

THE BENEFITS OF OBTAINING WISDOM PROVERBS 2

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

When I was a child, my father was an independent agent for a variety of insurance companies who sold a variety of insurance products--- auto, fire, homeowners, health, disability, and life. Some of these insurance products are required. If you have a house with a mortgage, you must have a homeowner's insurance policy. If you have a car, you must have auto insurance. So customers in these cases who came by to my father's office simply had to choose among several companies and policies to get what they needed. For something like life insurance it was a different story. There was, and is, no law requiring people to buy life insurance.

So my dad had to work harder to sell life insurance. I remember going along with him a number of times as a little tike when he had appointments to talk to people about life insurance. Often it might be a farmer out in the country who wanted to hear about life insurance. My dad was a talker, and I would get bored pretty fast from the conversation.

I do remember that in his approach to selling life insurance there were two basic things that he would tell customers. One was the negative aspect--- the consequences of not having life insurance. The basic danger was that an individual's family could be left in serious financial trouble if the breadwinner happened to die. The positive aspect was that there were benefits to having life insurance. Those benefits included protection for one's family, peace of mind, an investment component for retirement, and a means of borrowing money at a low rate of interest.

The author and compiler of the Book of Proverbs is also a salesman of sorts. The product that he is selling is wisdom, which I have defined as "skill in daily, godly living." In #1 we saw that he described the negative consequences that come upon those who do not try to obtain it. The eventual danger for these people is calamity. This may include physical problems, family difficulties, financial ruin, and legal problems. Now in #2 we will look at what the author says are the benefits which come from seeking wisdom.

I.

First, in vv. 1-4 we learn about THE PREMIUM REQUIRED TO OBTAIN WISDOM. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE PREMIUM REQUIRED TO OBTAIN WISDOM) There is a cost for this policy. Verse 1 begins an "if-then" statement: "**My son, if you receive my words/ and treasure up my commandments with you...**" "My son" is a term that is used a number of times in the first nine chapters to mark out the beginning of a section of thought. It is also a reminder that the Proverbs have their origin in the instructions of a father to a son, although King Solomon probably began compiling them to be used as a curriculum for training young men for government service.

Verses 1 & 2 tell us that what is necessary to obtain wisdom is an attentive and receptive attitude. The object of attention is the sayings and commandments of the father or teacher. These teachings represent principles of life that are true and that have their origin in the Creator of life.

This receptive attitude means paying attention to, and accepting, the truths that are being taught. This is in itself an indication that one is a child of God. In the New Testament in 1 Corinthians #2 v. 14 (1 CORINTHIANS 2:14) the Bible says, **“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”** If you are sitting here this morning and are accepting and embracing these truth from the Bible, that is an indication that you are truly a Christian, a child of God.

(PROJECTOR OFF) Notice also that v. 1 in our passage indicates that the pursuit of wisdom involves treasuring the commandments which have their origin in God. It seems to me that treasuring the commandments of God within us involves at least two things. **First**, it means memorizing Scripture. I suspect that Jesus had memorized the entire Old Testament. The familiarity that the apostolic writers of the New Testament had with the Old Testament in their references to it and their quotations of it suggests that they had at least large portions of it memorized.

Some of you have probably read about how in the Islamic madrasas, (PROJECTOR ON--- MADRASA) the religious schools, young boys are taught to memorize the entire Koran. Sometimes these students come from different language backgrounds, and they don't even understand the Arabic words that they are memorizing

In yeshivas (YESHIVA), Jewish religious schools, Jewish kids likewise memorize large portions of the Hebrew Bible. A couple of times we have shown on Sunday evenings parts of a video series called “That the World May Know.” Ray Vanderlaan, who put that together and who has spent much time in Israel, received his PhD from Yeshiva University in New York City. He says that he was a little intimidated on the first day of his studies to discover that the other 29 students in his class all had the entire Hebrew Bible memorized in Hebrew. (PROJECTOR OFF) Stories like that several decades ago motivated me to make memory of larger sections of the Bible a priority in my daily devotions.

