p 361 June 21 Lesson 3 (NIV)

RECEIVE WISDOM'S GIFTS

DEVOTIONAL READING: Job 28:12–28 BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Job 1; 42; Proverbs

8

PROVERBS 8:8-14, 17-21

⁸ All the words of my mouth are just; none of them is crooked or perverse.

⁹To the discerning all of them are right;

they are upright to those who have found knowledge.

¹⁰ Choose my instruction instead of silver,

knowledge rather than choice gold,

¹¹ for wisdom is more precious than rubies,

and nothing you desire can compare with her.

¹² "I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence;

I possess knowledge and discretion.

¹³ To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.

¹⁴ Counsel and sound judgment are

mine; I have insight, I have power."

.....

 ¹⁷ "I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me.
¹⁸ With me are riches and honor.

enduring wealth and prosperity.

¹⁹ My fruit is better than fine gold; what I yield surpasses choice silver.

²⁰ I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice,

²¹ bestowing a rich inheritance on those who love me and making their treasuries full."



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Key Verses

Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her. —**Proverbs 8:10, 11**

p 362 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. Describe the blessings of godly wisdom.

2. Explain why the benefits of godly wisdom far outweigh those associated with material wealth.

3. Write a prayer on behalf of someone that godly wisdom will guide his or her lifestyle.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Dispersal of Wealth
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Wisdom's Words (PROVERBS 8:8–14)
 - A. Based on Truth (vv. 8, 9)
 - B. Better Than Riches (vv. 10, 11)
 - C. Bringing Discernment (vv. 12–14)

Temperamental

- II. Wisdom's Wealth (PROVERBS 8:17–21)
 - A. Promised to Seekers (v. 17)
 - B. Providing Real Treasure (vv. 18–21)

A Different Inheritance

Conclusion

- A. ... And Wise?
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

p 363 HOW TO SAY IT

| choleric | kah- <i>lay</i> -rihk. |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| Ecclesiastes | Ik-leez-ee-as-teez. |
| Hippocrates | Hih-paw-cruh-teez. |
| melancholic | mehl-ahn- <i>kah-</i> lik. |
| phlegmatic | flehg- <i>ma-</i> tik. |
| sanguine | san-gwin. |
| Solomon | Sol-o-mun. |

p 362 Introduction

A. Dispersal of Wealth

My father passed away several years ago, my mother in December of 2015, and my older sister in the summer of 2017. My sister's passing left me to serve as executor of my parents' estate. My wife and I handled the sale of Dad and Mom's house, which closed title in May of 2018. About a month later, we closed the estate by distributing to the designated family members the money that remained in Mom's account.

While I appreciate what Dad and Mom were able to do to provide for their children financially, that is not the most valuable legacy that they left us. Both of them were faithful Christians who regularly took us to Sunday school and

church. They taught us the wisdom that the book of Proverbs calls its readers to obtain and cherish; they were conscientious of the importance of laying up treasures in Heaven.

My parents stewarded both physical and spiritual wealth well. However, others are not so wise. Many are extraordinarily rich in the things that will not last and exceedingly poor in eternal wealth. How do we invest in the riches that come only through the pursuit of godly wisdom?

B. Lesson Context

Wisdom was highly valued in the ancient Near East. Most nations had wise men who held high rank in government because of their skill (examples: Exodus 7:11; 1 Kings 4:30, 31, 34; Jeremiah 18:18; Daniel 1:19, 20). The Old Testament mentions wise women as well (examples: 2 Samuel 14:2; 20:16). The people who filled these positions in government and society were considered exceptional in wisdom.

Wisdom such as that found within the book of Proverbs is not limited to a specialized class of people. It is intended for everyone to live by and practice, regardless of their social status. Proverbs describes four animals that are said to be "extremely wise" (Proverbs 30:24–28). These are not exceedingly brainy creatures, but they do have skills in practical areas of living that help them survive and thrive. The wisdom God has provided p 363 in Scripture helps us do the same. Thus, wisdom is far more than intellectual prowess. This practical knowledge guides as we navigate through life in this broken, sinful world—by instructing us how to act, speak, and respond in a wide variety of situations.

