

How to Get Wisdom Become a Fool

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking wisdom, both human and divine, by defining wisdom as factual knowledge, situational insight, and necessary resolve to achieve righteous goals. It explores the risks and rewards of being considered a fool for Christ in a world that values worldly wisdom, encouraging a joyful embrace of potential insults and shame for the sake of true wisdom and faith. The sermon highlights the paths to wisdom, including valuing, praying for, and pursuing wisdom, walking with wise teachers, and viewing all things in relation to Jesus Christ.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:18, Proverbs 4:7, James 1:5, Proverbs 2:6, Proverbs 13:20, Psalms 90:12, Colossians 2:3, 1 Corinthians 1:27, Acts 5:41, 1 Peter 4:14

Topics: "Seeking Wisdom", "Embracing Foolishness for Christ"

Description

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Transcript

Because you are stronger now, would you come and make us wise that we might live lives that make clear to the world that you are superior in every way that is worthy. Don't leave us now. Help us continue to worship over your word, I pray.

And Lord, grant that you would speak in such a way that those who are here pondering whether they should seek wisdom in this school would hear from you. I ask this in Jesus' name, amen. My assigned topic is Get Wisdom.

So I'm going to take the first half of the message and talk about what it is that you should get, and the second half and talk about how to get it. What is it? As a rule, if someone asks you to define a word, you should respond by saying, according to whom? In what setting? In what book? In what chapter? In what verse? Because definitions vary according to speakers, according to context, according to time, and even within the Bible. So in general, be wary of doing what I'm about to do.

I'm going to venture a definition of wisdom that in general, I think, covers almost all the uses in the Bible. Risky. And I do this because we have to talk to each other.

And you cannot carry on a conversation with anyone and pause and define every word. You can't do it. Conversations and communication will come to a screeching halt if you say, Well, they taught us at them college and seminary that we have to define our words.

And so word, definition, word, definition, word. It's over, right? We're not going to communicate. So we have massive assumptions every time we're talking to each other that in general, we know what we're talking about.

So, I'm going to venture a definition that in general, if you talk to me, this is what I would mean about wisdom. So first a general definition, then we'll get more specific. Generally, the greatest human wisdom—and I say it that way because then you can deduce from the definition gradations of less great from this.

The greatest human wisdom is the factual knowledge and the situational insight and the necessary resolve that together has the greatest likelihood of achieving the intended righteous goal. So, for example, a military battle, justice on your side, the intended righteous goal is victory. A wise general will have the factual knowledge he needs—the terrain, the weather, the strength of the opposing army, where they're located, how they fight, how skilled are his own troops, how weary are they from the day before, and lots of other factual knowledge without which he will act the fool.

And he has to have the situational discernment and insight so that at the critical moment, the way the enemy is slowing on the right flank signals to him, one thrust from my elite troops at that point will cause the entire day to be mine. And then he must have the resolve to do it, knowing everything hangs on this decision. In a sinful and dangerous world, almost all acts of wisdom require some measure of courage.

So, wisdom combines knowledge of the facts of reality, specific, immediate discernment, insight, intuition. This is what separates the good counselor from the paid counselor who's not good. He's got lots of factual stuff in his head.

He doesn't get you. Just doesn't get you in this situation at all. He's just not discerning and necessary resolve.

You won't act as wisely as you could if you're ignorant of relevant reality, if you're undiscerning of the immediate dynamics of the situation, and if you don't have the resolve to act because you're lazy or fearful. Now, the reason I said having these things gives you the greatest likelihood of success in achieving your intended righteous goal is because only God never fails to achieve his intended righteous goals. The wisdom of God, his general knowledge of reality, his situational discernment, his necessary resolve, always succeeds.

No exceptions. He attains his ends. That's not true of finite human beings, believing or unbelieving.

The greatest human wisdom, with all its factual knowledge, all of its situational insight, all of its necessary resolve, will sometimes be thwarted in achieving its intended righteous goals because only God has the power to guarantee his wisdom. So, let's define God's wisdom then without qualification. Divine wisdom is the perfect factual knowledge of reality and the perfect situational insight and the omnipotent resolve that together will succeed in achieving his intended righteous goals.

Oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments. How inscrutable his ways.

