Moments for You

Volume 70, Number 4 Theme: Wisdom



Godly Wisdom

Proverbs 16:16 says, *"How much better to get wisdom than gold!"* The Bible urges us often to seek wisdom above all things, but there are different kinds of wisdom. First Corinthians 3:19–20 says, *"the wisdom of this world is folly with God … the Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."* There is obviously a difference between godly wisdom and worldly wisdom (see James 3:13–17).

Godly wisdom is, of course, from God and honors God. Godly wisdom starts with the fear of God and results in a holy life. Worldly wisdom, on the other hand, is not concerned with honoring God but with pleasing oneself. With worldly wisdom, we may become educated, street-smart, and have "common sense" that enables us to play the world's game successfully.

Godly wisdom enables us to prepare ourselves for eternity. With godly wisdom, we trade earthly values for biblical values (1 John 2:15–16). We recognize we are citizens of another kingdom, and we make choices that reflect that allegiance (Philippians 1:27; 3:20). Having godly wisdom means we strive to see life from God's perspective and act accordingly.

The book of Proverbs is full of practical instructions for life. Many proverbs contrast the wise with the foolish (see Proverbs 3:35; 14:24; 15:7; 26:11). Everyone makes mistakes, but the wise learn from their mistakes and take steps to avoid repeating them. The foolish may make the same mistake over and over again and never learn their lesson.

Godly wisdom may look very different from worldly wisdom. Jesus highlighted these differences in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). For example, He said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:43–45). Godly wisdom often requires us to do that which is opposite our natural inclinations. Godly wisdom is not focused on self-preservation but on furthering the kingdom of God. We can only live in godly wisdom when we are committed to crucifying our flesh and living in the Spirit (see Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:16–17).

The primary way we gain godly wisdom is by learning God's word. "The unfolding of Your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple" (Psalm 119:130). No one is born wise; we must acquire wisdom from God if we are to be truly wise: "Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, for I keep Your precepts" (Psalm 119:98–100).

Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom." Jesus wants His followers to be set apart from the world, making godly choices and living godly lives (1 Peter 1:15). We can only do that when His word lives in us.

We can also develop godly wisdom by carefully selecting those who journey through life with us: "Whoever walks with the wise becomes

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wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm" (Proverbs 13:20). Paul instructed the Corinthians to "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Those who want godly wisdom will choose for their heroes those who exhibit wisdom in their personal lives.

Scripture tells us to ask for godly wisdom: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him" (James 1:5). God wants us to have His wisdom. He is delighted to give it to us when our hearts are set to receive it.

—GotQuestions.org, condensed

Wisdom of the Cross

"The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

In the mid-nineteenth century, archaeologists digging around the Palatine Hill in Rome unearthed a house that formed one part of the palace of the emperor Caligula, an unpleasant man who reigned in Rome from A.D. 37 until he was murdered in A.D. 41.

The unearthed house soon became best known for a bit of graffiti that was found on one of its walls. It showed an image of a young man looking up in admiration at a crucified figure—a figure of a man with a donkey's head stretched out upon a cross. Underneath the picture, this was written: 'Alexamenos worships his God.'

Now it is possible that there was an obscure religion in Rome whose adherents worshipped a crucified donkey-man. But there is no real doubt that we see in this graffiti a mocking laugh at the strange new religion that was spreading across the Roman Empire—a seemingly ridiculous religion that started in Jerusalem and required its followers to worship a crucified God.

The Foolishness of the Cross

From the beginning, the most common view of the cross has been that it is crazy. But the problem with this perspective is that it is held by people with a tragic destiny. The cross is foolishness—but it is foolishness *to those who are perishing.* These are the sick patients who laugh at their doctor as he offers a cure. They are the accused criminals who reject the only good defense that their lawyer can give them.

In 1 Corinthians 1:19–21, Paul explains that God effortlessly makes foolish the wisdom of the world. In fact, since the world values fancy talk, big ideas, and proud solutions to life's biggest problems, God could not save through anything the world would think is wise. He declares it useless in the quest for salvation.

