue wisdom, we receive the benefits of discernment and good judgment. We are able to detect helpful or harmful motives and navigate complex situations to honor God. Verse 13 calls back to the first chapter of Proverbs, saying those who fear the Lord hate evil. To be wise in chapter one is to fear the Lord; therefore wise people hate evil. Evil is defined here as pride, arrogance, corruption, and lying. Wise people will resist and challenge those who show these characteristics. Wisdom will empower us instead to show evidence of common sense, insight, and strength that bring true lasting success.

### 2. The Promise of Wisdom (vv. 17–21)

Those who truly love and seek wisdom will surely find it. In the New Testament James reaffirms that those who ask for wisdom from God will receive it, but they must be willing to follow it once they have it (James 1:5). Wisdom is tied to prosperity and also justice. It is the effect of wisdom to receive both. This may seem contradictory looking at the world around us, but it is made clear from the law, history, and the prophets in the Old Testament. The king who has great wealth also needs to rule justly, or he is seen as a bad king. The one who has material prosperity is commanded to use it to care for the poor and vulnerable (Deuteronomy 15:7–8). This reality of great power coming with great responsibility to care for the poor and defend the vulnerable is one of the distinguishing characteristics of Israel against the other nations that surround it. Solomon himself embodies this well; the wealthiest man in the world is also the wisest and rules with justice. He asks God for wisdom rather than wealth, which is why God blesses him with wealth and wisdom are eternal. A principle here is that wisdom is of greater value than any material wealth and is actually the way to acquire true wealth spiritually and naturally. Furthermore, when we pursue wisdom, we receive the benefits of discernment and good judgment. We are able to detect helpful or harmful motives and navigate complex situations to honor God. Verse 13 calls back to the first chapter of Proverbs, saying those who fear the Lord hate evil. To be wise in chapter one is to fear the Lord; therefore wise people hate evil. Evil is defined here as pride, arrogance, corruption, and lying. Wise people will resist and challenge those who show these characteristics. Wisdom will empower us instead to show evidence of common sense, insight, and strength that bring true lasting success.

2. The Promise of Wisdom (vv. 17–21) Those who truly love and seek wisdom will surely find it. In the New Testament James reaffirms that those who ask for wisdom from God will receive it, but they must be willing to follow it once they have it (James 1:5). Wisdom is tied to prosperity and also justice. It is the effect of wisdom to receive both. This may seem contradictory looking at the world around us, but it is made clear from the law, history, and the prophets in the Old Testament. The king who has great wealth also needs to rule justly, or he is seen as a bad king. The one who has material prosperity is commanded to use it to care for the poor and vulnerable (Deuteronomy 15:7–8). This reality of great power coming with great responsibility to care for the poor and defend the vulnerable is one of the distinguishing characteristics of Israel against the other nations that surround it. Solomon himself embodies this well; the wealthiest man in the world is also the wisest and rules with justice. He asks God for wisdom rather than wealth, which is why God blesses him with wealth and power,

knowing he would use it righteously. It is our responsibility as believers to follow Jesus' example. He did not have material riches, but He had all the power of the Kingdom of God, which He used to heal the sick, cast out demons, confront the oppressive religious authorities, and care for those in need. We would be wise to seek wisdom to do the same works, recognizing that God can allow us to prosper with that same wisdom if we use it for His glory.

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. How does wisdom describe her advice? (Proverbs 8:8)
2. What does wisdom compare her worth to? (vv. 10–11)

### **Discuss the Meaning**

1. How have you seen wisdom benefit yourself or someone you know?
2. How is wisdom more profitable than silver or gold?
3. How does one get wisdom?

### **Liberating Lesson**

Wisdom is a scarce commodity in today's world. Everywhere we look, people are making bad choices, trying to live life by their own rules. Some things we see so much in our politics, business, and culture are called evil here in Proverbs. Pride, arrogance, corruption, and lying are all evil, yet many Christians do not identify them as such. Wisdom walks with justice and good judgment, yet we often allow injustice to reign for the sake of our comfort and convenience. God's Word calls us to a very different life—a life of godly wisdom. Wisdom involves knowing God's will and His Word, then having the ability to apply this knowledge. God is able to give us the wisdom to pursue both personal and collective prosperity. We can all flourish while also pursuing justice. All of the people had their needs met in Solomon's kingdom, and wisdom led to great wealth. Jesus shows us a Kingdom that is far greater, where God's power can supply our needs and challenge anyone who oppresses their neighbor. If we love God and love wisdom, we can find solutions to meet the pressing challenges and needs of our communities. We can have both justice and wealth if we have the wisdom and willingness to pursue them God's way.

