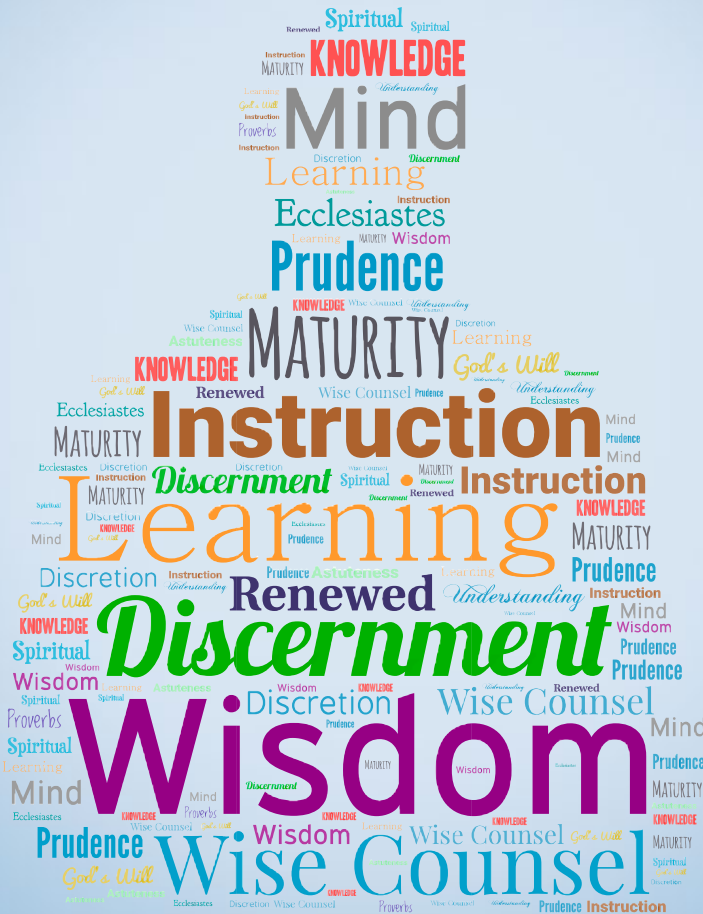




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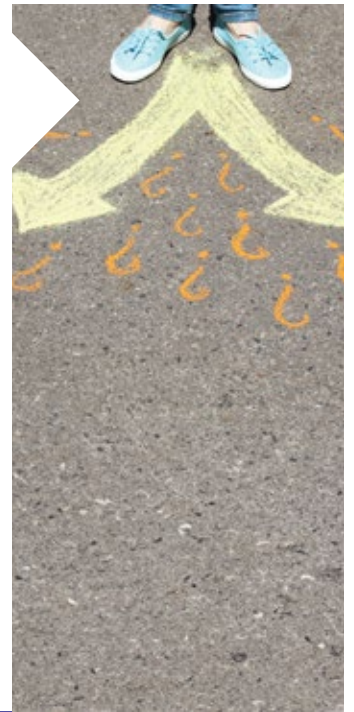
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The Thinking Christian: Biblical Wisdom in an Emotionally Driven World

From my earliest memories, Thanksgiving and Christmas have been some of the most delightful moments of my life. I must immediately thank my godly parents for being the wellspring of that delight. I love Christmas! I suspect that when most of us contemplate the incarnation of Christ, we think about truths like the miracle of the virgin birth, the promised Redeemer of Israel and Light to the Gentiles, and the glory attributed to God by the heavenly host. We don’t immediately think of the topic of these articles in this edition of *FrontLine*. Yet I find it most appropriate to consider wisdom and discernment at this season since Christ is identified in the Scriptures as “the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24). And that wisdom is the source of the believer’s redemption, righteousness, and sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). So it is appropriate for us to contemplate and rejoice in the wisdom of God during this season.

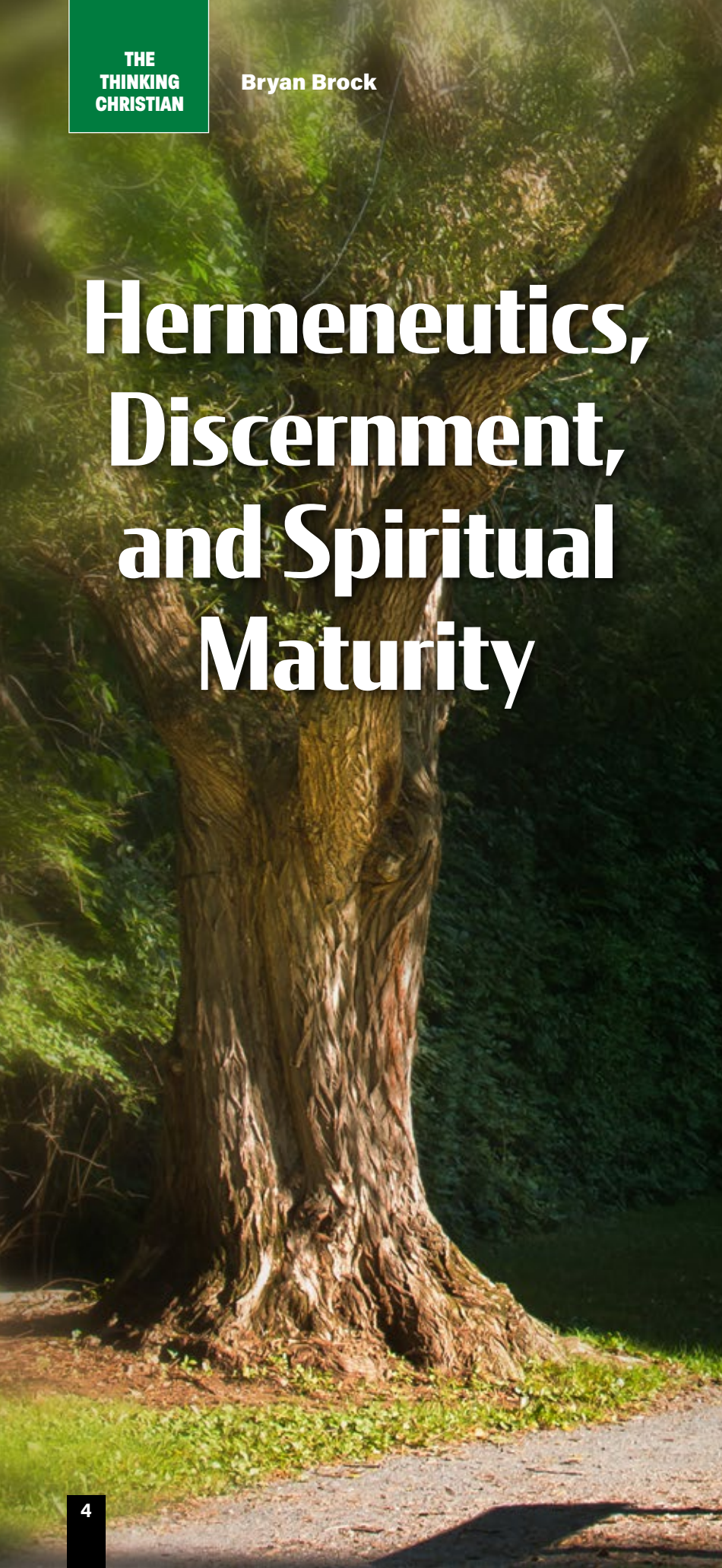
Paul affirms the significance of our topic when he prays for the saints in Philippi. “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment [the ability to perceive and discern]; that ye may approve [a testing process] things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere [to be judged and found pure and genuine] and without offence till the day of Christ. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God” (Phil. 1:9–11). In writing to the Colossians, he mentions, “we . . . do not cease to pray for you, and

to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:9–10). May God find in each of us a life lived faithfully—in season and out of season—in His wisdom!

If you are reading this article first, let me commend you for your discernment! (If you did not read it first, hopefully you have discovered from your reading the good order I am about to encourage.) Just as biblical wisdom and discernment keeps one’s life in good order, rather than out of order, let me encourage you as the reader to work through the articles from front to back, first to last. The material is built in an orderly fashion from foundation to application, so you won’t miss a step when ascending through this study of wisdom and discernment. This world, under its evil prince, is working desperately to keep lives out of God’s good order. May we be ones who love our Lord’s good order of things and who learn wisdom and discernment from His Word to keep our lives in His good order.

Dave Anderson has the privilege of serving as president at Maranatha Baptist University in Watertown, Wisconsin. God has graciously given him a quiver filled with six children and six grandchildren; a loving wife, Abi, who puts up with Dave’s antics; and a funny Clumber Spaniel named Quincy who thinks Dave is the Alpha Dog, at least most of the time.





Hermeneutics, Discernment, and Spiritual Maturity

Have you ever been in a conversation where someone stops mid-explanation to say, “Never mind, I don’t think you would understand”? How did that make you feel? If the person had been droning on about obscure Star Wars trivia, you might have felt relieved. But if the topic had been interesting to you, or perhaps one that you have some proficiency in, then you would likely have felt insulted.

What if the conversation had been about Jesus and the personal implications of His high priestly ministry? And what if the reason given for pausing the conversation had been that you were too spiritually immature to comprehend it?

Hebrews 5:11–6:12 provides this exact scenario. The author of Hebrews interrupts his own teaching to admonish his readers for spiritual immaturity and to call them to pursue maturity. What does this have to do with us? Certainly, many of us have been Christians for years or decades, have been educated in Christian colleges or seminaries, have heard countless biblical sermons, have read the Bible faithfully, and perhaps are even involved in ministry.

However, as humans, we tend to overrate ourselves. Studies consistently show that most people believe they are above average. For example, most drivers think they are better than average, and seventy percent of high schoolers see themselves as above-average leaders. Two-thirds of Americans believe they are smarter than average. And, not surprisingly, ninety-four percent of college professors rate their teaching skills above average.¹

Personal spiritual maturity is difficult to evaluate, which is why this passage is vitally important. As I contemplate my own maturity, I admit that there is comfort in knowing that others might rate me highly. Those who know me well—my family, fellow church members, colleagues, and students—would likely affirm my place in the brotherhood of the spiritually mature. But what would Jesus say? His evaluation is the only one that ultimately matters (Heb. 4:13; 2 Cor. 5:10; Luke 19:15–26).

So how should we evaluate our own spiritual maturity? It may surprise you to know that the answer is hermeneutics! Your skill in handling the Bible and the discernment it produces at the point of moral decision-making is a crucial mark of spiritual maturity. The author of Hebrews defines spiritual immaturity as being “unskilled in the word of righteousness,” whereas spiritual maturity is evidenced in believers “who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (5:13–14).²

FALSE STANDARDS OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Before we dig into the practical disciplines of spiritual maturity, it is imperative to clarify three false standards of maturity.

False standard #1: Christian longevity.

Longevity is the easiest measure for snap judgments, but the length of time a person has been saved does not necessarily indicate his level of maturity. The Hebrew churches were apparently making this assumption, which is why the author of Hebrews points it out as a false criterion. Although these believers had been saved long enough that they “ought to be teachers,” they needed someone to reteach them “the first principles of the oracles of God” (5:11–12). The consequence was that though these church members should have been more mature, they had instead “become dull of hearing” (5:11).

False standard #2: Doctrinal proficiency.

As the author of Hebrews encourages his readers to “go on to perfection,” he indicates that progressing toward maturity requires them to build beyond the “foundation” truths of Christianity (6:1). These foundation truths are good (and even essential) elements of Christianity but cannot be the sum total: biblical conversion, basic doctrinal distinctions, and necessary doctrinal commitments. “Repentance from dead works and of faith toward God” is a beautiful summary of gospel conversion that reflects Jesus’ teaching (6:1; cf. Mark 1:15). Sinners must turn from self-righteousness and trust in God’s forgiveness through Christ’s finished work. The “doctrine of baptisms” likely indicated the distinguishing of Christian baptism from other Jewish cleansing rites. Likewise, the “laying on of hands” was a symbol of God’s authorization (the giving of the Holy Spirit [Acts 8:17, 18–19]; the choosing of leaders [1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22]). The doctrines “of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment” (6:2b) are necessary doctrinal commitments (1 Cor. 15:12–19). Today we might call these elements “fundamentals of the faith.” The implication is that even this level of sound doctrine is not sufficient for spiritual maturity.

False standard #3: Acts of ministry.

In Hebrews 6, verses 3 and 9 serve as parentheses marking off the controversial “warn-

ing passage” (6:4–8).³ The beginning parenthesis indicates that church members can move on to maturity “if God permits,” and the concluding parenthesis indicates that the author is setting the warning behind and assuming that his readers belong to the “better” option and are indeed evidencing “things that accompany salvation.” As he returns to his theme, the author wants his hearers to know that although they are being admonished for their spiritual immaturity, that does not mean that their “work and labor of love” in Christ’s name does not count (6:10). Even for those currently struggling with maturity, God is not “unjust to forget” how they have ministered to their fellow believers and continue to serve. The implication is twofold. First, immaturity does not invalidate God’s commendation of our loving acts of service. Second, acts of service do not automatically indicate spiritual maturity.

UNDERSTANDING AND ATTAINING SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Recognizing these false standards sharpens our focus to return to the thesis that how we handle the Bible and our discernment at the point of moral decision-making is a crucial mark of spiritual maturity. The author of Hebrews uses the contrast of milk and solid food as a metaphor for our maturity level based upon our ability to consume God’s Word. Contrary to popular belief, the metaphor is not about doctrinal proficiency (as seen above and in 1 Corinthians 3:2).⁴ So what is spiritual maturity, and how can we attain it? The author of Hebrews gives two marks—or disciplines—of mature believers.

First, mature believers pursue personal biblical discernment. This should not be confused with the kind of discernment that focuses on others and how they’re living; rather this kind of discernment actively pursues what God exposes in me through His Word—the thoughts and intentions of *my* heart (4:12–13). This process requires me to pursue skill in “the word of righteousness” (5:13). In this case, skill (the opposite of being “unskilled”) probably has the idea not of expertise but of experience. A skilled believer seeks both to understand and to incorporate the Bible’s instructions in righteous thinking and living (the way of righteousness; see Ps. 1:6; 5:8; Prov. 2:20; 8:20). In verse 14

this idea is made plain. Mature believers are those “who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” The challenge for believers is to welcome God’s revealed perspective of righteousness so that it brings moral clarity to each of our daily decisions. As we recognize God’s will, our decisions become in-the-moment tests of faith. By saying “yes” to God, we exercise our spiritual muscles and are trained toward greater maturity.

Second, mature believers are maturing believers.

To say it another way, maturity is not a destination; it is progression. As the author of Hebrews concludes his instructions on maturity (6:11–12), he calls us to “show the same diligence . . . until the end.” Additionally, he returns to his earlier admonition, this time with the encouragement to “not become sluggish” (the same Greek word as “dull” in 5:11). The point is that any believer who reads the word of righteousness faithfully, comprehends it accurately, and applies it diligently will never run out of growth material. As soon as we stop pursuing Christlike maturity we are at risk of needing someone to teach us again the first principles of the oracles of God (5:12).

ENCOURAGEMENT TOWARD SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Lest we become discouraged at the prospect of this ongoing pursuit, the author of Hebrews ends with three hugely encouraging realities. First, this spiritual maturity marked by daily discernment is the place of “full assurance of hope” (6:11). The joy of assurance flourishes as we grow. Second, the encouragement to “not become sluggish” is resourced in Christ (4:14–5:10). We read the ultimate expression of this in verse 16: “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Read these verses, welcome the truth, and pursue growth through His grace! And finally, the example for this kind of “faith and patience” (6:12) can be found and imitated in the pages of Hebrews. Read the stories of faith in Hebrews 11 (and beyond) and consider each moment of discernment and choice of faith, and remember that, someday, we too will inherit the promises!

