

Born to Win

Wisdom

by: Ronald L. Dart

In the Book of Daniel, the first chapter of the Book of Daniel (and this sermon is not going to be about prophecy, by the way) there is a rather interesting little byplay or event that takes place that I've often thought of and considered with some fascination. The story is fairly familiar to everyone that Daniel and his three friends (And I wonder how many of you know their names. Probably an awful lot of you could sing Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, but for your trivia quiz sometime ask somebody what were their *Hebrew* names—because they are also listed in the Book of Daniel.) were among a number of young men who were in sort of preparation to become a part of the king's staff of wise men, magicians, astrologers, or what have you. And so they kept them in for a period of time and they fed these people a certain diet (You're familiar with how Daniel and his friends *refused* that diet and asked for a special diet and were given that special diet) and then when all was said and done and they came in to appear before the king they were fair, and they looked good, their countenance was clear, and their eyes were bright and intelligent, and obviously on any questions they were asked they were very perceptive and men of considerable wisdom, and the king added them to his staff, and they were right next to the king. In fact, from all indications, Daniel was *the number one man* on Nebuchadnezzar's staff. You might call him the presidential chief of staff. He was the man who did most of the advising for this gentile king.

Now, this may be the first situation where a Jew found himself next to the seat of power in a nation that was not a Jewish or Israelite-ish nation. From that time until today, the Jews have maintained a tradition, somehow, of always being somewhere close to the seat of power, if not the power itself—perhaps unseen, perhaps unaware, the power behind the throne, the ones pulling the strings, or what have you—but they have *always been* somewhere close. That has been true, really, down through history.

They have also been, as a people, very successful as bankers, merchants, and in their own businesses. They have often been highly placed in educational institutions. Now, obviously the Jews are an intelligent and a very capable, a very able people. I know that they also often envied, and sometimes feared, and often have become (I think as a result of envy and of fear) objects of persecution in almost every nation where they have ever been. There are, I think, a lot of reasons for that—the most-often quoted not necessarily being the most accurate. But I've often thought about this as to why it is that Jews have always been drawn to positions of more or less power. Now, I really don't believe it is because they are more intelligent and more able than mankind as a whole, because from what I understand of the laws of genetics that's not really possible—that there are certain laws of genetics that regulate that type of thing and that actually pull us all toward a sort of mean, no matter what our genetic background, our race, or our associations.

True, there is some hereditary effect on intelligence but I forget what it is—I think it's the law of “regression toward the mean” that if a couple get married and the man is six feet tall, the woman is five feet tall, the odds are very, very heavy that the child's height will fall somewhere *between* the two. He will not be taller than the one or shorter than the other. That was what they call regression toward the mean. People will always tend to move toward the median of whatever is there. So highly-intelligent people and less-intelligent people's children will tend to regress towards the mean. There are, of course, the exceptional ones that fall outside of the mean from time to time—both in height, physical appearance, skinny, fat, or whatever else it is that a person might be. These things happen but we always keep coming back toward the mean.

So I don't really see any reason why we should assume that the Jews have wound up there because they are somehow *genetically superior* to other people. Also note that other intelligent and able people—certainly just as intelligent and just as able as the Jews—have not had any such tradition. There is no comparable people, no matter how intelligent or sharp, who have ever had the reputation of being next to the seats of power or being bankers and merchants and successful in educational pursuits and so forth, as the Jews have. Now, why is that? I have often wondered.

There are two major factors, I think, in this. One is the Jews have retained their identity and their pride of race through dispersion. In other words, they have been dispersed all over the world—that the word *diaspora* is known to all—and yet through it all they have retained a knowledge of who they are and a pride of who they are, through all of this. Now, that's fairly important. In order to be influential in Russia, you've got to *be* in Russia. If you're going to be influential in an African government, you've got to *be* in Africa. And the Jews, because of their dispersion—their being carried into captivity or *driven* into captivity, driven away from their homeland, or because they got up and went because of money or trade or success or going out and working—have wound up dispersing themselves throughout all the peoples of the world. So they are *there*. That's the first thing. Other people, including Israelites who went into captivity, have not retained their identity and their pride of race as the Jews have done. And so even were they in such positions of power, you would not be aware of their presence there—in most cases because they have not troubled to maintain or retain their identity.

The second major factor (And I think this is the important consideration. It's what my sermon is really about today.) is that the Jews have a tradition of *exalting* wisdom. Now, some time ago my wife had some clients looking for a home in Tyler who were Jews. And in the process of getting acquainted with them and finding them a house, we had two or three occasions to go to dinner with them and sit and chat about one thing or another. Of course, you talk about real estate for a little bit but that wears them pretty soon, and before you know it you're off into philosophical questions and political questions or whatever you may be discussing. One of the most striking things about our conversation where the frequent references and the use of little pithy quotations from ancient Jewish rabbis (you know, of the 1st century or the 5th century or the 8th century or the 15th century or what have you) which really had a lot of punch, a cutting edge to them—you know, went right to the heart of a question, had tremendous wisdom and thought behind them. And I remember one day thinking, you know, in the conversation, that all of the lines of Jewish thought and the *quality* of that thought... I mentioned to them, I said one of the reasons for the quality of Jewish thought is the Jews have had a *long* time to think.) They have been thinking for a long time.

You see, the point is they've been thinking for a long time *as a people* and they have *retained* what they have thought and not allowed to go frittering off into the cosmos. They have retained it for their children and for their children's children *because* they *exalt* and they *hold high* and it is important in their whole culture and their whole societal structure, *wisdom*. Wisdom has intrinsic value and is taught, as such, to those people and to their children. You can find thick volumes of Jewish wit and humor, and Jewish philosophy, and Jewish sayings because the Jews have tried hard to hold on to their wisdom down through all generations, and it has been exalted and taught to their children. And I have a feeling that a great deal of their success is because they are, by and large, a *wise* people. They are not a wise people by heredity or by accident. They are wise people because wisdom is a part of their tradition and their literature.

