

Happy Is the Man • Proverbs 3:13–14

Life is tough to figure out. It sometimes seems as if it is a game we are forced to play but are never told what the rules are. We have to figure out what the rules are as the game is being played. Yet, just when we think we have it all figured out, the rules seem to change . . . or maybe we didn't have them figured out at all.

There is childhood, that amazing mixture of fantasies, fun and fears that merges into adolescence when childhood is over but adulthood has not yet begun. It is a time of transition that is both terrific and terrifying. Adolescence is then followed by adulthood with its many unpredictable chapters through relationships, jobs, homes, health and eventually death.

It's all so difficult to figure out. We have books and seminars and counselors to help us understand life and it's crises and to put it together. Yet, whether we have life figured out or not, we still must go on with it. We must make a constant chain of decisions. And the quality and consequences of those choices often hinge upon our basic understanding of life.

Proverbs 3:13-14 is about the man who has figured out life: "Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold."

Wisdom! What is it?

The Hebrew word translated "wisdom" is "chokmah". To understand the word, let's see how it is used elsewhere in the Bible.

Exodus 35:35 translates "chokmah" as "skill", describing the abilities of Bezalel and Oholiab to serve as brilliant craftsmen in the building of the Old Testament tabernacle.

It was during the 40 years of transition from captivity in Egypt to the occupancy of the Promised Land in Palestine. The tabernacle was the place where people went to worship

God. God gave very detailed and specific instructions on how this tabernacle was to be built. It required a great deal of construction skill, particularly in artistic forms. Two men were given special responsibilities in this area. These men were Bezalel and Oholiab.

We are told in Exodus 35:35: (God) has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work as craftsmen, designers, embroiderers in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen, and weavers – all of them master craftsmen and designers.

Ezekiel 27:8 uses the word "chokmah" to describe the navigational skills of the seamen from the Mediterranean port city of Tyre.

Recently our Kenmore washing machine got the jumps. It seemed as if its insides were loose whenever the tub would spin. It still worked, but it certainly was noisy! So Charleen called the Sears repairman and set up an appointment for him to come and repair the machine. It so happened that she was out of town on that date, so I went home at lunchtime and he was waiting outside. He walked in, lifted the lid, pulled out a white washer-like part worth \$3.79 and replaced it for \$44. It took only a few minutes and solved the problem.

The Hebrews would have said he has "chokmah", "wisdom" . . . the skill to do what needs to be done to get the right results.

Proverbs 3:13 says that whoever finds "chokmah"

for life is blessed, or "happy". That person has the skills to live life right. When choosing a career, he has wisdom. When courting a wife, he has the skill. When facing bankruptcy, he has "chokmah". When diagnosed with cancer, he knows how to handle it.

God designed and created our world and our human race. He understands how we work and what it takes to succeed.

This proverb does not describe a rich man, a healthy man, a young man or an old man . . . it describes a wise man. He is like a skilled craftsman, like a seasoned sailor, like a Sears repairman . . . only his skill is at living, coping, making choices throughout life.

Indeed, happy is the man who finds wisdom!

Essential to the skills for successful living is understanding the divine design of life. In Proverbs 2:6 we read, “For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.”

God designed and created our world and our human race. He understands how we work and what it takes to succeed. He knows how to handle our internal jumps when we go into a spin.

The wise man lives life as God has designed it. The fool lives life as God never intended it to be. For example, God designed us to live morally, monogamously, heterosexually. He designed us to be sober, peaceful, faithful, honest, working. God never intended for us to use our lips to lie, our hands to steal, our minds to doubt or our sex to commit adultery.

The happy man who finds wisdom lives his life following the divine design.

In Minnesota we have some distinct seasons. One of them is “tick season”. If you have dogs and cats you understand that this can be a problem for them. Recently I bought a can of Sulfodene SCRATCHEX to spray on our dogs and cat. I don’t know much about the product except that it says on the can “keeps ticks and fleas off dogs up to 4 days and cats up to 9 days.”

On the back of the can the first line under “Directions For Use” says: “It is a violation of federal law to use this product in a manner inconsistent with its labeling.”