### **Application for Activation**

All in all, "wisdom is the principal thing; ... with all thy getting get understanding" (from Proverbs 4:7). Many of us are taught and encouraged to seek material things—the economy depends on it. However, we do well to seek wisdom because our life depends on it. Many people have education, knowledge, and information—but they have no understanding. Instead of selfishly seeking wealth, we should seek wisdom. When we are humble enough to know that we need God's wisdom daily, God is faithful enough to give it. Wisdom is often demonstrated by the daily choices we make. This week keep a diary of all the major decisions you make. At the end of the week review your decisions to see if your choices demonstrated godly wisdom or foolishness. Determine if godly wisdom is a part of your life by the choices you made. Godly wisdom can cause us to have the success that is lasting and be a blessing to ourselves and others.

### **Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

---

---

---

---

### **Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned:

---

---

---

---

## More Light on the Text

### Proverbs 8:8–14, 17–21

Proverbs 8 develops the idea of a personified Lady Wisdom, first mentioned in Proverbs 3. Here, she calls out—standing on the street corner, asking for any who are foolish or simple to listen and reap great rewards. After this overview of the worth, goodness, and richness of wisdom, she goes on to describe how she was the first thing God created and how she rejoiced as He formed the rest of the universe. Lady Wisdom shares a close relationship with God and desires a close relationship with any who will listen to her too.

**8 All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them. 9 They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge.**

Wisdom begins her call to the simple by assuring them she is trustworthy. The words of wisdom are true and pure. The Hebrew of v. 8 emphasizes righteousness by placing that phrase at the beginning of the sentence: “In righteousness are all the words of my mouth.” “Froward” means twisted, and perverse has a similar meaning of turning or distorting. The image left by these two words is of a physically gnarled and snarled mess. Wisdom has none of that. Instead, her words are “plain” (Heb. *nakoakh*, *naw-KOE-akh*), meaning upright and straight, making an image of the exact opposite of “froward or perverse.” Lady Wisdom will lead you on straight paths, with no twists or turns. Wisdom will communicate with you clearly. Even though we often stress about choices we make, if we take the time to listen to wisdom—whether from a trusted mentor or directly from the Word of God—the best course of action is clear.

**10 Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. 11 For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.**

A common refrain in Proverbs is that wisdom is better than wealth. This is easy for Solomon, the richest man in the world, to say. However, it is true that once you have enough money to physically sustain your household, no extra wealth will make you significantly happier. Proverbs often records that wisdom is better than gold, silver, or rubies. Rubies (Heb. *panimim*, *pah-nee-NEEM*) might refer to the precious gem that we call a ruby today, which would have been very expensive after trading it from where they are found in southeastern Asia. It could also refer to pearls or red corals, which could have come from the nearby Mediterranean Sea, though they were still rare beauties and difficult to obtain. No matter the exact kind of costly artifact, the Bible tells us that of “all the things that may be desired,” wisdom is the most important. Wealth is not needed to live a life of blessing, peace, and joy. For that, wisdom is needed.

**12 I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions. 13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate. 14 Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength.**

Hebrew poetry often makes use of parallel structures, making a statement in one line, and

then basically repeating that statement with close synonyms in the next line. This makes it hard to distinguish nuances between words since the point of using them together is to emphasize their similarity. Knowing this literary structure, note how these verses use every other word there is to describe wisdom. Lady Wisdom is associated with prudence, knowledge, “witty inventions” (Heb. *mezimmah*, *meh-zeem-MAH*, elsewhere translated discretion or planning), counsel, “sound wisdom” (Heb. *tushiyah*, *tooshee- YAH*, elsewhere translated counsel or aid), understanding, and even strength. All these many associations are meant to give the reader the feeling that wisdom has no end. It is broad, touching all aspects of life. She has thought of everything and has everything covered.

Of these associations, strength is the outlier. Each of the other synonyms for wisdom deal with the intellect, but “strength” here refers to physical power. Two kinds of strength might be in mind here as being in wisdom’s

possession. The verses immediately following this pertain to kings, princes, and judges all ruling with wisdom. Wisdom could be claiming to have the strength of these political figures behind her. However, the word for “strength” (Heb. geburah, geh-boo- RAH) can also refer specifically to God’s mighty works. Later in Lady Wisdom’s address, she tells how she was the first thing God created and how she witnessed His mighty deeds of Creation. God even delighted to use Wisdom as He built the universe. Therefore the strength wisdom claims here might refer to divine power. We only need to follow wisdom ourselves to have access to all kinds of intellectual rigor, but also to the power behind God’s mighty works.