Everybody agrees, I think, that wisdom is good. But for the most part we live as though wisdom is something that just *happens*—it's something you have or you don't have, something that is just there or it's not. I don't think many of us would think, well, you're *born* with wisdom. That's obviously not possible. but yet still we don't think in terms of the development thereof or of a course of action designed to create that. We do not hold it as though it were a matter of family tradition. It's almost as though it were a matter of genetics or the happenstance and experience of life. The fact is that the first Jew to exalt wisdom was a man named Solomon. I want you to turn back with me to 1 Kings. In fact, who knows, he may have been the first man to really exalt wisdom in the way that he did. In 1 Kings, chapter three is a relatively familiar and tremendously important statement or event made by Solomon. We're told 1 Kings 3, verse 3:

1 Kings 3

AKJV

³ And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places.

This was about the only flaw that anyone had to suggest. He should not have been doing that, but he was.

1 Kings 3

AKJV

⁴ And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer on that altar.

Now while he was there (because even though he was offering his offerings in the wrong place, he *was* offering that offering to the Eternal. He knew the Eternal, and we are told he “loved” the Eternal. That’s quite a statement to be able to make about a man—that he *really* loved God. And God’s obvious response to that is seen:

1 Kings 3

AKJV

⁵ In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give you.

Here you are, you know, with a lot of problems in your life, a lot of things you are trying to overcome, a lot of things you’re trying to accomplish. And here you are and all of a sudden you’re praying and you fall into a trance and God appears to you and he says, “John, ask what I shall give you.” What would you ask for? What would you want? What would you seek? You’d hate to be given that question without a little time to think about it, wouldn’t you? Like the guy in the boat who caught this fish that offered him three wishes if he let him go (you’ve seen a commercial?) so he asked for a beer. His friend said, “Just one?” Then he said it tasted, so good he asked for another one. And, you know, it’s really kind of funny...we oftentimes don’t realize...you know, we get that one wish, you wish for some particular thing you’re after, but when you’ve got it all of a sudden you’re going to have a new need to meet tomorrow. Solomon said:

1 Kings 3

AKJV

⁶ [...] You have showed to your servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before you in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with you; and you have kept for him this great kindness, that you have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

⁷ And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.

⁸ And your servant is in the middle of your people which you have chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.

⁹ Give therefore your servant an understanding heart to judge your people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this your so great a people?

Now, you put yourself in the position of God for a moment, and you find a man who really loves you, and you’re drawn to love him, too, for he is apparently a very lovable man, and you just reveal yourself to him a dream and say, “Ask what you want. I’m going to give it to you.” And he thinks a moment and in his prayer he says, “What I want you to do is to give me a wise and understanding heart so I can judge your people fairly and right.” Would that make you feel good—to see that a man would ask for that instead of asking for something, you know, so selfish or just something that he could’ve just bestowed upon his own desires or lusts or feelings or appetites. It made God feel good. It says:

1 Kings 3

¹⁰ And the speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing.

¹¹ And God said to him, Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked for yourself long life; neither have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies; but have asked for yourself understanding to discern judgment;

¹² Behold, I have done according to your words: see, I have given you a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like you before you, neither after you shall any arise like to you.

¹³ And I have also given you that which you have not asked, both riches, and honor: so that there shall not be any among the kings like to you all your days.

¹⁴ And if you will walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as your father David did walk, then I will lengthen your days.

Man, what a beautiful promise. And he got all this because he asked for *understanding*—you know, a wise and understanding heart. Now, wisdom is defined as “the ability to judge soundly and deal sagaciously with facts, especially as they relate to life and conduct.” You know, it’s the ability to make a wise decision, to make a good decision, a profitable one—one that that will bring good to yourself and other people concerned as opposed to having things go all sour and all wrong. Understanding is defined as “the ability to apprehend or grasp the meaning of things.” To understand what’s going on, to know the meaning, to not merely accumulate a bunch of facts and knowledge and statistics, but to be able to put them together, to to assimilate them, to be able to synthesize them into something more, and to be able to grapple with *meaning* out of what would otherwise simply be nothing more than knowledge. It is a tremendous gift. And it is interesting enough that this particular gift came to Solomon from the Lord as a supernatural gift, but he’s not the only man who ever had the gift of wisdom. For Solomon began a tradition of exalting wisdom, of collecting and collating it, putting it in order, and laying it out in different categories, and putting together sayings of wise men of all ages and of all generations, and of holding wisdom *high up* on a pedestal.

I want you to turn back to the obvious place—you know where I’m going, probably, already—the Book of Proverbs. For here is the collection where Solomon put together, I would have to say, one of the most important...No question. Even if you’re looking at it from a purely secular or human point of view, it *has* to be one of the most important collections of the wisdom of man ever put together in one book in one place. And, of course, if you look at it at a little higher plane, you have to realize it is *the* most important collection of wisdom ever put together. Proverbs 1 and verse 1:

Proverbs 1

¹ The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel;

² To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;

³ To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;

⁴ To give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

⁵ A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain to wise counsels:

⁶ To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.

⁷ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

⁸ My son, hear the instruction of your father, and forsake not the law of your mother:

⁹ For they shall be an ornament of grace to your head, and chains about your neck.

Now, I want you to imagine, for a moment, a family who had from their earliest recall taken *this* passage of scripture as their family motto. They’ve actually had it printed up on a little plaque and kept it on the

walls of the rooms of their houses and it was from great-grandfather to grandfather to father to son passed on they had old family heirlooms and wisdom and knowledge and instruction and little mottoes like “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” [Proverbs 9:10, Psalm 111:10]. I want you to imagine a family that through about four generations had really made that their working motto. That that thing which they exalted was more important to them than houses or land, was more important than the accumulation of wealth (although the accumulation of wealth was acceptable and they could certainly do that). It was more important to them than anything that they be sure that they maintain their commitment to wisdom, their exaltation of wisdom, that wisdom was the principal thing, that knowledge was good but the understanding of the knowledge was *essential*. This was their thing, thought *four generations* of people. What kind of family do you think that be? What sort of children do you suppose they would have? Do you think it would be a family that, by and large, was rich or poor? You’ve got the rich over here and the poor over here. Where you think they would fall along that spectrum of economic welfare after four generations of living by these principles that I just read to you here?

Do you think it would make any difference? Do you suppose there would be more successes or more failures? Naturally, somebody in the family is going to fail. But, in balance, do you think more of them would be successes in life are more of them would be failures in life? On a scale of an honest man over here and a crook over here, where do you think they would fall on that spectrum—somebody who really had worked at, parent teaching their children? I think you’d have to find some difference, wouldn’t you, between these people and a family that didn’t do this?