Paul says this foolish message about a Savior on a cross is actually what we need. The death of this Man actually saves all those who believe it. And when people discover this, they find themselves, with young Alexamenos, gazing at the Man upon the cross, seeing the God-man of the biblical gospels, rather than the donkey-man of the mocking world. Knowing Jesus gives us a whole new perspective on the wisdom of the wise.

Christ and the Christian

Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 1:30 that God takes all those who believe in Christ and places them in Christ. There they find true wisdom, discovering that the Christ who appears to be nothing is in fact everything: He is the wisdom of God's provision.

In Jesus we find our righteousness: we are justified and forgiven before the throne of God. In Christ

Jesus we find our sanctification: we grow in holiness as we grow closer to and more like Him. In Christ we find our redemption: our full and final deliverance from sin and guilt, from punishment and curse, from final death and hell.

Everything that we are and have comes from Christ alone and in Christ alone. We must be connected to Him to benefit from anything that He has done. —Chad Van Dixhoorn, condensed

The Wisdom of the Wise Men

The wise men. What a strange part of the advent narrative. Technically, the wise men were magi, magicians or wizards that lived and worked in the Persian Empire. They spent the majority of their time studying ancient texts, prophecy, and divination. According to Matthew 2, the three magi who visited Jesus had studied the book of Micah, quoting a messianic passage to King Herod as the impetus for their journey: "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel" (Matthew 2:6, see Micah 5:2–4). The magi must have studied thousands of texts and read countless prophesies. Yet, this prophesy must have been different in their eyes, justifying a costly trans-imperial journey. And these sacrifices were not without justification, for "going into the house, they saw the Child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him" (Matthew 2:11).

In many ways, these magi who set aside everything to find Christ lived out a teaching that Jesus would deliver decades later. Discussing worldly worry, Jesus teaches in Matthew 6 to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). Thus, as we seek God first, we find that which will truly sustain us. These magi sought Christ, a costly yet worthwhile endeavor, meeting with the creator of the universe face-to-face.

Scripture does not tell us what happened to the magi after their interaction with Christ other than that "they departed to their own country" (Matthew 2:12). However, if the other encounters with Jesus recorded in the gospels are any indication, I am confident that their time with Christ was transformative. These men, the intellectual leaders of their community, returned home knowing Christ, a truth that cost them much yet informed and transformed the remainder of their study.

Are we willing to sacrifice like the magi to know Jesus? Are we willing to put our life on hold to commune with and worship Him, or do our overly full schedules take precedent? This is a stinging question for us, particularly this time of year. December seems to be the month when social commitments pile up. Parties, shopping, pageants, and the like seem to sap all our mental and emotional energy, causing us to look at our Bible in the morning and turn away, metaphorically saying to Jesus, "I'll talk to you later … if I have time."

What do you need to do to "seek first the kingdom of God" this holiday season? Whatever it is, I pray that you have the determination to overcome and relentlessly seek Christ before anything else. Like the magi, it may come at a cost, but it will be well worth the sacrifice.

—Robert Jacobs, condensed, livehope.org

A Heart of Wisdom

Psalm 90 is a prayer written and used by Moses in his approach to the Lord. Verse 12 says, "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."

This is not a request that the Lord would let us know the exact length of our lives. Moses was asking for a true sense of the reality that our lives here are very brief and could end at any moment. We are reminded in James 4:13–14, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit'—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes." Solomon wrote in Proverbs 27:1, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring."

We seek to understand how fragile and brief life is so that we can live wisely. Realizing that life here is very short, Moses desired to live his life accordingly. For this, he asked the Lord for His wisdom of how he should live. Solomon wrote in Proverbs 4:5, "Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of My mouth."

We are told to "get wisdom." You may be asking, "How do I get the wisdom of God?" Let's read James 1:5, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." Isn't that simple? To acquire knowledge about God, we must spend time in His word, prayerfully looking to Him to teach us as we study our Bibles. To acquire the wisdom of God, we simply ask the Lord for it. Of course, our request must be sincere. James 1:6 says, "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind." As believers in the world, we should constantly ask the Lord for His wisdom in every circumstance.

