

VALUE WISDOM

DEVOTIONAL READING: Proverbs 2:12–22

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Genesis 39;
Proverbs 2

PROVERBS 2:1–11

- 1** My son, if you accept my words
and store up my commands
within you,
2 turning your ear to wisdom
and applying your heart to
understanding—
3 indeed, if you call out for insight
and cry aloud for
understanding,
4 and if you look for it as for silver
and search for it as for hidden
treasure,
5 then you will understand the fear
of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
6 For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come
knowledge and
understanding.
7 He holds success in store for the
upright,
he is a shield to those whose
walk is blameless,
8 for he guards the course of the just

and protects the way of his
faithful ones.

- 9** Then you will understand what is
right and just
and fair—every good path.
10 For wisdom will enter your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant
to your soul.
11 Discretion will protect you,
and understanding will guard
you.

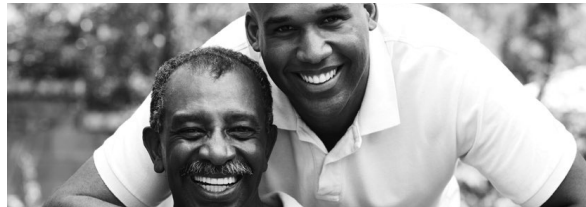


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KEY VERSE

For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.—Proverbs 2:6

p 354 MANY FACES OF WISDOM

Unit 1: Wisdom in Proverbs

LESSONS 1–4

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. State promises and blessings associ-

ated with godly wisdom.

2. Compare and contrast uses of the words *wisdom*, *knowledge*, *understanding*, *treasure*, and *discretion*.

3. Begin keeping a journal of occasions when godly wisdom has “preserved” him or her.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

A. More Valuable Than Gold

B. Lesson Context

I. Earthly Father’s Plea (PROVERBS 2:1–5)

A. Search for Wisdom (vv. 1–4)

B. Find Wisdom (v. 5)

II. Heavenly Father’s Word (PROVERBS 2:6–11)

A. Source of Wisdom (v. 6)

B. Protection for the Wise (vv. 7, 8)

Information That Protects

C. Preservation in Wisdom (vv. 9–11)

Well Preserved

Conclusion

A. Seekers for Life

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

p 355 HOW TO SAY IT

Colossians Kuh-*losh*-unz.

Corinthians Ko-*rin*-thee-unz (*th* as in *thin*).

Hebrews Hee-*brews*.

parallelism *par*-al-*lel*-ism.

Phelps Feh-*lps*.

Solomon Sol-*o*-mun.

p 354 Introduction

A. More Valuable Than Gold

Swimmer Michael Phelps electrified the sports world when he won a record eight gold medals at the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics. But he had made a different kind of impact in the 2004 games in Athens, Greece. There Phelps, who had earned a spot in the 4×100-meter medley relay, decided to give up his spot to Ian Crocker. Crocker was swimming in what he thought was his final Olympics, and he had yet to earn gold thus far in Athens.

The American team won the relay, and Crocker received the gold medal that had eluded him. Phelps’s gesture of withdrawing from a race for the sake of a teammate identified him as a gold medalist in more than swimming. It made him a champion of a different kind in the eyes of many.

Olympic athletes are known for their highly disciplined training in pursuit of world-class excellence and of winning the gold medal that distinguishes them as the best. In today’s Scripture, Solomon

encouraged his son (and all readers of his words) to pursue something far more valuable than any precious medal.

B. Lesson Context

Proverbs often uses a form of Hebrew poetry called *parallelism*. This is where two or more lines of text make the same point by using synonyms or near synonyms. For example, Solomon says of wisdom in [Proverbs 3:17](#):

her ways are	pleasant ways
↓	↓
all her paths are	peace

In other words, all of wisdom's ways are the same as her paths, and they are both pleasant and peaceful. The effect of this literary technique is to emphasize the point being made. Parallelism occurs frequently in today's lesson.