Continued on page 8

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WISDOM

INSTRUCTION

Instruction for the believer includes God's chastening (3:11-12). The Lord uses difficulties and adversities in our lives to instruct us. God's chastening is one of the critical elements in the assurance of our salvation. We should therefore not willfully reject God's work in our lives, nor should we become stressed out because of the correction God brings. The wise man responds positively to instruction in whatever form it comes (4:13; 23:12).

UNDERSTANDING

Solomon uses both the noun and verb forms of “understanding” in his introduction: “to understand the words of understanding” (1:2). The basic idea of understanding is seeing with knowledge, as in 7:7: “I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding” (the phrase “void of understanding” is literally “lacking heart” rather than “understanding”).

The word is related to the preposition “between.” It means the ability to distinguish “between the true and the false, the good and the bad . . . , the wholesome and the pernicious.”⁴ There are so many choices and temptations in our world that without discernment we can become hopelessly mired in sin. Today’s sins are well-dressed and popular. Television makes sin look normal. Sinful men and women have

become the heroes of the athletic world.

The movie industry makes stars of those who live wicked lives. The allure of sin can trap and entangle those without discernment.

Discernment between good and bad is not sufficient, however. It is also essential to distinguish between the good and the better. We do not have enough time to do merely the good. If our lives are to be meaningful, we should choose the best.

PRUDENCE

Wisdom comes by receiving instruction. This produces understanding, the ability to distinguish between good and evil. This is followed by the “instruction of wisdom” or “prudence.” The instruction in verse 3 differs from the instruction in verse 2. The underlying concept of this word is to interweave or entwine, with the resultant idea of being successful. Success is based upon thinking an idea through and interweaving all the factors of a plan into a workable fabric.⁵ Prudence also implies an intelligent knowledge of the reason we choose the good. It is common sense combined with biblical principles. All too often, we look at a problem and see one quick solution. Instead, we should think things through, seek counsel, and meditate on the issue. There may be another way, an easier way, or perhaps a more biblical way. If we choose the wrong solution to a problem,

we have not solved it; we have merely compounded it—hence the need for prudence.

ASTUTENESS

The next word in the introduction is “subtily,” that is, astuteness or wise dealing. The difference between this and the previous words for wisdom is the addition of a kind of business sense, that is, an ability to look down the road and see what lies ahead.⁶ The astute man has enough foresight to see any danger coming and act appropriately (22:3; 27:12). Blind optimism is not faith but folly.⁷

KNOWLEDGE

The word “knowledge” refers to experiential knowledge and is used in a personal sense for knowing God or someone else intimately. Our experiences can be positive or, unfortunately, negative. Learning through failure happens when Solomon’s progression is not followed. He began with instruction, that is, being taught. The result of good teaching is understanding, that is, an ability to distinguish. Having understanding allows us to deal wisely with various situations and become astute in our dealings. We can then properly gain correct experiential knowledge, that is, a knowledge that comes from doing the right thing.

However, if experiential knowledge comes ahead of wisdom, instruction, and understanding, then we will experience many of the negative things in life. Practice makes perfect, as the saying goes, but only when the practice is done correctly. Solomon’s order is critical, for if the order is changed, problems will result.

The only sources of knowledge mentioned in Proverbs are God and godly individuals. Knowledge comes from people who have knowledge (15:2). Knowledge also comes from God Himself. Proverbs 1:7 is the motto of the book of Proverbs: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” Reverence for God, love for Him, and fear of His judgment all combine to bring us into an intimate relationship with Him (2:6; 22:12).

DISCRETION

We sometimes do the right thing for the wrong reason. Discretion is the ability to comprehend the right purpose. Discretion lets us look beyond an action and determine whether our purposes for the action are right or wrong. Thus, discretion goes a step beyond understanding and looks behind the obvious.

One example is the excellent wife, who “considereth a field and buyeth it” (31:16). She looks the field over, perhaps several times. Discretion is needed to look beyond the actual appearance of the property and decide whether or not it has good potential. She then devises a plan and accomplishes her purpose of providing for the family.

LEARNING

Solomon’s next term is “learning.” The verb form means “to take,” and the noun refers to that which is taken and increased (1:5; 9:9; 16:21, 23). A good teacher knows that actual teaching is not just delivering material to the students. We may read our Bible in the morning, but by our coffee break, we cannot remember what or even where we read. We go to church but get little out of the preaching. We listen to our Sunday School teacher and learn nothing. When that happens, the problem is not with the preacher or teacher. Instead, the problem is that we are not reaching out and taking what is given. We become the one who starved at a feast because he failed to eat. Learning is not passively received. Our responsibility is to “take” and “keep” the instruction, for only then does it truly become “learning” (4:2–4).

WISE COUNSELS

The final term in Solomon’s great definition of wisdom is “wise counsels.” The word originated from “rope-pulling, i.e., steering, directing a ship.”⁸ Sailors had to know the ropes to steer their ships correctly. In times of difficulty, this knowledge had to be second nature. No time could be wasted on

SOLOMON DEFINED WISDOM IN A SERIES OF NINE WORDS. THE WORDS THEMSELVES AND THE ORDER IN WHICH THE WORDS ARE GIVEN LAY OUT A HELPFUL UNDERSTANDING OF WISDOM.

checking the instruction manual or even asking an expert. From this original meaning, the term developed into the related idea of counsel, or moving in the right way. At this final stage of wisdom, we can act upon biblical principles almost instinctively and keep heading in the right direction, whatever the circumstances bring.

Counsel is necessary before action. Proverbs 11:14 states, "Where no counsel is, the people fall." People fall when their plans fail; plans fail when advance preparation or counsel is absent. Like a novice sailor, when the storms come and immediate action is necessary, inexperience becomes a critical factor. The higher our goals, the more important the counsel becomes.

CONCLUSION

Solomon defined wisdom in a series of nine words. The words themselves and the order in which the words are given lay out a helpful understanding of wisdom. Wisdom comes first by receiving instruction and having the moral nature disciplined. This produces understanding, the ability to distinguish between good and evil. This is followed by prudence, knowing why something is or is not good. This helps us become astute, that is, able to see what the results of an action will be. These become the basis of experiential knowledge and an intimate relationship with God. This is followed by discretion, the right purpose for doing what one does. This produces a man

of learning, one who desires and reaches out for an even closer relationship with God and wisdom. It is this person, and only this person, who can steer his ship aright. He knows the right course for his life and can set his sails in the right direction.

Larry Oats teaches theology and related subjects at Maranatha Baptist University and Maranatha Baptist Seminary. He enjoys writing and traveling with his wife to visit his twelve grandchildren.



¹ *Gesenius's Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (London: Samuel Bagster, 1846), 277.

² *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:878.

³ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907), 416.

⁴ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, eds., *Commentary on the Old Testament* (repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers, 1986), 4:416.

⁵ Keil and Delitzsch, 4:416.

⁶ Derek Kidner, *The Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 17 (repr., Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 37.

⁷ Kidner, 147.

⁸ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, 287, italics removed.

Hermeneutics, Discernment, and Spiritual Maturity

Continued from page 5

Bryan Brock teaches homiletics, apologetics, doctrine, and Bible courses. He loves investing in people in the three spheres of his life: family, church ministry, and the university.



¹ Alex Mayyasi, "Why Do We All Think We're Above Average?," *Priceonomics* (blog), July 17, 2013, <https://priceonomics.com/why-do-we-all-think-were-above-average/>; "Social Comparison Theory," *Psychology Today* (blog), n.d., <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/basics/social-comparison-theory>.

² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations will be from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

³ For sake of keeping our focus on the teaching about spiritual maturity, we must avoid dealing with this section in any kind of detail. The theologically and biblically acceptable options include a warning about false conversion or a warning about fruitless Christianity.

⁴ The NT uses this analogy three times. First Peter 2:2 does not contrast good and bad, but rather calls all Christians to desire the Word of God as babies naturally desire milk. In 1 Corinthians 3:2, however, Paul uses the milk metaphor to rebuke Corinthian believers for allowing fleshly immaturity to dominate their motives and relationships. They needed the milk of the Word until such time as they could grow in basic submission to God. The author of Hebrews more closely follows Paul's meaning.



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How Wisdom Should Produce

Is truth merely generational? Is it, as is commonly held today, subjective, fluid, and relevant only to specific circumstances and times? Or is it a cherished, life-saving treasure to be infused and imparted to posterity? Proverbs embraces the latter.

Proverbs 4 is a homey picture of a wizened, nurturing father and his starry-eyed, naive young son. It's as if the father is looking into the rearview mirror of life, remembering past mishaps and wrong turns, while the son is gazing through the windshield at the endless, enticing prospects emerging on the horizon. The father speaks with the perspective of sunset, while the child revels in the alluring possibilities of sunrise. The father earnestly seeks to instill the value of wisdom and how it translates into discernment so his son can avoid potholes, detours, and accidents on his journey.

Proverbs 4:3–6 crosses three generations. It narrates a conversation the grandfather had with the father, who, in turn, tells his son. He begins by saying, “For I was my father’s son . . . he taught me also, and said unto me . . . Get wisdom . . . Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee.” In modern-day terms, the parent is saying to the child, “When I was your age . . .” Will the next generation in our families, churches, or nation merely roll their eyes at such an appeal, or will wisdom be transferred into lives that have gained discernment?

In this article, the concepts of wisdom and discernment will be understood in these ways:

- Wisdom: the repository of the principles of life
- Discernment: the right response to and the practice of those principles

Proverbs 4 reveals a progression of three key areas in which wisdom is introduced in practical ways to develop discernment. The father simply pleads, “Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings” (v. 10). This is the point where the wisdom of the current generation becomes the embryo of discernment of the upcoming generation.

DISCERNMENT, LEVEL ONE: ARE WE WILLING TO LISTEN TO YESTERDAY’S PERSPECTIVE? (4:11–13)

The statements are concise. “I have taught thee . . . I have led thee . . . Take fast hold of instruction . . . for she is thy life.” One of the key factors in gaining discernment is whether or not one is teachable. Willingness to hear is part of “driver’s training,” the down payment on the insurance of valuing the wisdom lessons from the previous generation, rather than needlessly learning through mistakes.

I well remember my father teaching me how to drive. It was on an old Jeep Willys pickup truck that had three shift levers on the floor—yes, a stick shift. He tossed me the keys and told me to drive the truck in the soccer field where the only damage I could inflict would be to the cows and donkeys that were grazing there. I was twelve years old and eager to drive, but I had no “rearview mirror” experience. I was forced to admit my deficiency and go back inside to ask my father to help me under-

stand the correlations between a gas pedal, a clutch, three gear-shift levers, and (most importantly) the brake pedal. I became a focused listener to the one who had already driven thousands of miles.

The context of this portion of Proverbs has already employed such words as *instruction*, *doctrine*, *law*, and *commandments*. These words present a teacher-learner relationship. One who has experience is instructing someone who does not have certain knowledge or skill. These words also convey boundaries and specificities, and the context reveals the benefits of such guidelines. It is the appeal of Lady Wisdom attempting to arouse an appetite for the right choices of life. “She shall . . .”

- “Preserve thee” (v. 6)
- “Keep thee” (v. 6)
- “Promote thee” (v. 8)
- “Deliver thee” (v. 9)

DISCERNMENT, LEVEL TWO: ARE WE WILLING TO RESPOND OBEDIENTLY TO YESTERDAY’S PERSPECTIVE? (4:14–19)

A willingness to listen to wisdom is a good beginning, but appropriately responding to that wisdom is where discernment emerges. It is at this point that the realities of wisdom are deemed valuable data, and discernment nudges one toward practical application. Again, notice some key words in the passage: “Enter not . . . go not . . . Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.” These bold imperatives plead for a proper application of what one has heard. The expectation is



Discernment

that listening should lead to learning and implementation, which leads to living.

The entire book of Deuteronomy is an entreaty to hear, heed, and do. (In essence, this is the overarching focus of the entire Bible.) Deuteronomy 5:1 follows this sequence as Moses implores a nation for the second time, saying, “Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them.” Clearly this is the pattern that the author of Proverbs 4 sets forth: hear, learn, keep, and do.

The lead driver in this Proverbs account highlights the dangers and blessings of the potential choices of life by labeling the path that is lit with truth and the path that is darkened with ignorance.

The path that is lit (v. 18). Note the distinctions of this route.

- “Thy steps shall not be straitened”—the course is unobstructed (v. 12).
- “Thou shalt not stumble”—the route provides firm footing (v. 12).
- It is “the path of the just”—the way of holiness (v. 18).
- It is “as a shining light”—well-illuminated and increasing in brightness (v. 18).

What is depicted is the dim light of early dawn outlining a path. As the traveler progresses, the light increases toward daylight. Those who choose to walk in the light actually discover more light.

The path that is darkened (v. 19). What greater contrast is there than that between light and darkness? The difference is uni-

versally obvious. Sadly, for individuals who have refused to listen, darkness does not appear as darkness, because they have been blinded by lack of wisdom. Verse 19 is vividly clear in its portrayal: “The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble.” Note the conditions on this path: the pursuit of “mischief” (v. 16), the restless desire to cause others to “fall” (v. 16), and the appetite for “wickedness” and “violence” (v. 17).

One may wonder why anyone would deliberately make such a choice and reject what is obviously the better path. The answer, which confronts every human, is sin. Sin is so blinding that it causes one to reject wisdom, and by doing so, to fail to grasp hold of discernment. The two are intertwined.

DISCERNMENT, LEVEL THREE: ARE WE WILLING TO VALUE YESTERDAY’S PERSPECTIVE? (4:23-27)

An oft-quoted verse from Proverbs is nestled within this context and summarizes the father’s plea. Proverbs 4:23 states, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” One can only imagine the father’s intensity as he urged his son to “keep” these most valuable family heirlooms being endowed, for as he had explained, “they are life unto those that find them” (v. 22).

CONCLUSION

Proverbs 4 presents the transaction that should occur between each generation and the successive one. At stake is one’s heart, that place where life’s choices are made

and confirmed. The implications within this chapter are vital for every facet of life, encompassing submission of the entire body.

- “Incline thine **ear**” (v. 20)
- “Let them not depart from thine **eyes**” (v. 21)
- “Keep them in the midst of thine **heart**” (v. 21)
- “Put away from thee a froward **mouth**” (v. 24)
- “Ponder the path of thy **feet**” (v. 26)

It appears that Solomon indeed had been given wisdom from God as he requested. His appeal to his son, however, was that of discernment, the incorporation of wisdom into every facet of life.

“When I was your age” is the perspective of each departing generation. Are we being transparent and authentic with this rear-view look? A new generation is now slipping into the driver’s seat behind the steering wheel. Will we have these conversations with them when sitting at home, and when walking by the way, and when lying down, and when rising up (Deut. 6:7)? Will they discern the inestimable value of the wisdom practiced by those who have gone before?

Steve Love pastored nearly forty years, and he now serves on the Bible faculty at Maranatha Baptist University, where he has also enjoyed serving in interim pastorates. He and his wife were raised in ministry families and are blessed to have continued the legacy with ministry-minded children.



The Only Wise Pursuit

Wisdom from Ecclesiastes

Over the last ten years, I've had the privilege of teaching a course that covers Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, devoting the last third of the semester to the latter book. Students enjoy the practicality and diversity of Proverbs, touching as it does on a multitude of everyday issues and giving helpful direction in living life from the divine point of view. As we begin to cover Ecclesiastes, the contrast with Proverbs is striking. The thesis of the book, which the preacher (Qohelet) wraps around his entire argument (1:2; 12:8), is that everything in life is "vanity," a word that indicates futility, emptiness, meaninglessness, absurdity, and transitoriness. Qohelet, who was most likely Solomon, then pursues this theme relentlessly, using the word "vanity" thirty-eight times and employing other metaphors, such as "chasing the wind" and unprofitability.

