

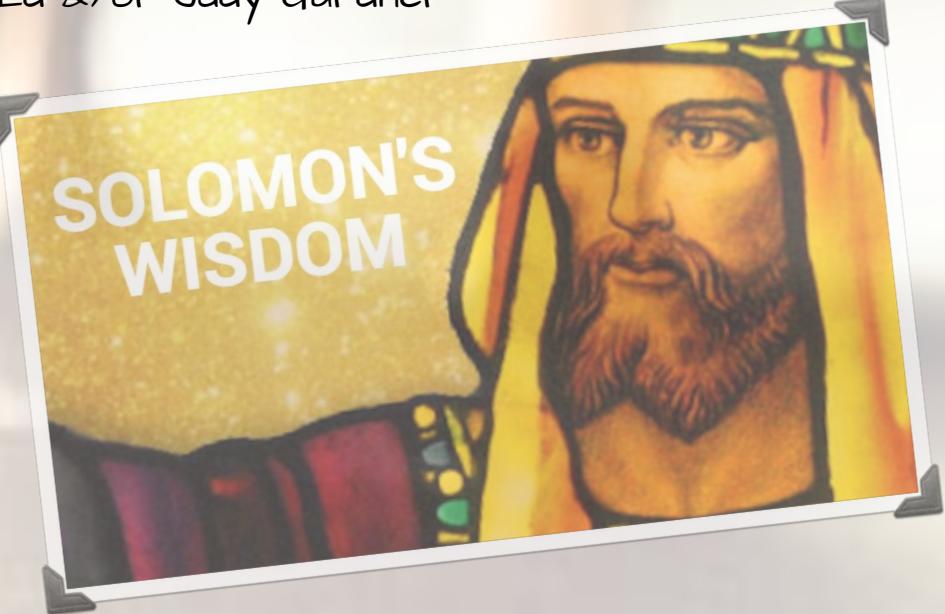
January 20-24, 2025 Edition

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The Year<sub>(s)</sub> Of Jesus Part 158

The Wisdom Of Solomon?

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

\*\*\* These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

\*\*\*\* Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside](http://www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside)). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

**Monday Reflection:** Today we begin a brand new lesson series that is going to take us through next year. A year of learning to walk in wisdom. I'm calling it, The Year Of Wisdom and over the next 52 weeks we're going to dive into the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and James- the wisdom books of the Bible. Wisdom is a fascinating concept to me. I always thought it was about intelligence but it's not. In fact Solomon who wrote the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes was the wisest man who ever lived- for a while.

Solomon's career as the King of Israel starts off with a bang. He gets a visit from God in a dream and is offered anything he wants. He could have chosen wealth or power or fame but he asked for wisdom. God was pleased with that ask. He made Solomon the wisest man who ever lived (until God Himself walked this earth as a human at which point Solomon at his height of wisdom was only a shadow of the wisdom displayed by Jesus). Solomon's wisdom became the stuff of legends in the ancient world. People from all over the world came to talk to him and seek his counsel. But over time Solomon developed a problem- he stopped walking the path of wisdom that God had shown him and about which Solomon himself had written a book about. That's right- he kind of wrote the book on wisdom. It's called Proverbs and it's filled with instructions on how to grow in wisdom. And this book is totally unique. There's nothing else like it in the Bible. It's filled with insight and wisdom and he begins this book by telling us what the launching off point for wisdom is.

Fear of the LORD is the foundation of true knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. Proverbs 1:7 (NLT)

Now I don't know about you but I've always been confused by those places in the Bible that talk about the "fear" of the LORD- I thought God doesn't want us to live a life of fear so what then are verses like this talking about? Well let's look at the same verse that we just read from the Message paraphrase:

Start with God-the first step in learning is bowing down to God; only fools thumb their noses at such wisdom and learning. Proverbs 1:7 (MES)

Now that's a proverb! That I can understand. One thing about the Message is that it says things in ways that make people who've read the Bible their entire lives stop and take a second look at what we just read. That for me is the beauty of the Message. It's not perfect but it does make us think twice when we read it. And that's what the proverbs were designed to do- to be catchy and get into our brain and make us think about what we just heard. Writing an effective proverb takes a certain kind of mind. A good proverb has to be brief, it has to have deep insight into the human character and it has to be expressed in a few unforgettable words that just stick with you. And every culture has a few people who are just naturally talented at this. In our day these people mostly write country western songs. Just the titles of these songs are unforgettable:

How Can I Miss You If You Won't Go Away?

