



# PURSUIT OF WISDOM



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## Setting the Stage: What is Wisdom?

What do you value most in other people? We often admire people for their intelligence, competence, and success, but when was the last time you heard someone praised for their wisdom? For some, the image of a wise person might be a distant figure, retired from society in silent meditation. In contrast to this picture, the pursuit of wisdom is, for Christians, a central theme of our lives.

The book of Proverbs, written so that we might “know wisdom” (Prov. 1:2), elevates wisdom above anything else we could possess. Proverbs teaches us that “whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool” (Prov. 28:26). The writer exhorts us to pursue wisdom like an intimate friend (Prov. 7:4). We are also reminded that wisdom is “more precious than jewels” (Prov. 3:15), because to find wisdom is to find life itself (Prov. 8:35). In the New Testament, Christians are also exhorted to “look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise” (Eph. 5:15).

Since wisdom is central to the Christian faith but neglected in modern society, it is important that we first understand what wisdom is. If we want to pursue wisdom, we must know what we are pursuing.

Think of wisdom as the ability that enables someone to apply what they know. A skilled craftsman is someone who not only knows what each tool is for and what materials to use for this project or that one but also can wisely apply that knowledge to create something functional and beautiful. Wisdom is a skill that enables individuals to utilize the necessary means to achieve a specific purpose. So, wisdom is not just knowledge, but the ability to apply what knowledge one has in the best way possible. This means that someone can theoretically know how to build a boat (what materials to use, what tools are needed, what the process should look like), and not be able to build a boat themselves. It’s one thing to have a recipe. It’s a whole other thing to know how to cook. In the Bible, we have examples like Joseph, of whom Pharaoh said that “there is none so discerning and wise as you are” (Gen. 41:39), who skillfully governed Egypt. Or think about “Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whom the Lord has put wisdom and skill to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary” (Exod. 36:1; 1Kgs. 7:14).

This life skill guide addresses the fundamentals of wisdom and how to pursue it. It seeks to explore the meaning of having wisdom as well as how to become wise. We won’t deal so much with how to make every kind of decision,<sup>1</sup> but we will consider what it means to pursue wisdom for the countless decisions we must make in life. In other words, the pursuit of wisdom is the act of becoming a wise person.

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<sup>1</sup> I recommend the reading of Andrew David Naselli’s life skill guide “God’s Will and Making Decisions.” Andy’s life skill guide is particularly helpful in the decision-making process, exploring not only what God’s will means in the Bible, but also helping Christians to make wise decisions.

Decision-making is the act of making a choice—a specific action that reflects the wisdom one has cultivated. The pursuit of wisdom is in the realm of character development and not just decision-making.

So, we will focus on the practice of pursuing wisdom. We will explore five interrelated ways to pursue godly wisdom. Some ways are more foundational, but they are all needed in order for you and me to become wise.

- The Fear of the Lord – the foundation of true wisdom
- Christ – wisdom incarnate and redeemed
- Prayer - pursuing wisdom in the power of the Holy Spirit
- Scripture - the source and guide for wisdom
- The Local Church – the framework for the pursuit of wisdom

Let's begin with the most fundamental of these ways to pursue wisdom:

## Part One: The Fear of the Lord—The Foundation of True Wisdom

The first book of the Bible starts with the words “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). From this simple yet profound introduction, we learn that there is one God, and he created all things. Some verses later, we read that “God created man in his own image” (Gen. 1:27). Human beings were created to reflect God himself. Human beings are not divine but were created in the image of God. Since God is the creator and we are creatures made in his image, then, if we want to know ourselves, we must know who God is.

The Bible also teaches that “the Lord by wisdom founded the earth” (Prov. 3:19), “in wisdom you have made them all” (Ps. 104:24), and that all things were made “for its purpose” (Prov. 16:4). “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).

Imagine a piece of art, perhaps a painting or a sculpture. An observer can study its colors, textures, and lines, and offer theories about its meaning and purpose. However, their observations are mere speculations or, at best, deductions based on what they can see. Only the artist can say what it is and what purpose they had behind their work. If this is true for a human author who is limited and flawed, how much more can we say about a perfect God who is the author of all things that exist?

To sum this up, then, there is one God who created all things wisely and good for a purpose which he himself determined. Human beings are part of God’s wise and good creation, made in his very own image. Therefore, to know God is necessary in order to know ourselves, our purpose in life, and, consequently, to pursue wisdom.

