

Teaching Tips

December 3
Bible Study Guide 14

Words You Should Know

A. Terrible (Psalm 47:2) *yare'* (Heb.)—A form of the verb “to fear,” it describes the awe-inspiring effect that the Lord has on people

B. Excellency (v. 4) *ga'own* (Heb.)—It refers to a right and proper joy in God's good gift of the Promised Land.

Teacher Preparation

A. Pray a prayer of thanksgiving for God's rule over the nations.

B. Prayerfully study the entire lesson.

C. Study the word “sovereign” in a Bible dictionary, and be prepared to discuss the fact that God is sovereign (in control of His universe and never out of control).

O—Open the Lesson

A. Open with prayer, thanking God for His sovereignty.

B. Then introduce the Words You Should Know for today's study.

C. Use the In Focus story to segue into today's theme and discussion.

D. Ask: “Who is ruling over the nations? How do you know that He is the Supreme Ruler?” Discuss.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Have volunteers read the Focal Verses.

B. Use The People, Places, and Times; Background; At-A-Glance; In Depth; Search the Scriptures questions; and More Light on the Text to further help clarify meaning.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Use the Discuss the Meaning and Liberating Lesson sections to explore the meaning of the text for life today, stressing still who is ruling over the nations.

B. Allow the class to give their own input.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Examine the salient points in the Application for Activation section.

B. Finally, summarize the attributes of God—a good leader.

C. Close with prayer.

Psalms

GOD'S RULE OVER THE NATIONS

Focal Verses • PSALM 47

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: IDENTIFY reasons to praise God's rule over all the earth; BE FILLED with joy that God rules over all the earth; and PRAISE God for His sustaining leadership.

In Focus

For many years, Lottie was an enthusiastic fan of several Black leaders who she considered to be good leaders. She even joined a number of organizations that heralded an excellent leadership staff.

But by the time Barack Obama was running for president, she was somewhat ambivalent. Although she voted for him, she felt that racism was too deeply entrenched in this country for a Black man ever to be voted in as president. When the evening of Election Day came, Lottie was standing with the crowds, tears streaming down her face as Barack Obama, the president-elect, gave his victory speech. She thought that she would never see that day come in her lifetime. Lottie believed America was beginning to change and things were getting better but since then several administrations have come and gone. She was witnessing a "backlash" and it appeared as if things were getting worse.

Today's lesson we are reminded above every earthly leadership is God, who reigns as Lord over all of heaven and earth.



Keep in Mind

"Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding" (Psalm 47:6–7, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV Psalm 47:1 O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph.

2 For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth.

3 He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet.

4 He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved. Selah.

5 God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.

6 Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises.

7 For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.

8 God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness.

9 The princes of the people are gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth belong unto God: he is greatly exalted.

The People, Places, and Times

Kings. From the earliest days of written history in the Ancient Near East, people were mostly organized under kings. The first monarchies arose from city-states. Rural living did not need the rules, regulations, or organization that cities required, so monarchies first began in urban areas.

Israel was slower in adopting a monarchy because it began as a group of mostly rural clans. But from as early as Genesis 17:6, God promised Abram that he would become the father of kings, and so it was assumed that Israel would be ruled by kings. The major problem that Israel had, when they first asked Samuel for a king like all the other nations, was that they were breaking off the covenant relationship with God as their King (1 Samuel 8:4–8). They did not trust Him to lead them and protect them, and they desired leaders just like the nations around them.

Christ, the King. When God chose David to be the king of Israel, the people had a charismatic leader, a great military man, and a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 16:12–13; 2 Samuel 5:1–5; Acts 13:22). And it was through the line of David that our Lord and Savior, Christ our King came. The Old Testament made it very

clear that this King would be called “Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies of God as King.

Jesus announced that with His coming, His kingship began (Luke 17:21). At this time, He is King in the hearts of those who follow Him. He is also ruling over the physical world, which He created and sustains (John 1:3). But in the future, everyone everywhere will see Jesus as the King and all things will come under His rule (Revelation 11:15).

Background

When the Israelites settled in the Promised Land, they were surrounded by idol-worshiping nations and living among people who had numerous gods. The Gentile nations thought of their gods as ruling over the areas in which they lived. This idea often filled the hearts of the Israelites, and they began worshiping the gods they found in their land. The Canaanites had gods of fertility (Baal and Asherah) that the Israelites thought would help them in their farming. The people worshiped the gods of fertility in many decadent ways, such as in religious prostitution.

