



"Life would be infinitely happier if we could only be born at the age of eighty and gradually approach eighteen."
—Mark Twain

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Knowledge and Wisdom (Part One)

Author Sandra Carey writes, "Never mistake knowledge for [wisdom](#). One helps you make a living; the other helps you make a life." Put another way, knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is knowing not to put it in a fruit salad!

Knowledge is having information, knowing facts, possessing skills acquired through experience or education. Wisdom, however, is knowledge of what is true or right coupled with proper judgment as to action. We can also think of it as the ability to think, act, or discern what is best or applying common sense and experience at the right time, at the right place, in the right way.

We assume that wisdom comes with age, which is partly true but not a given. We all know someone of a certain advanced age who still does dumb things—and on the flipside, we have all seen a young person make excellent decisions. Knowledge and understanding form the basis of wisdom, and over time, then, a person gains experience. On a physical level, this experience combines with knowledge to give us insight, leading to wisdom.

Plenty of learned individuals with extensive life-experience understand little to nothing about the Bible and the wisdom it contains. Most people can memorize and recite the Ten Commandments, but do they understand them? Can they expand them to apply their principles to various situations? Without God's Holy Spirit working in them, they are merely repeating words. Their wisdom is merely "on a physical level."

The primary Hebrew word for "wisdom" is *ʾokmh* (*Strong's* #2451), a feminine noun used 145 times in the [Old Testament](#). It means "skillful, wisdom, wisely." Solomon uses *ʾokmh* 41 times in Proverbs and 28 times in Ecclesiastes, meaning that just under half of its biblical appearances come from one writer, Solomon. *ʾokmh* indicates "wisdom" but can also refer to technical skills or special abilities, such as the artisans in Exodus possessed whom [God](#) used to make things for the Tabernacle.

Solomon uses it in the sense of "the right use of knowledge; using common sense; or skill in living and in relationships with others." This kind of wisdom accrues over time. We naturally become wise, or skilled in living, as we age, right? Solomon himself possessed great wisdom, but he did some stupid things in his dealings with women and foreign gods. He began with great wisdom, but toward the end of his life, at a time when his wisdom should have been at its peak, he seems to have lost it.

So we will look into the seeking *and* keeping of wisdom, beginning in [Proverbs 1:1-7](#):

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion—a wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, to understand a proverb and an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Notice in verse 2 that wisdom and instruction go together. The wise man listens and learns more. Verse 3 again pairs wisdom and instruction. Verse 4 tells us that these proverbs will give a young man knowledge, something not always easy to accomplish. When a young person reaches the late teenage years, he knows so much. He goes off into [the world](#), college, work, travel, or whatever he chooses to do, and later comes back to share that knowledge with the poor, old parent, who is in desperate need of enlightenment. *The Contemporary English Version* puts verse 4 in an understandable way: "From these [the Proverbs], an ordinary person can learn to be smart, and young people can gain knowledge and good sense." (*Contemporary English Version*® Copyright © 1995 American Bible Society. All rights reserved.)

Even though Solomon lived 3,000 years ago, this wisdom is timeless.

Verses 5 and 6 tells us that the wise will continue to learn! They will not stop learning, seeking understanding, and growing. With the young mentioned in the previous verse, the reader may assume that Solomon implies a contrast here, that the "wise" are older. This may well be the case, but it does not mean that wisdom is confined to those of the senior set. Typically, it does but not always. Anyone, of any age, with the gift of God's Holy Spirit, through study, prayer, and meditation can gain wisdom, that "skill in living" that we all need and want.

In verse 7, the very beginning of knowledge, which we must possess to gain wisdom, is the "fear of the LORD." *The Good News Translation* renders verse 7 as, "To have knowledge, you must first have reverence for the LORD. Stupid people have no respect for wisdom and refuse to learn." (*Good News Translation*® Copyright © 1992 American Bible Society. All rights reserved.)

An article appears in the news just about every week of yet another professor somewhere spouting off learnedly on some subject but sounding like a complete moron! The professor sounds this way to us because we process his words through the knowledge and wisdom filter that God has given us. This filter, which has developed in us over time spent in His Word, governs our thoughts and actions. The professor may be quite knowledgeable in his field

of study and even in the wisdom of the world, but God and His Word play no role in his life. So, by the biblical standard, he is a "fool"—or one of the "stupid people," as *The Good News Translation* flatly states it.

Next time, we will pursue the idea of how valuable godly wisdom should be to us.

- Mike Ford

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Ecclesiastes and Christian Living \(Part Nine\): Wisdom as a Defense](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Ecclesiastes is a book of wisdom. The kind of wisdom that it teaches, however, is not of the purely philosophical variety, but is a spiritual sagacity combined with practical skill in living. John Ritenbaugh explains that this kind of godly wisdom, if applied, will protect a Christian as he experiences the trials and tribulations of life in this world.

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