A few weeks into the study, students begin to feel the weight of Qohelet's argument, and, invariably, someone will voice the mood of the class and ask if life is really supposed to be this depressing. At the end of the course, the students submit a short essay on the theme of the book, and a surprising trend appears in the essays. Many of the students comment that they thought the book was pessimistic until they really grasped Qohelet's purpose. Then they realized that the wisdom of Ecclesiastes dovetails with that of Proverbs and has a message that is actually quite encouraging. What is that encouraging message embedded in an ancient essay designed to show the utter futility of everything done "under the sun"? Consider a metaphor: if I needed to cut down a tree and someone gave me a chainsaw, it would be very helpful to be told that hitting the tree with the chainsaw for hours would be utterly futile. That's not the way the chainsaw is designed to work. Being told how it's

... THERE IS ONLY ONE WISE PURSUIT: SEEKING MEANING AND FULFILLMENT IN GOD ALONE AND ACCEPTING ALL HIS GIFTS AS MEANS TO KNOWING HIM AND OBEYING HIM BETTER.

supposed to work would be enormously helpful, and that is what Ecclesiastes sets out to do relative to this rather important thing of living life. There is only one wise pursuit, and Ecclesiastes helps us find out what it is.

A CONCLUDING COMMAND

A narrator brackets the preacher's discussion, writing the first two verses of chapter 1 and the last seven verses of chapter 12 (the narrator may be a literary convention rather than a different person from the preacher, but identifying him does not affect the meaning of the book). He provides the conclusion of the whole discussion, but he makes it clear that he is simply drawing together the point Qohelet has been making throughout the book. The conclusion is, frankly, somewhat obvious: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." Fearing God is the theme of Proverbs and Old Testament wisdom literature in general, so we are not surprised to find Ecclesiastes peppered with this idea (3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12–13). While Ecclesiastes does not contain commandments as such, the assumption underlying wisdom literature is that rightly relating to God—fearing Him—entails obedience. Wisdom is not just knowing what to do but determining to do it. The point of Ecclesiastes is that fearing God and obeying Him is extremely challenging in a broken world. Distractions, frustrations, and tragedies abound. In the midst of such apparent dysfunction, how can one live successfully?

Qohelet's argument develops along three primary lines, with many sub-themes and digressions.

SOLOMON'S QUEST TO FIND MEANING

First, he uses an argument from experience. He claims to have gone on a quest to find satisfaction in life. The lessons he learned can profitably be appropriated

by his readers so that they don't have to waste time and resources discovering the same realities. The strongest argument that Qohelet, the preacher, is Solomon is that no one else who was a "son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1) had the resources requisite to such a quest. No one was wealthier, enjoyed more peaceful conditions, or had more brilliance to prosecute such an experiment. He sought meaning in pleasure, in an array of royal accomplishments, in intellectual pursuits—in short, in whatever came into his heart. Nothing "under the sun" satisfied his inner yearning for meaning. You and I have resources and intelligence, and we can expend them looking for something under the sun to meet our deepest needs, but Qohelet's example can save us from inevitable disappointment if we will simply learn from his example.

Second, he canvasses different aspects of life—such as work and leisure, jurisprudence and government, and finances—to show the futility of seeking ultimate meaning in any of them. If we think our job will give us final satisfaction, Qohelet points out the dangers of being either a workaholic or lazy, and the unpredictability of the cutthroat work world. If we expect politics to provide the solution, Solomon frankly highlights the graft and injustice that characterize even the best political systems. Perhaps money is the answer? No, Qohelet avers, money is hard to amass, easily lost, and incapable of providing either the happiness or security that it promises. Perhaps something else under the sun will meet our deepest needs? Qohelet clarifies by providing a famous poem at the beginning of chapter three that shows that his conclusions apply to literally everything

under the sun. He is at pains to topple every idol that we would be inclined to bow down to.

Finally, he refuses to let his readers forget the inevitability of death and that everything under the sun is impermanent and, therefore, of only limited value. It is disconcerting how often death appears in the argument: 2:14–16; 3:19–21; 5:15–17; 7:1–4; 8:8; 9:1–12; 11:8; 12:5–7. Qohelet, however, is intent on disconcerting us. Stuff can seem very tangible and alluring at the moment; it is helpful to be reminded that decay and destruction are unavoidable. "Moth and rust corrupt, and thieves break through and steal." All the things I clutch are going to slip away; trying to find satisfaction in them is folly. Death, however, brings the lesson even closer to home. The stock market may or may not crash, but I will. Do I have a plan for what happens then?

A KEY EXPRESSION

At this point, you may be wondering how my students ultimately find Qohelet's argument comforting. It, of course, would not be comforting if the preacher was an existentialist and, like Sartre or Camus, simply threw his readers back on their own resources. How do we deal with the dread that comes from seeing the utter futility of life? Sartre replies, "Embrace the angst, jettison all thought of transcendent meaning, and carve out your own space. You can make your own meaning; although it has no permanent value, it's the best you can do." (These are my words. For Sartre's precise expressions, see *Existentialism Is a Humanism* [1946]). Praise God, that is not where Qohelet leaves us.

The key expression in the preacher's argument is "under the sun," which he uses twenty-six times. If life is limited to what can be experienced through our five senses, if all that exists is found under the sun, and if Sartre's materialism is true, then the argument of Qohelet is devastating: life has no hope or ultimate meaning. Pursuing satisfaction in a meaningless, transitory, and frustrating world is bound to end in disappointment. But his argument is depressing only if one is a materialist. If reality exists beyond the sun, if there are eternal things not subject to the ravages of time, and if everything down here was designed to direct people to look beyond the sun, then Qohelet's argument is the instruction manual for finding satisfaction, meaning, and joy.

Although the book refers to this idea at several key points (see, for instance, 6:10–12; 7:13, 23–24; 8:6–8), perhaps the key verse that drives this point home is 3:11: "He [God] hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end." The word translated "world" means "eternity" and speaks of the sense of transcendence God has placed in every person. People claim to be materialists because they

look around and see only matter; the reality is that they are materialists because they suppress the sense they have that the matter they see is not all there is. Not only are God's fingerprints imprinted on everything that exists, but He has placed within every human an eternal soul that echoes His own nature. Once man comes to recognize that this life is not the end but the beginning of an eternal existence, then he will be compelled to look for meaning on the eternal plane. He will look beyond the sun.

TRUE MEANING REVEALED

The beauty of Ecclesiastes is that the instruction manual doesn't merely say, "Find meaning in the eternal rather than in the temporal." That in itself would be very helpful, since it drives us to trust in God, who alone inhabits eternity. But Qohelet takes the argument one step further. Once one looks beyond the sun and finds meaning in a relationship with God, one discovers the true meaning of everything else. If one lives for food, he finds that meals can't meet his deepest yearnings. He always needs a new and better meal, and his true needs are unmet. But once one lives for God, he discovers that meals are God's gift for a specific purpose. Meals can satisfy

that specific need. That is, living for God makes meals more enjoyable, work more enjoyable, pleasure and money more enjoyable, and so forth. Each thing is viewed as a gift that has a specific purpose, but no thing is allowed to be an idol, supplanting the role that only God can fill. The preacher brings out this theme at various points in the book where he urges his readers to eat and drink and enjoy life (2:24–26; 3:22; 5:18–20; 9:7–10). He is not contradicting himself; he is pointing out the relative joy that can be experienced when one finds ultimate joy beyond the sun.

Ultimately, then, there is only one wise pursuit: seeking meaning and fulfillment in God alone and accepting all His gifts as means to knowing Him and obeying Him better. Any other pursuit is a wasted life. Whatever the task, nothing can be more encouraging than having an accurate instruction manual.

David Saxon teaches church history, Baptist history, Bible, and theology at Maranatha Baptist University. He loves expository preaching and enjoys participating in the chapel book series.



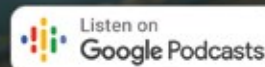
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The Renewed Mind

The Key to Conformity to the Will of God

“I don’t want to teach you what to think; I want to teach you how to think” has become a cliché in educational circles. The truth is that no matter how sharp our reasoning processes are, we will never get right answers unless we ask the right questions, and we will not ask the right questions unless our minds are renewed.

Romans 12:2 links the renewed mind with the will of God: “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” Believers need to consider the questions this passage raises.

WHAT IS THE WILL OF GOD?

The first question we should ask is this: exactly what did Paul mean by “the will of God”? This term can have several meanings. The “determinate counsel” of God concerns what will inevitably happen because God wills it so (Acts 2:23). God also has a directive will that concerns matters like vocation and location for individual believers (see Acts 16:6–10).¹ Some contend that God does not have a directive will. If one stays within the bounds of biblical commands and acts on biblical wisdom, God does not care what one chooses to do. This view is suspect for many reasons, such as whether God has a special purpose only for Bible characters like Abraham or David or Paul, but not for ordinary Christians.²

God also has a moral will concerning right and wrong. God’s moral will seems to be what is primarily in view in Romans 12:2 because the will of God here is the opposite of worldliness. However, we cannot rule out an element of the directive will since Paul immediately follows this verse with information about the role of believers in the church.

How do we determine the moral will of God? On the surface, this question seems to be a simple question with a simple answer. Murder and bank robbery are wrong because the Bible clearly says they are wrong. Even unsaved people understand this answer. Was Paul simply stating the obvious, or do we need to look further?

Paul does not waste words. Some practices or actions are not so easily determined to be right or wrong. Paul dealt with such matters in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 and in Romans 14. Deciding which practices are right and which are wrong is not a matter to be delegated to someone else. One could decide based on thunder from the pulpit, but while pastoral exhortation may be fully justified, God holds each of us personally responsible. “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind” (Rom. 14:5).

Conformity to the will of God involves surrender. Paul urges us in Romans 12:1 to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. The word “body” stands for the whole person.³ Surrender is fine in the abstract, but how should we use our renewed minds to discern the specifics?

INADEQUATE QUESTIONS

Does this action make me feel good? God created us for His pleasure, not our own (Rev. 4:11). Just because something is pleasurable does not mean it is either right or wrong.

Are all my friends doing it? Jesus warned us about the broad way and the narrow way. What the crowd does is often wrong (Matt. 7:13–14).

Can you show me where the Bible says what I want to do is wrong? The burden of proof lies with the one who wishes to justify his actions (Phil. 1:9–10).

What does the preacher say? This question is good as far as it goes, but we are each responsible for ourselves. Like the rest of us, preachers are fallible. Furthermore, the preacher may not touch on an issue that you need to decide.

HELPFUL QUESTIONS

Here are some questions, drawn from Romans 12:1–2, that Paul wants us to answer about decisions regarding activities.

First, we look at verse 1: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

Is this act or practice holy—in conformity to the character of God?

Does it please God?

Can I do this with a reverent spirit?

The word translated “service” (*latreia*) refers to the service of worship. The word

“reasonable” (*logikos*) points forward to the renewed mind in verse 2.

Does this action or practice conform me to the world? In verse 2, what does the “world” refer to? The word Paul uses (*aiōn*) means “age,” the spirit of the times. Satan is the god of this world, that is, this age (2 Cor. 4:4). John uses a different word in 1 John 2:15–17 when he says, “Love not the world.” John’s word (*kosmos*) refers to the organized system that is opposed to God. In contexts such as these, the meanings of the two terms are so similar that the words are interchangeable.

We must identify what is worldly to avoid it. Such a process runs the risk of legalism, but only if we assume that following a list of rules makes us spiritual. We need to agree that worldliness exists and that it is a danger to be avoided even though we may not agree completely on what is or is not worldly.

The world has its own thought system and values that are opposed to God. The world promotes sin and rebellion against God through culture, peer pressure, visual

enticement, and other means. Paul exhorts us not to allow the world to determine the shape of our lives.

What is the long-term result of this action or practice? We prove that the will of God is good and acceptable and perfect by putting it into practice. The word translated “prove” is in the present tense, indicating an ongoing process of testing.

Our renewed minds should be asking the above questions all the time to conform our lives to the moral will of God, but what exactly is the *renewed* mind? First, note that the word is in the present tense, as the translation “renewing” indicates. At the moment of salvation, every believer receives a new nature, which includes a new capacity to understand the things of God. We must develop that capacity by the deliberate training of our senses to choose good and refuse evil (Heb. 5:14). This development takes time.

Such development is necessary because the Bible could not answer every specific question we have that is related to difficult matters without being impossibly long. We

must develop our minds by acting on the understanding that we have, while digging deeper into the Word to find principles by which to judge.

Since retiring from twenty-one years of missionary service in Hungary, **David Potter** has been an adjunct professor of New Testament at Maranatha Baptist University. He and his wife Jean enjoy reading, travel, and spending time with their grandchildren and great-grandchildren.



¹ Since the apostolic era, God has not revealed His will in dreams and visions. Nevertheless, this passage does show that God has a directive will for believers.

² A related idea is that God cannot know the free choices of human beings in advance. For a refutation of this false view see Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, vol. 1 (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 227–29.

³ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 751.



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Biblical Decision Making

Seeking “The Will of God”

As a teacher at a Christian college, I frequently speak with students concerned about finding “God’s will for my life.” On the one hand, such a desire is a sign of the Spirit’s work in an individual’s heart (Phil. 2:12–13). On the other hand, I also interact with students who have fallen into faithless anxiety; they are loathe to step out in faith because they fear they will either miss God’s will or disqualify themselves from it. This is not how we ought to think of God’s will.

Such a view of God’s direction betrays a failure to know Him. The God who is “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Exod. 34:6–7) does not capriciously hide blessings. It is regarding His abundant goodness that God states, “My ways [are] higher than your ways” (Isa. 55:8–9). “He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). We serve a good God who delights in pouring out His blessing upon us. In this article, I present a pattern for biblical

decision making grounded in this revealed character of God.

DEFINING “GOD’S WILL”

For many, “God’s will” is nebulous and frightening. They know God is good (Ps. 34:8), gives only good gifts (James 1:13), actively works for good in suffering (Rom. 8:29), and is good even in His chastening (Heb. 12:10). Yet having known believers who suffered terrible trials, they fear God’s will, lest it be the *via dolorosa* of our Savior and others: Job, Joseph, David, Elijah, and Paul, to name only a few. Truly, “many are the afflictions of the righteous” (Ps. 34:19). Others face the opposite struggle: they see God’s will as a mystical, hidden path they must divine with anxiety-inducing attentiveness, lest they miss the reward for lack of perfect timing. Still others worry they have done something to ruin God’s will for their life. These are all errors.

Theologians have given us helpful categories for thinking about God’s will. First, God’s *perfect will* describes His desire that all things be in accordance with His character. Second, God’s *permissive will*

describes how He allows for sin and its consequences (Matt. 7:13–14), yet works His plan even in those consequences (Rom. 8:28). Third, God’s *sovereign will* encompasses events He has ordained to come about regardless of attempted interference (Ps. 135:6; Eph. 1:11; 3:11). Fourth, God’s *preceptive will* consists of His commands for human beings, to which He holds them accountable (Exod. 20:1–17; 1 Cor. 6:9–10). Fifth, God has a specific plan for the life of every believer to do good works (Eph. 2:10), though He has not specified this plan in Scripture; we often refer to this category as God’s *hidden will*. No wonder there is such confusion on this topic!

When we talk about “seeking God’s will,” we refer primarily to the fifth category: God’s plan for the lives of individuals. I prefer to think of this last aspect of God’s will as His *guided will*. The anxiety many feel regarding God’s will occurs at the crossroads of His permissive will and His hidden will; they fear God will allow them to deprive themselves of blessings even though they obediently seek Him. This line of thinking views God as a capricious

Father who sets up uncommunicated and unattainable criteria for blessing; this view is pagan, unscriptural, and often indicative of abuse. Jesus tells us that God is not such a father (Matt. 7:11). Instead, we should see the Christian life as the joining of God's revealed will and His guided will. As we obey God in what He has clearly told us, we find that He sovereignly directs us toward the wonderful plan and glorious blessings He desires to lavish upon us in His indefatigable love. Living in God's guided will is called "walking in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16–26).

GOD'S REVEALED WILL

While "the secret things belong unto the LORD" (Deut. 29:29), there is much He has revealed. We glimpse His perfect will in Scripture, and His permissive will and His sovereign will played out in history, but most clear is His preceptive will in the commands of Scripture. He has given specific commands to individuals and universal commands for His people of all times, but most boil down into a few major categories.