The wise way to use SCRATCHEX is to spray it on your dog, not up your nose, not in your eye, not light it with a match and turn it into a flame thrower.

The wise man understands that he, too,

comes with a warning that says: “It is a violation of divine law to use this life in a manner inconsistent with its design.” (And we were designed in the image of God!)

“Blessed (happy) is the man who finds wisdom.” He has the skills to live life right and to follow the divine design.

What is it worth to be able to live like this? What is it worth to be wise, to have the skill for successful living? According to Proverbs 3:14 this wisdom “is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold.” In other words, if you could choose between money and wisdom, choose wisdom every time!

Several years ago I attended a seminar in Chicago that was put on by the American Management Association for chairpersons of college and university boards. The teacher spoke on choosing trustees for boards. He said, “There is only one qualification which really counts and that is good judgment. Don’t choose trustees because they are rich or famous or powerful because that alone without good judgment will ruin the school. But if your trustees have good judgment, the money and everything else will follow.”

That is revolutionary advice to many college fundraisers. But, it is also advice for life! When it comes to choosing a mate, raising a child, overcoming a disaster, coping with death . . . wisdom is worth more than silver or gold every time.

Verse 15 of Proverbs 3 goes even further, personifying wisdom as a woman and saying, “She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her.”

I don’t know what you desire. We each have our own list. But for the practical figuring out and living out of everyday life, nothing compares to wisdom. Yet that is a goal seldom sought. We often hear people desire money, health, marriage, family, cars, houses, jobs or fame, but rarely do we hear anyone say, “I want to be wise!” However, that is the best there is. Better a wise father than a rich father. Better a wise son or daughter than a famous one. Bet-

ter to be wise than beautiful. “Blessed is the man who finds wisdom.”

Now all of this kind of begs the question, where do you get it? If wisdom is so wonderful, making a man blessed/happy, where do we find it?

We are told in Proverbs 9:10, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”

“Fear” is a somewhat uncomfortable word for many of us. We usually are quick to define “fear” as “awe” or “reverence”. That’s okay if we clearly understand what is meant.

I “fear” the ocean. I love it, but I know I am no match for it. It is far bigger and stronger than I am. Therefore, any relationship I have with the sea must be on its terms and not mine.

Those who “fear” God are at the beginning of wisdom. They know that they are no match for him. They always come to God on God’s terms and never on their own. They respect him; they love him; they are loyal to him . . . always recognizing that he is GOD!

The Greek poet, Horace, wrote: “He has half the deed done, who has made a beginning.” And so it is that wisdom is at least half found by those who fear God and seek to live life on God’s terms and not their own.

The second element in finding wisdom is in asking.

There is a fascinating story in the Old Testament book of I Kings, chapter 3, that tells the story of young King Solomon who received a startling offer from

God in verse 5: “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.”

Solomon admitted that he was not adequate for the challenges he faced in life, and so he used up his one wish asking for wisdom. He asked that God give him the skill “ to distinguish between right and wrong.”

God granted his wish and Solomon became the wisest man on earth.

His wish can be our wish! We read in James 1:5: “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”

I ask often! I need the skill to live life successfully as a man, a husband, a father, a pastor. Every day I lack wisdom. Every day brings challenges beyond my ability. Every day I ask God “who gives generously to all without finding fault.”

Wisdom is not something instantly secured once and for all like a heart transplant. Wisdom is learned and lived throughout all of life. It is more like aerobics or a musical instrument . . . cumulative, to be sure, but it must be maintained to be beneficial.

Let me offer a couple of practical suggestions for learning wisdom. Read Proverbs. In seeking wisdom many read a chapter a day, corresponding the 31 chapters to each day’s date. Read it repeatedly until its wisdom is learned. There are many people who have done this for a lifetime.

And practice wisdom. Make a daily discipline of fearing God, asking for wisdom and making clear choices of right rather than wrong, of God’s design rather than any other.

May this proverb become your biography! “Blessed is the man (or woman) who finds wisdom . . . who gains understanding.”

Be wise.

Be happy.

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