

# GET WISDOM

## PURIFYING THE CONSCIENCE 5

Wisdom is the fruit of a purified conscience.



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A REVISION STUDY FROM  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Get Wisdom  
Purifying the Conscience 5  
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## Welcome to *Get Wisdom*

The conscience, we recall, does the work of processing thoughts and feelings into words and deeds. If our conscience has not been purified from dead works, our soul will not be healthy, and we will not refract the life of Christ into the world.

We need to make sure that we have embedded in our conscience those Kingdom-and-glory priorities which are consistent with the lifestyle to which God has called us (1 Thess. 2.12). We must further work to massage Kingdom values into our conscience, so that we can sort out and harmonize our thoughts and words with the values and priorities of the Lord.

If we can achieve this, and maintain a purified conscience, the outcome in our lives will be wisdom, love for God and neighbors of a practical and edifying nature, that allows us to serve others with the grace and truth of God. In this study, we will look briefly at the nature of wisdom, and how to purify our conscience to help ensure that our thoughts and feelings come together in words and deeds that glorify God and edify our neighbors.

*ReVision* studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 The Value of Wisdom

... and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Colossians 2.2, 3

*What would you ask?*

Early in his reign, King Solomon was given the opportunity to request of God whatever he might like. Given such an opportunity, what would you do?

Solomon asked the Lord for wisdom (1 Kgs. 3.3-14). He might have requested anything – wealth, fame, the destruction of all his enemies, long life. But he asked for wisdom. Solomon understood that nothing is as valuable in this life as having the wisdom of God with which to serve Him and others.

Because he asked wisdom of God, God granted it to him, and with wisdom, much else besides. The wisdom of God is a precious treasure. It is nothing less than skill in living according to His divine purpose and plan. Wisdom is what the conscience produces when it processes sound thinking, true loving, and Kingdom values into action. Wisdom is the ability to grasp and demonstrate the mind of Christ, the heart of God, the priorities of the Kingdom, and the life of the Spirit in every aspect of life. Nothing reflects the character of Christ as much as the wisdom God gives us, so that we might serve Him and others. Thus, to gain the wisdom of God should be the goal of every one of the followers of Jesus Christ.

Wisdom is the outworking of Kingdom values in love for God and neighbors, and it is the pure product of a purified conscience.

*Wisdom crying*

In Proverbs 8 the Wisdom of God identifies Himself as the Servant of the Lord. Wisdom cries out to all who will listen, offering them the opportunity to gain the benefits He offers (Wisdom is translated as a *she* in this passage, only because the abstract noun, *wisdom*, is in a feminine form in the Hebrew).

This Wisdom is none other than the Word of God, the second Person of the Trinity, Who came among us as Jesus of Nazareth. And just as Jesus called all the world to turn to Him and find the blessings and wisdom of God, so the Word of God in Proverbs 8 holds out the benefits we might know from devoting ourselves to the pursuit of wisdom. Wisdom is gained through hearing the Word of God, submitting to the Word of God, and being transformed by the Word of God.

What are the benefits of wisdom? From Wisdom we may learn whatever things are noble, good, and true (vv. 6, 7). Wisdom can guide us in the path of righteousness, and enable us to understand the knowledge of God and His Word (vv. 8-11). Wisdom leads to prudence, discretion, goodness, humility, and profitable speech (vv. 12-15). It is the skill by which rulers govern and justice obtains within a nation (vv. 16-20). Wisdom is thus of great benefit, not only to the one who possesses it, but to all the people who have contact with the wise person.

*A treasure to be desired*

Thus wisdom is greatly to be desired, for in possessing wisdom we actually possess the very character of God Himself, as He lives and works through us to bless all those we meet.

All who keep the way of wisdom know blessing, fullness of life, and favor with God (vv. 32-35). Solomon understood the value of wisdom, and he prayed earnestly that God would grant it to him. But while God granted Solomon wisdom, wisdom did not come to him as a parcel from heaven, but as the result of a diligent quest to gain what God had promised. Gaining the wisdom of God is a work of the soul – mind,

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heart, and conscience. That means it's also a work of our bodies, for we must be willing to devote both time and energy to acquiring the wisdom of God. We must study to *learn* wisdom; we must nurture a strong *desire* for wisdom; and we must value it as the highest outworking of all our other values and priorities.

