

Russell Kelfer

The Four Faces of Wisdom

901-A

Series: Living Lessons From Proverbs



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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

The Four Faces of Wisdom

How would you like to have the Wisdom of Solomon? How would you like to know how to make the right decision every time? How would you like to see your life in harmony with the heart of God in the way you think; the way you act; the way you work; the way you use your resources; the way you relate to your family; and the way you minister to others? How would you like to be that wise!

My friend, I have good news for you this morning from the Word of God. Not only can you be that wise, you are that wise! All that is needed is for us to unlock the door to the secret chambers where the wisdom we already possess is stored, and it's all ours both to enjoy and to use to glorify God.

Where can we find the keys? Once again, there's GOOD NEWS. God has written a book. It's called the book of Proverbs, and tucked within its pages lies the secret combination to God's treasure house of wisdom. No other book in the Bible more clearly states its purpose or more boldly promises its readers blessings than this one.

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel;

(Written) To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding:

To receive instruction for wisdom, judgment, and equity

To give subtlety to the simple and to the young man knowledge and discretion.

A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:

To understand a proverb, and the interpretation: the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:1-7)

Paraphrased by Kenneth Taylor, those seven verses say this:

These are the proverbs of King Solomon of Israel, David's son:

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He wrote them to teach his people how to live, how to act in every circumstance.

For he wanted them to be understanding, just and fair in everything they did.

I want to make the simple-minded wise!" he said. "I want to warn young men about some problems they will face.

I want those already wise to become the wiser and become leaders by exploring the meaning of these nuggets of truth.

How does a man become wise? The first step is to trust and reverence the Lord! only fools refuse to be taught

(Proverbs 1: 1-7 Ken Taylor)

Do you catch the full impact of what that says? It says the wisdom God gave Solomon is yours, and then some if you'll just read and heed the book of Proverbs. It says you'll know how to live life. That's "Shoe Leather" Christianity! You'll know how to act in every conceivable situation. And this book, God says, is for two groups of people. The first is the simple-minded: those simple-minded by virtue of youth or those simple-minded by virtue of innocence, guilelessness, teachability, or trust. In other words, all those who know they don't know it all, can take this book and become wiser than their teachers; wiser than the ancients. And any man, any woman, can become simple-minded simply by choosing to.

The second group addressed, are those who are already in the process of becoming wise. You, Solomon said, you who are growing spiritually already, can find in this book the kind of spiritual vitamins that will spur your growth, quicken your step, accelerate the process. So everyone who is growing or wants to grow is included. You and I are the object. The Book of Proverbs is the vehicle, and wisdom is the ultimate objective. So let's join hands and hearts and begin this new journey together, a journey through the Living Lessons of Proverbs (God's book of Principles). Lesson one, is entitled, "The Four Faces of Wisdom," and our outline for this, the first leg of our journey, looks like this:

- A- The Wonderful World of Wisdom
- B- The Six Facets of Wisdom
- C- The One Essential of Wisdom
- D- The Four Faces of Wisdom
- E- The First Step to Wisdom

The Four Faces of Wisdom

The Wonderful World of Wisdom is ours for the taking, Solomon says. Just what is it? Can it be defined? It must be! The dictionary defines it this way:

Wisdom=Understanding what is true, right, or lasting. It is common sense coupled with good-judgment. What is true, right, lasting, good.

A Biblical definition, then, since only God is good: since only God is truth, since only God is righteousness, since only God is eternal, would be: An understanding of God's perspective as it relates to daily decisions.

As we shall see as the weeks unfold, Solomon unfolds an even deeper concept of wisdom as the book develops. In fact, as early as chapter one, we find that wisdom has the attributes not of mere information, but of personality.

Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets;
She crieth in the chief place of the concourse, in the
openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words
saying,

How long ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the
scorners delight in their scorning, How long will fools hate
knowledge?
(Proverbs 1:20-22)

So wisdom reveals itself to have the attributes of personality and the characteristics of seeking men and women to give itself to. Wisdom cries out, "Here I am. You don't need to live the way you live any longer." And then verse 23 reveals wisdom to be more than a personality. We find that personality belongs to the person of God. (Wisdom is speaking.)

Turn ye at my reproof: behold I will pour out my Spirit unto
you, I will make known my words unto you. (Proverbs 1:23)

Then Jesus Himself confirmed that fact when He said of Himself,

Therefore also said the wisdom of God (Luke 11:49a)

Wisdom is the practical expression of the person of Christ as He encounters victoriously the routine choices of life. Let's simplify it one step further.

WISDOM = the mind of Christ in control of the Christian.