Would they be lucky or unlucky? Well, surely that doesn’t make any difference, does it? Oh yeah, oh yeah, you bet it does. Because, you see, a wise man will not expose himself to the *bad* risks. He’ll only depend on luck when the odds are in his favor. And he’ll wind up looking lucky because he’ll be in the right place at the right time, because he has decided to take chances only when the chances favor him and not when they favor the other guy. Oh yeah, they will look like *lucky* people.

Will they be powerful or a helpless type of people? You know, the people over here are close to the seats of power and the people over here are oppressed and downtrodden and helpless and unable to affect the outcome of things around them—where do you think all these people would fall? You don’t have to think very hard about that, do you? You don’t have to really think hard about it, at all. You realize that if people will set out and begin to make *wisdom* a family tradition, it has got to make a difference in the *way* they’re going to be living, in *where* they’re going to be living, in how much *power* they have, how much *wealth* they have got, how much effect they have on the world around them. All of this grows out of *wisdom*. Knowledge and wisdom and understanding will *always* rule over ignorance. Even men who know *nothing* about the Bible know *that*.

So which would you rather be: a man of knowledge, a man of understanding or a man of ignorance? Now, it’s easy to decide what you would *rather*, but can you understand that there is a way to be one as opposed to being the other? Because it isn’t a matter of genetics; it is a matter of tradition. In the 2nd chapter of the Book of Proverbs: What is the ultimate source of wisdom? Where does wisdom ultimately come from? Chapter two, verse one:

Proverbs 2

AKJV

- ¹ My son, if you will receive my words, and hide my commandments with you;
- ² So that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding;
- ³ Yes, if you cry after knowledge, and lift up your voice for understanding;
- ⁴ If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures;
- ⁵ Then shall you understand the fear of the LORD[.]

Now, there is such a thing as *knowing* the fear of the Lord without *understanding* the fear of the Lord. Where are you on that? Do you *know* about it or you *understand* it? He’s talking about understanding.

Proverbs 2

AKJV

⁵ Then shall you understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.

⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom: [...]

What's your ultimate source? Write it down—it's God, it's the Lord.

Proverbs 2

AKJV

⁶ [...] out of his mouth comes knowledge and understanding.

Knowledge is one thing, but a grasp of the *meaning* of that knowledge and the *relationship* of that knowledge to other knowledge is another matter. Out of God's mouth comes both knowledge *and* understanding.

Proverbs 2

AKJV

⁷ He lays up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly.

⁸ He keeps the paths of judgment, and preserves the way of his saints.

⁹ Then shall you understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yes, every good path.

That's where it comes from. What are, then, the *results* of wisdom, seeing where it comes from? Chapter two, verse ten:

Proverbs 2

AKJV

¹⁰ When wisdom enters into your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul;

That's interesting. Once it's there—once that love of wisdom, that appreciation of wisdom—once you have begun to develop in your life and in those around you (and never forget, the Bible says the those who walk with the wise should become wise [Proverbs 13:20]) and in your circle of acquaintances, in the people you're with, when wisdom is exalted and knowledge is upheld—once that wisdom begins to enter into your heart and knowledge becomes pleasant to your soul, *discretion* comes on the scene.

What's discretion? Well, discretion is the ability to make decisions—really almost without thought—that keep you out of trouble as opposed to getting you in trouble. It's simple things like not opening your mouth and saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. Some of us feel like we have a gift for that, you know, for saying just exactly the wrong thing at the wrong time. You know, people who always have that fit word, people who have a knack. And don't you know people who seem like they always have the right thing to say and they don't put their foot in their mouth. They weren't, as some of us were, born with a silver foot in their mouth. They always have a good word to say. They're always able to be helpful. They seem to be able to give a careful answer instead of the impulsive answer. Why is that? Well, I'll tell you something. They are that way because they were *trained* to be that way. From the time they were little, bitty children, the examples that they were set before them were that way. Wisdom was exalted. Discretion (that is, withholding your speech until you've got something worth saying) was held up. They were taught these things from the time they were little ones—the value of saying the right thing and how important it is not to always be popping off at the mouth. Everything that comes to your mind *isn't worth saying*. Do you know that? That's a profound piece of knowledge, isn't it? Every thought of your mind is not worth utterance, and sometimes you're better off just to simply stare back blankly at another person's face than you are to open your mouth and say something. That's discretion. It's the knowledge, the wisdom, the ability to keep your mouth shut. Why do I keep on talking about the mouth? Aren't there other things? Oh, yes. It's just that *that's* the one where it always seems to come to the crunch the

quickest.

The discretion affects *so* many things that a person may do in his life, and the decisions that he makes (sometimes has to make them quickly). Discretion is that quality that enables you to make the *right* decision quickly, almost automatically, because of what has been placed in your heart and your soul, and your knowledge of what is right and what is wrong and what is seemly and what is unseemly and what is fit and what is proper and what is not. It goes on to say discretion will be there when you come to this particular point in your life:

Proverbs 2

AKJV

¹¹ Discretion shall preserve you, understanding shall keep you[.]

And, boy, it makes such a difference when you understand a set of facts that are put at your disposal about the way people are behaving, and that understanding is one of the things that gives you the discretion. When you know what's coming down it's a lot easier to respond to it then it is if you haven't got it put together.

Proverbs 2

AKJV

¹¹ Discretion shall preserve you, understanding shall keep you:

¹² To deliver you from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaks fraudulent things;

¹³ Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness;

¹⁴ Who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked;

¹⁵ Whose ways are crooked, and they fraudulent in their paths:

¹⁶ To deliver you from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flatters with her words;

¹⁷ Which forsakes the guide of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her God.

¹⁸ For her house inclines to death, and her paths to the dead.

¹⁹ None that go to her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life.