I've Got You On My Conscience, But At Least You're Off My Back.

I Bought The Shoes That Just Walked Out On Me.

I Fell In A Pile Of You And Got Love All Over Me.

And my personal favorite:

I'd Rather Have A Bottle In Front Of Me Than To Have To Have A Frontal Lobotomy

Those are proverbs! Those are things you have a hard time forgetting. And those were Solomon's specialty (at least one of them). We'll look tomorrow at what happens when even the wisest man who ever lived ignores the proverbs that led to him becoming the wisest man who ever lived but for today maybe spend a few minutes thinking about what wisdom is and how you've been doing at walking in it over the course of your life.

**Tuesday Reflection:** Now wisdom in the Bible is not about IQ. Wisdom is primarily about making right decisions. It's about how to make God-honoring, life producing decisions. It's about the ability to discern what the noble, constructive, God honoring course of action would be in real life, everyday decisions and then take the steps those decisions demand. And when it came to those decisions Solomon literally wrote the book. The book of Proverbs is all about how to stay on that path of wisdom and by doing so to continually grow in wisdom. But Proverbs also offers up a warning about what happens if one ever stops walking the path of wisdom- he or she becomes a fool. And that's what ends up happening to Solomon. How? By ignoring the advice found written in his own book:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Proverbs 3:5-6 (NLT)

Solomon stopped trusting the LORD with all his heart. He started to depend heavily on his own understanding. Instead of seeking God's will in all he did Solomon started to live out his own will in his life. How? Well, the in the Old Testament God commanded that every king of Israel should copy down in his own hand a set of guidelines. He was to read those guidelines EVERY DAY:

When he sits on the throne as king, he must copy for himself this body of instruction on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. He must always keep that copy with him and read it daily as long as he lives. That way he will learn to fear the Lord his God by obeying all the terms of these instructions and decrees. This regular reading will prevent him from becoming proud and acting as if he is above his fellow citizens. It will also prevent him from turning away from these commands in the smallest way. And it will ensure that he and his descendants will reign for many generations in Israel. Deuteronomy 17:18-20 (NLT)

The guidelines were very simple:

The king must not build up a large stable of horses for himself or send his people to Egypt to buy horses, for the Lord has told you, 'You must never return to Egypt.' The king must not take many wives for himself, because they will turn his heart away from the Lord. And he must not accumulate large amounts of wealth in silver and gold for himself. Deuteronomy 17:16-17 (NLT)

But the day came when Solomon sent to Egypt for horses. He ignored God's advice and married not just a few wives but 700 wives! Can I just say THAT'S CRAZY?!?!? In fact I have so much trouble just handling one wife that the fact that Solomon had 700 makes me really question whether he was in fact truly wise. And that's the rub, right? It was decisions like that that caused him to "become proud and act as if he is above his fellow citizens". And over time it caused Solomon to go from being the wisest man who ever lived to becoming one of the greatest fools this world has ever known (by the Bible's definition of those two words). And I imagine he didn't ignore the commands found in Deuteronomy chapter 17 because he thought they were a bad idea. I imagine he saw the "wisdom" in those commands but felt like he could handle the danger that went along with ignoring those commands. I imagine if you asked him if those commands were a good idea he'd say something like, "of course they are. Most kings of Israel should totally follow God's advice. But I'm Solomon! I'm the wisest man who has ever lived! I can handle a little danger."

But he couldn't. And neither can we. If we want to be wise then we have to walk on the path of wisdom. Remember the passage we read from Proverbs chapter 3? It's one of the best definitions of wisdom I know of:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Proverbs 3:5-6 (NLT)

I know the word "wisdom" never appears in that verse but this is what God is inviting us to- to trust Him with all of our heart- even when that seems contradictory to what makes the most sense to us in our own minds. And He promises if we do that then he will guide our steps- show us what path to take and isn't that really what we're all after in this life? To know which path to take? At the beginning of his career this is what Solomon wanted more than anything but over time he started to depend more and more on his own understanding. More and more he stopped seeking God's "will" for his life and went his own way. And that led to a disastrous end to Solomon's career. It turned out that it didn't matter how wise he was- ignoring God's directions leads to one becoming a fool.

