

# Wisdom's Call

## Introduction

For many years I have been studying wisdom literature from the Scriptures—first to teach it to my children and second, to share this critical truth with Christians. I have become convinced that few in Christendom have knowledge of this subject. It may be especially true of men. This is very sad when you consider that God designed men to be leaders in society and in their home. How can a man lead when he does not know God's wisdom? How can he impart wisdom to his children if he has no idea how to apply godly wisdom in his own life?

This book is written to help men become wise—to help teen-agers to know what to say when society's temptation rushes at them—to give grandfathers a foundation for passing on life's lessons to their grandchildren—to remind all of the unsurpassed value of wisdom.

No one needs to be told that God's wisdom is virtually unheard of in our society—it's not found in the public classroom—not at the university—not in the realms of entertainment—not in the market place nor the social world. Unfortunately, it is rarely available in our churches. What are we to do?

I am convinced the answer lies in "going back to the Book". God wants us to be godly wise men but just becoming Christians does not make us wise automatically. He has provided the resources in the Scriptures to become wise if we will just search them out. I pray this book will help you on this quest.

**For its (wisdom's) profit is better than the profit of silver,  
And its gain than fine gold.  
She is more precious than jewels;  
And nothing you desire compares with her.  
Long life is in her right hand;  
In her left hand are riches and honor. (Proverbs 3:14-16)**

Paul Winslow

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## ONE: Taking a First Look

Years ago a father and his two sons were camping in the high Sierras of California. One night as they were bedded down and looking up at the beautiful stars, one son asked, "Why are there so many stars?"

Dad thought of all he knew about the cosmos from such sources as the astrophysicist, Steven Hawking, as well as his own study in physics, but then decided to say, "I guess God needed to make that many when he created the heavens long ago."

The son continued with his questions, "But how did God make all the stars?"

"I really don't know except Genesis says, "He spoke and it was so," was the reply. Similar questions came from both boys on into the night. Dad was hard-pressed to find the right answers to satisfy their inquiring minds.

Not long after that trip, the father was studying in Palestine. An instructor gave a special session on wisdom literature from the book of Proverbs in which he pointed out that wisdom was present at the time God created the cosmos (Proverbs 8:12–31). He went on to say that these things were to be taught by fathers to their sons:

**Now therefore, O sons, listen to me,  
for blessed are they who keep my ways.  
Heed instruction and be wise,  
and do not neglect it.  
Blessed is the man who listens to me,  
watching daily at my gates,  
waiting at my doorposts.  
For he who finds me finds life  
And obtains favor from the Lord.  
But he who sins against me injures himself;  
All those who hate me love death. (Prov. 8: 32–36)**

Dad suddenly realized that in the Scriptures were the answers to his sons' questions; answers that he had never seen before; answers that were wrapped up in wisdom. Upon returning home he began the process of learning what wisdom was all about and how he could teach it to his children.

I was that father and I continue to pursue wisdom. Now I am trying to pass it on to my grandchildren.

Everyone seems to want wisdom and yet, there is so little of it around. Congress doesn't seem to have it—movie stars don't produce it—our Supreme Court lacks it. What has happened to us as a culture? Even common sense seems to be in short supply.

In our quest for wisdom, perhaps it would be helpful to start with these questions: What is wisdom? How does wisdom work? Where can I get wisdom?

### *What is wisdom?*

The Bible is a storehouse of knowledge about wisdom. Jesus told a parable in Matthew 7 about two men who built houses—one was wise and the other foolish. In I Corinthians the apostle Paul contrasts spiritual wisdom with worldly wisdom. Many more examples are given in the lives of various people and an entire book of Scripture is given to the subject. Let's begin with a specific definition.

In the Old Testament the word wisdom is best defined as a *skill of living life harmoniously in two directions simultaneously*.