Knowing God. Scripture is revelation: information that God has revealed about Himself so that we might know Him. Unbelievers do not know God (John 15:21), false teachers wrongly claim to know Him (Titus 1:16), but believers are those who do know Him (1 John 2:3). Yet Paul prays for believers to know God more (Eph. 1:17). Knowing God's will begins with knowing Him, and for that we need Scripture. In interpretation, we always ask, "What does this passage tell me about God?" before moving on to application.

Holiness. Holiness and knowing God go together, as exemplified in the life of Christ (John 8:55) and shown in His commands to His followers (John 14:15; 1 John 2:3). One of the plainest statements of God's will is this: "This is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3). As we learn more about God, we see His character, which He commands us to imitate (Luke 6:32–36); that is what His commands are designed to help us do (Deut. 10:12–13). Yet we cannot keep His commands perfectly, and so our lives are marked by confession. We cannot keep His commands perfectly, but when we fail, we know that we are still justified if we are in Christ:

"He cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). Even as we pray that God would help us to be holy, we can have confidence that this prayer will be finally answered (1 Thess. 5:23–24).

Love. Jesus summarized the law as love for God and people (Matt. 22:36–38). Indeed, several passages on imitating God's character focus on His love (Luke 6:32–36; Eph. 5:1–2; 1 John 4:7–12). Holiness and love are often seen as opposites, so church culture tends to swing back and forth between the twin dangers of holiness without love and love without holiness, but both errors denigrate the cross. So foundational are these two attributes that Isaiah records the seraphim crying "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts" (Isa. 6:3) and the apostle John tells us that "God is love" (1 John 4:8).

These three together represent God's revealed will for the believer: knowing God, holiness, and love. And just as holiness and love cannot be separated, so they cannot be imitated apart from knowing God.

GOD'S GUIDED WILL—BIBLICAL DECISION MAKING

As in all matters of the Christian life, the decision-making process should be bathed in prayer. I have developed the following questions to help me ask God for guidance based upon the truth of His Word; this helps me to not mistake my emotions or sinful desires as God's leading. May they be of help to you.

Does it violate a command in Scripture?

Of course, this excludes the various case laws of the Old Testament, as they are fulfilled in Christ, but the enduring principles of the Ten Commandments should be part of this process, and especially the teaching of the New Testament. Also, we are not searching merely for prohibitions, but also for commanded actions; if your choice means disobeying another command in Scripture, you violate this step.

Does it violate a principle in Scripture?

Some of God's revealed will for our lives is found in the patterns of Scripture. Some examples are the general commands of honesty, compassion, and service; you may not see a specific command to track your time accurately at

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FROM the CALL TO THE FIELD

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News From All Over



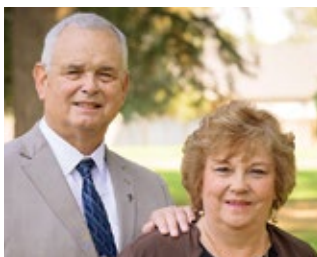
Dr. Joshua Crockett

became the sixth president of Bob Jones University in May 2024. Dr. Crockett holds a BA in rhetoric and public address and an MS in counseling from BJU. He earned an MDiv from BJU Seminary. In 2020,

he completed a DMin from Liberty University with an emphasis on expository preaching. Crockett's initial goals are to support faculty and staff, increase enrollment, continue the emphasis on a biblical worldview and student discipleship, and formulate the next strategic plan. He and his wife Karie have four children.

Pastor Ken and Debby Jackson

make their home in Roebuck, South Carolina, and serve with Gospel Fellowship Association Missions in the Interim Pastor Ministry. In September 2024 they started a new ministry at Westside Baptist Church in Eugene, Oregon, where Ken is the interim pastor. Ken and Debby's ministry has now taken them "coast-to-coast." In June 2024 they finished nineteen months of ministry at Carmel Baptist Church in Mosiertown, Pennsylvania. Their first interim ministry was at Cornerstone



Baptist Church in Scarborough, Maine, in the fall of 2022.

Dan and Janice MacAvoy

married in 1979 and serve the Lord together, most recently at Hanover Baptist Church in

Glen Allen, Virginia, where Dan is the pastor. They ministered in Kenya for fifteen months. Dan's ministry of forty-one years included pastoring in three churches in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. While pastoring he taught for eighteen years at Virginia Baptist College. Dan and Janice have traveled to help missionaries in twelve other countries. They look forward to serving in an interim capacity in retirement as God leads. The MacAvoy's have four children and fifteen grandchildren.

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FIRST PARTAKER

“The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits” (2 Tim. 2:6)

May God Be Gracious to Thee, My Son

I'm writing this from the table of a cabin in the mountains of North Carolina. For over forty years our family has retreated to spots like this for both overnights and longer vacations. Spurgeon had a corner of his backyard in which there was a small shelter, something like what we would call a gazebo. He prized its quiet detachment and fondly named it “Out of this World.” Cabins like the one in which I'm writing this morning have been very much like that for us.

Part of the pleasure of these times is choosing what to bring to read. My ache for getting time away for reading is such that I generally begin a stack of possibilities weeks ahead of time. The day we were ready to leave, it was nine titles high. But one was clearly first in my heart, a book I'd known about only since June. Searching on the web turned up just a single original copy (1864), advertised by a used religious book dealer located in Westcliff-on-Sea in the United Kingdom. It was not cheap, and the shipping cost was outrageous, but I was delighted when it arrived at my door a few weeks later.

You may be aware that our beloved hymnwriter John Newton had the capacity for many and enduring friendships. One of his dearest friends was a nonconformist minister named William Bull. Bull was situated at Newport Pagnel, a little over six miles from Newton's church in Olney. The two often met at one another's homes, or in a garden shed out behind the residence of

William Cowper (another of our beloved hymnwriters) in Olney; where, much to Cowper's disgust and suffocation, Newton and Bull would envelop the small space in clouds of happy pipe smoking.

Bull pastored the same church for nearly fifty years. He was also in much demand for preaching elsewhere, especially in London. He was a friend of Hannah Wilberforce, aunt of the famous William Wilberforce and sister to one of the wealthiest men in Europe, John Thornton. Thornton became Bull's closest friend, carrying him away (literally) to many and sometimes extended preaching opportunities among evangelicals in England, Scotland, and even Ireland. With the help of Thornton and Newton, Bull began in his home a training school for ministers that eventually graduated nearly a hundred men.

My new book is the story of this man's life, sensitively written by his grandson, Josiah (author also of a definitive life of Newton, still in print by Banner of Truth). It's verbosely titled, *Memorials of the Rev. William Bull, of Newport Pagnel. Compiled Chiefly from His Own Letters, and Those of His Friends, Newton, Cowper, and Thornton. 1738–1814.*

This week I came to something especially blessed. Bull and his wife, Hannah, were parents to six children: Benny, Billy, Tommy, Polly, Sally, and one whose name I cannot find. Only Thomas lived to adulthood. All the love of his often-bereaved parents, and all of their most attentive parenting and prayers went into his upbringing. This biography of his father includes several letters to him on his birthdays that are some of the most touching outpourings of a father's affectionate, spiritual concerns for a child that I can recall ever having read. Thomas returned his parents' love, and was

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in every way a dutiful, spiritually-minded son. After being trained in the ministerial academy by his father, he was ordained as co-pastor with his father at the age of twenty-eight. It was an arrangement that continued successfully until the father's death, fourteen years later. Remarkably, it was duplicated at the church afterward, when Thomas' own son, Josiah, was ordained to be co-pastor with his father.

That rather long introduction is for the purpose of magnifying what I read this morning: William's ordination charge to Thomas upon his installation as co-pastor on October 23, 1800. In a magazine article recalling the event, William was described as *a venerable father on the memorable day exhibiting grateful sensations and ecstacy of mind.*

The father introduced his text that day (Genesis 43) as suggesting a fitting *motto* for the occasion. It consisted of the words of Joseph upon seeing, for the first time in over twenty years, his brother Benjamin. *They are the language of great tenderness of spirit, of the warmest love, and the most sincere devotion*, he explained. *The great man's spirit was melted*, he continued. *He cries out with all the dignity of a patriarch and all the unction of a saint, "God be gracious unto thee, my son."*

I love ordination sermons from the past. There are some from which I've copied notes to myself in a little leather journal I call *KINDLING* (in the spirit of ἀναζωπυρεῖν [*anazōpurein*], 2 Tim. 1:6), and which I reread from time to time in quiet places like this. But I feel as though this one is especially satisfying. Perhaps it is my circumstance this week that makes it so. Or perhaps it's having read it in the context of William's biography, with its frank record of heartaches, both personal and ministerial, right up to this zenith when he ordained his only remaining son to the gospel ministry.

William opened with a poignant paragraph which the biography to this point confirms in every detail.

A variety of circumstances concur to render this the most delightful, the most painful day I have ever seen. It is the blessing of God on the most diligent, the most unwearied exertions of nearly thirty years; the gracious reward of the most delightful services; the answer of a thousand prayers; the gratification of my fondest wishes; the crown of all my labours; and the glory that gilds the evening of departing life.

Unless I'm greatly mistaken, the charge to follow will restir right aspirations in the heart of any minister; unless he is (for some reason known only to himself and to God) afflicted at this present time with a divine chastisement rendering him hardhearted and unfeeling. That could be. May the Lord use this charge to re-humble you that He may *restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten.*

To preclude any thought that the ideals in this charge are unrealistic, try to keep in mind as you read that this charge comes from a father to a son—a son who will join him now as co-pastor. That father admonishes his son to aim for these high, scriptural ideals, without any apparent anxiety that some glaring defect in his own life might undercut his words. Thomas knew his father, and William knew that he knew. Though keenly aware of his own failures and fallibility (as the biography attests), William evidently was confident that his own personal and ministerial example was credible in these very areas about which he charged his son. Remembering that should give reality and weightiness to what you read.

The charge commences where every minister must begin every day, with his own non-professional life as an ordinary Christian. From there, it proceeds through his devotional life, to his study for sermons, to his entrance into the pulpit on the Lord's Day, and so on. As we would say, it "checks all the boxes." It is densely packed. To profit well, you'll need to read it slowly, reflectively, and prayerfully. Try to hear it being preached by a most tenderhearted father. May it do your soul the good that it has done mine.

THE MINISTER'S PERSONAL WALK WITH GOD

1. I wish and pray that God may be gracious to thee, my son, *in all thy experience as a private Christian, and thy personal walk with God.* Without this, however judicious, however well conducted your future ministry be, it must soon become unprofitable to your hearers and a calamity to yourself.

May He bless thee with a deep and ever growing sense of *the evil of sin*—the infinite evil there is in sin,—and give you to discern its malignity in the mirror of His own holiness, the groans of Calvary, and the plague of your own heart. May God be gracious to thee, my son, by giving thee to the last moment of life *an increasing admiration of the dignity and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ*, a rich experience of His saving grace in thine own heart, and a most unutterable delight in the joys and glories of His salvation. May He bless thee with a clear and scriptural experience of the *work of His Holy Spirit in your own soul.* May He give you a strong and lively view of the nature, beauty, and excellence of that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord; and to the end of your days may this divine capacity for the kingdom of heaven grow in you like the palm tree and flourish like the cedars of Lebanon.

May God be gracious to thee, my son, and daily strengthen thy faith in Him, thy love to God, thy

love to Christ, thy love to holiness. May you progressively advance in real holiness of heart and life; and then I have the authority of an apostle to say, that having your fruit unto holiness your end will be life everlasting.

THE MINISTER'S PRIVATE DEVOTIONS

2. May God be gracious to thee, my son, in *all your private devotions*. It is in the closet that you must lay the foundation for all your comfort and usefulness in the pulpit. It is here that you must seek to bring down the dew of heaven on your own spirit.

In your retired moments be first and principally concerned to have your fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. Pour out your soul at the throne of grace,—humbly, frequently and fervently; praying without ceasing; “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit and watching thereunto with all perseverance.” That minister will generally prosper most who most waters with secret prayer that seed he means to sow in the pulpit.

THE MINISTER'S PREPARATORY STUDIES

3. May God be gracious to thee, my son, in all thy *preparatory studies* for the pulpit. You will then be led to choose the most interesting and solemn subjects; you will study to preach Christ and Him crucified; you will vindicate the regenerating and sanctifying graces of the Holy Spirit; you will deeply consider the value of immortal souls; you will often reflect, “I am now preparing to speak to men whose eternal welfare is at stake,—I am going to speak to men in the name of God, and to speak to God in the name of a whole congregation. This very sermon I am about to deliver may be my last. I must soon give an account of my stewardship and be steward no longer.

Look up to the Lord in secret prayer for His divine assistance and blessing on all your studies. You will find in the pulpit the happiest effects from such a course of previous study and devotion. In your private studies pursue the knowledge of divine truth with vigour, diligence, and the keenest investigation. Be always open to receive the truth wherever you find it; and leave it to little minds to confine their studies to a sect or a party. An enlarged understanding will always pursue the truth, take in extensive views of objects, and as complete and comprehensive views as can possibly be obtained. It will lead you to be always candid and generous to those who differ from you. Despise the dirty meanness of a narrow sectarian spirit, and

the brutal blindness of bigotry, which never was, nor can be, anything but the demon of persecution in embryo. Be assured you never meet with a bigot but you see a persecutor in disguise. But you, my dear sir, “have not so learned Christ.” May your private studies be so sanctified that even the enemies of the truth may see in the fruit of them what it is to have been with Christ.

THE MINISTER'S PULPIT MENTALITY

4. May God be gracious to thee, my son, whenever you *come into the pulpit*. May you always be concerned to keep the right object in view—the glory of God and the eternal salvation of your hearers. Pursue that object with faithfulness, diligence, and zeal. Instruct the ignorant, reprove the careless, warn the disobedient of their guilt and danger of going down into hell with the sound of salvation in their ears. “Warn every man, teach every man in all wisdom, that you may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” Strengthen the weak and fearful, comfort them that are cast down, enforce the consolations of the gospel, the security of an everlasting covenant, the infinite merits of the blood and righteousness of Christ, the unspeakable riches of divine grace, the unshaken faithfulness of God to His promises, and the certain joys and glories which are set before them in the world to come, warning the aged of their approaching change and endeavouring to prepare them for it.

May God be gracious to thee, my son, and enable thee—

First, to be always plain and simple that none may misunderstand you. Often think of the simplicity of your great and dear Lord. He invites you to learn of Him. He was meek and lowly. Let the same mind be in you that was also in Jesus Christ.

Secondly, let your strain be always evangelical. Let it be evident that you are not come to amuse your hearers with a moral essay, but to deliver the living truths of the living God. At the same time, preserve the most sacred regard to the moralities of the gospel. Let zeal for gospel truths glow in your heart, sparkle in your eyes, and shine in all your sermons; then shall you prove yourself a true evangelist, and it will be manifest that God is gracious to you of a truth.

Thirdly, let your strain be spiritual and experimental. Strongly mark the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart, from its first beginnings in regeneration to its complete perfection in bringing the soul to glory. Describe the duties, the trials, the spiritual conflicts of the people of God. Let your hearers

learn from your lips the truth of what they feel in their own hearts, what they have to fear, what to hope for, and what to feed upon in the way to Canaan.

Fourthly, let your strain of preaching be practical.

Let it evidently lead to that temper, that conversation and walk in life, which Jesus requires from all His true disciples, and which shall most effectually stop the mouths of gainsayers and shame into silence the cavils of ignorant and foolish men. Your Lord hath said, "By their fruits ye shall know them." Let your hearers never forget that "the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy; and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (James 3:17, 18). If God be gracious to thee, thou wilt never bring controversy into the pulpit, but will often remind your hearers that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law."