Today's lesson from Proverbs continues the appeal to follow the path of wisdom that is grounded in the fear of the Lord. The principles are found in the introductory nine chapters of the book (see Lesson Context in lesson 1). In these chapters, Wisdom is personified thrice as a woman and pictured as making her own appeal (see Proverbs 1:20–22 and commentary on lesson 1; 8:4–36, partially included in today's lesson text; 9:4–6 and commentary on lesson 4). Wisdom's foil is the seductive woman called Folly, whose tempting words lead to disaster.

Wisdom is described again as calling out and raising her voice (Proverbs 8:1; see 1:22–33). And as was the case in Proverbs 1:21, Wisdom is positioned at prominent, public locations so that her cry cannot be missed (8:2, 3).

I. Wisdom's Words (PROVERBS 8:8-14)

A. Based on Truth (vv. 8, 9)

8. All the words of my mouth are just; none of them is crooked or perverse.

Wisdom has previously described her words as "trustworthy," "right," and "true" (Proverbs 8:6, 7). Furthermore, "[Wisdom's] lips detest wickedness" (8:7). A similar declaration occurs in the present verse. The claim is comprehensive; all of Wisdom's words are grounded in what is just. Crooked is a synonym for perverse (compare Job 5:13; 2 Samuel 22:27). The rightness of everything Wisdom says excludes any falseness, even from merely twisting the truth or omitting key details.

9. To the discerning all of them are right; they are upright to those who have found knowledge.

Though some assume that gaining wisdom is a complicated, high-level pursuit, Wisdom asserts that her ways are *right* to those who are *discerning*. Wisdom's counsel is also right in her straightforward goals. There is no hidden agenda or anything to be ashamed of when following Wisdom. There is no fine print to entrap someone later.

Words that are *upright* appeal to those who are guided by understanding and *knowledge*—the kind of knowledge that begins with the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7). Such individuals see no need to debate the worth or value of these words; they make perfect sense. The only appropriate response to them is obedience.

B. Better Than Riches (vv. 10, 11)

10, 11a. Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies,

Wisdom presents herself as the first of two choices facing a person. The second choice is the best material this world has to offer, represented by the precious metals *silver* and *choice gold* (implying gold of the finest quality; compare Psalm 19:9, 10) and the costly jewels *rubies* (compare Proverbs 3:13–15).

The offer of such abundant wealth would be hard to refuse. Yet wisdom possesses more lasting value and produces far more genuine pleasure and enjoyment than anything the world has to offer (see Job 28).

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to ensure that our words live up to the standard of Proverbs 8:8?

Digging Deeper

How might this verse speak to the concept of a "little white lie"?

p 364 11b. and nothing you desire

can compare with her.

This is perhaps the boldest statement in today's lesson text. Though the kind and amount of things people owned was different in biblical times, the desire for stuff, especially valuable stuff, still existed. All this and more amounts to nothing compared to the value of wisdom. This is true even if one were to obtain every desirable thing imaginable (compare Ecclesiastes 2:8–11).

Centuries later. Paul will have much to say to Timothy about the temptations associated with riches. The apostle will counter those who believe that "godliness is a means to financial gain" by declaring that godliness with contentment is itself the great gain (1 Timothy 6:5, 6). Those who set their hearts on obtaining riches are subject to many harmful desires that ultimately destroy them (6:9). In fact, the love of wealth is "a root of all kinds of evil" (6:10). If people desire to be rich, Paul will write, then they should seek to be "rich in good deeds" (6:18). The key questions are these: What do you love? Do you desire to be rich as God defines the term, or as the world does?

What Do You Think?

What appointments should appear in the schedule of someone committed to grow in wisdom rather than to the pursuit of material wealth? *Digging Deeper* What is your reaction to this witticism: "Money is only a means to an end, and when you don't have it, that's the end"?

