

GET WISDOM

THE GOOD CONSCIENCE 5



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Get Wisdom

Strong Souls 22
Get Wisdom
The Good Conscience 5
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Get Wisdom

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Get Wisdom

Welcome to *Get Wisdom*

A defining feature of a strong soul is the ability to direct the life in wisdom. Such direction begins in the conscience, where, looking the Law of God and values of the Kingdom of God, our thoughts and affections are sanctified and engaged to guide us to walk as Jesus did.

So we need to get wisdom, whatever that takes. Happily, Scripture offers sound guidance in our pursuit. A good conscience and a strong soul will show the wisdom of God in all things.

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?

As we know, 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 soul produces when the conscience processes sound thinking and true loving through Kingdom values. 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 good conscience. Aim at wisdom. Cherish wisdom. Let all the moments of your day be filled with the wisdom that is the product of a good conscience and a strong soul (Eph. 5.15-17).

OK, but how?

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 (vv. 22, 23), 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. When we seek the Lord like this, in response to His call and for the purposes of renewal, holiness, mission, and legacy, wisdom will fill and transform us into His own image and likeness.

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

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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, 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 focus and goal of 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 – Preparation: In which areas of your life would you like to realize more of God's wisdom. Commit these to the Lord in prayer and begin working to know of His wisdom in each area.

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 in our conscience and our inner life.

As the Lord wrote through Moses, “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you...” – note that word, *require* – “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. Fear the Lord, walk in His ways, and love Him. This is the way to wisdom.

Thus, we must not shy away from fearing the Lord; rather, let us accept it as part of the Lord’s calling and pursue it, seek it earnestly, and live fruitfully in the wisdom fearing God affords.

Most of us have an idea of what it means to love the Lord. But what is involved in fearing Him? While our primary focus in this part of our study of a strong soul is on the conscience, and we have previously discussed the role of the heart in maintaining a strong soul, it is important that we review the role of fearing God in maintaining a conscience which governs the soul for wisdom.

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* and of our own *unworthiness* and *sinfulness*. In our day, the tendency is to bring God down to our size, and to make Him our friend or counselor; but we neglect to see Him as our Creator and sovereign Lord, as the One Who holds our very lives in His hand, 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 can do to lead us to greater fervor and devotion in our walk with and work for Him (Heb. 12.3-11). It can indeed be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10.31).

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, care, and command (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. When we know God in His immensity and power, we will also discern 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. We will fear to offend Him or to challenge His truth or stray from His paths. That we are often inclined to do

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so should cause us to tremble with fear before the awesome might and holy power of God.

Moses wrote that we will only truly love God – the God of all compassion, the God of our redemption, the God Who is our heavenly Father – when we fear Him as we should. Love God, Who is altogether worthy of our whole-hearted love; but fear Him as well, for He is equally worthy of that.

What God can do

This applies even to us who have been redeemed by His grace. Though we are saved 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.

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). The writer wants us to fear God and what He can do to keep us in the righteous path. 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. If we value wisdom as a priority for a good conscience, then let us nurture the fear of God as the way to begin being wise.

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.

Get wisdom, Solomon exhorted us (Prov. 4.5, 7); and if you would do so, learn to fear the Lord (Prov. 9.10).

For reflection

1. Do you agree that it is important to fear 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. Offer it to the Lord in prayer.

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 *heart* to desire wisdom. But we must also dedicate our *mind* 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. When we desire wisdom and work to learn it, wisdom will take root in our *conscience*, flourish in our soul, and bear its fruit in our lives.

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.

And in all His Word, of course, but especially His Law. If, in our study of God's Word, we neglect the Law of God, we deprive ourselves of the foundational resource, not only for wisdom, but for loving God and our neighbors (Matt. 22.34-40).

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. And it should be natural for us to do so as well.

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 prescribed for 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 keep that draft of the Law with him always. 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. Thus he would begin to acquire the wisdom that would mark the early and middle years of his reign.

Even the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings, followed this same protocol, as He Himself tells us in Matthew 5.17-19. He, the very Wisdom of God incarnate, 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). God has made us kings and priests, each in our own sector of His Kingdom (Rev. 1.6). 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.

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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 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 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.

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.