Components of this definition are:

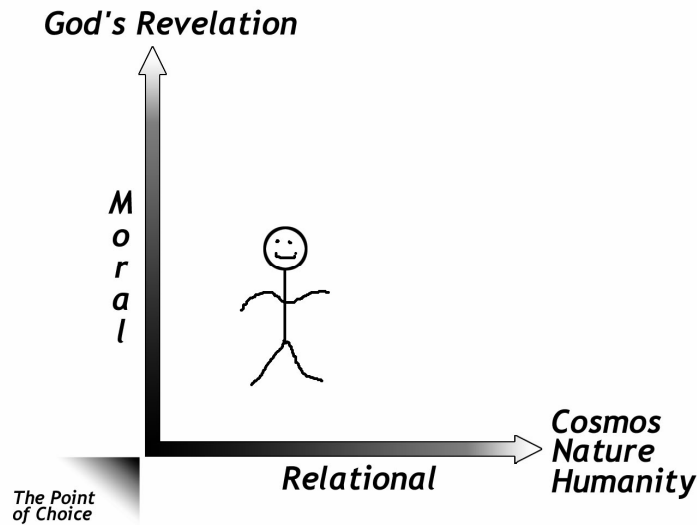
The fact that wisdom is a *skill* means that it is something learned over time—we don't get it all at once. Also, like any skill, it takes practice to perfect.

The fact that it is for *living life* means that it is practical—good for each person's life regardless of education, status, geography, gender, or any other factor.

The fact that it operates *harmoniously* means that it fits in without struggle—most people sense that the wise solution is “right”.

The fact that it *operates in two directions simultaneously* means that every wise decision has a vertical component and a horizontal component. The vertical is moral in nature, while the horizontal is relational.

It can be illustrated this way:



We make decisions and choices at the point of convergence between the two axes. These choices affect every area of life. We will benefit from learning how to “skillfully” blend the vertical (moral) with the horizontal (relational) for each choice we make. Jesus always did this perfectly. He didn’t avoid all the problems and difficult circumstances of life but He was able to cope, to handle life and to be at peace.

Lets look a little closer at these two components so that we can begin to understand how to make wise choices.

The vertical axis reflects God’s moral code of life. The Scriptures say that the law of God (His moral code) is written on every man’s heart (Romans 2:15). Every man has some idea of what is morally right (whether admitting it or not). Since God’s character is the only source of morality, we can say that our choices must be in harmony with the character of God in order to be wise.

The horizontal axis reflects how God made things we relate to—the cosmos, the world of nature, the world of humanity. God has incorporated Himself into the horizontal as well. The psalmist states: **“The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork”**(Psalm19:1). Therefore, our choices must be in harmony, in a relational way, with the way God has made everything we interact with.

If I throw my garbage over the fence into my neighbor’s yard, I have harmed my neighbor—that’s morally wrong. I have also hurt my relationship with my neighbor—that’s relationally wrong. I’ve also trashed the environment—that’s wrong for our planet. If I engage in

an adulterous affair, I have broken God’s moral law and am subject to His judgment. I also have harmed myself, my spouse, and the other person—on a relational basis.

### *How does wisdom work?*

Taking our definition, let’s go to the book of “beginnings” to learn how humans are to make use of wisdom.

**Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness... God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Genesis 1:26, 27)**

What does it mean that we humans are created in God’s image? It can’t mean a physical image since God is spirit. It means that God has placed His characteristics in us—like the ability to love, the ability to create out of resources, the ability to communicate, the ability to appreciate art, beauty, music, humor—we could go on and on. However, the most dominate characteristic we have from God is “choice”. We are *choice beings*.

Humans use this characteristic every day. As parents we know it is very important to teach our children how to make good choices instead of bad ones. Said another way, we want them to make *wise* choices instead of *foolish* choices.

There is something else to notice in this passage. God said He would make man in both His image and His likeness. How is likeness different from image? *Likeness* is taking the image characteristics of God and using them “like” God would, if He were me. My mother would say to me when I was a young boy, “Paul, what you just did isn’t very Christ-like, is it?” Unfortunately, I always knew exactly what she was getting at.