We are at a place in our culture where there is a lot of talk about new years resolutions. Do you have any yet? I can't think of a better resolution than to look for and then walk the path of wisdom that God lays out for us. In order to find that path the Bible says we must trust God with all our heart, question our own understanding of what's best for us and the world, seek His will in all we do and then (and if we do those things) God will show us what paths to take. But what does that look like practically speaking? That's what we'll look at for the rest of this week but tracing the journey the Wise Men took to find the long awaited newborn King of the Jews. What did their journey look like? And how will that impact how we live? I'm hoping you will join me and make it your new year's resolution to find out by spending the next 52 weeks learning what it means to walk in wisdom.

**Wednesday Reflection:** So this week we are looking at how to "walk in wisdom". Learning what it looks like practically speaking to become "wise" and to do that we're going to trace the journey the Wise Men took when they went looking for Jesus.

We could spend a whole day talking about the Wise Men (who they were, how they knew the star would lead them to Jesus, etc.) but we did that last week and so for today let's just assume we know the origin story of the Wise Men and move on from there. What did they do that showed they were "wise"? Well first of all they were seekers of truth. Their lives were dedicated to wisdom and that led them to a search which would take them to the very personification of truth:

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." Matthew 2:1-2 (NLT)

They saw His star. The star they had been waiting on (again if you're curious about their origin story go back to last week's devos and read all about it). They saw it and what did they do? Well, they pursued it. They didn't have to you know. They could have stayed where they were and speculated about what the king that they believed the star pointed to. But they didn't. They got up and followed the star. Why? Because they didn't just want to imagine what that baby would be like- they wanted to know. These guys were seekers of the truth (and they found out they were actually seekers of THE TRUTH but didn't know it just yet).

Who was this baby? Well, if you believe what the Bible says about what the angels told everyone about this baby (Mary, Joseph, Zechariah, Shepherds, Simeon, etc.) then this baby is God Himself stepped into our world. He is the One through Whom everything was created and Who holds it all together by His power. But you don't just have to take the angels word for it- when He grew up He made some outrageous claims about Who He is:

You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. John 8:32 (NLT)

This baby was THE TRUTH- not just A truth. And if you look at that sentence and think, "well Jesus never said there that He was the truth- just that we would know the truth..." then take a look at something He said a little later on in the book of John:

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. John 14:6 (NLT)

Just on its face that seems pretty outrageous to me but consider this- the word that is used in this sentence for "the" is so emphatic. It's like Chesny Hawkes song from 1991- I Am The One And Only. It was a great song (if you like cheesy '80s pop music [I know... it was 1991 but it was still cheesy '80s music style] and I do- don't judge me- I'm an eclectic kind of guy. A renaissance man of sorts if you will when it comes to musical tastes) and it was on the Doc Hollywood sound track. Anyways, in the song the argument is made that Cheney Hawkes is not like anyone else. He is the "one and only" and you "can't take that away" from him. Go ahead and listen to it on YouTube and it will prepare you for what I'm going to say next.

Go ahead. I'll wait. Did you listen to it? Ok, then here it is- when Jesus says in John 14 that He is the way, the truth and the life He's not saying that He's a way, a truth and a life. There was a way that John could have written that particular passage of scripture that would have made that case. But he didn't write it that way. He used the most emphatic form of the definite article (I think that's the right way to state that but not being an

English major I may be off just a might here in my grammatical terminology but the theology is sound) available to him. I think you could write that verse out as Jesus saying that He is "THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE". Not just starting each word off with a capital letter but ALL UPPER CAPS.

All that to say this- the Wise Men were pursuing THE TRUTH. That's what Wise Men (and Wise Women for that matter) do. They look for and pursue THE TRUTH. It's ultimately what every one of God's stars guides us to- THE TRUTH. And when we find the living embodiment of THE TRUTH what we find is God Himself wrapped in human flesh, in human frailty and somehow still God Himself in the very midst of all that weakness and humanity.

If we want to walk in wisdom in 2018 what we're going to have to do is make up our minds to pursue THE TRUTH. We may have no idea what that will look like when we find it. We may be scared about what finding THE TRUTH will mean in our every day lives. I am with you. But wisdom is worth it. Remember this all about learning to trust the Lord with all of our heart, question our own best thinking about things, seek His will every day of our lives and when we do those things then God promises to show us the path we should walk. He does that by sending stars our way all of which lead to the same place- Jesus. God's Son. THE TRUTH.

Will you follow?