To fear the Lord is to realize you are under His power. If you are not obedient to His commandments, this “fear” is an actual terror. However, if you have a loving relationship with Him, He will use His power to bless you, and your “fear” is more akin to awe and respect. “The fear of the LORD” is equated with many ideas in Proverbs. It is the beginning of wisdom (9:10), beginning of knowledge (1:7), knowledge of God (2:5), knowledge of the holy (9:10), and instruction of wisdom (15:33). It is also a fountain of life (14:27) that prolongs days (10:27) and turns away evil (19:23). This is the only example in Proverbs of the fear of the Lord being defined by what it is not. It is not evil.

It hates evil in all its various forms: pride, arrogance, evil paths, and froward (i.e., lying) mouths. “Hate” (Heb. sane’, saw-NAY) is associated with being someone’s enemy. Evil is the enemy of those who honors the Lord. If we are to follow in the paths of wisdom, we too must hate evil. When you hate something, you jump at every chance you get to work against its spread, fueled by a fire to see right prevail. Wisdom is seen not only positively enforcing her counsel, but also fiercely defending her adherents from deceit that might try to pull them away from her. This ought to be the way we react to evil too. We must hate it and allow Christ’s love to show the wisest paths to rebuild and reconcile after evil is punished.

**17 I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me. 18 Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness. 19 My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver.**

Although Wisdom hates her evil enemies, she loves those who seek her out. “Seek me early” (Heb. shakhar, shaw-KHAR) attempts to translate the poetic intensity and eager searching the word connotes. Wisdom is not trying to hide. The beginning of the chapter showed that she is calling publicly for any who will listen. Anyone who seeks for her will find her (cf. Jeremiah 29:13).

For the second time in this one speech (cf. v. 11), Lady Wisdom says she is more valuable than silver and gold, repeating herself so that even

the simple will remember and understand. Not only is wisdom more valuable than gold, silver, and rubies, but wisdom has those same things in her possession. She has material wealth and riches to benefit us economically, plus she has “honour” (Heb. kabod, kah-BODE, usually translated glory) and righteousness to benefit us spiritually. “Durable” or lasting riches are found only with wisdom, as the Bible asserts often that wealth is transient. “Revenue” (Heb. tebu’ah, tehboo- AH) refers to one’s agricultural income, whether fruit, grain, or cattle. In an agrarian society as Solomon’s, fruit, grain, and cattle were signs of wealth just as much as silver and gold. Wisdom tells us what her fruit and revenue are in the following verses.

**20 I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: 21 That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.**

Instead of directly leading to gold and silver, Lady Wisdom leads those who love her down the ways and paths of righteousness and judgment (Heb. mishpat, meesh-POT, also translated justice). The purpose of walking these paths is so that those who love wisdom will inherit “substance,” and be filled up with “treasures.” Wisdom leads us righteously and justly, not simply only because those are the best ways from a purely spiritual lens, but also because going those routes allows wisdom to grant us what is materially best too. The word translated here “substance” is difficult in the Hebrew, Yesh (YESH). It is usually translated “there is” or “there are,” but that

would not work with the rest of the sentence. One can supply another noun and say “There is [an inheritance] that I will cause those who love me to inherit.” Or one can understand yesh as referring to something that simply is there, that exists, a “substance.” From this much, we cannot tell if the “substance” is substantial, but the latter half of the verse clarifies that wisdom will “fill” her followers’ treasures. “Treasures” here may refer to valuables themselves or to the place where they are stored. Wisdom will fill these treasure houses up with good things so that we have enough and more than enough. In this way, Lady Wisdom reflects God to us, showing us the best paths—paths of righteousness and justice—for our own benefit, and showering us with further blessings along the way. This is the extravagantly loving and wise God we serve.

## **Daily Bible Readings**

### **MONDAY**

Christ, the Wisdom of God  
(1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

### **TUESDAY**

God Abundantly Rewards Job's Faithfulness  
(Job 1:1-5)

### **WEDNESDAY**

God Restores Job's Family and Wealth  
(Job 42:10-17)

### **THURSDAY**

Wisdom Calls the People to Respond  
(Proverbs 8:1-7)

### **FRIDAY**

Wisdom Present and Active During Creation  
(Proverbs 8:22-31)

### **SATURDAY**

Choose Wisdom and Live  
(Proverbs 8:32-36)

### **SUNDAY**

Wisdom Affects All of Life  
(Proverbs 8:8-14, 17-21)