

BA

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Kingdom Wisdom





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2025: Kingdom People



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Who is the Wise Man?

I'd randomly ask my twins this question when they were little — while at play, at the dinner table, tucking them into bed. Just out of the blue: "Who is the wise man?"

The smiles would appear. They knew the answer. They knew Jesus' parable of the wise man. "The man who built his house on the rock!" they'd shout, competing to say it first. I'd wait, the question still hanging. "Who is the wise man?" It always went like this, and then it would click: "The one who hears Jesus' words and does them!"

With the wise and foolish, Jesus concluded His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:24-27). Where's wisdom found? Jesus' answer is simple yet profound: "Hear Me! Obey Me!" The Master's instruction to a kingdom people evokes the *Shema*: "Hear, O Israel: . . . thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart . . ." (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5, KJV throughout). The way of wisdom is inseparable from a relationship of hearing, loving, and obeying the Lord himself.

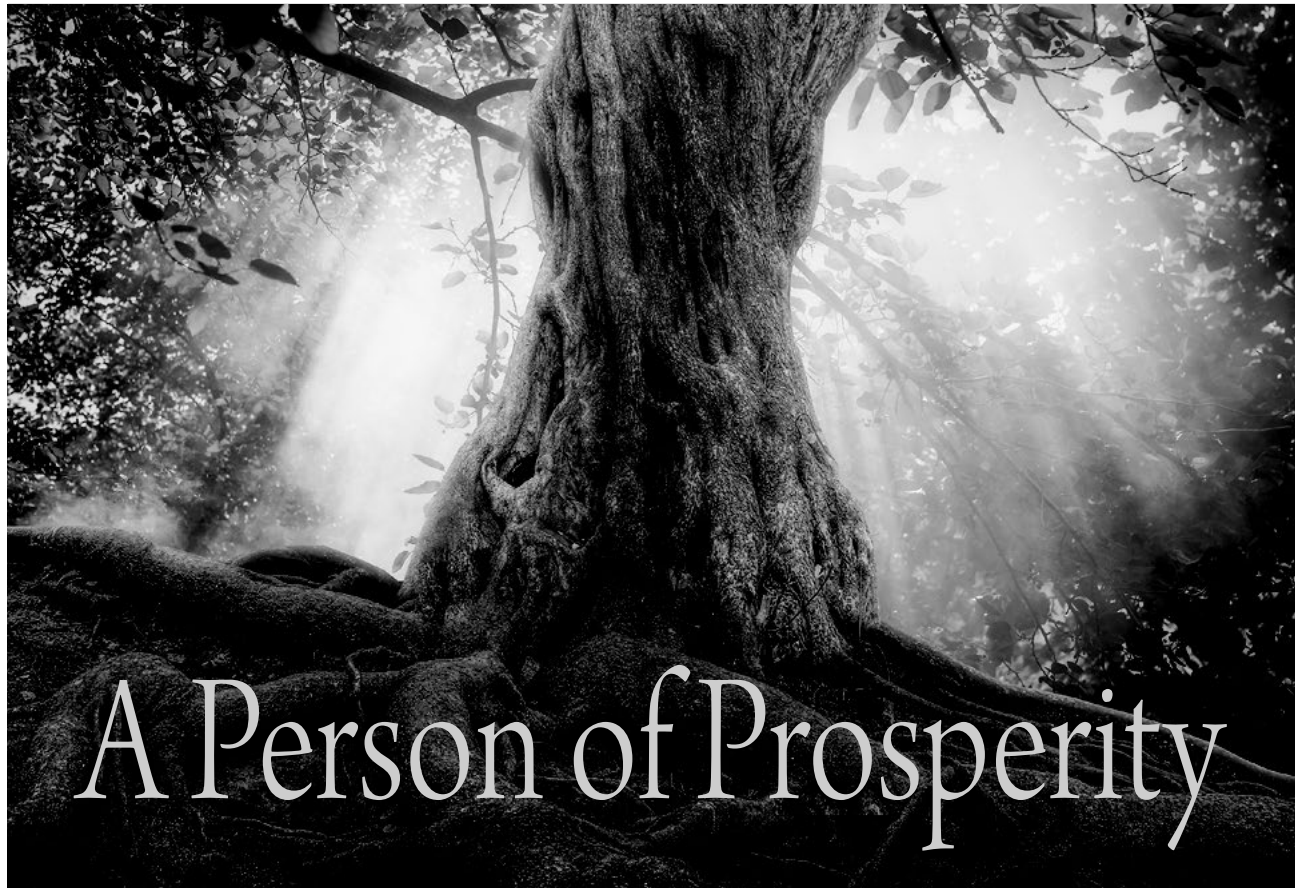
We are all building something: a life, a faith, a future. But with so many voices in this world, who will we listen to? It matters because what we hear directs what we do. This is what Proverbs is about. It sounds like Jesus: "Through wisdom is an house builded; . . . Hear me now . . . O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth. . . . A wise man will hear . . ." (24:3; 5:7; 1:5). *We listen to God!*

The foolish man thinks himself wise when he builds the easy way, the fast way, the way that works. But all is sand. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom," Proverbs 9:10 says. The fool has no fear, no faith, because he cannot hear: "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). The first step of the wise is faith.

James asks the same question I asked my young children: "Who is a wise man . . . ?" (3:13). It couldn't be simpler, or more challenging. We know the answer, as my twins did, but saying it is easy. It must be done. *Hear Jesus!*

— Jason Overman





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Learning the way of biblical wisdom.

by **Dr. David Downey**

One of my favorite hymns (I confess I have many “favorites”) is “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us” — partly because of its beautiful melody in a minor key, but mostly because Jesus has had a tremendous impact on my life with His gentle leading. Many times, I have wandered about, trying to be faithful to His leadership but uncertain what steps to take. Then in hindsight, I could see that the Shepherd was guiding me all along, closing doors and opening

them. I recognized His masterful artistry after the steps had been taken and decisions made.

I am intrigued by the biblical theme of prosperity. I have studied God’s Word deeply to see if there was something I missed — some secret, some clue. I was willing to do anything to find this biblical prosperity, and I believe God knew I was willing for Him to reveal it to me. Much of what I learned came to me while studying the first psalm. I will concentrate on the first three verses, as they are as full a bucket as I can carry today.

What not to do

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of

the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful (Psalm 1:1).

We tend to see walking as more committed than sitting. We might view Psalm 1:1-3 as simple repetition. It is written otherwise, however, as these verses are ascending in impact. People walk and commit to a way, but when they stand in it, they are firm. Moreover, once people sit, in a sense, they have joined that way with their whole life. The psalmist is clear: How blessed is the one who refuses to do this!

If we wish to follow biblical wisdom, we will first realize that rebellion is not an option. We have chosen a way, and it is not disobedience. Prosperity is never

found in refusing God's guidance. In his commentary on this psalm, Charles Spurgeon says that from this text the rest of the psalms flow. Blessings are promised for the person who is willing to reject the way of darkness and choose God's way.

At a conference, I heard a pastor tell one of the most memorable events of his life as a young farm boy. His father had taught him how to wring a chicken's neck, which he did not like at all. He wrung the chicken's neck, but his father had forgotten to tell him the chicken might run around for a while.

Terrified, the boy started running too. By chance, everywhere he went in the barnyard the chicken followed him. He turned and the chicken turned. He zigged and it zigged. He tripped and fell, and the chicken ran right over his back. The father, trying to comfort the traumatized boy, said, "Son, he's dead. He just doesn't know it yet."

This is a fitting picture of us. Scripture says that we are "dead to sin." However, we may need to remind ourselves of this fact. We should refuse the way of death.

What to do

But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night" (v. 2).

Thomas a Kempis said, "I have no rest, but in a nook, with *the book*." Such a person delights in the law. It is still the law, and it still brings a yoke, but it is an "easy" yoke and a "light" burden.