The Moabites, who were descendants of Lot and lived just to the southeast of Israel, worshiped Chemosh, a god who demanded child sacrifice. We even read that King Ahaz, a descendant of King David, burned his own children as sacrifices to foreign gods (2 Chronicles 28:1–3). Molech, the god of the Ammonites, was also worshiped with human sacrifice. No wonder God detested these religions!

At-A-Glance

1. God Is King Over All the Earth
(Psalm 47:1–4)
2. God Has Ascended (vv. 5–6)
3. God Is Reigning Over All the Earth
(vv. 7–9)

In Depth

1. God Is King Over All the Earth (Psalm 47:1–4)

This psalm presents the coronation of our God, the King over all. No wonder everyone everywhere is commanded to clap! This psalm was composed during the period when Israel had kings, but always needed to be reminded that the Almighty God was their King.

The sons of Korah (temple assistants) wrote Psalm 47 for a Jewish religious festival, probably for the Feast of Tabernacles, in which Jews fashioned structures of branches and lived in them for one week, once a year, to commemorate the 40 years they lived in tents in the wilderness. First Kings 8:2 reveals that when the temple was inaugurated, Solomon led the people in celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles. According to *Oxford Universal Dictionary*, a “tabernacle” is a temporary dwelling place made of canvas, branches, or boards. It is a hut, a tent, or a booth. During the wilderness

years, God dwelt with His people in a tent called the Tabernacle.

Perhaps Solomon was reminding the people that when they lived in tents in the wilderness, so did their God. But now that they lived in the Promised Land in houses of mud, brick, and stone, the temple was to be a permanent facility for His presence. And as Solomon dedicated the brand new temple to the Lord, He saw God symbolically living in the temple. However, as the King of all nations, God is enthroned in heaven above. We read these words in Solomon’s prayer of dedication for the temple: “Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee” (1 Kings 8:27). Even Solomon’s beautiful temple was not the throne of God; heaven itself is not big enough to contain Him.

All of God’s people worship the Lord Most High, who is the King over all the nations; but Psalm 47:3–4 reminds us that He chose the Jews specifically. God was the one who empowered them to subdue the nations in Canaan and around them. He gave them an inheritance, that is, the Promised Land. And He took great pride in them and loved them.

But when we look back at verse 1, we see the anticipation of the evangelization of every nation, which is happening right now. Imagine the day when we will all be praising our God together!

2. God Has Ascended (vv. 5–6)

Verses 5 and 6 are the center of this psalm, which was composed as a liturgical procession. When Solomon dedicated the temple, the Ark of the Covenant was solemnly carried on the proscribed poles to bring it to the temple. The ark symbolized God’s throne and the temple as His heavenly palace, so it is not hard to imagine that this psalm was used or composed for this occasion. Other processions portrayed in the book of Psalms are meant to be sung as the pilgrims made their way toward the temple in Jerusalem to celebrate the special festivals.

However, many Christians today like to read Psalm 47 on Ascension Sunday, the day that commemorates the day that Christ ascended from earth back to heaven. Angels sang songs of praise when our Savior came to earth as a baby. Surely the whole heavenly host welcomed Him back with shouts of joy, sounds of trumpets, and songs of heavenly praise.

In verse 6, we are commanded four times to sing praises to our King. This is more than the enthusiastic, raucous praise of verse 1. This is the more formal singing of praise. Now we are commanded to make beautiful music to our King.

3. God Is Reigning Over All the Earth (vv. 7–9)

These verses portray the grand finale of history. God is now sitting upon His throne, King over all the earth. Once more we are commanded to sing praises to Him.

This is a missionary psalm. It views the day when God's plan for all people is finally accomplished. God is the King over all the earth. This reminds us of Isaiah 52:7, NIV, which commissions us as missionaries, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, . . . who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" We have an important part in the installation of our God as King over all the earth. Our job is to bring the Good News of salvation to people all over the earth.

Psalm 46:10 tells us that God will be exalted among people all over the earth. The book of Revelation speaks over and over again about the Lord Jesus sitting upon the throne. Angels encircle His throne and sing, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (5:12).

Search the Scriptures

1. Name some audible ways of praising God, our King (Psalm 47:1, 6–7).

2. Name some reasons for praising God (vv. 2–4, 7–9).

Discuss the Meaning

1. In what ways is God the King over all the earth now?

2. In what ways is His reign in the future?

Liberating Lesson

When we look around, it's plain to see that Satan still has control over our world today. As believers, we are the ambassadors for the kingdom of God. We represent the interests of our King. Discuss some of the things that God cares about and how we can lobby for His kingdom and do our part to reflect God's kingdom in our society.

