

THE PURSUIT OF WISDOM

James 3:13

INTRODUCTION

Illustration – Years ago the English atheist Thomas Huxley, “Darwin’s Bulldog,” was in Dublin, Ireland, for some speaking engagements. On one occasion, he left his hotel in a hurry to catch a train, taking one of the city’s horse drawn taxis. Huxley thought that the doorman at the hotel had told the driver where he was going, so he simply settled back in the cab and told the man at the reins to drive fast. The driver set off at a vigorous pace. In a few minutes, Huxley realized that the cab was headed away from the station. “Do you know where you are going?” he shouted to the driver, “No,” the driver answered, “but I’m driving fast.”

➔ This is a perfect picture of people driving fast in the pursuit of “wisdom” of the world – in the wrong direction.

Illustration – Franklin Delanor Roosevelt said in his inaugural address: “*We don’t know where we are going but we are on our way.*”

READ James 3:13-18

James is sometimes called “the wisdom book of the NT”
James speaks like an OT wisdom writer

James 3:13a begins – “**Who among you is wise and understanding?**”

“**wise**” – *skilled, expert: cultivated, learned: forming the best plans and using the best means for their execution:*

Moral insight and skill in deciding issues and implementing practical solutions

“wise and understanding”

“Wise” - more moral (more to do with the heart)

“Understanding” - more intellectual (more to do with the mind)

- There are many who are full of understanding while being empty of wisdom

“Many a man’s knowledge is a torch to light him to hell. You who have knowledge of God’s will, but do not do it, in this, you surpass the devil, ‘who transforms himself into an angel of light.’”

THOMAS WATSON

“The bare knowledge of God’s will is ineffective. It doesn’t better the heart. Knowledge alone is like a winter sun which has no heat or influence. It doesn’t warm the affections or purify the conscience.”

THOMAS WATSON

The Wisdom Literature/Books in the Bible

- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Solomon (some question if a wisdom book)
→ God’s Plan for Life

The Wisdom Literature teaches us how to think like wise men.

- where wisdom really goes → teaches us how to act like wise men.
- this is true of the entire Bible but there is concentrated emphasis in these books

Illustration –People are often heard saying: “Oh well. Live and learn.”

- No.
- Yes, we should learn from our mistakes but the order that God gives us in the wisdom books is the opposite
- The Wisdom Books teach us to Learn and then Live

- Our acts are built on the foundation of God’s true wisdom
- A changed life is the fruit of this wisdom.
- An ordinary man learns by his own experience.
- A wise man learns by the experience of others.
- A fool learns by nobody’s experience

“**wisdom**” – the Hebrew word *hokmah*

1. Skill in technical work
 - a. Metal and Woodworking (Exod 35:30-36:7)
 - b. Working with Cloth (Exod 36:35)
 - c. Sailors (Ezek 27:8-9)
2. Skill in Administration of State
 - a. Joseph (Gen 41:33,39)
 - b. David (2 Sam 14:20)
 - c. Solomon (1 Kgs 3:12; 4:29-34)
 - d. Daniel (Dan 5:11)

The Greek word *sophos* or *sophia* had the meaning of “wise” or “wisdom.” Originally used to describe anyone with expertise in a specific domain of knowledge or craft: a chariot rider, sculptor, warrior. Gradually the word came to mean general wisdom.

Biblical wisdom is the source of Life

**“She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her,
And happy are all who hold her fast.” Proverbs 3:18**

Biblical wisdom provides the foundation for all we do – a life submitted to Christ, the heart obedience.

Proposition: Survey of the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament

- I. The **Conflict**
- II. The **Call**
- III. The **Conclusion**

So That: We will pursue and hold fast to God's Wisdom

I. The Conflict

Point – Wisdom from Above vs. Wisdom from Below (James)

There is a war at hand

- There is no neutral ground
- That is the myth of the western, academic, philosophical mind
- God makes it very clear there is no middle ground – there is the love of God and the love of self; there is the pride of man and the fear of God
- The two cannot coexist

Paul captures this for us in **1 Corinthians 1:20-25; 2:4-7**

- There is a war between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom from God

Psalms – right from the beginning in Chapter 1 - the righteous man in contrast to the wicked man

Proverbs – emphasis of the wise man in contrast to the fool

- Conflict between wisdom and folly

Proof – **Job 2:11-13** – effective ministry of silence.