Even these decisions that revolve around the impulses of the body, the passions of the body, the biological drives, the discretion that's involved in those is a much simpler thing when understanding is present. You know, when just a simple, clear, logical analysis of what is involved in a case of adultery or fornication should lead a man with intelligent, you know, foresight and self-interest to stay away from it. It should lead him to say, "There's no future here. There's nothing in that for me. There is pleasure that maybe lasts for an hour in that whole situation and after that there's nothing but regret, and I wind up being nothing but the loser." When the mind is in control, it's a *piece of cake* to make a decision about something like that. But when the body's in control it is also a piece of cake—but the problem is that the decision is probably going to be wrong. It's made easily. It's made quickly. But it's made without discretion.

Proverbs 2

AKJV

²⁰ That you may walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous.

²¹ For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it.

²² But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it.

Now, that's basically the results of wisdom. Okay, what's the *starting point* for wisdom? We can ask you a whole bunch of question and we can answer them one at a time just marching right through the Book of Proverbs. Here they all are. What's the starting point for it? I love the way that chapter three begins because, truth to tell, right here is the basic, fundamental starting point for wisdom.

¹ My son, forget not my law; but let your heart keep [*that is, retain*] my commandments[...]

I wonder how many of you could recite, in order, the Ten Commandments. I bet you I'll find a higher percentage of the children in here that would be able to do than adults. I won't take a poll right here and now, because a lot of us adults haven't looked at it in a long time, might not be that quick, we might not get it word for word right, but a lot of the children can do that. Boy, that's good. Do you know what the value of that is? That at a very early age—and from maybe your earliest reactions we you are up here as a teenager—you can sit there and knock off the Ten Commandments just like that and know exactly what all of them say and not even remember that much about when you learned them? Man, the value of that.

Now, that's not a big thing. It's not some huge, gigantic thing. It's not some task that is so monumental and overpowering that I don't even know how to grab hold of it. It's not that big a deal to teach children the Ten Commandments, is it? Reckon why more people don't do that? Reckon why more people don't, let's say, start at the very young ages with their children and begin teaching them—not only the Ten Commandments, but the Law of God in general, and all the principles of it and explaining the ramifications of it, and why some aspects of it were very valid for that time and cannot be applied the same way today (for example, the laws regarding slavery)? You may have a little trouble with some of them but there's nothing even wrong with telling your children—when asked certain questions—“You know, honey, I don't know the answer to that. I'll see if I can find out.” There are some things, of course, that are for God to know and for us *not to know* and we'll have to put up with that. But, nevertheless, to teach the child God's Law so that he understands the most *fundamental principles* of wisdom—the knowledge... You see, wisdom has to do with how a person puts knowledge together and uses it. And without the knowledge there is no way to go and no place to go. The foundations, therefore, of wisdom—of Godly wisdom—have to be God's Law. There it is, bang.

¹ My son, forget not my law; but let your heart keep my commandments:

² For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to you.

Now, let me ask you something, parents: If you had it in your power today—if you just knew right now in your power that you could *guarantee* for your child long life and peace and health, would you do it? Maybe you'd be willing to sign a paper if I got a little document up here that you could guarantee it for them, would you come up here and sign the paper? What would you pay? To *guarantee it*, to actually lock it in right now, today, that your child would have a long life, peace, happiness, and everything that goes with it. You know, to guarantee that—I mean actually lock it in right now, today—that you have a long life, peace, and happiness; everything would go real well for them along the way—length of days, long life in peace. You'd pay a lot, wouldn't you? According to what I just read here, all it really costs you is some time with your children.

It costs you some time with your children, sitting down with the Bible, with God's Law. (Spending a little time in preparation because you better be ready. You start trying to teach your children when you have not prepared and it will not be one of your best sermonettes.) But when you're ready and you can sit down, you'll take the time and you will begin to teach your children—even if it's only memorization to start with—the Law of God. If you'll take a little time to go through the other books of the Law, and begin to explain to them the Law and how it affected those ancient people—and there are a lot of good documents and books available that help you fill in the gaps in your knowledge and, of course, there's also the church that will help you fill in the gaps in your knowledge as time goes on. Go to those areas where you understand and know something about it. Don't go into the areas you're ignorant about, to start with. Don't get into the complicated and difficult parts; go to the *simple* things—the simple and straightforward things that everybody agrees on and can easily understand—and teach your children God's Law.

In the process of doing this, the foundation of long life, length of days, and peace are laid. They may not stay there, but at least you've done *your* part and all that's in *your* power to guarantee it, because this is a promise of God. He will do that if a person will do it and stick with it.

Proverbs 3

AKJV

³ Let not mercy and truth forsake you: [...]

Now, let me ask you something: do you think that this is a switch of subject? I want to tell you it's not a shift of subject because the Law of God, *without mercy* is a dangerous instrument. This is something, I think, many people have not understood: that without mercy the Law of God is a dangerous instrument. And one of the most fundamental things and one of the basic messages that Christ tried to get across to the Pharisees is that, "If you had understood what this means when I said, 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice.' you would not have condemned the guiltless. Now, what you been doing?" You know, they did not understand mercy and so, consequently, the Pharisees they charged off out of the night armed with nothing in the world but the Law of God and a *total absence of mercy* and could not understand why they did not have understanding and wisdom—because a key element was missing. First of all, you start with the Law of God, and then you add mercy.

Now, one of the nice things about teaching your children about the Law of God is that you love them and you're *inclined* to want to have mercy toward them, anyhow. And it is your inclination to be a little easier on them and not require every last farthing of penalty from them, and to extend mercy to them that gives you a beautiful chance to explain what mercy is. Mercy is that quality that involves the withholding of punishment even when the punishment is *deserved*. It doesn't mean you don't punish when they don't deserve it. It means there are times when they *do* deserve it that you don't punish, and you explain, "That is what is called 'Mercy.' You deserved to be thrashed within an inch of your life, but I'm not going to do it. I'm going to extend mercy." And you've got this reason or that reason or the other reason to do it. Or you can just say, "I don't really have a good reason for doing it...except for one, and that is to teach you the meaning of mercy, and that there is going to be a time in your life when you're going to have a chance to exact the last farthing of another man and I want you *not to do it*. And I want you to remember this day—when I could have done it to you and I didn't because of pure, unadulterated mercy and I want you to do it for the same reason."