Treasuring God's Word means not only memorizing it but also loving and appreciating it. I had a seminary professor who told the story several times about a neighbor whom he had while he was living in Israel. This man knew the Psalms and the first five books of the Old Testament in Hebrew from memory. My professor said that he knew them word perfect, having tested him several times. Yet this man was an atheist. He had learned and memorized these Old Testament portions while he was in rabbinical school. Yet he did not even believe that there was a God. Memorizing God's Word is insufficient to produce wisdom. There must also be an appreciation and reverence for it as well.

Verse 2 stresses the idea of attentiveness to God's Word: **"...making your ear attentive to wisdom/ and inclining your heart to understanding..."** Constantine (PROJECTOR ON--- CONSTANTINE) was the Roman emperor who, in the early 300s AD, was converted to Christ and was instrumental in making Christianity a legal religion and then promoting it throughout the empire. Supposedly he would stand for hours at a time to hear the Bible read and taught. According to the early church historian Eusebius when once he was asked to sit down, he refused and replied **"that he thought it wicked to give negligent ears, when the truth handled was spoke of God."** (PROJECTOR OFF) What enthralls preachers and Bible teachers and Sunday school teachers is the sight of people following along in their Bibles, taking notes, and asking questions about what is being studied. That attitude, according to our text, is foundational to the pursuit of wisdom.

Verses 3 & 4 appear to describe a more active involvement on our part. Not only are we to pay attention to the teaching of, and about, wisdom but also we are to work hard at getting it. Notice v. 3: **"...yes, if you call out for insight/ and raise your voice for understanding..."** This sounds like a heartfelt reference to prayer, doesn't it? If God is the ultimate source of wisdom, we need to ask him for it. James #1 v. 5 (PROJECTOR ON--- JAMES 1:5) in the New Testament says, **"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."**

When I work on my sermons, I often utter short prayers asking God for wisdom to help in my understanding of the passage and the way to communicate it well. The best explanations and applications and illustrations that I give are due, to a large extent, to answered prayer. (PROJECTOR OFF)

It is also true, however, that prayer alone is not a substitute for the serious study of God's Word. That seems to be the thought of v. 4: **"...if you seek it like silver/ and search for it as for hidden treasures..."** Wisdom is compared to silver that comes from a mine. The form of the Hebrew word for "silver" refers specifically to the metal that is mined and smelted. It is silver that is the product of hard work.

We in Nevada know something about silver. Our nickname is "the Silver State." In 1859 there was a mining boom up toward Reno. This guy by the name of Henry Comstock (PROJECTOR ON--- HENRY COMSTOCK) staked out a claim on the east side of Mt. Davidson. He is popularly given credit for discovering this lode that contained silver, though there were a couple of other miners who first found it. But Henry staked some claims to land containing this valuable silver lode.

Henry Comstock was originally from Ontario, Canada. He was a trapper and an explorer before he took up prospecting in what was originally western Utah territory. He could also not read or write. But he laid claim to land that contained gold and silver. For that connection the valuable streak of silver became known as the Comstock Lode. But Henry Comstock did not know how to develop and use the valuable silver that was in his possession. So he sold his rights to the minerals at what historians regard as much too low a price. He used that money to establish two trade goods stores. Those failed,

largely because he lacked business sense. Ten years later he committed suicide near Bozeman, Montana. Henry Comstock had considerable riches available to him, but he never properly took advantage of them. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The author of Proverbs says that we have great riches available to us. The truly valuable find is wisdom. But it takes some work on our part to dig out this wisdom, to assay it, to process it. In practical terms this means studying God's Word. It means prayer. It means meditation. It requires discipline and a certain humility. It means not doing other things that might seem to be more fun. Such is the cost, the premium, necessary to obtain wisdom.

