

The Gift of Wisdom (19)

A gifted story: "It's going to fall down any day now!" Everyone looked up at the top of the steeple at the sagging cross. "Someone's going to get killed when it comes down." "We've got to take it down now." The feeling of panic was spreading through the Council. "I wonder how bad it really is- maybe we should just have someone check it over first." Bob spoke softly, and everyone listened. Everyone always listened when Bob finally spoke because it seemed he was usually right. He liked to wait until everyone had shared their thoughts, and then he would ask an insightful question or two, and render his opinion. In the end, Bob's wisdom prevailed and the cross was simply repaired.

Biblical references:

1 Cor. 12:1-8— *The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all. The Spirit gives one person a full of wisdom, while to another person the same Spirit gives a message full of knowledge.*

James 3:17-18— *...the wisdom from above is pure first of all; it is also peaceful, gentle, and friendly; it is full of compassion and produces a harvest of good deeds; it is free from prejudice and hypocrisy. And goodness is the harvest that is produced from the seeds the peacemakers plant in peace.*

2 Peter 3:15— *Look on our Lord's patience as the opportunity he is giving you to be saved, just as our dear brother Paul wrote to you, using the wisdom that God gave him.*

Definition and comment:

The gift of Wisdom: the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to know the mind of the Holy Spirit and to receive insight into how given knowledge may best be applied to specific needs arising in the Body of Christ. With this gift the Spirit endows particular Christians with an understanding of God's will and work as it relates to the living of life.

In the early church a "message of wisdom" served a revelatory purpose by enabling a few specially chosen individuals to receive the hidden and secret wisdom of God. There was a close kinship between this gift and the gift of prophecy. The Apostles and Prophets exercised this gift regularly, and the wisdom the Paul received resulted in a considerable amount of Scripture. Many feel that the "message of wisdom" was fulfilled upon the completion of the New Testament.

However, it is still commonly accepted that "wisdom"(vs. a "message of wisdom") is needed by every Christian in order to find the right course to take after considering various sources of information. Some people are endowed with a special ability to sift through all the facts and see the bottom line, to understand the direction that needs to be taken after hearing all the possibilities and considering all the details. These are the people today that we believe have the gift of wisdom. Although special inspiration from God is not ruled out, the gift is more likely to be exercised to choose the best logical course of action.

Affirm that you have this gift; questions to ask yourself:

Have you applied spiritual truth effectively to situations in your own life?

When a person has a problem, are you usually able to guide them to the best biblical solution?

Do others ask you for workable ideas or alternatives?

Do your recommendations for church positions or solutions to problems often turn out well?

Can you intuitively arrive at solutions to fairly complicated problems?

Are you comfortable grappling with a variety of possibilities and determining which appears best?

Areas for study and personal growth:

It is especially important that you understand the nature of your gift of wisdom as it applies to you. Study all appropriate Bible passages to clarify the difference between a “message of wisdom” and the “use of wisdom.” Read especially: 1 Cor. 2:4-13; 4:1; 12:7-10; 13:8-12; James 1:5; 3:13-18; Peter 3:15-16. Also read about the wisdom of Solomon: 2 Chronicles 1: 1-12; 1 Kings 3:1-28.

There is considerable responsibility attached to being known as a good decision-maker. It will be important for you to develop the discipline to hear all sides fully, to gather and absorb all relevant facts and consider all perspectives before making a determination as to the best course of action to take. Learn how to do this methodically and to document the details that support your conclusion.

Having the wisdom to make right choices carries the burden of delivering the advice thus generated, and this may not always be popular. Learn how to present your determination in a convincing manner, helping all sides realize how their views were carefully considered and weighed. Work on laying out your finding compassionately and always under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Insure that you give attention to the urgings of the Holy Spirit in your deliberations and decision-making through prayer. Learn to subjugate your own beliefs, preferences and particular dogmas as well as those views of people in a position to influence you in favor of making truly wise determinations base on the evidence and guidance of the Spirit.

Develop the ability to ask probing and pertinent questions that bring out what everyone needs to hear. Study basic logical concepts (as well as fallacies) that will help you analyze arguments and see truth more readily. Appropriately targeted questions can often help a person see things in a different light.

Study group dynamics to learn how people interact in a group setting. This will give you insight into why people may be reacting and contributing in certain ways to the group discussion and better enable you to get to the heart of the matter at hand.

General ways to use the gift of wisdom:

Personally: assist family or friends in making good decisions

Within the church: be a council member or officer; plug in to task forces or committees (see more specific church service opportunities in the Booklet *Channels for Using the Gifts*).

Within the wider community: serve on any of various community service boards

For reflection:

Having wisdom and being able to convey it are two very different things. Your gift of

wisdom will enable you to readily see a truth that you may find incredible others fail to see. You will need to be patient enough to give others time to “see the light” as is evident to you. Steven Covey, in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, presents a good discussion on paradigms that shape our thinking. Helping people to shift their paradigms is an important step in broadening their range of acceptance of new ideas. You will need to have a good grasp of where people are coming from as you seek to exercise your gift of wisdom and communicate your conclusions.

Wisdom is not the only gift needed for good decision-making. The logical answer may not be the right answer. As such, you will have to factor in the contributions of people with the gift of discernment—these people have a sense of what is right and wrong, what is good and what is evil, what is appropriately motivated and what is not. When it is determined, however, that the course under consideration is a good one, wisdom should be employed to help determine the best direction to take for the task to be appropriately completed to everyone’s satisfaction.

In some ways using wisdom is like playing chess—you have to look ahead at all the possibilities and see which avenues are clear and which are fraught with peril. It takes a lot of hard thought to be a grand master chess-player. Similarly, exercising wisdom is no easy task, but when thoughtfully done, perilous situations are avoided and the church is victorious.