

ADOPTIVE WISDOM

Ephesians 1:3-14
2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12β-19

New Store/Maysville Presbyterian Churches
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Let me jump right in here — From where do we get wisdom? In fact, what is wisdom? My *American Heritage Dictionary* defines wisdom as: (1) the ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting insight; (2) Common sense; good judgment; (3)a. The sum of learning through the ages, knowledge, (3)b. wise teachings of the ancient sages; (4) A wise outlook, plan, or course of action.”

This all sounds good. But again, where do we get this ability, or good judgment, or sum of learning, etc.? There is a clear connection between the common understanding of wisdom as a collection of knowledge and our school systems’ curricula and implied goals. Attending classes, doing homework, listening to the teachers and professors is supposed to give one wisdom. And, I agree that a certain type and a certain amount of wisdom is gained through this process. For the record, I’m a big proponent and believer in classic liberal arts education whereby one learns the foundational concepts of language and the arts, social sciences, mathematics, and the physical and theoretical sciences; all .the purpose of learning how to think and thereby, gaining wisdom.

But are there other sources of wisdom? Maya Angelou, the late Poet Laureate of the United States, tells this in her autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*:

“As I ate [Mrs. Flowers] began the first of what we later called ‘my lessons in living.’ She said that I must always be intolerant of ignorance but understanding of illiteracy. That some people, unable to go to school, were more educated and even more intelligent than college professors. She encouraged me to listen carefully to what country people called mother wit. That in those homely sayings was couched the collective wisdom of generations.”¹

Again, focusing on wisdom as collective knowledge, Ms. Angelou directs our attention to a source of wisdom we most often see in close-knit communities and in extended families. Haven’t each of us heard pithy sayings or stories from our mothers or grandmothers about life, such as how making a pie relates to good relations 234between husband and wife or brother and sister? Or, if you’re like me, your dad or granddad would relate life’s lessons to fishing, baseball, woodworking, or gardening. The wisdom gained from either source is valid and worthy — even if sometimes a bit narrow, and oftentimes a bit out in left field — meaning you’d have to go off into left field to figure out how what you heard was wise...

And then there is the wisdom that comes from the ultimate source, from the Creator of all wisdom, from the One who gives the gifts of discernment and judgment, of

¹ Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

learning and of teaching, who guides and inspires courses of action that are deemed wise — the Source of all sources — that is, God, our Lord and Savior, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, Friend, Father of all. And, as we heard from Paul's *Letter to the Ephesians*, God blesses us with grace and wisdom in Christ.

Proverbs 2:6-10 states: "For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk blamelessly; guarding the paths of justice and preserving the way of His faithful ones. Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant in your soul."

Paul puts it this way: "Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who blesses us *in Christ* with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places... He has destined us for adoption... *through Jesus Christ*, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace... that He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ..." Going on, Paul makes each point of how God's wisdom and blessing becomes ours in and through Christ Jesus.

That's the take-away here. All of our wisdom, all of our knowledge comes from God. The writer of *Proverbs* stated it, and Paul affirms it. More importantly, Paul declares that out of God's wisdom (which we receive by adoption through Jesus) we receive the blessings of redemption, forgiveness of sins, baptism, faith, and the proclamation of the gospel. And, that our response to such God-given gifts is to give praise and honor back to God. In short, we are to worship.

But that may seem counter-intuitive these days. Given what wisdom comes to us, our world, culture, and society would say, "Make a profit! "Use this wisdom for personal gain!" Yet, is that the purpose for which it was given? If we receive wisdom through Christ Jesus, how do we reflect it through the model of His life and teachings? How do we use this gift to accomplish God's purpose of bringing His Kin-dom here on earth? As Paul might have put it: "How do we take this wisdom and live out our destiny according to the purpose of Him who accomplishes all things according to God's counsel and will?"

Now, there's a question for the wise!

Yet, each of us, you and I, individually and together, have been given the gift of wisdom by God. And, we are to exercise such wisdom so that our actions work to accomplish God's purpose — that may be singing in the choir; it may be praying for

others; it may be bringing meals to those whose economic circumstances can't provide enough. God's wisdom may lead us to new things, to new ministries and missions. But, at the heart of it all is how such words and deeds bless God in, through, and as Jesus the Christ.

Our challenge is to discern and identify the gifts God has given us. And, then, to use them wisely — not for our own comfort and convenience, but for the work of the Kingdom — for as Paul puts it: God's "good pleasure."

Let us pray: God of all wisdom, of all knowledge, of all life, You alone are the true source of all that we know, all we can know. From You comes the good gifts we receive and the purpose and will to use them wisely. We ask that the Holy Spirit guides us as we seek Your wisdom, as we exercise wisdom, as we give You praise and glory and honor in making manifest Your Kingdom ruled and made visible in, through, and as Jesus the Christ, our Lord and Savior; in whose name we pray. Amen.