

Overall point: wisdom comes in seeking after God

Ephesians 5:15-20

New International Version (NIV)

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live —not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is one of my favorite parts of the bible because he manages to cram so much in to such a small book. In just six chapters he manages to list just about everything that a Christian shouldn't do, and then everything we should do as we live out our faith. And he weaves this theme of love throughout the whole thing as he reminds us what Christ did for us and what that means in our lives. Paul focuses this down and tells us to be wise here at the beginning of chapter 5, and that's really the theme of all or scriptures this morning. Paul tells us to be wise. Solomon asks God for wisdom.

For us, seeking Godly wisdom, where does that come from? And what does that even mean? The dictionary says that wisdom is knowledge of what is true or right coupled with judgment as to action. And I think that it's a very important distinction to make between more knowledge as we look at having Godly wisdom, because Solomon shows us that God's wisdom comes from the heart, that it's found in seeking after God, and that it's all about action.

An angel appears at a faculty meeting and tells the dean that in return for his unselfish and exemplary behavior, the Lord will reward him with his choice of infinite wealth, wisdom or beauty. Without hesitating, the dean selects infinite wisdom.

"Done!" says the angel, and disappears in a cloud of smoke and a bolt of lightning. Now, all heads turn toward the dean, who sits surrounded by a faint halo of light. At length, one of his colleagues whispers, "Say something."

The dean looks at them and says, "I should have taken the money."

There are all kinds of jokes like that that start out with people having wishes granted. And there is usually a choice like that or some other limitation in there to make the joke work. But when God appeared to Solomon in the verses that Diane/Tammy read earlier, he didn't say "tell me what you want out of just these couple of choices." And he didn't trick Solomon like a genie from a story. He just said "Ask." And it's interesting to note that after Solomon finally does get around to asking, the writer tells us that God was pleased. God was pleased just as much for what Solomon didn't ask for as what he did. So pleased, in fact, that God gives him some bonuses here: wealth, honor, and a shot at long life.

Now Solomon was legendary for his wisdom. And rightly so. He wrote at least three books of the Bible, and God himself told Solomon that no one else will ever be as discerning as him. But Solomon wasn't granted this because he was perfect. The chapter that we read even made a point of saying that he offered sacrifices in the old high places. This was a sin, because God had commanded that sacrifices be made wherever the ark of the covenant was. The first thing Solomon does when he awakens from his dream is to go back and make burnt offerings correctly, but even once God has granted him wisdom, that's not the end of his mistakes, screw-ups, and sins. Solomon fell away from God as he got older, and because of that, he even has

an RBI in his sin and punishment statistics. God punishes Solomon by splitting his kingdom in two during the reign of his son Rehoboam. This guy was far from perfect.

But what Solomon got wrong later in life was what he got right here in 1 Kings chapter 3. He asked God for wisdom out of his desire to do God's will. He told God metaphorically that he was "a child." He knew that he was not able to do the job on his own. But he was faithful because he knew he'd been appointed to his task by God, and so he asked the Lord for the tools necessary to rule God's people. And even though it took a decent amount of wisdom for Solomon to ask this of the Lord, he reminds me of that old saying that "God doesn't Call the equipped, he equips the Called."

He also reminds me of a scene from a familiar movie. Do y'all remember the movie the Wizard of Oz? When the Scarecrow, Tin Man, Dorothy and the Cowardly Lion set off together down the yellow brick road, they're each looking for something. (*sing*): A brain; a heart; a home; the nerve. (I've seen it once or twice and that was my favorite song). At the end of the movie they've finally completed their quest and they bring the broomstick of the Wicked Witch of the West to the Wizard, and after they call him out for being a fraud, he does give them some things to help them. But there are no brains or hearts in his black bag. There're diplomas and medals and symbols of what the characters already have. But the intellect and the compassion and the courage they wanted were things they found by being faithful along their quest.

So in a similar fashion Solomon found Godly wisdom by seeking after God. By being faithful and doing God's will to the best of his abilities, and by asking for help to do God's work, not just his own. And I find it interesting to note that when he asked God for wisdom, and God says "sure, dude, I'll make you wise," He doesn't say "alright, I'm gonna overclock your brain." He tells Solomon that he will give him a discerning *heart*.

Another movie I couldn't help but think of after reading Solomon's story here is the King and I. Until this week, I hadn't seen that movie in years, but I have always remembered the part in Act I when the crown prince is talking to his father the king. He asks whether the world is flat and rides on the back of a great turtle, or if it is a round ball spinning on an axis as he has been told in school. The king replies that it is a round ball... he believes. This shocks the crown prince, who says, but you must know. You are king, you know everything.