When Jesus came preaching in His hometown, the people

said, "Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands!" (Mark 6:2). His wisdom, His authority in teaching, and His miraculous works were all united to His complete obedience to His Father.

Jesus also meditated on Scripture, evidenced when He used it so readily in both His temptations and teaching. He spent much time in prayer, often going out long before daylight to pray, going apart to pray, or praying before He completed some great

and aspirations. We can choose to institute an action we have already planned. Sometimes at night when sleep will not come, we should use these times to pray, to meditate, to call on God. Peaceful sleep can soon return.

Joseph Caryl, a Puritan minister in England, wrote in 1647 of reading Scripture:

It may be, at once reading or looking, we see little or nothing; as Elijah's servant went once, and saw nothing; therefore he was commanded to look seven times. What now? says the prophet, "I see a cloud rising, like a man's

“If we wish to follow biblical wisdom, we will first realize that rebellion is not an option.”

act. Jesus did these things because He delighted in the law of God (Matthew 4:1-11).

A person thinks about what they like. We don't dwell on terrifying or unpleasant thoughts for long, if we are wise. The word for *meditation* literally means to "growl" or "speak in an undertone." We recall the words of God we read in the Bible and reapply them daily to our lives. When we have a quiet pause, we may insert these thoughts

hand;" and by-and-by, the whole surface of the heavens was covered with clouds. So you may look lightly upon a Scripture and see nothing; *meditate often upon it*, and there you shall see a light, like the light of the sun.

Promise

He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its

season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper (Psalm 1:3).

Notice that Scripture says this person will be like a tree “planted.” This is not a wild tree but one specifically planted and cultivated so that it will produce. It is a choice plant, set next to the waters of nourishment, prepared for the Master’s good work. Because of this, the tree produces fruit in season. Early fruit is not fully flavored and is bitter. Late fruit is spoiled. But those who walk with God in His Word produce exactly when they should. They remain steadfast through trials and prosperity alike, always strong and useful.

The psalmist concludes with our theme: “Whatever he does shall prosper.” No “if’s, and’s, or but’s,” “might’s, would’s, or should’s” here. The person who forsakes the call of the flesh and embraces the Word of God will prosper. We know Scripture reminds us to pray while believing and to base our belief on the promises of God, rather than on our own wishes. When we pray for what we have already been promised, we ask with boldness and certainty! We have been promised prosperity if we forsake the fellowship of the rebellious and meditate on the Word of God. So we ask for prosperity, believe it is coming, and live in it!

Soul prosperity

We should listen carefully, however, or we will be misled by our own desires. The psalmist knew that there are times of bitterness and loss, just as there are times of jubilation. When I was younger, I tended to look at this psalm and dance in dreams

of wealth and success. As I grew older, I learned that to be prosperous is not necessarily to dance at all.

The prosperity we long for is that of our souls. If God chooses, He may give us advancement, health, or wealth, for He delights in giving to His children. But what we truly long for is His

presence, His favor, and our usefulness.

This is what meditating on His Word reveals. **BA**

Dr. David Downey
writes from Burleson,
TX.



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Failure to Thrive

He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage (Proverbs 11:28).

One of the hardest parts of my life as a social worker was to see children who failed to thrive. Their bony bodies, sunken eyes, and pale skin broke my heart. Saddest of all was their loss of hope. So many of those children failed to receive proper physical care, and the majority of them lacked emotional support. No one gave them hugs, paid attention to them, played with them, talked to them, or picked them up for one-on-one bonding, so they gave up on life. They lay, sat, or stood still, expecting nothing. Along with their failure to thrive, without proper intervention, those children failed to survive.

The children I’ve described had no choice. Their caregivers were responsible to see that they received their daily needs. As adults, we choose. We fail to thrive if we seek nurture from the wrong sources.

God, our Creator and sustainer of life, offers never-failing love and daily provision. Will we accept His gifts of salvation, guidance, and spiritual sustenance? Or will we turn to the world’s false promises through self-centered, temporary pleasures that eventually lead to destruction?

Choose to thrive and be fully alive with hope for all the future holds.

— Diana Derringer

We Are What We Treasure



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by Stephen R. Clark

Common pop “wisdom” found in romantic comedies and song lyrics is “The heart wants what the heart wants.” Often, it’s employed to excuse impulsive behavior. While this could be as mundane as indulging in too much chocolate, this wisdom is often related to questionable relationship choices.

The implication is that our desires erupt within us unbidden, uncontrollable, and they must be answered. In other words, we have no choice but to act on these desires. Not following these random passions is considered unthinkable because, you know, “The heart wants what the heart wants.”

What’s truly unthinkable is believing our desires are not based on our choices. Otherwise, why would Scripture warn us in Proverbs 4:23 to “Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life” (NLT)?

In fact, Jesus cautioned that “what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander” (Matthew 15:18, 19).

How do all these things get into our hearts? We put them there. If we treasure greed, lust, sex, darkness, and avarice in our hearts, our desires will grow from them.

Another bit of pop wisdom is to follow or listen to your heart. But Scripture counters with a caution: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).

What are we to do? Like Paul, we want to cry out, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24). It comes down to treasuring the right things in our hearts. As Paul says, “I delight in the law of God, in my inner being” (v. 22).

Going back to Jeremiah and adding context, the solution becomes clear:

“Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit” (17:7, 8).

To ensure our hearts want the right things, we need to place our trust solidly in the Lord. We need to feed our hearts on the deep truths of God’s Word. It is through treasuring and immersing ourselves in the words God has spoken — the Bible — that our hearts can become healthy.

When computer programs go awry, it’s often due to bad code. The programmer’s mantra is “Garbage in, garbage out,” meaning that if someone botched the code to begin with, then the program will deliver untrustworthy results.

The same is true with how we program our hearts. If we put garbage in, we will get faulty results.

Instead, if we treasure in our hearts love, peace, generosity, selflessness, compassion, grace, and the like, the results will be more of the same.

What are you putting into you? **BA**

Stephen R. Clark writes from Lansdale, PA. Scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version*, unless otherwise noted.





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Gaining wisdom and power
to make the right choices.

by Mark A. Lawton

You have heard that Jesus said, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16).

Being like doves resonates as a sensible standard for the followers of the Prince of Peace. You would agree, right? However, you may wonder why Jesus advises Christians to be wise as serpents. I certainly did, especially considering the ancient serpent in the Garden of Eden. But the answer is clear:

“But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and

to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you” (vv. 17-20).

The background of this section of Scripture is that Jesus mentored His apostles in the good news and taught them how to share it with others. When the time came for the apostles to minister, Jesus empowered them, provided guidance to them, and blessed them. This scripture is an essential model for Christians today regarding the church’s ministry (vv. 1-15).

Key elements

We need to examine the key elements in Matthew 10:16.

Sheep: the twelve apostles; you and me and all faithful followers of Jesus (John 10:1-30).

Wolves: malevolent beings who despise Jesus. There is a long list of wolves, and their intentions remain the same: to steal, kill, and destroy all that the holy God cherishes, especially His people, for whom Jesus serves as good Shepherd (vv. 10, 11).

Wise as serpents: serpent-like attributes, such as being wary, shrewd, prudent, wise, observant, cunning, clever, cautious, and intelligent. Snakes swiftly avoid being stepped on or caught in danger.

Harmless as doves: innocent, without a self-serving agenda, guileless, without falsity, simple, and with no desire to hurt anyone; kind, gentle, caring, nurturing, helpful, and generous. The Christian can add to this list all the fruit of the Holy Spirit: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22, 23).

Serpents and doves share a common trait: advanced intelligence. Both exhibit ingenuity in their lifestyles. Snakes are not easily deceived. They can detect danger through smell, taste, touch, and by sensing temperature in their environment. Doves are also highly intelligent and possess exceptional navigation skills.

By daily practicing discernment akin to snakes and applying dove-like navigation skills grounded in the Bible, we can

avoid being consumed by wolves while serving to people as faithful ministers of the good news.