Today's lesson continues the appeal from the father to the son ([Proverbs 1:8, 10, 15](#); see lesson 1). Though the son could find many other enticing treasures to seek, the father impresses on the young man the superiority of finding wisdom.

p 355 I. Earthly Father's Plea ([PROVERBS 2:1-5](#))

A. Search for Wisdom (vv. 1-4)

1a. My son, if you accept my words

The father offers a conditional invitation. *If* the son will *accept* his father's words, then a certain reward will follow (see commentary on [Proverbs 2:5](#) below). The second clause (in [2:1b](#) below) clarifies what it means to *accept* these words. If the son will not listen to his father, he cannot expect to receive these blessings.

1b. and store up my commands within you,

Sometimes we *store up* objects to protect them from being used or harmed. *Storing* Scripture is for the purpose of having those items available to use whenever needed to provide the wisdom that only God's Word can supply (compare [Psalm 119:11](#)). Storing the father's *commands* will ensure that the son can refer to them at any time and so find his way in any situation.

2a. turning your ear to wisdom

The thought begun in [Proverbs 2:1](#) continues. *Turning* one's *ear* creates an image of actively listening to whoever is speaking ([Proverbs 4:20; 5:13](#)). In other Scriptures, the same Hebrew word is used to ask the Lord to "hear" or "listen" to the praying person (examples: [Psalms 17:1; 86:6; 142:6](#)). Other passages tell how God's people failed to hear his teaching and for that reason came under his judgment (example: [Zechariah 1:4](#)). Here the son is encouraged to listen closely so that he will miss nothing that *wisdom* has to

say.

[Proverbs 9:10](#) teaches that wisdom begins with “the fear of the Lord.” Does this mean that the wisest person is the one who cowers most in terror before God? Not exactly. It means that the wise person is the one who respects God to the point of obedience. We are on the path of wisdom when we hear and heed God’s directions. This is the path that Solomon desperately wants his hearers to find and follow.

2b. and applying your heart to understanding—

Becoming wise involves more than just one’s ears. The *heart* must be included as well. Biblically, the heart describes our ability to reason, think, and consider spiritual matters (example: the stubbornness of Pharaoh in [Exodus 7:13; 8:15](#)). Each person must “above all else, guard [his or her] heart” ([Proverbs 4:23](#)). Both wisdom and *understanding* have already been cited as part of the purpose for which the proverbs have been compiled ([1:2](#); see lesson 1).

What Do You Think?

How do we go about being more receptive to wisdom?

Digging Deeper

How do texts such as [Acts 17:18; 1 Corinthians 1:20](#); and [Colossians 2:8](#) caution and challenge you in this regard?

3. indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding,

The son is now challenged to engage his *voice* in the pursuit of *insight* and *understanding*. His crying out will represent an intensifying search; the son is to be consumed with a desire for wisdom.

Again, Solomon uses a couple of vivid metaphors to describe the necessary quest *for understanding*. We are to bellow for it, raising our voices and clamoring for it. Previously, Wisdom was pictured as crying out in the public arenas ([Proverbs 1:20–23](#)). She longs to be heard, and she is looking for those who are desperate to follow after her (compare [James 1:5](#)). Now it is we who are to call out for her.

4. and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure,

To illustrate how passionate the son’s desire for wisdom must become, a comparison is introduced: he must become as earnest in his quest for wisdom as many are for the material wealth [p 356](#) of *silver* and *hidden treasure* (compare [Matthew 13:44–46](#)).

Indeed, the drive for material wealth often drains the desire for wisdom. Jesus warns us to “be on [our] guard against all kinds of greed” ([Luke 12:15](#)) and tells a parable to illustrate how the obsession with material wealth and success can

blind us to the things of God (12:16–21). People “put their hope in wealth” (1 Timothy 6:17) when their trust should be in God. He is the source of wealth that riches cannot provide: wisdom.

Job uses a similar comparison when he describes man’s quest for wisdom (Job 28:1–11). The chapter concludes with a declaration that echoes Solomon’s words: “The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding” (28:28; compare Proverbs 9:10).