Entire books have been written on the attributes of God, and our space in this life skill guide is very limited. But I want you to take some time to think about what the Bible teaches about the one true God. God is spirit, transcendent and majestic. He is infinite, self-sufficient, and immutable. Although he is knowable, God is incomprehensible (above what our minds can fully understand). God is omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipresent (not limited to space or time). He created, sustains, and rules over all things. God is also holy and just. He is perfectly pure, and he justly punishes all evil.

The one true God is glorious beyond imagination! He was not created by us or in our image. He cannot be controlled or domesticated, nor does he need his creatures to exist—he alone has life in himself! Despite our limited understanding, the only proper response we can offer to God’s perfect attributes is a profound sense of “awe”. That is, the one true God is to be feared (respected).

No wonder the Bible affirms that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7), and “the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10). The fear of God is the proper response of human beings before God and his works. But what does it mean to fear God? Isn’t fear a bad thing?

We aren't talking fear like what you feel when you think there is a monster under the bed. This fear of the Lord consists in having reverent awe before God. "Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!" (Ps. 33:8). The fear of God leads to obedience, love, and worship. As we read in Deuteronomy 10:12: "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul"? This was God's plan since he created us in his image—that we fear him and live for his glory.

There is bad news, though. After Adam and Eve ate of the fruit God had forbidden them to eat, we read in Genesis that they hid themselves from God (Gen. 3:8). When Adam was questioned why he hid himself, he said: "I was afraid" (Gen. 3:10). God had given Adam a command, and he disobeyed. God is holy and just, and he had told Adam that the consequence of his disobedience was death (Gen. 2:17). A holy God cannot have any communion with sin. A just God must punish all sin. Once Adam sinned, fear remained the only proper response to God. But now, as a sinner, Adam's fear was no longer just reverence and awe. Now, Adam (and every human who came after him) must fear God's judgment and condemnation.

The prophet Isaiah also knew something of fear when he "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" (Isa. 6:1). In his vision of God's glory, Isaiah saw angels who stand humbly before God and worship him. In contrast, Isaiah responded to the sight of God's glory with terror: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:5). In God's mercy, Isaiah did not receive what he deserved. In God's grace, we read "your sin is taken away, and your sin atoned for" (Isa. 6:7).

The Bible teaches that "all have sinned and fall short of God's glory" (Rom. 3:22), "none is righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10), and "all have turned aside" (Rom. 3:12). After Adam sinned, all human beings were born into the same situation. We all failed to respond appropriately to who God is. In our foolishness, we all failed to fear, obey, love, and worship him. And because he is holy and just, all people stand guilty and are justly condemned before God. Just as Isaiah, we all need God's mercy and grace.

In conclusion, we all failed to be wise as we were created to be in the reverent fear of God and for his glory. We cannot perfectly respond with awe and obedience to the holy, just, and glorious God who created us in his image. As sinners, the fear of the Lord starts as a fear of judgment and condemnation because all have fallen short of his glory. Nonetheless, this fear continues to be the beginning of wisdom, because once we face the reality of who God is (holy and just) and who we are (sinners), it leads us to the heart of the Christian faith: we need a Savior. We need Jesus Christ, who is the perfect embodiment of wisdom, but also in whom our broken relationship with God is restored. He is the one who took our condemnation upon himself so that we might be reconciled to God and, through him, truly begin to live in the fear of the Lord and be wise.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. How does having wisdom differ from simply having knowledge?
2. Why is it necessary to know who God is before we can know ourselves?
3. What is the problem we face when we learn that God is holy and we are sinful? What is the solution?

## Part Two: Christ—Wisdom Incarnate and Redeemed

What cannot be said of any other human being, the Bible says about Jesus: “In whom are all the riches of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). The necessary implication is that in the pursuit of wisdom, we must focus our attention on the person of Jesus. It is in this man that wisdom is found. But Jesus is not just the means to achieve wisdom, as if we come to him just to receive something. It is in him that wisdom is found. In other words, he is wisdom. And since Jesus is wisdom, the pursuit of wisdom is intrinsically a pursuit of him as the end goal. So, it is not possible to pursue wisdom without pursuing Jesus himself and to be like him.