May our prayers imitate Moses' prayer. Let's ask the Lord to give us a sense of how short our lives are and give us His wisdom that we might live our lives properly and for Him. Each moment of each day should be lived in preparation for living in eternity with the Lord. May we hold on to things of this world very loosely, realizing they will soon be gone. Understanding we don't have a lot of time here, we should be involved in sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with others so that they might be saved and live eternally with the Lord.

—Answers From The Book, condensed

Walk in Wisdom

Do you have a new year's resolution? Resolutions often include exercising more, dieting, or achieving some other personal goal. But what if you made a resolution to walk every day in wisdom? Imagine how much better life might turn out if wisdom guided your every decision.

In the book of Ephesians, Christian believers are told to walk "carefully" (5:15), understanding the dark powers at hand and understanding that these powers are ultimately subject to God and His light. We, as children of light (5:8), are called to redeem the time, to act carefully—wisely—in each moment to assure that we are living according to the will of the Lord (5:17).

The apostle Paul, who wrote this letter, did not ultimately desire that these believers would acquire vast amounts of knowledge, or learn an array of street smarts from various

life experiences. He was referring to something much greater: "the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him" (1:17), that their hearts would "know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe" (1:18–19).

He was speaking of spiritual wisdom—a gift from God that allows us to know more of His character and will, and to know the "breadth and length and height and depth" of the love of Christ … which "surpasses knowledge" (3:18–19). In this spiritual wisdom we can grasp more deeply the miraculous, far-reaching effects of Christ's death and resurrection, which brought Heaven to us, and us to Heaven! Through our faith in Him, He gives us a spiritual rebirth through His resurrection power, and with new spiritual eyes, we can see and judge the vast cavern that exists between good and evil. This wisdom that Paul prays for is so that the believers would be so enlightened by this truth that they would want no part in evil.

It's not an easy feat to keep oneself unstained by the world, though. The plague of evil is rapidly spreading and infecting vulnerable hearts. All creation suffers under the influences of the unleashed power of principalities and the prince of the air (2:2). But believers, with spiritual insight, can see that that those powers need not touch them, since in Christ they are seated in heavenly places with Him (2:6).

As the Old Testament teaches us, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). In the reorientation of our hearts to Him, and the Holy Spirit's presence within us, He pours out spiritual wisdom and knowledge that brings us out from under the power of sin and death and helps us to walk with joy and hope in His eternal gifts and purposes.

Are you walking in His wisdom today? How can you do so even more in the new year?

—Tricia Kline

The Wise Builder

There is a person, Jesus says, who "hears these words of Mine and does them," and there is also a person who "hears these words of Mine and does not do them" (Matthew 7:24-27). He then illustrates the contrast between His obedient hearers and His disobedient hearers by His parable of the two builders. The wise builder dug deep and constructed his house on bedrock; the foolish builder could not be bothered with foundations and was content to build on the sand.

As both moved forward with their buildings, the casual observer would not have noticed any difference between the two structures. The difference was in the foundation, and foundations are rarely seen. Only when a storm broke were the foundational issues revealed. The house built on the rock withstood the storm, while the house on the sand collapsed in ruin.

In the same way, professing Christians (both the genuine and the false) often look alike. You cannot easily tell which is which. Both appear to be building Christian lives. They both hear Jesus' words. Both are members of the visible Christian community. Both read the Bible, go to church and listen to sermons. The reason you cannot tell the difference between them is that the deep foundations of their lives are hidden from view. The real question is not whether they *hear* Christ's teaching but whether they

do what they hear. Only a storm will reveal the truth. It may be a storm of crisis or calamity that uncovers the genuineness or falseness of their claim to faith. If not, certainly the storm of the day of judgment will reveal all that is hidden.

The truth that Jesus has been pressing home is that an abundance of biblical knowledge can never be a substitute for obedience. The question is not whether we say nice, polite, correct, enthusiastic things to or about Jesus; nor whether we hear His words, listening, studying, pondering and memorizing until our minds are stuffed with His teaching. It's whether we do what we say and do what we know. Those who truly hear the gospel and profess faith will give evidence of that faith by the obedience of their lives.

—John Stott, condensed, from *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*

Wise to What Is Good

"I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil" (Romans 16:19).