Wisdom calls to us as well, pleading with us to learn the ways of God and to avoid the paths of folly, sin, and death. We, too, should make the pursuit of wisdom the highest priority in our walk with the Lord. Let us follow Solomon in his acquisition of this precious virtue, so that we might gain wisdom as he did.

*For reflection*

1. How would you explain the idea of *wisdom*? What is it? How does one acquire wisdom? What are the benefits from being wise?
2. Why do you suppose we don't hear the words, *wisdom* or *prudence* so much these days? Have these become less desirable? Why or why not?
3. Meditate on 2 Corinthians 3.12-18. We are being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. What does this suggest about becoming wise?

*Next steps – Conversation: Talk with some Christian friends about wisdom – what it is, why it matters, how we can get it. Factor their responses into your thinking about goals for this study.*

## 2 The Beginning of Wisdom

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;  
A good understanding have all those who do His commandments.  
His praise endures forever.* Psalm 111:10

### *Loving God...and fearing Him*

We read of Solomon, at the beginning of his reign, that he loved the Lord and walked in all the statutes of the Law of God (1 Kgs. 3.3). Loving God is one side of what we might call the gold coin of affections defining how we are to relate to the Lord.

To love Him is one side; to fear Him is the other. Fear of God is the *first* and *most important* affection of the heart, for unless we fear God, we will not truly love Him. Thus, the heart plays an important role in helping to establish wisdom as the conscientious outworking of our inner life.

As the Lord wrote through Moses, “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him...” (Deut. 10.12). As surely as Solomon loved the Lord, he must have feared Him as well. Fearing the Lord is the starting-point for gaining the wisdom of God; indeed, without a proper fear of God, we shall in no way get the wisdom we need to live for and serve Him well. If we do not love and fear Him, He will not give us that which is most characteristic of Him.

Most of us have an idea of what it means to love the Lord. But what is involved in fearing Him? It is important that we review this affection here.

### *The fear of God*

The fear of God is more than simply a kind of reverence for Him. It’s not just being in awe of God, although it certainly includes that. We fear God when we have a proper sense of His *immensity* and *might*. In our day, the tendency is to bring God down to our size, and to make Him our Friend and Counselor; but we neglect to see Him as our Creator and sovereign Lord, as the Father Who disciplines and the Judge Who purges.

But He is every bit these as well, and given our smallness, our tendency to drift into unrighteous paths, and our too-easily complacent approach to living by faith, it is good for us to fear what God may do to lead us to greater fervor and devotion in our walk with and work for Him (Heb. 12.3-11).

The Scriptures teach that all the vast cosmos is contained within God (Acts 17.28). He exercises power and authority over everything He has made, so that nothing exists or continues to exist without His direct supervision and care (Heb. 1.3). When we realize just how great, vast, and powerful God is, fear of Him will begin to rise within us.

But fear of the Lord goes beyond even that. To fear God is, literally, to be afraid of Him. For when we know God in His immensity and power, we will also begin to know Him in His purity and justice. Confronted with the purity and justice of this immense and all-powerful God, we will see ourselves as altogether unworthy of anything but judgment, wrath, and destruction at His hands. Such a prospect should cause us to tremble with fear before the awesome might and holy power of God.

Thus we will fear God because we know what we deserve from Him, and we know what He is capable of doing, to bring justice against guilty sinners.

## *Get Wisdom*

### *What God can do*

Further, even though we are redeemed through our Lord Jesus Christ, we continue to sin and stray from the path God has marked out for us. This is not where God wants us to be, and it is not what is in our best interests, though we may be otherwise persuaded.

Thus straying from the Lord, and drifting from the moorings of our salvation (Heb. 2.1-3), we become vulnerable to His discipline, which, the writer of Hebrews reminds us, is never pleasant (Heb. 12.11). We fear God as we should when we understand His immensity and power, tremble before His holiness and justice, and dread His discipline against our daily sins.

This fear of God is the *beginning* of wisdom. We must have this fear firmly stationed within our heart, or we will fail to discern the true wisdom of God for any situation.