Add to your daily time in the Lord some meditation in the Ten Commandments. Read regularly through the precepts, statutes, judgments, and testimonies of the Law, especially as we find these in Deuteronomy. Pray through a section of Psalm 119 each day. Meditate on the ways the apostles cited and used the Law as instructive for our lives in the Kingdom of God. Pray that God will give you wisdom as you seek it daily in His Law.

We do not study and keep the Law hoping that this might save us. Neither did Israel of old. It was only after their deliverance from Egypt that God gave them His perfect Law of liberty to guide them in wisdom and love (Jms. 1.22-25). We learn the Law, obey it, and encourage one another in it because this is the way to wisdom (Deut. 4.5-8) and greatness in the Kingdom of God (Matt. 5.17-19), and because God's Law outlines the good works God has prepared for us to walk in as His redeemed and saved people (Eph. 3.8-10).

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 meant reading, meditating in, studying, and living in obedience 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*, that is, to realize more of God's great 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, and wisdom is an essential element of a good conscience and a strong soul.

We can get the impression that, following his 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 gift 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).

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The creation is a vast library of insights and examples on how to be wise and to live for the glory of God. 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. 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 life and culture, and He invited His hearers to consider the wisdom of God revealed there. By the examples of creation and culture, Jesus pointed to the mysterious ways and wonders of God's Kingdom.

We're not going to be wise by just wishing it were so. Nor by praying earnestly, although we must. 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 discern 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, including His Law. But growth in wisdom increases by ongoing, daily study of the world around us. Our investigations of creation don't need to be cosmic in scope or scientific in approach. There is plenty around us, right where we are, to delight us with the beauty, wonder, simplicity, and majesty of God, if only we will take the time to look and learn.

If we would be wise like Solomon and Jesus, we must take up the study of the creation, devoting ourselves through reading, study, observation, contemplation, and conversation, to searching out 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. Ask yourself: What is God showing me about Himself? About what it means to be wise?

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 Ezrabite, 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

Solomon was diligent in studying creation and everyday life; he also accomplished many works of culture, drawing on the wisdom he gained from the Law and creation, and preserving that wisdom, through culture, for the generations to come. His proverbs, songs, and works reflected his vision of God and His works. We continue to this day to benefit from the writings Solomon left for us.

People are inescapably cultural. We make and use culture every day. Solomon understood this, and in his work of culture he demonstrated how we may discern and make use of the wisdom of God.

Solomon's father, King David, had written that it pleased God to receive gifts from all kinds of people, so that He Himself might inhabit those gifts, to manifest His glory and wisdom (Ps. 68.18). In this case, what He received was all the many cultural resources, large and small, that the people contributed for building the temple of the Lord (1 Chron. 29.1-9). Accordingly, in his quest to gain the wisdom of God, Solomon set himself to understand and create culture. The works of God in culture, like His works in creation, can yield much wisdom to help us realize a good conscience and a strong soul for serving God 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 manifest the wisdom of God. So, just as Solomon studied the Law and 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 in 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 for 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 and glory 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 cannot save a people; indeed, in many ways culture can undermine belief in God and set people on a course of degradation and self-destruction. But God is present in the work of culture, even among those who do not know Him, leaving a witness to Himself and thus to His wisdom for all who know how to seek the glory He has deposited in the forms of culture (Acts 14.17; Prov. 25.2).

Culture-making

In his book, *Making Culture*, Andy Crouch insists that every believer is a culture-maker. We all use language, enjoy music, select various kinds of décor and couture, indulge certain diversions and intellectual activities, and make use of many other forms of culture, all of which say something about who we are and what we desire. Thus, we all have abundant opportunities to seek the Lord and manifest His wisdom in our day-to-day lives with and in culture. From our use of all these forms of culture and more we may learn and express the wisdom of God.

A good conscience works to bring our Kingdom values to light in wisdom through all the cultural forms we make and use. Understanding culture and discerning the glory and wisdom of God in it can thus be powerful resources for shaping the soul and maintaining a good conscience.

But if we would know God's wisdom through our cultural activities, we must be willing, like Solomon, to understand the nature and use of culture and to bring our cultural lives under the searchlight of God's Word. Only then will we have the discernment we need to benefit from culture rather than be overwhelmed and corrupted by it.

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 think clearly if we would realize 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 how 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 the way we do our work? Give some examples.

