

**Wisdom: knowledge in context**

Jubilee Mennonite Church

Bryce Miller

Courage to Continue Series

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**Purpose:** To place the discernment of God's way into the context of a needed and necessary skill.

**Message:** True wisdom goes well beyond easy knowledge, but steers us toward the way and being of God in our world and in our lives.

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; Proverbs 2:1-11 [I will read]

**Synopsis:** We are awash in information. Facts and notions are at our finger tips at all times of the day. But has this made us wise? I am willing to say that many of us would venture not. Wisdom surpasses knowledge because it is knowledge in context of life meant to serve the greater good. For the indigenous, it is the knowledge of connection to and preservation of the created order that constitutes wisdom and a good way forward. For we as Christians, we are asked to seek knowledge of God (e.g. relationship with, not just factual comprehension of the text) in order to apply the knowledge in the context of the world. True wisdom connects us with God's way not to serve ourselves, but to enable us to more and more incarnate the way of Christ in the world. Reconciliation calls us to live in that knowledge and to be wise in how we are the people of Christ for the Kingdom of God.

Way of speaking about wisdom from the indigenous perspective: *The Beaver carries wisdom. Wisdom is not to be confused with knowledge. Wisdom is the gained experience and knowledge is to know the difference and accept responsibility and accountability. When one pollutes the water, one does not break a human law, but the law of nature, which states that to poison the water, is to destroy oneself.*

Proverbs 2:1-11 [Message]

- <sup>1-5</sup> **2** Good friend, take to heart what I'm telling you;  
collect my counsels and guard them with your life.  
Tune your ears to the world of Wisdom;  
set your heart on a life of Understanding.  
That's right—if you make Insight your priority,  
and won't take no for an answer,  
Searching for it like a prospector panning for gold,  
like an adventurer on a treasure hunt,  
Believe me, before you know it Fear-of-GOD will be yours;  
you'll have come upon the Knowledge of God.
- <sup>6-8</sup> And here's why: GOD gives out Wisdom free,  
is plainspoken in Knowledge and Understanding.  
He's a rich mine of Common Sense for those who live well,  
a personal bodyguard to the candid and sincere.  
He keeps his eye on all who live honestly,  
and pays special attention to his loyally committed ones.
- <sup>9-15</sup> So now you can pick out what's true and fair,  
find all the good trails!  
Lady Wisdom will be your close friend,  
and Brother Knowledge your pleasant companion.  
Good Sense will scout ahead for danger,  
Insight will keep an eye out for you.

Knowledge:

- Date of the first Anabaptist baptism: [REDACTED]
- Population of Winnipeg: [REDACTED]
- How many liters in a 5 gallon bucket: [REDACTED]
- What bird appears on the Mexican Flag: [REDACTED]
- Franklin Roosevelt's middle name: [REDACTED]

We live awash in knowledge. Information is our stock and trade. It is generally said that we are exposed to between 4000 and 10000 advertising messages each day, and that is just the messages that are trying to actually sell us something. The late-night inane conversation about whether so and so was in that movie or whether it was the other guy has gotten a whole lot less involved as we can just ask our phones and find out that we were both wrong. Data is everywhere as we try to capture, analyze and predict the movements of everything from traffic to individual drops of water in a pipe. All of this information gives us insight to the ways and means of how our world works. It lets us get through the day on time and well informed. It can even tell us how many steps we took to accomplish just that.

None of this is news of course. We are touted the wonders of our tech and the limitless nature of our knowledge by way of our data driven life style almost every day. We can capture and collate vast quantities of data about the world, but I strongly suspect that our topic for this day, wisdom, is in sad, short supply. There is actually ample evidence that all this new power and new ways of being has progressed so fast that we are struggling to keep up. The technologist and writer Isaac Asimov reflects “The saddest aspect of life right now is that science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers wisdom.” Wisdom is not knowledge. Knowledge is all the stuff that we know—the facts and figures of the world, the books we can read, the stuff that go into our education and all the rest.

Wisdom is tough to talk about because it is one of those “you know it when you see it” sort of things. And you miss it when you don't. Wisdom is defined most often within the dictionary as “the quality of being wise”. All in all not terribly helpful in the main. Wisdom is built on knowledge, but it goes beyond knowledge to see the broad common judgement of what is best in a situation based on experience and so much else. Let me offer some hallmarks of wisdom then. First, wisdom is knowledge put to use in the context of something bigger than itself. We can always find a fact for any situation to support a given outcome. Wisdom knows that there is a context in which knowledge must be applied to get the best possible outcome for

everyone involved. Second, Wisdom is accountable. An Indigenous explanation explains this well. It describes wisdom as being accountable for the outcome of all decisions. One act poison the water, it offers. There is nothing to stop Humanity from doing so. But wisdom, being accountable for the ultimate outcome of the decision, teaches us that poisoning the water is ultimately poisoning one's self. Third, wisdom considers broad knowledge, experience, and ethics right alongside what someone knows. I often here "well, I am not smart like that" when people encounter a problem (most often a technical problem, because there is nothing quite like a malfunctioning piece of software to make you feel stupid). We are quick to give "Smart" to those who have an easy way with the popular elements of knowledge, and to accept dumb or stupid if we don't measure up. Wisdom knows that there are many ways of being intelligent, and each one is important for the gifting of the community. Wisdom places each gift within its proper place, each one needed to be the community we are called to be.