Application for Activation

Today, God wants to be King of our lives. What are some areas of your life that you need to more fully turn over to Him?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Psalm 47

1 O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph.

The psalmist begins by calling all the people of God to worship with clapping and shouts of triumph. The Hebrew word for “people” (*am*, *ahm*) is not the word for “nations” (*gowy*, *GO-ee*), which is normally used to refer to people outside the Jewish nation (Gentiles), but instead carries a more general meaning in this context.

However, the theme of this verse is parallel to the theme of other verses in the Psalms which call all the earth to worship the Lord as King. Consider Psalm 117:1: “O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people.” Psalm 67:3 reads, “Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee.” And Psalm 86:9 foretells a time when all peoples will unite in praise to the one true God: “All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name.” There is a sense in which the call to worship is a call to separate ourselves from the world and devote ourselves to God and His glory. However, there is also a real sense in which the people of God are called to worship in order to lead the non-believing peoples of the world to worship. Jesus taught that the Father is actively seeking true worshipers from every nation, who will worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23). God-honoring worship is one way that the people of God display the worship that God is seeking.

Hand clapping in Old Testament times was sometimes a derisive gesture (see Lamentations 2:15 and Nahum 3:19), but in Psalm 47, the clapping is an expression of joy. In 2 Kings 11:12, the people clapped in celebration of Joash’s installation as king.

In Psalm 47:1, the invitation to shout recalls the celebration David led when he brought the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem in

2 Samuel 6:1–19. This event was marked by extraordinary amounts of sacrifice and dancing to the Lord. Of course, 2 Samuel 6:15 notes that shouting and trumpets were also a part of this joyous event. At this event, David danced with such abandon that his wife Michal derided him for making a fool of himself in front of the people (v. 20). The people of God also celebrated with shouting in Ezra 3:11–13 when the foundation of Zerubbabel’s temple was built.

2 For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth.

In verses 2–4, the psalmist gives reasons for the call to clap and shout. The first reason is that the Lord is “terrible” (Heb. *yare’*, *yaw-RAY*). *Yare’* is a form of the verb “to fear,” and it describes the effect that God has on people. His enemies shudder before Him in absolute terror. His people stand before Him in reverent awe. Other English versions use words such as “awe-inspiring, awesome, glorious, to be feared.”

The name of God used here emphasizes the greatness and glory that provokes fear. “Most high” (Heb. *elyown*, *el-YONE*) describes the Lord as the one who outranks all other rulers and authorities.

3 He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet.

From the time of Abel (Genesis 4), the people of God have faced opposition from those who are in rebellion against the Lord. The promise of God has always been that He will fight for His people and subdue our enemies. In fact, apart from His efforts on our behalf, the fight would be hopeless.

Believers in Jesus must remember that although we are surrounded by people who do not share our allegiance to Christ, unbelievers are not our true enemies. Our ultimate enemies are sin, death, and Satan. And the Scriptures clearly teach that the Lord’s subduing of the

nations is uniquely and finally fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Psalm 2:8–9 hints at this when it predicts the consummation of God’s reign over all the earth.

4 He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved. Selah.

If verse 2 directed our attention to God’s nature and verse 3 to His certain victory, verse 4 calls us to recognize His generosity. “Inheritance” (Heb. *nachalah*, nakh-al-**AW**) is used frequently in the Old Testament to refer to Canaan—the Promised Land which the Lord promised to Abraham and his descendants forever. An inheritance is a permanent possession and cannot be taken or lost, either voluntarily or involuntarily. In fact, the law of the Jubilee required that land in Canaan not be sold permanently, but returned to the family to which it was allotted in the days of Joshua every 50 years (the Year of Jubilee, Leviticus 25:8–17). This was a perpetual testimony to God’s eternal promise.

“Excellency” (Heb. *ga’own*, gaw-**OHN**) is translated “pride” or “glory” by other English translations such as NLT and NIV. In other contexts, it refers to the sin of pride (overestimating one’s own worth). Here, however, it refers to a right and proper joy in God’s good gift of the Promised Land.

5 God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.

This verse reminds the reader of 2 Samuel 6:15, in which David and the people of Israel bring the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem with shouting and the blowing of trumpets. In fact, the psalmist has used keywords from 2 Samuel 6:15 in this text to link the passages. “Shout” (Heb. *t@ruw`ah*, ter-oo-**AW**) can refer to shouts of joy or victory or shouts of fear and alarm. The word is used to mention shouts at the coronation of a king (1 Samuel 10:24), and in battle (Joshua 6:10). In Psalm 47:5, the

phrase “sound of a trumpet” is literally “voice of the ram’s horn” in the Hebrew text. The *showphar* (sho-**FAR**), or “ram’s horn,” was used in celebration as well as in signaling armies or large groups of people in civil assembly. It was a blast of the *showphar* that signaled the people to approach Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:16).

