

# Sermon Notes



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The Disciplines of Wisdom and Guidance

Proverbs 8:22-32

This lesson brings to a close our series on Christian disciplines. It has been quite a ride with ups and downs for all of us. The videos and lesson notes will remain on our social media sites so you can grab one when you need it.

Today, we are talking about wisdom and guidance. Let's define our terms. We are not talking about intelligence. Intelligence is the result of a combination of factors, especially genetics, early development, and diet in your first few years. It means your ability to gain and retain knowledge.

Wisdom is the ability to manipulate and use the knowledge you have. Some people with very high IQs are not wise, and some of the wisest people you may meet have never gone to university or read the Great Books.

Guidance is the collected wisdom of the community. It can also be the wisdom of a trusted person in the community. For example, it can be instruction from a coach to a member of his team. It can be counsel that you receive from a wise person, credentialed in the field. It can be guidance you receive from a pastor or the church.

Remember: no matter how smart or dumb you think you are, you can be wise. Wisdom is using the information you have and the tools you have to hand. Wisdom is so important that the writer of Proverbs devoted 2 chapters to her. Yes, "her." Proverbs is a collection of random sayings that have no central theme or flow, but when it comes to chapters 8 and 9, the collector stays with one theme: the personification of wisdom.

Proverbs 8:1-6. First, wisdom is not hidden. People constantly try to find hidden meaning, esoteric knowledge, secrets of the masters, and, according to the internet, "things they do not want you to know!" the fact is that wisdom is there, available to us all. James 1:5-8. (don't ask for wisdom and then tell yourself you're too stupid or unworthy to receive it).

Some examples of wisdom being right there in front of us and yet ignored. We say we oppose drinking and driving, but we allow stores to sell cold alcoholic beverages, and bars have parking lots. We say we are opposed to distracted driving, but there is not a day when I am not held up at a light by someone staring at their phone or nearly run off the road by someone (often in a semi-truck) who is staring at a phone or a map.

We say we know the national debt is a bomb that will impoverish our grandchildren, but we vote for increases in benefits and spending and suggest that more people should receive more gifts from public funds. We call it compassion, but our grandchildren won't look at it that way.

We buy a new car to save on petrol costs without doing back-of-the-napkin math that would quickly show us it would take 20 years to break even. We go into debt getting university degrees that will never get us a good enough job to pay off the debt.

We already have all the information we need to have. We are just refusing to apply wisdom and use what we know to understand what is best to do.

Since our wisdom alone is often ineffective through non-use, we need to talk about guidance. God gave us all the information we need to understand that we will need to consult others frequently throughout our lives. In Romans 12 and 1st Corinthians 12, we see lists of gifts that God gives people. Two facts should leap out at us: everybody gets at least one gift, and nobody gets them all. We need the skills, intelligence, and wisdom of others. (ASK for directions!)

The first Christian community took this very seriously. Acts 4:32,33 (echoes of Acts 2:44-46). Before sending out Paul and Barnabas, in Acts 13, the people fasted, prayed, and worshiped. That would be a good idea for all of us when we are considering making a move or starting (or ending) a ministry.

When different opinions about how Jewish new Christians should be and concerns over the behavior of the Gentile converts threatened to divide the new Christian faith, they gathered in Acts 15 to hear from the elders, the apostles who were present, and all sides of the discussion before saying, "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..." (Acts 15:28).

Note that Acts 15 was very different from the great councils of the Christian faith, such as Nicaea and Trent. In the councils, you only had the leaders who self-chose to attend or those who were allowed to attend. There was debate and then a vote, overseen in some cases by a secular head of state or their representative. In Acts 15, we do not see top-down leadership or dictatorship. We also do not see democracy, for there is no vote. We do not see declarations concerning who is in or out of the faith. Christianity has ignored Acts 15 to its hurt for 2000 years.

Other forms of guidance can be reaching out to ask questions as people do almost every week via email or Slido. It can be mentorship or using a spiritual advisor. I have an ever-changing group of about 12 people (the number is unimportant) that I consult before making a big decision. I am not seeking the will of the majority but the wisdom of the group. They have never let me down, even when I didn't take their advice (rarely).

Some Christian groups have elevated Guidance well above the rest of us. The Quakers, the Society of Friends, believe in community guidance. That is where the Spirit meets us. They meet and sit quietly until the Spirit motivates someone to speak or sing. Perhaps, this is why they were among the first Christians to corporately decide that slavery was evil and Christians should band together to abolish it.

Richard Foster, in his excellent book, "The Celebration of Discipline," recounts a meeting of about 200 Christians who were sharply divided by an issue. As time went on, a united sense of direction began to manifest and all but a few came to agree with each other. One person stood and said, "I do not feel right about this course of action, but I hope that the rest of you will love me enough to labor with me until I have the same sense of God's leading as the rest of you or until God opens another way to us." THAT is wisdom AND guidance in one phrase.

How many churches and homes would not have broken had they applied wisdom and guidance to their choices, actions, and plans? How many wars would not have begun? How many misunderstandings would have never festered into divisions?

One very important aspect of wisdom is knowing that you do not know all you need to know. Think of knowledge as a circle. The larger you grow your circle, the more it borders on things that are not a circle. I know geniuses with doctoral degrees who have so little wisdom that I worry about them trying eat with sharpened forks. I know people who are wildly successful in business, amassing great fortunes, who assume they know what they need to know to run a church, a family, a state, or a nation.

We will never gain the wisdom we need until and unless we are humble enough to say, "I don't know. Can you explain that to me?" Or, "I can't do that. Would you do that for or with me?"

Intelligence is only partially within our control. We can read more, eat better, exercise a little more, and our intelligence may increase. Wisdom is a decision, but so is ignorance. Listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the community of faith and choose wisdom.