

## *Seeking Wisdom*

*(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist, August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024 - 1 Kings 3:3-14 & Ephesians 5:15-20)*

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Whenever I think about wisdom, the cartoon on your screen always comes to mind. Here is this gifted child who pushes on the door of his school and wonders why it would not open. He has forgotten to do as it says, pull. How often have you done that, going in or out of a building? If I am honest, many times and sometimes it takes a while for the penny to drop, and for me to realise I am doing exactly the opposite to the instruction. My brother said to me time and time again, 'You people with your degrees and fancy education just don't understand the simple things',

What do you think of when you think of wisdom? 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. Wisdom, I think involves asking questions – the questions we are taught at school – who, what, when, where, how and why, especially why. Wisdom also requires humility and openness to new ideas.

God invites Solomon to ask for anything in the world he would like. So, what does he ask for – an understanding mind so he could govern the people and the ability to know the difference between good and evil. Right request says God, and you shall have a wise and discerning mind (and some other things as well). Right because Solomon has put the people before himself.

The bible is full of both wise sayings and sayings about wisdom. Wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord, it says in many places. Just have a quick read through the book of Proverbs.

God's wisdom seems to turn conventional or worldly wisdom on its 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! What's more doubters, tax collectors, prostitutes are all included in the plan. God's wisdom is found in unexpected ways and places.

Rabbi Ben Zoma asks – Who is wise? The answer – One who learns from all.

Paul encourages the Ephesians to be wisdom seekers. They are encouraged to learn what is good and right as they try to understand the will of God. Living in God's way will avoid the pain of foolish decisions and will strengthen the community. The first step in this process is to recognise God's presence.

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

Let me share with you a few ideas.

As Baptists, one of the hallmarks of this denomination, is that we meet together regularly to make decisions, choices and to attempt to discern the will of God for us in

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the current time and situation. That is what our church meetings are about and what our church review will be about.

The Community of Transfiguration in Teasdale have a three-step process they use. Their starting point is of course God. They say 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 – those within and beyond the church.
3. Listen to self – self-awareness, a gift which takes practice, humility and patience

This is good process to keep in mind as we attempt to discern God's will for this community and its future, especially as we come to a time of review next week.

Alan Marr and Rowena Curtis go a bit deeper and suggest some questions we might ask in the process.

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 presented
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 do not confirm your decision

These ideas will help us discern what is the best way of serving both God and people in our context, it will help us discern God's will for the future for us. We may not end up with the wisdom of Solomon, but it will help us be seekers of wisdom as Paul calls for.

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 the courage to ask God for wisdom, asking for the gift that will benefit all people not just our own selves.

May we learn together 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.