

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Larry Helscher's Message of July 5, 2009
"Got Wisdom?"**

[Today's message focuses on the ultimate source of wisdom – Jesus Christ.]

[Topics: Wisdom; Wisdom Literature; Jesus Christ; Life to the Full]

Excerpt: In the autumn of 1960, a young college freshman entered the University of Cincinnati. The main campus building is called McMicken Hall. Now Mick and Mack are two giant stone lions that guard the main entrance to the building. Engraved in stone above the entrance is the statement, "Wisdom is the principle thing, therefore get wisdom."

This freshman had a vague idea that this quote was probably from the Bible but didn't know where. (It's actually Proverbs 4:7.) The question is did that young freshman graduate with wisdom? Did he get wisdom while he was there? He probably didn't get a whole lot of wisdom while he was there. Larry Helscher knows because he was that freshman.

Now here's the dictionary's definition of wisdom. "Wisdom is making wise decisions." Not very helpful is it? Now a lot of people will seek wisdom from their parents or from someone older. And that's probably a good thing. But where does most of society get their input? Where do they get their wisdom?

All of you would probably agree that one of sorely missed things in our society today is wisdom. Just look at your newspaper or on the Internet – wherever you get your news – you'll find there's a great scarcity of wisdom.

So where do we find wisdom? We find that a lot of people depend upon entertainment and or sports figures for their wisdom. But judging from their life styles that may not be too good. Others look for wisdom in the field of education, particularly higher education. Now one may get a good secular education there but probably not too much wisdom.

One of the results of higher education is that we wind up with a secular worldview not a Godly worldview. Here's a quote from Franklin Graham, who recently conducted a campaign in Uruguay. *"Many Christians might assume that a spiritual awakening would be unlikely in Uruguay. It's one of the secular and atheistic nations in the Americas. But this is not the case. Uruguay has one of the world's highest rates of depression, loneliness and suicides. Many of its people admit that they need hope. They have begun to realize that a secular worldview holds no real solutions to their problems."*

So the secular worldview that's offered by modern education doesn't really give us the wisdom for living. If our institutions were Christian, you wouldn't need a Campus Crusade for Christ. This and other Christian organizations try to combat the secular materialistic worldview that higher education yields.

And the third area that people might look for wisdom is government. Government wisdom. Hmm, that's almost an oxymoron isn't it? Now there are many fine people in

government. Now some in our congregation are in government or in the field of education. And that's good. Some of you may remember that Ron Kelly, in last week's message, mentioned in Paul's letter to Timothy about praying for those in authority.

And certainly we should pray for them. How should we pray for them? We can pray for wisdom for them and protection for them and their families. These are just a few of the things we can pray about. At the time when Paul wrote this letter, Caesar was a tyrant, whom Paul was asking them to pray for. So how much more can we pray for our leaders who aren't oppressing us like Caesar was oppressing Christians and others.

Now Billy Graham wrote down a prayer a few years ago and former radio commentator Paul Harvey aired this prayer on his radio program. This prayer got the highest response Paul Harvey ever got in the history of his radio program. This prayer addresses our lack of wisdom.

"Heavenly Father we come before you today to ask for your forgiveness and to seek your direction and guidance. We know that your Word says, woe to those who call evil good. But that is exactly what we have done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and reversed our values.

We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery. We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare. We have killed our unborn and called it choice. We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable. We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self-esteem.

We have abused power and called it politics. We have coveted our neighbor's possessions and called it ambition. We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression. We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment.

Search us O God and know our hearts today. Cleanse us from every sin and set us free. Amen"

The leadership in our country and in our state and in our city – all levels of government – merely reflects the character of the people. That's just the kind of government we get. Now we are to support our government, certainly, and to pray for all our leaders. And in that Scripture to Timothy one of the results of our prayers was so that we would be able to live peaceable lives as Christians.

Now one place we can go and should go to get wisdom is the wisdom literature of the Bible. Now the Psalms, Proverbs, Book of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon are the wisdom literature. And there's a term that the theologians use called "progressive revelation." It's simply the phenomenon of the Old Testament starting out with shadows and types with more and more of the revealing of truth as we get into the New Testament. Wisdom is an excellent example of it.

Ps. 111:10 says, **"Wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord."** So that's how wisdom begins. Then we come to Proverbs and it says that wisdom is the principle thing; therefore get wisdom. It still doesn't tell us a whole lot about wisdom or where we should finally go for wisdom.

Now you could say there are three categories of wisdom. The first one is carnal-physical wisdom. Even to be a successful crook, you need to have wisdom to do evil and illegal things. That's the kind of wisdom we don't want. Now the Bible has some to say about that. In **Col. 2:8**, we read: **See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.**

It's talking about deceptive philosophy, which passes as wisdom. And then in **verse 23**, **Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.**

Historically what was Paul talking about here? He was writing about what is called the Colossian heresy, which in general was a belief that you needed more than Christ for salvation. You needed secret knowledge and certain human rituals. Paul shows at the end of verse 23 that this is the wrong kind of wisdom to live the Christian life.

Also in **Romans 1:21-23**, Paul writes, **For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22) Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.**

Today people worship and lust after material things not false idols. Notice that "they claimed to be wise." That's the kind of wisdom people find in the world.

Now the second category of wisdom is what Larry Henschel calls protective secular wisdom. The Book of Proverbs could be called 'Human Relations 101,' or how to get along in this world. This wisdom will help you live a successful life in this world. It's a great foundation. And it should be studied. It's also wonderful for teaching children.

