



Lesson 4 – God Is Wise

Ever faced a difficult problem that seemed to have no good solution? Sometimes you struggle to solve a problem because you are missing important information, but sometimes you have all the information and still don't know what you should do. This is because when we face complex problems, we need more than knowledge – we need wisdom. Living in the information age, it's sad to see people have access to more knowledge than ever yet be totally confused on what life is all about. People go through years and years of education, carry a device capable of accessing most of the world's information, yet feel totally lost and hopeless in their lives. Just knowing more won't help us live well; for that we need wisdom.

Can you think of any examples of people who were brilliant, yet totally without hope or direction?

We may frequently find ourselves confused and unsure what our next step should be, but our God is never is. God always knows what decision He should make because He is all-wise. His plans are without flaw. He is never surprised by unforeseen problems. God never gets to the end of a plan and thinks to Himself, "Whoops, if I could do that over I would do some things differently." Scripture reminds us repeatedly that God is wise, and that because of that we can trust Him.

Why do we sometimes doubt the wisdom of God?

In this lesson we will see what wisdom is, and what it means that God is wise. Then we will see some of the ways in which God's wisdom is demonstrated. Finally, we will see that because of God's wisdom we should trust God's plan and go to Him for wisdom of our own.

What Is Wisdom?

If we are going to say that God is wise, we need a clear understanding of what wisdom is. Defining wisdom can be tricky. People often have a vague idea of what wisdom is, but when asked for a specific definition things get hazy.

How would you define wisdom?

Knowledge and Wisdom

Wisdom is related to knowledge, but they're not the same thing. Understanding how these two ideas are related but different will help us when it comes to defining "wisdom."

How are knowledge and wisdom different and how are they be related?

The Hebrew word for wisdom (*chakmah*) means “skill.” For example, this word is used to describe the skill of the artisans who built the tabernacle (Exodus 28:3; 31:3, 6; 35:10, 25-26, 31; 36:1-2). So what is the connection between a carpenter’s skill and the type of wisdom for life we find in books like Proverbs? Both involve not just knowledge, but the practical use of that knowledge. It’s one thing to read a book and know what you need to build a chair from a block of wood. But book knowledge on how to build a chair won’t be enough to make a beautiful product. That knowledge must translate into practical skill or it’s worthless.

Similarly, economists might carefully study a nation’s economic indicators, have access to thousands of spreadsheets of complex data, know the history of how economies function, and yet still not know which course of action they should take. They could still make the wrong choice because they have to answer questions like: Of all the data, which information is the most relevant? How would current choices affect the future of the country? The same problem is faced by those seeking to use wisdom in their everyday lives. Which principles from God’s Word apply in *this* situation? If I make this choice, what will be the outcome? What if I make a different choice? Knowing information won’t guarantee you make the right choices. Wisdom is the ability to use knowledge to arrive at the best outcomes. As one theologian put it, “Knowledge is an understanding of general rules, and wisdom is a drawing conclusion from those rules in order to particular cases.”¹

A Definition of Wisdom

When discussing God’s wisdom, Wayne Grudem had this helpful definition: “*God’s wisdom means that God always chooses the best goals and the best means to those goals.*”² We’ll borrow and slightly modify that definition for our own purposes: **God’s wisdom is when He uses His knowledge to choose the best goals and the best ways to achieve those goals.** This means that God’s wisdom involves His knowledge, but it goes beyond His knowledge. God’s wisdom is the skillful application of that knowledge to (1) know what the best goals are and (2) know and choose the best ways to achieve those goals.

If we break down the two halves of this definition, we see that wisdom involves the right goals and the right ways to achieve those goals. Having the right goal is important, because having the right goal will set the course of your direction. The Bible sometimes talks about the wisdom of the world (James 3:12-18; 1 Corinthians 1-2). One of the differences between worldly wisdom and the wisdom of God is that they start off with different goals.

What is the goal of God’s wisdom?

What is the goal of the world’s wisdom?

If you start off with the goal of the world – to magnify the self – you will get go in a very different direction than if you start off with the goal of God – to magnify Himself. But even once you start with the right goal you then need to have the ability to select the right path to accomplish that goal. Having a company goal that you do everything with excellence and glorify God is wise, but simply having that goal isn’t enough.

¹ Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, Volume 1, 508.

² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 194.

Wisdom is also required to know how to accomplish that lofty goal. God's wisdom means both that He always picks the best goals and that He always chooses the right path to achieve those goals.

Why do some people question the good goals God?

Why do some people question the ways God goes about seeking to achieve those goals?

God's Wisdom on Display

As with all of God's attributes, God's wisdom is more than an abstract idea. God shows His wisdom in concrete ways through His actions. In this lesson, we will see three ways in which God shows His wisdom: His creation of the world, His ongoing providence over the world, and His work in saving lost humanity.

