

Need for wisdom

By Pastor Alan Utting

'Wisdom is the reward you get for a lifetime of listening when you would rather have talked.' Eugene Peterson

After returning from a conference on *cell groups*, I proposed implementing this programme in our growing church. At the subsequent leaders' meeting, I outlined the strategy to my team, who fully supported the plan. We proceeded to launch it, appointing group leaders who took on pastoral responsibilities for their members. Despite these positive developments, I regrettably lost a valued leader and colleague as he was absent from the initial team leaders' meeting, and I did not take the time to update him afterward. This oversight resulted in his feeling excluded which is understandable. Although I regularly prayed for wisdom over the years, I recognize that, on this occasion, I acted unwisely. This experience highlights the importance of careful consultation and timing when introducing new initiatives, ensuring all stakeholders are informed and involved in the process.

Again, Eugene Peterson puts it succinctly when he writes, 'We are glutted with information but we are starved for wisdom. We know so much about everything under the sun, but we live astonishingly trivial lives. Why? Why do we know so much and live so badly? Well, partly at least because we as a culture are admiring the wrong people and have lost touch with 'the wise'.

Biblical Perspective

Proverbs is the book of wisdom where the word 'wisdom' appears 52 times. For example:

'The Proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight... '(1:1,2).

'For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding, 2:6
'My son, do not let wisdom and understanding out of your sight, preserve sound judgment and discretion' (3:21).

Unfortunately, Solomon could talk about wisdom with impressive insight, but in the end, failed through not taking his own advice.

Observations

1. The Oxford dictionary defines wisdom as 'the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment.'
2. I was disappointed in browsing in my library on my 'leadership books' for the topic of 'wisdom' to discover that I could only find two books which touched on that subject briefly. Yet this is one of the essential qualities of leadership. It usually takes time to develop wisdom. It's as we reflect on past experiences including our mistakes, that with the Lord's help we grow. Peter Drucker puts it simply, 'Always ask about the things you are seeing, 'What does this mean?''
3. 'If we lack wisdom, cry out to God for it,' says James (1:5). Solomon initially had a desperate cry for wisdom in leading his people;

'So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?' The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this so God said to him, 'Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart' (1 Kings 3:9-12), but unfortunately through the deceitfulness of his heart, he finished his life poorly. (1 Kings 11:39).

When encountering challenges or uncertainty it is needful to seek out reliable sources of wisdom and knowledge to guide your decisions. 'In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Colossians 2:2,3 paraphrase). Relying on this promise has been a great strength to me.

4. Wisdom comes through listening to others. In seeking the truth, don't simply go to people who always agree with you. Go to those who speak the truth. 'Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy' (Proverbs 27:6).

Even little children can have wisdom. At that time Jesus said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children' (Matthew 11:25).

5. We have all had dreams of what it would be like to live in a perfect ministry world, such as having a flourishing ministry, with good team members, financial abundance and spiritual fruit in whatever form that may take. The truth is that we do not live in a perfect world.

Viv Thomas* looks at the life of Daniel, who transported out of his home country arrived in a foreign culture, where he had to learn another language along with many other things. Daniel shows us that when ministering cross-culturally, we need extra wisdom. With wisdom, Daniel learnt to walk with God in his difficult pathway.

6. Amy Carmichael gives good advice, 'others may, I may not'. Wisdom makes the right and sometimes hard choice without judging others.
7. Knowledge may lead to wisdom, but as one person rightly observes, 'the theories of this generation are likely to be replaced by others in the next generation and altered once again by the following generation'. Walk carefully.

Jesus modelled the necessity of going after wisdom, Luke 2:40, 52 as did Paul, Ephesians 1:17.

Appointing leaders without prior testing can lead to mistakes. A probation period helps assess if a candidate has the right attitude, even if opinions differ. The early church chose people already serving in similar roles (Acts 6:3), which helped prevent errors when appointing leadership.

8. When listening to significant conversations, it is sometimes useful to quieten one's heart and discern if there are other influences at work. Sometimes people may say the right thing, but their spirit is not correct. Picking this up is wisdom at work.

A prayer for wisdom: 'Give me an understanding heart so that I can govern your people well and know the difference between right and wrong' (1 Kings 3:9).

Resources

Viv Thomas, *Second Choice: Embracing life as it is* *

Gordon MacDonald, *A Resilient Life*