- For seven days and seven nights, Job's friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) effectively ministered to Job in silence
- ...and then they opened their mouths...
- Job's friends give bad counsel
- They give statements that are true (knowledge – **4:6**), but with very wrong application (no wisdom – **4:7**).
- They demonstrate knowledge without wisdom
- We have to be very careful when quoting the book of Job
- **38:2** – God answers Job - **“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge”**
- God rebukes the friends – **42:7** – **“It came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “My wrath is kindled**

against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has. .

- They are slow to hear and quick to speak (James 1:19)

We see in the book of **Job** this war between the wisdom of man and the wisdom of God.

Psalms 1:1-2 → Counsel of the wicked or the counsel of the Lord

- David is saying there are two types of counsel – from man and from God - everyone has to make their choice

Prov 9:1-6, 13-18 – both wisdom and folly invite

- Which is it going to be?
- Which are you going to accept?

Eccl 2:13-14a – “**And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.** ¹⁴**The wise man’s eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness.**”

- In **Ecclesiastes**, we find out that just as there are false priests, false prophets, there are also false wise men

The contrast is clear throughout the Bible – particularly in these books.

In **Ecclesiastes**, a major theme is the futility of men in the pursuit of wealth, sex, of anything that they would seek to bring them pleasure.

- Solomon, the author, was incredibly rich but in his life he didn’t always tap into the true wisdom that God had given him.
- He wrote **Ecclesiastes** towards the end of his life to help men and women understand that the pursuit of anything other than God is vanity – it is fleeting.
- “Vanity” mentioned 38 times (1:2; 2:11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 26; ...) – Hebrew – that which lacks substance, is fleeting, transitory, perplexing, obscure – like breath, wind, vapor, meaningless, futile – 1:4 – “striving after wind” 3:19 – “no advantage” 2:11; 3:9; 5:16 – “no advantage”

Application: We must realize, in the end, we can't explain why things happen the way they do. His message is to enjoy life as a gift from God without trying to figure it out – our marriages, work..... We don't always need to know the why. We just need to know how we should respond.

Application – We need to be like children. When they are very young, we expect instant obedience. As they get older, there is more explanation but obedience is still the expectation.

Illustration – **Carl Steinmetz** was born in Germany in 1865. He stood just four feet tall as an adult, his body contorted by a hump in his back and a crooked gait, and his stunted torso gave the illusion that his head, hands and feet were too big. But he was a giant among scientific thinkers, counting Albert Einstein, Nikola Tesla and Thomas Edison as friends, and his contributions to mathematics and electrical engineering made him one of the most beloved and recognizable men of his time.

He identified and explained, through a mathematical equation that later became known as the Law of Hysteresis, or Steinmetz's Law, phenomena governing power losses, leading to breakthroughs in both alternating- and direct-current electrical systems. He helped America usher in a golden age of electrical engineering.

Steinmetz Americanized his name to Charles Steinmetz. He chose Proteus as his middle name—the nickname his professors in Germany had affectionately bestowed upon him in recognition of the shape-shifting sea god. In Greek mythology, Proteus was a cave-dwelling prophetic old man who always returned to his human form—that of a hunchback. Steinmetz enjoyed the comparison.

On one occasion, Henry Ford, whose electrical engineers couldn't solve some problems they were having with a gigantic generator, called Steinmetz in to the plant. Upon arriving, Steinmetz rejected all assistance and asked only for a notebook, pencil and cot. According to Scott, Steinmetz listened to the generator and scribbled computations on the notepad for two straight days and nights. On the second night, he asked for a ladder, climbed up the generator and

made a chalk mark on its side. Then he told Ford's engineers to remove a plate at the mark and replace sixteen windings from the field coil. They did, and the generator performed to perfection.

Henry Ford was thrilled until he got an invoice in the amount of \$10,000. Ford acknowledged Steinmetz's success but balked at the figure. He asked for an itemized bill.

Steinmetz, Scott wrote, responded personally to Ford's request with the following:

Making chalk mark on generator	\$1.
Knowing where to make mark	\$9,999.

Henry Ford paid the bill.

In the same way ...

Proverbs 8:10-11 “Take my instruction and not silver, and knowledge rather than choicest gold. ¹¹“For wisdom is better than jewels; and all desirable things cannot compare with her.”

- the wisdom of God will fix any mental problem that we have
- it is not going to fix the situation but there is the instant solution that comes from the heart that is totally given over to God
- the Wisdom books spell this out for us

Application: The first step is to understand the conflict.

II. The Call

Point – the call to wisdom

Proof – **Job 28:12-20**

The **Wisdom Psalms** – 1, **34:11**; **37:1-7**, **23-31**; 119
1, 19, 32, 34, 37, 49, 73, 78, 112, 119, 127, 128, 133

There is one over-arching summary lesson in Proverbs.