We will not get to wisdom apart from the fear of God. Yes, we must love the Lord, for we know how much He loves us. But we must also fear Him, for only then will we properly humble ourselves before Him, so that He might give us all His most precious gifts.

If we would get wisdom, we must learn to love the Lord and to fear Him, for the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

### *For reflection*

1. Do you agree that it is important to fear the Lord? Do you hear much talk – teaching or preaching – about fearing the Lord? How can you nurture fear of God in your heart?
2. How does fearing God in your heart help to ensure that your conscience will lead you to practice wisdom?
3. Fear and love are two sides of the coin of our most important affections toward God. Why is it important that we develop both together?

*Next steps – Transformation: Outline your own approach to sustaining a healthy fear of God. Share this with another Christian and ask for your friend's response. Talk about fearing God as the beginning of wisdom.*



### 3 To the Law and the Testimonies!

*And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David ... 1 Kings 3.3*

#### *To make us wise*

Getting wisdom is not simply a matter of *desiring* to be wise. Of course, we must set our *hearts* to desire wisdom. But we must also dedicate our *minds* to acquiring those wise insights and perspectives that allow the conscience to process thinking and feeling, through our Kingdom values, into wise and loving actions.

So we need to apply ourselves diligently to those sources that can prepare our soul for wisdom, beginning with the Law of God.

As I have previously explained, the Law of God is a much-neglected resource for gaining the wisdom of the Lord. While the fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of wisdom, real *growth* in wisdom comes from steady exposure to and immersion in the wise and holy Law of God.

David wrote that the Law of God can make even simple men wise (Ps. 19.7). God explained through Moses that His Law would make the people of Israel a nation wise and to be admired: “Therefore be careful to observe [God’s statutes and judgments]; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’” (Deut. 4.6).

Because Solomon loved and feared God, it was natural for him to turn to the Law of God to get the wisdom he sought for serving the Lord and the people of Israel.

#### *Solomon, Jesus, and the Law*

Let us assume that, in turning to the Law of God as his father David had, Solomon followed the protocol assigned to all the kings of Israel (Deut. 17.18-20). This would have required Solomon to prepare a draft of the Law of God in his own handwriting, to submit that draft to the priests for review and approval, and then to keep that draft of the Law with him at all times. As king Solomon was expected to read from the Law daily, to learn the fear of God from the Law, to allow his heart to be shaped in humility by all that the Law teaches, and to walk in the paths of righteousness marked out therein.

Even the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings, followed this same protocol, as He Himself tells us in Matthew 5.17. He, the very Wisdom of God incarnate; He perfectly fulfilled all the Law of God, and determined that it should be foundational for teaching in His Kingdom.

We who have been redeemed by our Lord Jesus Christ, are now a “royal priesthood” unto the Lord (1 Pt. 2.9, 10). We must therefore make it our business to seek the wisdom of God in His Law, so that we might walk in the same path that Solomon and Jesus walked (1 Jn. 2.1-6), and get the kind of wisdom Solomon did for serving God and others.

#### *Repenting of our neglect*

If we would be wise, we must repent of having neglected the Law of God so long. Those who neglect the Law of God will find that even their prayers can run afoul of the Lord (Prov. 28.9). But if we apply ourselves to the Law of God, reading and meditating in it daily and seeking by all means to walk in its holy and righteous and good path (Rom. 7.12), then we will find that the wisdom of God will be more readily with us in everything we do.

### *Get Wisdom*

The wisdom of God is that skill in living that reflects His indwelling presence in our lives. We are on the right path to wisdom when we nurture the fear of the Lord along with our love for Him. And when we daily submit to the Law of God, and, indeed, to all the teaching of God's Word, we begin to discover wisdom from the Lord for every aspect of our lives, every day of our lives.

We cannot get wisdom merely by asking for it or desiring it strongly. We must *apply ourselves* to the work of getting wisdom, and this will mean learning from those whom we know to have been wise. For Solomon and Jesus – as for Paul and all the apostles, and great saints throughout the ages – getting wisdom means reading, meditating in, studying, and living obediently to the Law and Word of God.