They cannot be fathomed by humans. They cannot be thwarted by humans. For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be glory. Amen. I love the wisdom of God.

I love the God who has perfect wisdom. Now, I said that I would get more specific. That's the general definition of wisdom best among men and in God.

Here's my more specific definition. The greatest human wisdom is the factual knowledge of reality and the situational insight and the necessary resolve that will succeed in attaining full and lasting happiness. So, I'm not qualifying it.

Like has the best chance of attaining. I'm not. That's gone.

Because God has ordained that no power in the universe can keep his redeemed people acting in his spirit given wisdom from attaining full and lasting happiness in his presence forever. Nothing can hinder it. Finally.

First Corinthians chapter 2 verse 7. We impart, the apostles to believers. We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God which God decreed before the ages for our glory. Oh my.

That divine wisdom planned, planned for his people before creation cannot fail. He's not crossing his fingers. When that wisdom is imparted to us by the Holy Spirit in the new birth, and we walk according to that wisdom in faith, we cannot fail to be happy forever.

You cannot. It was decreed for your glory which won't bore you. So, my more specific definition of the best human wisdom, the kind that we want and we can have, blood bought by Jesus, given by the Spirit through faith, that wisdom is the factual knowledge, situational insight, necessary resolve that together succeed in attaining full and everlasting happiness.

Now, before we turn to how do you get that, let me give you some Bible. He's like, you didn't quote Bible yet, except kind of sideways. Okay, here's the foundation where I'm building.

2 Timothy 3.15, the sacred writings are able to make you wise for salvation through Jesus Christ. Now, notice how wisdom works. It is a means to a goal.

Wisdom is always a good means to a good goal. The Scriptures, it says, make you wise unto, wise unto, wise unto, you get this, wise unto salvation. It's going somewhere.

Wisdom is how you get there. It's a means to an end. So, I'm inferring from this text that Paul means the Scriptures impart to you the necessary knowledge of reality, the necessary discernment of situations, and the necessary resolve unto salvation.

They impart to you what you will need to walk on the narrow road of faith and obedience that results in final salvation, full and everlasting happiness. Or Proverbs 3.13, happy is the man who finds wisdom. Biblical wisdom is not a dead-end street in the cul-de-sac of misery.

It's a path, it's a road to lasting happiness. Or Proverbs 24.13, my son, eat honey, for it is good, and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste. Know that wisdom is such to your soul.

Wisdom's like that to your soul. If you find it, there will be a future, a honey-sweet future, and your hope will not be cut off honey-sweet forever, if you find wisdom. Or Proverbs 19.8, he who gets wisdom loves himself.

Not meaning finds himself lovely. No, no, that's not what it means. It means embraces for himself a glorious future.

He who finds wisdom embraces for himself a glorious future. Okay, here's the beautiful summary from Proverbs 8.32-36. Wisdom is talking, I love the way she talks. And now, oh sons, listen to me, wisdom, listen to me.

Blessed are those who keep my ways, walk wisely. Blessed are those who keep my ways. Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.

For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord. But he who fails to find me injures himself. And those who hate me love death.

Could it be clearer that wisdom is the knowledge, the insight, the resolve that successfully leads to full and everlasting joy? Or Proverbs 16.16, to get wisdom is better than gold. Why? Gold can buy almost anything, almost anything. It can't buy life, can't buy joy forever.

It can buy lots of earthly things, can turn men into idiots. Folly is a joy to him who has no sense. But it cannot buy what we want, what we need most, full and everlasting happiness.

Only wisdom, true wisdom can do that. Those who find wisdom find life. And all who hate her love death.

Why don't you put my picture up? Outside my study at home, hanging on the wall is this. And I pass it every day. I have for 17 years.

It's a calligraphy from Timothy Bottson. A friend sent it to me. That's a pure silver piece at the top and a pure gold piece underneath.

I have no idea what they're worth. They're not coming out of that frame unless somebody breaks into my house. And it says, choose my instruction instead of silver.

Knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is more precious than rubies. Nothing.

So you're heading to work, you're heading to speak, you're heading who knows where you're heading today. Nothing you desire can compare with her. Why? Because she leads to the fulfillment of all your desires.

End of definition. Get wisdom. How? When I was in the 11th grade, I wish I remembered her name.

