

Walking with God

# OUR WISE COUNSELOR

Trusting God's Guidance

PHYLLIS BENNETT

NAVPRESS® 



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# FOREWORD

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One big difference between our current culture and that of a century ago is that the Victorians saw life in terms of roles, while we see it in terms of relationships. Real life, we say, is a matter of relationships, for roles minimize personal involvement while relationships maximize it.

In saying this, we speak more Christian truth than perhaps we realize. For real life according to the Bible means relating not just to other people but also to the personal God who made us. We live and move and exist in him, and it is both scandalous and impoverishing when we ignore him.

Who is he? The startling truth is that he is a *society*. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share with each other an intimate and loving relationship. Yet in the unity of their interpersonal life, they constitute a single divine being. God is they, a society and a team, and they are he, the only God there is.

A mystery? An inexplicable reality? Yes, but a life-giving one. It is our privilege not simply to acknowledge the truth of the Trinity but also to enter into Spirit-sustained relationship with the Father and the Son—a relationship which from one standpoint is *eternal life*, and from another is *knowing* God.

Knowing people involves, first, knowing facts about them and, second, making their acquaintance. How deep our relationship goes depends on how much empathy we have, how many concerns and interests we share, and how much we seek to exalt the one we love. It is the same with knowing God.

The Bible is God's communication to all who hear or read it. Through its varied contents, the Triune Lord tells us about himself and calls us to himself. A proper understanding of the Bible will focus at every point on both the information about God and the invitation to know him.

[OUR] WISE COUNSELOR

The WALKING WITH GOD series is designed to help you achieve this focus. I heartily recommend it. These studies generate vision, insight, wisdom, and devotion in equal quantities. Use them and you will be blessed.

J. I. Packer

# ABOUT THE WALKING WITH GOD SERIES

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Every Christian desires a deeper, more personal relationship with God. We long to know him better, to feel his presence, and to experience his power in our lives. Jesus himself tells us,

And this is the real and eternal life:  
That they know you,  
The one and only true God,  
And Jesus Christ, whom you sent. (John 17:3, MSG)

WALKING WITH GOD Bible studies can help you build greater intimacy with God by exploring who God is and how you can know him better. Each guide focuses on a specific attribute of God, such as his love, his faithfulness, or his mercy. The studies are warm and practical and personal, yet they are firmly grounded in Scripture.

The WALKING WITH GOD series has been field tested in churches across America, representing a wide variety of denominations. This time-intensive process ensured that the guides have solid biblical content, consistent quality, easy-to-use formats, and helpful leader's notes.

The WALKING WITH GOD Bible studies are designed to be flexible. You can use the guides in any order that is best for you or your group. They are ideal for Sunday-school classes, small groups, one-on-one relationships, or as materials for your quiet times.

Because each guide contains only six studies, you can easily explore more than one attribute of God. In a Sunday-school class, any two guides can be combined for a quarter (twelve weeks), or the entire series can be covered in a year.

Each study deliberately focuses on a limited number of passages, usually only one or two, which allows you to see each passage in its context. If you would like to look up additional passages, a Bible

concordance will give the most help.

The WALKING WITH GOD series will help you *discover* what the Bible says rather than simply *tell* you the answers. The questions encourage you to think and to explore options rather than merely to fill in the blanks with one-word answers.

Leader's notes are provided in the back of each book. They show how to lead a group discussion, provide additional information on questions, and suggest ways to deal with problems that may come up in the discussion. With such helps, someone with little or no experience can lead an effective study.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

1. Begin each study with prayer. Ask God to help you understand the passage and to apply it to your life.
2. A good modern translation—such as the New International Version, the New American Standard Bible, the New Revised Standard Version, or *The Message*—will give you the most help. Questions in this guide, however, are based on the New International Version.
3. Read and reread the passage. Emphasize different words. Read the verses out loud. You must know what the passage says before you can understand what it means and how it applies to you.
4. Take your time and respond to the questions provided. In addition to the questions, always ask, “What does this mean?” and “Why does this matter?”
5. Use a Bible dictionary to look up any unfamiliar words, names, or places.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR GROUP STUDY

1. Come to the study prepared. Careful preparation will greatly enrich your time in group discussion. Not only is your role in a small group to explore and expand your own understanding, but it's also to support one another.

2. Be willing to join in the discussion. The leader of the group will not lecture but will encourage people to discuss what they have learned in the passage. Plan to share what God has taught you in your individual study.
3. Stick to the passage being studied. Base your answers on the verses being discussed rather than on outside authorities such as commentaries or your favorite author or speaker.
4. Try to be sensitive to the other members of the group. Listen attentively when they speak, and be affirming whenever you can. This will encourage more hesitant members of the group to participate.
5. Be careful not to dominate the discussion. By all means participate, but allow others to have equal time. One group member may need more time to talk about what's on their mind. Be sensitive about their needs. Use good judgment and allow extra space when needed; *your* time might be the next time your group meets.
6. If you are the discussion leader, you will find additional suggestions and helpful ideas in the leader's notes at the back of the guide.