God's Wisdom in Creation

One of the main ways in which God displayed His wisdom was in the creation of the world. When God fashioned the world, we are told that He did so by wisdom (Proverbs 3:19; Jeremiah 51:15). As we study the world in which God made, we learn something of the intelligent and wise Creator who calibrated everything so that it works so well. Psalm 104:24 tells us that God's wisdom is seen in the variety and abundance of creation. God could have made the world a simple, boring place, but instead He made it unbelievably complex. The beauty and wonder and splendor and creativity and design of the world is meant to point back to the fact that the one who made all of this is very wise.

Can you think of any other passages in God's Word that teach we can learn about God from the world He made?

What are some examples of the beauty and complexity about creation that have always been most impressive to you?

God's Wisdom in Providence

God's wisdom is seen not only in His creation of the world, but also in the way He maintains it. This idea is related to God's creation, but it is different. The deist will argue that God created the world, but then like a giant clock He wound it up and stepped back. The Bible teaches, however, that God remains vitally interested in His creation. In Job 38-41 God shows up and begins to address Job. Throughout this encounter God asks Job if he can do the types of things God can. Some of this has to do with creation (38:1-11), but much of it involves God's ongoing care for His creation. In beautiful poetic language, God points out to Job that not only did God make the world, but He continues to rule it by wisdom (38:34-41). God continues to care for His creation, not through miracles, but through His ongoing providential care.

Many people today think that since through science we better understand how the world works, this removes the need for God. Why is such thinking wrong, and what should our response be?

Scripture is also clear that God not only governs the natural order, but that He also rules over the kingdoms of the world. Proverbs tells us that the king's heart is in God's hand (Proverbs 21:1). The prophets remind us that God rules in the kingdoms of men, and no one can stop Him (Isaiah 40:15-17; Daniel 4:34-35).

Although we may look at the national and international scene and think things are in chaos, the Bible reminds us that behind it all is the steady hand of God directing history to its proper end.

Why do we struggle to believe that God is truly in control of everything?

How do we as believers navigate trusting God's wise care and also working towards righteous political ends?

God's Wisdom in Redemption

God's wisdom is seen in His creation and providence, but it is especially revealed in His plan of redemption. The ultimate display of God's wisdom is in the goal He set of redeeming fallen man and the plan He is executing to bring that goal to pass. In fact, Ephesians goes so far as to say that God is displaying His wisdom to heavenly beings through what He is doing in the church (Ephesians 3:10)!

In what ways does the gospel demonstrate the wisdom of God?

Sadly, much of the world misses this wisdom. Paul tells the Corinthians that the wisdom of God is considered foolishness to the world. Whereas the world is seeking for something impressive and intellectual and strong, God sent a Messiah who died a violent death on the cross. To the world, that looked foolish and ridiculous, but to God that is the power of salvation (1 Corinthians 1:18, 21-24). God's reason for all of this? So that His wisdom would be seen as superior to man's wisdom, and so that people would glory in Him rather than in their own wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

What are some ways today in which people find the gospel foolish?

Our Response to God's Wisdom

Trust and Obey

When God makes a choice, we can be confident it is the best choice. God's love is a great comfort, but love alone won't be enough for us to trust God. I may love someone, but if I can't do anything about their problem what difference does that make? And if someone wants what's best for you and can do anything, that's great, but what if they get it wrong? God loves us, He can do whatever He wants, and He is all wise. He always has the best possible goal in mind, and He knows the best way to get to that goal!

But God's wisdom does not mean that we will always understand what He is up to and agree with Him. Romans 11:33 and Isaiah 55:9 both remind us that God's ways and His wisdom are far beyond ours. Sometimes God allow us to understand what He is up to and why He is doing what He is doing. At other times, we may never know all the answers while here on earth. But understanding and believing that God is all-wise should give us the confidence we need to trust and obey God, even if we can't explain everything He is up to.

How would you help a believer who was struggling to trust God because they couldn't understand why He was allowing something in their lives?

Seek God's Wisdom

God is wise and He freely offers that wisdom to us. When Solomon was given the chance to ask God for anything, he recognized that most of all he needed wisdom. But you don't need God to come to you in a night vision and offer you anything in the world before you can ask for wisdom. James 1:5 tells us that God is willing to offer wisdom to all who ask Him! The wisdom books repeatedly tie wisdom back to God, because without God there is no true wisdom. The fear of the Lord – an understanding of who God is and a healthy fear that His Word must be listened to – is the true basis of all wisdom (Job 28:28; Psalm 110:10; Proverbs 9:10). God's Word gives wisdom, and God's Spirit gives wisdom to those who ask. The all-wise God does not hold on tightly to His wisdom, He freely shares it with those who humbly ask and seek Him!

Why don't we ask God for wisdom more frequently?

What if someone asks for wisdom but still isn't sure what to do?