C. Bringing Discernment (vv. 12-14)

12. "I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion.

The father has encouraged his son to practice wisdom by keeping good company and avoiding those who would entice him into sinful practices (Proverbs 1:10; see lesson 1). Now we learn that Wisdom herself keeps good company. *Prudence* speaks of a person who is discerning in making choices, cautiously deciding what is right.

Wisdom also claims to be familiar with *discretion* (compare Proverbs 1:4; 3:21). In Proverbs 2:11, discretion is said to "protect" the person who possesses it. The present verse may then be highlighting Wisdom's ability to provide one with the necessary insight to spot harmful influences or people when they are encountered and take steps to avoid them.

The writer of Hebrews characterizes mature individuals as those who have practiced wisdom so that they can "distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5:14). This aligns with Wisdom's words here. Though the wise person will be innocent

Though the wise person will be innocent of evil, he or she must also recognize evil in order to avoid it (Matthew 10:16).

13. "To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.

The wisdom of demonstrating a healthy *fear of the Lord* is emphasized throughout the Old Testament (examples: Deuteronomy 6:2; Psalm 128:4; Jeremiah 26:19). The assumption is that a proper reverence and respect for God will result in obeying him (examples: Genesis 22:12; Exodus 20:20). One cannot keep his commands without learning *to hate evil* (compare Job 28:28; Jeremiah 44:4).

What Do You Think?

What are some tangible ways that we should express our hatred of evil? Digging Deeper

Is it possible that hating evil can become its own misguided form of evil? Why, or why not?

The attitudes cited in this verse are all sins that are part of *evil behavior*. They each detract from the life of blessing that is the fruit of prioritizing wisdom over material wealth. *Pride* and *arrogance* are used synonymously. This is the only place in the Old Testament where these two words occur together. Pride in particular is condemned because it stands in the way of the humble heart that the Lord both requires and honors (see Proverbs 6:16–19; 16:18). Evil behavior and perverse speech are built on pride and arrogance (compare 8:8). Speech that is perverse goes against what the Lord finds pleasing. It is counter to the kind of speech that Paul will state later that followers of Jesus are to demonstrate (Ephesians 4:29).

p 365 14. "Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have insight, I have power."

Wisdom continues to make her case for earning both hearing and heeding from her listeners. The blessings that come with obtaining wisdom contrast sharply with what the Lord and Wisdom both hate (see Proverbs 8:13). The *insight* and *power* of wisdom elsewhere are said to overthrow entire cities (21:22; compare 16:32; Ecclesiastes 7:19).

What Do You Think?

If you suddenly had double the amount of godly wisdom you have now, what would neighbors notice differently about the way you live?

Digging Deeper

What would you be willing to give up in order to make time to devote to "wisdom doubling"?

TEMPERAMENTAL

Four centuries before Christ, Greek physician Hippocrates tried to explain

why people have differing temperaments. He hypothesized that personality variations are related to internal secretions of one's body. The four temperaments he identified were caused by an imbalance of blood (a "sanguine" temperament), yellow bile (a "choleric" temperament), black bile (a "melancholic" temperament), or phlegm (a "phlegmatic" temperament).

Using these ancient terms, a sanguine person is optimistic, active, and social. Choleric individuals are independent, decisive, and goal-oriented. Melancholics tend to be deep, very traditional, and orderly. Finally, a phlegmatic individual tends to be relaxed and easygoing. Hippocrates suggested that these characteristics were balanced in an ideal personality type, with no one characteristic dominating.

Centuries before Hippocrates, Solomon described godly wisdom as a balance of personality characteristics. "Wisdom" and "prudence" coexist; "knowledge" and "discretion" work together, as do "insight" and "power" (Proverbs 8:12–14). Have you found balance in wisdom?

—J. E.

II. Wisdom's Wealth (PROVERBS 8:17-21)

A. Promised to Seekers (v. 17)

17. "I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me.