We also are to go on a treasure hunt for wisdom, seeking and searching. Wisdom is available but must be sought. We are not born wise. Wisdom is not intuitive; in fact, the wisdom of God is sometimes counter intuitive because it goes against our impulses of self-preservation, self-importance, and greediness.

What Do You Think?

Who could be your role model as one who lives out the implications of Proverbs 2:4?

Digging Deeper

To initiate a mentor-protégé relationship, what questions would you ask this person?

B. Find Wisdom (v. 5)

5a. then you will understand the fear of the LORD

This verse gives the conclusion (note

the word *then*) to the previous four verses. There the interest in obtaining wisdom has been described in terms of increasing desire. If the son will dedicate himself fully to the search for wisdom, he will come to *understand the fear of the Lord*.

It bears noting that this is the third time the phrase “fear of the Lord/to fear the Lord” has been used in the first two chapters of Proverbs. It first appears in the opening verses of the book, introducing the reader to the “beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7). The second time is when Wisdom herself cries out and urges passersby to heed her voice and not be among those who refuse to fear the Lord (1:20–29).

5b. and find the knowledge of God.

Having understood the fear of the Lord, the son will discover the key to knowledge (Proverbs 1:7). Wisdom and knowledge are not, biblically speaking, found through mastery of a body of facts or data. They are found in a relationship with the Lord that acknowledges him as their source. Neither wisdom nor knowledge is an end in itself; the Lord himself is the end of the quest.

What Do You Think?

How would you explain to a new believer the relationship between *fear* and *knowledge* as those terms are used in Proverbs 2:5?

Digging Deeper

How would your explanation differ for an unbeliever, if at all? Why?

In another sense, however, the quest has only begun. There are always new adventures and insights to receive as one learns to trust the Lord with all one's heart and acknowledge him in all one's ways ([Proverbs 3:5, 6](#)).

Such a discovery as this may seem foolish and hardly worth the effort in the eyes of the world. Secular culture fails to consider God at all when searching for the source of wisdom. But God's wisdom has always been scorned by the unbelieving world. This truth adds to the wonder of the gospel message, particularly as seen in the cross of Jesus ([1 Corinthians 1:18-31](#)).

II. Heavenly Father's Word

([PROVERBS 2:6-11](#))

A. Source of Wisdom (v. 6)

6. For the LORD gives wisdom: from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

God's *wisdom* results in fulfillment by leading people to develop the qualities emphasized as being necessary for a good life. *Knowledge and understanding* signify far more than intellectual prowess (see commentary on [Proverbs 2:5](#) above); [p 357](#) apart from God, these are often

used for violent, destructive purposes. Both knowledge and understanding have to do with learning God's character and recognizing what he desires.

The reference to the *mouth* of the Lord highlights his spoken and written Word as the source of wisdom. ([Psalm 119:72](#) offers a similar comparison.) God's inspiring our Scriptures ([2 Timothy 3:16, 17](#)) gives them authority that mere humans writing on their own cannot achieve, no matter how wise. Jesus countered one of the devil's temptations with the words, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" ([Matthew 4:4](#)). Certainly, we need physical sustenance. But without knowledge from God, we are spiritually starving to death.

B. Protection for the Wise (vv. 7, 8)

7a. He holds success in store for the upright,

The idea of *holds ... in store* may bring to mind Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount about storing up treasures in Heaven ([Matthew 6:20](#)). Whereas Jesus will call his disciples to store up for themselves, here the Lord himself is the one who holds in store *success* as a treasure *for the upright* (compare [Psalm 84:11](#)).

These are riches that one can draw from at any age and stage of life. One never outgrows the need for the Lord's

wisdom. But a person must be willing to admit that need and express a humble dependence on what the Lord has provided in his Word.

7b. he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless,

A *shield* is usually buckled around the arm of the soldier to provide a means of defense against a sword, a spear, or an arrow. The soldier is then able to use his free hand to carry his own weapon into battle.