But what makes Jesus worthy of such devotion? Before we move forward, we must stop and ask a very important question: Who is Jesus? This was the same question Jesus himself asked his disciples: “Who do you say that I am?” (Matt. 16:15). And Peter famously and rightfully affirmed: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). This affirmation sets Jesus apart from any other human being that has lived on earth.

Jesus is the Son of God. In simple terms, being the Son of God means to be God, i.e., God, the Son. This is clear in Scripture. The Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus because “he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18). Interestingly, John’s gospel starts this way: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Before he became a man, he was eternally God with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

But Peter also confessed that he was the Christ. Christ means Messiah, the anointed one. Jesus was the fulfillment of God’s promises that go all the way back to the Garden of Eden when Adam sinned. When God cursed the serpent, he said: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). God said that the serpent would be defeated one day by the seed of the woman. The solution for the sin of Adam and Eve was promised by God in the Garden of Eden. This is the reason why the Old Testament is full of genealogies. Most of these genealogies follow the promised seed as history unfolds and God’s plan to save humankind comes to pass. We progressively are told that this seed will be a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah. Fast forward in time, God reveals that the promised seed will be a descendant of King David and Solomon. Later, Isaiah prophesied about the seed with these words: “And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD” (Isa. 11:2-3a).

The promised seed would be a man, just as God intended a man to be when he created mankind—a man whose delight was in the fear of the Lord—a man who would have a Spirit of wisdom and understanding. We read in the gospel of John: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14). It is only in the New Testament that God’s eternal and wise plan of salvation is fully revealed.

Because Jesus is God incarnate, “he is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb. 1:3a). “He is the image of the invisible God... for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Col. 1:15a, 19). He was fully human, “yet, without sin” (Heb. 4:15). This means he lived wisely, in the fear of God, a perfect life of obedience to the Father. His thoughts were pure, his words were true and always appropriate, and his actions were perfect. At his baptism and transfiguration, God the Father said about Jesus: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). No one else but God the Son could be the perfect image of God and please the Father completely.

But Jesus’ perfect life is not enough to remove the condemnation we deserve because of our sin. The penalty for sin is death. By God’s grace, Jesus not only lived a perfect life, but he died and resurrected. In his death, he paid the penalty for sins. The New Testament affirms that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8), “Christ died for our sins” (1Cor. 15:3). Not only did he die for sinners, but he also died in their place, as a representative. “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (1Pet. 3:18). There was an exchange. Sinners that deserved to be punished are declared just, while Jesus, the only just man who ever lived, was punished in their place. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2Cor. 5:21). In his resurrection, he is able to give life to all those whom he represents, who are united to him by faith. We start from a position of spiritual death— “dead in the trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). People are fools by nature, and their hearts are corrupted. The fact that Jesus is an example of wisdom is not enough for someone who is spiritually dead. All people need a new spiritual life. Jesus said that “unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Jesus resurrected to give sinners, who are spiritually dead, a new life, a new heart, with a new set of desires and the ability to pursue wisdom.

Now, you can better understand why Jesus is worthy of our full devotion and is the focus and end goal in our pursuit of wisdom. He “became to us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1Cor. 1:30). Once God forgives our sins and gives us a new life, the proper and good fear of God is restored, because now we no longer live in the fear of condemnation. In union with Christ, we are now free to live for the reason we were created—to fear God and live for his glory.

Let me ask you: have you been born again? Have you repented of your sins and put your faith in Christ for your salvation? Jesus is the only one who can save sinners. He alone can make you wise.

In short, the pursuit of wisdom is the pursuit of Jesus Christ himself, as he is the perfect embodiment of wisdom and the one through whom our broken relationship with God is restored. Through his life, death, and resurrection, Christ redeemed us from the fear of condemnation, allowing us to live in a reverent fear of God and begin to reflect God’s image, which means to become like Christ (Rom. 8:29; 1Cor. 15:49), for God’s glory.

## **Reflection Questions:**

1. Why is knowing who Jesus is necessary in order to become wise?
2. How do we go from being rebellious and foolish to redeemed and wise?
3. Have you trusted in Jesus? If not, what is holding you back?