The Ark of the Covenant served as the “seat” for God’s presence in the tabernacle and the later temple. Thus, the Lord is referred to as the one who is enthroned between or above the cherubim (1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Kings 19:15).

6 Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. 7 For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.

The psalm begins its final, climactic section with a rousing call to the people of God to join together in loud and passionate worship. The repetition of “sing praises” raises the intensity of the psalm’s message, but without losing any focus on the truth. The description of God also builds in intensity, progressing from God to King, to King of all the earth.

“Sing” (Heb. *zamar*, zaw-**MAR**) may mean either “sing” or “make music.” The precise meaning of “with understanding” (Heb. *maskil* or *maskiyl*, mas-**KEEL**) is uncertain. Some English versions translate this “with a psalm” (NLT, RSV) or “a psalm” (NIV), at least partly because *maskil* is used as a title for some 13 psalms (for example 32, 42). Even though we don’t know its precise meaning, *maskil* is derived from a Hebrew word meaning “wisdom, understanding.” So we can be certain that the psalmist is not calling his hearers to a type of worship that is based exclusively on human-generated emotion. Worship that honors God is marked by a passionate, sincere, thoughtful response to the truth of who He is and the great things He has done for us.

8 God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness.

The Lord is not only the King of His people. He is King over all the earth, even over those who do not acknowledge Him as God. God tells us, “That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear” (Isaiah 45:23). The word for “heathen” in Psalm 47:8 is the Hebrew word *gowy* (GO-ee), which literally means “nations,” but is used frequently in the Old Testament to refer to the Gentiles.

9 The princes of the people are gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth belong unto God: he is greatly exalted.

The final verse of the psalm points out another reason why God’s reign is cause for rejoicing. It is only right and proper for the Creator and Owner of the universe to be on the universe’s throne. After all, He is the greatest, the highest; therefore He should reign. “Princes” (Heb. *nadiyb*, naw-DEEB) are people of exalted social position such as nobles or overlords. The “shields of the earth” may be a reference to the princes of the people. They are both the protectors and the representatives of all the peoples of the earth, so the Lord’s rule over the “shields” expresses both His power over even the greatest human rulers and the universal reach of His reign.

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Say It Correctly

Asherah. ASH-uh-ruh.

Baal. BAY-uhl.

Canaanite. KAY-nuh-night.

Chemosh. KEE-mosh.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 92

1 Samuel 21–24

DAY 93

1 Samuel 25–27

DAY 94

1 Samuel 28–31

DAY 95

2 Samuel 1–3

DAY 96

2 Samuel 4–7

DAY 97

2 Samuel 8–12

DAY 98

2 Samuel 13–15

Teaching Tips

December 10
Bible Study Guide 15

Words You Should Know

A. Hide (Proverbs 2:1) *tsaphan* (Heb.)—To hoard or reserve.

B. Merchandise (3:14) *chokmah* (Heb.)—Gain; profit.

Teacher Preparation

A. Read the Lesson Aim for this week. What do you want your students to take away from this lesson?

B. Read the first three chapters of Proverbs. Pray that God would use you to create a desire for wisdom within your students.

C. Read More Light on the Text to gain a deeper understanding of this week's passages.

O—Open the Lesson

A. As the students enter the room, hand each student a blank index card. Instruct the students to write a definition of wisdom on their card.

B. Next, collect the cards. Read some of the definitions out loud. Ask the students to clarify the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Have some of the students confused these two concepts?

C. Ask a volunteer to read the In Focus story aloud to the class.

D. Read the Keep in Mind verse out loud. Then ask a student to offer a prayer for the class that was based on the verse.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Before the students arrive, write the title of today's lesson and the At-A-Glance outline on the board.

B. Ask for volunteers to read each of the three passages of the Focal Verses out loud.

C. Initiate a discussion about each passage. Use the information in the In Depth section to assist in the discussion.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Direct the students to the Liberating Lesson section. Read and discuss the article.

B. Ask the students to share some of the benefits of wisdom they have seen in their own lives.

C. Ask for volunteers to share any new insights that they may have received from today's lesson.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Give the students a few minutes to quietly reflect on today's lesson. Instruct them to record their thoughts in the Remember Your Thoughts section.

