

ACQUIRING AND USING WISDOM

By

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My child, if you accept my words and treasure up my commandments within you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; if you indeed cry out for insight, and raise your voice for understanding; if you seek it like silver, and search for it 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 blamelessly, guarding the paths of justice and preserving the way of his faithful ones. Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart.

Proverbs 2:1-6

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHAT IS WISDOM?

TRAITS OF WISDOM

THE ACQUISITION OF WISDOM

WISDOM AND WOMANHOOD

SUMMARY

ACQUIRING AND USING WISDOM

GENERAL PRINCIPLES PERTAINING TO WISDOM

Wisdom is not knowledge; rather the use of knowledge. Wisdom is power and is capable of transforming mankind. The results of the gift of wisdom benefit all of society. Wisdom is even the primary source of longevity. Wisdom is not religion but requires godly boundaries if it is to be utilized for good. Wisdom flows from the heart but is regulated by the mind. Most women are born with it, few men seek it, and all of us need it.

The purpose of wisdom is to render justice. Wisdom's purpose is seen in the nature of its creation. According To Proverbs 8:22, wisdom was created by the Lord before the creation of the universe. Moreover, wisdom accompanied the Lord in the creation process. Wisdom is the chief testimony for God's existence and His intervention in the affairs of men. Now, if all of this seems rather complex --then believe me, it is. The subject of wisdom and its acquisition is a complex subject. Solomon says however, obtaining wisdom surpasses any other goal one could hope to achieve. Ultimately, the wisdom received will glorify the Lord and not ourselves.

WHAT IS WISDOM?

First, let us define wisdom. We tend to think of wisdom as a thought process rather than a heart process, yet scripture plainly states that wisdom resides in the heart. Wisdom is not related to intelligence, for even the intellectually slow may be wise.

Other ancient peoples did not have the same depth of understanding concerning wisdom as the Hebrew, God's people, did. The words used for wisdom in other ancient languages refer to knowledge, or even magic. The Old Testament uses words for wisdom which most often focus on behavior. Prudent, competent, or experienced action in the face of life's problems is the usual intent of our wise words, or wisdom. Perhaps the best simple definition comes from the literature of the Institute of Basic Life Principle, which defines wisdom as "seeing life from God's point of view."

There are three types of wisdom. The first two are of heavenly origin; their source is God. The first type of heavenly wisdom functions in the heart of man and deals with the affairs of men. The second resides in the spirit and is concerned with the affairs of God. The third, is earthly wisdom its source is the devil. James 3:15-16 describes some of the differences between heavenly wisdom and that which is unspiritual.

TRAITS OF WISDOM

Wisdom and Silence. Silence must reign if one hopes to acquire wisdom. *“Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise,”* which means the most fundamental step a person must take is to be silent. Why is silence so important? Because the tongue is the source of most of the foolishness in our lives. To restrain one’s words, to limit them to the bare necessity, is prudent for it limits one’s opportunities to speak inappropriately.

Moreover, the purpose of silence is to listen. One must listen for wisdom. One cannot talk and listen at the same time. Silence is not withdrawal, nor is it inattentiveness. Silence is not listening in order to give feedback about the correctness of what is heard. Silence with no intent to speak intensifies the hearing process. Everything we think, feel, or are, eventually comes out our mouths. What a person says gives insight into what motivates that person to change. These jewels are useless if we do not hear them. True, there is a time to speak, but never before you have heard.

So, what does one listen for? A person’s character is the sum total of all that he thinks, good and bad. What a person thinks is exhibited in what he says and in what he does. The wise person listens to the flow, looking for places to change the channel. Arguing is like trying to stop a flood of water. *“If a wise man has an argument with a fool, the fool only rages and laughs, and there is no quiet.”*

It would be wise to say that almost any time a person says something foolish, our response ought to be silence. In fact, the best way to keep out of trouble is to guard with great diligence our response to foolish statements. Silence is the second-most important quality of wisdom following the fear of the Lord. Silence alone may be mistaken for wisdom.

Wisdom And Good Deeds. The next trait of wisdom is good deeds. If for nothing else, good deeds reveals one as wise. The book of James is the New Testaments book of Wisdom Literature. This book puts major emphasis on the concepts of faith, works and wisdom. Observe what happens when you replace the word faith with the word wisdom.