II. A.

(PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE BENEFITS FROM OBTAINING WISDOM) The rest of #2 describes THE BENEFITS FROM OBTAINING WISDOM. I find four of them. The first is given to us in vv. 5-8. Verse 5 reads: **"...then you will understand the fear of the Lord/ and find the knowledge of God."** Verses 1, 3, and 4 contained an "if" clause. This is a conditional clause that the grammarians call the protasis. If this condition is met, then this consequence will follow. In v. 5 we find a "then." This is the payoff. This is the consequence. The grammar experts call this the apodasis. The first benefit which comes from the pursuit of wisdom is THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. (II. A. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD) If we pursue wisdom, we can know God. We can have a relationship with Him.

Years ago I got a letter in the mail inviting me to a dinner in Washington with George Bush. I thought that this invitation sounded kind of nice. It would have been a bit of a thrill to meet the President. Hard as you may find this to believe, there was a catch. It was necessary to make a donation of a few thousand dollars to the Republican Party. Probably a significant number of people were happy to make that kind of a donation to shake hands with the President and have their picture taken with him. I have my doubts about whether that kind of a meeting would qualify one to say that they know George Bush.

But contrast that situation with what is promised here in our passage. If we pursue wisdom, if we pay the necessary premium, we can know the God of the universe. Imagine that. We can come into a permanent, personal, ongoing relationship with the Author and Sustainer of life, with the Creator of the universe. **"...you will find the knowledge of God."**

Verse 6 begins with the word "then," suggesting further support for the idea that knowledge of God will result from the pursuit of wisdom. For verses 6-8 tell us that wisdom and protection for our moral integrity ultimately find their source in God. The proverbs in this book deal with universal, practical principles of life. Even unbelievers are able to recognize and acknowledge many of them. But one who is serious about growing in wisdom--- in skill in daily, godly living--- is eventually going to come to know God. For wisdom is in the end inseparable from the author of these universal principles.

So in our pursuit of wisdom, which is found in its fullest form in the Bible, we will come to know God.

B.

In vv. 9 & 10 I find a second benefit that comes from the pursuit of wisdom. Verse 5 began with a “then” and was followed by a benefit. Verse 9 likewise begins with a “then” and is followed by a benefit. That benefit I would describe as THE KNOWLEDGE OF RIGHT BEHAVIOR. (II. A. B. THE KNOWLEDGE OF RIGHT BEHAVIOR)

Solomon probably compiled these proverbs largely for the purpose of training young men for government service. Skill in discerning righteousness and justice and equity and every good course would be vital for these future leaders. The assertion is that these things become theirs from the pursuit of wisdom.

Verse 10 tells us, “**...for wisdom will come into your heart,/ and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul...**” Knowledge of right behavior becomes intuitive to the man or woman who is pursuing wisdom. A wise person can enter a new situation or meet new people or be presented with a request to make some kind of decision and be able to sense wrongness and rightness. There may be no particular verse that the wise person can use to back up his judgment or evaluation. But because he or she has become trained in wisdom, he can intuitively pick up motivations and potential dangers and sincerity and insincerity and maturity and immaturity. It is not that we are judging people in a condemning kind of way. We are simply exercising discernment. We know right behavior from pursuing wisdom.

C.

(II. A. B. C. DELIVERANCE FROM...) The third benefit that comes from the pursuit of wisdom is DELIVERANCE FROM EVIL PEOPLE as explained in vv. 11-19. Verse 11 says, “**... discretion will watch over you,/ understanding will guard you...**”

Have you seen the movie “The Natural?” (THE NATURAL) For those of you have not seen it, or who need a reminder about the plot line, it is the story of a talented baseball player whose role is acted by Robert Redford. As a young man he takes a train with his high school baseball coach to go to a tryout with a professional team. It so happens that a famous baseball slugger is on the train. Robert Redford’s coach challenges the slugger with the statement that the youngster can strike out the slugger with three pitches. Robert Redford does just that.

