

How to Be a Wise Guy

Proverbs 1:1-7

Rev. Brian Bill

January 5-6, 2019

The weekend between Christmas and the New Year is often difficult for churches to navigate.

One church I know cancels services the last weekend of the year and instead encourages its members to have “*Church in My Jammies*” while providing a 20-minute video complete with music and a message.

Our daughter Emily and son-in-law Matt just moved to Virginia and researched churches so they could find one to attend last weekend. Excited to find a church that lined up doctrinally, they woke up early and arrived to find only a handful of cars in the parking lot.

They discovered the church had cancelled services but had not posted anything on their website about it. One of the other confused guests in the parking lot went on the church’s Facebook page and found this: “*ANNOUNCEMENT! We are observing a church-wide sabbath this Sunday, so there will be no services this week. We encourage you and your family to rest and recharge.*” BTW, I thought one of the purposes of the Sabbath was for God’s people to worship together!

Another church pastored by a well-known and respected gospel-preaching pastor, cancelled services at all of their locations, encouraging its members to #worshipathome. The pastor explained they were cancelling services because of the intensity of their Christmas Eve outreach and they know it’s a “*busy travel time.*”

Are you kidding me? Churches in America are cancelling services because people are tired?

One writer pointed out the contrast between these churches and the attitude and actions of our persecuted brothers and sisters in China. In advance of the persecution one pastor saw coming, he prepared written documents so his church would know how to respond when he was in prison. Here’s what he called it: “*14 Decisions: In the Face of Persecution, What Will I Do?*”

Here's the very first decision: **DO NOT STOP GATHERING TOGETHER.**

“Under no circumstances will we stop or give up on gathering publicly, especially the corporate worship of believers on Sundays...the Bible’s teaching on not neglecting to gather together is higher than any secular law...I will not cooperate with the police banning, shutting down, dissolving, or sealing up the church and its gathering. I will not stop convening, hosting and participating in the church’s public worship, until the police seize my personal freedom...”

The writer concludes his post: *“Our Chinese brothers refuse to give up under persecution what so many American Christians voluntarily neglect or dismiss under ease.”*

Speaking of last weekend, Pastor Dan sure did a fantastic job walking through Psalm 46 where we were reminded that God is our refuge. Beth and I watched the sermon video on Sunday afternoon. I'm so glad we didn't cancel! We would also not have had six baptisms, eight new member introductions and two baby dedications!

Let me be quick to say that I'm not judge and jury of what other churches choose to do but I do believe a case could be made the American church has lost its fear of the Lord. I recently heard a pastor (not from this area) begin his prayer this way: *“Yah, hey God...”* Romans 3:18 immediately came to mind, ***“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”***

God is looking for faithful followers who fear Him and tremble before Him. Philippians 2:12-13: ***“...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”***

And God is longing for churches to walk in the fear of the Lord. Acts 9:31 gives this report about the early church: ***“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.”***

I cringed several years ago when a well-known quarterback made this statement after winning the Super Bowl: *“I'm going to kiss my wife and children. Drink a lot of beer...Then I'm going to say a little prayer and thank the man upstairs...”*

Here's a news flash. He's not the big guy in the sky, or the man upstairs.

He's the Lord of Hosts, the Most High God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the King of Kings, the Omnipotent Potentate who is Omniscient and Omnipresent, the Lord of Lords, the God of the Angel Armies who is holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty, God in three persons, blessed Trinity! Hebrews 12:28-29 gives us this challenge: ***“let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”***

We're kicking off a new series this weekend from the Book of Proverbs called, “Wise Words to Live By.” Here's a summary of where we're headed: *To be wise in God's eyes, let's revere and draw near in the new year.*

The book of Proverbs contains insightful observations with a focus on day-to-day behavior and personal character. A proverb has been called a *“short sentence founded upon long experience.”* I'm sure that's what was behind Proverbs 26:17: ***“Whoever meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a passing dog by the ears.”*** That's wisdom from experience!

Essentially, Proverbs is an instruction manual that covers all of life. The beginning chapters present a series of lessons that a father is teaching his son and the latter chapters emphasize how God's wisdom applies to changing life situations as the son matures.

Purpose of Proverbs

The purpose of Proverbs is found in 1:1-6: ***“The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know [experience] wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive [to get, to take] instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth—Let the wise hear and increase [to do something after inactivity; to enhance] in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles.”***

Proverbs was written so you and I can become wise in God's eyes. It's not enough simply to be educated and have knowledge, as important as education is. We also need wisdom, which is the ability to use the knowledge that we have. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for **“wise”** is used to describe people who are adept at working with their hands.

We're going to discover five practical pathways to wisdom. We'll spend most of our time on the first one because of its importance.