Solomon promises it in three stages. He says you'll find knowledge, and you'll gain understanding until you'll become wise.

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1) KNOWLEDGE = Knowing the facts about the mind of Christ;

2) UNDERSTANDING = Knowing how those facts apply to us, and

3) WISDOM = the actual employment of the mind of Christ activated in the reality of experience.

Example: What is the mind of Christ where lying is concerned?

Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord:

(Proverbs 12:22a)

You read that, and you accept the fact that God hates lying. You have gained knowledge, but suppose you have a habit of lying. It seems to be ingrained in your personality. Then one day, you tell a lie (the kind of lie you've always told), and suddenly God's Spirit takes God's Word and says, "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord," remember? "You are a liar; stop it!" You have just gained a spirit of understanding. You have personally applied the mind of Christ, where lying is concerned, to your habit of lying. The expression is conviction. The result is understanding.

Now you have knowledge, and you have understanding; but you still have a choice. You know God hates lies and you now know YOU are a liar. Now suppose a friend asks you a question. The answer is simple, but painful. You have a choice—to tell the truth or to tell a lie. It's wrong to lie, and you "naturally lie." But if you choose to exercise the mind of Christ and tell the truth no matter the consequences; YOU ARE BECOMING WISE where lying is concerned, and you have entered the Wonderful World of Wisdom once again. The reason we have the book of Proverbs is to practically show us how God thinks, to personally show us how it applies to us, and to powerfully show us that He can live in harmony with His thoughts as He lives out His life in us.

So we don't need to lie anymore. We don't need to gossip anymore. We can be God's parents, God's employees, God's people in the marketplace of life, because we are becoming wise. But how do we attain this wisdom? How do we appropriate God's mind in the area of life in which we live? (I know, read the book of Proverbs.) But as we study Proverbs, it seems almost as though God has taken a lot of the qualities of practical godliness, turned on His heavenly mix master, and scattered them like seasonings throughout its 31 chapters. In one chapter, you may find twenty subjects, or you may find one subject in twenty chapters. So

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that, by reading, say a chapter a day, the many faceted diamond of wisdom sparkles, perhaps, in a dozen directions until one lodges in.

If you read chapter fourteen, you will see surface God's thoughts on the Godly woman, on the tongue, on inventory in business, on lying, on counsel, on planning ahead, on friendships, on grief, on self control, on poverty, on hard work, on inner strength, on parenthood, on a bitter spirit, on death, on national righteousness, and on good employees. (Just to name a few). That's eighteen subjects in one chapter.

But suppose you want to know the whole mind of God as revealed in the Book of Wisdom, say, on parenthood, or self-control, or friendships. What then? Then you would have to take the entire book and arrange it topically. Then taking ALL the verses on each of the subjects, take a look in depth at God's perspective.

That's our goal these next few (the word "few" is inserted with great caution) months. We hope to topically arrange the book of Proverbs and then approach, at least some of those topics, with only one object in mind, "WISDOM" (the literal changing of our responses to life) until we are living in perfect harmony with the mind of Christ. I'm excited about it. Excited, first of all, because as I took and listed the subjects God has addressed in these 31 chapters, I saw my own life come into sharper focus and great areas of need beckon to be conformed more perfectly to the mind of Christ. I'm still not through finding subjects God wants us to look at for wisdom. I've already found 80 of them, and more are surfacing every day. But for the sake of previewing where we're going, let's have a look at some (relax, I said some) of those 80. They will affect basically at least six areas of our lives. So let's look at the six facets of wisdom.

1- God wants to change our ATTITUDES. He talks about:

- Anger (and how to stop it)
- Ambition (and how to recognize it)
- Bitterness (and how it ruins a life)
- Contentment (and tells us why we need it)
- Conceit (and why we don't)
- Courage (how He gives it)
- Envy (how He hates it)

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Fear (where it comes from)
Humility (where it comes from)
Hypocrisy
Impulsiveness (doing before thinking)
Insensitivity (doing without thinking)
Lust
Pride

2- Our attitudes ought to affect our BEHAVIOR. He describes our:

Appetites (adultery, drunkenness, gluttony)
Enemies (who they are and how they got there)
Friends (how to make them and how to keep them)
Keys to good health
The importance of honesty
The importance of not meddling
The Godliness of modesty
The godlessness of slothfulness (It says much about slothfulness)
Self-control
Self-centeredness
Strife (in the family, in the church)
Stubbornness (You know someone who's stubborn, don't you?)
Sleep (Why we need it, how to get it.)
Tongue (It addresses the whole nine yards—lying, sarcasm, cursing, flattery, making vows, boasting, judging, and nagging).