Also on the train is a seductive woman who was hanging out with the famous professional baseball player. But now she moves in on Robert Redford and asks him lots of questions about how great he things that he will be. When they arrive at their destination, she invites him up to her hotel room and shoots him. Redford survives and, after a long recovery, makes a comeback. In one scene where he is reunited with his childhood sweetheart whom he had dropped from his life since the time of the shooting, he talks about the incident with the seductive woman and says something to this effect: “**I just didn’t see it coming, and I should have.**” Glen Close, his childhood

sweetheart, comforts him and says, **“There’s no way you could have seen it coming.”**

But the man in pursuit of wisdom would have seen trouble coming. He would have recognized this seductive woman’s shallow desire to hang out with great athletes. He would have seen the fickleness of her commitment in being willing to change boy friends at the drop of a hat. He would also have remembered his allegiance to his childhood sweetheart. The wise man would have avoided being alone with this seductive woman in her hotel room. The wise man or woman will tend to experience deliverance from evil people.

1.

In vv. 11-19 we are given two illustrations of evil people. First, we are told about THE EVIL MAN. (II.A.B.C. 1. THE EVIL MAN) He is described as having perverted speech. He delights in doing evil. Truth for him becomes error, and wrong becomes right. He is devious in all his ways. The extreme examples of this would include the Russian dictator who claims that a “special military operation” is needed to remove a threat to the motherland and to free the Ukrainians from Nazi rulers. It would include Hamas terrorists who claim that Israeli oppression justifies murdering men, women, and babies. It would include supporters who chant “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

There are less extreme examples that we occasionally encounter in the course of every day life from people who want to use us for selfish purposes. The promise here is that the pursuit of wisdom will deliver us from their influence and their schemes. We will be able to recognize them and not get caught up in their schemes.

2.

Verses 16-19 provide a description of a second example of an evil person. This is “the forbidden woman,” or “THE ADULTERESS (II.A.B.C.1.2.THE ADULTERESS),” as she is described in v. 16. The Hebrew word for both of our translated terms implies foreignness. These women are outside the circle of proper relationships. Although prostitution was prohibited by the Old Testament, some of Israel’s neighbors permitted it. Some scholars suspect that prostitution in Israel was primarily practiced by foreign women. So it is today that we hear reports that our open southern border has resulted in sex trafficking of women from other countries.

Whether or not the loose woman described here was a prostitute, the author saw her as a danger and a temptation to these young men. Their male egos were potentially susceptible to the flattery of her words. So the author unmask her true character. She is an unfaithful woman. She disobeys the commandments of God. Her ultimate end is ruin and destruction.

Verse 19 adds, **“...none who go to her come back,/ nor do they regain the paths of life.”** The author sees the yielding of young men to such women as the beginning of a walk down a path from which it is difficult to be diverted. Certainly Solomon observed what happened to his own father David when he consorted with Bathsheba. Adultery led

to murder which led to family division which led to the temporary loss of David's kingdom and more death and destruction.

I knew a Christian fellow named Dave who once has an experience with a prostitute when he was a student at a Christian college. Years later he was still covered over with guilt about it. He experienced severe depression and was at times suicidal. For days at a time he was seemingly incapacitated. Part of the reason, though not the entire reason, was the guilt and self-condemnation that he had about this experience. It was destructive to him, and Dave had a hard time getting back on the path of life.

The promise from Proverbs is that the pursuit of wisdom will deliver us from the wiles of evil people like the adulteress and the evil man.

D.

The fourth benefit that comes from the pursuit of wisdom is described in v. 20: **“So you will walk in the way of the good/ and keep to the paths of the righteous.”** This is the benefit of RIGHT CONDUCT (II.A.B.C.D. RIGHT CONDUCT) It goes beyond the second benefit of the knowledge of right behavior to actual right behavior. That second benefit deals with discernment and judgment and correct evaluation. This benefit holds out the promise of good conduct itself. The man or woman involved in the pursuit of true wisdom will soon find himself or herself doing right things. The result of that is contentment and peace of mind and lack of fear.

III.