Adam and Eve started out using God’s characteristics in the same way God would have, until they *chose* to disobey. From that moment on, mankind has used God’s characteristics “selfishly”—the way man wants rather than the way God wants. For example, men have used “creativity” to make weapons of destruction, they have used “communication” to build hate, they have turned “beauty” into pornography and the list goes on. Only through redemption can we once again *choose* to use God’s characteristics “God-like” in the power of His Spirit.

When Hezekiah became King, the Scriptures said, “He did what was right”. He tore down the high places. That was where Israel worshipped the Baal and the Asherah. Hezekiah recognized that if he was going to be a God-like king, he had to get rid of the idols in Israel. Jesus did the same sort of thing, when He came to the temple and found merchants and money changers in the middle of the temple. These people were gouging the citizens who came to offer sacrifices. He threw them all out, because as He said, “This is the house of prayer.”

If we are going to be God-like in our own lives, we must first look around and see what idols can be found. The first commandment states that we must not have any other gods before God. So, we will do what God would do if He were us, we will throw all our idols out. One such idol appeared in my life some years ago—it was in the form of a custom built, mid-engine, V-8, Corvair.

I had always wanted to build a special automobile. One day everything came together for me to experiment on the lowly Corvair (the one much maligned by the press). After a year and a half of hard work, lo and behold, I had a piece of machinery that would blow the doors off just about any production car of that era. It had seven coats of hand rubbed, candy apple red lacquer. It had tuck and rolled, white sandalwood upholstery. It had a 350 horsepower, solid lifter, V-8, small block Chevy engine. It had all of the running gear that made it handle very much like an opened-wheel, formula-one car. Best of all, everywhere I went it caught the attention of car buffs and quite a few folks who wanted to test me at the closest stoplight. Even my wife Karen enjoyed driving it, because as she put it, “It was sure fun to drop the hammer every now and then.”

One day I was about to pull out of a parking lot into traffic when a pickup with a couple of kids in it pulled in front of me, cutting me off. As they went by, one of them leaned out of the window and spit on the hood of my car. Right then I discovered that my beautiful car was also an idol—seeing how ready I was to tear that guy limb from limb. That’s what you want to do, you know, when your idol is threatened.

Very soon thereafter I had a little session with the Lord. Alone in the living room, I took the title for that car and gave it to Him. It was His car now and He had my permission to do anything He wanted with it. Before long, He turned it into a new roof for our house, new furniture for the living room and new carpet in the family room. My family couldn’t believe I would sell the car, until I explained that it had become an idol to me and I had given it to the Lord.

*Where can I get wisdom?*

Where can we go to get a handle on how to be wise in our choices? Fortunately, there is a place. Let's start with Proverbs 9:10.

**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,  
And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.**

Notice this amazing statement—*wisdom* and *understanding* are by-products of fearing and knowing God. This indicates that the vertical axis should develop first—the more we know God personally, the more we see the “rightness” of His moral absolutes.

Furthermore, the more we learn about Him, the more we understand how He works throughout the horizontal world. As our knowledge and understanding grow, we become more capable of making wise choices. We also become less inclined to let our emotion, our circumstances, pressures from society, and manipulation by other people govern our choices.

Amazingly God offers to let us know Him so we can become wise. He has also assigned the wisest man who ever lived to help in this process. King Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs for this purpose. But we must *open* the book, we must *study* what is written there, we must *desire* to know Him and we must *ponder* the truth presented. This is the only way to obtain God's wisdom.

The same blanket of stars that captured three campers' imaginations so long ago stirs me yet today to give thanks for the way in which they were made. Psalm 104:24 expresses it; **O Lord, how many are Thy works! In wisdom Thou has made them all...** In my awe and gratitude for the cosmos, my relationship with Him deepens.