

Growing in the Gift of Wisdom

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One of the gifts of the Spirit that doesn't receive as much attention as its impressive and flashy counterpart, prophecy, is the gift of wisdom. This unassuming ability, listed among the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, is indispensable in helping us flourish in this life. The aim of this article, then, is to help us understand, desire and cultivate the gift of wisdom.

Foolishness & The Beginning of Wisdom

True wisdom at the outset has nothing to do with cleverness, IQ, natural intelligence or education. There are many clever people who Scripture would call fools because they don't believe in God (Psalm 14:1). There is nothing more utterly foolish than a person (even a savvy and educated person) who rejects "*the only wise God*" (Romans 16:27, NIV).

As foolishness is marked by rejecting God, true wisdom begins in relationship with the Lord. Proverbs 9:10 (ESV) says, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.*" In other words, this is the starting point of wisdom. Along with this, we mustn't forget the cross of Jesus, which enables us to know God. It is the wonderful cross that most profoundly displays the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 2:6-7) in saving us, and our relationship with the Lord is always an embrace of the cross.

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Defining the Gift of Wisdom

From this foundation, godly wisdom can be described as the ability to have insight into people and situations and then to make the right godly choices from that insight. This biblical wisdom is not abstract or ethereal but is practical and realistic. It involves the choices we make in everyday life and helps us flourish in our relationships. This is "*the wisdom from above*", as James 3:17 (ESV) explains.

Wise Men

The roots of wisdom gifts go back to ancient times, firstly through those recognised as wise men, and secondly through books of wisdom. Wise men were revered along with prophets in former times. These individuals were sponsored by the royal court or the temple, and became prominent men of influence in local communities, as important as the priests and prophets. They acted as counsellors, giving personal counsel and political advice.

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What was the difference then between the prophet and the wise man? While the prophet spoke God's words, the wise man was not trying to speak on behalf of God in the same way. Instead, he gave advice in various forms, enabling a person to live a life pleasing to God. Today, we mustn't forget that we also need to see wisdom and prophecy walk hand in hand in the church. The Spirit gives both to build up His people (1 Corinthians 12:4).

Wise Books

We find wisdom literature sprinkled throughout the Old Testament books and, more notably, in books such as Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Job and Ecclesiastes focus on a type of philosophical wisdom, helping the reader accept that life doesn't always make sense, especially when tragedy and suffering come to us. JI Packer says, "*The real basis for wisdom is to realize that most of what happens to us can often be inexplicable*". God doesn't always give us the 'why' and so it wise to acknowledge that we see in part and we will need to trust God when we don't have the answers. The book of Job and Ecclesiastes teaches us this.

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Proverbs is an example of practical wisdom, giving us down-to-earth, common sense statements that are desperately needed in the crazy, nonsensical culture we find ourselves in today. Proverbs is like an ancient Twitter feed. The book contains short, memorable, pithy statements designed to be hard-hitting and humorous. Because much of the practical wisdom of Proverbs was designed to be remembered, simple overstatements are used. When you read Proverbs, don't forget that these are catchphrases. They are not meant to be over-analysed or taken to be binding promises. As one author says, "*..it speaks truth, but not the whole truth*" (Gordon Fee). God, then, has given us Proverbs to keep our feet on the ground, our heads open to reason and our hearts turned towards fearing Him.

Growing in the Gift of Wisdom

At times I find myself lacking in godly wisdom and desperate to grow in it. Fortunately, Scripture says, "*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, ESV).

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I want to highlight two practical ways in which God can give us wisdom. Firstly, through developing a lifelong love for reading Scripture prayerfully. The wisdom books along with the rest of the Bible are *“the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ”* (2 Timothy 3:15). Secondly, through learning from godly individuals who have shown to be fruitful in their lives. This can include elders and more mature believers who have succeeded in different areas in life (Proverbs 15:22; Hebrews 13:7). These have been two key ingredients God has repeatedly used to allow me to grow in the gift of wisdom.

In closing, as we look back on a tumultuous 2020, thank God that He gives us what we need to navigate through uncertain waters. We can't predict the future, but we have been given the Spirit, the Scriptures and wise individuals to help us make godly decisions to glorify God!