Applying truth

Every Christian is a minister of the gospel. Our lives are the platform Jesus uses to touch others. Our hearts are the pulpit that the Spirit of God speaks through.

We make choices every day. In these moments, discernment and decisions meet and shake hands. Discerning requires applying authentic biblical truth. Why is it so important to know? Because it is the only truth that mat-

workers and become ministers who hold the true Word of God in our hearts, from which the Holy Spirit speaks.

Discernment

How can we distinguish between the holy and the evil? How can we differentiate the true words attributed to God's Bible from those of false teachers and from true teachers spreading bad seeds? How can we tell the ministry of genuine pastors apart from wolves dressed as pastors?

First, let's address recognizing the wolves.

“Every Christian is a minister of the gospel. Our lives are the platform Jesus uses to touch others.”

ters: the heavenly Father's Word, Jesus. When we live by it, Jesus manifests Himself in our lives. We can be like doves spreading the message of hope.

When we know God's genuine Word, we can easily discern the false words attributed to Him. We understand that Satan, along with false Bible teachers, false prophets, and our own lustful nature, produces counterfeit scriptural truths. Bank employees can detect counterfeit money immediately because they are familiar with real currency and handle it all day.

Let us be like those bank

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is



Testing the Spirits and Making Decisions

Four decades ago, the Holy Spirit taught me a method to test all spirits:

- By determining who they say Jesus is.
- By the pure Word of God in context and the entire counsel of God.
- By the character of God. Is His true nature revealed? A wrong view of God Almighty can lead to an incorrect message. For example, God's unconditional love contrasted with the world's acceptance of lustful actions misconstrued as love.
- By the character of the spirit.
 - Heavenly or demonic?
 - Human?
 - Ministering God's love with unconditional love?
 - Self-serving, manipulative, prideful, legalistic, controlling, and similar traits?

The Spirit of God taught me a similar approach to decision-making and discerning words, actions, ideas, organizations, and motivations (including my own) to determine if they come from the heavenly Father for me. I also apply this process to do the right thing, even when no one is watching.

Test all things by

- God's Word. Does it align with the Bible in context and within the entirety of the Holy Scriptures?
- God's character. Does it truly reflect the holy character of God, who loves unconditionally?
- Its origin: Is the spirit or motivation of the source from God?
- Its timing. Why is this the right moment?
- Its fruit. This represents the teachings, advice, and counsel, along with the outcomes of the person sharing these insights.
- Its witness. Is this something God has already spoken to you about, or do you deep down feel that something is off?

— Mark. A. Lawton

greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:1-6).

Warning: Trying all spirits is not the same as judging people. Testing spirits is wise like a serpent and will keep us out of danger (see sidebar). Judging people determines their future, and only God can do that. However, we shall know them by their fruits.

Scripture and prayer

Read Matthew 10:1-42 several days in a row. Consider reading different translations and study tools. Approach it as if you were studying with the Lord Jesus, and ask Him questions about discerning good and evil.

This is a prayer I began saying when I was just seventeen, and I have recited it nearly every day of my life since then. Modify it to suit your needs: "Heavenly Father, please help me gain the wisdom, strength, intelligence, courage, faith, and power to make the right choices, judgments, and decisions according to Your will for Your glory and purposes."

Following God's leading will help you be wise and innocent like Jesus in all your decisions. **BA**

Mark A. Lawton
writes from Tamworth, NH.



Questions & Answers



In Matthew 16:28, Jesus said, “There are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” How can this be true?

Context is key. Drawing from the three Gospels that record this saying (Matthew 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27), Jesus instructs His disciples that 1) the kingdom of God is near; 2) He is the promised Messiah; 3) He must die and be raised again; 4) His disciples must take up their cross and follow Him; and then 5) some present there will see the kingdom come in power before they die. Following this, all three Gospels feature the Transfiguration, witnessed by Peter, James, and John, about a week later.

The Transfiguration context of Jesus revealed in kingdom glory provides the most common interpretation of Matthew 16:28. Other major interpretations point to the resurrection and ascension of Christ (Acts 1:6-11) and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost (2:1-4).

In the warning that follows the Transfiguration, Jesus gives a hint about what He meant by this saying and how the key events above are connected: “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead” (Matthew 17:9). Jesus’ momentary transfiguration was a visionary foretaste of the glory to be revealed in His resurrection. And His resurrection would be the beginning, or firstfruit, of the fullness of His kingdom still to come (1 Corinthians 15:20-28).

Jesus’ first and second comings are connected. This is most clearly seen in what Jesus says to the Eleven in Galilee between His resurrection and ascension: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18).

That declaration fulfills the prophecies of

Daniel 2 and 7: “the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands,” subduing all governments; and “The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure” (2:45). In his vision (chapter 7), Daniel sees the revelation of the governments of earth from his time to eternity. He also sees the Son of Man coming to the Ancient of Days and receiving “dominion and glory and a kingdom” (vv. 13, 14) during the time of those kings, just like the image of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. Unlike those earthly kings, Jesus’ kingdom will endure forever. From Daniel, we realize that Jesus’ kingdom coming has a first and second stage, a beginning and an end.

Jesus’ promise that some standing there with Him would see His kingdom coming was fulfilled when His eleven disciples saw its beginning at His resurrection when He defeated sin, death, and Satan. This unites the most common interpretations of Matthew 16:28 as Jesus comes in kingdom rule within the lifetime of His disciples. His transfiguration was a first glimpse. His resurrection revealed its full glory, and His ascension into heaven and outpouring of the Spirit validated His kingdom power and authority.

The beginning of Jesus’ glorious kingdom rule was established at His resurrection. It continued in the work of the apostles as the early church was given His kingdom power and authority to make disciples of all nations (2 Corinthians 5:14 — 6:10). It continues to this day as lives are miraculously changed through the gospel message. And it will continue until it climaxes in Christ’s second coming when His kingdom fills the earth. That final kingdom coming began at Jesus’ resurrection, and His disciples witnessed it, just as He said they would.

— Elder Chip Hinds



Finding our foundation in
Christ alone.

by **Caroline S. Cooper**

"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock" (Matthew 7:24, 25).

At the end of His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells His disciples and the surrounding crowds a story of two builders whose houses stood in the path of a storm. The fate of each rested on its foundation. The house built on a solid rock stood strong against the wind and waves. However, the house built on shifting sands broke apart and floated away with the floodwaters. Jesus adds, "And great was its fall" (v. 27), emphasizing total destruction due to the weak foundation.

Jesus reveals an important trait of the builders based on where they built. The man who built on a rock possessed wisdom. Here, Jesus uses the Greek word *phronimos*, translated "wise" and defined as "having the capacity to understand." In considering where to build his house, this

man understood that a solid, immovable rock would provide the strongest base.

On the other hand, the man who built his house on the sand is described as foolish (*mōros* in Greek). This word can also be translated "unwise," a direct contrast to the man who exhibited wisdom. Through this illustration, Jesus teaches that the result of foolishness is destruction.

Proverbs contains many sayings that compare and contrast wisdom and foolishness. One verse can be applied to the builders in Jesus' parable: "Wise people store up knowledge, but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction" (10:14). Building on a rock might seem like the obvious choice, but Scripture tells us that we tend to go our own way instead of seeking wisdom. Proverbs 11:2 says, "When pride

comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom.”

Since wisdom is the obvious good choice, how do we obtain it?

Sayings of Jesus

Jesus gives us a hint in Matthew 7:24. The word *Therefore* at the beginning reveals a connection between what Jesus said before and what He will say next. In other words, the builder is wise by hearing and acting on Jesus’ prior “sayings.” To discover what Jesus taught, we have to go back to the beginning of His sermon.

Jesus started the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes (blessings, Matthew 5:3-10). He continued by teaching about life in the kingdom of God, which included lessons on the intent of the law, relationships, and how to pray. Jesus then issued a warning: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (7:21). The parable of the two builders wrapped up Jesus’ sermon.