# INTRODUCING *OUR WISE COUNSELOR*

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Recently our family hosted a dinner party, and one of our dinner guests brought a flowering plant as a hostess gift. What a delight to receive love from a guest when our goal was to express love to them.

In John 14:2, Jesus tells us that he will be our host someday in heaven, for he has gone away to prepare a place for us. But what a privilege it would be to take a gift to him when we meet him at heaven's door. Psalm 90:12 gives us an idea of what that gift might look like and how we can prepare to take that gift to him. It reads, "Teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom" (NASB).

When we are coming up to a much-needed vacation, we count the days we have left to work. School children count school days left before school is out. Even department stores count the shopping days left until Christmas. But how many of us really think about making each day count until God takes us home? Are we using each day to prepare a gift that would delight him—a heart of wisdom?

The NIV states this verse a little differently: "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." The word *gain* in Hebrew means "to harvest" or "to bring forth" or "to pull in." When a farmer harvests wheat, he benefits from the harvest, but so do all the people who will eat what he harvests. As we gain a heart of wisdom, we will benefit from our wisdom, but so will every other person our life touches.

The word *wisdom* in this verse in Hebrew means "skillful wisdom." The word-picture it paints for me is of a white-water rapids trip our family took last summer. As we were buffeted down the rapids in our rubber raft, there were rocks and churning water and powerful undercurrents all clamoring to take us under. It took skillful wisdom to navigate through those tumultuous currents and land us safely at

the bottom of the rapids.

In the same way, when we gain a heart of wisdom, we receive the skillful wisdom we need to keep from going under in the currents of life. And that skillful wisdom not only protects us but also benefits every other person who is with us.

But we cannot gain this kind of skillful wisdom if we are not getting to know God on a daily basis. That is what this study guide is designed to do—to help us get to know the “Wonderful Counselor” and the God who gives wisdom generously (see James 1:5).

We will look at Solomon as he asks for the gift of wisdom when he could have asked for long life, success, or financial prosperity. We will discover from Isaiah that our wisdom cannot compare to God’s wisdom, that his thoughts are far above our own. We will dip into Proverbs to learn that God tells us to choose wisdom over folly that we might grow wiser still. And finally we will look at the Psalms to discover that God’s Word provides wisdom and guidance for every aspect of life.

Jesus sent the disciples into the world to be as “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16, *KJV*). As you seek wisdom and counsel from the Lord, may he “give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better” (Ephesians 1:17).

Phyllis Bennett

# THE GIFT OF WISDOM

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1 Kings 3

When William McKinley was sworn in as president of the United States in January of 1897, he stated, “Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people, that is so great.” What a great request to make on inauguration day!

Perhaps President McKinley took the essence of his statement from King Solomon, whom God considered to be the wisest man in all the earth. Soon after Solomon’s “inauguration” as king of Israel, he made this request of the Lord: “Give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?” (1 Kings 3:9).

A famous Arabian Proverb reinforces Solomon’s humility and his desire to seek the gift of wisdom:

He that knows not and knows not that he knows not:

He is a fool—shun him!

He that knows not and knows that he knows not:

He is simple—teach him!

He that knows and knows not that he knows:

He is asleep—wake him!

He that knows and knows that he knows:

He is a wise man—follow him!<sup>1</sup>

Solomon was certainly not a fool. He began his reign as king as a simple man—who knew that he knew not. 1 Kings 3 describes the first part of his life and how he sought “the gift of wisdom.”



5. After giving thanks, what does Solomon request from the Lord (see verses 7-9)?

What reasons does he give for presenting this particular request to God?

6. The Lord is pleased with Solomon's request (see verses 10-15). In what ways does God express his pleasure?

7. Why should we value wisdom and discernment more than riches, honor, and a long life?



12. From Solomon's life we learn that wisdom and discernment are gifts from God that can be requested (see also James 1:5). In what area of your life do you need these gifts?

## SUGGESTED PRAYER

Let Solomon's prayer be a model to you as you ask the Lord for "a wise and discerning heart" in the area of your life you named in question 12. Ask God to give you a longing not for wealth or success or people's approval but for wisdom.

## MEMORY VERSE

*The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, ". . . I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be."*

1 KINGS 3:10-12

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To grow in wisdom, keep a journal for the next week of all the situations in which you find yourself needing wisdom. Note in your journal whether you take time to ask God for wisdom or whether you forge ahead with your own ideas. Try to develop the conscious habit of asking God for the gift of wisdom, a gift he promises to give to those who ask (see James 1:5).