1 – Develop the Fear of the Lord

Proverbs 1:7 is both the theme of the book and the key that unlocks the way to wisdom: ***“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”*** We see in this one verse the *nature*, the *necessity* and the *neglect* of the fear of the Lord.

- **The Nature of the Fear of the Lord.** Let's start with the first phrase: ***“The fear of the Lord...”*** When we truly fear the Lord, we will recognize that He is the Creator and we are the created. He is the Sovereign and we are His servants. He is the Father and we are His children.

The phrase ***“fear of the Lord”*** literally means to, *“live before the face of God.”* It's the idea of being so in awe of God that I long to obey Him. One pastor puts it like this: *“When we fear the Lord, there is an element of dread at what His wrath can do, but there is also such a respect for Him and for His will that nothing else matters but doing that which pleases the Lord.”*

The true fear of God is a child-like fear. The Puritans used to call it a *“filial fear,”* a combination of holy reverence and glowing love. To fear God is to have a heart that is sensitive to both His greatness and His graciousness. It means we simultaneously experience great awe and deep joy. Or to say it another way, we're called to revere *and* to rejoice in Him. *To be wise in God's eyes, let's revere and draw near in the new year.*

Fearing God includes understanding how much God hates sin and fearing His judgment on sin. The main emphasis of the entire Bible is the fear of the Lord. Listen to some selected Scripture passages that show how important this is.

- 1) **The fear of the Lord can keep us from sinning.** Exodus 20:20: ***“Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the **fear of him** may be before you, that you may not sin.”***
- 2) **Fearing God will motivate us to care for the hurting.** Leviticus 19:14: ***“You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall **fear your God**: I am the Lord.”***

- 3) **God blesses those who fear Him.** Psalm 128:1: “*Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways.*”
 - 4) **God works wonders so we will fear Him.** Ecclesiastes 3:14: “*I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him.*”
 - 5) **Fearing God is of supreme importance.** Ecclesiastes 12:13: “*The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*”
 - 6) **If we don’t fear God, we’ll forsake Him.** Jeremiah 2:19: “*...Know and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the LORD your God; the fear of me is not in you, declares the Lord GOD of hosts.*”
- **The Necessity of the Fear of the Lord.** The second phrase tells us the fear of the Lord is “*...the beginning of knowledge.*” The word “*beginning*” was used to describe, “*the choicest of offerings, the most excellent, the best, the chief.*” It also refers to a “*starting point*” and the ultimate goal. Proverbs 9:10 adds, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*” We will never find wisdom by worshipping a god made in our own image. When we fear Him, we are humbled. Until our hearts are right, we are unable to receive the “*wisdom that comes from heaven*” according to James 3:17.

Here’s the bottom line. If we want to know anything, we must grow in our fear of God. Without the fear of God, we know nothing.

- **The Neglect of the Fear of the Lord.** Proverbs 1:7 ends by showing the contrast between those who fear God and the fools who don’t: “*...fools despise wisdom and instruction.*” The word “*despise*” means, “*to scorn, hold in contempt.*” There are really only two categories of people in the world – the wise and the wicked, those who revere and those who reject, God-fearers and godless fools.

D.L. Moody was a passionate preacher who boldly proclaimed the gospel. People often heckled him. In one meeting an usher handed Moody a note while he was preaching. Thinking it was an announcement, he quieted the crowd and prepared to read it. Known for his quick wit, Moody looked up and said, “*I’ve just been handed a letter which contains the single word – ‘FOOL!’ This is most unusual. I’ve often heard of those who have written letters and forgotten to sign their names, but this is the first time I’ve ever*

heard of anyone who signed his name and then forgot to write the letter!”
Taking advantage of this teachable moment, Moody changed his sermon text on the spot to Psalm 14:1: ***“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God!’”***

A fool is not just someone who is a couple bricks short of a load, or one whose elevator does not go to the top floor. A fool is not somebody who is a few fries short of a Happy Meal. In Proverbs, the fool is the one who doesn’t follow God’s ways. He’s the one who knows the right thing to do but instead does the opposite, or simply does nothing. 1:32 says the ***“complacency of fools will destroy them.”***

The Book of Proverbs lists a number of practical benefits that result from living in the fear of the Lord. Here are three of them.