THE MINISTER'S PUBLIC CONDUCT

5. God be gracious to thee, my son, *to sanctify your life and conversation*, and that you may carry into all your social and relative connections the sweet and blessed fruits of what you have been delivering from the pulpit. "Be an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in purity." Let it be evident that you pursue no other object than the glory of God and the salvation of men. Let your whole life be meek, gentle, humble, and affectionate. Let it be always kind, friendly, and generous. Let it be decent, dignified, and holy: for real holiness is the highest dignity of man. Let it be manifest that as you profess to live for God, you do actually live to Him.

Be always humane and tender. Pity the poor, and do them all the good you possibly can. No money is so well laid out as that which is given to the poor, and when your own circumstances will go no farther, use your interest with others that they may assist you in this good work. Visit the afflicted, and help them to bear their burdens. Never think yourself above the meanest of your hearers in their afflictions. Your Master, who "measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out the heavens with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance," He condescends "to feed His flock like a shepherd, to gather the lambs in His arms and to carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young."

Preserve in all your carriage an easy dignity, and an endearing tenderness and courtesy. Shun the company of all those who are given to contention and controversy. It never does good, but always mischief. As far as in you lies, "live peaceably with all men." As you pursue truth in your study with perfect candour, so carry the same generous spirit into your life and conversation. Love everybody who loves the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE MINISTER'S PROMISED BLESSING

6. May God be gracious to thee, my son, *to give a divine blessing to all your labours*, and afford you effectual support under all the trials you must expect in your ministry. Without His blessing, Paul may plant and Apollos water in vain. Without this, the watchman watcheth the city in vain.

Earnestly pray for Divine assistance in your work in all its extent, and then look wholly to the Lord for a blessing. Oh, may your ministry be so honoured and blessed that you may have many who shall be your joy and crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord. For "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

"I charge thee therefore, before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." "And may God be gracious to thee, my son!" "The God before whom thy fathers have walked, the God who hath fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless thee."

Mark Minnick pastors Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina. His sermons are available at mountcalvarybaptist.org/sermons and on your favorite podcast app: search for "Mount Calvary Baptist Church" and subscribe.

Five Books for a Deserted Island

Note: Contributors were asked to identify five books (other than the Bible) that they would choose to have with them if they were marooned on a deserted island.

It was in my second year of Bible college (1978) that I began pastoring at the age of twenty-seven. I can remember the words of my homiletics professor, Dr. Kenneth Dean, encouraging our class of preacher boys to build a good library like a mechanic would build his toolbox. I set out to do just that, and I am so thankful for his wise counsel. Choosing only five books to have (other than a Bible) on an island creates some consternation. After changing my mind several times, I narrowed it down to these five, but not necessarily in this order.

***A Shepherd Looks at the Good Shepherd and His Sheep*, by Philip Keller.** This book is a commentary on John 10. The fact that Keller was born in East Africa to parents who were missionaries gives him more credibility than some commentators. He spent his early years as a shepherd, and he draws several illustrative pictures throughout the book of how a shepherd's objective is to manage his flock in such a way that the sheep will flourish. The greatest snapshot that he brings into focus is the picture that our Good Shepherd's purpose is that the sheep “may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (10:10). The book was given to me by a mentor who is now in heaven. Both had a profound impact on my life, especially in the early years of my ministry as a pastor. Keller gives me a perspective of my calling that I did not have before and would not want to lose as a pastor. I believe this book would hold my calling dear to my heart.

***Philippians: An Expositional Commentary*, by James Montgomery Boice.** One of my favorite New Testament books is Paul's epistle to the Philippians. In this book Boice cultivates the message of joy (the theme of the book), hope, love, purpose, aspiration, unity, and confidence to his readers. It is a verse-by-verse commentary written in conversational style that is both delightful and easy to read. I like his personal touch. Having this book while all alone on a deserted island would sound a positive note that would keep the joy of the Lord in my heart while dealing with the challenges of being marooned. I believe this book would encourage and refresh my spirit in the long and lonely days of abandonment from man, but not from the Lord and His Word.

***The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*, edited by James Orr.** Orr was a Scottish Presbyterian minister who also served as a professor of theology and church history. He was an outspoken defender of evangelical doctrine in his era

and a contributor to *The Fundamentals*, written and published between 1910 and 1915. After much labor and with the help of several contemporary theologians, *ISBE* was compiled and published in 1915. It contains nearly ten thousand entries from more than two hundred theologians and is a tremendous resource for studying the Bible and discovering the historical backstories of various names and places. I use *ISBE* in almost every sermon I build. The biography of every Bible character is rich with their ancestry and cultural background. *ISBE* also provides detailed information about the cities, geography, and customs of the day. It verifies agricultural and military facts, as well as the manners and practices of how people lived in both Old and New Testaments. It would be a priceless resource for me because it would keep my mind busy. The wealth of information in this encyclopedia is so vast and incalculable that it would help fill the time on an isolated island, keeping my mind sharp.

***Many Infallible Proofs*, by Henry M. Morris.** Early in my ministry, I had the privilege of hearing Dr. Morris preach. Morris is considered by many to be the father of modern creation science. However, this book carries a different fingerprint in that Morris deals with apologetics, or what is referred to as the study of Christian evidences, and he does so in a genius way! His approach to the structure of Scripture is both compelling and extremely convincing. This book would be good for me because it would keep my mind on the authority of the Holy Scriptures, something that would be helpful if stranded alone on an island.

***The Treasury of David*, by C. H. Spurgeon.** The book of Psalms was written by men whose feet were made of clay, yet they were in a personal living covenant with the perfect God of heaven. All of them found themselves in the depths of despair multiple times. Throughout the book of Psalms, David speaks of these depths in very personal ways. This indicates to me that there were times in their lives that they felt thrown into the deep with no one to come to their rescue! It was like being locked away by bar and bolt. This book is just what the title claims: a *treasury*. It teaches us that men like Moses, David, and Asaph learned to cry out to God during their deep trials of life. What a help that would be to me on an island with no one to talk to but the Lord, who loves me and knows every detail of my distress. I find this book to be a help to my spirit now, and I believe it would be a comforting resource on a deserted island.

Rick Arrowood is the executive director of Slavic Baptist Mission.

Was the Gift of Tongues Designed for Evangelism?

Luke’s account of the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 focuses considerable attention on the role of the gift of tongues on that special occasion. Before Peter stood to address the whole multitude, Jews from a wide variety of foreign countries heard individual believers—the one hundred twenty who had gathered in the upper room (Acts 1:15)—speaking in their native languages. We can imagine such foreigners naturally gravitating toward the particular speaker who was using the language familiar to them, forming small groups all around the open square. That would have been an amazing way for God to initiate the mission of communicating the gospel to the world.

In our day the call to foreign missions requires a significant investment of time, energy, and resources before the preaching of the gospel can even begin. After raising financial support (usually a process consuming two to three years), most missionaries must then learn a new language. A degree of mastery that enables one to minister effectively typically requires another three or four years of focused effort. Cessationists, of course, are convinced that the gift of tongues ended at some point during the early centuries of the church. We might wonder, though, why doesn’t God just provide the same gift of tongues today as He did in the first century?

A closer examination of the biblical text may shed some light on this valid question. Immediately after describing the arrival of the Holy Spirit to indwell believers and His bestowal of the gift of tongues, Luke’s next priority is to make clear that the nature of that gift was the ability to speak a foreign language that one had never studied. As proof, he notes the presence of many devout Jews from numerous regions of the world who were living in Jerusalem at that time. Their devotion to the Jewish religion is important for the legitimacy of their testimony about their experience that day, which Luke proceeds to cite (Acts 2:5–11).

The foreigners describe two important features of what they heard that morning (Acts 2:11). First, they identify the *form* of communication: “we do hear them speak in our tongues.” That the disciples were speaking real human languages is here asserted by a large number of first-hand witnesses who were native speakers. Since the source of this gift was the Holy Spirit, we may safely assume that God’s people were speaking these languages with complete fluency. The “others” who accused the disciples of being intoxicated (Acts 2:13) were the Jews born in Israel who didn’t understand any of the foreign languages. To them it all sounded like nonsense.

Second, the listeners describe the *content* of what they heard as “the wonderful works of God.” The list of God’s amazing deeds is long, including the creation of the world, the exodus from Egypt, the

conquest of the Promised Land, and a host of other great events. The gospel certainly ranks high among God’s wonderful works, but several factors indicate that the disciples were recounting a broader range of God’s actions in the past as recorded in the Scriptures.

The multitude of Jews gathered in Jerusalem that day were witnessing an astounding supernatural event: untrained people were suddenly able to speak in foreign languages. Clearly God intended that miraculous phenomenon to confirm the divine origin of the gospel message that Peter was about to proclaim. Deuteronomy 13:1–3, however, states that a miracle alone was not enough to confirm the authenticity of a messenger. A false prophet might perform “a sign or a wonder” but accompany that impressive display with a message of apostasy. Despite the miracle, such a prophet must be rejected.

In order to expect the Jews in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost to accept the truth of the gospel, then, the disciples had to accompany the miraculous demonstration of the gift of tongues with a message that the Jewish people would immediately recognize as true. The gospel itself would not qualify because the person and work of Jesus Christ was a highly controversial topic in that environment. Instead, the Holy Spirit directed the disciples to utilize their supernatural gift to communicate well-known and commonly accepted biblical truths. The combination of miracle and truth was all that was needed for Peter to gain a hearing.

Once Peter began to preach the gospel to the gathered crowd (Acts 2:14), he did not need to utilize the gift of tongues. Greek was the language of the world at that time, spoken throughout the Roman Empire. Both the foreign Jews living in Jerusalem and the nationals born there could understand the message Peter proclaimed to them in the one language they all knew. At that point the one hundred twenty believers speaking in tongues would have fallen silent so that everyone could listen intently to Peter as he explained the arrival of the promised Holy Spirit and preached the message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Although we might see a distinct advantage in a spiritual gift that would enable us to communicate the gospel effectively to people of different languages all around the world, that is not God’s plan. In fact, it has never been His plan, even on the day of Pentecost. Instead, the Lord’s call to foreign missions includes a level of personal commitment that drives His people to persevere in the difficult challenge of learning a new language. And for that task He promises to provide His grace.

Gary Reimers is pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina, and adjunct professor of expository preaching at BJU Seminary.

The Beautiful Winged Feet of the Gospel Messenger

To understand prophetic writings, we must recognize that they often encompass both an immediate and a future literal application. Such is the case with the prophecies presented in Isaiah 52:1–10. In their primary meaning, these words refer to the news of deliverance that the heralds proclaimed to Jerusalem when King Cyrus permitted the captive Jews to return from Babylon to their native country. But it is equally true that these words relate to the preaching of the gospel in this dispensation of grace, for Paul quotes Isaiah 52:7 in his great treatise on the spread of the gospel in Romans 10:13–15. The picture that the Holy Spirit gives the prophet Isaiah is that of couriers running and skipping upon the mountains as they hurry to the city of Jerusalem to declare the good news.

Keil and Delitzsch in their commentary on the passage state, "The exclamation 'how lovely' does not refer to the lovely sound of their footsteps, but to the lovely appearance presented by their feet which spring over the mountains with all the swiftness of gazelles. Their feet look as if they had wings because they are the messengers of good tidings of joy." Paul would certainly agree with that assessment as he presents the characteristics of the beautiful winged feet of the gospel messenger in Romans 10–12.

Winged feet are not foreign to our western cultural thinking. The Goodyear Tire Company logo paints such a picture. Mercury in ancient times was the god of trade and commerce; but it was as a swift messenger for all the gods of mythology that he was best known, and as such he has continued to be known through the centuries. The idea of speed had much to do with Goodyear's selection of the symbol, for the wing-footed Mercury was regarded as a fleet herald of good news. In Goodyear's application, it represented the good news of their products. According to Romans 10:14–15 the winged feet of gospel messengers are critical in our day, not for commercial purposes but for the glory of Christ and the salvation of souls. Such has been the need throughout church history, as exemplified by two great missionary heroes.

Robert Moffatt, a missionary on furlough in England, was telling about the dark continent of Africa. In the audience that day was a young Scot named David Livingstone. He was studying to be a doctor and had decided to give his life to the service of God, but where and how he was not sure. As he listened to Dr. Moffatt's story, he heard the missionary say, "There is a vast plain to the north where I have sometimes seen, in the morning sun, the smoke of a thousand villages where no missionary has ever been." Livingstone never forgot those words—"the smoke of a thousand villages." Afterward, he went to Dr. Moffatt and

asked, "Would I do for Africa?" That moment constituted David Livingstone's great decision. He, of course, went on to become the great explorer and missionary to Africa.

When Jonathan Goforth left his native Canada and first arrived in China to reach the lost for Christ, an old, experienced missionary gave him this advice: "Do not attempt to speak of Jesus the first time you preach to a heathen audience. The Chinese have a prejudice against the name of Jesus. Confine your efforts to demolishing the false gods." Later that evening, Goforth shared with his wife the advice that he had been given and with hot emphasis added, "Never, never, never! The gospel which saved the down and out in the slums of Toronto is the same gospel that must save Chinese sinners." Years later, more than one missionary came to Jonathan Goforth and asked what the secret was by which so many Chinese had been delivered from the power of sin. He replied, "I simply believe and teach God's Word. Some have said that you cannot preach to a proud Confucian scholar the same as to the common crowd. But," he added, "there is no royal road to God. Rich or poor, Chinese or Canadian, educated or ignorant, all are sinners and therefore must come to the same Savior by the same road."

Yes, we need swift messenger feet today in the cause of Christ. But what are the characteristics of human feet that result in them being winged and beautiful? Paul gives us the answer in Romans 10–12. Obviously, the essence of their work is taking the gospel, but in Romans 10–12 Paul describes the characteristics of the feet of those who fulfill the vision of Isaiah 52.

BEAUTIFUL, WINGED FEET ARE CONVERTED FEET (ROM. 10:9–11)

W. E. Vine clearly states the issue relating to the statements of Romans 10:9–11: "The actual order is now given: faith first, then confession. In order to be saved, righteousness must be reckoned, and this depends on faith; but faith necessarily leads to confession. Absence of confession betokens lack of faith."

BEAUTIFUL, WINGED FEET ARE CONSECRATED FEET (ROM. 12:1–2)

The challenge of Romans 12:1–2 is that following the giving of our body to God as believers, we are not to be conformed or fashioned by the external world system from which we have been redeemed. The sentence may be translated, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold" (J. B. Phillips).

The Greek word translated “transformed” occurs in only two other ways in the New Testament. It is used to describe the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2) and the glorious change wrought in the believer when he steadfastly contemplates the Savior (2 Cor. 3:18). This Greek word gives us our English word “metamorphosis.” The dictionary defines it as “change of form or change of character.” An example is the caterpillar, which undergoes metamorphosis in its chrysalis and emerges a glorious butterfly. The same creature that enters the filmy tomb emerges, but the change is so remarkable that it is not recognized as the same.

The Greek word translated “renewing” means “to renovate.” Being transformed mentally by Christ is a remodeling process—pulling out of our temple, our body and our mind, the old things that do not please Christ and putting into them those things that do please Him.

BEAUTIFUL, WINGED FEET ARE COOPERATIVE FEET (ROM. 12:3–13)

The work of the gospel messenger is not his work alone, but the work of the collective body of Christ around the world. Thus, in the church age, God has ordained that His people gather into local assemblies to advance the gospel.

In the fall of the year, a young woman named Linda was traveling alone on the rutted and rugged mountain highways of Yukon, Canada. Linda didn’t know that no one travels alone to Whitehorse in a rundown Honda Civic, so she set off where only more substantial vehicles normally ventured. The first evening she found a room in the mountains near a summit and asked for a 5 AM wakeup call so she could get an early start. She couldn’t understand why the clerk looked surprised at that request, but when she woke to early morning fog shrouding the mountain tops, she understood. Not wanting to look foolish, she got up and went to breakfast. Two other diners invited Linda to join them, and since the place was so small, she felt obliged. “Where are you headed?” one of the men asked. “Whitehorse.” “In that little Civic? No way! That pass is dangerous in weather like this.” “Well, I’m determined to try,” was Linda’s brave, if uninformed, response. “Then I guess we’re just going to have to hug you,” the man suggested. Linda drew back. The man laughed and explained that he and his friend were truckers, and that “hugging” meant staying close together on the highway. “We’ll put one truck in front of you and one in the rear. In that way, we’ll get you through the mountains.” All morning through the dense fog Linda followed the two red dots in front of her and had the reassurance of an escort behind her as they made their way safely through the mountains. Yes, believers need each other as they advance with the gospel on winged feet.

