

## **The Beginning of Wisdom**

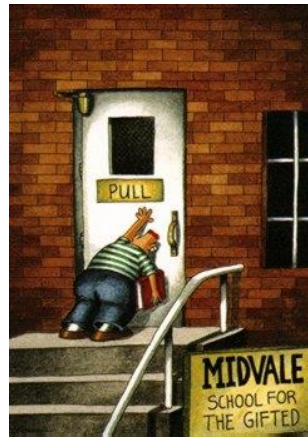
*(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021 1 Kings 3:3-14 & Ephesians 5:15-20)*

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If I had dollar everytime my brother said to me, 'You people with your degrees and fancy education just don't understand the simple things', I'd be as rich as Solomon. He would continue – 'I ask a simple question and you answer a completely different question'. Maybe it was too much study in criminal law?

What do you think of when you think of wisdom? For some reason this Gary Larson cartoon always comes to mind. Perhaps it is because it sums up what my brother used to say.



There are many words that come to mind when we think about wisdom – cleverness, intelligence, brainy, genius, knowledge, smart, having good judgement, discerning, common sense.

God's wisdom seems to turn many of these ideas on their head – blessed are the meek, the poor, the peacemakers. Victory is found in suffering, a motley crew of fishermen and women are entrusted with the good news and from them a worldwide movement begins, doubters, tax collectors, prostitutes are all included in the plan.

Wisdom I think involves asking questions – the questions we are taught at school – who, what, where, how and why, especially why. Wisdom therefore involves humility and openness to new ideas and quite probably patience.

Where do you find wisdom? In art or satire? In poetry or comic strips? In cartoons or prose? In art or nature?

Rabbi Ben Zoma asks – Who is wise? The answer – One who learns from all. We only need to look at nature to see many wise acts – maybe in how a bird builds a nest or a spider weaves a web. In the observation of children, we see wisdom beyond their years. Wisdom it seems to me is often found in unexpected places.

The writer to Ephesians implores them to live as wise people, to try to understand the will of God. They and we need to show by word and actions that as we lead a new life based on following Jesus, we are different.

Solomon has succeeded his father David as king and we are told he loved the Lord, obeyed the law and made appropriate sacrifices as his faith required. Now his ascension to the throne was not without problems, his brother was out partying assuming he

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would take the throne, so already before Solomon is king there is a threat to his kingship. In a dream, the Lord asks him, what he wanted. Rather than a shopping list, as sometimes our prayers are, Solomon asks for a far greater gift. In his humility, and acknowledging the great task he has set before him, he asks for an understanding mind so that he could govern God's people appropriately, and to have the ability to discern between good and evil. What a wonderful request, perhaps our leaders in church and society should take a leaf out of Solomon's book and make that prayer. Solomon's request is granted and history records him as the wise king, but he also gets blessings upon blessings – riches, power, all because he put people and their needs before his own need for power and prestige.

So how do we get this wisdom, this ability to know the difference between good and evil, or maybe even good and better?

The starting point of course is God. The idea of wisdom is personified in Proverbs and invites us to enter that place, she, that is wisdom, calls us to walk in the way of insight.

So how do we do that?

Let me share with you some tips I have gathered over the years.

The first three step process comes from the Community of the Transfiguration in Teesdale. Wisdom or insight or awareness starts with listening with the ear of our hearts.

1. Listen to God – prayer, reading scripture
2. Listen to others – involves dialogue with people, with research, with experts
3. Listen to self – self-awareness, a gift which takes practice, humility and patience

A good start, to think about how we live as wise people both individually and corporately, how we together discern God's will for the community.

Another process to discern the will of God in a community is articulated by Rev's Alan Marr and Rowena Curtis:

1. Focus – ask what the important question is
2. Ground – name our values, beliefs and purposes
3. Shed – get rid of our bias and preconceptions
4. Root – listen to the bible, the wider church tradition
5. Listen – to the Spirit, to all voices, even the ones we don't agree with
6. Explore – dream big, fly kites, brainstorm
7. Improve – add value to each possibility
8. Weigh – think through the costs and benefits of each possibility
9. Close – select a possibility, this may not be the final step, but it will help get you there
10. Rest – sit with the possibility and look for feelings that confirm or not your decision

I can't guarantee that you will then have the wisdom of Solomon, but I think you might be on the way. These tips will help you discern the will of God in your context, in our current context which is a trying situation at the moment.

The Psalm we began with today has the line – the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Perhaps the word awe or reverent submission is a better way to understand this, perhaps it means being in relationship with God is the beginning of wisdom.

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Albert Einstein said – Wisdom is not the product of schooling, but of the lifetime attempt to acquire it. Wisdom that is not schooling.

Aristotle said – Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.

Let us ask God for His gift of wisdom, wisdom that sees God and what is good in every situation, to see the goodness of God in the world around us.

May we all have the humility of Solomon and be prepared to ask God for wisdom, ask for the gift that will benefit all people not just our own selves.

May we have the courage to take up the invitation of Proverbs and learn to walk in the way of insight.

May we all learn what is good and right and leads to life.

May we find wisdom in unexpected places.

May God give us all an understanding heart. Amen.