It's important, frankly, as a man or woman gets on up in their lives, you interact with the world around you and you are not in the frame of mind of wanting everybody in the world to get what they deserve. Because it's rough. I don't want what *I* deserve. I know the kind of life that I have led up until now, if it were all weighed up in the balances, and there was not the sacrifice of Christ involved in it, and I got what I deserve for my life—I'd be dead. So I don't want what I deserve and I don't think you do either. Therefore you must not be prepared to give to other people what *they* deserve, else God *will* eventually exact what you deserve. And it's an important concept and it's one that *you* not only need to understand, it's something your *children* need to learn and to understand. This is part of the family tradition of wisdom.

Proverbs 3

AKJV

³ Let not mercy and truth forsake you: bind them about your neck; write them on the table of your heart:

Now, the Law's supposed to be there too, isn't it. I have heard a lot of emphasis over my lifetime about writing the Law on, you know, the hems of your garments or upon the wall of your house. I have a placard on my wall with the Ten Commandments up there. Probably what I need to do is put one right next to it that says "Mercy & Truth" because you can't have law without mercy and truth and have any kind of a balanced existence.

⁴ So shall you find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man.

Now, what a combination. You know, to be able to walk out in the world and to know that I'm going to have favor from God *and* man. You know, God's going to like me. Men are going to like me. Why is this going to be true? Because I basically live according to the Law of God and I also, at the same time, have tied around my neck like an albatross mercy and truth, and my family tradition is mercy and truth and the Law of God. You know, I think I could live next door to a man that felt that way, don't you? The men on both sides of me—both these guys are men who believe in keeping God's Law and are very dedicated to God's Law. But at the same time they're men who are also dedicated to truth and they're dedicated to mercy and they're not the sort of people who want to exact the last ounce of every penalty that a man might deserve. Boy, I'd like to have neighbors like that. (Maybe I do, actually. I don't know my neighbors as well as I'd like to.) But not very many people in this world probably measure up to this. But why not start with *your* family. You know, it would be nice to have somebody like this living next door to *you*, why not start teaching and trying to create a family tradition of your own so that your *neighbor*, at least, will have somebody like this living next to him.

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart; and lean not to your own understanding.

Ah, in other words, don't put quite so much trust in your own perceptions and your own surety. In my lifetime I've been blessed with being very good friends was some very wise men—some very intelligent men, yes, knowledgeable, yes, but also very wise—who had an incredible knack of insight and the ability to see and understand and grasp and to arrive at decisions oftentimes quickly, and had an extremely high ratio of accuracy in those decisions. An interesting thing about that: I also found that they had a tendency—all of them—to *rely* on this high ratio of accuracy in their wisdom and in their decisions to the extent that when natural caution should have exerted itself, it didn't.

I remember an interesting case when two very good friends of mine—two man of high intelligence, great moral integrity, two of the finest men I've ever known—were sitting down chatting over some problems. And both of them were, you know, managers, executives over large numbers of people, an ocean apart. And we were visiting with the one man over in England and my friend, from Pasadena, began to explain about some of the problems that he had back in Pasadena, "I've got this difficulty, I got that difficulty, and I've got the other difficulty." and my friend from England interrupted him and said, "Let me tell you how to handle that." You know, just, bang, just like that, he had an instant solution. The problem was, he was wrong. He answered a matter that he didn't really understand. He was talking to a man who was just smart as he was, just as converted as he was, fully as understanding, and a man who was living day-in and day-out with the problem. And he should have had that natural bit of caution they stepped up and said, "Wait, don't tell this man that you understand his problem. You've just been hearing what *he* told you. All you know is what *he* told you—and he may not have told you the whole story yet."

The point is, we have a tendency, once we begin to gain a bit of wisdom, to lose the natural caution that we ought to have and start *leaning* on and *relying* on our own understanding. A wise man, even as he gains in wisdom and grows in understanding, will have right along with it this *natural distrust* of human wisdom and of his own wisdom, in such a way as he will often say, "I *might* be wrong, but..."

Now, quite frankly, it's a good thing to work that into your habitual vocabulary. Because even when you don't feel it, if you say it, you force yourself to slow down just a little bit and you preserve at least the *appearance* of your reputation of wisdom. Because most of us have learned over a period of time—even if nobody had ever explained this, we would know this—that a fool utters all his mind, a wise man holds it in. That a fool can answer any old question that comes down the pike, a wise man often says, "I don't know." So if we just think about this a minute and we want to keep on *looking wise* we will say, "Well, I

might be wrong, but have you considered the possibility of trying it *this way*?” And you say that even when your insides are screaming out, “You fool! Why don’t you do it this way! This is clearly right; anybody ought to be able to see it!” Is that deceptive? Oh my, no. That’s not deceptive. That comes out of a man who may have learned, over a period of time, how easy it is to be wrong when you *think* you are right.

I don’t know, I have this thing about me: I just hate to be embarrassed over something, you know, where I have not got all my ducks in a row and I have made this confident pronouncement and somebody says, “Well, Ron did you know that…” and I say, “Oops. No, I didn’t know that.” And all of a sudden, I’m wrong. There was this thing that came up sometime back where somebody was trying to put the pressure on us about this calendar controversy thing that grew up a year or so ago. And someone got on my case because they thought that I was being subjective and not being willing to look at the truth because I didn’t agree with them on the counter-situation and I said, “Hey, I don’t have any bias about this matter. I don’t care which way the calendar is. It makes no difference to me, at all. In fact, if I had any bias it would be in the other direction from what you think it is.” Because, you know, it would be fun if you could find this new truth and something really new and, if you could say, to embarrass some people who have been wrong about something by twisting their tail a little bit over some doctrinal thing that they didn’t have right. You could have a little fun with that along the way. The problem is, you get busy and start twisting somebody’s tail, you don’t want to forget that there are some pretty smart theologians still out there. And if you don’t have all your ducks in a row, they are going to shoot them out of the water. You are going to suddenly find yourself high and dry, and your argument won’t hold up, and they are going to prove it, and you’re going to be embarrassed. I don’t like that feeling; that is a very embarrassing feeling. You have that happen to you a few times and it slows you down.

But I think that is a very important part of wisdom: don’t lean to your own understanding—don’t depend on it. Trust on *the Lord* with all your heart. That means, when you come up on things in the Bible and God tells you one thing and your own understanding tells you another thing, you’d better be careful about leaning to your own understanding. You’d better depend on God and depend on his word and put your weight down on his word rather than putting it down on how *you feel*

Proverbs 3

AKJV

⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths.