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have **wisdom** but do not have works? Can **wisdom** save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?*

*So **wisdom** by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have **wisdom** and I have works." Show me your **wisdom** apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my **wisdom**. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe--and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that **wisdom** apart from works is barren? Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that **wisdom** was active along with his works, and **wisdom** was brought to completion by the works. Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by **wisdom** alone. Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so **wisdom** without works is also dead.*

Wisdom is a social gift. It is not given to be exercised on one's self. It is a gift for the whole community. If a person truly believes, then that faith will be illuminated by the things she does. In the same way if one is wise, her wisdom will be shown by her good deeds and wise behavior. Works are so very important to the integrity of the body of Christ.

More majestically, believers' good deeds are their heavenly clothing. More precisely, hear how John describes it in Revelation 19:8. "*It was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure--for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*" The good things we do here on earth will be apparent to all in heaven. Again, take note, hard work is standard fare for women. May I quote a common proverb? "A woman's work is never done." Thus, I suspect that women will be the best-dressed occupants in the hereafter.

ACQUISITION OF WISDOM

How does one become wise? We have already stated that wisdom is given by the Lord and is predicated on the fear of the Lord, but what other principles are involved with obtaining wisdom?

Wishing for wisdom is not enough. Wisdom is a treasure more precious than gold and silver, and it must be treated as such. One must search diligently for wisdom if there is any hope for it to be found. Once obtained, it must be valued highly. Wisdom cannot be given to or taken from another. A teacher can impart knowledge but not wisdom. Wisdom literature does not give us wisdom. It points the way to wisdom and motivates us to seek it.

There are certain principles important to acquiring wisdom. The book of James points out that wisdom is from God who gives to all men generously. Asking for wisdom is essential to obtaining it. The second thing James says about getting wisdom is that one must ask in faith. That person must believe that God will give him what he is asking.

Third, James says a double-minded man receives nothing. He receives nothing because he can not make up his mind what he wants. He has not truly placed his faith in God's ability and authority. Now, this matter of faith is vital because authority, wisdom, and faith are tied together. In the account of the centurion servant whom Jesus heals in Matthew 8:5ff, we learn that authority is an important aspect of faith. Authority is also the cornerstone upon which wisdom relies. From authority extends the fear of the Lord which is the foundation for wisdom.

What are the specific steps one takes to acquire wisdom?

1. We choose an area we desire to illuminate.
2. We must be willing to pay a price; in fact it will be a sacrifice, for wisdom is costly.
3. We must ask God for wisdom.
4. We must believe that we will receive it, for without faith there will be no reward.
5. We cannot be double-minded.
6. We should recognize that wisdom frequently comes at the end of great temptation.
7. The entirety of the first chapter of James is about acquiring wisdom. Look at all of the items that related back to wisdom: bridling the tongue, putting aside anger, purity of heart, and doing good deeds.

Men and Women Acquire Wisdom Differently. Another characteristic about wisdom is that men and women acquire it and use it in a different manner. Let us compare the two.

MAN

Self-affliction (humbles himself)
Studies to acquire knowledge
Teaches to communicate
Competes with others
Publicly heralds wisdom
Affects society
Comes in the mind

WOMAN

Seeks to serve others
Senses others
Practices silence
Mediates between others
Privately exercises wisdom
Affects her family and community
Experience in emotions & spirit

Notice that men, for the most part, depend on biblical studies to acquire wisdom. They do word studies, cultural analysis, linguistic searches, historical inquiries, and so on. These resources all lead to wisdom through use of the mind. Men will turn thoughts over and analyze them from different perspectives. This analysis produces insight which the man disseminates through teaching.

A woman's source is her spirit and her heart. This is not to say that womanly wisdom is inferior because its source is not logic. Remember, wisdom is not an intellectual property, and it is seated in the heart and received by faith. The truth of the matter is that the wisdom of men and women is equal. Their purposes are different. Whereas the ultimate purpose for the man is to render justice, a woman's wisdom provides protection, particularly with regard to her family and community.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom for both men and women, and both get wisdom by asking it of God. What transpires next is different. A man begins to acquire wisdom through study and gaining knowledge, but a woman acquires it through heeding the direct prompting of God's spirit.