The Hebrew word translated *blameless* may also be rendered “integrity” (example: [1 Kings 9:4](#)). Such a person is not half-hearted or superficial regarding devotion to wisdom. The individual has set foot on a path from which he or she does not intend to deviate (see [Proverbs 4:25–27](#)).

8. for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.

To guard in this context means that the Lord watches over *the course of the just*. The Lord never abandons *the way of his faithful ones*; he guides and keeps them in his care in every circumstance. Numerous assurances provide strength and endurance to God’s people who suffer because of the brokenness of the world ([Psalm 91:1–4](#); [Isaiah 40:31](#); [Hebrews 13:5, 6](#)).

The phrase *faithful ones* is often associated with holiness or being set apart in

some way ([1 Samuel 2:9](#); [Psalm 97:10](#)). Here it signifies those who are distinguished by their commitment to live by the wisdom that comes only from the Lord (compare [Joshua 24:15](#); [Acts 14:23](#); [1 Peter 4:19](#)).

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to acknowledge more consistently the reality of God’s constant protection?

Digging Deeper

What should others see in us when that happens?

INFORMATION THAT PROTECTS

Some information is essential for large groups of people to know. But how does one get them to listen? British actor and producer Richard Massingham offered one solution.

Massingham saw that many major problems in Great Britain could be avoided by an informed public’s taking simple precautions. After much thought, Massingham left his first career in medicine and started his own company, Public Relationship Films, in 1938. In his films, Massingham played an absent-minded, ordinary man whose lapses in judgment allowed his audience to laugh at him and at themselves reflected in him.

This character suffered the consequences of his nonsensical decisions,

thus demonstrating the importance of looking both ways before crossing the road, sneezing into a handkerchief to avoid spreading disease, and so on. In this way, the genre that became known as Public Information Films (PIF) in the United Kingdom was born.

Massingham's lighthearted but informational messages became a new standard for being heard p 358 by the public. Solomon knew that God-given wisdom would help his countrymen in their everyday affairs. Such wisdom would invite God to be their protection. What does God want wisdom to teach you?

—J. E.

C. Preservation in Wisdom (vv. 9–11)

9. Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path.

As an individual follows the Lord's direction and receives his help in life, he or she gains experiential understanding of the qualities the Lord views as *good*: righteousness, justice, and fairness. All three recall the stated purpose for the book ([Proverbs 1:3](#); see lesson 1).

Understanding these three virtues allows the people to pursue right and just relationships (example: [Deuteronomy 1:16](#)). Such a *path* is far different from the one that sinners entice people to travel, of which the son has already been

warned ([Proverbs 1:10–19](#)).

10. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.

Heart and *soul* are difficult to distinguish in terms of what they specifically designate. In this poetic verse, they are intended to be parallel terms (see [Lesson Context](#)). The differences between the terms are less important than the similarities: both refer to the inner person, to his or her motivations.

Wisdom and *knowledge* must be internalized to the point that they impact the spiritual makeup of an individual. Accepting biblical wisdom is not solely a mental exercise, though the heart in Scripture is associated with the mind, as previously noted (see [Proverbs 2:2](#) above).

11. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.

The promise of protecting and guarding the person who lives by godly wisdom uses the same verbs found in [Proverbs 2:8](#): “for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones” (compare [1 Samuel 2:9](#). The father will find nothing more satisfying personally than to see his son walk in a way that marks him as one of those who is faithful to God (see also [Psalms 31:23; 37:28](#)).

What Do You Think?

Should you set a goal to gain more discretion so that understanding may result, or should you set a goal to gain more understanding so that discretion may result?

Digging Deeper

How do the various uses of these same terms in [Proverbs 1:4](#); [2:2, 3, 6](#); [3:13, 19](#); [5:2](#); [8:1](#); [10:23](#); [11:12](#); [14:29](#); [15:21](#); [17:27](#); [18:2](#); [19:8](#); [20:5](#); and [24:3](#) influence your response?