#### *For reflection*

1. What is the Law of God? What should be the Christian's relationship to the Law of God? Meditate on Psalm 1 and Matthew 5.17-19 in your answer.
2. The Law of God is not *unto* salvation, but *for the sake of salvation*. In the light of Ephesians 2.8-10 and Philippians 2.12, explain this.
3. Meditate on Romans 7.12. Why does it make sense to think we might be able to gain wisdom from meditating in God's Law?

*Next steps – Transformation: Spend this day meditating on Psalm 1 and Matthew 5.17-19. At the end of the day, complete this statement: "I need to become more familiar with God's Law because..." Pray your completed statement back to the Lord, and begin working on it the next morning.*

## 4 Study the Creation

*I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised.* Ecclesiastes 1.12, 13

*A quest, not an endowment*

Solomon asked God to grant him wisdom so that he might rule the people of Israel justly and well. Solomon feared God and feared what God might do if he failed in his calling to rule as Israel's king. Thus, he had a good start in gaining what he sought, for the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

I think we can get the impression that, following that evening's encounter with the Lord, Solomon awoke the next day and was suddenly the wisest man on earth. Like the Tin Man, suddenly spouting the Pythagorean Theorem, we might think Solomon was *immediately* endowed with the wisdom of God.

But that is not the case.

God granted Solomon's request for wisdom, but, apparently, not as a sudden endowment from on high. According to his own account in the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon had to seek the wisdom of God by all the means of revelation God had provided. So Solomon became a student of the Law of God (Eccl. 12.13), following the practice of Israel's kings by writing a copy of the law and meditating in it day by day. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and daily meditation in God's Word describes the path wisdom would take in our lives.

*Wisdom as wide as the world*

But Solomon did not stop with studying the Word of God only. He also became a student of the world of creation. Solomon understood, as David taught, that God was making Himself and His glory known in the things He has made. Thus, Solomon expected to discern the Lord and His wisdom by becoming a student of the world around him – creation and culture alike. His proverbs are full of insights and wise conclusions which Solomon derived from careful observation.

Solomon's father, King David, had written of the works of creation,

*All Your works shall praise You, O LORD,  
And Your saints shall bless You.  
They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom,  
And talk of Your power,  
To make known to the sons of men His mighty acts,  
And the glorious majesty of His kingdom.* (Ps. 145.10-12)

Solomon knew that God has hidden His glory in the world of creation, and with His glory, His wisdom. The creatures around us and the patterns of the created world reveal much about God and His character and purpose. The more familiar we become with these, and the more we ponder them in the light of God's Word, the more we may expect to discern the Lord and His will from the things He has made.

Solomon understood that, as a king who sought the wisdom of God, it was his responsibility to seek out, through the study of creation, whatever God might be pleased to reveal there of His glory and wisdom (Prov. 25.2).

The creation is a vast library of information and example on how to be wise and to live for the glory of God.

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Knowing this, Solomon took up the study of created things – trees, plants, beasts, birds, reptiles, and fish (1 Kgs. 4.33). He wrote thousands of proverbs and songs to encode his observations, reflect on them, and pass them on to others.

### *Jesus, creation, and wisdom*

Jesus also guided us to see the wisdom of God in everyday things and situations. Following Solomon's example, Jesus pointed to birds, flowers, fields, seeds, and more to draw the attention of His hearers to the wisdom of God encoded there. He told stories about everyday situations of society and culture, and invited His hearers to consider the wisdom of God revealed there. Jesus explained, by the examples of creation and culture, the mysterious ways and wonders of God's Kingdom.

We can learn wisdom by including with our study of God's Law, some observing and reflecting on the world around us. By allowing the Word of God to illuminate our path, we can see the presence, power, and purpose of God at work in created things, and have the teaching of His Law and Word reinforced in our daily experience.

Becoming wise begins in the fear of God and devotion to His Word. But growth in wisdom increases by an ongoing, every day study of the world around us. If we would be wise like Solomon and Jesus, we must take up the study of the creation, devoting ourselves through reading, study, contemplation, and conversation, to discerning the wisdom of God as revealed in the things He has made.

