

## **Priceless Wisdom** **By David Feddes**

*It cannot be bought with the finest gold... the price of wisdom is beyond rubies. Job 28:15,18*

How much money does it take to buy a good education? Apparently, even huge amounts aren't enough to do the job if other things are lacking. You can spend unlimited money on schools, but if you have administrators who don't manage well, or teachers who don't teach well, or students who don't learn well, or parents who don't live well, or a general atmosphere of disorder and decaying morals that makes it impossible to do anything well, the money would do about as much good going down a garbage disposal.

In the United States and Canada, public school spending keeps going up, but achievement is not going up. Over a period of three decades, total spending per student in elementary and secondary public schools doubled, even adjusting for inflation. Thanks to spending increases, the number of students per teacher is the lowest it has ever been, and the number of computers and other equipment is the highest it has ever been. But students aren't learning any better.

If you think that expensive facilities and highly paid experts are the key to good education, just look at the results achieved by home schooling. More and more parents are bypassing schools entirely and teaching their children at home. Most of these children don't have lavish facilities, most of the parents aren't certified teachers or experts, and yet the *average* home schooled child outperforms more than 80 percent of all students on standardized tests.

Politicians and the teachers' unions sometimes make it sound like we could solve all our problems if only we spent more money on public schools. But more money isn't always the answer. The cost of schools keeps going up, but the quality of schools doesn't. Rich schools are producing poor learners. Christian schools on a modest budget, and homeschooling parents with no special expertise at all, produce better results than school districts with enormous budgets.

I'm not saying that all money spent on education is wasted or that public schools never teach anything worth learning. Many teachers work hard to help kids learn important information and master valuable skills. But even if a school succeeds in doing this, even if it succeeds in helping students to make a living, is it helping students to see what makes life worth living?

When we see that some schools can't even produce better test scores with all the money they spend, we're only looking at the tip of the iceberg. Forget the test scores for a moment. What about common sense? What about character? What about moral decisions? What about the way children relate to other people? What about the way they relate to God?

True wisdom isn't based on technology or budgets. It's rooted in God. Any approach to learning that doesn't begin with God is an approach that can't provide the wisdom we need. And any approach that does begin with God usually ends up doing a lot of other things right as well.

### **Beyond Technology or Money**

Where can we find wisdom? Can we discover it if we do enough research and exploration? Can we buy it if we come up with enough money? Or do we need something else entirely? The Bible answers these questions in the book of Job, chapter 28. This chapter is full of amazement at human genius in technology and exploration, in money and economic matters, but as good as these things might be, they're not enough. They don't give us a handle on wisdom.

Job speaks of the technology and skill involved in mining. Silver and gold, iron and copper, precious stones—these things are hidden far below the surface of the earth, but people figure out ways to get at them and refine them. People know how to dig down where no animal can go, they know how to bring light into the darkest areas, and they know how to find what they're looking for. Job says, "Man's hand assaults the flinty rock and lays bare the roots of the mountains. He tunnels through the rock; his eyes see all its treasures. He searches the sources of the rivers and brings hidden things to light" (28:9-11). Whether we talk about the mines and tunnels and architectural wonders of the ancient world, or about the cars and computers and skyscrapers of our own day, it's astonishing what people are capable of doing.

But no matter how many discoveries we make, no matter what technology we develop, we're still not any closer to finding the wisdom we need to guide our decisions and make sense of our lives. Sure, we can send shuttles out into space and submarines down to the ocean floor and mining equipment into the depths of the earth. "But," says Job, "where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell? Man does not comprehend its worth. It cannot be found in the land of the living. The deep says, 'It is not in me'; the sea says, 'It is not with me'" (28:12-14).

We can look high and low, we can explore all the wonders of science, but we still find ourselves wondering, "What does it all mean? Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where are we headed? How shall we live?" In order to have real wisdom, we need answers to those questions, but those aren't the kind of questions that exploration can answer. Wisdom isn't a thing lying around somewhere waiting to be found and processed by the technology of experts and specialists.