B. Read the Application for Activation exercise aloud, and encourage the students to complete the exercise at home.

C. Close in prayer, asking God to give each student a desire for godly wisdom. Encourage the students to search for wisdom as if they were seeking a priceless treasure.

Proverbs

A TREASURE WORTH SEEKING

Focal Verses • PROVERBS 2:1–5; 3:1–6, 13–18

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: DEFINE wisdom both in the context of Proverbs and in terms of its practical application to our own lives; COMPARE knowledge and wisdom; and DECIDE to seek God's wisdom in our own lives.

In Focus

Rev. White received his PhD in theology from an Ivy League Seminary, but now he couldn't remember what day of the week it was. He vaguely remembered walking through the doors and checking himself in at a rehabilitation center.

He tried to figure out at what point he had thought his alcoholic behavior was OK. Over the last year, he lost his wife, his position in the church, and his reputation. There was no longer any evidence of pride or arrogance in his trembling body.

Rev. White knew the Holy Spirit had caused him to stumble through the doors of the rehab center. A slight veil of soberness made him want everything back. He sank to his knees in the prayer position he had taught others but had not assumed in three years.

"Forgive me, Father, for forgetting your Word and disobeying your voice. Lord, restore me to my first love and lift my soul out of this pit of despair." Thunder began to rumble, and suddenly a lightning bolt sliced the sky. Startled, he opened his eyes to see the words on a small wooden plaque on the wall. "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." It was the first time that he had noticed the plaque over his bed. He struggled to his feet with joy, realizing that what he wanted was to trust God again.

Today's lesson reminds us that wisdom flows into our lives directly from God.



Keep in Mind

"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding"
(Proverbs 3:13, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV Proverbs 2:1 My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee;

2 So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding;

3 Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding;

4 If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures;

5 Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.

3:1 My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments:

2 for length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.

3 Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart:

4 So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.

5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

3:13 Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.

14 For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.

15 She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.

16 Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour.

17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

18 She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her.

The People, Places, and Times

Solomon. Authorship of the book of Proverbs is attributed to Solomon in 1:1; 10:1; and 25:1. However, several sections are attributed to other authors (see 22:17 24:34; 30:1 31:31). Along with Job and Ecclesiastes, Proverbs is known as Israel's wisdom literature.

In biblical times, Israel's leadership consisted of three different groups of leaders: the prophets, the priests, and the wise men. The wise men were a distinct class, probably associated with the scribes. The wise men were often involved in the politics and moral issues of the day and were usually skilled writers. Many of them were probably government officials. Generally, the wise men were far less prominent and authoritative than the other leaders. Earnest seekers of life's lessons, they drew informal disciples from the common people. The wise man often dispensed

his wisdom both in a public forum and to those who sought him out privately.

In the Old Testament, the first person who was called "wise" was a woman from Tekoa (2 Samuel 14:1–20). Another wise woman is mentioned in 2 Samuel 20:14–22. Job was a wise man from this period (Job 29:7–25). And Solomon, of course, is the quintessential wise man of the Bible. But there were many other wise men and women who are unnamed in the Bible.

The teaching of the wise men (or women) was often done in public places (see Proverbs 1:20–21), such as the town gate. Later, formal schools were formed where pupils would gather as the wise man shared his wisdom. These teachings were often prefaced with "my son," directing the words of wisdom to any individual who would take heed. The wise men employed imagery,

allegory, personification, and even riddles and fables to direct their listeners toward wisdom.

Background

The word “wisdom” generally connotes such ideas as skill, experience, knowledge, or good judgment. The Hebrew word used in Proverbs for wisdom is *chokmah* (khok-maw’), meaning “wisdom,” “experience,” or “shrewdness.” This word can refer to technical skills or special abilities, but *chokmah* is also the knowledge and ability to make the right choices at the opportune time. This kind of wisdom, based upon the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7), is the type of wisdom believers should desire.

Throughout the Old Testament and specifically in the book of Proverbs, wisdom is connected to such words as “commands,” “precepts,” and “laws.” In the New Testament, we realize that Jesus has become the fulfillment of all wisdom. As believers today, we understand that “keeping the commandments” or “obeying the law” is accomplished through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Following a list of rules will never draw us into the place where we can find the hidden treasures of wisdom.

How can we approach Proverbs with the light we have as New Testament believers? Here’s the gist of it: We cannot have true wisdom without knowing the Wisdom-Giver. In 1 Corinthians 1:30, the apostle Paul says that Jesus “is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” Jesus is wisdom! When we pray for wisdom, we are praying to know Jesus better! What a concept! He is all in all. Only in Him will we find what we need to live a victorious, vibrant Christian life. In Him “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3).

