

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.
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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."**