



Oct 17, 2021 - “Living with Discernment” - Proverbs 3:21-24

## OPEN

Two weeks ago, we were on Vancouver Island. Did you know that the island has the [highest concentration of caves in North America](#)? This is due in part to the erosion of soluble rocks.

There are also amazing formations to explore on Gabriola Island beaches due to erosion by the sea. We chatted with a couple on a Gabriola beach who asked where we were from. I said, “I’m from the Island.” At that point, *discernment* was needed to understand what I was saying. Which island!?

Today we continue in our series “**The Way of Wisdom**” from Proverbs 3. We have considered the idea that wisdom is **moral skillfulness**. The moral skill we are considering today is *discernment*.

Throughout Proverbs we are invited to pursue, guard, and practice God’s wisdom. But remember, God’s wisdom is something that He persistently and patiently instills into our lives. “*For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.*” (Proverbs 2:6)

The reason we’re looking in such a detailed way through Proverbs 3 is because too many followers of Jesus “hunt-and-peck” through Bible passages for just the pleasant highlights [[wild turkeys are also found on Vancouver Island](#)]. But we are trying to have a more robust review of God’s wisdom – to see it from a bigger perspective, not just in bits and pieces.



## DIG

Colossians 1:9-10 contains a prayer that Christians would be **filled with God’s wisdom**. What “moral skills” have we observed in Proverbs 3? Thus far we have considered living with **obedience** (vv.1-2), **faith** (vv.3-4), **trust** (vv.5-6), **humility** (vv.7-8), **generosity** (vv.9-10,27-28), and **meekness** (vv.11-12) and **understanding** (vv.13-20).

### [A] Command – v. 21

As we have seen in other couplets in Proverbs 3, here is another “*command–consequence*” structure. The command is: “*My son, preserve sound judgement and discernment, do not let them out of your sight*” (v.21). The term “discernment” (NIV) can also be translated “discretion” (NASB). It is a Hebrew term which is based on the word for “purpose” or “plot”.

In fact, this term is used in other parts for the Old Testament to describe those who devise *evil* schemes. However, in the book of Proverbs, it is a key term used for God’s wisdom – with a view to God’s eternal, good purposes.

The purpose of the book of Proverbs is to provide God’s children with “knowledge and discretion” so that the “discerning” will be guided (1:4-5). Thus, when we read Proverbs 3:21 there is action anticipated. We must get beyond just “keeping an eye” on God’s wisdom to where we obey. As we read in Proverbs 15:14, “*the discerning heart seeks knowledge*”.

The consistent message in Proverbs is that people of wisdom and discernment are humble students of God’s truth. Further, when we practice God’s wisdom and live with discernment, we will experience divine blessing (see vv.22ff).

### [B] Consequences – vv. 22-24

How do we experience God’s divine blessings? We must walk in His ways of wisdom. We cannot disobey and expect to experience God’s “well done”. Discernment, therefore, is an active engagement with the ways of God. When we walk in discernment, we will experience positive results. Note that these are qualities which God works *into* us so that ministry may flow *out of* us.

- **Graced to be gracious – v.22** “*And they will be life to your soul and adornment to your neck.*” This connects with Proverbs 1:9 in which a wreath/crown is added to the neck ornament.
- **Led to be leaders – v.23** “*Then you will walk in your way securely, and your foot will not stumble.*” What value is there to be led in a secure way if we do not help others along that path?

- **Calmed to be confident – v.24** “When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.” How do we gauge a calm, unafraid heart? Take stock in the middle of the night!

### [C] Application

In the New Testament term “discern” refers to making a distinction or differentiating. Examples include discerning the weather (Matthew 16:3) to discerning spirits (I Cor 12:10). The Holy Spirit especially gifts some believers with discernment. What is clear, is that true discernment and wisdom only takes root in the life of the *regenerated* person (I Cor 2:14).

- Are you a merely a “looky-loo” of God’s wisdom? Are you content just to observe or admire discernment from a distance, without engagement?
- Do you fall prey to pseudo-discernment? Do you make life choices based on God’s wisdom or based on convenience, cost, and comfort?
- Does your discernment guard you from the false way? In **I John 4:1-6** we are instructed about the “*Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood*” (v.6).
- Does discernment help you humbly learn more about God? Are you motivated to grow in Him?

The phrase *semper reformanda* is from the Reformed theological tradition and encourages believers to be “always reforming” – to be actively growing in Christ. We might also consider the stark contrast between the godly characteristic of discernment compared to the new trend of deconstructionism.

In March 2019 Sam Hailes posted an article called “*Deconstructing Faith: Meet the evangelicals who are questioning everything*” ([read article](#)). He wrote,

...not everyone who doubts their faith ends up rejecting it. In fact, many evangelicals are claiming that an in-depth review of their beliefs has strengthened their faith. It’s a story I’ve heard time and time again from friends, acquaintances and even the odd well-known church leader. So, what’s going on? Academics have dubbed it ‘theological deconstruction’, but in simple terms, they’re referring to what happens when a person asks questions that lead to the careful dismantling of their previous beliefs....Asking questions is arguably a sign that a person’s faith is growing, not stagnating. The answers that satisfied us as Christian teenagers may not sustain us as we enter mid-life. We need to think again, and the Bible’s instruction to love God “with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37), means we can’t bury our heads in the sand.

Unlimited or unguided deconstructionism is dangerous. What is more, God has already provided a tool to explore challenging and deep questions of faith. He has called us to be discerning. Additionally, He has especially gifted some for deep discernment about difficult issues.

### REFLECT

Growth in spiritual discernment and wise discretion is expected of every follower of Jesus. Reflect on this fact as you read **Hebrews 5:14**.

Do you need discernment for a difficult responsibility? You could pray the prayer of **Solomon** from I Kings 3:7-9.

*Now, LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So 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?*

Are you struggling to submit to God’s ways in your life? You may need to pray like **Richard Foster** in his book **Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home**, (HarperOne, 1992, 56).

*O Lord, how do I let go when I’m so unsure of things? I’m unsure of your will, and I’m unsure of myself...That really isn’t the problem at all, is it? The truth of the matter is I hate the very idea of letting go. I really want to be in control....Jesus, please, teach me your way of relinquishment.*

Do you need to discern how to respond to a myriad of needs around you? Centuries ago, **St Francis of Assisi** prayed for discernment to serve well.

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*