There is something within us that is drawn, almost magnetized at times, toward those things that are improper or even outright vile. At times each of us wants to see, taste, touch, or experience what God forbids. We want to watch things that glorify evil, to participate in what is off-limits, to experience what God says is unfitting.

One of the responsibilities of every Christian is to train ourselves to embrace what is good and reject what is evil. We are responsible to fill our hearts and minds with what is good and to empty them of what is evil. When writing to the church in Corinth Paul said, "Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature" (1 Corinthians 14:20).

As we assemble these passages and others like them, the point becomes clear: God calls us to have extensive knowledge of good and minimal knowledge of evil. He calls us to have the judgment to identify what is evil and the innocence that comes from refusing to immerse ourselves in it or even to expose ourselves to it.

I've watched friends and acquaintances develop a fascination with doctrinal edginess, error, or even full-out heresy. They knew the truth as the Bible proclaims it but wanted to add to their knowledge a thorough understanding of error. And somehow, over time, that error became less and less repulsive, and more and more attractive. Eventually, and often to their own surprise, they found themselves drawn to it, convinced by it. John MacArthur insists that: "The more willingly we associate with evil, the more it will drag us down to its level."

I've seen people so immerse themselves in pop culture and entertainment that they come to imitate and resemble the people they admire. They began with a desire to watch things that were just a little less innocent than they were accustomed to and found that, rather than satisfying their appetites, this merely whetted them. They did so from a desire to express Christian freedom or a desire to be culturally informed and relevant. They advanced from film to film, rating to rating, until nothing was too repulsive, nothing was off-limits. The innocence that had once protected them gave way to a knowledge that harmed or even destroyed them.

As Christians we need to be aware of evil, aware of its existence, its shape and contours, yet without developing an obsession with it. We need to know enough about evil to discern and resist it, yet without

stooping to plug our minds full of it. Our expertise is to be not in what is evil but in what is good. In fact, it is those with the greatest expertise in all that is good and pure and lovely who are best equipped to identify and flee from what is evil and foul and ugly.

—Tim Challies, condensed

Wisdom in the Word of God

The testimony of the heavens (Psalm 19:1-6) is enough to convict someone of the need of repentance, of getting right with the God of the universe. But God has added more to that. He has given us His word, and in Psalm 19:7-11, we have the testimony of the law.

This term "law" does not mean just the Ten Commandments, but the whole revelation of God's mind and will in His word. In that sense the entire Bible is the law of God, and this law is perfect. This is confirmed by the New Testament revelation as well (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

God has given a perfect revelation in His word, and what is the effect if followed? *"Reviving the soul" (Psalm 19:7)*, turning the soul to God. Then note: *"The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple" (v.7).* Do you want the wisdom that really counts? Study your Bible. How is it that people of the world who are wise as to other things are so ignorant as to spiritual things? It is because they ignore the testimony of the word of God. If you study your Bible in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, you will find that it will give you an illumination, a knowledge, a wisdom that all the writings of men can never give you.

"The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart" (v.8). This term "precepts" means the paths that God lays out for you, the instruction as to how you ought to walk. People are sometimes afraid of God's precepts and statutes, but when you walk in them, instead of finding disappointment, your heart is filled with gladness.

"The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes" (v.8). I have known people who were altogether uneducated and yet through the study of this Book, because they had learned in the school of God and His word, they were wiser far than many who have had lots of degrees attached to the end of their names.

"The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever" (v.9). As you read the word and are brought consciously into His presence, that sense of awe comes over your soul and you say, "I do not want to grieve a God like that; I want to walk in obedience to Him," and the result is the cleansing of your life.

"The rules [decisions] of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether" (v.9). Do not ever believe anything else. Satan will try to make you think that the decisions of the Lord are often hard and cruel and will run contrary to your own best interests, but when you begin to revel in this word, you will say to yourself, "I have never found anything so precious to my soul as this." *"More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb" (v.10).*

"Moreover, by them is your servant warned" (v.11). Study the word of God not only for your own delight and upbuilding but also in order that you may be guarded from things contrary to the mind of God, keeping His word unto the end. *"In keeping them there is great reward" (v.11).*

—H.A. Ironside, condensed and adapted