Wisdom
vs. Foolishness

Wisdom is seeing the hand of God in every experience of life.

Definition

The primary Hebrew word for wisdom is chokmah. It comes from a root word meaning “intelligent, prudent, cunning, clever; to teach, instruct.” Another Hebrew word translated wisdom is sekel. It comes from a root word meaning “to be circumspect; to act prudently, to prosper, to have success; to have expertise; to teach; to give insight, have comprehension.” The stated purpose of Proverbs is to “know wisdom [chokmah]” and “to receive the instruction of wisdom [sekel].” (See Proverbs 1:2–3.)

The main Greek word for wisdom is sophia, which denotes practical skill and acumen. One Greek word translated wise is phronimos, which means “thoughtful, sagacious, discreet. It implies a cautious person.”

God provides a description of wisdom [sophia] in James 3:17. “The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”

How Is Wisdom Demonstrated?

When wisdom is first mentioned in Scripture, it is in reference to the skillful making of things to benefit the work of God. For example, God instructed that wise men should make the priestly garments. “Thou shalt speak unto all that are wise-hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron’s garments to consecrate him, that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office” (Exodus 28:3).

Wisdom competes in the city streets for the eyes and ears of the simple.

“Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets . . . saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?” —Proverbs 1:20–22

Next, God chose wise men to construct various buildings for the work of God. The man God chose to build the tabernacle was filled with wisdom. “I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, And in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship.

“And I, behold, I have given with him Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan: and in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee” (Exodus 31:3–6).

The theme of building, in association with the wise, continues throughout Scripture. God gave Solomon great wisdom and understanding, and with it, Solomon built the Temple.

In the Book of Proverbs, he stated, “Wisdom hath builded her house” (Proverbs 9:1). Again he explained, “Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established” (Proverbs 24:3).

“Knowledge is proud that he has learned so much; wisdom is humble that he knows no more.” —William Cowper

“Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.” —1 Corinthians 8:1
As a boy, Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature; He was a carpenter in His father’s shop. When He began His ministry, He used the analogy of a wise man building his house on a rock. Paul described his own ministry by comparing himself to a wise master builder. (See Matthew 7:24 and I Corinthians 3:10.)

The function of wisdom is to build up, but the result of foolishness is destruction. “Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands” (Proverbs 14:1).

What Are Characteristics of a Wise Person?

- A wise person will love one who rebukes him. “Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee” (Proverbs 9:8).
- The wise will consider the lessons of nature. “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise” (Proverbs 6:6).
- A wise son delights the heart of his father. “A wise son maketh a glad father” (Proverbs 10:1).
- A wise person loves the law of God. “The wise in heart will receive commandments” (Proverbs 10:8).
- A wise person controls his tongue. “He that refraineth his lips is wise” (Proverbs 10:19).
- A wise person wins others to Christ. “He that winneth souls is wise” (Proverbs 11:30).
- A wise person listens to counsel and instruction. “He that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise” (Proverbs 12:15). “A wise son heareth his father’s instruction” (Proverbs 13:1).
- A wise person makes friends with the wise. “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise” (Proverbs 13:20).
- A wise person knows how to use information in the right way. “The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness” (Proverbs 15:2).
- A wise person will avoid conflicts with leaders. “The wrath of a king is as messengers of death: but a wise man will pacify it” (Proverbs 16:14).
- A wise person will learn how to give precise answers. “The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips” (Proverbs 16:23).
- A wise person knows how to give good counsel. “The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish doeth not so” (Proverbs 15:7).
- A wise person will reform rebels. “A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame” (Proverbs 17:2).

Why Is Wisdom So Important?

In order to explain the superior value of wisdom, God compares it to the most precious things in life.

1. It is more valuable than gold—“My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver” (Proverbs 8:19).
2. It is more precious than jewels—“For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it” (Proverbs 8:11).
3. It is more valuable than riches—
“Riches and honour are with me [wisdom]; yea, durable riches and righteousness” (Proverbs 8:18).

4. It should be our first priority—
“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7).

What Great Heroes of Faith Received Wisdom?

• **Joseph**
  “Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art,” and “he made him governor over Egypt and all his house” (Genesis 41:39, Acts 7:10).

• **Joshua**
  “Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the LORD commanded Moses” (Deuteronomy 34:9).

• **Daniel**
  “God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. . . . And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers” (Daniel 1:17, 20).

• **David**
  “David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him. Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. . . . David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul; so that his name was much set by” (I Samuel 18:14–15, 30).

• **Solomon**
  “God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. And Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt . . . . And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom” (I Kings 4:29–30, 34).

• **Ezra**
  “And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thy hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not” (Ezra 7:25).

• **Stephen**
  “Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom . . . . and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost . . . . And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake” (Acts 6:3–10).

How Do We Get Wisdom?

1. **By asking God for it**—“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5).

2. **By studying God’s Law**—“Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of...
God identifies four animals as “exceeding wise” and explains why. (See Proverbs 30:24–28.)

1. The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer.

2. The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks.

3. The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands.

4. The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings’ palaces.

the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people” (Deuteronomy 4:6).

3. By keeping God’s commandments with us—”Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me” (Psalm 119:98).

4. Through the fear of the Lord—”The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10).

5. By reading the Book of Proverbs—”The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity” (Proverbs 1:1–3).

6. By God’s testimonies—”The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple” (Psalm 19:7).

7. By hearing instruction—”Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not” (Proverbs 8:33). “Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning” (Proverbs 9:9).

8. By seeking it early—”I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me” (Proverbs 8:17).

9. By listening to rebukes—”Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning” (Proverbs 9:9).

10. By seeking wise counsel—”He that walketh with wise men shall be wise” (Proverbs 13:20).

**Personal Evaluation**

**How wise are you?**

- Do you go to sleep with thoughts of God so that your reins can instruct you in the night seasons?
- Do you rise early in the morning to seek the wisdom of God?
- Have you developed skills so that you can make things with excellence?
- Do you love those who rebuke you?
- Do you study the world of nature for insights and analogies?
- Are your parents pleased with your character and your actions?
- Have you searched for rhemas from Scripture and meditated upon them?
- Is your heart filled with truth so that you can control your tongue?
- Are you skilled in winning others to Christ?
- Do you seek the counsel of wise friends?
- Do you look for ways to apply the truths you have learned from God’s Word?
- Do you value wisdom more than silver and gold?
- Do you study the testimonies in Scripture for application to your own life?
- Do you delight in the commandments of the Lord?
- Do you live in the reality that God is watching and evaluating everything you say and do?