## Part Three: Prayer—Pursuing Wisdom in the Power of the Holy Spirit

We start with prayer because it keeps us humble and reminds us that, although the pursuit of wisdom is a command that requires a continuous and deliberate effort on our part (Prov. 4:7; Eph. 5:15), wisdom is a gift that we cannot achieve on our own. “The Lord gives wisdom” (Prov. 2:6). So, James teaches that “if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” (Jas. 1:5). This promise shows God’s good desire to give wisdom to those who humbly seek it.

Perhaps the most famous example of someone humbly asking God for wisdom is King Solomon, who recognized that “I am but a little child” (1Kgs. 3:7) and asked God for “an understanding mind to govern your people” (1Kgs. 3:9). And God replied to Solomon: “I give you a wise and discerning heart” (1Kgs. 3:12). Later, we read that as Solomon wisely judges, the people “perceived that the wisdom of God was in him” (1Kgs. 3:28). “And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure” (1Kgs. 4:29). King Solomon is a clear example that wisdom is a gift that God gives to those who humbly ask. So, we should pray and continually ask God for wisdom.

At the same time, Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3 sets a good pattern for our own prayers. The apostle teaches us to pray to the Father: “I bow my knees before the Father” (Eph. 3:14). The purpose is so that “Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:17). But notice what Paul asks the Father: “that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being” (Eph. 3:16). The power that enables Christ to dwell in us through faith is the power of the Holy Spirit in us. God “is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20).

In the culture we live in, we are constantly told to believe in ourselves, that if we look inside ourselves, we have all the resources we need to succeed. But if the pursuit of wisdom was something we could achieve on our own, why would we need to ask God to give it to us? Wisdom is a gift of God, which is given to us by the Holy Spirit, and it comes by means of prayer. We pray to the Father that the Holy Spirit might give us wisdom. In order to be wise, we must be filled with the Spirit that can make us wise.

The perfect example of a wise man filled with the Holy Spirit is our Lord Jesus Christ. The gospels show us the centrality of the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ ministry. Let’s use the example of the gospel of Luke. It starts with conception. The angel tells Mary that “the Holy Spirit will come upon you” (Luke 1:35a). The role of the Holy Spirit was not merely that Mary would become pregnant without having sexual relations, but that “the child to be born will be called holy” (Luke 1:35b). What distinguished Jesus from any other man (his holiness), was an act of the Holy Spirit. This holy “child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom” (Luke 2:40). When he was baptized, “the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove” (Luke 2:22). This descent of the Holy Spirit meant that Jesus was God’s anointed but also his empowerment for his ministry. After his baptism, “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit... was led by the Spirit in the wilderness”

(Luke 4:1), where he would be tempted by the devil. Jesus resisted the devil's temptations in the desert by the power of the Holy Spirit. After being tempted, we read that "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee" (Luke 4:14). It is in the synagogue that he reads publicly a scroll of the prophet Isaiah that said, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Luke 4:18; cf. Isa. 61:), which Jesus confirms to be a prophecy concerning himself (Luke 4:21). Jesus was full of the Spirit of wisdom, which Isaiah had foretold concerning the Messiah (Isa 11:2).

In order to become more and more like Jesus, we must also be filled with the Holy Spirit. If we want to pursue wisdom, we must be like Jesus, who was filled with the Holy Spirit of wisdom. So, when Paul prays for the Ephesian church he asks that "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him" (Eph. 1:17); and for the Colossian church he asks "that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all Spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Col. 1:9).

Similarly, we are exhorted to pray "at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints" (Eph. 6:18). And even in our prayers we have the promise that "the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26). The Spirit we pray the Father might give us to strengthen us, is the same Spirit that actually prays for us. It seems the same principle was in Paul's mind when he commands the Philippians to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12b–13). We pursue wisdom in the certainty that the God who saved us and gave us a new life will not only command us but also guarantee that we are able to obey what he commands.

Let us pursue wisdom by praying at all times for God to fill us with the Holy Spirit. We pursue wisdom by praying, in the certainty that God will grant us what we desire because we pray according to his will.

Now, we must understand that when we pray for wisdom, we are not asking God to give us direct special revelation. Wisdom is what allows us to apply what we know about God and ourselves.<sup>2</sup> The wise person is not omniscient, nor does wisdom require direct special revelation. In fact, it is because we do not know all things, nor did God reveal to us all things, that we need the ability to apply what we do know with discernment. The wise person knows that "the secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). Wisdom is not about having access to a special secret knowledge hidden from others, but the ability to apply to our lives what God has revealed to us, which leads us to the next point.