BEAUTIFUL, WINGED FEET ARE COMPASSIONATE FEET (ROM. 12:14–21)

D. L. Moody, in one of his sermons, pictured the Lord Jesus after His resurrection giving directions to Peter. “Go, find the man,” He says, “who thrust his spear into My side and tell him

there’s a much quicker way to My heart. Find the man who crowned Me with thorns and tell him I should like to give him a crown of life.”

Adoniram Judson was converted from agnosticism and called by God to serve the cause of Christ in Burma. He and his wife were to pay a terrible price in opposition before their first convert was won. During his early ministry, he was imprisoned for nearly two years and subjected to every conceivable barbarity and cruelty. During the first few months, his wife gave birth to a child. Soon afterward the mission house was burned down, leaving the young mother impoverished. Added to this, the eldest child developed smallpox, and the distracted mother was driven to the verge of despair. Then Judson’s execution was announced. The young couple prepared for the worst, but in the meantime, Judson was smuggled away, and his wife was unable to discover where he was. By the time they were reunited, the cost in suffering was terrible. The husband was scarred and worn; the wife was dressed in rags and reduced to utter destitution. Yet through it all the Judsons never lost sight of their goal—to love their enemies into the kingdom of God. In all their sufferings they were sustained by the matchless grace of the Lord Jesus. Judson’s two ambitions were to translate the Bible into the native tongue and to see a church of one hundred established before his death. He more than realized both goals. By blessing those that persecuted them, by blessing and cursing not, they disarmed opposition and came through more than conquerors.

It is significant that the first of John’s “signs” in his Gospel was performed by the Lord at a wedding, and the last at a funeral. The one was performed in life’s gladdest hour, and the other in life’s saddest hour. In the one Jesus rejoiced with those that rejoiced, and in the other He wept with those that wept.

Al Masters was an ordinary Christian who was married and had a little boy and a small business. He considered himself very blessed. Just before Christmas one year, his little boy was killed by a fifteen-year-old driving without a license. Al was filled with a deep desire for revenge. And even though the driver could not be brought before the full power of the law because he was a juvenile, Al did everything he could to try to get the courts to throw the book at him. Al dropped out of church. A year after the accident, on Christmas Eve, Al’s wife convinced him to return to the services. That night he listened to the story of the Word becoming flesh. He recognized his own unworthiness for Christ to come for him, and he began to weep. The next day, on Christmas, he set out to find out more about the boy who had killed his son. He discovered that he came from a broken home and lived with an alcoholic mother. Al sought out the young man, who was trying to make a living on his own. He ended up giving him a job in his shop, and then later took him into his own home. That young man, now an adult, says that Al Masters is the godliest person he’s ever known.

Bud Steadman is Missions Mentor with Baptist World Mission.

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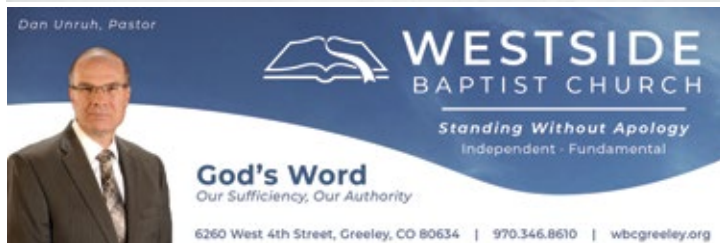
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South Regional Fellowship

Swan Creek Baptist Church
2501 Swan Creek Rd.
Swan Creek, NC 28642
Coordinator: Tony Facenda

March 24-25, 2025

Northern California Regional Fellowship

Calvary Baptist Church
160 Seaside Court
Marina, CA 93933
Coordinator: Dan Pelletier

April 14-17, 2025

Northwest Regional Fellowship

Grace Baptist Church
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CANADA
Coordinator: Don Johnson

May 12-13, 2025

Wyoming Regional Fellowship

Friendship Baptist Church
265 Vannoy Parkway
Thayne, WY 83127
Coordinator: Jay Sprecher

May 19, 2025

Mid-America Regional Fellowship

First Baptist Church
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Rockford, IL 61108
Coordinator: David Huffstutler

June 9-11, 2025

FBFI Annual Fellowship

(Combined with New Testament Association)
Calvary Baptist Church and
Maranatha Baptist University
745 W. Main St.
Watertown, WI 53094
Coordinators: Robert Loggans,
David Anderson

September 9, 2025

New York City Regional Fellowship

Bethel Baptist Fellowship
2304 Voorhies Ave
Brooklyn, NY 11235
Coordinator: Matt Recker



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REVIEW OF SUMMER HIGHLIGHTS

JUNE 15-AUGUST 18, 2024

- Sessions: 40,828
- Page views: 54,382

HIGHLIGHTS FROM PROCLAIM & DEFEND

- “The Doctrine of Ecclesiastical Separation is Being Lost—We Cannot Let It Happen” (<https://wp.me/p1VQSk-5rM>)
- “The World Tells Us How It Really Feels” (<https://wp.me/p1VQSk-5rq>)
- “The Bible and DEI” (<https://wp.me/p1VQSk-5rS>)
- “The Humble Hearer” (<https://wp.me/p1VQSk-5rj>)
- “A Few Inches from Civil War” (<https://wp.me/p1VQSk-5qw>)
- “The Salvation of Infants and the Mentally Disabled” (<https://wp.me/p1VQSk-5pA>)
- “The Indispensable Affection of Love” (<https://wp.me/p1VQSk-5ps>)
- “Why Did the Purity Movement Die?” (<https://wp.me/p1VQSk-5p6>)

These are only a sampling of the thoughtful articles we publish each weekday.

Check out the latest at www.proclaimanddefend.org (or follow us on Facebook where we post daily links).

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PROCLAIM & DEFEND PODCAST

We feature interviews with our *FrontLine* authors as the main attraction on the podcast. This allows us to go into a bit more depth than we can do in the articles themselves, enhancing what we produce in the magazine. We have other features as well, so please check out *Proclaim & Defend* at <https://proclaimdefend.substack.com>

- Interview 40: “A Future for Israel and Insights from the Unappreciated Prophets” (<https://proclaimdefend.substack.com/p/interview-40-a-future-for-israel>)
- Interview 41: “Mark Lounsbrough—Blessing and Dominion” (<https://proclaimdefend.substack.com/p/interview-41-mark-lounsbrough-blessing>)
- Interview 43: “Douglas Brown—No Future for Israel? Supersessionism 101” (<https://proclaimdefend.substack.com/p/interview-43-douglas-brown-no-future>)
- Interview 36: “Malinda Duvall on Landing the Learjet” (<https://proclaimdefend.substack.com/p/interview-36-malinda-duvall-on-landing>)
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Is Your Wisdom Wise?

The word “wisdom” conjures up pictures for me, like the older woman who opens her mouth with grace and a loving pat on the arm, or the confidant who answers overwhelming problems with a gentle smile and mountains of perspective-changing truth, or the grandpa figure who smiles knowingly at a young person wrestling with a difficult biblical truth. However, I don’t admire the *words* of the senior saint who always says the right thing, but the calm, confident spirit that attracts me, a spirit full of wise assurance in God and His truth.

Recently I have found myself less calm and assured than I should be, begging God for wisdom. What does following Christ look like in the 2020s? How do I parent young adult children in an LGBTQ+, gender-confused, sex-saturated, pluralistic world? How do I recognize true wisdom amid today’s cacophony of confusing and conflicting voices—even among Christians? More importantly, as I grow in spiritual knowledge, how do I know if I am truly wise?

In the third chapter of his epistle, James asks a pointed rhetorical question, “Who is wise and understanding among you?” (3:13, NKJV). In context, James has just laid out staggering truths about the tongue, and so the reader may immediately think James is prompting his hearers to examine their *words* to ascertain whether they are wise. But James gives an unexpected answer. He asserts that the wise person is the one who shows wisdom—the one who *lives* wisdom principles.

Wisdom involves more than what we know or what we say. Wisdom also involves how we *live out* what we know. You see, a wise person will *show* wisdom through meek, wise living.

James warns that there is wisdom that sounds wise, but which is actually the outflow of self-seeking competitiveness. It’s fueled by a selfish, bitter heart (3:14). This kind of wisdom is deceptive, not given by our Father, but by the Evil One, the Father of Lies. Sadly, false wisdom leads to confusion and a variety of evil deeds (3:15–16).

So how can we recognize truly wise wisdom? James reminds us that we can know wisdom by her fruits—by her deeds (3:13; Matt. 11:19). Although I’ve never seen these qualities hanging on a wall like the fruit of the Spirit, James 3:17 provides us a compact description of the fruit of wisdom.

- First, true wisdom is *pure*. It is innocent, not mixed with selfishness or wrong motives. It isn’t jealous or self-seeking. In contrast to devilish wisdom, true wisdom doesn’t have a hidden agenda. By application then, I must beware of those who sound wise, but who are seeking a following for themselves. More importantly, I must keep watch on my own heart. A good question to ask may be, “Why am I drawn to this truth?” or “Why is this important to me? Because it promotes *me* or because it’s biblical truth?”
- True wisdom is also *peaceable*. The Greek word here means “free from worry.” James indicates that true wisdom produces inner peace. This kind

of wisdom will not stir up worry in self or others. When I’m in a tizzy or inner turmoil, I prove my thoughts are not wise. True wisdom produces a stable peace. And when others try to stir up fear in me, want me to spread conspiracies, or are willing to disrupt unity in the assembly over tangential issues, they are not demonstrating wisdom.

- True wisdom is also *gentle*. A harsh, unapproachable spirit is not wise. Rather, true wisdom is considerate of others, and has a reputation of reasonableness, speaking the truth in love. Paul uses the same word in Philippians 4:5, instructing us to be known for this kind of moderate spirit. When I disagree with someone and want to lash out at them, I am not demonstrating true wisdom. Likewise, when I see brash, angry people, I must stop and consider that what they are saying probably isn’t from wisdom.
- True wisdom is *open to reason*. While sadly we sometimes think of strong leadership as taking a stand and never budging, true wisdom is opposed to that stance and is instead easily entreated. Godly wisdom doesn’t explode or shut down when opposed or questioned but is willing to converse, reason, and when appropriate, yield. My husband tells our children, “The truth is never afraid of the light,” and, likewise, wisdom is open to conversation and isn’t fearful of examination. When I react emotionally to the

questions of others or clam up when certain topics are broached, I'm not evidencing the reasonableness that is a hallmark of true wisdom.

- True wisdom is *full of mercy*. While there are times to make righteous judgments, godly wisdom looks for opportunities to see mercy triumph over judgment (2:13). Wisdom from above reflects our merciful Heavenly Father, seeing people as works in progress. A wise person gives others the benefit of the doubt, recognizing he or she desperately needs mercy as well.
- True wisdom is *full of good fruits*. Real wisdom is productive. The evidences of righteousness abound in a wise person.
- True wisdom is also *impartial*. James has already presented the sinful nature of partiality (2:9), and godly wisdom resists playing favorites, but rather is consistent.
- Finally, true wisdom is *sincere*. Real wisdom is without hypocrisy. You can take the words of a truly wise person at face value.

In a day when lies abound, foolishness persists, and truth is at a premium, I long to be wise. I expect you do too. I want to bring Scripture to bear in good and appropriate ways in my life and in the lives of the women I minister to.

It's easy to have opinions. I could talk all day about why I'm against such-and-such, and why so-and-so is wrong, and

why it's wise to do such-and-such. And yet, when my children watch my life or my friends observe me, do they see a compelling portrait of wisdom that reflects the character of God? Do they see a woman who is stable, gentle, reasonable, merciful, and sincere? Or are they confronted with a woman who's worrisome, harsh, unreasonable, judgmental, partial, and ultimately self-seeking? I have a lot of work to do, but I'm thankful the Spirit is at work in me on this very subject.

How about you? Do you need to join me in a renewed commitment to pursuing godly wisdom? Growth in wisdom happens only as we look to Christ who is our wisdom (1 Cor. 1:30) and immerse ourselves in the Word of God, because "the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Prov. 2:6, NKJV). You and I must prioritize the Word of Christ so that it dwells in us richly *in all wisdom* (Col. 3:16)!

Adapted from a blog post first written for women on ThinkBible.online.

Rebecca Brock teaches women's ministry courses at Maranatha Baptist University as an associate professor in the College of Bible and Church Ministries. She and her husband, Bryan, have four children and serve together on staff at their local church. Rebecca is a frequent speaker at women's retreats and also enjoys sushi dates with her husband and cheering for her children at sporting events.



Practicing Gratitude

Continued from page 28

restrictions. I often forgot to give thanks in those difficult months. Selling our old house was complicated as promising offers fell through. Houses we liked would be sold before we could schedule a visit. Once we finally sold our house, we still couldn't get our offers accepted on a house in Minnesota, which dragged out the transition even longer, and I didn't feel thankful. But now that we are moved, I can reflect on how the details came together and how God provided temporary housing and free storage and great moving helpers and led us to just the right house. Though I can look back and thank God for the difficulty of moving, I needed to thank Him during the process. I share my story of the Lord's faithfulness and providential care to help you remember He will take care of you, too.

Remembering God's nature, His mighty acts on our behalf, His faithfulness, His providential care, His presence, and His promises should help you and me give thanks in everything. "O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever" (Ps. 136:1).

Traci Mayes is an online English professor with four adult children. She and her husband, Preston, have adjusted fairly well to empty-nest life and enjoy living in Minnesota with frequent visits to see children and grandchildren in Wisconsin. (Photo by Morgan Brown)



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“Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”

Colossians 4:5–6

Every summer I look forward to the time when the ears of sweet corn begin making their way to the local produce stands. Nothing says “summer” like biting into freshly cooked corn on the cob and experiencing the sweet flavor of the kernels exploding within my mouth. Not to mention the levity that is added to a summer picnic when one of these tiny eruptions shoots across the table into an unsuspecting family member’s face. Eating fresh sweet corn is truly a delicious and enjoyable experience.

One of my favorite corn varieties is Silver Queen. The eight-inch tapered ears consisting of fourteen to sixteen rows of tender, sweet white kernels have an excellent flavor that is moderately sweet and best enjoyed when eaten fresh.¹ Whether boiled, steamed, grilled, or roasted, Silver Queen corn on the cob is amazing! Yet, despite its natural sweetness and delightful taste, you will never witness me eating my corn plain. It needs a little something . . . a little butter, and “Please pass the salt.”

Throughout human history, salt has been a substance of significant importance with multiple applications. One of the most well-known applications is to season our food. When applied appropriately, the right amount of salt added to a food dish can produce delicious results. For example, when I add salt to my corn, I experience an enhancement of the corn’s sweetness

that makes the corn more palatable. The increased palatability produces a desire within me to consume more sweet corn, while the saltiness causes me to reach for my sweet tea to wash it all down.

While I enjoy the effects of salt on my corn, the apostle Paul reminds me

Please Pass the Salt

Seasoning Your Communication with Wisdom, Discernment, and Grace

I should also add salt to my speech. As he concluded his epistle to the church at Colossae, Paul analogously references salt as he admonishes the Colossian believers, “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt” (Col. 4:6). While the context of Colossians 4:5–6 is an exhortation to believers on how they should speak wisely, graciously, and persuasively toward unbelievers (“them that are without”), Paul issues a similar, more general exhortation to the Ephesians: “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph. 4:29). In both passages, Paul stresses that our communication should be influenced by wisdom, discernment, and grace. It is important to know what to say or not to say, to know when to say it, and to know how to say it.

