**Proverbs 4:7-9**

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/prov/prov-4/proverbs-47-9/>

Solomon finishes his testimony and expounds on how wisdom is in our best interest.

The first half of these verses (7-9) carry over from the previous section where Solomon is quoting the advice he received from his father. He is restating many points he made in the first three chapters. This remembrance of what was taught to him adds another layer of validity to his sayings. These are eternal truths passed from generation to generation. As he was taught, so he teaches.

Verse 7 tells us the first step to living a life of wisdom: The beginning of wisdom is: acquire wisdom. This is a sort of companion to what Solomon says earlier in Proverbs, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). Gaining wisdom begins with two choices we must make. One is who we trust: God or ourselves. The other is what we will do, what we will seek. Solomon urges his students to seek to acquire wisdom.

The beginning here is to resolve to acquire wisdom. This is an admonition to be deliberate. To adopt gaining wisdom as an objective. These choices will lead to wisdom, which will reveal how to live one’s life according to a true perspective, and be guided by the path of wisdom. In order to live this way, we have to begin by understanding that life is bigger than what we can see naturally with our very narrow human perspective.

To find wisdom, we need something bigger than ourselves. We need to acquire it from a source greater and stronger than our own internal, self-centered being. In short, we need God. Additionally, we need to recognize we are not God. That we are made to serve Him and to serve one another. That life is about more than our feelings, desires, and imperfect internal narrative. Truth is transcendent. We cannot do it alone.

The word for beginning in the phrase the beginning of wisdom is the Hebrew “re’shiyth.” It is not just about time, but priority, so it is often translated as “best” or “chief.” Thus, Solomon is not just saying this is the beginning of wisdom. The verse more literally says wisdom is the beginning. The first thing. The most important thing.

And with all your acquiring, get understanding. This is listed as a sort of secondary pursuit. “While you are at the store shopping for wisdom, pick up some understanding as well.” So, what is the difference between the two? The Hebrew word for wisdom is “chokmah”, which denotes a practical skill, something tangible and useful. Wisdom is an applied skill, an active behavior. The word for understanding is “biynah” and it means “discernment”, the ability to comprehend meaning. The purpose behind something.

The patterns (or path) of wisdom lead to understanding. This supports what some modern psychologists observe, that the way to change human thinking begins with choosing new actions. The actions develop habits, and the habits cause our thinking to align with our actions. This is a reason why obedience is in our best interest. By obeying God, we form life-giving habits, which in time leads to understanding.

We prize her (Wisdom) and honor her by choosing her as the chief, the beginning, the first pursuit. Trusting in He who provides wisdom lays the foundation to pursue her. We should be aware that it is in our true self-interest to gain wisdom. Solomon tells us that if we will prize Wisdom then she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. Wisdom will exalt and honor us when we embrace her. She will exalt us in part by illuminating the truest sense of who we are. As we develop a character aligned with wisdom, she will honor us. The opinion of others is not referenced. Wisdom bestows an honor that transcends the opinions of others.

Wisdom leads us to see reality as it is, which is the essence of humility. As the New Testament states:

“GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.
Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”
(1 Peter 5:5b—6)

The Apostle Peter likely learned Proverbs; the first part of this quote paraphrases Proverbs 3:34. In the last part of this quote, Peter says that God will exalt us, rather than saying wisdom will exalt us. This is not surprising, since God is the source and essence of wisdom. But it likely means that acquiring wisdom will lead to exaltation both in this life as well as in the life to come.

Wisdom is ours to embrace. An embrace is an action that can be chosen. We can embrace or shun wisdom. Wisdom is not something we catch, like a virus. It is not something we are born with. It is something we acquire through a series of good choices. Wisdom is a paradox because we gain the greatest outcome for ourselves by submitting to God, who is outside our “self.” We acquire wisdom by choosing one act of trust, one act of obedience at a time. Through the humility of choosing to see and engage with reality as it is, we set ourselves up to receive the promise that God will exalt us in due time.

Wisdom will place on your head a garland of grace; she will present you with a crown of beauty. When wisdom aligns us with reality, it adorns our lives with beauty and grace (favor). Both the garland and the crown are adornments, markers of celebration and honor. Wisdom awards all these things. The garland and crown symbolize joy, recognition, and authority. In addition to these honors, wisdom will present the prizes of grace and beauty. Grace is synonymous with “favor.” The Hebrew word for beauty (“tiph’arah”) in this context is often translated “honor” or “glory.” Honor and glory are the prizes for acquiring wisdom and understanding. Living in wisdom leads to noble character, which is itself a garland of favor.

Romans 2:6-7 speaks of the time of ultimate judgement, when God “WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.” Verse 7 echoes Proverbs, saying that for “those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality” will go the reward of “eternal life.” The seeking of “glory and honor” in this passage is seeking approval or reward from God, as opposed to self or others; to gain God’s approval for our choices, our “deeds.” Just as Solomon exhorts his students to seek glory and honor from wisdom, the Apostle Paul exhorts the believers in Rome to seek glory and honor from God (which are one and the same). In each case, we are exhorted to pursue a true means to gain lasting satisfaction for our souls.

The reward for seeking God’s approval in Romans 2 is “eternal life,” which is used in the New Testament to refer to a lasting, transcendent quality of life. “Eternal life” is referred to as both a gift (John 3:14-16) as well as a reward (Romans 2:6-7). The gift of eternal life is experienced by walking in the ways of life, which also are the ways of wisdom. This Romans 2 passage also echoes Proverbs in stating the kinds of choices that God honors: “perseverance in doing good.” Solomon insists that wisdom leads us to do good, while folly leads us to do evil.

Romans 2:8 goes on to describe those who do not gain God’s approval as being “selfishly ambitious” and not obeying the truth. This is, again, the same basic message as Proverbs. Trusting in “self” instead of trusting in God leads to folly and evil. Obeying the truth leads to a life of honor, while suppressing the truth leads to madness.

Wisdom also leads to living a life of beauty, For something to be beautiful, it must reflect what is true, what is real. When we trust God and follow His ways, we choose to live in reality as it was created. This leads us into wisdom, because we are living in reality as it is. This causes our lives to be a thing of beauty; we are reflecting what is true.

This is the end of Solomon’s reminiscence of what he was taught by his father. Starting in verse 10, he begins to tell his young audience what they can expect from a life of wisdom.

**Biblical Text**

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**And with all your acquiring, get understanding.
8 Prize her, and she will exalt you;**
**She will honor you if you embrace her.
9 She will place on your head a garland of grace;**
**She will present you with a crown of beauty.”**