3- He wants to show us how to WORK and how to run a business:

Credit
Indebtedness
Employers
Employees
Faithfulness
Laziness
Keeping inventory (too much and too little)

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4- God wants us to have His perspective of STEWARDSHIP. So He teaches us about:

Generosity

Giving

Greed

Poverty (How He sees the poor)

Riches (How He views the rich)

Stewardship (How to handle what you have)

5- Through wisdom He wants to change our HOMES. So He talks about:

Children (how not to be one)

Discipline (how to use it)

Parenting (how to like it)

Rebellion (how to stop it)

Rejection (how to reject it)

Partiality

Widows

Wives

Womanhood (in general from His perspective)

6- All this wisdom ought to affect our RELATIONSHIPS & our MINISTRIES. So God instructs us on:

Decision-making

Encouragement

Grief (how to cope)

Leadership

Priorities (what's important)

Rebuke (how to: who to)

Planning (why to: when to)

Using nature to teach spiritual truth and demonstrate character.

Wow! That's where we live. There are at least 80 subjects, and they fall logically into those six facets. How we think in our hearts, act in our worlds, work on our jobs, spend our money, raise our families, and how we minister to people—six logical divisions to the subjects found in Proverbs.

But I don't think we'll study them that way because there's

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something about that division that genuinely demonstrates how wisdom changes your life, but subtly infers that it's something we do. You and I will not become wise by what we do because wisdom has already done it.

This brings us to Part 3 of our study. It's entitled, "The One Essential of Wisdom". There is one essential truth that turns understanding into wisdom. We will only address it briefly in this lesson, but we will refer to it again and again as we come to new portions of our study. The key is simply this: You cannot become wise! You cannot become wise because you already are... If wisdom is the mind of Christ, then you possess all wisdom because you already have the mind of Christ.

Now we have the mind of Christ. (I Corinthians 2:16)

The Williams translation puts it this way,

We now possess Christ's thoughts.

You do not appropriate the mind of Christ; you simply choose to set it free. This study will be depressing to you if you do not understand this principle. It'll just keep piling on more guilt and more frustration. The one essential to wisdom is CHOICE. The mind, at the point of volition, must make decisions. Whatever the issue be lying, gluttony, humility, good stewardship, you do not need to be able to do it. You only need to choose to do it. When you choose to do it, Christ does it. Back to our original illustration, let's assume you are a habitual liar. You read of God's perspective of lying. You see how it personally affects you, but you just can't stop lying. You don't need to. That's right. Jesus Christ lives in you, and He is incapable of telling a lie. So at the moment of decision, when the pressure's on, you say to God, I choose the mind of Christ. You already have it. It is resident with you in the person of the Holy Spirit. All He is waiting for is your decision. The rest is God's problem. You get out of God's way now, and let Wisdom fire. He won't lie, I promise you. Your lying will stop because the mind of Christ is controlling your tongue.

You may have a new Mercedes parked in front of your house. (I doubt it, but imagine you do.) You can go and sit in that Mercedes all day and never get anywhere. You can go VROOM, VROOM, Purr—Screech." You can imitate that Mercedes. You'll get a headache and look like a fool, but you won't get anywhere. You are in it, but powerless. The change comes the moment you choose to let the Mercedes take you where you want to go. You

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choose to turn on the key and start the engine. You choose to turn left; then to the right. You choose to stop. Then its power starts you, stops you, leads you according to your choices.

If you're a believer, you are now in Christ. He has all the power, but you have the power to choose. As you gain knowledge and understanding, you choose to be wise. And the Wisdom of God living in you does the rest. He cannot lie. He will not be lazy, or conceited, or fearful, or slanderous, or insensitive. He can't be.

If you're tempted to gluttony and staring at food, make a choice. Christ in you is not a glutton. Choose the mind of Christ, and He will resist that dessert, and you'll walk away. Remember, it's your choice, but it's His power. Total victory awaits us because God does it all. We only choose, but choice is the one essential to Wisdom. So that's the framework for our study of Proverbs. Now it's time to begin. I'd like in the few moments that remain to briefly acquaint you with the outline of our study and then begin to look at the first step towards enjoying wisdom. We've already said we'll not use the six facets of wisdom as the basis for progressing through Proverbs. Instead, we'll look at the Four Faces of Wisdom. You say, "What is that?" Well, as I looked and looked at this list of 80 or so expressions of wisdom, a pattern began to appear, and this multitude of subjects began to logically fall into four different phases or faces of wisdom. What seems even more exciting to me, is that these four basic manifestations or groups seemed to me to be progressive in nature. One group builds on the others. So much so, in fact, that I believe they form a pattern of wisdom from Proverbs that will stair step unto the mature Christian life.