One afternoon, when I was a college student, I was driving my car through a downtown area when I was stopped at an intersection by a traffic signal. On all four corners of the intersection were young men holding posterboard signs with various scripture verses such as John 3:16, Romans 3:10, Romans 3:23, and Romans 6:23. Meanwhile, other young men were street-preaching the message of the gospel. However, their disposition and delivery were not pleasant. They were all yelling and screaming at the people inside their vehicles. Some of the young men were even red in the face. While I appreciated their boldness and zeal, their caustic disposition overshadowed their message. They certainly lacked knowledge of Paul’s admonition to the Colossians. Nobody at the intersection wanted to hear what they were saying. The other drivers just wanted the traffic signal to change so they could get out of there. The young men’s speech was bitter and unpalatable.

Paul’s emphasis on the disposition of our speech is emphasized in Colossians 4:6 with his use of the word “grace.” In this instance, the word conveys “gracefulness” or “pleasantness.”² Such pleasantness is achieved when we analogously season our speech with salt. This salt analogy was one Paul’s audience would have understood, and it is one we need to understand as well. Consider the following properties of salt as they relate to sharing the gospel with unbelievers.

First, salt enhances flavor. When salt is added to food it increases the desirable flavors of the food. It can even cause foods that are unpalatable to “taste better.” When I add salt to my Silver Queen corn, it does not make the corn sweeter, but rather it diminishes any bitterness and allows the corn’s

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Practicing Gratitude

Writing thank-you notes seems to be something of a dying art. Do you still write thank-you notes? Do you make your children write thank-you notes? Is it as much a struggle in your house as it used to be in my house? I used to threaten to tell grandparents never to send another gift if a certain child didn't write a note to thank them for this one.

We all know practicing gratitude is not always easy. I find it much easier to be ungrateful and unthankful. But since gratitude is commanded or mentioned often in Scripture, it is a spiritual discipline that we need. Our American Thanksgiving holiday provides a great opportunity to practice gratitude.

We need to follow the command in 1 Thessalonians 5:18: "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." How hard is it to give thanks in everything? What about when all your children are crying at once? Or your dinner burns? Or you feel unappreciated? Or the rent check bounces? Or you get a cancer diagnosis? We're supposed to give thanks then, too?

When we can't see a reason to be thankful, we might start with the basics. We thank God for loving us in such a way that He provided the only plan that would satisfy His holy nature and allow sinful humans to approach Him. His goodness and provision give all of us a reason to give thanks when seemingly there are zero human reasons to do so.

Additionally, Psalm 30:4 and Psalm 97:12 urge us to "give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness" and when we remember His mighty deeds. His sacrifice

for us, His power throughout the ages, and His holiness supply abundant reasons to give thanks. When life is collapsing on all sides, God is still God, and I can still praise and thank Him for His nature, for His goodness to me, and for His mercy and lovingkindness.

Further reasons to give thanks include His presence and His promises. "The LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Josh. 1:9) is a comforting truth and a wonderful promise to cling to when I can't see anything else to give thanks for. The Scriptures reiterate the promise of His presence as well as many other wonderful truths, such as the promise of forgiveness and the promise of an eternal home. "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2) reminds us that this fallen world is not our final home. Because this world is temporary, my focus can and should be eternal rather than temporal. Keeping our focus on eternity allows us to give thanks in everything.

God knows how good practicing gratitude is for us. Having an attitude of gratitude changes our outlook on life. As I learn to give thanks even for the negative circumstances God sends my way, I reset my outlook and become more content in my view of life. I may not feel grateful, but I can actively give thanks to God for the day, for His grace, for life, and for His lovingkindness. I can speak thankful words to reset my spirit for the day. And I can eventually come to the place where I give thanks for what I perceive as a negative.

As we look for His hand at work and trust in His providential care for us, as we remember He loves our families more than

we do, and as we call to mind His faithfulness and lovingkindness, then we can rest in Him. We can rest in His goodness and faithfulness and rest in His strength. Who parted the Red Sea? Who rose from the dead? "What a mighty God we serve" is not just a line from a children's song. Call those truths back to your mind, give thanks to our great God, and rest in Him. By practicing gratitude in this way, you can allay the worry and anxiety that may threaten your rest. These reasons and so many more prompt us to practice the spiritual discipline of cultivating a grateful heart.

This November, let's practice gratitude intentionally. You could write on your calendar or journal something you are thankful for each day. As a family, you could do a daily thankfulness list or social media post. Or you could create a thanksgiving tree, adding a leaf each day. It doesn't have to be elaborate to be effective. Visual reminders help us focus. What else could you do?

To remind myself to focus on gratitude throughout the year and not just in November, I use a blessings jar to which I add slips of paper or notes. When I empty the jar on New Year's Day, I get to remember that blessings take many different forms. In addition to my blessings jar, my reminders are a tray of Scrabble tiles spelling out "grateful" and refrigerator magnets saying "Choose Joy" and "Choose Gratitude." Choosing gratitude and practicing thankfulness will keep our focus where it needs to be.

I needed to be reminded to give thanks during the months of trying to move from Wisconsin to Minnesota during COVID

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Hebrews 11: What It

After a series of warm and sobering encouragements, the writer of Hebrews reminds his readers that “the just shall live by faith” (10:38).¹ That citation from Habakkuk 2 is not only a crucial soteriological assertion (cf. Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11). It is also (as here) a call to the justified to live out a life of faith. Faith is the means by which we are justified but also the means by which the justified are to live (cf. Col. 2:6–7). This column continues to raise the question, “What does that look like?” Hebrews 11 answers that question with a series of biblical examples—ordinary men and women who, despite daily doubts and sins, modeled a trust in the words of an extraordinary God.

SARAH: LIVING BY FAITH MEANS ENTRUSTING ONESELF TO GOD’S PROMISES (11:11–12)

The example of Sarah’s faith is sandwiched right in the middle of the discussion of the patriarchs; she was, after all, the vital human link between Abraham and his heirs. These two verses are a highly compressed summary of what is, in Genesis, a protracted and tortuous tale that unfolds over the space of twenty-five years and eleven chapters (Gen. 12–22). Well into that story, when God (apparently for the first time) clarified to Abraham specifically that barren *Sarah* would be the one to bear his promised heir (Gen. 17:16), he was initially just as incredulous as Sarah (Gen. 17:17; 18:12). At some point, however, the laughter of disbelief turned to the wide-eyed wonder of trust in God’s promise (Heb. 11:11), then into the merriment of celebration when the divinely promised impossibility became reality (Gen. 21:6–7).

This NT summary in Hebrews 11:11–12 fast-forwards to the end of that story to focus attention on Sarah’s submissive trust in God’s promise and on the role of Sarah’s faith in the realization of that promise to Abraham. What was that role? The first word of verse 12 (“therefore”) provides a hint. The connection of 11:11–12 can be restated like this: *Because of Sarah’s faith, an innumerable offspring came from one man (and him as good as dead)*. Remarkably, Abraham is both passive and unnamed in these verses, which essentially credit the birth of the nation Israel to the faith of Sarah!

Sarah decided that the God who had promised the impossible would be faithful to see that promise through. Sarah had to reach a verdict about God in her heart. The question was not, “Can I trust my husband in this?” The question was not, “Can I figure out a way to make this happen?” (that was Genesis 16, and it didn’t go well). The question was, “Can I trust God to do exactly what He has said?” And the answer came in Genesis 21:1–2.

ABRAHAM: LIVING BY FAITH MEANS ENTRUSTING ONE’S LOVED ONES TO GOD’S PROMISES (11:17–19)

We tend to think of Abraham’s offering of Isaac as illustrative of his obedience. That’s where Genesis 22 seems to focus our attention. But Hebrews 11 specifically spotlights something quite different: Abraham’s *faith* in sacrificing Isaac. This passage lets us eavesdrop on how faith reasons and talks, especially when it confronts enormous personal loss, especially when it seems to contradict everything we thought God was doing and saying up to that point. Abraham’s faith in God’s promise is the fulcrum of this passage. It’s right in front of our noses in the text. Abraham is explicitly identified as “he who had received the *promises*” (11:17), and Isaac as the one “of whom *it was said*, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called’” (11:18). The passage spotlights God’s promise; in the end, *this* is what Genesis 22 was about.

Abraham’s dilemma was the apparent contradiction between a *promise* of God (Gen. 17:19) and a *command* of God (Gen. 22:2). Abraham’s conundrum wasn’t, “How can I obey these two conflicting commands?” but, “If I obey this command, how can He possibly keep that promise?” Obedience to God’s clear command would, it seemed, undermine God’s equally clear pledge. The temptation, in short, was to worry about God’s part.

But to read the Genesis account, there was no conflict or quandary for Abraham at all. He never questions, never vacillates. It takes the sudden call of the angel of the Lord to stop him from obeying God to the letter (Gen. 22:10–11). How could Abraham be so unhesitatingly resolute?

Over years of exercising it, Abraham’s trust in God’s words became so reflexive, so instinctive and unwavering, that he had already reached an astonishing conclusion: “God was able to raise him [Isaac] up, even from the dead” if that’s what it would take to keep His promise (11:19). How could the writer of Hebrews possibly infer Abraham’s thinking? It can actually be deduced from an attentive reading of the Genesis narrative. Abraham told his servant, “The lad and I will go yonder and worship, *and we will come back to you*” (Gen. 22:5). If Isaac was indeed to be sacrificed, there’s only one way that could happen.

What makes this act of faith so extraordinary? Abraham had no reason for believing that God would ever do such a thing. So far as we know, he had no revelation or personal experience or historical precedent that would lead him to expect God to raise up a dead person. But *he was so thoroughly convinced of the reliability of God’s words that it was easier for him to imagine that God would*

Looks Like to “Live by Faith” (Part 3)

do something utterly unprecedented than that He would fail to fulfill His words to the letter.

Abraham’s willingness to reason outside the box is one of the most striking examples of a legitimately sanctified imagination. It is instructive for what we do with God’s personal promises as well as His prophetic promises. When confronted with the apparent conflict between what God promised and what seemed reasonable to imagine or expect, Abraham’s instinct was not to interpret God’s promise spiritually. It apparently never occurred to him to think, “Maybe God’s promises are referring to *spiritual* descendants, and the land God promised is really just a *spiritual* inheritance.” Abraham clung to the straightforward jots and tittles of God’s words. God may have to do something utterly unexpected in order to do what He said, but He can never abandon His words.

When confronted with a clear word from God, faith reasons like Abraham did in Hebrews 11:19. God will always find a way to keep all His promises, even if it means doing something unprecedented, unimaginable, unheard of, and even impossible.

WHAT MORE SHALL I SAY?

Neither time nor space permit the author of Hebrews to expound on every individual example of those “who through faith . . . obtained promises” (11:32–33). Instead, he launches into a staccato bullet list of names and circumstances that divide into two classes.

There were those whose faith enabled them to accomplish what they never could have accomplished apart from trust in God’s words (11:32–35a). They conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut lions’ mouths, doused raging fires, escaped the edge of the sword, gained strength when they were weak, became mighty in battle, and put foreign armies to flight. Some mothers even had their dead children raised back to life.

But then there were the “others,” those whose faith enabled them not to achieve but to *endure* (11:35b–38). Some accepted torture rather than recant their faith because they were confident in the greater reality of their resurrection.² “Still others” were mocked and beaten, chained and imprisoned. Some were executed by stones or saws or swords. And others lived out their days roaming the earth in sheepskins and goatskins—destitute, afflicted, tormented—living in deserts, mountains, dens, and caves, bearing what they never could have endured without a sustaining trust in God’s words.

Most of us find our lives a mixture of conquest and suffering. Few people spend their lives in only one class of experiences,

though some seem to be called to a greater share of hardship and loss than others. We are inclined to pry into the whys of providence and pit our lot against that of others (like Peter in John 21:21–22). In C. S. Lewis’s *The Horse and His Boy*, Aslan quiets such inquisitiveness into the lot of others with the words, “Child, I am telling you your story, not hers; I tell no one any story but his own.” The writer of Hebrews makes the same point when he concludes, “Let us run with endurance the race that is set *before us*” (12:1). Do not picture that race as though all of us were running on the same oval track in a stadium. The course varies from person to person. Everyone’s own “race” is individualized in an innumerable variation of personalized cross-country courses tailored for each by the providence of God.

You and I are prone to be too preoccupied with the here and now. Too often we don’t really believe and trust God’s words about eternity enough. We tend to gauge our success or failure by our present experiences (or those of others) and their immediate and visible outcomes. Hebrews 11 thrusts us into a larger reality and shows us what it looks like to navigate our way through this present, visible world by trusting God’s words about the larger realities—future things and unseen things. God never intended this life to provide the bulk of our reward or satisfaction, only the smallest foretaste. This life is not the whole story. It’s not even most of the story.

“The just shall live by faith” in the trustworthiness of God’s words. That is the key to receiving the testimony and approval of God in both doing and enduring whatever course God lays before you.

Layton Talbert is professor of theology and Bible exposition at BJU Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina. This series is adapted from chapter 10 of *The Trustworthiness of God’s Words: Why the Reliability of Every Word from God Matters* (Christian Focus, 2022).



¹ Scripture is quoted from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

² Hebrews 11:35–36 links the reader to a historical era underappreciated by most Christians—the intertestamental period. The word “tortured” literally refers to being stretched out on a rack and beaten with rods. Conservative commentators old and recent agree that the writer is clearly referring to events from 2 Maccabees 6–7 that were well-known to his readers. While not part of the inspired canon, the books of Maccabees are one of our most valuable sources of intertestamental Jewish history.

Wisdom and Discernment in Evangelism

The theme of wisdom and discernment is interesting when considered in the context of evangelism. When and how to share the gospel are two questions many have in their desire to bring people to Christ. Both require wisdom and discernment. We all can probably think of moments when we felt the Holy Spirit was prompting us to say something, and we instead remained silent. Or we spoke up and said the right thing, but our timing was bad and caused a negative reaction from the person we were trying to witness to.

God in His mercy and grace allowed me to serve in Edmonton, Alberta, for eighteen years. We got to see a large number of people accept Christ as Savior and became a large first-generation Christian church. Here are a few things I observed.

RETHINK THE INVITATION

The invitation after a sermon has fallen on hard times in recent years. I think that in desiring not to manipulate or pressure people, we may have swung the pendulum too far the other way.

A good sermon does not consist only of information. People can use Google for that. A sermon should also give Bible-based application. An invitation gives people a moment to talk to God about how they personally want to apply what they just heard. If the gospel is shared, as it will be regularly if you are preaching through books of the Bible, the invitation gives the lost an opportunity to acknowledge that they need Christ and want more information.

When I first went to Edmonton, I was preaching to ten people in addition to my family. The platform was a four-inch riser. There was no place to “come forward and pray.” In rethinking the invitation, I saw challenges with come-forward invitations.

First, unless those who want to respond are on the aisle, they have to walk past people to get to the front, and it is natural to wonder who is looking. At that point, a person is wondering what others are thinking instead of what God is thinking. That is distracting. A first-time visitor or lost person would certainly be wrestling with the same thing.

Second, some people want attention, and they go forward to be seen by others, not to respond to God. Because I could not have people come forward, I simply said, “If God is working in your heart, just sit in your chair, and when you are done praying, stand up. I won’t end the invitation until everyone is standing.” I also made it clear that I would not call anyone out or embarrass anyone. I always addressed those who might not be sure of their salvation and who wanted more information, and I asked that they would either quietly raise a hand or simply look up at me. Whenever I said, “I see that hand,” our folks knew that they should leave me alone afterward so I could move to be near that person in case they wanted to make an appointment to discuss the plan of salvation, and someone often did.

Once we moved into our new auditorium, we had three steps up to the platform and a place to which people could come forward. However, to avoid distraction, we decided to continue to have people respond while remaining in their seats. The congregation also asked me to stop talking during the invitation because it was distracting while they were trying to pray. So the piano just played quietly until everyone was standing. I can think of many times when I did not give a strong gospel presentation in the sermon but still asked if there were any present who were not sure they were saved, and people would respond. One time it happened four

Sundays in a row. Asking each week during the invitation whether anyone was present who was not saved gave a gentle reminder to the whole church that we need to be concerned about lost people.