Barriers to Acquiring Wisdom. A woman's acquisition of wisdom is hampered if she seeks it in the same manner as the man. If she attempts to acquire insight by man's means, then the results are manly insight and not womanly wisdom. The insight and knowledge a woman gains through study is still of value. A woman acquires knowledge, distills it, and applies it to relationships. After a woman distills the knowledge, she assimilates it then disseminates it through wise behavior.

Another barrier to wisdom arises from the typical relationship men and women have. Men and women rarely listen to each other. Neither hears what the other is saying, yet they need to. Though both perceive things differently, it is only with the combination of both perspectives that solutions appear.

The man brings leadership to the relationship; the woman brings wisdom. Both are necessary if the relationship is to function in a healthy manner. This may be compared to the relationship between the president and the Congress. The president is to provide leadership and direction; ideally, the Congress provides wisdom to guide him in his leadership.

Yet another barrier to wisdom is foolish behavior. Proverbs' main definition of foolish behavior is an inability to restrain the tongue, specifically with the expression of anger. Alongside anger is foolishness, also known as immorality. Both inhibit the acquisition of wisdom.

For men, anger inhibits the acquisition of wisdom, while anxiety does so with women. Both of these emotions tend to be overwhelming, even all-consuming. Just as anger interferes with a man's reasoning power (his seat of wisdom), anxiety can overwhelm a woman's heart and spirit (her seat of wisdom). The heart does not have the capacity to process both anxiety and wisdom at the same time, just as the mind cannot operate rationally in the presence of anger.

WISDOM AND WOMANHOOD

My wife thinks it rather presumptuous of me to tell a woman how to become wise. She may be correct. I have learned to be careful in such matters, for my wife is a wise woman filled with good deeds, and besides she looks great in white linen.

Wise women have always been a part of society. It is instructive that the word wisdom in its various forms in Greek, Hebrew, and Akkadian, embraces the feminine usage. That is the noun forms of the word in these languages tend to be feminine. I find this interesting since the woman is the first to show an interest in wisdom. In my experience, the man seeks wisdom and insight when he has to or when he is made to. Ask any counselor who seeks counseling. Most will say their schedules are mostly filled by women. Spend time in any bookstore and observe who is buying the self-help books.

Out of four hundred women mentioned in the Bible, there is sufficient information to ascertain some basic character traits about one hundred and forty of them. Approximately one hundred and fourteen or eighty-two percent of this number might be considered good. This conclusion is reached either by statements made

about them or the manner in which they lived their lives. Of this number, nearly seventy percent may be said to have behaved, exhibited, or expressed wisdom in their lives. Even fifty percent of the evil women exhibited a worldly wisdom.

The creation of man and woman presents many interesting challenges. Limiting our observations to what the Bible has to say about wisdom, look at Gen. 2:18ff and Gen. 3:6. *“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise.”* Now, it is that last phrase *'desired to make one wise,'* which draws our attention. What did wisdom have to do with the situation?

I believe the answer lies in the basic difference between man and woman. A careful reading of Genesis 1-3 reveals a distinctive difference in their creation. Man was created to tend God's creation--a woman was created to tend man. It takes two verses to describe man's creation and purpose five to recite woman's creation and purpose. This gives us some indication of the complexity of the task facing the woman.

Wisdom was not necessary for a man to fulfill his purpose. Evidently, it is crucial for a woman. One of the basic essential traits the woman is required to possess if she is to complete her task successfully is the quality of wisdom for how else can she tend man? Thus, for this reason I am suggesting that wisdom is an inborn part of the make up of the fabric of the woman's being.

This explains why the deceiver could deceive. Satan understood the woman's desire for wisdom. Satan above all else desires and esteems wisdom, what else is craftiness based on? Therefore, Satan understood her craving for knowledge, wisdom, and insight.

