

what? where? who?

Giles Cattermole considers guidance and God's will

PART 2: godly wisdom

This is the second of a three-part series on guidance. Part 1 (God guides, we follow) was published in the Spring issue of *Nucleus*,¹ and part 3 (godly decision-making) will be in the Winter issue.

In the first part of this series, we saw that because God is both loving and sovereign, we can trust his guidance: even when we don't understand what's happening, we know his plan is good, and it will be fulfilled. We also saw that God's plan for his people is that they live holy lives for his glory. Our role is to trust him, and obey him; to be faithful and loving. Guidance is obedience. When we're faced with the sort of questions that trouble us - who to marry, what job to do, where to live - we already know what God wants for those who are in Christ: to become more like him and to bring others to know him too. Living out everyday decisions according to God's overall plan, is what the Bible calls wisdom.





Giles Cattermole is CMF Head of Student Ministries

Godly wisdom is about understanding and decision-making: understanding God and his world, and living accordingly. To start off, Proverbs is a great place to learn more about wisdom.

Wisdom starts with knowing and obeying our God: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding' (Proverbs 9:10). Wisdom is given by God to guide us in righteousness and justice (Proverbs 2:6-10). And as we live wisely, we will know God more (Proverbs 2:1-5). As we know God, we become wise, so we know God better.

Many of the proverbs are observations of everyday living, seeing how the world works (eg Proverbs 25:17, 24). They're rules of thumb, not absolute rules for all circumstances (Proverbs 26:4-5). Generally, those who live in harmony with the way God designed things will succeed and those who reject God's order in creation will do badly (Proverbs 10:4-5).

Proverbs assumes that the godly person understands God's purposes in creation. God made everything good; creation works according to the maker's instructions. And humanity's role is to rule over creation as God's image-bearers (Genesis 1:27-28). Adam named the animals (Genesis 2:19-20), and Solomon's wisdom was exemplified by his knowledge of creation (1 Kings 4:29-34). This is true for us today in medicine. As we study anatomy and physiology, we are learning how God designed his masterpiece to work; as we learn pharmacology and surgery we gain a degree of control over nature.

But wisdom isn't just about studying and manipulating the creator's world - the pagans did that too and admired Solomon for it

(1 Kings 4:34). Wisdom is about obeying the creator's Word (Deuteronomy 4:5-6), being in right relationship with him, knowing who we are and what our role is.

Wisdom is living *responsibly* in God's world - making decisions as rulers over his creation, accountable to him. We are not meant to usurp God's rule, but to rule as his regent. Nor are we to abdicate this responsibility; we are to understand God's purpose for us as rulers over his creation under him. Wisdom is living *rightly* in God's world - according to his commands. We are to fulfil our proper relationships with the world, each other and God. Godly wisdom means right and responsible relationships in God's world, according to God's Word.

We should see this wisdom in all our decision-making; when faced with ethical dilemmas as much as with those life-decisions we commonly seek guidance for. God has made us to be responsible decision-makers, understanding and thinking through our situations and coming to right and godly decisions, just as Solomon did with the baby claimed by two mothers (1 Kings 3:16-28). God doesn't promise to give us easy answers; he has made us to work them out in the light of his Word, according to his purposes in creation.

sin

But everyone, even the greatest scientist and scholar, has been a fool. No-one has obeyed God perfectly (Psalm 14); none of us on our own is, or can be, perfectly wise. Solomon, that great example of wisdom, became an idol-worshipper, adulterer and tyrant. Foolishness, failure to understand and obey, is sin. And because of sin, the order in God's creation has

become disordered. Our relationships with God, each other, and the world are broken. Bad things happen to good people (Job). Life without God is meaningless (Ecclesiastes). As medics, we see the corruption of God's good creation in the pathology department, on the wards, in every suffering patient and bereaved relative. We see it in our own lives, when our priorities and concerns so often are our own and not God's. We see it when we're taught that the primary ethical principle is autonomy, 'my choice', over and above our relationships with others or God. The Bible tells us that autonomy, the elevation of my own rule above all others, is the problem. The harmony of God's creation is seen in obeying God, loving each other, and ruling over creation. As we reject that, our world is scarred by disharmony and disorder. If we continue to reject God we face an eternal existence without him, without loving relationships, with no control over our environment.

Christ

But the good news is that God has rescued us from this mess. Real wisdom is in Christ (Colossians 2:2-3). Christ crucified is our wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:18-30). The world's wisdom is about my own cleverness and knowledge and self-actualisation; God's wisdom is Jesus, dying on the cross for us, taking the punishment we deserve for the foolishness of our sin. Jesus was the wisest man (Matthew 12:42), the only person to live perfectly in harmony with God's design in creation, under God's rule and blessing, loving others, in control of nature. And the supreme demonstration of his wisdom was to give himself for others. In his death and resurrection he brings forgiveness and new life for those who turn from their own wisdom and trust him.

- Wisdom understands the order and purpose of creation in Christ. He fulfils what it means to be a perfect human in God's image. In his death he shows what love is (1 John 3:16).
- Wisdom understands that our status is not in our intelligence or popularity or being a doctor. It's only in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).
- Wisdom lives day by day in the light of Christ. The wise build their lives on hearing Jesus' words and putting them into practice (Matthew 7:24-27).
- Wisdom seeks to tell others the good news of Jesus (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

Wisdom is to be in Christ; to become more like him; to bring others to him. Wisdom is holiness and witness, to the glory of God. Wisdom is living and speaking for Jesus. How does this help me when I'm struggling with issues I need guidance for? Whether it's a thorny ethical dilemma or deciding who to marry - whatever it is, your decision must be guided by how it will bring God glory; how it will bring people to know Jesus; how you will be acting like Jesus (1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1).

Paul's prayer for the Colossians was 'that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Colossians 2:2-3).

In the next and final article in this series, we'll see how this wisdom will shape our practical decision-making. In the meantime, read 1 Corinthians 1-3, and pray that God will give you the wisdom to understand it, and live it. ■

REFERENCES

1. Cattermole G. what? where? who? *Nucleus*. Spring 2012 21-23