At-A-Glance

1. Wisdom: What Is It? (Proverbs 2:1–5)
2. Wisdom: Why Do We Need It? (3:1–6)
3. Wisdom: What Are Its Rewards?
(vv. 13–18)

In Depth

1. Wisdom: What Is It? (Proverbs 2:1–5)

Godly wisdom is the ability to apply God’s Word and His will to everyday situations. Wisdom is not gained by attending seminars, reading books, or taking college courses. So how do we gain wisdom? Wisdom comes from a daily, consistent, purposeful application of God’s Word to everyday circumstances.

Wisdom also comes from experiencing life, with all its joys and sorrows. Many believers and unbelievers have the kind of wisdom gained from trial and error (i.e., a “learn-from-your-mistakes” kind of wisdom). But godly wisdom is a direct byproduct of walking in the Spirit. This wisdom for living is bestowed upon us as a gift from God (see Proverbs 2:6; James 1:5).

There are, however, some prerequisites to receiving wisdom. We must first desire wisdom. Small children will often plug their ears in order to block out something they do not want to hear. Sometimes, Christians, too, will childishly close their minds and their spirits to the Holy Spirit, not wanting to receive wisdom. But Proverbs 2:1 says, “If thou wilt receive my words” and thereby implies that a teachable spirit is necessary if a person is to receive wisdom.

When we have received wisdom, we are told to “hide” it in our heart (2:1; Psalm 119:11). The Hebrew word used here for “hide” is *tsaphan* (tsaw-fan’), which means to treasure or store up. Many people today are focused on accumulating wealth; therefore, making more money and obtaining more “stuff” is a driving

compulsion. Some will spend every waking moment and every available cent in search of more. Yet, as believers, we are exhorted to expend our time and resources to gain the riches of wisdom.

Verse 3 instructs us to cry out for knowledge and understanding! Pray for wisdom. Call out to God for His will in every situation. Be diligent in searching the Scriptures. That's the second prerequisite for gaining godly wisdom: We must be willing to do what it takes to acquire wisdom. It will take time to search God's Word. It will take time and perseverance to pray for godly wisdom. It will take a quiet heart to hear the voice of the Spirit. But in order to gain the treasure, we must be willing to dig (v. 4).

When we do find wisdom, we find God (v. 5). We begin to understand His nature. We stand in awe of who He is. We have found the treasure. The advantages of wisdom are numerous: deliverance from evil men (2:12), blessings (v. 21), divine guidance (3:6), happiness (v. 13), long life (v. 16), riches and honor (v. 16). The list could go on and on. But the overarching prerequisite to and reward for gaining wisdom is a burning desire to know God.

2. Wisdom: Why Do We Need It? (3:1–6)

Proverbs 3:1 instructs us not to forget God's law. Practically speaking, this means we must keep our focus on God. The treasures of God are not attained by lackluster performance. Believers must be diligent in seeking, reading, and meditating on God's Word; spending time in prayer; and heeding the Spirit. Does this guarantee we will have a long, peaceful life? Proverbs 3:2 seems to intimate that it does. Generally, of course, one can expect to reap the benefits of living a wise and prudent life. But we can't make it into a linear equation because life does not work that way. We can all think of examples to illustrate the inequity and disappointments of life.

So what is the point of gaining wisdom? As with all spiritual issues, it is a matter of the heart. If our only motive for achieving wisdom is to obtain the "perks," then we're headed for disillusionment. We have to be able to see further than that. As we focus our eyes on Jesus, He begins to mold us into His image. The wisdom that flows from Him becomes a way of life, a fiber of our very being as believers. We are then able to go forth as workers in the harvest, as builders of God's kingdom. We seek after wisdom so that we may be servants.

As we seek to know the God of wisdom, more of His characteristics will blossom within us. Proverbs 3:3 mentions mercy and truth. Along with the wisdom of God comes the knowledge of how to respond in every area of our lives, including our relationships with others. If we approached every person with mercy and truth, conducting ourselves with wisdom, we would be getting closer to the way Jesus lived. In fact, verse 4 says that if we will do so, we will find favor with God and man. The rewards of wisdom may not be minutely predictable, but they are worth searching for.

In verses 5 and 6, we find a summation of all that the writer of Proverbs has discussed so far: Trust in the Lord because He is able to care for you. In other words, God is sovereign. We must acknowledge Him in every area of our lives at all times. Though we seek His wisdom, He is the One who enables us to apply it. He is the One who gives us life and directs our steps.