So, how may we know that wisdom as a trait pre-existed with the woman? Let's consider an analogy. Say, for example, you enjoy chocolate. Perhaps even, crave its delicious taste. How did that craving come about? Was it because you just looked at it and knew it would be good? No, at some point, you acquired a taste for its pleasure. So it is with wisdom. For the woman to crave wisdom, she had to have a prior knowledge about its goodness. The prior knowledge was based on God creating it in her in order to fulfill her work of tending to man. Helping necessities awareness, insight, and understanding. These traits were sewn into her fabric so she could fulfill her task.

The ramifications are enormous. I have spent a lifetime speaking to men and women about the innermost secrets of their lives. I have never met a woman who, either in the physical or spiritual realm, lacks the drive for the acquisition of

knowledge, wisdom, or insight. Even if it were a strip tease dancer who hates men emphatically, her desire was to know how to entice them even more effectively. Some women will fulfill the need for these traits by seeking the Lord, others prefer to receive them at the hands of the evil one.

Another ramification of this inborn drive for wisdom can be seen in the so-called double standard. I have heard many ask, "Is it a greater 'sin' for a woman to be unfaithful in a marriage than the man?" Just asking this question acknowledges its universal experience. Many cultures more quickly and sternly condemn a woman's unfaithfulness while ignoring the man's. Why does this reaction occur? A woman's betrayal of the man involves the very foundation of her being, God's purpose for her. One cannot tend two men at once and give one's self fully to the task.

This also explains why man's infidelity is a sin against God rather than against the woman. His offense against the woman is small comparison to how he offends God with his immorality. God gave the man the woman as a special blessing to him. He negates this blessing by taking other women and offends the Maker by trampling on His gift. Offending the Creator is a far greater offense than offending a person.

The Worldly Wise Woman. There are many women with worldly wisdom, women who have intimate knowledge of man's weaknesses, desires, and lust, and women who know how to exploit them to his destruction. James describes this wisdom as that which is earthly, non-heavenly, unspiritual, and of the devil. The presence of the fear of the Lord ekes out of the crevices and hidden parts of the heart, and reveals, cleanses, and purifies the heart in preparation for every good work. What differentiates the worldly wise from the heavenly wise woman?

The woman with worldly wisdom behaves in a manner that emphasis herself and what she has to sell. She advertises her product in such a manner as to draw attention. Her nonverbal behavior further energizes visions of ultimate fulfillment. What are the characteristics of a worldly-wise woman? She is an expert with smooth, sweet enticing words. Her words are intensified with physical contact and nonverbal behavior. She dresses in a manner which attracts the world. She tends toward impulsive, rebellious behavior. Proverbs declares that in sharp contrast to her appealing words, she is a hard, cold person. Her appeal is to the individual with promises of intense pleasure and fulfillment. This is not to say that all women with worldly wisdom display all of these traits. However, every woman will reveal the source of her wisdom by her deeds.

Please note that the woman appeals to an individual while the man appeals to the crowd. The woman is most effective in one-to-one encounters because of the emphasis God placed on relationships in her creation. Man, God created with a view towards society as a whole. Men have always wanted to build villages, towns, cities, and to control the world. Women want to control relationships, their home and families.

Some of the world events of the past few months provide us with a good example of women who possess worldly wisdom. Princess's Diana's death at the age of thirty-six brought the world to mourning. With a pretty face and winsome smile, Princesses Dinah traveled the world in behalf of the British kingdom and charities. Her death in a car accident in Paris brought worldwide attention from newspapers, magazines, and television. The streets of London and other major cities were filled with miles of flowers and lined with hundreds of thousands of mourners. The world fell at the feet of this person, declaring her a symbol of womanhood.

Yet, the truth is she was a woman of only earthly wisdom, which is in a way foolishness. She suffered from bulimia and depression all of her adult life. She could not hold her marriage together, in part because of adulterous affairs. Consequently, in death she abandoned her sons to a father as cold as the north wind and a grandmother filled with bitterness and envy. This is the course and product of worldly wisdom. This is why fear of the Lord is important. A woman will acquire wisdom from one source or the other. The product of wisdom may be holy or unholy, spiritual or unspiritual, heavenly or earthly. Fear of the Lord serves as a compass illuminating the proper direction.