### *For reflection*

1. Have you ever thought about the creation as a source of wisdom? If no, why not? If yes, give an example.
2. Skim through Proverbs and pull out some examples showing what Solomon learned from observing the creation. How did he see the wisdom of God in these examples?
3. Make a quick list of aspects of the creation which you might expect to reveal something about the wisdom of God. Beside each item in your list, explain briefly what you might expect to learn about wisdom from observing this item.

*Next steps - Preparation: Choose something from the creation around you, something immediately accessible for you to observe. Watch it for a while – a slowly meandering creek, the night sky, birds at the feeder, the leaves on a tree. Make a stab at discerning the wisdom of God visible in this item. Share what you learn with someone else.*

## 5 Wisdom in Culture

*And God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore. Thus Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men—than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the surrounding nations. He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. 1 Kings 4.29-32*

### *Culture and glory*

As diligent as Solomon was in studying creation and everyday life, he accomplished many works of culture, to encode the wisdom he gained from creation, and to preserve that wisdom, through culture, for the generations to come.

Solomon's father, King David, had written that it pleased God to give gifts to all kinds of men, so that He Himself might inhabit those gifts, presumably, to manifest His glory and wisdom (Ps. 68.18). Accordingly, in his quest to gain the wisdom of God, Solomon set himself to studying and creating culture. The works of God in culture, like His works in creation, can yield much wisdom to guide our conscience for serving Him and others.

This only makes sense, for, since no human society has ever existed without culture, it would have been impossible to rule Israel well apart from some understanding of how culture should be used to encourage and express the wisdom and glory of God.

Solomon understood that works of culture have powerful ability to shape and serve a nation; but they must be used in a manner consistent with what God has revealed in His Law, if they are to aid in realizing the wisdom of God. So, just as Solomon studied the creation in pursuit of the wisdom of God, he also set his mind to understand culture, and his hands to bring wisdom through cultural artifacts to the people of Israel.

### *A man of culture*

Solomon's cultural interests and achievements were many and great. He understood the ways of poetry, music, and folk wisdom, as 1 Kings 4.32 makes clear, by referring to his penchant for composing songs and proverbs. He knew that such cultural forms and expressions could be important means of communicating the wisdom of God.

In pithy proverbial sayings and memorable songs, God can encapsulate much wisdom that can serve us in all kinds of ways. Many have found that, by reading one chapter a day from the book of Proverbs, they learn the wisdom of God and practice it more consistently.

But Solomon's engagement with culture did not stop with music and musings; the King of Israel sought the wisdom of God in great works of public art and architecture. We see the detail with which Solomon attended to the building of God's temple, using only the finest materials, according to the most lavish of plans, to create a workable and glorious structure for the worship of the Lord (1 Kgs. 6).

He also built a great palace, gardens, parks, pools, vineyards, stables, and houses. He testifies that he was guided by wisdom in building all these things (Eccl. 2.3), and so we can believe that, like the temple, there was much of the wisdom of God to be observed in the cultural achievements of Solomon.

### *Culture-making*

In his book, *Making Culture*, Andy Crouch insists that every believer is a culture-maker; thus, all of us have abundant opportunities to seek and to manifest the wisdom of God in our day-to-day lives with and in culture. Everything from the words we speak to the food we eat, the way we dress, how we do our work, our

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participation in the life of the community, and our preferences in reading, study, films, and avocations – all these are forms of culture in which we may learn and express the wisdom of God.

The conscience seeks to bring our Kingdom values to light in wisdom through just such cultural forms and opportunities.

But if we would show God's wisdom through our cultural activities, we must be willing, like Solomon, to understand the ways of culture and to bring our cultural lives under the searchlight of God's Word. We can learn much about the wisdom of God through culture, and we can show His wisdom through our cultural lives to the people around us.

But we must study carefully and well if we would get the wisdom of God by this means.

*For reflection*

1. Make a quick list of the different aspects of culture in which you are daily engaged. Meditate on 1 Corinthians 10:31. How can the culture you use bring glory to God?
2. Can we learn God's wisdom from culture? From music, let's say? Or the history of our country? Give an example of something an item of culture has taught you about the wisdom of God?
3. Your work is an aspect of culture. Should we seek God's wisdom for our work? Should others be able to discern God's wisdom in our work? Give some examples.