She was quite the teacher. It was a trigonometry class. At least half of it was trigonometry and then I forget what the other one was.

I never made calculus, but trigonometry was my last end of mathematics. Yes. Never again will I take any math course.

I love scientists. I love them. On her wall was Proverbs 4-7.

The beginning of wisdom is this. Get wisdom. And in all you're getting, get insight.

That's a strange verse in a trigonometry class. But it made the point. Don't be neutral.

Right? Don't be neutral. Okay, so here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to give you, I think, I forget how many, but paths to wisdom that I'm not going to focus on.

But I feel like the one I want to focus on would be so lopsided. If I didn't mention these, then it would be strange. So, here's the ones I'm not focusing on.

I love them. Hope you'll love them too. Some of them might be appointed for you.

Number one, get wisdom by prizing her. Proverbs 4-8. Prize her highly and she will exalt you.

She will honor you if you embrace her. So, don't be neutral. Prize her.

Esteem her. Desire her. Cherish her.

She will honor you with her presence if you prize her. If you're neutral, she will walk away. She's not dumb.

Neutrality is not attractive to God or wisdom or any human being for that matter. Don't be neutral. Number two, pray for it to come, for God to give it.

James 1-5. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God. Ask God who gives generously to all without reproach and it will be given.

Number three, get wisdom by pursuing her. Prizing, praying, pursuing. If you make your ear attentive to wisdom, if you seek her like silver, if you search for her as for hidden treasure, you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

So, don't be passive. Don't be neutral. Don't be passive.

Listen. Seek. Pursue.

She will be found by those who prize her, pray for her, and pursue her. And you should ask, pursue her where? And my answer might be Bethlehem College and Seminary. And why would I even think of that except the fact that this is preview day? The reason I would think of it is because we intentionally work hard here to help you on the path of wisdom, to pursue it.

And there are five biblical ways to pursue wisdom that we self-consciously try to help you with. Number one, we are committed to helping you pursue wisdom in the Word. Psalm 19 7, the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

You will not be a wise person apart from the testimony of the Lord. Therefore, the burden lies heavy on us. Can we help them walk in the testimony? Number two, we are committed to helping you pursue wisdom not only in the Word of God, but in the world of God.

Proverbs 6 6, go to the aunt, this is serious, go to the aunt, O sluggard, consider her ways and be wise. Huh. One of the main reasons that we believe in a liberal arts education where you read lots and lots of

stuff outside the Bible is because the Bible tells us to.

The Bible tells us there are dimensions of wisdom to be found in the assiduous, penetrating, critical, biblical observation of the world, not only in the Bible. So somebody says, whoa, you're drifting away from the Bible by reading books outside the Bible. Well, our answer is we're obeying the Bible to look at ants.

You can look at ants in the ground. You can look at ants in a biology book. Lots of ways to look at ants or a thousand other things that God Almighty in His infinite wisdom has put in this world not to be ignored.

So the great books that show these great things, oh my, what you can learn from the world, its folly, its shrewdness, its calamities, its wonders, it would be dishonoring to its maker who is all wise to ignore it when he has told you go there and get wise. Number three, we are committed to helping you pursue wisdom by helping you walk with wise teachers. Proverbs 13, 20, whoever walks with the wise becomes wise.

God never intended you to walk through the word or walk through the world alone, ever. He never intended you to do that. Walking with the wise as you ransack the word and walking with the wise as you ransack the world makes you wiser than if you ransacked the word and the world alone.

Number four, we are committed to helping you pursue wisdom in the light of eternity. Psalm 90, verse 12, teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. So I'm walking to church half an hour ago, about that, 45 minutes, and sirens coming from both ends, from HCMC, got an ambulance, from the fire station over on Franklin, he got a fire truck, and they stop at the corner of 12th and 11th, and they go into the brown building on the corner.

Can't see any problem. Number your days, old man. 72-year-old John Piper who's walked this path 12,000 times, number your days, they're going to ring for you.

That helped me preach. That made me wiser about this moment. That put a weight on me an hour ago.

That's why they were there, among other reasons. Don't miss it. Teach us to number our days that we may get wisdom.