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<sup>2</sup> Let me recommend you again Naselli's life skill guide, where he defines wisdom as "the skill to live prudently and astutely." Because Naselli focuses on decision-making, his life skill guide complements and gives very practical advice on the practice of wisdom in the decision-making process of our daily lives.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Is it normal/natural for you to pray that God would give you wisdom? If so, what kinds of things do you ask God for wisdom for? If not, why not?
2. Why do we need to ask God for wisdom even as we're told to pursue wisdom?
3. Who gives us wisdom? How?

## Part Four: Scripture—The Source and Guide for Wisdom

We have been defining wisdom as the ability that enables someone to apply what they know. Wisdom is more than knowledge, but it cannot be less. In fact, true wisdom presupposes that what we know is true. In order to be wise, we need to be knowledgeable. A good lawyer must know the law of their country and how the judicial system works. In the same way, if the fear of God is the proper response to who God is, then we need to know God in order to respond appropriately. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Prov. 9:10). Only fools despise knowledge.

The question, then, is not whether we need knowledge to pursue wisdom, but how we can know the truth (i.e., how we can have access to an infallible source of knowledge). In order to be wise, we need to fear God. And in order to fear God, we must know him. We already know that God has revealed himself perfectly in the person of his Son, God incarnate, our Lord Jesus Christ. But how can we know about Christ?

You probably already know the answer to this question. The only reliable and infallible source of knowledge is the Word of God. Although we had to deal with more fundamental aspects first, I have been assuming and saying that Scripture is our source and guide in the pursuit of wisdom from the beginning of this life skill guide. As I sought wisdom to write these words, I had the concern to explicitly quote Scripture so that you might be convinced by what God revealed. As the apostle Paul reminded his son in the faith, Timothy, who “from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2Tim. 3:15; cf. Ps. 119:98-100).

The Bible is the only infallible source of knowledge because the Bible is the Word of God. “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2Pet. 1:21). The Bible was written by men, but what they wrote was revelation from God. While they wrote, they “were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” So, “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2Tim. 3:16-17). Notice first that, although written by men, the Holy Spirit guaranteed that what was written was the words breathed out by God himself. What is usually referred to as inspiration, the biblical term and image is that of expiration. The words of the Bible are the very words of God. Second, because Scripture is God’s Word, it is profitable in order that we might “be complete, equipped for every good work.” Something that is complete does not need anything to be added. The Bible is, therefore, sufficient to equip us for every good work.

Of course, the Bible does not teach us to ride a bike or to change the oil in our car. The Bible is sufficient to make us “wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim. 3:15). God’s special revelation in Scripture has a very specific purpose: to make us wise. “The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple” (Ps. 19:7b). As it reveals the truth about God and us, the Bible is both necessary

and sufficient to give us the knowledge of the truth in order to lead to salvation, which can only be found by trusting in Christ. This truth is not only valid for our conversion, but also for our growth in the likeness of Christ. As our knowledge of Scripture increases, we learn more about God and ourselves; we also learn to trust Christ more.

To sum this up, the pursuit of wisdom is not seeking special revelation, or mystical experiences, or subjective feelings. It is not a secret knowledge reserved for an elite few. Instead, it is revealed truth, openly declared by God through the prophets and the apostles, perfectly embodied in God's Son, Jesus Christ, and recorded in Scripture. God's Word is to be "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105). A truth accessible to all who genuinely seek to understand it. The Holy Spirit, who inspired the Word, is the same Spirit who enables us not only to understand but to make us wise.

So, in the pursuit of wisdom it is crucial that you "do not lean on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5) and "be not wise in your own eyes" (Prov. 3:7). As a Christian, now that you have come to know Christ, you have a special responsibility to "look carefully, then, how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, (...) do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:15, 17). The will of God, which Paul wants the Ephesians to understand, is God's revealed will. No wonder Psalm 1 describes a blessed person as someone whose "delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers" (Ps. 1:2-3).

If you are reading this life skill guide, you most likely have a Bible (or several) or at least have access to one. So many of us are tremendously privileged that we can own a copy of God's Word. Let's make full use of this gift and read, study, meditate, memorize, and intentionally apply God's Word to our lives. After all, the Word that can make us wise.

