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The Promises of God

LIFE'S BIGGEST QUESTIONS | ECCLESIASTES 2:26a

Hundreds of television game shows have come and gone over the years. Some, like *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* and *Twenty One*, have focused on asking individual contestants simple questions based on general knowledge, and awarding huge sums of money for correct answers. Fans of the king of intelligence-based shows, *Jeopardy*, often disparage newcomers for asking questions that they consider too easy in comparison to the relative wealth being distributed. While that debate does not have earth-shattering implications, it does raise a significant question of its own: What *are* life's most important questions?

We would be hard pressed to identify "the" most important question in life. But we can identify some significant ones—one of which has to be Job's: "How can a mortal be righteous before God?" (Job 9:2). Game show replies to that question would be worth hearing, because men and women in cultures all over the world have asked that question since the dawn of time. To ask it another way, "What must a person do to please God?" And behind that question is really the root issue: "Why should we want to please God?" It took an aged king, whose worldview was laced with a lot of reality and a little bit of cynicism, to provide the answer to this last question: "To the person who pleases Him, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and happiness" (Ecclesiastes 2:26a NIV). King Solomon had learned that knowledge, money, power, fame, and fortune were empty pursuits; that the only true pursuit in life was (and still is) God: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind" (12:13). God, in

return, gives the person who seeks Him exactly what they desire.

We are people who need wisdom, knowledge, and happiness, but these things are not found in the world. To get them, we must please God. The two wisest men in the Bible, Solomon and Jesus, seem to agree on that point. Jesus said, "The one who sent Me is with Me; . . . I always do the things that are pleasing to Him" (John 8:29 NASB). In our pursuit of wisdom, we can do no better than to follow His example.

GOD'S PROMISE TO YOU:

"My greatest pleasure comes from your pleasure in knowing Me."

REFLECTIONS MINISTRIES

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REFLECTIONS

Reflections on God's
revealed truth

MARCH 2018

CONFORMED TO HIS IMAGE

Father, I give thanks that You foreknew me, that You chose and called me, and that You have declared me righteous in Christ. My desire is that I become fully conformed to His image in spirit, soul, and body so that I will display the beauty of His light as it shines through me and blesses others. I eagerly await the fullness of my adoption as Your child through the redemption of my body. I long for the day that will come when we put off mortality and are clothed with immortality. In the resurrection of our bodies, we will enjoy the fullness of our salvation. You will do away with death and sickness and suffering and grief, and this perishable body will become imperishable. We will manifest Your life and reflect Your glory through the prisms of our unique personalities, so that each of us will contribute to the whole at the great feast and in the great dance.

A teaching letter encouraging believers
to develop a clear mind and a warm heart.



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WISDOM || PART TWO

THE FOUNTAIN OF WISDOM

THE PROVIDER OF WISDOM

As with most things of value, wisdom is elusive, and it seems to be in short supply. Some people are crafty and shrewd, others are well informed and highly educated, but few of us manifest the quiet depth of wisdom.

In his book *Making Life Work*, Bill Hybels tells of a conversation he had with a businessman. Business was going so well for this man that he'd had to hire new salespeople to fill all the orders. "The only problem," the man told Hybels, "is that so many of my new salespeople act weird. . . . They do stupid things and get themselves in trouble."¹ He went on to catalogue all the "weird" things his new salespeople did: They showed up for work late. They inflated prices. They were rude and uncooperative. Rather than building a successful career, they sabotaged themselves and wound up getting fired.