You come to Bethlehem, you will smell eternity. The sweet breezes of heaven and the smoke of hell blow through these halls regularly. Because walking near eternity makes you wiser in the world.

The preacher said, Ecclesiastes 7, It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart and become wise. Number five, we are committed to helping you pursue wisdom by bringing all things into relation to Jesus Christ. I'm going to leave this for Jason, but I'll just quote Colossians.

All things were created through him and for him. In him all things hold together, and in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom. You miss him, you miss everything.

May be smart, you won't be wise. So those are my vital paths that I'm not focusing on. Now, we close with what I intended to focus on from the beginning.

So prize her, pray for her, pursue her in the word, in the world, in the company of wise teachers, in the light of eternity in relation to Jesus. That's my non-focus. Here's my focus.

First Corinthians 3.18, Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. Gorgeous purpose clause.

Here is an indispensable path to wisdom. Become a fool that you may become wise. He's not merely saying, if you seek to be wise in the eyes of God, the world will regard you as a fool.

He is saying we must happily embrace the role of fool in the world. Happily embrace the role of fool in the world. Quote, in order that you may become wise.

Hinna genetai sothos. We must not be ashamed of being a fool for Christ. You give it all up if you're embarrassed by Christ and his word.

Now here's the context in First Corinthians that makes sense out of that statement. Paul says that at Corinth there are wise people who are emptying the cross of its power by substituting their eloquence for the cross and its offense. The wise men of Corinth are to them cross is foolishness.

1.18 The world did not know God through wisdom. 1.21 Rather, the thoughts of the wise are futile. 3.20 The wisdom of this world is folly with God.

3.19 God will destroy the wisdom of the wise. 1.19 God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. 1.27 Therefore, become a fool that you may become wise.

This is an embrace. This is not a mere result. Why do I focus on this? I focus on this because Bethlehem College and Seminary is an academic institution.

Academic institutions, like once glorious ghost towns, breed fear of being called a fool like slums breed rats. Academic institutions or academia breed cowardly conformists posing as cutting-edge progressives. Students and teachers in academic institutions have the strongest aversion to being seen as fools in the eyes of other academics.

That's why. To be a faithful Christian, obedient to the Word of God, truly wise in Corinth or the Areopagus of Athens, where Paul was called a babbler, one of the smartest men in the first century, a babbler. To be a Christian, to be obedient to God's Word, to be truly wise in Corinth, in Athens, and in the halls of an academic institution, you must become a fool.

Thoughtful fools, to be sure. Hope-filled fools, to be sure. Happy fools with lots of serious joy, to be sure.

But fools, nevertheless, unashamed, happy fools. Not self-pitying, not dour, not defensive, not forlorn, not miserable, not, oh, poor me, fools, but unashamed, happy, hope-filled fools for Christ. So here's the crucial question for your future and our school.

Will we be ashamed of believing what the Bible teaches when the world calls us fools or worse? Or will we outrejoice the world not only in spite of their insults, but because of them? Will we be like Paul, who said, 2 Corinthians 12, for the sake of Christ, I am, take a deep breath, content with insults. Will we? Will we respond like the apostles when they were ashamed, when they were shamed as fools in Acts 5.41? They left the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be shamed for the name. That's a miracle.

We breed miracles like that here, or we fail. Go over to chapter 16. Beaten with rods, stripped, thrown in jail, midnight, they're singing.

Paul and Silas are singing. It must have galled them, those rascals who thought we got rid of them, and then there's an earthquake. Will we obey Peter's letter when he says, chapter 4, 1 Peter, Rejoice if you are insulted for the name of Christ.

The spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Will we turn from the pitiful rewards of boasting in men and remember all things are yours. I'll say it again.

All things are yours, whether Apollos or Paul or Cephas or the world or things present or things to come or death or life. All things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. Why would you boast in men or give one flip of their shaming words unless you don't believe it? So I exhort you, get wisdom.

Become a fool that you may become wise. A thoughtful, hopeful, happy fool for Christ. Why don't you stand, and I'll pray for you as you go.

Lord, these are all miracles we're talking about here. Ordinary human beings, the natural man, does not have the emotional wherewithal to rejoice at being shamed. Something happened.

Something miraculous happened. Oh, God, cause it to happen to these friends. And through this school, I pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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