It’s not wrong to have a come-forward invitation, and I think that when people are under intense conviction over their sin or their need for a Savior, they couldn’t care less what others think. I also don’t think it’s wrong not to have an invitation. Each church has to think through what they do and why they do it.

THE EVANGELIST OR GUEST SPEAKER

Having an evangelist or guest speaker seems to be another area that has fallen on hard times. Ephesians 4:11–16 seems to me to indicate that an evangelist would be a help to the church. In our church’s case, we didn’t need messages on salvation as much as we needed messages on sanctification.

Morris Gleiser, Torrey Jaspers, Mike Bere, Jim Berg, Jim Van Gelderen, David Shoaf, and Phil Shuler were all a tremendous blessing over the years. They would preach, and people would respond as if it were the first time they had ever heard preaching on that topic, even though I had preached on it many times. Sometimes a fresh voice and a fresh perspective is what is needed. It takes wisdom and discernment to know who will be a blessing to a church, but I found evangelists and Bible teachers really helped ours.

These are a couple of things to think about as we seek to take the Word to the world.

Jim Tillotson is the president of Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa.



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Regional Reports

CHESAPEAKE BAY FBFI REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

The 2024 Chesapeake Bay FBFI Regional Fellowship was hosted by Tim Leaman at Calvary Baptist Church in Westminster, Maryland, on Friday, August 23. There were thirty-three in attendance, which included several pastors, missionaries, and even two chaplains. The keynote speakers were Jeff Davis, the director

of the EMU mission board, and Tim Leaman. Jeff preached an encouraging message from Psalm 46, and Tim followed up with an informative session on tips for mentoring men for the next generation. After a time of prayer, everyone headed downstairs for a delicious lunch and blessed time of fellowship.

NEW YORK CITY FBFI REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

The 2024 New York City FBFI regional meeting on September 10 was hosted by Matt Recker at Bethel Baptist Fellowship in Brooklyn. Guest speakers were Dan and Juanita Unruh, who in 1995 established Westside Baptist Church in Greeley, Colorado. More than sixty attended the fellowship, including pastors, missionaries, and evangelists. Dan spoke to the entire group from Acts 5:26–32 on “The Motto of the Obedient,” which is “we ought to obey God rather than men.” In the second session, Pastor Unruh spoke to the men

about the “*Andrizomai*” club he started with his three sons when they were young. This word comes from 1 Corinthians 16:13, which says we are to “act like men.” Juanita spoke to the pastors’ wives and other faithful women on “The Portrait of a Godly Woman” from Psalm 1. Everyone was blessed and encouraged by the great messages and encouraging fellowship together. Next year’s fellowship will be September 9 at Bethel Baptist in Brooklyn, and the guest speaker will be Ben Sinclair, Director of Baptist World Missions.



Biblical Decision Making

Continued from page 19

work, but the broad principle of honesty means that you should.

Does it violate the goal of wisdom? God’s word has much to say about wisdom. While the book of Proverbs contains few commands and still fewer promises, it offers much guidance on how to live successfully in God’s world, God’s way, for God’s glory. Wisdom helps us know when and how to apply principles. Part of wisdom is seeking godly counsel from mature believers; if you are a college student, these are not likely to be your peers but rather spiritual mentors in your life.

Does it violate the rule of love? Up until now, the decision-making process could seem very self-focused, but that ends with the rule of love. In our decisions, we must ask whether our choices will help or harm others. While we may have liberty, if using that liberty would lead another believer into temptation, that choice is off the table (1 Cor. 8:7–13), and likewise if it would set a poor example (1 Tim. 4:12). On the other hand, if a choice would eliminate an opportunity to show love, we must be careful that our motives are not selfish. Even Jesus came not to be served but to serve (Matt. 20:28).

After working through these four questions, it may be that you have multiple choices open to you. Check your motivation for each choice and seek godly counsel in case you have missed anything, but if you have truly sought the will of God in Scripture and prayer through the whole process, pick the choice that seems best in light of scriptural wisdom. While deciding purely based on our desires will lead to sin (James 1:14–15), God reshapes our desires as we walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16–17) so that we can consult our renewed desires through the rubric of Scripture.

When we seek God in this way—knowing Him as He has revealed Himself in Scripture, obeying His revealed will in Scripture, and seeking Him through desires renewed by Scripture—we cannot go wrong. Not only will we not choose sin, but God will make it clear if He has a better plan, and if so, He will lovingly and sovereignly direct us to the best way. You cannot “miss” God’s will by seeking God.

Benjamin Flegal teaches doctrine and Greek at Maranatha Baptist University, as well as several Spanish courses in the humanities department and Old and New Testament survey courses online. He and his wife enjoy reading, visiting museums and zoos, and ministering to college students both on campus and in their local church.





Serving in the Secret Service

On July 13, 2024, the global community watched in stunned silence as an attempt was made on the life of former president Donald Trump. What began as a moment of sheer terror quickly transformed into one of profound admiration as the brave men and women of the Secret Service sprang into action. Without hesitation, they formed a protective barrier around the former president, putting their own lives at risk to shield him from harm. Their selfless courage and unwavering commitment to safeguarding the nation's former leader left a lasting impression on all who witnessed the extraordinary display of heroism.

The Secret Service is one of the oldest federal law enforcement agencies in the United States and is recognized as one of the most prestigious and elite agencies globally. The Secret Service began in 1865 as a bureau in the Treasury Department to fight the rampant counterfeiting of America's currency. By the conclusion of the Civil War, it was estimated that nearly one-third of the currency in circulation was counterfeit, presenting a severe threat to the stability of the nation's financial system. While the Secret Service continues to tackle issues related to counterfeit money, its mission has since broadened to encompass a range of financial crimes, including credit card fraud, wire and bank fraud, and various forms of cyber-enabled financial crimes (<https://www.secretservice.gov/about/history>).

The Secret Service's protective mission began in 1901, in response to the assassination of President William McKinley. In the wake of this tragedy, Congress gave the Secret Service the task of safeguarding the President of the United States. Since then, the scope of their protective duties has expanded to encompass not only the President and Vice President and their families but also visiting world leaders, as well as candidates and nominees for elected office (<https://www.secretservice.gov/about/history>).

The stability of the free world often hinges on the diligent efforts of the Secret Service. Their commitment to excellence is crucial, as they are tasked with ensuring the safety and security of high-profile individuals, including national leaders and visiting dignitaries. Every moment on duty demands the utmost professionalism and vigilance, underscoring the profound responsibility they hold in preserving global stability.

Secret Service agents and Uniformed Division officers, while performing a highly demanding and critical role, are fundamentally ordinary individuals who grapple

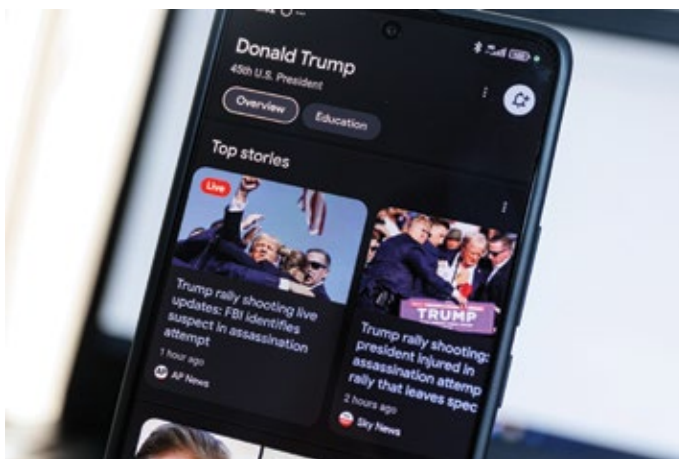
with the same personal challenges that everyone faces. They deal with issues related to life, marriage, family, health, and spiritual well-being, just like anyone else. However, their profession adds an extra layer of complexity to their lives. The nature of their work involves immense stress and frequent travel, often requiring them to be away from home for extended periods. During election seasons, it is not uncommon for agents to be on the road for months at a time, with only a few days at home. This demanding schedule places a significant burden on their families, with spouses shouldering the full responsibility of managing the household, akin to the situation faced by the families of deployed military personnel. Given the critical importance of their duties, Secret Service agents must remain focused and undistracted by personal issues, as their roles are essential for national security and public safety.

In 2017 the Secret Service started actively recruiting chaplains to revitalize a chaplain program to help support their officers and agents worldwide. I was humbled to be chosen to become one of the chaplains for the Secret Service. I believe that serving as a chaplain in the Secret Service offers a distinctive opportunity to serve my country. Chaplains play a crucial role in supporting and maintaining the well-being of agents, who are tasked with protecting the most significant leaders of the free world.

In any law enforcement agency, building trust and relationships is a gradual process that takes time. As a chaplain, engaging in activities such as visiting the Chicago field office, attending holiday parties, participating in meetings, celebrating retirements, and supporting agents during wakes or funerals for their family members all contribute significantly to fostering confidence and rapport within the agency. One of the most exciting aspects of being a Secret Service chaplain is the opportunity to work closely with agents during protective details. Secret Service chaplains have the unique privilege of riding in presidential

motorcades and meeting both former and current presidents and first ladies.

This year, the Chicago Field Office was tasked with overseeing both the Republican National Convention (RNC) and the Democratic National Convention (DNC), drawing thousands of Secret Service personnel to the Chicago area. Both events were designated as National Special Security Events (NSSEs), requiring





an extensive allocation of law enforcement resources and over eighteen months of meticulous planning. The Secret Service was responsible for the security of the most influential leaders from both parties at these conventions. As a chaplain, I had the honor of supporting the Secret Service throughout the planning and execution of these two major security operations in 2024.

Just days before the RNC was the attempted assassination of former president Trump. For many agents, the events of July 13 served as a stark reminder of the inherent dangers of their job. Family members began questioning their career choices, while the agents themselves felt disheartened by the negative media coverage. God allowed me to be in the right place at the right time to minister to many agents who were looking for encouragement and were open to talk. I spent time with the agents who formed the human shield around President Trump captured in the iconic image of him

raising his fist in the air. Some of the Presidential Counter Assault Team (CAT), among the world's most elite tactical operators, requested prayer as they started their demanding shift.

The DNC in Chicago presented new challenges, including reports and concerns of up to thirty thousand protesters potentially descending on the event, raising fears of a repeat of the 1968 riots from the last DNC held in the city. These concerns over the potential civil unrest opened many doors to minister as Secret Service and other law enforcement personnel sought the calming, supportive, and spiritual presence that chaplains could provide.

When I first became a pastor, I could never have envisioned finding myself standing just an arm's length away from the President of the United States, ministering to the Secret Service. Yet God has opened remarkable doors in my ministry to law enforcement, allowing me to serve in ways I could not have anticipated. As Jesus said, "The fields are white unto harvest," and I truly believe this is evident in the law enforcement community. Many officers face discouragement and pain, seeking solace and answers that can be found only through Jesus Christ. I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity to be involved in this unique and impactful ministry, and I am continually amazed by the ways God has guided and used me in this vital work. Let us all pray for skill, wisdom, safety, and salvation for our Secret Service and all law enforcement personnel.

Troy Shoaf is the associate pastor at Independent Baptist Church in Bolingbrook, Illinois. In addition to serving as a chaplain for the Secret Service, he is also chaplain for several other agencies and the founder of Blue Line Ministries.



Please Pass the Salt

Continued from page 26

natural sweetness to dominate the flavor. The gospel by its nature is confrontational, and if it is communicated to an unbeliever in a caustic manner, the unbeliever most likely will not even pause to listen to what is being said. By seasoning our communications with salt, the message of the Gospel "tastes better," and unbelievers may be more inclined to hear or "taste" what we have to say instead of immediately rejecting or "spitting out" the gospel message.

Second, salt increases palatability. When salt is added and the corn's sweet flavor is enhanced, making it taste so good, I have an increased desire to consume the corn. It is an enjoyable and satisfying experience. I may even go back for a second piece. When the message of the gospel is "seasoned with salt" as it is communicated to an unbeliever, it increases the palatability of the message. The result is an increased willingness by unbelievers to stop and listen to or "consume" what we have to say, and they may even be inclined to come back for more.

Finally, salt creates thirst. As I eat my salted corn, I notice my thirst increases, and I reach for my sweet tea to satisfy and quench my thirst. As an unbeliever consumes the message of the gospel seasoned with salt, it increases their thirst for truth, and they may very well reach out to you to understand how they can quench

their thirst. Consequently, Paul admonishes his audience to "know how ye ought to answer every man" (Col. 4:6). Again, it is important to know what to say or not to say, to know when to say it, and to know how to say it. The next time you eat corn on the cob, or any food, and you say, "Please pass the salt," I hope you will remember Paul's words and season your communication toward unbelievers with wisdom, discernment, and grace.

Thomas Graham currently serves as the Vice President for Academic Affairs at Maranatha Baptist University in Watertown, Wisconsin. He recently celebrated his thirtieth wedding anniversary with his wife, Cherie, who also serves at MBU. Thomas and Cherie have three adult children, two adult children-in-law, and one amazing grandson.



¹ Alta Mae Marvin, "Healthy Tip—Silver Queen Corn," *Home & Garden Information Center* (Clemson University, South Carolina), July 19, 2019, <https://hgic.clemson.edu/healthy-tip-silver-queen-corn>.

² Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 578.



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The Message We Are to Proclaim

First Corinthians 1:18 declares, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." The great and powerful message we must proclaim is the same one the apostle Paul preached in 2 Corinthians 4:5: "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." The Lord Jesus Christ must be the focal point of our message. John the Baptist said in John 3:30, "He must increase, but I must decrease." Paul wrote in Galatians 6:14, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

Today, there is a great emphasis on knowledge. Our high-tech age offers a variety of avenues for obtaining vast amounts of knowledge at the mere touch of a button or screen. But note what the Word of God says in 2 Timothy 3:7, "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." In 1 Corinthians 1:19, Paul quoted a passage from Job that says, "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Paul himself was a very educated, intelligent man. Observe what Matthew Henry wrote about Paul in his commentary:

Paul had been bred up himself in Jewish learning at the feet of Gamaliel, but in preaching the cross of Christ he laid his learning aside. He preached a crucified Jesus in plain language, and told the people that that Jesus who was crucified at Jerusalem was the Son of God and Savior

of men, and that all who would be saved must repent of their sins, and believe in Him, and submit to His government and laws. This truth needed no artificial dress; it shone out with the greatest majesty in its own light, and prevailed in the world by its divine authority, and the demonstration of the Spirit, without any human helps. The plain preaching of a crucified Jesus was more powerful than all the oratory and philosophy of the heathen world.

What a simple yet profound declaration of the supremacy of the gospel. It is Christ alone who saves mankind from sin. Note what the Lord Jesus declares in John 3:17, "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." It is such a powerful and clear truth God has proclaimed to all mankind. He does not want to condemn anyone; He wants sinners to come to Him, the giver of eternal life. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." If you have never realized that you must come to Jesus for salvation, then you need to ask Him to save you from your sins. Romans 10:9–10 promises, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." And when a person comes to the Lord Jesus, He will save that person and completely transform his life! A man of God from Austin, Texas, said, "Salvation

includes an ongoing transformation in your life." Second Corinthians 5:17 declares, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." When a person is delivered from the penalty of his sins, he will experience a change in his life that only salvation can produce.

Paul gave personal testimony of his own transformation that occurred after he came to Christ. He said in 1 Timothy 1:12–15,

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

Regardless of what you have done, Jesus will save you. Remember what He said in Luke 5:32: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." If you acknowledge that you are a sinner, turn from your sin, and put your faith in Christ alone, you can claim the promise given in John 6:37: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Ask Him to save you now, and He will!

Evangelist Jerry Sivnksty may be contacted at PO Box 141, Starr, SC 29684 or via e-mail at evangjsivn@aol.com.

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