Scripture and prayer fit perfectly together. True wisdom is a gift from God—one we cannot earn on our own. Scripture is the source and guide to make us wise. Prayer is our constant confession that wisdom belongs to God alone and that we are utterly dependent on his grace. It's the act of humbly asking the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit, for the wisdom we desperately need. It keeps our hearts rightly oriented, reminding us that every good and perfect gift, including the gift of wisdom, comes from above.

Let us be a people who are so saturated in the Word and so reliant on prayer that our lives become a living testament to the wisdom that comes from God alone.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. How do the Scriptures function as the source of wisdom?
2. What do your times in God's Word look like as of recent?

## Part Five: The Local Church—The Framework for Pursuing Wisdom

Every plant requires a specific amount of sunlight for its growth, the right type of soil to serve as its foundation and provide essential nutrients, and the proper amount of water to nourish and sustain it. Without these essential elements, a plant would wither and die. Just as a plant needs a specific environment to grow, a Christian needs the local church. The local church is the proper framework where a Christian grows in knowledge and wisdom (i.e., in the image of Christ).

The Christian identity is communitarian. Once we are united to Christ, we are united to all those whom he represents. The New Testament uses several metaphors to help us understand this. For example.

- A people - “But you are... a holy nation, a people for his own possession... Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people” (1Pet. 2:9-10; cf. Eph. 2:19; Tit 2:14).
- A temple - “In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22; cf. 1Pet. 2:5).
- A family - “the household of God, which is the church of the living God” (1Tim. 3:15; cf. Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19).
- A body - “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1Cor. 12:12-13a; cf. Rom. 12:4-5; Col. 1:18).
- A flock - “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” (Acts 20:28).

Membership in a local church is essential in the pursuit of wisdom.<sup>3</sup> When Paul prays for the Ephesians, his desire is that “Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:17) so that they may be able to comprehend the love of Christ “with all the saints” (Eph. 3:18). Christians can only properly comprehend the love of Christ together with other Christians. Just a few verses later, Paul tells them that God gave gifts to the church so that we might be like Christ. God gave pastors to the church “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” (Eph. 4:12–13). If you want to be wise, you must become more like Christ. You become more like Christ in the context of his body, the church, where we are built up together. A Christian separated from a local church will gasp for spiritual life, much like a fish on dry land.

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<sup>3</sup> If you are not convinced about the need to be a member of a local church, I highly recommend that you read Jonathan Leeman’s life skill guide, “The Case For Church Membership.”

As members of the local church, we worship God together. Corporate worship is one of the ways we are shaped together in Christ's likeness. As Paul says to the Ephesians, "look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, (...) be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart" (Eph. 5:15-21). In this text, Paul relates wisdom (walk as wise), being filled with the Holy Spirit, and corporate worship (represented in congregational singing). This should come as no surprise. The proper response to God is to worship him.

It is in the context of corporate worship that the Word is preached. As we established above, Scripture is the only infallible source of true knowledge. Corporate worship is God's appointed means for his Word to be proclaimed and applied to our lives. By sitting under the faithful exposition of Scripture, we gain the knowledge that is necessary for wisdom. It is through the preaching of the Word that God teaches his people, corrects our false beliefs, and makes us like Christ. As Jesus prayed to the Father: "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." (John 17:17).

It is also in corporate worship that we obey the ordinances. The Lord Jesus instituted two ordinances to be administered by the local church: baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are means by which the gospel is made visible—we see, taste, and feel the gospel. Of course, the baptismal water, the loaf of bread, and the cup do not have magical properties, but they were given to build us in the faith. In baptism, we see the gospel represented in the immersion of the repentant sinner. Baptism confirms and proclaims that the sinner was united to Christ in his death and resurrection (Col. 2:11–12; cf. Rom. 6:3–4). In the Lord's Supper, we see the gospel portrayed when a local church, as one body, partakes of the Bread and the Cup (1Cor. 10:16-17). The Lord's Supper is a memorial meal in which the body of Christ remembers Christ's body, which he gave in the place of his people, and Christ's blood, which he shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

Each local church also has pastors or elders. They are Christ's gift to the church with the purpose that we might become like him. "And he gave... shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12). They are to be men of exemplary, Christ-like character who are able to lead God's people by God's Word. "An overseer must be above reproach... able to teach" (1Tim. 3:2). He must be above reproach because he has to set an example to the church, being able to say like Paul: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." (1Cor. 11:1; 1Cor. 4:16; Phil. 3:17). Just as Paul, Timothy is also exhorted to "set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1Tim. 4:12b). Godly pastors exercise their authority for the good of the church. Church members are commanded to "obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls." (Heb. 13:17a).