Wisdom never spurns anyone who truly loves her (compare 1 Samuel 2:30; John 14:21-24). This verse also commends those who *seek* Wisdom, a challenge that was included in the previous study (Proverbs 2:4, 5 in lesson 2; compare 1 Chronicles 16:11; Matthew 7:7-11). Preferably, the seeking begins *early* in one's life so that an individual can gain the maximum benefit from wisdom (compare Ecclesiastes 12:1).

The quest for wisdom is not an impossible, idealistic dream walk. It is very much within our grasp if we turn to God. Our search is governed by our respect for God and his ways. Our goal is to know God and his ways more fully so that we may better follow them. This is a happy, joyous journey, the lifelong pursuit of godliness.

B. Providing Real Treasure (vv. 18-21)

18a. "With me are riches and honor,

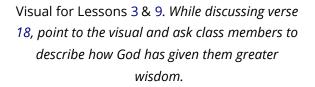
Wisdom promises that *riches and honor* result from obeying her invitation. One is reminded of Solomon's request for wisdom. God not only granted the king's request but also gave him much that he had not asked for, including "both wealth and honor" (1 Kings 3:5, 10–14; compare

Deuteronomy 8:18).

Some look at the promises of riches and honor that are associated with wisdom as an assurance that material wealth and prosperity will come to anyone who chooses to obey the Lord and live by his wisdom as found in Scripture. Other verses appear to offer such a guarantee (Proverbs 3:9, 10, 16; 10:22; 22:4).

Like all proverbs, however, caution must be exercised in interpreting these as guaranteed rewards for faithfulness. The proverbs in Scripture express principles that find fullest reward in eternity and do not always result in an easy life. One must not overlook the role that human free will and sin have in impacting how certain proverbs actually play out. For instance, Proverbs 22:6 p 366 speaks of a child being well taught and still living in wisdom in old age. Yet we all know of cases where children went astray in spite of their parents' wise teachings. Or a statement such as "A gentle answer turns away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1) does not describe what happened to Jesus at his trial prior to his crucifixion. He gave such an answer to his opponents, and they still crucified him (see Luke 23:3-32).





These exceptions do not negate the truth found within a given proverb; they simply illustrate that we have to be cautious in expecting an ironclad guarantee in every case. For this reason, we must not be surprised that not everyone who lives a wise and godly life will experience material prosperity or even a perfectly peaceful life. One example of this is Jeremiah. Though he clearly lived his life in fear of the Lord and therefore wisely, the prophet suffered much in his ministry (examples: Jeremiah 26:8, 9; 38:4-6; 40:1). In contrast, the wicked often live prosperous and seemingly carefree lives (compare Ecclesiastes 7:15; 8:14).

18b. "enduring wealth and prosperity.

If we are ever troubled by circumstances, rest assured that we are not alone. The psalmist wrestled with the same issue and came to understand that material prosperity is only temporary; it ends when the Lord carries out his righteous judgment (Psalm 73:16–20). Real wealth, found in wisdom, is *enduring*. Like the treasures in Heaven, wisdom's *wealth* cannot decay or be stolen (Matthew 6:19, 20).

19. "My fruit is better than fine gold; what I yield surpasses choice silver.

The comparison with *fruit* goes well with wisdom's earlier portrayal as being a "tree of life" (Proverbs 3:18). Wisdom bears worthwhile fruit throughout one's life and provides invaluable insights for any age, stage, or circumstance of life. Once again, its reward is compared favorably to precious metals (compare Job 28:12–19; Proverbs 3:13, 14).

It is important when considering the promises of riches and wealth in Proverbs to examine another book that has much to say about wisdom: Job. The man himself is described at the outset as being of exemplary and upright character (Job 1:1). Yet we know the tragedies that befell him in the course of a single day. Though he was wise and praised God through all his trials, he still went through those trials. Wisdom did not save him from the sorrows that Satan visited on him (1:12–2:10). Job experienced an abundance of sorrow, in spite of conventional wisdom that said he would be blessed for his faithfulness (example: 4:7, 8).