Verses 21 & 22 provide THE CONCLUSION. (III. THE CONCLUSION) It is the PAYOFF OF A WISDOM POLICY. Verse 21 describes the positive aspect: **“For the upright will inhabit the land,/ and those with integrity will remain in it...”** In Deuteronomy #28 and Leviticus #26 God promised the children of Israel before they entered the promised land that if they obeyed God, they would be greatly blessed. They would experience prosperity and peace and security in their land. Now the author is addressing the future leaders of the nation, and he is expressing a related principle. Those individual Jews who are righteous in their behavior can be confident of remaining and prospering in the land. In Psalm 37 v. 29 (PSALM 37:29) Solomon's father David said, **“The righteous shall inherit the land/ and dwell upon it forever.”**

The negative consequences that come from failing to pursue wisdom are found in v. 22 of our passage: **“...but the wicked will be cut off from the land,/ and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.”** Following the blessings for obedience described in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 are even longer passages that describe the curses that will result from failing to obey God. One of the chief curses is that Israel will be scattered among the nations if it turns from God. Here in v. 22 the principle is expressed that individual Jews who are wicked will be cut off from the land.

Back in Psalm 37 again King David declared in v. 38 (PSALM 37:38), **“But transgressors shall be altogether destroyed;/ the future of the wicked shall be cut off.”** Last time we saw in #1 that the destruction of the wicked results from their own

doing. Verse 18 said, “...**they set an ambush for their own lives.**” Here in our passage there is a hint of direct divine involvement in the undoing of the wicked.

Baptist pastor from Chicago Scott Willis (WILLIS FAMILY), his wife, and the youngest six of their nine children were traveling in their minivan on I-94 in southern Wisconsin, a stretch of road that I have traveled many times, when a scrap of metal fell off of a truck just ahead of them. Their minivan ran over the chunk of metal. It punctured the gas tank. There was an explosion, and all six of their children in the van died. The parents survived.

(WILLIS ACCIDENT) It turned out that the truck driver had been warned about not having his load properly secured. But the driver did not speak English and did not understand the warning. It also turned out that he did not earn his Illinois commercial drivers license. He bought it from Illinois state employees, who in turn passed along money to higher state officials. The chief official behind the corruption scheme was Secretary of State George Ryan. (GEORGE RYAN) He later became governor of Illinois. In 2006 he was convicted of corruption and sent to prison. **“But the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.”**

(PROJECTOR OFF) The tragedy to the Willis family was real. But their remaining children went on to produce 34 grandchildren. The state of Illinois also paid the Willis family and their lawyers \$100 million in damages. The pastor and his wife used that money to set up a charitable organization called the Khessed Foundation. “Khessed” is a Hebrew word that is translated in the Old Testament as “loyal love,” or sometimes “mercy.” The money in that foundation has been used to support a wide variety of Christian and charitable causes. It has been used to help many people. In the midst of tragedy there is still an application of the proverb expressed in v. 8: **“He guards the paths of justice/ and watches over the way of his saints.”**

In the conclusion in vv. 21 & 22 we again see the positive and the negative consequences involved in the choice to pursue wisdom. Are you in the market for a good life insurance policy? I suggest for your consideration a universal wisdom policy. If you reject the opportunity, there may be serious negative consequences, both to you and to your family. You may be following a path that ultimately leads to destruction.

On the other hand consider the benefits that come from choosing wisdom: the knowledge of God, the knowledge of right behavior, deliverance from evil people, and right conduct. Interested? There is a premium which is required to be paid. The good news is that the premium has already been paid. For Jesus Christ was God who became man. He died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. Our only responsibility is to believe in this Jesus. The eternal life part of this policy is thus guaranteed.

But there are premiums that will come due on a regular basis if you want to take advantage of the other aspects of this wisdom policy. If you want to experience all of the benefits that a universal wisdom policy has to offer, you must pursue wisdom on a

regular basis. That only comes through prayer, fellowship with other Christians, and the regular study of God's Word.