I was always impressed by my father's way of being family with his in laws. My mom's side of the family was solidly farmers, and when the economics of farming failed, truck drivers throughout my growing up years. With the glaring exception of my father who held a master's degree in English (of all things) and was a school administrator, magazine editor, and executive throughout my growing up years. One might assume that Dad and his brother's in law were as opposite as they could be. But I was always impressed by my father's ability to talk with them and to them, genuinely taking an interest in their world, and learning at each family gathering a bit more about the advantages of Peterbuilt versus Freightliner, or what have you with the greatest of ease. For me, this is a way of exercising wisdom recognizing the knowledge and experience of others simply because it is theirs, and treasuring as your own, and learning what you may from it. What might have been a natural division was not seen as such, and I admire both my dad's and my Uncle's wisdom in making it so.

Let's add Godly wisdom to the mix here too. How do we go about developing that discipline? Proverbs is an immensely practical book with Solomon offering advice from generation to generation about the mundane and the holy. The purpose is set out in the first chapter "to teach shrewdness to the simple and Knowledge and prudence to the young." The base of wisdom is the fear (respect) of YWHH, and the seeking of the way of God (1:7). Proverbs 2 invokes the seeking of the values of God above all things. And on it goes. Godly wisdom comes from a knowledge of God's word, yes, but I think even more so a working

knowledge and living with the values of God and the foolishness of the cross. As Christian, we are invited time and again to emulate the way of Christ who was said to be “full of wisdom” in his teaching and interacting with the world. That is most on display as he interpreted the law through the lens of the Kingdom of God, time and again frustrating what was known about God (doesn’t like harvesting on the Sabbath, would never heal a person thought to be full of sin, would bring a messiah who would come and conquer the world, but instead enters triumphantly on the donkey in modesty). The list goes on and on. What makes Jesus’ wisdom wise was not just that he knew the scripture and the law. He does; he has the knowledge to engage the ways of God on that level. But he doesn’t stop there. He places that knowledge into the context of who he knows God to be and the relationship that he lives out of with God. It is precisely this that gets him in trouble. It is this unwillingness to stick to the knowledge of the ways things are and always would be, but to build beyond that to bring about something better that brought him to the cross to bring about a new wisdom in the foolishness of the cross, through which we are each invited into God’s wisdom by the saving work of the Christ.

Godly wisdom is wisdom that is sought in relationship with and walking with the living God. It is the result of discipleship. It is a knowledge of the way of the cross that calls us each to become like Christ and live in the wisdom of God made known to each of us, calling us to the work of reconciliation and bridging the gaps that divide us one from the next. We develop that wisdom in relationship with God, and in seeing God working in our relationships with other people. When we take on the challenges of being little Christs, we have the knowledge of God’s word, our experience of who and what God is in our lives and our living, and the responsibility to live out of that knowledge with deep love and deep embrace of all who God embraces—the whole world for whom his son died. If this is not the foolish wisdom of the Cross, I don’t know what is.

May we each be blessed enough to be known to be more than just book smart when it comes to the love of God, but to know God’s love, and live the wisdom of the living God in new ways, each and every day. Amen.

## Blessing When the World is Ending

Look, the world  
is always ending  
somewhere.

Somewhere  
the sun has come  
crashing down.

Somewhere  
it has gone  
completely dark.

Somewhere  
it has ended  
with the gun,  
the knife,  
the fist.

Somewhere  
it has ended  
with the slammed door,  
the shattered hope.

Somewhere  
it has ended  
with the utter quiet  
that follows the news  
from the phone,  
the television,  
the hospital room.

Somewhere  
it has ended  
with a tenderness  
that will break  
your heart.

But, listen,  
this blessing means  
to be anything  
but morose.  
It has not come  
to cause despair.

It is simply here  
because there is nothing  
a blessing  
is better suited for  
than an ending,  
nothing that cries out more  
for a blessing  
than when a world  
is falling apart.

This blessing  
will not fix you,  
will not mend you,  
will not give you  
false comfort;  
it will not talk to you  
about one door opening  
when another one closes.

It will simply  
sit itself beside you  
among the shards  
and gently turn your face  
toward the direction  
from which the light  
will come,  
gathering itself  
about you  
as the world begins  
again.

—Jan Richardson