That’s always an interesting one to me. “In all your ways” doesn’t really make any exceptions, at all. And, of course, most of us will ask the blessing before our breakfast and dinner and so forth, and we pray, and we talk to God about the things that are really important in our life. And I don’t know just how far down he wants us to beat that. I don’t think you necessarily need to pray to God about what color shoes you’re going to buy, or this type of thing, but clearly we make a lot of decisions in our life that are sometimes of pretty serious import without consulting God, without praying about the matter, without even considering his will. Now, it didn’t even say, necessarily, that you have to always *pray* about it. It says “in all your ways *acknowledge* him”.

In other words, just say “God has said that you’re not supposed to do this sort of thing and I therefore I’m not going to do it.” Even to the point of saying, “Well, I don’t really believe that God’s will is even expressed on this subject.” You have acknowledged him, haven’t you? You have acknowledged the fact in that you have paused for a moment and said, “You know, does the Bible say anything about this? No, it doesn’t. Really, then, it would be kind of wrong for me to decide that this is right or wrong when *God* hasn’t even said whether it’s right or wrong, wouldn’t it?” That’s acknowledging God.

Proverbs 3

AKJV

⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths.

⁷ Be not wise in your own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.

⁸ It shall be health to your navel, and marrow to your bones.

⁹ Honor the LORD with your substance, and with the first fruits of all your increase:

And, of course, this is the purpose of tithing—to honor God.

Proverbs 3

AKJV

¹⁰ So shall your barns be filled with plenty, and your presses shall burst out with new wine.

¹¹ My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction:

¹² For whom the LORD loves he corrects; even as a father the son in whom he delights.

You can depend on the fact that when God corrects and chastises you it will always be done for your welfare and for your benefit—to make you better. Don't despise the chastening of the Lord. Now, you've got to be a little bit careful about *perceiving* the chastening of the Lord. Time and chance does happen to all men, we must never forget that. And I know that, in some cases, when some sort of malady strikes a given individual it's tempting to say, "Aha! See there? He disobeyed God and the Lord got him." That is not necessarily the case. But as far as you personally are concerned, it does you well, when things aren't going well, for you just jerk yourself up short and say, "Now, wait a minute. Have I really been thinking about God in the things that I'm doing? Am I really acknowledging him in the things that I'm doing? Have I begun to move away from him? Is what is happening here to get my attention and get me back where I belong?" You know, I've had that happen to me a few times my life, haven't you? Where I've been absolutely certain that God was *not* pleased with what I was doing and with the general direction in which I was going and if he didn't actually *cause* what has just happened to me he actually saw it coming and let it happen and I had better *learn* from what has just happened to me. Don't ever lose that awareness that God *can* and *will* and *is willing to* chasten you at any given moment. And when he does it, it will only be done because he wants you to be better, because he wants you to do better, and because he wants nothing but the best for you.

So the starting point for wisdom is God's Law and his correction and his teaching. Now, what is the value of wisdom? Verse 13:

Proverbs 3

AKJV

¹³ Happy is the man that finds wisdom, and the man that gets understanding.

¹⁴ For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.

¹⁵ She is more precious than rubies: and all the things you can desire are not to be compared to her.

You just can't get them even in the same ballpark

Proverbs 3

AKJV

¹⁶ Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honor.

How much do you want? What are you looking for in life? Do you want to be live to be an old man, you know, and see your grandchildren and maybe even be lucky enough to see a great-grandchild? Would you like to be honored by the people who are your friends and compatriots and colleagues, and respected by them? Would you like to have sufficient of this world's goods to not have to worry about things and to be able to give to your own family, and lay up for your children, and help the poor? Well here we're talking about these things coming to people who cherish, honor, and exalt *wisdom*.

Proverbs 3

AKJV

- ¹⁶ Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honor.
¹⁷ Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.
¹⁸ She is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her: and happy is every one that retains her.
¹⁹ The LORD by wisdom has founded the earth[....]

You want to know what wisdom can accomplish? It was wisdom in God that founded, that built, that formed the earth on which you and I walk.

Proverbs 3

AKJV

- ¹⁹ [...] by understanding has he established the heavens.

Walk outside tonight when it's dark and the sky clears, and look at the stars if you want to understand the power of understanding.

Proverbs 3

AKJV

- ²⁰ By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew.

That's a part of his design.

Proverbs 3

AKJV

- ²¹ My son, let not them depart from your eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion:
²² So shall they be life to your soul, and grace to your neck.
²³ Then shall you walk in your way safely, and your foot shall not stumble.
²⁴ When you lie down, you shall not be afraid: yes, you shall lie down, and your sleep shall be sweet.
²⁵ Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it comes.
²⁶ For the LORD shall be your confidence, and shall keep your foot from being taken.

Beautiful, isn't it? Now, the Book of Proverbs contains a collection of Solomon's wisdom and it falls out in multiplied categories and you can spend hours and hours studying this book and trying to understand and put together the concepts of it, and they are simple and they are beautiful. Take, for example, verse 27 that follows:

Proverbs 3

AKJV

- ²⁷ Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do it.
²⁸ Say not to your neighbor, Go, and come again, and to morrow I will give; when you have it by you.

Now, you might initially think that this is a matter of helping the poor, but that's not what it's about. The margin says "Don't do not withhold good from the *owners thereof*." What it's talking about is paying your bills. You know, somebody sends you a bill and he's done the work on your house, or he's done the work in your yard, or he dug up that ditch and he's put that pipe in there and covered it back up and did a good job for it, and he comes around with a bill in his hand and says, "Would you mind paying this for me?"

You know I need it; I've got to pay some bills of my own." And you've *got* the money, but because you want to hang on to it to, say, earn that last ounce of interest on it or whatever reason you've got you say, "Well, look, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll pay you next week" or "I'll pay you next month" or "I'll get around to paying you somewhere." He said, "Don't do that. Here's wisdom, you want it?"

Proverbs 3

AKJV

²⁷ Withhold not good from [the owners thereof], when it is in the power of your hand to do it.

²⁸ Say not to your neighbor, Go, and come again, and to morrow I will give; when you have it by you.

²⁹ Devise not evil against your neighbor, seeing he dwells securely by you.

