

One of the great challenges of the Christian life is learning to trust God when life does not make sense. It is relatively easy to affirm the sovereignty and wisdom of God when circumstances are favorable. It becomes considerably more difficult when suffering arrives, plans fail, relationships disappoint us, or the future becomes uncertain. Proverbs 3:19–27 addresses this tension by grounding practical wisdom in something much larger than human experience: the character of the Creator. Solomon's argument is essentially that the God who possesses sufficient wisdom to govern creation can also be trusted with the circumstances of my life.

This connection becomes particularly significant when Proverbs 3:19–20 is read in light of Proverbs 3:5–6. Earlier, Solomon commands, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding." Why should I trust God's understanding rather than my own? Verses 19–20 provide an answer: "The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew." God's wisdom is demonstrated by creation itself. The universe is evidence that His understanding infinitely exceeds mine.

The book of Job provides a powerful illustration of this truth. Job desperately wanted an explanation for his suffering. He had experienced devastating emotional loss followed by intense physical suffering. His friends attempted to explain his circumstances through simplistic theological formulas, but their conclusions were wrong. Eventually Job asks the fundamental question, "But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?" (Job 28:12). His conclusion is profound: "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding" (28:28).

When God finally speaks to Job, however, He does not provide the explanation Job expected. Instead, God asks questions. Where was Job when God laid the foundations of the earth? Could Job command the morning? Had he explored the depths of the sea? Did he understand the boundaries God established for the oceans? Through these questions, God directs Job away from the question of why and toward the question of who. Creation reveals the intelligence, greatness, power, sovereignty, and wisdom of God. Job ultimately responds in humility: "I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth."

There is something deeply personal here for me. Sometimes I want God to explain Himself when God is asking me to trust Him. I want to know why something happened, why a prayer was not answered as I expected, or why a particular season has become difficult. Yet my understanding is necessarily limited. God's is not. The God who tells the ocean where to stop knows the boundaries of my circumstances. The God who commands the morning already knows what tomorrow holds. The God who feeds the birds and clothes the lilies has not forgotten me. Faith, therefore, is not believing that everything happening to me makes sense. Faith is trusting that everything makes sense to God.

This theological foundation leads naturally into the practical instruction of Proverbs 3:21–26. Solomon tells his son to preserve "sound wisdom and discretion." Sound wisdom involves choosing what is most consistent with obedience to God. Life constantly presents choices, many of which are not simply decisions between obvious good and obvious evil. Sometimes several legitimate options exist. Wisdom asks which course of action is most right, most excellent, and most glorifying to God.

Discretion takes this concept one step further. In this passage, discretion carries the idea of carefully devising a course of action and then exercising sound judgment in pursuing it. Biblical wisdom is therefore not merely reactive. It is intentional. A wise person does not simply wait for circumstances to determine the direction of life. He develops purpose, direction, and vision consistent with the character of God.

I find this particularly important because it corrects a common misunderstanding of trusting God. Trust is not passivity. Saying “God is sovereign” does not mean that I should live without goals, plans, or direction. Scripture presents God as purposeful, and human beings created in His image should likewise live purposefully. My plans may change (and experience has taught me that they often will) but my fundamental direction should remain unchanged. My ultimate purpose is not the successful completion of every plan I make. My purpose is to glorify God through the person I become while pursuing those plans.

Solomon says wisdom and discretion become “life for your soul and adornment for your neck.” The imagery beautifully connects internal character with external conduct. Wisdom should characterize who I am when nobody is watching and what others see when they are. Integrity exists when those two realities correspond. Character is not merely reputation. It is the consistency between the hidden person (soul) and the visible life (adornment for your neck).

That kind of integrity produces something increasingly precious: rest. Solomon says, “When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.” Rest does not require abandoning purpose. Rather, genuine rest becomes possible when purpose flows from relationship with God instead of becoming the source of personal identity. When I live honestly before God, I do not have to maintain competing versions of myself. I do not have to fear that someone will discover a lie or uncover a hidden pattern of sin. A clear conscience creates a kind of security that circumstances cannot manufacture.

This also shapes the believer’s response to temptation. First Corinthians 10:13 promises that God will provide “the way of escape.” Wisdom and discretion help us recognize that escape. A person saturated in Scripture, accustomed to distinguishing right from wrong, and intentionally living toward a godly purpose is better prepared to recognize temptation before it becomes a trap. Wisdom does not eliminate temptation, but it teaches us where to put our feet when temptation comes.

Finally, biblical wisdom turns outward. Proverbs 3:27 commands, “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.” Wisdom is incomplete if it produces only personal stability. The wise person becomes a source of encouragement to others. I can look back over my own life and remember people who believed in me, encouraged me, corrected me, helped me carry difficult burdens, and reminded me to continue walking toward the Lord. Their influence creates an obligation of grace: what others have given to me, I should be willing to give to someone else.

Life is difficult enough without Christians becoming professional critics of one another. There are already plenty of voices prepared to identify our failures. What people often desperately need is someone who recognizes evidence of God’s grace and encourages them to continue.

Proverbs 3:19–27 therefore presents wisdom as far more than intellectual ability. Wisdom begins by recognizing the greatness of the Creator, continues by trusting His understanding rather than our own, shapes the purposes and decisions of everyday life, produces integrity and security, and ultimately expresses itself through doing good to others.

I will not always understand what God is doing. I will not always know why He permits a particular circumstance or redirects one of my carefully constructed plans. But I can know the One who does understand. The God who established the heavens by understanding and founded the earth by wisdom is the same God who directs my steps. I do not have to understand everything God is doing in order to trust the God who understands everything.