- **Consecration.** One of the best ways to stay away from sin is to fear God. Proverbs 3:7: ***“Fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.”*** Proverbs 8:13 says it stronger: ***“The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil.”*** And Proverbs 16:6 tells us when we tremble before God, we’ll move away from sin: ***“By the fear of the Lord one turns away from evil.”*** If you’re serious about following God, then focus on fearing God. According to 2 Corinthians 7:1, the way to grow in holiness is by seeing God as holy: ***“...let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”***

Fearing God is having the continual awareness that our loving heavenly Father is watching and evaluating everything we think, say and do. Colin Smith puts it like this: *“To fear God is to love Him so that His frown would be your greatest dread and His smile would be your greatest delight.”* I came across an example of how this can motivate us to do the right thing. I have permission from Debbi Collins to share what happened to her this past week when she was at Jewel.

I checked out and was chatting away with the cashier -- as I left, I noticed as I was walking out the door to the parking lot 3 items still in the cart -- immediately I turned around and told her I didn’t think I paid for them and sure enough, after checking my receipt - I didn’t! So she rang me up and thanked me for being so honest -- I smiled at her and told her I couldn’t help it - God is always watching me!

I went outside to the cold chill of blowing winds - found my car and unloaded the contents of my cart - I pushed the cart to the cart return - grabbed my purse...and there were 2 packages of Chocolate Chunks!!! NOT PAID FOR! I was cold! I wanted to get home! This can't be happening! I got in the car and proceeded to drive out of the parking lot, all the while thinking how I was going to pay for these two elusive items! I could go home then come back tomorrow and give them extra money -- no -- that won't work -- so I turned the car around looking for a close parking space - but parked - again - FAR AWAY FROM THE DOOR. I went in, found a cashier who wasn't busy and "purchased" my two bags of Chocolate Chunks as if I just picked them off the shelves -- I made it! No one saw me bring them in - I looked like a "normal" shopper.

Then the bagger who helped me the first time just moments ago saw me -- "forgot something else?" she asked with a small sideways grin -- I just smiled and walked out the door...found my car and drove home!

That reminds me of the song, "Oh, be careful little hands what you do. For the Father up above is looking down in love, so be careful little hands what you do."

- **Confidence.** Cultivating the fear of God can also give us confidence according to Proverbs 14:26: "**In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge.**" Speaking of children, we're called to bring them up in the fear of the Lord according to Psalm 34:11: "**Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.**" Job 4:6 asks, "**Is not your fear of God your confidence...?**"
- **Contentment.** Most of us struggle to be content with life so fearing God can help us find satisfaction. Proverbs 15:16: "**Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble with it.**" Fearing God also helps us to not be jealous of what others have according to Proverbs 23:17: "**Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day.**" Proverbs 19:23: "**The fear of the LORD leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied.**" Paul David Tripp writes, "*Only when awe of God rules your heart will you be able to keep the pleasures of the material world in their proper place.*"

If you want to be consecrated, more confident and content, then revere and draw near in the new year!

The primary way to become a wise guy or a wise woman is to live in light of the Almighty's awesomeness. The second pathway to wisdom is to devote ourselves to Scripture.

2 – Devote Yourself to the Word of God

Psalm 19:7: *“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.”* Psalm 119:130: *The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.* 2 Timothy 3:15: *“...The holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation...”*

There is no way to become wise apart from the Word of God! It doesn't matter how smart someone is, if he or she does not know the Bible, they are wisdom deficient.

I've been humbled this week to know that 10 of our young adults gathered with 7,000 others for three days of preaching and praise at the Cross Conference in Louisville. That's triple what it was a year ago! Here's what that conference was all about: *“CROSS exists to see our generation live for the most loving cause in the universe: bringing people from every tribe, tongue, and nation into the everlasting joy of knowing and worshipping Jesus.”* Special thanks to Pastor Dan and Pastor Kyle and Liesl for pouring into this next generation.

During this same week, over 40,000 18-25 year olds gathered in four locations for the Passion Conference. That's 8,000 more than last year! Listen to their mission: *“Passion exists to glorify God by uniting students in worship, prayer and justice for spiritual awakening in this generation.”*

And the Urbana Missions Conference took place after Christmas with 11,000 college students diving into God's Word in order to hear His will for their lives related to global missions. Listen to their heart: *“God uses Urbana to reveal his glory and call generations to surrender to Christ's lordship.”* One of the most moving images is students waving white flags to demonstrate their surrender to do anything and go anywhere God sends them.

Do you see the irony? While some churches cancelled services, thousands of young adults gathered to grow to give and then go with the gospel!

Here's a challenge for those of us who are older. Let's stop dissing the younger generation! May God bring revival to the church and may He do it through them!

Have you devoted yourself to the Word of God?

3 – Determine to Get Wisdom

After developing the fear of the Lord and devoting ourselves to the Word of God, the next step is to determine to get wisdom. Here's the bottom line: One does not get wise without working at it. We need to be proactive, not passive.