Those who listened to the wisdom-giving sayings of Jesus had to rely on the words and stories they heard. Scrolls of Scripture were not readily available back then. Today, we have easy access to the entire Word of God. When we listen to and obey the sayings of Jesus, and the entire Bible, we gain wisdom for building the foundation of our relationship with the Lord.

Sure foundation

Luke’s account of this parable includes additional insights. A person who hears and follows

Jesus’ words “is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock” (6:48). In contrast, the foolish man builds his house on the earth, with no foundation.

Wisdom guides us to build on the rock. Digging deep is the key to weathering the storms that come our way. What is the solid, immovable rock we are to build on? Paul reveals the answer in 1 Corinthians 3:11: “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

Paul gives additional insight. He tells the church at Ephesus that they are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus as the chief cornerstone. All believers are being fitted together “for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22).


Peter also cites Jesus as the cornerstone by referencing

prophecies in Isaiah (8:14; 28:16) and Psalms (118:22). We, “as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).

When we read, study, meditate on, and memorize Scripture, we are digging deep into God’s truth. As a result, the Lord gives us wisdom to build our lives on the foundation of Christ. With Him, we can celebrate our blessings, stand strong against temptation and trials, and join with other believers to sing praises to our solid and immovable rock, Jesus Christ. Our true foundation.

BA

Caroline S. Cooper
writes from
Harrisonville, MO.



Praying Together

Prayer is one of the best ways to communicate with God. For a long time, the CoG7 family has been connected through prayer. Every two weeks we share areas of our lives where we need guidance, comfort, help, and more. We want to thank you because the prayer network is getting bigger.

We want to extend this spiritual discipline by adding thanksgiving to our prayers. We believe and trust an almighty God who, in His time and by His will, answers our prayers. If God has answered your prayers, please share that with us.

This is a great time to share your petitions or gratitude with prayer partners around the Conference and worldwide. Here is the link: <https://cog7.org/prayer-request-form/>.

Welcome

If you are a new member or have been with the CoG7 family a long time, discover some of what we offer.

Questions? Contact us at
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CHURCH OF GOD
(SEVENTH DAY) UNITED STATES & CANADA

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PRAYER

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MEMBER ORIENTATION

David Discovers

Wisdom



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by Marcia Sanders

The sun was bright overhead, the clouds fluffy white against a brilliant blue sky as David, Jason, and Skippy raced through the pasture to home. Laughing, David fell to the ground just inside the fenced yard, and Skippy danced around both boys before flopping across David's stomach.

"Skippy, get off!" David sputtered. "You're too heavy!"

"David, have you ever noticed how being outside in the sunshine on a cool day makes you want to run really fast?" Jason asked. "It's kinda like it fills you up on energy just as food fills your stomach."

"I hadn't thought of it like that, but you're right. Now that I think about it, being active makes me feel good, while lying around the house on a rainy day makes me tired. That's weird, huh?"

"You know, Pastor John mentioned some things in youth class that give us energy and other things that take it away," Jason said. "He's right. Being thankful for what God has given us, spending time reading my Bible and praying . . . all of those things make me feel good."

"Right. But spending too much time on my phone or watching TV makes me tired and like I don't want to do anything," David responded. "Too much sugar does that too."

"Speaking of food, can we go inside and get a snack?" Jason asked.

"Sure." David hopped up and headed through the back door.

"Mom, Jason and I need a snack. What is there to eat?"

Mom turned from the sink where she was

washing dishes and smiled. "Well, there are some apples and bananas, granola bars, cookies. Or you can make peanut butter sandwiches."

"Hmmm, lots of choices," David mused. "What do you want, Jason?"

"Well, I'd like a cookie, but now I'm wondering if that's what I should eat . . . considering what we were just talking about."

Mom asked about that discussion. The boys told her what they had noticed about which things gave them energy and which ones drained it away.

"The Bible has quite a bit to say about making wise decisions," Mom told them. "And it doesn't apply only to big decisions, like giving your heart to the Lord. We should also ask for wisdom in the little things, like foods and activities. Our bodies are the temple of the Lord and should be treated as such."

"That makes me think of our memory verse from a few weeks ago," David said. "You know the one, Jason — Luke 2:52. It says Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and people. I think that means He made wise decisions, large and small, based on what His Father would want Him to do."

"So, I think we should grab an apple and read the background verses for our next Sabbath school lesson," Jason said.

David smiled. "Sounds wise." **BA**

Marcia Sanders writes from Fort Smith, AR, where she attends the Church of God (Seventh Day) with her husband, Randy.



Understanding how to
discern God's will.
by Kelsey Gjesdal

I sat at my desk, biting my lip and staring at my phone. I'd told the interviewer I would give her an answer to the job offer that day. While I knew what the Lord wanted me to say, I felt crazy for needing to say it. The job checked all the boxes on paper: It was in the field I wanted to work in, with the pay range I hoped for, and held the possibility for career growth.

And yet, I felt uneasy about it. This job would require teaching some things I knew I couldn't teach in good conscience. But it was the only employer I'd applied to that offered me a position. My heart raced as I picked up my phone and typed out my answer.

Decisions, decisions

Ultimately, I turned the job down. I would question this decision many times as I continued applying for other jobs and being rejected by other employers. But every time I started to doubt my decision, I would remember that God's ways are not my ways; His ways are higher than mine (Isaiah 55:8). So even when I don't know what He's doing, I know I can trust Him.

"What is God's will for my life?" is a frequently asked question as we navigate transitions into new seasons and new responsibilities and plans. Where does God want me to go to college? Who does God want me

to marry? What job should I pursue? What does God want me to do next? We often find ourselves agonizing over big life decisions, afraid to step outside the Lord's will but also afraid to not step into His will when opportunities present themselves.

When we dive into the topic of God's will, it's important to distinguish between God's revealed will and His hidden will.

The revealed will of God is defined in His Word. These include things like rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18); being sanctified, or made more and more Christlike by the power of the Holy Spirit (4:3); and doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with Him (Micah 6:8). God's revealed will is made clear through Scripture, which guides the paths of our lives (Psalm 119:105).

The hidden will of God is what we're often thinking about when we seek direction for our lives. Most people are not satisfied with the Bible's answers when

they ask about the will of God. It's easy to think, *Of course, I want to grow in the Lord and live like Christ. But I want to know which job I'm supposed to take!* (Or insert any number of big and small life decisions we face.) Maybe the Lord has placed us in circumstances that feel difficult or different from what we dreamed for life, and we want to know what in the world God is doing.

I wrestled with these feelings as I applied for job after job and faced rejection after rejection. At the same time, I was submitting a book manuscript to multiple publishers, and all I heard was silence. I wanted an answer from God for what I was supposed to do. I wanted a five-year plan handed down from heaven. Instead, I came across this verse:

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law (Deuteronomy 29:29).

Do the Next Thing





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The Lord is omniscient; He knows the end from the beginning. I am not God. I don't need to know the end from the beginning. The Lord has revealed enough for me to be satisfied in Him and to rest in His sovereign hand. As Elisabeth Elliot often said, "I am called to simply 'Do the next thing.'"

Does this mean we should not plan for the future? Of course not. The book of Proverbs is filled with instructions in wisdom, and one of the traits of the wise is being prepared for the future (6:6-11; 31:21). But Proverbs 19:21 also admonishes, "Many plans are in a man's heart, but the counsel of the LORD will stand." We can make plans for the future, but they must be surrendered to the sovereign hand of God.

Making our plans

So how should we make plans if we aren't sure what the will of God is? A few principles can guide us.

First, we must make sure we are living in the revealed will of God. Live for God and be conformed to His ways, as revealed in Scripture, so that we may learn His will (Romans 12:1, 2). When we are saturated with Scripture and are intentional to live according to His Word, we will be prepared to handle our decisions with the wisdom that comes from knowing the source of wisdom Himself: Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

Second, we should pray about everything — trade anxiety about the future for prayer and thanksgiving, and trust the God of peace to be with us (Philippians 4:6, 7).