As the conversation progresses, the young prince asks when he will know everything. And how will he know that he has learned everything. The king simply and confidently replies "When you are king." But once his son is gone, the king spends the rest of the scene singing about how many things there are of which he wishes he was more sure.

Solomon didn't know everything that he needed to know just because he had become king. But God was pleased with his humility in asking for wisdom. Solomon told God figuratively that he was just a child. He knew that he had to rely on God. And the only stipulations God gave him for getting his bonus prize of long life were about that very reliance. He was to continue to walk in God's ways in faith as his father David had done.

I was trying to think of examples of wise people. I can see wisdom in the writing of C.S. Lewis. Or in the songs of Matt Theissan from Relient K. Even my little brother is somebody that I think is really wise. And always has been. When he was really young, our mom was trying to use an old saying in a teaching moment, and told him "People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." He'd never heard that phrase before, and offering his own input on what he thought that meant, immediately responded "People in glass houses shouldn't take showers." It was pretty funny to hear that from a little kid, but he thought through what he wanted to say and he meant it with all his heart. And that's something I continued to learn through another guy I think is pretty wise.

The first summer I was on staff in Ecuador, our group of interns spent a week out in the jungle with some missionaries from a different organization, along with one of our own directors and an Ecuadorian pastor, Fabian. Staffing a vacation bible school for about 200 indigenous kids. And I've told you guys about that jungle trip and that week of VBS before, but one of the most memorable things of those 8 days happened before we even got on the planes to fly out.

In fact, we were waiting in those planes. We'd already driven an extra couple of hours toward the jungle so we could save the tiny planes some fuel. We were literally where the road ended in a small town called Arajuno, and we were just waiting under a covered concrete soccer/basketball court at the small local high school, hiding from the sun, bored out of our minds.

We waited for hours, not sure what the weather was like back at the airfield in the city, and not knowing if the grass airstrip where we waited would be dry enough for the pilots to land by the time they ever got there. Eventually the high school students started coming out to the basketball court for their P.E. class. I'm not really sure how it happened, but somehow a couple of our guys joined in the basketball game, and before we knew it, we had a gringos-vs-Latinos match going on. And as sometimes happens when 15 random gringos shown up in a community in the middle of the jungle, the teachers didn't really make anyone go back to class after this.

It was once the game died out and the group was all just sitting around the bleachers that Pastor Fabian came back. I didn't even know he'd been gone. But he had two bottles of soda and a stack of tiny paper cups he'd managed to buy in a little *tienda* somewhere in the town. He

gathered us all into a circle, passed around coke a strawberry soda, and began reading from the bible.

Now this was the first summer I worked in Ecuador and my Spanish back then was limited to "left, right, chicken and rice, and I need a receipt." So I could not and cannot tell you what he was reading or what he said in the mini sermon he gave next. But I can tell you that none of the 13 gringo missionaries had thought "let's gather up these kids and make sure they hear about Jesus," much less acted on it. We were all waiting for the planes to get us to the people to whom our schedule said we were ministering. Pastor Fabian looked at that situation, with the same knowledge about it that we had, but made a judgment.

He talked with those kids. He prayed over them. The ones who wanted to hear more, he paired off with the Spanish-speaking gringos or the high-school aged Ecuadorian missionaries from our partner organization.

We talked a lot that summer about altar calls and whether it was effective to try to do ministry in a place like Arajuno where we knew we'd only be for a short time and not be able to follow up and help disciple new Believers. But Pastor Fabian said he just couldn't give up this one opportunity he felt he had been given to share his faith with these students. Just like that dictionary definition talked about, he used his biblical knowledge and his own sense of judgment to come to what I thought was both a very cool and a very wise decision. And knowing him the way I've gotten to know him in the years since, I think it was because he was simply listening to the will of God.

He was at least 8 hours away from his congregation in Quito, so he wasn't worried about church attendance. And we were stuck somewhere unexpected, so he wasn't just following his own plan. He was living out the scriptures, wisely making the most of his opportunity.

After Paul tells us to be wise, he talks about living that out in faith. As it's translated in the Message, he says "Don't live carelessly, unthinkingly... Drink the Spirit of God... Sing hymns instead of drinking songs. Sing songs from your heart to Christ. Sing praises over everything, any excuse for a Song to God the Father, in the name of our Master Jesus Christ.

Solomon didn't ask for knowledge of his enemies' next move, or the price of camels next week. He asked to be able to judge his people. Paul doesn't tell us to study, but to sing. And both of them teach us to *do*. To sing. To make decisions from our hearts. To seek wisdom in seeking God, walking in faith, knowing *His* will above our own.