Listen to the eight action verbs in Proverbs 2:1-5: “My son, if you **receive** [to grasp or seize] my words and **treasure up** [memorize] my commandments with you, **making your ear attentive** [to pay close attention] to wisdom and **inclining your heart** [stretching out, extending] to understanding; yes, if you **call out** [invoke, invite, summon] for insight and **raise your voice** [to give] for understanding, if you **seek it** [obtain] like silver and **search for it** [to search for valuables] as for hidden treasures.”

Three times Solomon writes: “**if you**” in order to show that if we want it, we must go in the right direction, make the decision and then be determined to go and get it. Verse 5 begins with “**then.**” If we're proactively going after wisdom, then we will become wise: “**Then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.**”

Interestingly, Proverbs 1 teaches fearing God leads to wisdom and chapter 2 says the search for wisdom leads to fearing God. The more we fear, the wiser we become and the more we search for wisdom, the more we will fear God.

4 – Decide to Ask For It

If you could ask for only one thing in 2019, what would it be? Fame? Power? Money? Good health? Long life? One night God appeared to Solomon in 1 Kings 3:5 and said, “**Ask what I shall give you.**” This was his chance to have anything he wanted!

Solomon's answer was startling in its simplicity. He merely requested a discerning heart and the supernatural ability to distinguish between right and wrong. God was

pleased with this kind of request and said in verse 12: ***“I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind.”***

Solomon became the quintessential wise guy simply because he asked for wisdom. Once we want wisdom more than anything else, we must decide to ask God for it.

5 – Dedicate Yourself To Jesus

The final pathway to wisdom is found in Jesus Himself. Listen to Colossians 2:2-3: ***“...that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”***

If you don’t yet know Christ, then you need to come to Him in faith. If you are already a believer, then make sure you are fully surrendered to Him. To know and love and follow Jesus is to gain wisdom.

If you want to become a wise guy or a wise gal, then develop the fear of the Lord, devote yourself to the Word of God, determine to get wisdom, decide to ask for it, and dedicate yourself to Jesus.

Action Steps

1. Wise people look for ways to witness. Proverbs 11:30 in the NKJV says: ***“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life and he who wins souls is wise.”*** 2 Corinthians 5:11 says, ***“...knowing the **fear of the Lord**, we persuade others.”***

This past week I’ve been trying to say, “Have a Holy New Year” instead of “Have a Happy New Year.” I discovered it’s a great conversation opener...and closer.

When I wished a worker at Whitey’s a holy new year, she just froze and then said thanks. When I bought stamps I started a conversation by asking the cashier how her new year is going. I then told her I’m trying to focus on having a holy new year instead of a happy new year. She said, “That’s interesting” and quickly moved away. When I went out for lunch on Thursday, I used this greeting and it led to a woman talking about a family member dying, which opened up a gospel conversation. Try it out and let me know how it goes.

2. Wise people get into the Word daily. God is looking for people who tremble at his Word according to Isaiah 66:2: ***“But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.”*** One of the best ways to grow in wisdom is to percolate on Proverbs every day. Our Bible reading plan this month is on Proverbs. Simply read the chapter that corresponds with the day of the month. When you read, ask these questions:

- **What virtue is applauded?**
- **What vice is to be avoided?**
- **What value is affirmed?**

To be wise in God’s eyes, let’s revere and draw near in the new year.

Communion

Around the turn of the previous century, people were so tired of hearing about the wrath of God that preachers started focusing more on the love of God. That was probably necessary but I wonder if we’re out of balance today. We talk so much about God’s love that many times we dilute His hallowed awesomeness and His majestic magnificence.

Scripture never depicts God’s love and His holiness as opposing attributes. Both are fully exhibited without conflict or compromise in the Godhead. God is utterly holy, totally transcendent, and to be revered. He is also unconditionally loving and very close to us.

I’m reminded of what Mr. Beaver said of Aslan, who represents Jesus, in the “Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe” by C.S. Lewis: *“Safe? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course He isn’t safe. But He’s good. He’s the king I tell you.”*

It’s at the cross where the fear of God and the possibility of friendship with God meet. We can both revere *and* draw near. God’s justice *and* His mercy, His truth *and* His grace are on full display when He says, ***“This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me...This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”***

Take some time now to revere *and* to draw near. Remember what He did for you. And repent of anything that is blocking your relationship with Him.

Distribution of Elements

New Members

Nathan, Jeannie and Matthew Gray (10:45)

Don and Nancy Johnston (10:45)

Mark and Stacy Zmuda (10:45)

Benediction

Psalm 86:11: ***“Teach us your ways, O Lord, that we may walk in your truth, unite our hearts to **fear your name.**”***

Go and be wise in God’s eyes, as you revere and draw near!

Have a holy new year!