

PROVERBS

Choosing Trees of Life over Unsatisfying Substitutes

Drifting from wisdom in favor of worldly values is as easy as a split-second glance at what the world offers and a millisecond of thought that maybe there's something to be said for such things after all. Before long we become like fish that swim all day long in water yet never know that they are wet. We need the Word of God to pull us out of that water and heave us to the shore where every wayward desire can be exposed and left behind in a pitiful little puddle.

Proverbs 3:13-20 describes wisdom in terms we have become familiar by this point in our study: silver, gold, jewels, riches, honor, and life. This is the description of what most everyone seeks, is it not? Riches and long life and honor are found in the wisdom of God. This is where we should seek our greatest good. It may not look like our greatest good in a material sense. In fact, it should matter very little to us what material shape God's blessings take.

A couple of studies ago, we looked at how our material blessings are merely assets with which to advance the Kingdom of God and provide for the needs of others. No matter what external appearance God's blessing takes, we can be sure that the words of Christ are true: "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:25-26)

I shudder to think how often my desires sink far below the great riches found in the wisdom of God to the level of a sin-engrossed world. When I should be unashamedly satisfied in

Christ, I become unflinchingly materialistic and satisfied with the customary comforts of our culture (often attributing these overindulgences to God, as if every comfort were a blessing). When I should be relentlessly pursuing holiness, I become readily distracted by the world's promise of pleasure. When will I learn that the riches of Christ and the wisdom of God are enough?

We must choose the tree of life over forbidden things. This is where Adam and Eve went wrong. They were created morally good and free to move about without a tinge of shame, as rulers in their world. The one command was that they not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam and Eve knew nothing of evil – there was no evil to be reckoned with in their paradise. Why would they exchange a thoroughly good experience for even the knowledge of evil? In taking of the fruit from that forbidden tree, they would know evil, and their world would be marred forever. How much better would it have been if they had obeyed and eaten of the Tree of Life (which was good to them for food), forever preserving their paradise of good!

They chose a path away from wisdom; their choice affects you and me. It has caused even believers to live in a constant state of choice – will we choose evil, or will we choose wisdom, which our proverb says is "a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed (Prov. 3:18)" ? If we chose the "tree of life", we preserve ourselves in the blessings promised in Proverbs 3:13-20 to those who seek after wisdom.



LOOK CLOSELY

observation

Proverbs 3:13-20

¹³ Happy is the man *who* finds wisdom, And the man *who* gains understanding; ¹⁴ For her proceeds *are* better than the profits of silver, And her gain than fine gold. ¹⁵ She *is* more precious than rubies, And all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. ¹⁶ Length of days *is* in her right hand, In her left hand riches and honor. ¹⁷ Her ways *are* ways of pleasantness, And all her paths *are* peace. ¹⁸ She *is* a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy *are* all who retain her. ¹⁹ The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; By understanding He established the heavens; ²⁰ By His knowledge the depths were broken up, And clouds drop down the dew.

Mark the word *happy* in v 13 & 18.

Mark the words that describe wisdom's acquisition in v 13 & 18.

Mark all the words used to represent the benefits of wisdom in vv 13-18.

Mark the word *wisdom* and its synonyms in vv 13 & 19-20.

Identification Key

Develop your own key for identifying the various words and phrases in the text provided. Use different colored pencils, circles, boxes, underlining, etc., but be consistent from week-to-week.



THINK CAREFULLY

interpretation

The word **happy** is a good translation of the Hebrew. The circumstance that brings this state of happiness is, as we have seen, a proper fear of the Lord and the acquisition of wisdom. For the one seeking wisdom, finding it and living it brings real and lasting happiness (blessing, joy).

"The words '**profit**' and '**gain**' ...are descriptive of one who invests with a view to a good return. The best long-term investment one can make is the pursuit of God's wisdom and understanding. The dividends it yields far outweigh any gains made by the pursuit of gains in capital" (John A. Kitchen, *Proverbs*, Mentor, 83).

"The mention of the **right** and **left hand** together signifies wisdom's generosity and readiness to give. Nothing held in wisdom's embrace is withheld from the one who will seek her" (John A. Kitchen, *Proverbs*, Mentor, 84).

The word for **pleasantness** has a broad range of meaning that here emphasizes the "sweetness" and "favorable" nature of the **ways** of wisdom.

We have already seen the warnings associated with forsaking God's wisdom. Here embracing His wisdom is pictured as the very source of life itself—a **tree of life**. This imagery goes all the way back to the first man and woman who, forsaking God's wisdom, sought their own way and were denied the **tree of life** and found only death. Embrace **wisdom** and embrace **life**.

Review Proverbs 1:7, 8, 23; 2:1-5; 3:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11. What part do we play in acquiring wisdom (v 13 & 18)?

How do "happiness" and finding God's wisdom go together?

Describe why Solomon uses precious metals and jewels to picture the gain of wisdom.

In your own words explain the benefits of God's wisdom.

How is God's wisdom still active in His creation?

How does the truth that creation was founded on wisdom benefit those who "find" it?



RESPOND WISELY

application

How has living according to God's wisdom benefited you?

Examine your heart. What things do you "desire" more than God's wisdom?

List the ways you are actively growing in wisdom.

List the ways you are sharing that wisdom.

Memorize Proverbs 3:13-15.