If wisdom isn't a thing you can discover through research or technology, it certainly isn't a thing you can buy with money. People have come up with amazing ways of creating wealth and handling financial transactions, but wisdom isn't for sale. No fortune is enough to pay for it. Job 28 says, "It cannot be bought with the finest gold, nor can its price be weighed in silver... the price of wisdom is beyond rubies" (Job 28:15,18). Spending more money on education can't even buy higher test scores. How can money possibly buy true wisdom?

If you put together all the information and technology in the world, if you add up all the wealth in the world, you're still no closer to wisdom than you ever were. You can't find wisdom no matter how long you search for it, and if you could find it, you wouldn't be able to buy it.

Wisdom "cannot be bought with pure gold," says Job, then asks again, "Where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell? It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing, concealed even from the birds of the air. Destruction and Death say, 'Only a rumor of it has reached our ears'" (Job 28:20-22). Nobody alive can find wisdom on his own. Even if you could explore the realm of the dead, you wouldn't find what you were looking for. Why is that? Job's answer is simple: "God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells."

### **The Fear of The Lord**

We can't find wisdom on our own, because God is the only One who knows everything and has made everything.

"He alone knows where [wisdom] dwells, for he views the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. When he established the force of the wind and measured out the waters, when he made a decree for the rain and a path for the thunderstorm, then he looked at wisdom and appraised it; he confirmed it and tested it. And he said to man, 'The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding'" (Job 28:23-28).

Know what that means? It means that the Lord who designed the patterns of creation also determined the pattern of wisdom. The fear of the Lord is wisdom, just as surely as air movement is wind or cloud condensation is rain. To shun evil is understanding, just as to shun jumping from tall buildings is understanding. To shun jumping from tall buildings shows the understanding of how to live in a universe where gravity is an inescapable law; to shun evil shows understanding of how to live in a universe where justice is an inescapable law.

Our world is so in awe of science and technology that many people depend on human research without divine revelation. And we're so in love with money that we focus more on financial value than spiritual values. But research without revelation is a dead end: we end up being all information and no wisdom. And value without values is just as deadly: we become so concerned with net worth that we become morally worthless. A godless education, even if it provides lots of information, is a disaster.

There's a story about the brilliant mathematician, Eugene Wigner. He was visiting a prominent university, and one of the students was eager to meet him. But the student didn't dare to approach the great man for fear of interrupting some deep thought. One day, though, the student saw Professor Wigner at the post office. Wigner was holding an envelope in one hand, and smacking himself on the forehead with the palm of his other hand. He grimaced and paced back and forth, obviously tortured and trying to solve some impossible problem. Again, the student hesitated to interrupt, thinking the genius might be on the verge of proving an important theorem right there on the back of an envelope. But when the professor began to look even more desperate, the student blurted out, "May I be of assistance, Professor Wigner?" At that the genius looked up, startled, and said, "Oh, yes, Wigner!" He scribbled his name onto the top left corner of the envelope and dropped it into the mail. For a moment he had forgotten his own name.

Now, you might laugh at a genius who can solve impossible math problems but can't even remember who he is. But a lot of us are in the same position. We know more information than any previous age, but many of us don't even know who we are. We don't act as though we're creatures formed by a great and infinite God. God designed us to honor him and shun evil, but we don't seem to realize that. We don't know who we are.

Research without revelation, financial value without spiritual values—this kind of approach can't possibly produce true wisdom. "God alone knows where wisdom dwells," says Job. "And he said to man, 'The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.'"

Job knew that this kind of wisdom is the only thing that can tell us who we are, the only thing that can hold us up when everything else fails. Job knew that wisdom isn't being able to figure everything out. Job lost his wealth, his health, and his children. He went through tragedies that he couldn't understand and that nobody else could understand. None of his friends could come up with the right thing to say to him.