*Next steps – Conversation: Can you think of a film you've seen that communicated something of wisdom? Talk with a friend about this as an example of how we might get wisdom by becoming more aware of the culture around us.*

## 6 The Ways of Conscience

*And men of all nations, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom, came to bear the wisdom of Solomon.* 1 Kings 4.34

### *People-watching*

Even a cursory reading of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs – the greatest literary achievements of King Solomon – will reveal that Solomon knew a good deal about the ways, longings, hopes, fears, and needs of men and women.

Solomon knew that God had made people in His own image, after His likeness, with the ability to know the Lord and to understand the world and life in ways consistent with God’s design, though not exhaustively (cf. Eccl. 3.10, 11). Solomon seems to have concluded, therefore, that he could learn something about the wisdom of God by watching people in their everyday lives. He seemed to know what Hopkins expressed in one of His poems, that “Christ plays in 10,000 places,” in the forms, features, faces, and ways of people from all walks of life.

By observing others, and trying to learn from their ways, Solomon believed he would grow in the wisdom he sought so earnestly from the Lord.

If we recall that wisdom is nothing more than “skill in living according to the purpose and plan of God”, then it makes sense to think that the actions of men and women, arising from the decisions and choices of *their* conscience, can lead us to get the wisdom of God. Some people are better than others at living wisely, and it is a good idea to identify wise people and learn from them as much as we can.

### *All kinds of people*

Solomon saw God’s wisdom in all kinds of people. In Song of Songs he shows us how God, in His wisdom, teaches men and women the importance of love and guides them in expressing love to one another.

At the same time, Solomon warns us, in both Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, of the danger of cheapening love by making it nothing more than a sensual experience. Love between men and women should be like the love God has for His people – pure, eternal, self-giving, mutually edifying, devoted, and engaging the whole person. Anything less than this, Solomon knew, was but a cheap imitation of love.

He must also have observed many friends relating to one another, for he had much to say about being a soul friend with another person. Solomon also warned readers about the bad examples of sluggards, cheats, deceivers, adulterers, and those who play fast and loose with the truth. He watched businessmen, rulers, parents, and people in a wide range of situations, in each case studying their actions to get the wisdom of God from them. He extolled the example of a godly wife, a wise citizen, and a devoted ruler. He saw what happened when people obeyed God’s Word, and he warned about the folly of thinking we know better than God about how we ought to live.

### *Observing the wise*

We can learn much about wisdom from paying attention to the people around us and the goings-on of the world. As C. S. Lewis reminds us, you will never see a mere mortal. Every person is an image-bearer of God, and by paying attention to others, and observing their choices and actions, we can get wisdom from God to live more consistently for Him.

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ means being a learner, and we can learn much about the wisdom of God especially from watching wise people who know the Lord and are faithful in serving Him, or by reading about

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them, as from our forebears in the faith. The more such people we have in our lives, and the more carefully we observe them, the greater will be the likelihood that we will understand how to live in the wisdom of God.

When our quest for wisdom is grounded in the love and fear of God, framed by the Law of God, and devoted to the service of God, then we may expect that diligent study and careful observation will yield additional insights into the wisdom of God from creation, culture, and the workings of human consciences.

If we would gain the wisdom of God, we must resort to all these sources with the keenest interest and devotion.

*For reflection*

1. Can you think of a wise person who has influenced you greatly? What is it about that person that caught your attention?
2. What's the difference between a hero and a celebrity? Should Christians have heroes in their lives? How might heroes help us to learn the wisdom of God? How would you counsel someone to begin looking for some heroes?
3. Read Hebrews 11. Jot down whatever you think we might learn about the wisdom of God from these heroes of the faith.

*Next steps – Conversation: Ask some Christian friends about their heroes. What have they learned about God's wisdom from these folks?*



## 7 Keep Your Motives Right

*So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.  
Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them.  
I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure,  
For my heart rejoiced in all my labor;  
And this was my reward from all my labor.* Ecclesiastes 2.9, 10

*A good start...*

We are making the point that wisdom is the general form the words and deeds take, which the conscience processes into action through the will. We need to make sure that our conscience is well furnished with Kingdom values and saturated with images, analogies, and precepts of wisdom, so that the wisdom of God will come through in all our decisions, choices, and actions.