Third, we should put the first two steps together and prayerfully weigh our specific life decisions in light of Scripture. Sometimes it is easy to see what decisions we ought to make because our choices are between something that honors the Lord and something that is contrary to the Word. But when we are facing two options that are both

good things, what do we do? We use the wisdom that the Lord has given us to weigh pros and cons, listen to the advice of trusted, godly mentors in our lives, and we make our decisions trusting that the Lord's plans ultimately will prevail.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit will make it clear to us that something is not for us, even if it seems good on paper, like the job offer I turned down. Sometimes people will think we're crazy for the choices we make when we're following the Spirit's lead, but we should expect that. After all, "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" (1 Corinthians 1:20).

Tough choices

Choosing the cross of Christ sometimes means saying no to things that seem good. Then we can say yes to where God leads us, even when all we know is that He is saying to simply "Do the next thing."

Maybe God tells us this so we won't boast in ourselves but only in God. As Paul writes, "By His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the LORD'" (vv. 30, 31). **BA**

Kelsey Gjesdal

lives in Albany, OR, with her parents and three siblings and attends the Marion CoG7.

Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.





On Discern

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by **Brian Franks**

Discernment is challenging by its very nature. People have spent millennia trying to discern the plans of deity. Even with our faith firmly in YHWH and having the Word of God preserved and readily available, we struggle to discern God's will and ways in everyday life. This single article on the subject couldn't hope to resolve the issue and all its facets, but perhaps it can shed a little light.

The Bible is an invaluable resource for discerning the will and ways of God. It is a record of God's interactions with individuals and nations throughout thousands of years. The more familiar we are with the Bible's contents, the better equipped we are to recognize God's work around us.

Old Testament

A few things stand out about God's interactions in the Bible. In the Old Testament, God interacts with a variety of people and through a variety of means. These include the growing written record that would become the Bible: the Urim and Thummim, signs, wonders, dreams, visions; dealings with priests,

kings, prophets, nations, regular people, and at least one donkey.

Sometimes God warns of a coming calamity, like the seven years of famine during Joseph's time in Egypt or Noah building the ark for the coming flood. Sometimes God catches our attention, like Moses with a burning but never burning-up bush. Other times God promises deliverance through some method, like raising up judges. Once He redirects an off-track prophet (Jonah) by having a big fish "escort" him back to God's plan.

Other times God gives prophecies, with imminent implications for the hearers and long-range promises. The point is, in the Old Testament, God reached out to humanity in a variety of ways to communicate His plans, His actions, and His expectations of the hearers. This is an important truth when it comes to discernment, as it shows us God is a willing and able communicator of what He is doing.

New Testament

The New Testament brings an entirely new level of revelation to the process of discernment. With the work of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit,

God is even more clearly accessible to believers.

An assumption of the New Testament is that those who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior, profess their faith, and seek God will receive the Holy Spirit. Only hours before His arrest, trial, and crucifixion, Jesus explains to His disciples the nature of the coming Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will teach them, guiding them into all truth, relaying what God says, and declaring the things to come (John 16:13, 14).

In John 17:20, Jesus prays not only for His disciples but also for all who would believe because of the Word they would preach about Him. How to become a Christian and walk in the newness of life with God is clearly unveiled for any who believe. Just getting this right removes much of the mystery of what to do with our lives.

However, God also works at the detailed levels of life. Consider Philip, one of the seven deacons appointed to ensure Greek widows were not missed in the church's food distribution (Acts 6). This task was simple but critical, and the deacons served for a time.

Later, the church was

ment

scattered through persecution (Acts 8), and Philip went to Samaria. There, he preached the gospel effectively, but then the Spirit of God moved him again. On a desert road, he met an Ethiopian eunuch, and Philip taught this man searching for truth in the Scriptures. Philip had to sense the Spirit's moving to get there, but God did not fail to communicate both in moving Philip and filling the gap in the Ethiopian's understanding.

This event and many others show that God is willing and able to communicate what He is doing, what He wants, and what we need.

Deference to God

This still leaves some questions. Why do I not hear God if He can so easily communicate? Why do my prayers seem to not work? What do I do while I wait?

The key is deference. Jesus demonstrates this perfectly when He prays regarding the coming events of the Passion: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39, NIV). We can communicate to God our requests, desires, and will, but then we

should wrap that in deference to God. We defer in humility that if we are off base, let God's will be done instead. Put another way, when we try to discern something, we can communicate what we want to do through prayer. We can ask for direction or permission, but then the whole prayer should be predicated on God's will.

A prayer that has served me well for decades goes something like this:

God, here is what I want/think I should do . . . but if that is not Your will, let Your will be done instead. Don't let me miss Your will. Make it clear to me when the time is right. Help me understand Your plan when I need to understand. Let me see each step as it comes. Light my way, put me in the right positions, and give me the right words to say. Your will above mine. Amen.

A prayer like this is an act of faith and often leads to patient endurance while God's plan comes together. Discernment is often just realizing that I need to wait on God to bring about His will for a situation and live faithfully until He does.

However, this waiting isn't passive. We continue in what we

know to do in faith. The wait is well worth the struggle, as God works beyond what we ever imagine He can do.

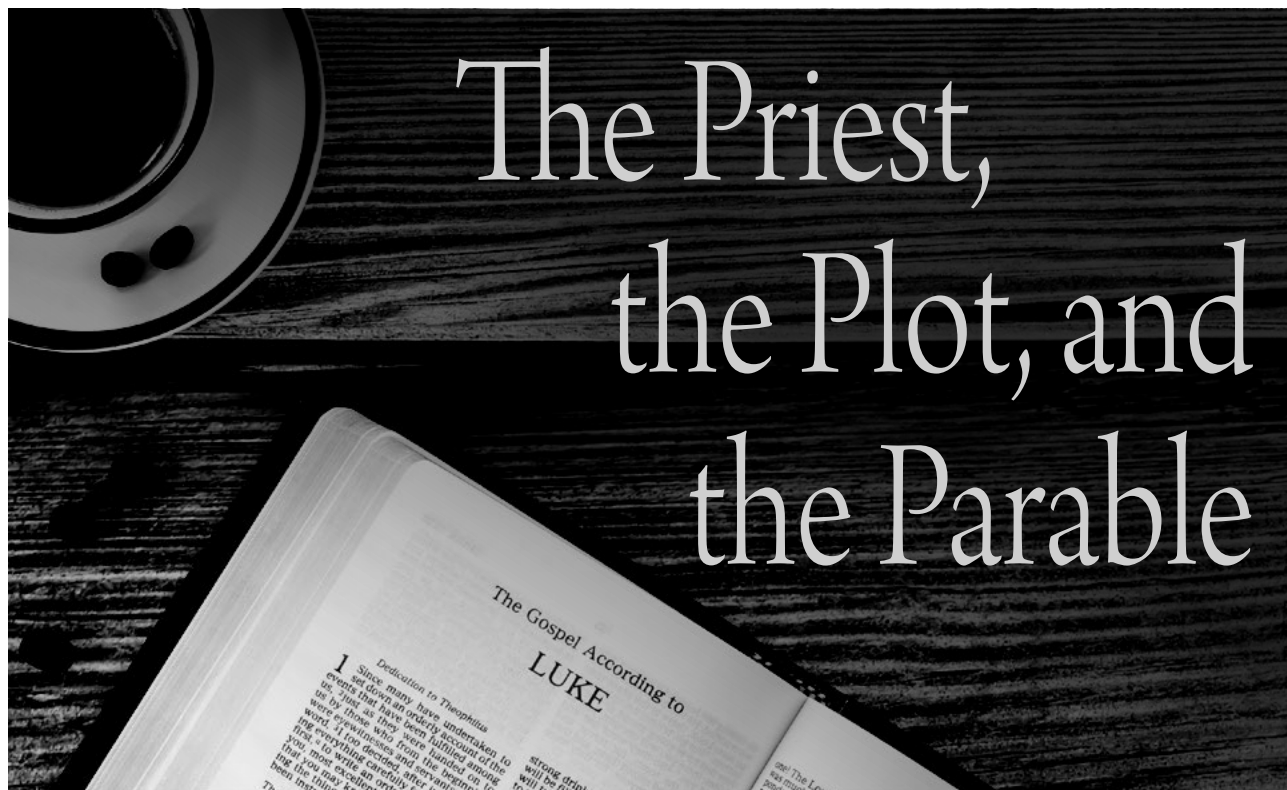
Final thoughts

Discernment is easier when we realize God has already revealed so much in His Word pertaining to how to live our lives. We can miss how powerful it is to simply live a life of faithfulness to God. The Word also reveals God is a willing and able communicator of His will and ways. If He needs to direct us a certain way, He will make it happen, often in a creative way that gets our attention.