Verse 5 says that we must trust in the Lord with "all" of our heart. In verse 6, the emphasis is on "all" once again: "In all thy ways acknowledge him." God desires complete obedience and surrender. But acknowledging God and accepting His direction in one's life requires humility. Humans have a tendency to think more highly of themselves than they should. As we search for and gain the wisdom of God, we must not become "wise in our own

eyes” (v. 7). When we choose to go our own way, we work against God, accomplishing His will in our lives. But when we trust Him completely, He directs our paths according to His perfect plan.

3. Wisdom: What Are Its Rewards? (vv. 13–18)

The word “happy” is used at the beginning and end of this passage. These verses describe the true joy of someone who has learned the secret of godly wisdom: complete dependence upon God. To rest upon God’s Word in the time of crisis, to know the Savior intimately, and to possess inner peace throughout life’s trials is truly more valuable than silver or priceless gems.

The benefits gained from this kind of wisdom are worth more than what could be gained from silver or gold (v. 14). This verse is not to be looked at in a materialistic sense, but in a spiritual sense. God’s will is for every believer to grow in the knowledge of Him (2 Peter 3:18). We are to be consciously striving for the kind of wisdom that effects change and growth within ourselves and others. This wisdom brings joy that transcends the happiness attained by wealth or any other earthly pleasure. In fact, verse 15 says that nothing we could desire compares with wisdom. That’s quite a statement! But even Job, one of the venerable “wise men” of the Bible, affirms that wisdom is far more precious than gold or silver, coral or pearls, rubies or sapphires or onyx (Job 28:1–28). Nothing else in this world can compare to personally knowing the sovereign God. The person who pursues this relationship gains peace (v. 17) and happiness (v. 18).

Wisdom is personified in verses 15–18, depicted as a woman holding the treasures of wisdom in her hands. In her right hand she holds life, and in her left hand are riches and honor (v. 16). Verse 17 says, “Her ways are ways of pleasantness.” The word “ways” in Hebrew is *de-rek* (deh’-rek), meaning “course of life” or

“mode of action.” In other words, the person who gains wisdom will enjoy the peace and “pleasantness” of knowing God as a way of life. This daily and lifelong pleasure far outweighs the pleasures or treasures of this world.

Godly wisdom is a “tree of life” to the believer (v. 18). If we feed from this tree, we will gain abundant life. We will find wisdom’s treasure—a deep and abiding relationship with the Wisdom Giver, God Himself.

Search the Scriptures

1. What is one of the prerequisites for gaining wisdom (Proverbs 2:2)?
2. What else will we find when we find wisdom (v. 5)?
3. What are some of the benefits of wisdom (3:2, 13, 17–18)?
4. Why is it important for believers to rely on God’s wisdom (vv. 5–6)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Discuss the difference between God’s wisdom and human wisdom.
2. What are some practical ways to gain godly wisdom? What are some life situations that might require wisdom?
3. Why is it sometimes difficult to view God as the source of true wisdom? How can believers make wisdom a high priority in their daily lives?
4. What are some tangible rewards of gaining wisdom?

Liberating Lesson

In today’s world, we have many avenues for gaining knowledge. Formal education, online courses, books, speakers, and the news media all contribute to an overload of information. How does wisdom differ from knowledge? As believers, how can we exercise godly wisdom in everyday situations? How can we encourage others to seek the priceless treasure of wisdom?

Application for Activation

Plan some quiet time this week to begin your search for godly wisdom. Identify situations or areas in your life where you need wisdom. Ask God for specific wisdom for those scenarios.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Proverbs 2:1–5; 3:1–6, 13–18

The Christian community accepts the book of Proverbs as a great book of wisdom containing many sayings and poems. The word “proverb” implies a sense of superiority in mental action. According to 1 Kings 3:12, when bestowing wisdom and understanding upon Solomon, God said, “there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.” Solomon demonstrated his possession of the “wisdom of God” (v. 28) in the sayings he recorded and the way he performed his duties as king and judge of the people. Solomon begins this book by revealing his purpose for

the teachings in Proverbs (Proverbs 1:1–4) and the benefits of obeying (vv. 8–9) and acquiring wisdom (3:1–6, 13–18).

1 My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; 2 So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; 3 Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; 4 If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; 5 Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.

This passage tells us what is necessary to acquire knowledge and understanding. We must first listen to the teacher (Solomon in this discussion), then follow his instructions so much so that the student must humble him or herself to receive wisdom. The Hebrew word for “wisdom” is *chokmah* (khok-maw’), a feminine noun meaning to be wise in mind, word, or action.