Next steps – Conversation: Can you think of a film you've seen that communicated something of wisdom? Explain.

6 The Ways of the Conscience

And men of all nations, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom, came to hear 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, interests, hopes, fears, and needs of men and women. His writings are filled with examples of people pursuing relationships, carrying out roles, and fulfilling (or not) their appointed responsibilities. Solomon believed there was something to learn by observing people and sifting their actions and choices through the filter of God’s Law (Eccl. 12.13, 14).

Solomon knew that God had made people in His own image, after His likeness, with the ability to know Him and to understand the world and life in ways consistent with God’s design, though not exhaustively (cf. Eccl. 3.10, 11). Solomon discerned the wisdom of God by observing people in their everyday lives and measuring their choices and actions against the Word of God. Even his own experience he found to be replete with insights to wisdom, derived largely from his excesses of ego and indulgence (Eccl. 2).

By observing people, 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* consciences, can lead us to discern the wisdom of God. Some people are better than others at living wisely, and it is a good idea to identify such people, observe their ways carefully, and learn from them as much as we can. But we can learn God’s wisdom even from the follies, foibles, and failures of those who lack wisdom, just as Solomon did.

All kinds of people

Solomon saw God’s wisdom in all kinds of people. In Song of Songs, he shows that wisdom can guide human love in proper ways, not in serving oneself but in honoring the beauty, dignity, and desirability of the beloved.

At the same time, Solomon warns us, in both Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, of the danger of cheapening love, reducing it to lust and making it nothing more than a sensual experience. Human love 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, oppressors, 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 gain 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.

By thus observing others, Solomon sought to gain wisdom to fortify his own conscience for choices and actions in line with the teaching of God’s Word.

Get Wisdom

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 meet – or observe – a mere mortal. Every person is an image-bearer of God and a beneficiary of God’s common grace; and by paying attention to others, and observing their choices and actions, we can discern wisdom from God to live more consistently for Him.

Those closest to us – spouse, family, and friends – represent the best opportunities for discerning God’s wisdom, both because they’re the ones we see most frequently and there is a good likelihood that they are believers in Jesus. Beyond that, the people in our Personal Mission Fields can teach us wisdom, too, as we see them making choices and taking actions that line up with the grace and truth of God. We can also learn wisdom from reading biographies of great people – poets, theologians, humanitarians, missionaries, and leaders in various arenas of life.

Growing in wisdom is learning to make good choices, choices in line with the Law of God and all His Word, choices that demonstrate that skill in living which honors God and others. Observing creation, making right use of culture, and paying attention to the ways of wise people can help us learn to make wise choices. When all such studies are grounded in and understood and directed by the teaching of God’s Word, we may expect to discern the wisdom of God to honor and glorify Him in all we do.

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ means being a learner, and wisdom is a learned characteristic. Like Solomon, we’re not born with it; we must acquire it through diligent effort. We can learn much about the wisdom of God from watching wise people who know the Lord and are faithful in serving Him and by reading their works, especially those of our forebears in the faith. The more godly 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 as well.

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 of creation, culture, and people will yield insights into the wisdom of God that can help us maintain a good conscience and a strong soul.

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 – Transformation: Who are your heroes? What have you learned from them? What have you learned of wisdom from those closest to you?

7 Right Motives

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 our words and deeds should take. Our conscience processes the thoughts of our mind and the inclinations of our heart into actions through the will. As Dallas Willard puts it (*The Divine Conspiracy*), we are called of God to redeem the time of our lives for wisdom as far as the active reach of our will. Or, as we might say, to the full extent of our Personal Mission Field. So 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 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. As far as our active will reaches, to all the people and places and things (culture) within our reach or influence, we are called, like Solomon, to redeem our time for wisdom (Eph. 5.15-17).

Wisdom, you will recall, is 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 (1 Cor. 10.12)!

When it comes to seeking the wisdom of God, we must strive to keep our motives pure. Wisdom, 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

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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!

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 people, 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 to establish and nurture a good conscience, let us pursue wisdom earnestly, all the while waiting in prayer for the Lord to search and scour our motives, laying bare the desires of our hearts lest, like Solomon, we see our quest for wisdom come to disaster and our failure 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. Commit your plan to the Lord as a long-term, ongoing project. Then get busy seeking more of the wisdom of our Lord Jesus.

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

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Thank you.