When we need or want more clarity in discerning something, simply turning to God in prayer, communicating the issue and the direction we think we should go, then deferring to God, is an act of faith and trust. And one well worth the wait. **BA**

Brian Franks lives in Colorado Springs, CO, with his wife and four children. He is also the co-director of Artios Christian College.





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Another look at the rich man and Lazarus.

by R. Herbert

Sometimes a little biblical detective work can open new windows into our understanding of New Testament stories and how they relate to us today. We can do this in one of Jesus' parables.

The priest

The Gospel of John tells us that when Jesus was betrayed, "They bound him and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year" (John 18:12, 13). The apostle John apparently knew some of the high priest's family and could provide

this detail not found in the other Gospels.

Annas was the patriarch of a dynasty of priests. He had served as high priest for ten years (AD 6-15). When he was deposed by the Roman procurator Gratus, Annas maintained a high degree of power through arranging the appointment of his five sons (Eleazar, Jonathan, Theophilus, Matthias, and Ananus) and his son-in-law, Caiaphas, to succeed him.

The Jewish high priest normally served for life (Numbers 35:25, 28), so the rapid-fire changes in succession after Annas suggest that he may have worked to keep control of things as the real power behind the temple hierarchy. This maintaining power while technically deposed would explain why Annas continued as head of the Jewish Sanhedrin (Acts 4:6). Perhaps it also explains why, when Jesus

was arrested, He was first taken, not to Caiaphas the high priest but to Annas. So real was Annas' behind-the-scenes power, Luke records that the word of God came to John the Baptist "during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas" (Luke 3:2).

The plot

In his Gospel, the apostle John gives us another bit of information relative to the dealings of the chief priests. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave, John tells us that "the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him" (12:10, 11). Again, John may have learned this because of his contacts in the high priestly households. But it is clear that this was a real plot to get rid of

not only Jesus himself but also Lazarus as evidence of Christ's miracle. Although Annas is not mentioned by name, it is inconceivable that such a plot would have been made without the knowledge of the chief priest and his sons.

To understand the significance of this background, we must look at one of Jesus' parables given at that time.

The parable

In His parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Jesus told His listeners, "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus . . ." (Luke 16:19, 20). The parable continues to say that when he died, the rich man implored the patriarch Abraham from Hades, "I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment" (vv. 27, 28). [Editor's note: See more on the interpretation of this parable in the BAP tract *Will God Punish the Wicked Forever?*].

Notice that although the NIV says "to my family," the Greek actually says "to my father's house" (as translated in the ESV and almost all other versions). When Abraham replies, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them," the rich man responds, "No, father Abraham . . . but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent" (vv. 29, 30).

To this, Abraham states conclusively, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if

someone rises from the dead" (v. 31).

The cast of characters in this parable is unmistakable. Although Lazarus is not specified to be the Lazarus of Bethany, whom Christ raised from the dead, the New Testament does not speak of any other Lazarus. Had it been a different individual, John would have identified him as he does in other instances when multiple people shared the same name.

The rich man dressed in purple and fine linen is surely the high priest Caiaphas, whose robes were exactly as described. Conclusively, the rich man has a father (Annas) and five brothers (brothers-in-law). In the close families of ancient Palestine, *brothers* could mean blood

the dead, so the actual high priestly family had not believed when the real Lazarus had indeed been raised. Understood this way, the story of Lazarus and the rich man is paralleled by several other parables in which Jesus used actual historical situations of His day (e.g., Luke 14:28-33; 19:11-27).

Discretion

We can take a practical lesson from the unfailing discretion of Jesus. Although His audience may have recognized the characters in His parable, Jesus did not identify them by name. Jesus never did that, though He could have publicly accused and discredited specific individuals on many occasions.



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brothers or brothers-in-law. So the identity of these individuals is clear. If this were not the case, there would have been no reason for Jesus to include five brothers in the parable. The rich man could just have pleaded for his family.

For Jesus' original hearers, it was clear in His parable that, just as the rich man's father and brothers would not believe even after the return of Lazarus from

In our own time of heightened political invective, this is an example for every Christian to consider. May we, too, follow Jesus' discretion in what we say about others. **BA**

R. Herbert (a pen name) holds a doctorate in biblical studies and ancient Near Eastern languages and archaeology. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



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The rewards of seeking
God's priorities.

by **Ruhamā Tewodros Assefa**

For years, I have been writing a journal for my future husband — letters filled with prayers, encouragement, and wisdom to help him grow as a godly man and spiritual warrior. I want him to be strong in faith, a leader in Christ, and someone who walks in wisdom.

But as much as I care about preparing for marriage, I realize something even more important: *My greatest calling is not to prepare for a future husband but to seek God's kingdom first.*

In a world where women are often told that their highest purpose is to marry and serve a

man, I have found that true wisdom is something much greater. It is not about waiting for a husband to give me purpose. It is about living fully in Christ now.

Misunderstood standard

Many people view Proverbs 31 as the ultimate guide to being a godly woman, often reducing it to homemaking and submission. But when we take a closer look, we see a powerful and wise woman:

"She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard" (v. 16). She makes business decisions and is financially independent.

"She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue" (v. 26). She leads with wisdom and kindness, teaching others with her words.

"She sets about her work

vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks" (v. 17). She strengthens herself for the tasks ahead and is diligent in her work.

"Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised" (v. 30). She reveres the Lord above all else, making Him the center of her life.

This passage is not about limiting a woman's role; it is about empowering her to walk in wisdom and godliness in every area of life. It is about being strong, discerning, and kingdom minded.

God first

Many cultures, including mine, still hold the belief that a woman's greatest achievement is marriage. While marriage is a beautiful gift from God, it is not the goal of our lives. Jesus tells us, "But seek first his kingdom

and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33).

The greatest wisdom we can have is the wisdom to seek God first. Before we prepare for marriage, a career, or any future milestone, we must prepare our hearts for God's will.

Just as Jesus "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" before stepping into His calling (Luke 2:52), we too must pursue wisdom — not for the approval of society, not for a future spouse, but for God's kingdom.

Women of wisdom

So, what does it look like to be a woman of wisdom in today's world?

It means using your gifts boldly — whether in leadership, business, ministry, or the home.

It means being discerning — not believing everything culture tells you about your worth.

It means walking in faith — trusting God with your future, whether it includes marriage or not.

When we put God's kingdom first, we step into a wisdom that is far greater than any societal expectation. We no longer chase approval or base our value on our marital status. Instead, we become women who reflect Christ in everything we do.

Changed prayers and high calling

I still write in my journal for my future husband, but my prayers have changed. I no longer pray just for "him" to be strong in faith. I pray that "I" will be strong in faith. I pray for

wisdom, discernment, and a heart that seeks God first.

I also pray for the women around me, that they will see their worth, not in cultural expectations but in Christ.

I pray for the young girl who is told she must marry to be valuable.

I pray for the woman who feels stuck in a role she didn't choose.