The third category of wisdom is spiritual wisdom. Let's look at **1 Cor. 2:6-7**. **We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7) No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.**

Once we are called, this wisdom is not so hidden. This is the kind of wisdom we want to zero in on here. This spiritual wisdom is also mentioned in **2 Tim. 3:15-17**. **And how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16) All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17) so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

So not only are we to get this wisdom, but we're to be equipped for good works. We're to share it with others; we're to have it emanating from our lives. Chuck Colson in his book, *The Good Life*, made this interesting statement. *"Americans have lost the ability for critical thinking."*

If you look at society today, you will probably agree with him. Well, thanks to the Holy Spirit and thanks to God's word, we can have the ability for critical thinking and we can have wisdom. In certain Scriptures you will find wisdom coupled with the Holy Spirit. For example in the instructions for ordaining deacons, it calls for men full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit.

Other Scriptures talk about wisdom and understanding, wisdom and knowledge, wisdom and foresight. Unfortunately most people today have a lack of foresight. We need to pray that our government leaders and representatives will be given wisdom and foresight.

Scripture also couples together wisdom and revelation. Revelation is wisdom and knowledge that is revealed from God, which is so important. Now we also know from Scripture that Jesus had wisdom even as a child. And that he also grew in wisdom and stature. When Jesus was 12 years old, the leaders at the Temple in Jerusalem were amazed at his wisdom.

Now some of you may be asking, "Where is this message heading?" It's heading to **Col. 2:2-3. My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3) in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.**

We started out in Scripture with fearing the Lord. Then we had the admonition to get wisdom. We have progressively come now to the fact that wisdom is in Christ. All wisdom is in Jesus. Here is **verse 3** from the Amplified Version, which is a paraphrase. **In Him (Jesus Christ) all the treasures of [divine] wisdom (comprehensive insight into the ways and purposes of God) and [all the riches of spiritual] knowledge and enlightenment are stored up and lie hidden.**

So that's where the wisdom, we want, comes from. It comes from Christ. Here is a definition of wisdom from the NLT Commentary. "Wisdom is the ability to make wise decisions in difficult circumstances."

So how do we get wisdom? Most of you are familiar with **James 1:5. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.**

It's just a simple thing of asking God in our prayers for wisdom for our family, for our loved ones, for our church, our leaders and for our self. So how do we get wisdom? We ask for it and it will be given to us.

Now here are some better definitions of wisdom. First the short definition: "Living as Jesus lived." That's the short definition of spiritual wisdom. It's the kind of wisdom we want. Now here's the long definition. "Wisdom is the ability to see life from God's perspective. And then to know the best course of action to take."

Sometimes we have some spiritual wisdom, but we don't use it properly. And when we don't, it turns out in a negative affect. This is a brief story from Evangelist Greg Laurie from his book, *How to Share Your Faith*.

Some years ago I was walking down the main street in Waikiki. I saw a man standing on the corner with a rather large sign. Emblazoned on the sign were the words "The wages of sin is death!" It also had some flames painted on it – no doubt for effect.

Yelling at the top of his voice to every passerby the overly zealous street preacher shouted such things as, "You're going to burn. God will judge you sinner. Repent or perish!" The things he was saying had a ring of truth to them. At the same time there was no love or compassion in his delivery. In fact it almost seemed that he took some kind of perverse pleasure in yelling this out to people.

So I walked up to him and tried to get his attention. "Excuse me." But he continued screaming at the people passing by. "Repent you sinners!" "Pardon me." But he continued yelling. Finally I got his attention. "What do you want," he barked.

"Well, I'm a Christian too. But I was thinking that you were only giving half the Gospel message out here tonight. It is true that the wages of sin is death, but I'm sure you are aware of the fact that the rest of that very verse says, "But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Why don't you put that message on the other side of your sign and turn it around every now and then so people get the whole picture? Then he screamed at me and told me that I was going to hell, too. It's sad when people misrepresent God like that.

So we can have a little germ of wisdom about the Scriptures, but totally present it wrong, which causes a negative effect. Now there's a positive wisdom, which is the one we want. Positive wisdom results in the Christian life lived abundantly. Jesus said that he came that we might have life and have it more abundantly.

Now did Jesus mean that we would have a lot of riches? No, not necessarily, but that we would live life abundantly because we would follow his teachings. Now **Ephesians 5:15-20** gives us a little glimpse into that. It shows us how wisdom can guide us to live.

Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, 16) making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17) Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. 18) Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. 19) Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20) always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Always giving thanks. Thankfulness is certainly a part of wisdom. We can be thankful for all that we have and all the opportunities we've been given. So positive wisdom results in the Christian life lived abundantly. True wisdom really involves what works and what doesn't work.

What is so amazing is that people who don't believe the Bible's message go on and continue to make mistake after mistake in their lives. Now all of us are prone to make mistakes of course. But the Bible reveals Godly wisdom and helps us from making so many mistakes and, of course, shows us who can give us eternal life. So God's wisdom guides us now in this life and it leads us to eternal life.

Key Scripture: Colossians 2:2-3, "My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3) in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

General Group Question: What is your greatest source of wisdom? Give an example of how this wisdom has impacted your life.

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. What do you think the difference is between a secular worldview and a Godly worldview?
2. What aspect of Billy Graham's prayer that was read on Paul Harvey's radio program moved you the most? Why?
3. Where does following human wisdom ultimately lead humanity?
4. What are some of the practical words of wisdom from Proverbs that have impacted your life the most?
5. How are you able to make wise decisions in difficult circumstances?
6. Who or what is the "wisdom of God"?
7. What is one of the main ways to gain wisdom?
8. What one aspect of advice from Ephesians 5:15-20 do you identify with the most?