The first segment is HUMILITY (under which fall the subjects of pride, teachability, correctability). It gives us God's perspective of self.

The second segment is SELF-CONTROL (under which fall the subjects of gluttony, drunkenness, anger, fear). It gives us God's perspective of choice or control.

The third segment is RESPONSIBILITY (under which fall the subjects of faithfulness, parenting, decision—making, home, job, ministry). It gives us God's perspective of the disciplined life.

The fourth segment is GENEROSITY (under which fall the subjects of greed, giving, serving, poverty). It gives us God's

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perspective of others. And more than simply being progressive in nature, we'll see that each depends on the one before it.

We'll see that HUMILITY leads to SELF-CONTROL. (Self-control without humility would be legalism.)

SELF-CONTROL leads to RESPONSIBILITY. (Responsibility without self-control would be hypocrisy.)

RESPONSIBILITY leads to GENEROSITY. (Generosity without responsibility would be foolishness.)

You'll see what I mean as we progress, but the bottom line is that all 80 or so of these subjects fit logically and progressively into one of those four areas of the development of wisdom. Hence, the Four Faces of Wisdom are our objectives for the months to come. But before we close this morning, let's take a closer look at the First Face of Wisdom and see if we can see more clearly all the stones that make up this cornerstone. At least thirteen subjects surface when you say the word "humility". Until you have a handle on this, no manner of self-control, responsibility, or generosity will matter. It involves a right attitude of who you are before God, who you'd be without God, and therefore, it controls how you respond to truth, to correction, to circumstances, and to others. You must first deal with the issue of pride, which leads to a study of conceit and ambition. When you have put self where self belongs, Christ in you sets you free to hunger for truth, and be teachable. This frees you to be correctable and open to rebuke. When this happens, kindness, sensitivity, and flexibility replace jealousy, hypocrisy, and strife. God will have clothed you with the first face of wisdom, HUMILITY.

Lord willing, here's how we'll progress. Here's our plan. We'll take each subject in the order it seems to fit into the scheme of things, using Proverbs as our base, the life of Christ as our living example, and the parables of the New Testament as our picture book of illustrations. We only have time to touch on the first characteristic of the mind of Christ in this lesson. But we do have time to take a preview.

The first issue every Christian has to face is the issue of pride. It is the original sin. It is the dominant characteristic in Satan's personality. It is reflected by two basic statements that the voice of this "stranger" whispers again and again and again into our ears. Those two statements are these: "I can do it." (and) "I deserve it." But Jesus answers, "But I couldn't do anything

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without the Father, and apart from me ye can do nothing.” You don’t deserve it. It is all of God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. But again, and again, Satan whispers the lie, “Get ahead. Get recognition. Take credit for what you can do.”

But God says,

Die to self

Give me the glory

And I’ll do it all for you.

The difference between those two philosophies clearly distinguishes the basic difference between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom which comes from God. Watch for those two lies “I can do it” and “I deserve it”—and know immediately that you are dealing with the issue of pride. Now what is pride? Let’s define pride. Pride is not only self exaltation; pride is simply preoccupation with one’s self. Humility then is the absence of preoccupation with self, which leaves one free to focus on God and other people. Pride wears two faces. While the disguises are different, they both are in essence preoccupation with self.

The most recognizable is self-exaltation. We call it conceit. It manifests itself as self-assuredness, or being cocky and inconsiderate. A second, more subtle form of pride is self-condemnation. We call it insecurity. It manifests itself sometimes as self-pity, self-degradation, or self-destructiveness.

One is preoccupied with how good he is. The other is preoccupied with how bad he is. But both are preoccupied with self and self is dead. So we need to make the arrangements, pay our respects, have the funeral, and press on.

Remember, pride is preoccupation with self, even if that preoccupation wears “spiritual” clothes. If it calls attention to you and not to Christ, if it enjoys acclaim and seeks recognition, if it begins each sentence with the pronoun “I”; it displeases God because we are choosing to ignore the mind of Christ, who always and only called attention to the Father. And we are choosing to ignore His Spirit who only called attention to the Son (never to Himself.) Monitor your thoughts this week, and every time you sense that you are focusing the spotlight on yourself or you hear someone whisper in your ear, “I can do it,” or “I deserve it,” hang on! You’re heading for a fall. Just remember what pride is.

Pride is that letdown that no one noticed your new dress.

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Pride is that spirit of comparison that puts down your friends as less disciplined or spiritual because they don't memorize or go to your Bible Study.

Pride has to sit on the front row, know the top people, and be thanked for all it does.