But, as important as pastors are in the life of the church, it is clear in the New Testament that all the members are actively involved in the ministry of the local church. First, realize that pastors were given "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). The body of Christ is built when the work of ministry is accomplished by the saints who were equipped by their pastors.

All the members of a local church should be committed to one another, helping one another to pursue wisdom, to be like Christ. God's Word exhorts Christians to "love one another" (John 13:34), "serve one another" (Gal. 5:13), "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2), "bearing with one another" (Eph. 4:2), "be kind to one another... forgiving one another" (Eph. 4:32), "comfort one another" (1Thess. 4:18), "encourage one another and build one another up" (1Thess. 5:11), "confess your sins to one another and pray for one another" (Jas. 5:16). So, "let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another." (Heb. 10:24-25).

All these commands mean that not only do we seek to help others to be like Christ, but also that we let others help us to be like Christ. "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice" (Prov. 12:15). "Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future." (Prov. 19:20).

To sum up, the local church is where we pursue wisdom. It is in the context of a local church, as committed members, that we learn, and grow to fear, obey, love, and worship God.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Are you a member of a local church? If not, why not?
2. Why is the local church the best context for how we grow in wisdom?
3. What are ways you try to serve the members of your church?

## Conclusion: A Living Testimony—The Ongoing Pursuit of Wisdom

In this life skill guide, we have sought to understand the nature of godly wisdom, moving beyond popular understandings to anchor it firmly in a relationship with God. We began by defining wisdom not as mere knowledge, but as the ability to apply what we know. We saw that the pursuit of wisdom deals with our character, not just decisions. It's about becoming a wise person, not simply acting wisely. Then, we explored the pursuit of wisdom which starts with (1) the fear of God, (2) the incarnate and redeemed in Christ, (3) pursued in the power of the Holy Spirit, (4) having Scripture as its source and guide, and (5) which grows in the context of the local church.

We started with the foundational principle: the fear of the Lord. True wisdom begins with a reverent awe before God, our Creator. This reverence is the proper response to God and his works, and leads to obedience, love, and worship. However, our sinful nature has turned this good fear into a fear of condemnation, which led us to our need for Christ. Jesus is not just a wise teacher or a good example. He is wisdom incarnate and redeemed. He is the perfect image of God, who lived a perfectly obedient life and died to redeem us from our sin, reconciling us to God. By being united with Christ, our fear of condemnation is replaced by a renewed, loving fear of the Lord, freeing us to live for his glory.

With our relationship to God restored in Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit in us, we are able to pursue wisdom in full dependence on God's grace through prayer. We learned that wisdom is a gift from God, one we must humbly ask for. As we pray, we are filled with the Spirit of wisdom that rested on Jesus Himself, enabling us to grow in Christ's likeness. This supernatural gift doesn't come as a secret revelation but through God's revealed Word. The Bible is our infallible source of truth, breathed out by God Himself and sufficient to equip us for every good work. It is the "lamp to our feet" that guides us, corrects us, and makes us wise for salvation. The pursuit of wisdom, therefore, is a continual act of growth in the knowledge of God's Word and reliance on the Holy Spirit to illuminate and apply it to our lives.

Finally, we saw that the pursuit of wisdom must occur in its proper context: the local church. Just as a plant needs the right environment to flourish, Christians need the local church to grow in wisdom. The church is a people, a temple, a body, a family, and a flock where we are equipped and built up together. It is where we worship collectively, sit under the authority of faithful pastors, and practice mutual love and encouragement. The church is the God-given space where we encourage one another to love and good works, guided by the wise counsel of other Christians.

Ultimately, the pursuit of wisdom is a process that will only be completed when we get to heaven and are with Jesus. It is a lifelong journey of becoming more like Jesus, who is the perfect embodiment of wisdom. This is the very purpose for which we were created: to reflect the image of God, for his glory. We are called to be a people who are so saturated with the Word, so reliant on prayer, so devoted to

Christ, and so committed to our local church that our lives become a living testimony to the wisdom that comes from God alone.

“Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages, but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith - to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.” (Rom. 16:25–27)