Using Womanly Wisdom. So if the woman possesses insight, how does she use it? How does the woman even get the man to listen? How does the wise woman reveal to her husband wise choices? The answer is a hard one; she must wait on the Lord. The woman cannot force her husband to pay attention to her ideas and to make use of her insight. The Lord must act on the husband's heart and make him realize the value of listening to his wife. Kim shared how the Lord brought this about.

Several years ago, I had a couple in counseling. The husband was very intelligent. He had risen very high in one of the top ten accounting companies. His opinion of his wife's definition of wise financial investment bordered on thinking her to be incompetent. Why, he reasoned, invest one's money in a bank where one collects four or five percent interest, when one can invest it elsewhere and get sixteen percent?

The Lord wanted to address a much deeper problem in James' life. After fifteen years of marriage, it was time to learn the importance of listening to his wife. Kim shared how the Lord brought this about.

It seems the Lord was prompt Kim to look at the newspaper, something she rarely had time to do. But she starting reading it. At first, she did not know what or why she was doing it; she just felt this intense urge. After awhile, she found herself looking in the business section. Again, she did not know what she was looking for. After a week or so, she found that she was looking for the name of a company in which her husband had invested a sizeable amount of personal and business money. She could find nothing about the company.

After some time, she decided to call the Attorney General of the State to make inquires about the company. Now, knowing this woman and hearing her say she called the Attorney General's office was quite a shock. It was not ordinary behavior for Kim.

However, the only information she received was a terse reply that they could not respond to her request. Now she was worried. However, she knew it would not do any good to tell her husband, he would merely laugh at her. (Later James acknowledged that this is what he would have done.) A couple of weeks went by. Then, one day they received an official letter stating that the owner of this company had absconded with all of the funds. It was a big financial loss for James. He recognized the Lord as the source of this correction. Most importantly, he learned to listen to his wife, even in an area where he possessed the greater knowledge. You see the Lord wants the man to listen to his wife. Listening does not always mean agreeing. It does mean hearing. There are many answers the Lord gives' only to the woman just for this reason. It teaches the man to put great value on his wife. When he learns to listen to her and to take seriously her ideas seriously, the woman feels of greater worth. God gives to the woman an insight that often seems illogical to the man.

SUMMARY

Wisdom can be defined as seeing life from God's point of view. If this is true, wisdom is essential for the Christian. That is why James encourages all who desire wisdom to ask God for it. God is eager to provide wisdom for His children, although he provides it for men and women in different ways so that they are better able to fulfill His design.

Silence is a critical component of the exercise of wisdom. A wise person may be recognized by good deeds and wise conduct. Anger, anxiety, and immorality can all inhibit the acquisition of wisdom.

A woman's wisdom can especially benefit her husband and family. She must learn to recognize wisdom from God, and her husband must learn to listen to this wisdom and recognize its heavenly source.

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He has been in private practice for fourteen years. Dr. Stettheimer has authored numerous articles and conducted seminars and workshops in the areas of addiction, incest, family violence, biblical character training, the motivational gifts and Christian women's issues. Prior to establishing CFS, he served thirteen years as the Coordinator of Aftercare Services of the Substance Abuse Unit at Terrell State Hospital. He has been married to Mary Stettheimer for over thirty-three years and is the father of two and grandfather of two.

It is Dr. Stettheimer's belief that God's Word provides the answers to life's problems and that difficult family problems provide an opportunity to acquire discipline and develop character. Regular participation in church and home devotionals is strongly encouraged in order to provide a firm foundation upon which character is built. It is through this process that enduring solutions are discovered and strong marriages created.

In addition to the production of this booklet, Dr. Stettheimer has authored the following Character Building Booklets (\$3.00/each):

PUTTING ASIDE ANGER

A STUDY OF AUTHORITY, RESPECT, OBEDIENCE, AND CORRECTION

ADDICTION: CAUSES AND CURES

CHRONICLING GOD'S BLESSINGS

BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN

SEX

ADULTERY: CAUSES, CURES, AND CONSEQUENCES

Aside from these booklets, Dr. Stettheimer has created a series on The Motivational Gifts which is available on Cassette Tapes (\$25.00) and Video Tape (\$60.00).