

**THE GIFT OF WISDOM**  
**Psalm 146 – Proverbs 24**

**Living God's Word—A Walk Through The Bible**

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When I was in the seminary I remember how there were concerns expressed by a few students—they were fearful of taking a call to a small, rural community; to a town stuck out in the middle of nowhere in North/South Dakota, Montana or even Minnesota.

There was kind of an unspoken arrogance by a few students that rural folks wouldn't be very well-read in theology or the classics; they wouldn't know the latest Biblical theologies and theories. Some said they wanted to be in a place where they could keep their mind challenged and stimulated intellectually.

When I took my first call as a pastor and moved to the small town of Maynard, MN (425 people); when I began serving the two churches in that parish, the Maynard Lutheran Church and the Wang Lutheran Church, I discovered very quickly that even though many of these folks had never read a major theological text book, many of them were very wise.

Many of these people had a far deeper faith in God than I did; probably even deeper than a number of the writers of these deeply intellectual and theological books.

I remember spending a lot of time visiting with these people on their farms, riding on tractors and combines with them, listening to their stories of faith. For me to experience how they planted those seeds each spring; how they then trusted God for the growth of these crops and for their livelihood, I knew I had a lot to learn from them and from their wisdom.

Throughout the nearly five years I served these churches I had many funerals, 49 all together. Through this I learned a lot about the hope and assurance we have of heaven and eternal life. For example, I remember shortly after Gladys died, going to see her husband, Ernest.

Ernest was an older retired farmer and was a lifelong member of the Wang Church (right out in the country). Ernest had been the leader for over 40 years of the Wang Lutheran Church's excellent male chorus (his father led the chorus for 40 years before him). When I got to his house on the farm, Ernest was busy serving coffee and goodies, and comforting all of us who came to be with him.

He kept saying, "Gladys is the lucky one; she is in a far better place; don't weep for her or me, she is with Jesus her Savior." Ernest was a saint in my life, an angel of God, who taught me a young, 27 year old pastor much from his wisdom and love for Jesus. He even got me to sing Norwegian hymns/songs in the Men's Chorus; I never knew if my pronunciation was ever right.

The Bible is very clear that there is definitely a difference between human intellect; I.Q.; book knowledge; and a person being wise and full of wisdom. Proverbs, which is a Biblical book of

wisdom, says in Chapter 1:7, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*”

This was also the debate that was happening in our Scripture reading from 1 Corinthians 2. Here the Apostle Paul was distinguishing between the wisdom of this world, that “*eloquence and human wisdom,*” and the wisdom that God gives.

Paul was emphasizing that some may think they are wise, may think they know the truth, but that it is only through God’s Spirit working in us that we are able to know God and the gifts he gives; that we are able to know spiritual things. In fact, he says that human wisdom without God’s Holy Spirit will see spiritual things being foolishness; human wisdom alone doesn’t even have a clue about the wisdom and things of God.

What was happening at that time in history was that there was a group of people known as the Gnostics who believed that knowledge was the way to salvation; who believed that only they were the “enlightened ones,” who thought they were superior to the Christians who they accused did not have such knowledge.

Believing that they were truly enlightened these Gnostics also surmised that it didn’t matter how they lived; they claimed that ethical behavior was simply relative and that they were free to do whatever felt good to them. Pretty much like many present day New Age beliefs.

Yet from New Testament times these teachings of the Gnostics have been condemned as heresy. They clearly go against Biblical truth; they have no understanding of the law or sin; no understanding of our salvation being found only in Jesus Christ.

That is why the Apostle Paul, a very brilliant and well-educated man, proclaims in 1 Corinthians 2:2 that he “*resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified*” (vs. 2). True wisdom is found in knowing Jesus Christ by faith; in being open to God’s Holy Spirit and the gifts he gives.

Now this debate concerning intellectual knowledge and the wisdom of God; between those who feel they are truly enlightened and who feel that Christians who live by faith are simply naive or uninformed, has gone on in every generation from the time of Psalms & Proverbs.

In fact, there continues to be divisions over these issues today. Some claim that Christianity has its head in the sand; that living by faith and trusting the Bible is very naive. On the other hand, some rigid fundamentalist Christians add fuel to these accusations when they assert that all scientific thought and intellectual reason is “of the devil.”

This I believe is an extremely unfortunate division for the fact that Christianity is not in any way anti-intellectual. In fact, some of the greatest minds, some of the greatest scientists who have ever lived, have been Christians. The Bible celebrates the gift of the mind; it needs to be developed to its fullest; it is important to ask questions, to struggle with issues, to use all the resources one has to research an idea or topic.

Yet the important ingredient, according to the Bible, is that we always remember that there is also a spiritual dimension beyond our own intellect; to remember that God is at work in ways we may never realize; to realize that there is in all of us a capacity for reason, for faith, for matters of the mind and of the heart. True wisdom is found in knowing the difference. It is found in trusting God and in making sure that we always see the things of our minds in a larger picture.

I have a very good friend who is a PhD, a scientist and a fine Christian. He says that every time he looks at the physiology of the human body; the new discoveries of research and science, his faith is strengthened in the wonder and awesomeness of God. The key is that he looks at science, discovery and the mind as gifts of God, and that he looks at all these things through the eyes of faith. He has, what Paul would say, the wisdom of God.

One of the great things about Christianity, about faith in Jesus, is that it is simple enough that even a little child can understand its basic truth; that Jesus loves us and died for our sins. On the other hand, the message of Christ is so challenging that many of the greatest minds, and thinkers the world has ever known, have not been able to plumb its depth of wisdom and knowledge.

One of the greatest intellectual and philosophical thinkers of all time was the Christian theologian, Dr. Karl Barth. One time someone asked him; out of all the volumes of books he had written, all the lectures and debates he had been part of, if he could sum up the most important and most helpful thing he had learned?

He said that the most important thing he learned; the center of all his study could be summed up in the little song that his mother taught him when he was a little child, “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” Dr. Barth was not only one of the most brilliant people to ever live, but he was also very wise, and was filled with the wisdom of God.

Here at Messiah these past weeks we have seen and experienced the healing that is happening in Gary Peterson’s life following a serious brain injury. Our intellect, of course, wants to give all the credit to doctors, medicine and therapists. Yet in God’s wisdom we see doctors and medicine as God’s instruments, as his hands on earth, and we know and believe that all healing is a miracle of God that defies our understanding.

In the church, as we look at the mission Christ has called us to. As we look at things like raising significant funds to add time to Charis’ position; adding a praise time following worship; empowering each of us to serve others in Christ’s name; growing Messiah’s mission and outreach, my intellect wants to say it is impossible, it doesn’t make sense.

Yet through faith and the wisdom of God I know that God can do far more than what makes sense to me. God can unite and inspire people to give far more than we might think; God’s plans for the church are always far greater than we can imagine.

How about you, my dear friend? Do you think you are wise when perhaps you are not? Do you often let your mind get in the way of living by faith? May we, each one of us, use the gifts of our minds and intellect to their fullest; may we, through the power of the Holy Spirit, know and trust the wisdom of God.