**Thursday Reflection:** So the Wise Men were in pursuit of the truth and we know that pursuit led them to THE TRUTH. But in order to find the truth they sought (walking the path of wisdom) they had to follow the stars that God sent them. When I think about the "stars" in the story of the Wise Men I generally focus solely on the celestial body that "led" them from the East to Jerusalem. But there were more "stars" in this story than the big shiny one in the sky.

First of all we know that the Wise Men were part of a priesthood that traced itself back to an Israelite named Daniel. We know Daniel was kidnapped and transplanted to Babylon where he and his friends were put into the civil service. We know that Daniel excelled to such a point that eventually he was put in charge of the "Magi"- the priesthood of Babylon:

King Nebuchadnezzar-made him chief over all the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers of Babylon. Daniel 5:11 (NLT)

Many scholars believe that Daniel (who wrote the book of Daniel that we find in the Old Testament) also wrote a book that the Magi held as sacred. A book that offered prophecies very similar to the ones found in the Biblical book of Daniel that would have had the Magi who lived 700 years after Daniel to be watching for something BIG to happen. This is not a crazy idea. It is an historical fact that around the time of the birth of Jesus there was a well known prophecy in the Roman world that a great ruler would come out of Judea (the place Jesus was born). Many Roman historians (and even the Jewish historian Josephus) talk about that prophecy. We also know that in 70 AD there is a Roman general named Vespasian (the guy who put down the Jewish revolt and destroyed

Jerusalem in 70 AD- a town in Judea) who used this prophecy as support for him becoming the next Caesar since he was a great ruler who had come "out of Judea". It worked for him.

So the Wise Men probably didn't just see a star appear and come to the very logical conclusion that the newborn king of the Jews had arrived. They had other "stars" that were guiding them. Other "stars" that when put together with the bright shiny light in the sky made them realize what they had been waiting for might be here. So they followed the star. The star and the knowledge they had took them to Jerusalem and the palace of king Herod. Why? Because the information that they had wasn't complete. It got them in the ballpark but then they needed some help. God sent them more "stars" in the form of Biblical scholars who told them that the scriptures teach that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem:

King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?" "In Bethlehem in Judea," they said, "for this is what the prophet wrote: 'And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.'" Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. Then he told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!" Matthew 2:3-8 (NLT)

Today I noticed something I hadn't really thought about until just now- God even used Herod as a "star" to guide the Wise Men on their way. That's crazy when you think about it and yet we see it over and over in the Bible. This is why we need each other- because none of us has all the information we need. God is constantly trying to send stars into our lives to help guide us on the path of wisdom. Too many of us don't think we need anyone else to walk that path. We think we can manage just fine on our own. But even if that were true (it's not but if you're not ready to let go of that illusion yet then consider this...) what makes you think this is just about you? Not only does God want to use His stars to guide you down the path of wisdom- He also wants to use you to act as "stars" to others who are trying to find the same path.

This is NOT only about me. This is NOT only about you. We need each other and God needs all of us to pitch in and do our part to make everything work the way it's supposed to. So the Wise Men get some more guidance and those "stars" lead them to Bethlehem where the big shine star in the sky guides them to the house where the baby is living at the time. I know- this doesn't fit well with our nativity sets which have the shepherds and the Wise Men at the stable. That narrative isn't correct. We're not sure exactly how long after His birth that the Wise Men show up but we know that when Herod realizes he's been tricked he kills all the babies in Bethlehem under the age of 2 years old based on the time frame he had from the Wise Men and when the star had appeared to them first.

But that's another story for another time. For the purposes of this devotional I wanted to point out that it wasn't just one star the Wise Men follow- there are multiple "stars" that

guide them to Jesus. That's what wisdom does- it eventually leads us to Jesus. I've seen it over and over in my life- people who are sincerely seeking the truth but don't believe for a second that that truth will have anything to do with Jesus are SHOCKED when they start to realize that their pursuit of the truth and the stars sent into their lives guide them to the same person that the Wise Men found. I want to talk about a couple of instances of that tomorrow but for today let me ask you this- are you keeping an eye out for the stars that God is constantly sending into your life and if so are you making yourself available to be one of those "stars" that God can use to guide others down the path of wisdom and ultimately to His Son?

And if not, what are you going to do about it?