We've been studying Solomon as one who sought the wisdom of God through prayer and diligent study, and who expressed the wisdom he acquired in a wide variety of ways.

Solomon's purpose for seeking the wisdom of God was so that he might serve the people of Israel well (1 Kgs. 3.9). His original desire to be wise expressed his longing to be a good king, like his father had been, and to serve the flock of God as a faithful shepherd. This is the *proper motive* for seeking the wisdom of God – that we might honor Him and serve others, thus fulfilling the twin commandments to love God and our neighbors.

Wisdom, you will recall, is only Jesus Christ living His life in and through us; therefore we would expect that, given His example, the only proper motive for seeking the wisdom of God is to serve others with His love and truth (Phil. 2.5-11).

Solomon began well, and for the greater part of his reign, accomplished the purposes of God according to the plans and wisdom God gave him.

But a turn came at some point, and Solomon records it for us in Ecclesiastes 2. There, even though he mentions that he was still operating out of the wisdom God had given him, it is painfully obvious that Solomon's motives had begun to change.

*...but then, disaster*

Read Ecclesiastes 2 aloud, and you will be overwhelmed with the number of times the first person personal pronoun comes into play – *I, me, my*, and so forth. As he prospered, Solomon seems to have begun thinking more about himself, his pleasure, and his own interests and needs, than those of the people of Israel. Lost in self-seeking, Solomon opened the doors of Israel to idolatry, adultery, self-indulgence, moral compromise, and spiritual disaster (1 Kgs. 11.1-13).

How easy it is for even the wisest among us to succumb to the temptations of sin!

When it comes to seeking the wisdom of God, we must strive to keep our motives pure. Wisdom, like the wisdom of Christ, will always seek the interests and needs of others first; it will never give in to base self-interest, nor to the indulgences of the flesh. Wisdom will always want to honor God and walk the path marked out by His Word. Wisdom will keep in mind the good of the larger community and will deny any temptation that encourages mere self-seeking. So long as our motive is pure and our quest for wisdom diligent, we can expect that God will meet us, provide for us, guide us into His wisdom, and use us in the service of His people in many wonderful ways.

## *Get Wisdom*

### *Get wisdom!*

Solomon believed that he could be wise, wise enough to serve the people of Israel as God Himself might do. He sought the wisdom of God by every means – through prayer and the Word of God, by learning the ways of creation, culture, and human relations, and by contributing as much as he could to the wellbeing of the people he served. He achieved much wisdom and provided many wonderful benefits to the people over whom God had established Him as king.

But when he failed to keep his eye on God, Solomon's wisdom turned to folly, and all his labors on behalf of the people of Israel led only to national dissolution and despair.

Our own nation is already struggling to keep from succumbing to despair. More than ever, the world is looking for wise men and women to give it hope and lead it to safer and more peaceable times. We can become the wise people our generation desperately needs. As we strive for the purification of our consciences, let us pursue wisdom earnestly all the while waiting in prayer for the Lord to search and scour our motives, laying bear the desires of our hearts lest, like Solomon, we see our quest for wisdom come to disaster and our practice of wisdom become a cause of shame.

### *For reflection*

1. Meditate on Proverbs 4.20-27. What do we need to keep an eye on to make sure our motives don't go awry?
2. How can Christians help one another in the quest for wisdom? What can we do to stimulate, encourage, and hold one another accountable in this effort to gain the wisdom of God?
3. To whom are you accountable for getting the wisdom of God, and what is your plan for doing so?

*Next steps – Transformation: Develop a plan for gaining the wisdom of God, including all the means mentioned in this study. Share your plan with a friend and challenge your friend to develop a plan as well. Pray together, and meet often, to encourage one another in this effort.*

*Get Wisdom*

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What is wisdom? Why does our conscience need wisdom to fulfill its role in the soul?
2. Explain the role of the mind, the heart, and the conscience in getting the wisdom of God.
3. What can keep us from growing in wisdom? How can we overcome these obstacles?
4. Suggest some ways that Christians could help one another to grow in wisdom.
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned about wisdom from this study? How are you implementing that lesson in your walk with and work for the Lord?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.