We are taught in these verses that wisdom is as necessary as breathing. As a part of God’s marvelous creation, we must do everything humanly possible to possess wisdom for ourselves; it is necessary for our very survival. When we seek something precious and are willing to search for it, we must at times use instruments, such as a pick and shovel, that will assist us in conquering whatever elements are obstructing the search. The instruments used in the hunt for wisdom are the head, heart, and voice. Many times, the elements of obstruction are the trials that we endure in this life. Nevertheless, whether we are seeking wisdom or riches, success is obtained as the instruments are used with concentration and determination on our part.

3:1 My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: 2 for length

of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.

Parental obedience comes with a promise of a long and peaceful life. This promise is also made in Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16; and Ephesians 6:2–3.

While “the law” is a set of rules established for the community to live by, a commandment is prescribed by an individual in—this case, Solomon to a son. Therefore, even though the law can appear to be impersonal, a commandment can be personal and individualized. As we strive to keep God’s commandments, it is the desire to demonstrate our gratitude to God for His promise of eternal life through Christ’s resurrection that motivates us.

3 Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: 4 So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.

Mercy is an aspect of God’s unmerited favor, which we cannot buy, steal, or borrow. God is truth. He speaks and judges the whole universe. In knowing this, we don’t want mercy and truth to walk away from us, but to stay with us continuously wherever we go. We must hide (treasure) God’s Word in our hearts so that in our obedience we will please Him and establish an intimate relationship with God and a positive relationship with humankind.

5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

To trust in the Lord, we must practice patience, courage, and confidence as we yield our lives, present and future, to Him. At no time must we depend upon what we think. We should enjoy the peace of knowing that God is in control of every part of our lives. As a part of God’s marvelous creation, we can be assured of His faithfulness toward us.

6 In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and he shall direct thy paths.

We must recognize that God exists and has ultimate control over every aspect of our lives. It is He who makes provision for us and allows us to accomplish the goals that we attempt to set for ourselves. God is our provider (Philippians 4:19).

3:13 Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.

The Hebrew word for “happy” is *’esher* (eh’-sher) meaning “blessed,” “fortunate,” or “enviable.” Understanding is drawn forth from God’s Word and life’s experiences. When we can take God’s words and apply them to our life experiences and live our lives for God’s approval, we are truly blessed. Only the knowledge and the meaning of God’s Word can create in us true happiness.

14 For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. 15 She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.

To gain wisdom is better than gaining profit from silver and fine gold. This comparison of wisdom to precious metals and precious stones (gems) is also found in Job 28:12–18. Job asks, “But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?” He then gives the answer: “God understands the way to wisdom and He knows the place of it [wisdom is with God alone]” (v. 19, paraphrased). In chapter 28, Job gives a discourse similar to Solomon’s as he tells his friends of man’s search for wisdom and wisdom’s value.

16 Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour.

Solomon continues his description of wisdom in the feminine gender as he reminds his students of the promise of long life and

riches. However, in this verse, he adds the promise of honor.

17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

The Hebrew word for “pleasantness” is *no’am* (no’-am), meaning “agreeableness,” “delightfulness,” “suitableness,” “splendor,” or “grace.” The Hebrew word for “paths” is *nathiyb* (naw-theeb’), meaning “beaten path” or “traveler.”

In this verse, wisdom is pictured as a graceful yet powerful lady with flowing garments. In one hand she holds that which only God can give, long life, and in the other hand that which only humankind can, influence. Yet those who embrace wisdom experience peace as they travel from place to place.

18 She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her.

The tree of life is first mentioned in Genesis as being in the midst of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:22–23). The fruit of this tree, if eaten after the Fall, would have confirmed Adam and Eve in their sinful state forever. However, Solomon lets us know in this verse that God is the giver of life, and that only through the wisdom of His Word can we find eternal life, which leads to happiness—provided we continuously respect and trust in God. Remember Jesus said, “I am the way the truth and the life” (John 14:6).

Sources:

From *The People, Places, and Times* (pg. 148): Buttrick, George Arthur, ed. *The Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 4. New York: Abingdon Press, 1955.

From *In Depth* (pg. 149): Buttrick, George Arthur, ed. *The Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 4. New York: Abingdon Press, 1955.

Say It Correctly

Chokmah. **KHOK**-maw.

Tsapham. tsaw-**FAN**.

No’am. **NO’**-am.

Nathiyb. naw-**THEEB**.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 99

2 Samuel 16–18

DAY 100

2 Samuel 19–21

DAY 101

2 Samuel 22–24

DAY 102

1 Kings 1–2

DAY 103

1 Kings 3–5

DAY 104

1 Kings 6–7

DAY 105

1 Kings 8–9