**Friday Reflection:** One thing that God promises in the Bible is that if you are searching for Him He will take care of the rest:

*When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen. When you come looking for me, you'll find me. Yes, when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else, I'll make sure you won't be disappointed. Jeremiah 29:12-14 (NCV)*

This is something the Wise Men learned. When they went looking for the truth, God made sure they found it. He's still doing the same thing today. One of my favorite stories is about a preacher named Erwin McManus. Erwin is a fairly controversial figure in modern Christianity. He doesn't necessarily see things the way traditional 20th century fundamental Christians see things and that leads to all kinds of interesting situations for him. One such situation was being invited to be a guest on a guy named Jon Gordon's radio show. Jon Gordon was not a Christian- in fact as far as you could get from it. And yet Jon Gordon was a seeker of the truth. He would "pray" to the "universe" and ask for guidance. He considered himself a healer and saw most of his work as being an "energy coach". He was extremely "new age-y" and yet he was starting to see Jesus everywhere in his life. He couldn't believe that Jesus could be the answer to his pursuit of the truth based on every experience he had ever had with those who claimed to speak for this Jesus.

Jon had a good friend who was a Christian and yet who didn't seem to be like the people he wanted to avoid at all costs who claimed to have all the answers. This friend told John about Erwin McManus- a pastor who often was attacked by the establishment "Christians" that Jon Gordon was so repulsed by. So Jon invited Erwin to come on his radio show (a show about energy healing) and talk about his latest book. Erwin had no idea what was coming. Jon as it turned out was determined to prove that Jesus couldn't possibly be the truth he was seeking and so his plan was to get Erwin to prove that by confirming all of his preconceived notions about Jesus and the Bible.

So Erwin sits down and everything is extremely pleasant until they're on the air and then Jon Gordon attacks. He starts out saying, "Pastor McManus- don't you Christians believe that you're the only ones who will be in Heaven and everyone else will burn for all eternity in Hell?" Erwin was taken aback. He wasn't expecting this line of questions- he was expecting to be interviewed about his book. John kept attacking with these Heaven and Hell questions until Erwin finally answered him by saying, "look- In John chapter 3

Jesus says He didn't come into this world to condemn the world but to save it. He said in John chapter 10 that He came to bring life- not death. So I decided a long time ago I want to be like Him. Everywhere I go I just want to bring a little bit of the Life that Jesus offers."

Jon Gordon sat back a little stunned and simply said, "I really like that answer..." And then the interview proceeded focusing on Erwin's book. Erwin said goodbye to Jon at the end of the show and never expected to hear from him again. Until he got a letter from Jon Gordon one day explaining what was going on. He told Erwin that he had been pursuing the truth and suddenly Jesus started popping up everywhere he went. He'd see Jesus on TV, in a magazine, on a billboard, in a book he was reading. He talked to his friend Daniel who pointed him to Erwin. His plan was to use Erwin to confirm his preconceived notions about Christians and Jesus but just the opposite occurred. He still wasn't sold so he went to see a Buddhist healer. Surely this guy would point him AWAY from Jesus. He told the healer his story and asked what he should do. Do you know what the Buddhist healer told Jon Gordon? He said, "it seems obvious that this Jesus is pursuing you. My advice would be to give yourself to him."

Say. What?

Jon Gordon says he was stunned. He didn't know what to say so he just got up and left. But he said that when he got to the stairwell he got down on his knees (because that seemed like what he was supposed to do) and gave his life to Jesus. IS THAT NOT THE COOLEST THING YOU'VE EVER HEARD?!?!?!? He ended his letter writing, "God brought me to my friend Daniel who pointed me to you, Pastor McManus. Then God led me to a Buddhist healer and that healer finally led me to Jesus. And now God is bringing me to those who are stuck and need Jesus more than ever!" He signed his letter, "sending positive energy your way- Jon Gordon: Christian Energy Coach.

I'm not sure what exactly that means and I'm sure that there are a lot of Christians who would say Jon Gordon is no example of the way God leads people (through "stars" just like the He did the Wise Men by even using King Herod to get the Wise Guys ultimately to Jesus) but to me it's one of the greatest miracles I've ever heard. Jon Gordon will have a lot to learn- just like the rest of us- but he's found the greatest Teacher Who ever lived to teach him.

What could be cooler than that? I want to end today's thought with the scripture we read at the beginning:

When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen. When you come looking for me, you'll find me. Yes, when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else, I'll make sure you won't be disappointed. Jeremiah 29:12-14 (NCV)

I think Jon Gordon would say- it's all true. All of it!