Job's account assists us in maintaining a proper balance when we read promises such as those cited earlier from Proverbs or found elsewhere in Scripture. Jesus spoke of seeking the kingdom of God first; then "all these things" (the material goods that "non-kingdom" people are so preoccupied with) will be provided (Matthew 6:33). But Jesus was also honest about the persecution that his followers would suffer (5:10, 11) and the cost that accompanies choosing to follow him (Luke 9:23; 14:33). At such times, the true value of the gifts of enduring wealth that godly wisdom offers will manifest itself.

20. "I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice,

Wisdom's ties with what is right have already been established (see Proverbs 8:9), as have her links to what is just (see 2:8, 9). Whether *justice* is understood as judging right from wrong or as practicing fair judgment in one's daily contacts and circumstances, Wisdom feels right at home p 367 in the midst of such Godhonoring decisions and actions.

21. "bestowing a rich inheritance on those who love me and making their treasuries full."

The word inheritance highlights the

"enduring" nature of Wisdom's wealth (Proverbs 8:18). It is an inheritance that Wisdom bequeaths to those who sincerely, passionately seek her (8:17). Once again, treasuries can signify the material benefits that accompany living by the counsels of Wisdom (see 15:6; 24:4, where the word is translated "treasure[s]"). But these are not the primary riches for which Wisdom is to be known and followed. The inheritance Wisdom provides is one that can be passed on to one's children with the understanding that, if pursued diligently, Wisdom's treasures will become just as precious and valuable to them.

What Do You Think?

What opportunities do you have to teach children to distinguish worldly wisdom from godly wisdom?

Digging Deeper

How will you pray for the opportunty to do so?

A DIFFERENT INHERITANCE

What happens to our wealth after we die? The usual answer is that it goes to our children. Some of the world's wealthiest individuals have different plans, however.

Rock star Gene Simmons made his fortune with hard work. He wants his

children to learn the value of work too. Martial artist and movie star Jackie Chan plans to give most of his wealth to charity and not to his son. His logic is clear: "If he is capable, he can make his own money. If he is not, then he will just be wasting my money." Warren Buffett has promised not only to give away 99 percent of his wealth, he's also partnered with Bill Gates to persuade other superwealthy individuals to do the same! Most of Buffett's fortune will go to charities, not to his children.

These and other incredibly rich people have expressed a Solomon-like wisdom when it comes to inherited wealth. Solomon recognized that the best gift we can leave our children is wisdom, not cash. When we live a life of righteousness, we ensure that our children will have a "rich inheritance" (Proverbs 8:21), not a life of ease and irresponsibility.

—J. E.

Conclusion

A. ... And Wise?

Some may ask, "Isn't it possible to be wealthy *and* wise?" True, the biblical record includes individuals who were both (examples: Genesis 41:41–44; 1 Kings 3:10–14; Job 1:1–5; 42:12–17). But the Bible clearly warns us about the spiritual dangers that material wealth and possessions can pose. The primary issue is the impact that this has on one's heart and thus on one's relationship with God (compare Psalm 52:5-7; Mark 10:17-23).

In his parable of the sower, Jesus warns of the "deceitfulness of wealth" that results in an individual's becoming unfruitful after receiving the gospel (Matthew 13:22). Similarly, Jesus asked, "What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?" (16:26). Of course, the implied answer is, "Nothing." To gain all the world has to offer at the loss of wisdom results in tragedy. That is true despite all the abundance that the whole world can offer.

All these teachings are consistent with Wisdom's plea to choose her above any form of material wealth. No matter how many priceless artifacts we amass—or how useful the new gadgets, inventions, and technological devices are—all the things that we may desire cannot compare with the value of wisdom.