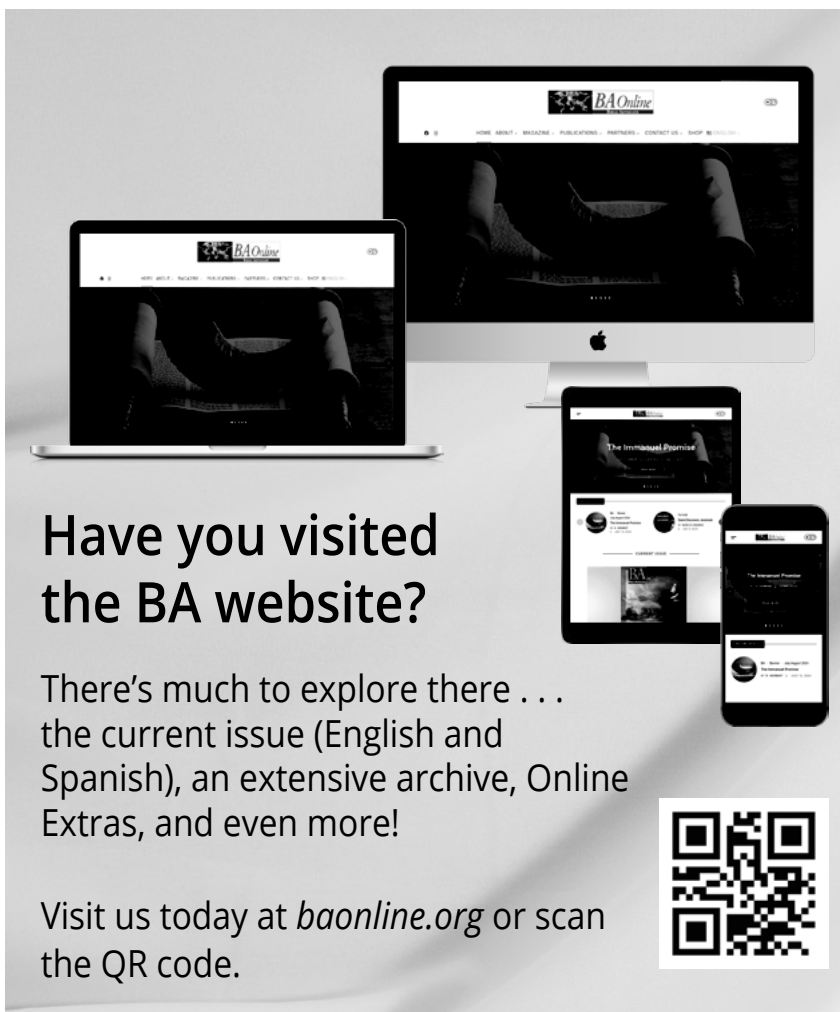
I pray for the world to see women as God sees them: strong, wise, and created for His glory.

At the end of the day, my identity is not in a future relationship but in who I am in Christ. Whether I marry or not, I want to

be known not just as a Proverbs 31 woman but as a kingdom-seeker — a woman who fears the Lord, walks in wisdom, and follows Him above all else.

So to every woman who has been told her highest calling is marriage, I say: Your highest calling is Christ. Seek Him first. Everything else will fall into place.


Ruhama Tewodros Assefa writes from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Scripture quotations are taken from the *New International Version*.



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When Jesus is King



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by Ken Lawson

I need to calm down! There is a better government coming!

For the present time of human governments on earth, we are living in massive nationwide and worldwide political unrest. Both national and international threats can often be terrifying. Just the fall-out from nasty politics within the United States, or any other country, can be upsetting to our family, friends, church, and community relationships.

Geneva Academy monitors all the armed conflicts that are active at any given time on the earth. Their information gathering reveals that, at this writing, approximately 110 small and larger wars are being fought. That is concerning.

If you are looking for something that will calm you from worries and pressure, no human leader, political party, human-guided nation, or collection of nations can do that for you. *None!* Why is this sought-after and hoped-for human help so worthless to us? Because “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Most, if not all, human politics can and have turned hateful and dirty at any moment.

God has provided only one hope and one choice for true peace and calm. This and more come with a solid, guaranteed promise that will bring peace and calm for us. His name is *Jesus!* “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done . . .” (KJV). Sound familiar? Those words are found in the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). Pray it often, and you will discover the way to calm down.

A full study of Jesus presents numerous details that leave us in awe about who this Majestic One is. He is not coming back to save only the members of our “chosen” party or nation. He is coming back

to save those *who chose Him as their Lord and Savior.*

Jesus was with God the Father when He created all things. Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26, KJV). In no time, humans gave themselves to every deceit and debauchery imaginable, and God’s image was corrupted. But God sent His Son into the world to restore that image and guarantee a hope of salvation. This hope became real when Jesus gave His life and shed His blood on the cross.

If you find yourself longing for calm, hope, and confidence for a better future, all this and more can be found in the one and only name that is above all names: *Jesus!* He is the very core of all of God’s promises. He is the only answer to our deep desire for a better life.

There is no hope in the promises of a political party. There is no hope tucked into the individual or collective promises of our various nation states. All have and will continue to fail. *But Jesus never fails!*

What are we to do? Read His story again. Embrace His purpose again. Stand up for His principles no matter where we live and what man-conceived politics “sound pretty good.”

Jesus is our hope, and He is coming back as king over all the earth!

“Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen (Revelation 22:20, 21, NIV). **BA**

Ken Lawson and his wife, Sandra, live in Cottage Grove, MN.





Lord of the Sabbath

I made the stars, formed the sun
The oceans' waves and crest
When all was done, a victory won
I made a day of rest.

I rode through time, led each saint;
They never walked alone
To those who saw, I wrote ten laws
On two tables of stone.

Though many died, they kept the faith
Like Job, Daniel, and Lot
Who, for My sake, through death and ache
My laws never forgot.

So finally, when I died
By stake, hammers, and nails
I looked ahead and heard you said,
Great Lord, I'll never fail.

I made the man, I found a way
Through which all can be saved.
And although death is stronger yet,
You'll rise up from the grave.

Warner Williams



Readers Write



BA Cover

This email serves to share with you that I know my family still reads the *Bible Advocate* or at least looks at the cover. I think every one of them called to exclaim they saw "Grannie's" (my mother's) photo on the cover [January-February 2025]. The whole family was blessed to see that.

C. H.
Tahlequah, OK

Sabbath School Quarterlies

Thank you for all the time and effort you put into making the Sabbath school quarterlies. Our church recently began using the quarterlies again after a long break away from them. The adult class has been enjoying them, and they are provoking a lot of good discussion. We do not follow the current schedule. Rather, I have gathered several samples, and then the other teachers and I review them and choose one that we think would best interest the class.

We recently completed the quarterly entitled *Transforming Vision into Reality - Part 7, Reforming and Transforming*. It

was good about pointing out areas of our lives in which we have adopted the world's view instead of God's. Toward the end of the class I asked for feedback, and they mentioned that they wished that the quarterly was written in more simple terms. Even though there was a glossary of terms in the back, there were still many times that [the class] felt there were things in the quarterly that they didn't understand. I have heard this comment a lot from people in various churches.

I wanted to share this feedback with you because I thought it would be helpful moving forward in creating new quarterlies. The content is *great*, but we want to make sure that it is in laymen's terms and that those without a theology degree can understand the content.

Again, thank you for undertaking such a big task of editing and creating quarterlies. It is so refreshing to have a source that we can go to that provides Bible studies that will not conflict with our unique beliefs.

D. S.
Stanberry, MO

Editor's note: I'm happy to hear that the Stanberry church is using the quarterlies again. Thanks for giving us another chance. It has been a blessing to write and edit the adult quarterlies over the last ten years.

Your critique is well received. Though I have not heard this kind of feedback in a while, I do recall receiving a few like yours on that particular quarterly. It was

definitely the hardest quarterly I've ever written. Jody McCoy and I wrestled with trying to make the philosophical terminology and concepts understandable. I'll admit that we did challenge our students with that one, but ultimately, we believed it was important material and worth the extra effort.

