

Theological Background

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There is a type of literature in the Bible that is sometimes called ‘Wisdom Literature’ and an important idea in these writings is that ‘the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom’. Wisdom is insight into the way life works: a proper understanding of the consequences of our thoughts, words and actions and an awareness of the true value of things. It is rooted in proper reverence for God who is the source of all life and all values.

Although related to education and knowledge, wisdom differs from cleverness. Wisdom may be best described as discernment gained through life experience and distilled into guiding principles. Sometimes, the word is used in the Bible to refer to the practical and technical skills possessed by an experienced craftsman or administrator. In the book of Proverbs, Wisdom is sometimes personified and, at one point, is spoken of as she who worked alongside God as a master craftsman when God created the world.

The opposite of wisdom is foolishness, which is a wrong understanding of life. Jesus tells the parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21). Although this parable may seem to be mainly about greed and obsession with money, at a deeper level it is about putting our trust or faith in the wrong things. It’s about missing the point; it’s about being a fool. The fool does not realize that his soul is ‘on loan’ from God, who can require it back whenever he likes. The fool thinks that the aim of life is to ‘be happy’ and he thinks that you can gain happiness by doing what you want and be gaining more and more possessions. The wise person recognizes their own limitations, trusts in God and understands that there is more to life than may be seen on the surface.

The Bible often points out that God’s wisdom is the reversal of ‘the wisdom of the world’. Christ’s sacrificial life and his teaching about love and humility may appear foolish by the world’s standards but, in reality, it expresses the Wisdom of God.

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Biblical References

I Kings 3:9 (Solomon's request for wisdom rather than power or wealth)
So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.

I Kings 4:29
God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore.

Psalm 111:10
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding.

Proverbs 4:5-7
Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.

Proverbs 8:22-30
'The LORD brought me (wisdom) forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old Then I was the craftsman at his side.'

I Corinthians 1:24-25
Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.