That little piece of wisdom just simply builds a reliance in you, a confidence in you, on the part of people you do business with. I woke up one day and realized that I had been negligent in paying some of the people that do certain types of work for me—not because I'm trying to put them off but because I just get busy and I forget them. And then I wonder why I have difficulty getting them out to the house to the job the next time. It makes a big difference in your relationship with working people who need their money if you show up on the job and pay in cash the minute they finish it so they've got money and they can go spend it right now. There's a lot of working people who do things like tapping & bedding or painting or sheet-rocking that depend on that money to feed their children—sometimes that week—and they haven't got some bank account where they can make it last until the next week or the month after that. They need to be paid right now. They'll put up with it, and they'll get by and somehow or another struggle, but they may be forced to borrow money and pay interest on that money in order to feed their kids on the following week—when you could have paid them this week. Well, you know, that's not what a wise man does. That's not what a godly man does. It is not the right way.

Now, here's a principle which you would think, "Well, I'll just look at myself and he looks out for himself" but in the *long run* you are not going to be as successful as you will if you follow the principle of don't withhold good from somebody it's due to, on the due date, when you got it in your hand to pay it. Just don't do that. Isn't that beautiful?

Proverbs 3

AKJV

³⁰ Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done you no harm.

I remember one day—we were on a trip and we had gone across on a ferry from England to France, and we had a ticket for the ferry. I'd gotten in the car, we drove up on the ferry, and I gave the ticket to the guy, and so forth. We went on the boat. We got to the other side, got our luggage and car, and drove up to the gate to leave the ferry grounds, and the guy says, "I've got to have the other half of your ticket for you to leave." I said, "What other half of the ticket?" I didn't have the other half of the ticket. He said, "Well, there was another half of your ticket." I said, "No, the guy, when I came in, he took my ticket. I don't have my ticket anymore." "Well, you can't leave without a ticket." Well, I blew up at him—I mean, I chewed him up one side and down the other. I really gave him what for.

The problem was that the man was just a guard. He just a Frenchman up there trying to his job. He'd been given his instructions as what to do: you don't let anybody out of here without his ticket, because there could be some deadbeat trying to pull some deal on us. So they've got to have a ticket to get out. He said, "I'm sorry, you'll have to go back and see the purser on the ship." Well, I got frustrated and went back to see the purser on the ship, raised Cain, raised Cain. Finally, I got out of there. I think it was afterward, when I got where I was going, that I picked up my suit jacket, dropped my hand in the pocket of my suit jacket, and there was the other half of that ticket. Oh, I felt *awful*—*really* felt awful. And it wasn't that long after that I was reading along in the Book of Proverbs and I hit this scripture and, I mean, it just stopped me like I was walking along at a good clip and ran into a brick wall.

³⁰ Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done you no harm.

And that gate guard hadn't done me any harm. And I didn't help his day along any better. Maybe he was thick-skinned enough by this time and had seen enough "Ugly Americans" that he didn't let it bother him that much. But it was not the thing that a wise man would do. If my family had a tradition of exalting wisdom, and in our family we knew enough not to shout at people who couldn't shout back, not to chew out people when it wasn't their fault, not to get on people's back when they're just trying to do their job, we might avoid making ourselves look like fools or bigots or just blustery, old nuts at times, as we sometimes do, if we just could follow simple, little principles of wisdom.

Now, I could take the rest of the afternoon, I think, in going on through and illustrating principles out of the Book of Proverbs. It's fun to do. I love to do it because there is so much *life* in this book; it's almost worth a verse-by-verse discussion from one end of it to the other. I think maybe it's more important because you can go through the Book of Proverbs, and you can read it carefully, and you're going to feel bad enough like a fool just by reading the things you get off the top without me trying to *explain* how much of a fool you are in the process. I'm going to pass on over that right now. I want to ask you what may be a more important question: How do you go about losing wisdom? If you've got it, or if you had it, how do you go about getting rid of it?

I'm reminded of a story in the Old Testament when David had to flee before Absalom. It's a long story, and one that I won't go back and try to read to you. But Absalom had more or less deviously worked his way around and gotten a lot of friends and was in the process of performing a coup which would have ended up in his own father's death and Absalom taking over the kingdom. There was a man who had been David's advisor and was an advisor in the kingdom during this period of time named Ahithophel. And we're told about Ahithophel that:

2 Samuel 16

KJ2000

²³ And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counseled in those days, was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God[....]

That man I had such a record of wise counsel that they said you were no better off going up to the temple and enquiring of Urim and Thummim and having your decision made by *God himself* than you were to just ask Ahithophel—*the man has wisdom*. And, of course, an awful lot of the decisions that God would give you are decisions that, if you just simply were man of wisdom, you could make yourself. So this Ahithophel aligned himself with Absalom. As David fled, the man named Hushai the Archite came to him and was going to go with him.

2 Samuel 15

KJ2000

³³ Unto whom David said, If you go on with me, then you shall be a burden unto me:

³⁴ But if you return to the city, and say unto Absalom, I will be your servant, O king; as I have been your father's servant in time past, so will I now also be your servant: then you may for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel.

Well, there came a point in time where Absalom consulted these men. He asked Ahithophel, "What shall we do?" and Ahithophel—the wise man—said: [2 Samuel 17:1–4] "You better go after David right now. You'd better gather every soldier you've got. You better go *whole hog*; we've got to go *all the way* on this and we've got to *destroy* David, and we've got to do it *right now* while they're running."

Absalom turned and said, "Okay, well, I've got to ask Hushai the Archite." Hushai—who happened to be

David's man—came in and said:

“I'll tell you what: you'd better realize that those men around David are some old warhorses that I don't know for sure if you want to mess with.” In modern mountain man parlance, they've been up the creek and over the mountain. They were men with the bark on. They wore out their clothes from the inside. They were tough. And he says, “Those guys are like wounded bears right now, and if you go charging off out there trying to fight these men they're going to be backed up in a corner. And you're not just fighting a bunch of little, old ladies from Pasadena; you're fighting against *the mighty men of David*—loyal to him and who would give their lives for him. And if you go out after him and you *lose that battle*, the word will go all over the country that there has been a great slaughter, and everybody will turn back to David, and you'll be standing there all by yourself.”