[Proverbs 2:12–22](#) (not in our printed text) continues the father’s description of the benefits of wisdom, especially in keeping the son from certain evildoers and one type of individual in particular. The first is “wicked men” whose “ways” and “paths” travel in the opposite direction from the way of wisdom ([2:12–15](#)). The other is the “adulterous woman” whose words are seductive and flattering but whose path leads to certain death ([2:16–19](#)).

The chapter concludes with another appeal to the son to “walk in the ways of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous” ([2:20](#)) and with a contrast between the upright and wicked ([2:21, 22](#)).

WELL PRESERVED

Across cultures, one fact remains: we all need to eat. But food begins to spoil as soon as it is harvested. For that reason,

throughout history people have developed several methods of food preservation. Exactly what methods were adopted originally varied according to climate.

For instance, in cold climates, keeping food on ice was convenient. Freezing impedes the growth of bacteria that spoils a harvest. Cool temperatures above freezing slow decay, so cellars, caves, and cool streams also were used for preservation.

In tropical areas, drying was the preferred preservation method. The sun and wind would dry foods naturally. Evidence shows that Eastern cultures preserved fish, wild game, and other meats this way.

These and other preservation techniques are still used today. Fermentation, pickling, canning, [p 359](#) and more allow food to be preserved for later consumption. Solomon spoke of wisdom as the ultimate method for guarding freshness and preserving usefulness of spiritual food. Solomon explained how God-given wisdom preserves us for his purposes. How do you experience God’s preservation of the good in your life?

—J. E.

Conclusion

A. Seekers for Life

The challenge in today’s text to find wisdom is expressed in terms of an

intense search, not just a casual or passing interest. One must cry out for knowledge and lift up his or her voice for understanding, not whisper. One must be as passionate for wisdom as many are for material wealth. An individual must seek for the Almighty himself, not the almighty dollar.

For some, however, the seeking spirit—the passion for wisdom and for the God who is its source—diminishes with time. In the Western world especially, we settle into routines and expectations at church and in our faith. We become comfortable with where we are spiritually. We lose the hunger and thirst for righteousness ([Matthew 5:6](#)). We may not be guilty of any blatant wrongdoing against God or against others, but neither do we maintain our sense of seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness ([6:33](#)). Our cry for wisdom is reduced to a whimper.

Ultimately, addressing this matter requires that we undergo a serious self-examination. This is particularly so with regard to our relationship with God. Since “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” ([Proverbs 1:7](#)), then maintaining a strong bond with the Lord and a reverence for him is pivotal to sustaining passion and growth. The spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study, and meaningful fellowship with other Chris-

tians dare not be neglected ([Hebrews 10:24, 25](#); etc.).

Our lesson text also highlights the necessity for a human teacher to convey to students the value of wisdom and thus of the knowledge of the Lord. True, reading insightful works can be of great benefit; but nothing teaches wisdom better than a consistent personal example.



Visual for Lesson 2. Point to this visual as you ask how decisions become habits, whether wise ones or unwise ones.

The best personal example is the one that a person sees daily in the home setting. Both mothers and fathers are to urge their children to receive their words and take to heart their commandments ([Proverbs 1:8](#)) so that wisdom and understanding can be theirs.

The responsibility then falls on the children to continue to cultivate their own desire for wisdom. They must cry out for it with raised voices. They must look for it as though seeking hidden trea-

sure. Parents can model wisdom as they encourage their children to seek it, but each individual must do the seeking personally. The parents can put wisdom into a child's head. But the journey those few inches from head to heart is the task of the growing child.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, in a world where so many mock and scorn you and your Word, you are still the only wise God. May we keep our thoughts, words, and deeds in tune with your wisdom and not allow the many distractions around us to quell our seeking spirit. May we pant and thirst for you even as the psalmist did. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God's wisdom never depreciates in value.

p 360 INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Before class, hide 15–20 pieces of indi-

vidually wrapped candy around your classroom. Make sure you remember where you concealed each piece.