Our goal is to make the material as understandable and accessible as possible, while also challenging and stretching our students. There is a balance there that is not always achieved. But we keep trying.

Keep up the good work. Studying the Word together is one of the greatest privileges of the Church.



Need a little
"extra" BA?
Be sure to read
this issue's
Online Extra:

"The Pursuit and
Possession of Wisdom"
by Denise Kohlmeier



Upcoming Projects

Artios is always looking for opportunities to grow. These projects are underway:

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- adding a satellite campus
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Got Wisdom?



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And where does one get
such wisdom?
by Esther Zeiset

At twenty-eight years old and a decade removed from high school, I knew I was far out of my league when I enrolled in English 201 at a community college. But I had a slew of story and article ideas rattling around in my head and wanted to expand my fledgling writing into a larger Christian publishing market. I determined that, even in a secular class, my writing would reflect my faith.

From the first night, the professor ruled his classroom with sighs, glares, and brusque commands. “In my class you can write about anything you want,

but. . . .” He paused to tuck his chin to his barrel chest and glared at us over his reading glasses. “Hear me on this: Do *not* turn in mindless drivel!”

Mindless drivel? Would he think it mindless if I wrote that my husband and I were attempting to establish a budget or of the pleasure I derive from gardening? Would he call it drivel if I wrote of insights from my morning devotions? What would he think if I wrote about my husband’s prison ministry and the mutual fulfillment we found in following God’s call?

Tense moments

I pushed aside my nervousness and wrote about those topics. My jitters heightened the next week when the professor called for our journals. “Stack

your notebooks on my desk,” he barked. “And there better not be balderdash and nonsense in them!”

A suffocating tension blanketed the classroom. The professor sank into his chair and commenced with reading our journals while we students worked on an in-class writing assignment. He sighed often and wielded a red pen with dramatic force and exaggerated scribbling. His heavy sighs gave way to dark mutterings about bigots and simpletons.

I tried to squelch my own sighs and corral my scattered thoughts into writing.

When class ended, I dug my notebook off the pile on his desk and hurried to the car. I opened my journal with a mix of curiosity and dread. My professor had circled a misplaced apostrophe

in bold red ink, and on the next page, he put an X over a comma. But he made no comment about my description of a trying day with the kids and my prayer for patience.

The scenario repeated itself week after week as the professor exhaled deep sighs and muttered that our writing was deplorable. Appalling. Complete baloney and gibberish. He punctuated each word with a heavy sigh.

Every week, I retreated to my car after class and worked up the courage to look at my journal. The professor marked grammatical errors, and after one entry he wrote *Good structure*. Nothing more. No accusation of drivel or balderdash.

Hidden wisdom

During the week of our eighth anniversary, I wrote in my journal of God's blessing on our marriage — about how far we'd come as a couple and where we would go. In another entry I wrote about a child's unchecked temper tantrum in the library, and that it led to a long discussion with my husband about how we define success for our children.

"I'd think we're successful if I can have theological discussions with our kids over breakfast," my husband said with a smirk. It was an obvious reference to my inability to discuss theologian-philosopher Francis Schaeffer's writings over cereal at 6:00 a.m.

In the end, we agreed our idea of success for our kids was vastly different from the world's values of wealth, power, and prestige. It would best be summed up by God's admonition stated in Micah 6:8: "To act justly and to

love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (NIV).

I'd worried that my God-talk and references to Scripture might offend my professor, but as I flipped through my journal pages, I saw only his grammar and punctuation corrections.

Until the end of the semester. On the last page. I sucked in my breath and stared at the words he scrawled in red ink: *I wish I were wise enough to notice all the little things you see as opportunities for learning and growth. Where does one get such wisdom?*

I sat in my car for long minutes, too stunned to move. Later,

emanate from my own genius or experience.

Proverbs 2:6 says, "For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." A closer look at surrounding verses indicates that He does not dump a truckload of wisdom on us willy-nilly, but He honors us with wisdom when we "cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, . . . seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures" (vv. 3, 4).

Wisdom is knowing how to apply God's truth to daily living. It is the right application of knowledge. The Bereans mod-

“Wisdom is knowing how to apply God’s truth to daily living. It is the right application of knowledge.”

when the shock passed and I could think straight again, I pondered his question. It left me with my own questions. Who, me? Wisdom? What in the world was he talking about? His words certainly did not describe me!

Insights to wisdom

In the years since that memorable semester, my thoughts have often returned to my professor's question. Over time I conceded that he was right. I do have wisdom — but it does not

eled godly wisdom when they "examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11, NIV). Amid the bombardment of all manners of philosophies and ideas, they tested those messages — even those from the apostle Paul. Scripture calls them "noble" for exercising active discernment.

In our age of information, diverse messages assail us at every turn. At first glance, those catchy social media quotes and memes might sound on target, but do



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they line up with the Bible? Think tanks and talking heads can lend persuasive arguments about social issues, but do they square with biblical principles? Are the movie and book themes we digest God honoring?

Eternal perspective

Wisdom looks at life through the lens of eternity. Because we are here today and gone tomorrow, a worldly perspective says, "This life is as good as it's going to get, so live it up while you can." Godly wisdom says, "This life is as bad as it's going to get, so prepare for eternity." As he regarded the brevity of life, the writer of Psalm 90:12 prayed, "So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

When we hold an eternal perspective, we evaluate what will be of substance one hundred years from now, and we prioritize accordingly. We take on the renewed mind that Romans 12:2 speaks of so that we "may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Indeed, when we embrace the mind of Christ, follow the instructions of our heavenly Father, and ask for daily guidance from the Holy Spirit, wisdom becomes embedded into our daily lives.

So, yes, I am wise. And if you are a maturing Christian, you are wise too. Very wise. **BA**

Esther Zeiset

writes from New-
manstown, PA.





What is Truth?

The Gospel of John recounts a conversation between Jesus and Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who quickly caved to demands that Jesus be crucified. Answering one of Pilate's questions, Jesus said, in part, "For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world — to bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37, ESV throughout). To this, Pilate responded with a rhetorical, and perhaps cynical, question: "What is truth?" (v. 38).

If Pilate was cynical regarding truth in his day, what would he think about "truth" in our day? Some men claim to be women, some women claim to be men, and everyone is expected to agree with them. Leaders of organizations purportedly created to support women are unable or unwilling to define what a woman is. Scientists alter or deny data that doesn't advance their agendas. We largely assume that public officials are consistently lying to us. Faith in most institutions is a thing of the past, and AI (artificial intelligence) is increasingly making it impossible to judge what is real and what is not real. These days, we can't fully trust our own eyes and ears!

Earlier in His earthly ministry, Jesus explained the problem that existed then and plagues us now. To a group of hostile unbelievers, Jesus bluntly said:

"You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell

the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God" (8:44-47).

Is it too much of a simplification to summarize Christ's statement this way?

Satan is the ultimate source of all falsehoods; God is the ultimate source of all truth. Those living under Satan in his domain of darkness are deceived and deceivers; they do not and cannot understand the truth God has revealed. However, those people God has "delivered . . . from the domain of darkness and transferred . . . to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13) can and do understand the truth God has revealed through His Son (the living Word) and through His holy Scriptures (the written Word).

What is truth? It is whatever God has revealed through Jesus and His written Word.

Two quotations from Francis A. Schaeffer's book *Escape from Reason* seem appropriate here: 1) "It is an important principle to remember . . . that the biblical presentation is that, though we do not have exhaustive truth, we have from the Bible what I term 'true truth.' In this way we know true truth about God, true truth about man, and something truly about nature. Thus on the basis of the Scriptures, while we do not have exhaustive knowledge, we have true and unified knowledge." And 2) ". . . men act the way they think."

Do you want to know and live true truth in a world devoid of it? Focus on Jesus and immerse yourself in the study of God's Word.

— Loren Stacy



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