At a time like that, you realize more than ever that there are some things technology can't control, some things money can't buy. What sort of wisdom can bring you through a situation like that? Job found that whatever else you can't understand, whatever else you can't buy, you need to fear God and shun evil. The book of Job begins by saying that Job was a prosperous man who feared God and shunned evil (1:1), and later in the story, although Job lost everything and was no longer prosperous, he still had one thing left: the wisdom to fear God and shun evil.

Many people are concerned, and rightly so, about schools producing students who can't balance a checkbook or read simple instructions. But what about all those students who don't really know who they are, who can't hold on to God through good times and bad, who don't save

their bodies for marriage or devote their minds to God or deal with hardship through faith rather than through drugs? Godless education is costing us terribly.

The Bible reveals a wisdom that begins with God, a wisdom that shows us who we are, a wisdom that directs our attitude and behavior no matter what happens around us. This is a wisdom beyond the reach of research, beyond the price of money, a wisdom that comes only through the Word of the living God.

### **Get Wisdom**

Among the many challenges facing modern education is the fact that there's so much information out there that it's easy not to have any unified sense of the big picture. If you want to be an expert on anything, you have to choose a very small area and try to master the mounds of information that are available on that particular subject. Someone has joked that the aim of graduate school study is to learn more and more about less and less until you know almost everything about almost nothing.

You and I need a center, a sense of what holds things together and directs our lives. We can't get that just by becoming an expert on some very narrow specialty. Specialized knowledge may help in your occupation, but you need something broader, deeper, more unified to be really wise. And that comes only through a relationship with God in Jesus Christ. The Bible says that in Christ all things hold together (Colossians 1:17). It says God's goal is that people "may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:2-3).

Why are so many public schools gobbling up so much money and getting such poor results? Well, money can buy more equipment and more access to information, but it can't make students love knowledge. Money can buy metal detectors for school entrances, but it can't make students renounce guns and violence. Money can buy condom dispensers for school bathrooms, but it can't make students value sexual purity and strong families. Money can buy drug testing equipment, but it can't create healthy attitudes that lead kids to stay away from drugs and booze in the first place. Money can buy lots of things, but it can't buy wisdom.

To fear the Lord and shun evil—that would do more to solve the crisis in our schools than all the dollars in the treasury. The longer our schools try to pretend otherwise, the more it will cost in money, and the more it will cost in damage to us and our children and our society.

A major magazine awarded the first prize in a student essay contest to an article titled "My 60-second Protest from the Hallway." The author, a high school girl, complained that her state requires every public school to set aside one minute at the beginning of each day for students to "meditate, pray, or engage in any other silent activity." Each morning this student would walk out of the room and stay in the hall until the minute was over. She thought it was wrong for a school to sponsor a time that might encourage prayer.

It's revealing that of all the essays in the contest, the magazine gave this essay its top honor and published it. Don't expect the media to encourage acknowledgement of God in school.

Even more revealing than what this shows about the media is what it shows about public schools. The author of the essay made a big deal about the one minute a day that she objected to. But she had no problem with the rest of the school day. Apparently her classes were a faith-free zone. A student who doesn't want God in public education only has to leave for one minute a day; the rest of the school day is godless enough to suit her.

What would it be worth to get an education that helped you center on God not just for one minute but for every minute and helped you see every subject in light of God's Word? What would such education be worth? It would be priceless. "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. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her." "Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding." "How much better to get wisdom than gold, to choose understanding rather than silver!" (Proverbs 3:13-15, 4:7, 16:16) Embrace the priceless wisdom of the Bible, and accept the Lord Jesus as the revelation of God's wisdom for us.

#### PRAYER

Father in heaven, thank you for the amazing world you've made. Forgive us when we ignore you. Open our ears to the Bible and our hearts to the living Lord Jesus Christ. Help us to seek not just information but true wisdom. We can't buy wisdom, Father, but please reveal it to us for Jesus' sake. Amen.