After all class members have arrived, explain what you have done. Give the class about five minutes to find your hidden treasures. If some pieces are not found, reveal their locations and distribute those pieces as you see fit.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “A Search for Information” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Give class members five minutes to complete as indicated. Allow students to share what they have learned.

Discuss either activity with these questions: 1—What other types of treasure hunts have you enjoyed in the past? (*Possible responses:* scavenger hunts, Easter egg hunts, etc.) 2—Sometimes our searches are not games but rather are vital parts of life. What are some of those? (*Possible responses:* job search, researching a major purchase, etc.)

Lead into Bible study by saying, “Treasure hunts and similar games are fun, but we all participate in much more serious searches. Let's see what Solomon taught regarding the nature of the most important search.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read the lesson text aloud. Point out that Solomon uses four

different words to describe a hidden treasure we must seek. Help the group determine what these words in [Proverbs 2:6-11](#) imply by saying, “While the four words are similar, they have slightly different meanings. Let’s see what light dictionaries can shed.” Distribute several of those for learners to use in the following small-group exercise.

Divide students into four groups: **Wisdom Group / Knowledge Group / Understanding Group / Discretion Group**. Ask each group to define the word for which its respective group is named. Also have them explain its importance in the context of the lesson text. Aid the groups with information from the lesson commentary as needed.

Allow the groups about 10 minutes for their research before asking them to share what they have found. Expect definitions along these lines:

- *Wisdom* is the ability to discern the right attitude, belief, or course of action.
- *Knowledge* refers to having a familiarity with facts and people that allows one to experience them intimately.
- *Understanding* is the faculty to process data reasonably to accomplish a task.
- *Discretion* speaks of the quality of having good judgment and mak-

ing responsible decisions.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Fill It In” exercise from the activity page. Have students work in small groups to complete the puzzle.

Into Life

As you wrap up this session, display a life preserver. If one is not easily available, a picture of one or a similar type of flotation device will do. Then pose these questions: 1—How do devices like this preserve, or save, lives? (*Expected response:* they prevent us from being pulled under the water.) 2—How do we use phrases like “being a real lifesaver” in a figurative way? (*Expected response:* something or someone keeps us from experiencing negative consequences in a potentially dangerous situation.)

3—When has godly wisdom been a lifesaver to you? In other words, what are some times when applying Bible truth helped you avoid disaster? (*Option.* State that no one is allowed to respond twice before everyone has responded once.)

Encourage the class members to keep a journal of occasions when godly wisdom has “preserved” them. (*Option.* Supply the class with notebooks for this purpose.)

To print the reproducible activity page, simply click the highlighted text below to create a pdf file on your hard drive. Then open the pdf file in Acrobat Reader and print.

[Activity Page \(June 14—Value Wisdom\)](#)

VALUE WISDOM

Lesson 2, Proverbs 2:1-11, NIV

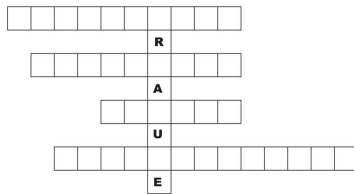
A SEARCH FOR INFORMATION

Seek to learn more about your fellow class members! Have a class member sign on the line after a description that is true for him or her.

- Has a middle name beginning with a vowel _____
- Was born in a month without an R in it _____
- Has visited at least 10 states of the U.S. _____
- Can count to 20 in a foreign language _____
- Loves crossword puzzles _____
- Knows all the words to a popular song _____
- Prefers winter to summer _____
- Ate a doughnut for breakfast today _____

FILL IT IN

Complete this grid by filling in key words from Proverbs 2:1-11. The meaning implied by each word and the verse in which it is found are in the clues below. When you are finished, the word revealed in the middle column will tell you how we are to treat these four attributes.



1. The ability to plan with a purpose that preserves and protects a person (v. 11a).
2. A familiarity with facts and people that allows one to experience them intimately (v. 6b).
3. The ability to discern the right attitude, belief, or course of action (v. 6a).
4. The faculty to process data reasonably to accomplish a task (v. 11b).

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