Hybels concludes that the bottom line of the man's complaints is that he can't find wise people. The people he hired were acting like fools. Hybels writes:

Today the word fool often means someone with low intelligence, but in biblical usage, fools may have a high I.Q. and a reputation for success. What makes them fools is that they ignore God's wisdom, preferring to follow the shifting dictates of the crowd or their own fallible opinions. While fools often consider themselves clever—people who know how to beat the system—their cleverness all too often leads to their ruin. Their penchant for distorting the truth, their lack of discernment and discipline, their

unwillingness to exhibit self-control and their apparent delight in throwing caution to the wind put them on a path to disaster.²

What is the source of wisdom? Job asked this question:

But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell? No mortal comprehends its worth; it cannot be found in the land of the living. The deep says, "It is not in me"; the sea says, "It is not with me." It cannot be bought with the finest gold, nor can its price be weighed in silver. It cannot be bought with the gold of Ophir, with precious onyx or lapis lazuli [sapphires]. Neither gold nor crystal can compare with it, nor can it be had for jewels of gold. Coral and jasper are not worthy of mention; the price of wisdom is beyond rubies. The topaz of Cush cannot compare with it; it cannot be bought with pure gold.

Where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell? It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing, concealed even from the birds of the air. Destruction and Death say, "Only a rumor of it has reached our ears." God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells, for he views the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. When he established the force of the wind and measured out the waters, when he made a decree for the rain and a path for the thunderstorm, then he looked at wisdom and appraised it; he confirmed it and tested it. And he said to the human race, "The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding." (Job 28:12–28 NIV)

According to this passage, only God understands the way to wisdom because He alone is the source of true wisdom. The wisdom of God is evident in the beauty, subtlety, richness, intricacy, variety, and splendor of the created order, and it is also evident in the person, powers and perfections of the God of creation.

FEARING THE LORD

Read that last verse again: "The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding" (Job 28:28). True wisdom can only be attained by cultivating the fear of the Lord. Proverbs 9:10 echoes this truth: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (NIV).

"True wisdom can only be attained by cultivating the fear of the Lord."

To fear God is to nurture an attitude of awe and humility before him and to walk in radical dependence upon God in each area of life. The fear of the Lord is similar to the mindset of a subject before a powerful king; it is to be under divine authority as one who will surely give an account. In his discussion on what it means to honor God's name, Rubel Shelly writes:

Scripture describes the spirit that hallows God's name as the fear of the Lord. This spirit is at once an attitude

of esteem and awe before the majesty of God and a confidence in his mercy and love. While Yahweh has revealed himself as a mighty and terrible God who is to be feared, he does not invoke the cringing, groveling terror that worshipers of pagan gods felt. The people of God's covenant community respect him. When he speaks, the people listen; when he commands, they obey; when he is disobeyed, he does not hesitate to punish. There is thus a stability about his relationship with his worshipers that was never present in any of the pagan myths. Their gods were petty, unpredictable, and untrustworthy. But Yahweh is the same yesterday, today, and forever.³

Fearing the Lord relates to trust, humility, teachability, servanthood, responsiveness, gratitude, and reliance on God; it is the exact opposite of autonomy and arrogance.

King David cried out to God: "Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name" (Psalm 86:11 NASB). David knew that he could not fear God if he had a divided heart. If his loyalties were divided between this world and the world to come, he would not be able to truly fear God. Wisdom relates to developing an eternal perspective on life, and it can only come from God—the fountain of all wisdom.

¹Bill Hybels, *Making Life Work: Putting God's Wisdom into Action* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 19.

²Hybels, *Making Life Work*, 20.

³Rubel Shelly, *Written in Stone: Ethics for the Heart* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing, 1994), 78.

EVERYTHING MATTERS

TEACH ME, MY GOD AND KING,
IN ALL THINGS THEE TO SEE,
AND WHAT I DO IN ANYTHING
TO DO IT AS FOR THEE.

—George Herbert (1593–1633), "The Elixir"

Even if it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, go out and sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures; sweep streets like Handel and Beethoven composed music; sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say, "Here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well."

—Martin Luther King Jr.



WHATEVER YOU DO IN WORD OR DEED,
DO ALL IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS,
GIVING THANKS THROUGH HIM
TO GOD THE FATHER.
—Colossians 3:17 (NASB)