
Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed.

The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew.

(Proverbs 3:13–20)

Introduction

Previously, we studied vv. 1–12 in which the wise, godly father describes the prosperity that comes from trusting the Lord – the prosperity of a long and fulfilling life that is generally to be expected of the godly.

The father has exhorted his son to trust the Lord in all circumstances, including when undergoing the painful process of training one's character through chastening (vv. 11–12). But what follows makes it clear that it is worth it. As we saw at the end of that study, the end is the "peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Hebrews 12:11).

Verses 13–20 emphasise the blessedness of those who find wisdom. It includes two of the five beatitudes in Proverbs. The word translated "blessed" connotes *happiness*. We can say that this passage points us to *happiness after hardship*. The prosperity of wisdom follows on the heels of the adversity of wounds. The rod of God's discipline produces the rich reward of discretion and therefore of real joy and happiness.

Though there seems to be a literary shift from v. 12 to v. 13, there is no reason to conclude that someone other than the father is still speaking. In fact, it makes good sense to see the father as still speaking. Having addressed the matter of discipline and chastening, the father wants to emphasise to the son the great benefits that flow from this. As I have said, adversity is a means towards wisdom and therefore to blessedness.

This passage can be divided simply into two sections.

Happy Are the Graced

First, a blessing is pronounced upon those who are graced by God:

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(Proverbs 3:13–18)

The graced are blessed in at least two ways.

Their Life is Enriched

First, in vv. 13–15, we learn that the life of the blessed is enriched: “Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.”

“The description of wisdom begins with a statement of its worth,” notes Longman. Once we see its value, we will do all we can to attain it. The words “silver,” “gold,” and “jewels” clearly show that wisdom is worth a fortune! It is for this reason that Kidner says, “Wisdom makes you a richer man than riches ever will.”

The idea here is of living a life that is profitable – one in which gain is gathered. Though, as we have seen, Proverbs does not teach a false prosperity gospel, yet neither does it teach a poverty gospel. In fact, it can be argued that where the gospel of the grace of God has been the most widely embraced, social upliftment has occurred. Yet, of course, none of this is to deny the biblical principle that “godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6).

Those who understand this truth will develop a right value system. They will seek true riches (see Luke 16:11). They will learn how God has designed life to be. (And you’re never too old to do so as the aged Moses showed in Psalm 90:12!) They will redeem the time by prioritising wisdom, only exchanging their time for those things of greatest value.

The father speaks of finding, attaining or acquiring wisdom. Obviously, then, wisdom is not something with which one is born. Rather, it is a gift of grace. Those who have it should consider themselves blessed; they should consider themselves *happy*.

Some people are just not happy. There are many reason for this. But if someone is always griping, murmuring, or unhappy, it may be that they are not pursuing wisdom where it is to be found: in the Lord Jesus Christ. They need to ask God for the grace of wisdom and therefore the grace of happiness.

If we are not happy, then the responsibility pretty much lies with us—at least if we are a member of God’s covenant people. After all, we have been given everything that pertains to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). These verses imply a responsibility, both for the son and for the father.

For his part, the son is responsible to attain wisdom. “We are not born with wisdom,” notes Brady. “We must find or encounter it. We need to obtain it.” And, though this comes through a variety of ways, the context informs us that one of these is through a proper response to the discipline of God. Those who respond with grace will be enriched.

Children, you can be graced with wisdom. You can be happy. But this is largely up to you. Learn submission. Christian, you can be graced with wisdom and happiness, but you will need to seek it—in God’s Word, in obedience, in submission to Christ. The call and invitation are extended to all: Turn to Jesus Christ.

For his part, on the other hand, the father is responsible to assist the son in attaining wisdom. Those who are spiritually responsible for others must work at helping others to be happy. The exercise of authority is for this purpose. As Paul used his authority to work for the Corinthians’ joy (2 Corinthians 1:23–24), so those in authority today should use their position to help those under their leadership to be *happy* (cf. Hebrews 13:17). Parents, use your authority to be productive of happiness rather than to be provocative of heartache (Colossians 3:21).

Life is Enhanced

Second, in vv. 16–18, we see that the life of the graced is enhanced: “Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed.”

These verses reveal some very strong incentives to pursue a life graced with wisdom. Simply, our life will be enhanced in numerous ways.

Life Enhanced with Longevity

First, their life will be enhanced with longevity: “Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honour” (v. 16). Tremper Longman is correct when he notes that “living by the principles of wisdom minimizes obstacles and threats to life.” Those who obey the rules are generally blessed with long life.

But, as we will see, quality of life is in view here as much as quantity of life. It is beautiful to note that God freely gives with both hands.

Historically, nations that have embraced the gospel, and then the Word of God as their source of authority, have had longer life spans. The converse is also true. As the gospel took hold in Europe, advances in health care attended it. John Calvin, in addition to being a religious reformer, was instrumental in the design of an advanced sewerage system in Geneva. Conversely, life expectancy in the increasingly secularised United States has steadily decreased through the abuse of opiates as people have cast off the restraints of the gospel.

