

WISDOM

by John D. Beckett

Some years ago one of our large customers copied our product, a sophisticated combustion device for heating homes. They spent more than \$2 million on design, testing and tooling. They confronted us with their development, expecting to either compete with us head on, or have their new product be a “weapon” to drive down our selling price. But that we couldn’t do out of respect for other customers. We were in a box. We needed wisdom and asked God to guide us.

Then, “out of the blue,” sprang a radical thought. We would ask our customer how much they had invested in their clandestine project and offer to reimburse them entirely. In return, they would guarantee to buy from us for a minimum of five years. As we met, we proposed this improbable solution. Their stunned silence spoke volumes. They hadn’t seen this coming! Yet, within minutes they agreed to our proposal. While it seemed to go against their strategy, we later learned they had discussed their scheme to build a knock-off of our product with a few key customers and found them outright indignant. God knew all this and gave us a way forward and a successful conclusion. He gave us wisdom!

I’ve often wished for more wisdom, to help guide business decisions and to be more effective working through everyday dilemmas. So I decided, during a recent summer vacation, to take a deep dive into the Scriptures to see what the Bible says on this topic. I was surprised by what I learned. Following are a few takeaways.

The Bible mentions the term “wisdom” 234 times. A third of these references are in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, most of which King Solomon wrote. God honored his search for wisdom and blessed him with a “breadth of mind like sand on the seashore.” I love that description of how God equipped this remarkable king. People came from all over the world to learn from him.

Job, living hundreds of years before Solomon, describes his quest for wisdom. He concludes that it cannot be found in nature, nor purchased with gold. It is hidden from all but God. He describes his discovery of wisdom’s source this way: “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom.” (Job 28:12-28) David and Solomon reached the same conclusion—that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” (Ps. 111:10; Pr. 9:10)



“Fear of the Lord” also embraces an awe of God. The Apostle Paul exudes in his awe of the Lord with this benediction in a letter to Timothy, his son in the faith. “He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him are honor and eternal dominion.” (1 Tim. 6: 15-16)

I find it awe inspiring to gaze at the stars on a clear night. With the unaided eye we see only a glimpse of heaven’s vastness. Yet photographs taken from the Hubble space telescope as it

orbits 360 miles above earth identify our own galaxy, the Milky Way, as but one of 100 billion galaxies. Astronomers believe we may discover as many as 200 billion galaxies once a new space telescope, the James Webb, is launched in the spring of 2019, at 100 times the power of Hubble. Here is a staggering prospect: the number of galaxies throughout the universe could total nearly 30 for every man, woman and child on earth. Our God is an awesome God!

What is wisdom's source? Solomon tells us: "the Lord gives wisdom." (Pr. 2:6) He also tells us the Lord stores up wisdom. Picture an inexhaustible reservoir, filled with God's wisdom, releasing its precious contents.

Proverbs 18:4 provides this beautiful imagery: "The fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook." We can picture wisdom cascading like a crystal clear stream over rocks, logs and tree limbs—all for our benefit!



James Webb Telescope

God's wisdom enabled Daniel and his colleagues to escape death when they were on the brink of execution. They were able to interpret King Nebuchadnezzar's troubling dream, prompting this magnificent response: (Daniel 2:20-23)

Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to *whom belong* wisdom and might.

He *gives wisdom* to the wise...

To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for *you have given me wisdom* and might.

In italics are three keys to wisdom: God is the source; he bestows it on his people; we must receive it.

Jesus, though only 12 years old, astonished others with his wisdom. Learned scholars were "stunned at his understanding and answers." (Luke 2:47, God's Word translation) Have you noticed wisdom, on occasion, that springs from the lips of young people (along with all the crazy stuff)? That's a reminder that each of us is hardwired to receive God's wisdom. Growing in wisdom is a lifelong process. Perhaps one day we can become as "wise old owls."

The Apostle Paul provides great insights on wisdom. For context, he battled Greek culture everywhere he ministered. He cautioned that the "wisdom of the Greeks" could take people captive "by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elementary spirits of the world, and not according to Christ." (Col. 2:8). Christ's provision stood in stark contrast, for in him "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Col. 2:3) Rest your faith, he admonishes, not on the wisdom of man, but in the power of God. (1 Cor. 2:5)

James, in the New Testament's most expansive comments on wisdom, is very practical. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will

be given him.” (James 1:5) As we ask, we connect with heaven where wisdom resides and heaven generously responds. We complete the linkage when we receive—it *will* be given to us.

A pastor friend pointed out to me that “ask” in the James passage is in the “present imperative” which is to say wisdom exists in the progressive, continuous sense. In other words, ask and keep on asking—during your next business meeting or phone call, or while wrestling through a problem with your teenager or business colleague.

Wisdom, when God gives it, requires a response—and that response is to act on what we’ve been given. As he concludes the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus contrasts two people, one wise, one unwise. The first heard what Jesus said and put it into practice. He built his house on a rock. He acted. The second also heard but didn’t act. He built on sand and watched his house collapse, swept away by the storm. I’m sure he felt foolish, and he was. Even Jesus called him foolish. (Matt. 7:24-27)

Conclusion

Consider these four “A’s” as keys to gaining biblical wisdom—Awe, Above, Ask, Act.

Awe: The fear, or awe, of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Walter Henrichsen notes, “During the last two centuries the distance between God and man was all but forgotten in Christian thought. Human logic decreed that people are basically good. Since people are like God, God is like people.” Henrichsen pointedly reminds us: “You worship a God who is holy, transcendent and eternal. Never lose your awe of it all.” (Day 258, Diary of a Desperate Man)

Above: It shouldn’t surprise us that true wisdom resides with our awesome God. James describes wisdom from above as “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.” (James 3:17) Its counterfeit, he says, is “earthly, unspiritual, demonic.” These contrasting attributes help us gauge the source in many situations.

Ask: What an invitation! We deprive ourselves if we rely solely on our wits, expertise and experience. Ask and keep on asking.

Act: Wisdom is an action word, not an academic or theological concept. As we act in faith, God releases a “bubbling brook” of insight, discernment and guidance from his infinite reservoir which then flows down into our daily lives—which further increases our awe of God!

We might view these four in a circle where one progressively leads to and fuels the next.

God’s provision for us is without bounds. A favorite verse of mine is: “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness.” (2 Pet. 1:3 NIV) That includes wisdom in time of need.

If we’re alive, we face challenges. Wisdom resides with our holy, infinite God. Ask. Hear his counsel. Then act. This is his desire for us. This is his precious provision!