The word “**wisdom**” dominates Proverbs.

The Book of Proverbs is → **call to wisdom**.

1:1-7	Introduction: Title and Purpose
1:8-9:18	Call to Wisdom – <u>10 admonitions</u>
10:1-22:16	1 st Collection of Solomon’s Proverbs
22:17-24:34	Words of the Wise
25:1-29:27	2 nd Collection of Solomon’s Proverbs
30	Words of Agur
31	Words of Lemuel

We are to teach our sons that spiritual wisdom is:
→ the greatest and purest **pursuit of life**.

Illustration – After the service last week, Margie and I had lunch with Chris and Tessa Ball, our missionaries to Asia. They both grew up in the church and have been in many different churches. One of the comments they made was that they had never encountered a church with the caliber of youth that we have here at San Tan Bible Church. This isn’t bragging or boasting – this is all from God. We must be full of thanksgiving for the work that God is doing in our young men and women.

Essex – “*We live in a society of lazy, insubordinate, perverted youth.*”

- this is a timeless truth
- it was true in Bible times, 15 years ago and now

MacArthur – “*The primary duty of a father is not to take out the trash. The primary duty of a father is not to bring home the bacon. The primary duty of a father is not to fix what’s broken. The primary duty of a father is to teach holy living to his children.*”

Proverbs 22:17 – “Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise (men), and apply your mind to my knowledge;”

Illustration – Song of Solomon

The Joy of Marriage experienced by the man and the woman is celebrated (vis-à-vis instruction).

Application – There are so many how to books and instruction manuals on marriage. God wrote a whole book, 1 out of 66 in the Bible, on marriage. He didn't write a how to manual. He wrote a celebration → this is wisdom

The Conflict, The Call.....

III. The Conclusion

Point – If you do not fear the Lord, you will not be able to receive, respond and understand this wisdom.

Proof – **Job 1:1, 8; 2:3; 28:21-28**

Psa 19:9; 25:12, 14; 33:18; 34:7, 9

Psalm 111:10 – “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do *His commandments*; His praise endures forever.”

Prov 1:7a – “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.”

Prov 9:10 – “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”

Everything starts with fearing God.

Teach your son...”Son, fear your God

- beyond behavior modification – a heart for God

Ecc 3:14; 5:7; 8:12-13

The crown jewel of Ecclesiastes – of the Wisdom literature:

➔ **12:13** “The conclusion, when all has been heard, *is*: fear God and keep His commandments, because this *applies to every person.*”

The words of the wise are to be understood in the light of, on the foundation of the fear of the Lord. **Deut 4, 5, 31.** The Law was given that Israel might learn to fear YHWH. He gave all the ceremonial requirements; He gave the law, to demonstrate to us our need for a Savior.

Deuteronomy 31:11-13 “when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing. ¹² Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. ¹³ Their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live on the land which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess.”

- that was the problem with Israel
- they needed to have circumcised hearts
- they needed to learn the fear of the Lord
- then they would be able to truly obey – not with their self as the focus – but with God as the focus

1 Kings 4:30 – “Solomon’s wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt.”

- Why? Because he feared the Lord.

Illustration– How does the book of Proverbs end? The Excellent Woman.

- What is the singular summary description of this Excellent Woman? **31:30** - she fears the Lord

Application – Evangelism, Edification, Exaltation – what Fear God means in each

- Evangelism - we need to be more biblical – we need to have “Fear God” at the heart of the message – it is not all we say but it must be included in our evangelism – we can’t tell them the good news if they don’t know the bad news – the sobering news – of God’s judgment
Edification - in our fellowship and counseling – there is a

horizontal encouragement one to another that must be God centered and not man centered

- Exaltation – the fear of God must be at the heart of our praise

Back to James → faith is demonstrated in works

- So he's saying again here, you say you're wise, demonstrate it. You say you're righteous, demonstrate it.

James 3:13a – “Who among you is wise and understanding?”

...for those of us who stepped forward to his initial question...

God demands through James that true wisdom must be proved by conduct

“Obedience is an excellent way of commenting on the Bible.”

Thomas Watson

James 3:13b – “Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.”

“**good behavior**” – outwardly good or beautiful

“**gentleness**” – submissiveness towards God, mildness → Greeks equated this quality with lack of spirit (negative)

- opposite of arrogant selfish ambition
- gentle power under control – a horse broken and now under control → bridled!
- In context, the tongue is bridled!

CONCLUSION