Life Enhanced with Loveliness

Second, their life will be enhanced with loveliness: “Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (v. 17). “Pleasantness” can be translated as “beauty” (see Psalm 27:4; 90:17; Zechariah 11:7, 10). In Proverbs 15:26 and 16:24, “pleasant” or “lovely” words are commended.

Our course of life (“ways”) can be either ugly or lovely. We can be either ugly or lovely; it all depends on whether we pursue a life of wisdom. Did Moses not display great loveliness when his face shone amid terrible personal hardship? Did Paul not display great loveliness when, in the face of great hardship, he learned to be content and rejoice evermore? Was Jesus not the very epitome of loveliness in the midst of his hardships?

On the other hand, consider Cain, whose face dropped and who displayed the gravest ugliness in the face of his “hardship.” He did not pursue wisdom, and he responded murderously when he felt afflicted.

Another aspect of loveliness is “peace.” This is a translation of that famed Hebrew word *shalom*, which is inseparable from the Lord (see Judges 6:24). The Lord is the source of the believer’s peace in the face of conflict.

Those with wisdom are happy because they have the Lord. He is the one who gives us a sense of general, comprehensive welfare.

Life Enhanced with Life

Third, their life will be enhanced with life: “She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed” (v. 18).

Brady says that the idea of the “tree of life” is “the sustaining of life, as with fruit from a tree.” Proverbs speaks repeatedly of this “tree of life.” “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life” (11:30). “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life” (13:12). “A gentle tongue is a tree of life” (15:4). In short, those who are enriched with wisdom will have a life that is full to overflowing.

William Ralph Inge said, “He who marries the spirit of the age will find himself a widower in the next.” Too often, those who desire personal and church growth take their cue from the world and soon find themselves emptier than when they began. Solomon records alternate counsel: cleave to – marry – wisdom.

As we have already seen, and as we will see again and again, wisdom is often personified in Proverbs as a woman – a woman to be pursued and women to be embraced. This appears in the text before us. In v. 18, the father tells the son to “lay hold” of this woman wisdom. The word used speaks of cleaving to, as in Genesis 2:24. The picture is that of marrying this woman, and then experiencing the offspring of this union. In this case, the offspring is profitability (vv. 13–18).

Of course, we know from the New Testament that Jesus in the vine in which wise, gospel fruit is produced (John 15:5). We must abide in him if we will bear the fruit of wisdom.

The tree of life ultimately points us to Jesus Christ, for true and full wisdom resides in him. For this reason, Longman writes, “Through wisdom, the sage now has contact with that tree. If it wasn’t the intention of the sage-author of this discourse to imply eternal life as the reward for the acquisition of wisdom, it is hard to read it any other way in light of the fuller revelation of the New Testament.”

It is Christ who is the richest of all treasures. “There is nothing better than to find wisdom, that is, to know Christ, to trust him and what he has done” (Brady).

Happy are the Godly

It is not only the graced who are happy, but also the godly: “The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew” (vv. 19–20).

This seems like a strange, out-of-place insertion. Is this a stand-alone statement, or is related to what has just been said? It seems to me as if it’s the latter.

The theme raised here will be developed in much more detail in Proverbs 8. But the essential point is that God created by the very graces that the father is enjoining on his son. That is, God created out of his wisdom and by his understanding. Several observations are worth considering.

Since we know that all things were created by the Word (John 1), this points us to the Lord Jesus Christ. Having just spoken about the “tree of life,” we can more clearly see that the person who is graced with wisdom should be extremely happy because they have been graced by and with the Lord.

The graces of wisdom and understanding are not merely theoretical, ethereal concepts without practical meaning. No, they are as solid as the earth itself. As Eric Lane comments, “Wisdom is as basic as the solids and liquids that constitute the material universe.... The benefits offered here are not uncertain and elusive but are as real and solid as the earth itself.” Wisdom and understanding are graces for real life.

Those who are graced with such wisdom are best positioned to understand the world as God has created and ordered it.

Those who are graced with wisdom are graced with so much more than wisdom and understanding; they are graced with a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. As Brady notes, “If God created the world through Jesus Christ, surely no trouble we may have to face will be too much for him. He has it all under control. You cannot come to know anyone greater. Think what he might bring about in your life if it is given over to serving him.”

Conclusion

Seek happiness by seeking the Lord. Ask him for the grace of wisdom. Ask him for his grace to guide you to find this treasure. He wants to enrich you, he wants to enhance you, he wants to enlighten you. The path to this however is not lined with roses. Rather, it is quite often the path of hardship. Don't despise it, and don't grow weary of it; rather, submit to God on it, seek him on it. And the promise he gives is that if we seek, we will find.

AMEN