He created just the right amount of fear, and they listened to him instead of listening to Ahithophel. And the Bible says they did so

2 Samuel 17

AKJV

¹⁴ For the LORD had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring evil on Absalom.

Ahithophel was right. Hushai was a spy. And they listened to the wrong person. I think it's a rather fascinating illustration of the sort of thing that can happen. Right after this decision was made to go with Hushai's advice instead of Ahithophel's advice, Ahithophel went in and hanged himself—he committed suicide—because his counsel was rejected.

And this, I think, is one of the ways in which wisdom begins to get away from us. When there is advice contrary to sound wisdom (and sometimes contrary to God's word and sometimes contrary to God's Law) and you listen to that advice or you begin to doubt your own counsel or your own wisdom as a result of it, the effect of that can be pretty bad. And I think a lot of men out there began to doubt their own perceptions of right and wrong. Now I want you to turn back to the first chapter of Proverbs again, where it really basically tells us in the simplest possible terms *how it is* that you lose wisdom (just in case any of you want to know). Verse 20 of Proverbs 1:

Proverbs 1

AKJV

²⁰ Wisdom cries without; she utters her voice in the streets:

²¹ She cries in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she utters her words, saying,

²² How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?

²³ Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit to you, I will make known my words to you.

Wisdom is not way off somewhere. According to the analogies in the Book of Proverbs, wisdom is wandering up and down the streets looking for *you*. Not necessarily the other way around; she's not hiding out in the corners and the dark caves. You don't have to go climb to the top of the Himalayas or go wandering off down on Mount Sinai in the Sinai Peninsula—wisdom is wandering around the streets of Tyler, Texas looking for you *today* according to the analogy of the Book of Proverbs. He says:

Proverbs 1

AKJV

²³ Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit to you, I will make known my words to you.

I'm not going to hide them.

Proverbs 1

AKJV

²⁴ Because I have called, and you refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded;
²⁵ But you have set at nothing all my counsel [...]

Who's talking? Wisdom, personified, is talking.

Proverbs 1

AKJV

²⁵ But you have set at nothing all my counsel, and would none of my reproof:
²⁶ I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear comes;

There is, you know, a spirit of wisdom. The Bible speaks—there are actually about four scriptures or so in the Bible that actually mention a “spirit of wisdom”. And it is definitely possible for a person to *lose* the spirit of wisdom. And certainly, whenever you begin to see people making foolish decisions, when you begin to sit back and say, “You know, it seems to me so logical what should be done.”—and nobody can seem to see it, nobody seems to be willing to do it—you began to realize that there are some *terrible* constraints overriding what wisdom is calling for. And people have stopped listening to wisdom. And when you stop listening to wisdom, wisdom stops looking for you.

Proverbs 1

KJV

²⁶ I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;
²⁷ When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.
²⁸ Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me:

That would be horrible, wouldn't it? To be suddenly thinking in terms of “I need some wisdom. Boy, what I need is wisdom. Boy, what I need is wisdom at this point in my life!” and just not be able to find it *anywhere*. Because, you see, when you get to a certain point in your life you don't even know who to listen to anymore. You don't even know how to know who's telling the truth anymore.

Proverbs 1

KJV

²⁹ For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD:

How do you lose wisdom? There it is: You hate knowledge—you don't want to know—and you do not choose the fear of God as opposed to the fear of something or somebody else.

Proverbs 1

KJV

³⁰ They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.
³¹ Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.
³² For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.

Prosperity doesn't destroy; prosperity destroys *a fool*, not a wise man. Prosperity can help, and given to a

wise man can be used to help others—but it destroys fools.

Proverbs 1

KJV

³³ But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.

It's beautiful, isn't it. You lose wisdom just by turning away from it, not listening to it, rejecting it. And the funny thing about it is: just like Absalom turned away from Ahithophel, he turned away from the man with the best record of wisdom in the whole kingdom. He turned away from a proven, known source of wisdom and listened to somebody else. Why do you do that? He did it, essentially, because he was afraid. He did it, probably, because in the process of attempting this coup he had *already* acted contrary to the course of wisdom. The course of wisdom called for the man to be subject to his father, to be loyal to his father, to be obedient to his father, to stay in his father's kingdom and do the best he could. But he *deliberately* tried to undercut *his own father* and we did that, his end was there. Turning now, if you will, back to Proverbs the ninth chapter. Here is the beautiful song of wisdom:

Proverbs 9

AKJV

- ¹ Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars:
- ² She has killed her beasts; she has mingled her wine; she has also furnished her table.
- ³ She has sent forth her maidens: she cries on the highest places of the city,
- ⁴ Whoever is simple, let him turn in here: as for him that wants understanding, she said to him,
- ⁵ Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.
- ⁶ Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding.
- ⁷ He that reproves a scorner gets to himself shame: and he that rebukes a wicked man gets himself a blot.
- ⁸ Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate you: rebuke a wise man, and he will love you.

Man, that's a beautiful concept. Correct a wise man and he will love you. There's a test, there's a test. Because if you rebuke a person and he hates you, what's it told you? If you correct him—point out an error—to a *wise* man, he'll love you.

Proverbs 9

AKJV

- ⁹ Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.
- ¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.
- ¹¹ For by me your days shall be multiplied, and the years of your life shall be increased.

Now, you stop and think about it for a moment: What's your family tradition? What are the things that your family exalts? What are the things that you hold up *high* for everyone in your family to strive toward and look for and want and to seek after. Well, the Jewish people, traditionally, have held up wisdom. And you can see the fruits of that tradition in the lives of many of their people. You wouldn't want to necessarily judge a nation by one of its people, would you? But we all know, don't we, that Jewish people have always gravitated toward the seats of power; they have always been powerful and influential people; that among those people who are in, let's say, the merchant class of the world that Jews have long been dominant in that class of people; that among the artistic and expressive arts, in particular, and the performing arts, the Jewish people have always been right up in the forefront of the whole thing. How did they get there? Did they get there by chicanery and cheating and lying and so forth? A lot of people believe that. I don't. I believe it's because they have held those things up as goals—as honorable goals—

to be striven toward for their children, generation after generation after generation. What do you hold up for your family?

Finally, in conclusion, verse 12:

Proverbs 9

AKJV

¹² If you be wise, you shall be wise for yourself: but if you scorn, you alone shall bear it.

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