Pride has to have its way. It's too insecure to accept a 'No'.

Pride always needs new clothes, new activities, and new achievements to call attention to itself.

Pride goes crazy when his name is in the paper or mentioned from the pulpit or even talked about in private.

Pride may be camouflaged as modesty, self-pity, or self-degrading remarks; but its object is still the same, to steal the glory from Jesus Christ. So anything it does that says, "Look at me," is worth it to him. Pride loves to look in the mirror or at old pictures and imagine. Pride has a problem with reality. He dreams a lot, and in his dreams he's always the hero. In case you've never met him, his name is Pride. Who knows? You just may meet him this week.

In closing, I want to give you some principles from Proverbs to think about.

Principle 1- When we're preoccupied with ourselves, it literally makes God sick. (Proverbs 8:12-13: 16:5). (See if that's not true. It'll make you more sensitive to the issue of pride.)

Principle 2- By being proud, we actually force God to resist us and take from us the GRACE He's prepared for us. (Proverbs 3:33-35; James. 4:6-10)

Principle 3- Pride is the primary cause of eventual failure. (Proverb 11:2. 16:18 18-12 29:23)

Principle 4- The proud man is worse than the fool. (Proverbs 26:12) (Think about that and see what God says about fools!)

Principle 5- Humility leads to honor. (Proverbs 15:33)

Principle 6- Pride leads to arguments. (Proverbs 13:10-28:25)

Principle 7- Poverty is better than pride. (Proverbs 16:19) (If you have to exalt yourself to get rich, stay poor.)

Principle 8- You can spot a prideful spirit. Ask yourself these questions:

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- 1) Do you want to be seen with the right people or in the right places? (Proverbs 25:6-7)
- 2) Do you brag about tomorrow's plans as though they had to happen? (Proverbs 27:1,2)
- 3) Do you subtly call attention to your own accomplishments? (Proverbs 27:1,2,4)
- 4) Are you unable to handle praise? (Proverbs 27:21)
- 5) Are you always in the middle of an argument? (Proverbs 28:25)

These are the symptoms of the disease of Pride. We'll look at those next, and we'll look at how Jesus handled the issue of pride. And we'll take a look at two parables that personify God's perspective of pride, the parable of the ambitious guest (Luke 14:7-15) and the parable of the proud prayer (Luke 18:9-14). We will, at last, be on our way into the Wonderful World of Wisdom.

Now I want to make you a promise. Satan's going to bug you this week in the area of pride. He's going to try to make you preoccupied with yourself, how good you are or how bad you are, how you feel or how important you are. First of all, it is because he always does. It's the cardinal characteristic of his nature. And secondly, because he is a seed-snatcher, and you can always find him in whatever garden the Spirit has just planted. He means evil unto you, but God means it for good. So the Spiritual hand grenade he tosses at you God wants you to toss right back like proverbial hot potatoes until they blow up in his face.

Here's what you do. Pray and ask God for wisdom where pride is concerned. James, chapter one, tells us, "If any of us lack wisdom (in a certain area) just ask God. He'll give it to us liberally and literally, and He'll never scold us for asking." Ask Him. He'll goad Satan into tossing you some living landmines this week in the area of pride. Your ego will try to explode. But as the enemy whispers his lies, God will give you a spirit of knowledge from these verses, and He'll give you a spirit of understanding or conviction as the lies begin to flow. Suddenly your mind will be faced with a very real choice, and you can choose to humble yourself. You'll find yourself saying, "God, I can't do it, but you can. I choose to be wise in the area of humility." And Wisdom (Jesus Christ) will flood your soul with a humble spirit. As we

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find ourselves supernaturally becoming less preoccupied with ourselves, our hunger for truth will multiply. We'll become more teachable, more correctable, more open to rebuke. Spiritual strongholds will crumble and lights will go on in the dark closets of our hearts, and we will awaken only to find by God's miraculous grace we are becoming wise.

WISDOM: YOURS FOR THE TAKING

Wouldn't you like to be wiser?
Your feet with wisdom shod?
Wouldn't you like to daily know
That you have the mind of God?
Wouldn't you like to have victory
Where so much defeat has been?
Wouldn't you like the power of God
To conquer besetting sin?
Wouldn't you like to know for sure
God's already paid the price—
That hourly, throughout life's little trials
You H A V E the mind of Christ?
It's all yours, Beloved
A goal you can realize.
It's all in the book of Proverbs
God's handbook to make you wise.
Together, let's study its faces
While praying that we may become
Living lessons in wisdom
Reflections of God's precious Son.
We already have the wisdom
We only need learn to pray;
"Lord, teach us to choose to release it,
Day after day after day."

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