B. Prayer

Father, thank you for the abundance of gifts that you provide to those who choose to heed the call of Wisdom. Thank you for examples of that wisdom who have shaped us over the years. Help us to be such examples to those in our spheres of influence. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Before wisdom's gifts can be opened and treasured, they must be sought.

p 368 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

Ask class members to find merchants' reward cards that they have in their wallets/purses or on their key chains. Ask for volunteers to state the advantages they receive from using their cards.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "We like the discounts, bonus points, rebates, and other perks that reward cards provide. But Solomon speaks of wisdom as offering even greater rewards. Wisdom's value is our topic today."

Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups, designating them **Religious Group**,

Educational Group, and **Domestic Group**. Explain that each group will be considering a case study of a challenge that a teenager named Sophia faces. Distribute three sets of handouts (you create), one for each group, with the following information.

Religious Group (Proverbs 8:8–11): Sophia exchanges text messages on a regular basis with friends in the youth group. Everyone gets along well, but Sophia is worried that some of their jokes involving Carlos may be crossing the line from good-natured teasing into bullying.

Educational Group (Proverbs 8:12–14): Sophia's school friends follow influential celebrities on social media. Some celebrities have good things to say; others, not so much. One particularly popular celebrity posts questionable content on a regular basis. But he's also really funny, and "following" him (in the sense that social media uses that term) could give Sophia something in common with most of her classmates.

Domestic Group (Proverbs 8:17–21): Sophia doesn't get along with her dad. They don't have many similar interests. His rules are stricter than those of her friends' parents. And he works a lot, so she doesn't see him often. She loves her dad, and she knows he loves her too, but the relationship needs some improvement. Include on all handouts the following questions: 1—How did group members react in similar situations in their youth? 2—What options are available to Sophia? 3—What pluses and minuses does each option offer? 4—What does the assigned text offer in the way of wise counsel for Sophia?

After groups discuss their respective scenarios, have them summarize their answers to questions 2, 3, and 4 in wholeclass discussion.

Alternative. Before class, recruit a volunteer (preferably female) to play the part of Wisdom in an interview. Pose the following questions, which you have given to your volunteer in advance, during the interview: 1—Why should people take you seriously? (*Proverbs 8:8-11*) 2—With whom do you associate and avoid association? (8:12-14) 3—What do people stand to gain from heeding your counsel? (8:17-21). The parenthetical passage references need not be voiced during the interview, but should be the basis for the whole-class discussion that follows.

Option. Distribute to study pairs copies of the "Wisdom Wanted!" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. After pairs complete as indicated, start a discussion by asking which is truer: we apprehend wisdom or wisdom apprehends us.

Into Life

Have learners pair off to discuss one or two rewards of wisdom that members of the pair desire to experience. After several minutes, ask that each learner write a prayer for his or her study partner in light of the other person's expressed desire for wisdom. Close with your own prayer that encourages class members to pray their prayers for the others each day in the week ahead.

Option. To expand the previous activity, distribute copies of the "Wisdom Needed!" exercise from the activity page. Allow one minute for class members to complete as indicated.

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 21—Receive Wisdom's

Gifts)

Receive Wisdom's Gifts

Lesson 3, Proverbs 8:8-14, 17-21, NIV

WISDOM WANTED

Complete this wanted poster for Wisdom. Find content for each category in the verses cited.

| Wanted: WISDOM | | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|--|-----|--------|
| Description (| Proverbs 8:8-11): | 123 | | | |
| Known Assoc | ciates (Proverbs 8:1 | 2-14): | | | |
| Reward for A | pprehension (Prov | rerbs 8:17-21): | | | 1.32 |
| | | A.T.S. | | 112 | 1000 C |

WISDOM NEEDED!

Think of a friend or acquaintance in each category of the chart below who needs godly wisdom in a specific area. Use this listing as a prayer reminder for the next seven days.

| Category | Name | Area of Wisdom |
|-----------------|------|----------------|
| A coworker | | |
| A family member | | |
| A neighbor | | |
| A public figure | | |

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