

Principles for Transformation: Connecting Personal and Public Life

Eight Steps Along the Path to Wisdom

By Dr. Art Lindsley



If I were to take you in a helicopter to Afghanistan and parachute you into the middle of the country without a map and without knowledge of how to discern where one of 10 million mines are located, how long do you think you would last?

Being dropped into minefields without knowing how to avoid them is like life without wisdom. It is important to know life's terrain in order to negotiate it safely as well as to experience the fullness of life. If we are to pursue our callings to the best of our ability, we need to obtain wisdom. Really wise people have put a lifetime of effort into gaining wisdom. How do they do it? Here are eight steps.

1. Fear the Lord

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom because when we are in awe of him we are humbled. We realize our finitude and fallenness. There are several verses throughout Proverbs that note this, including:

- [Proverbs 1:7](#): *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."*
- [Proverbs 15:33](#): *"The fear of the Lord is the instruction for wisdom."*

Calvin began his *Institutes* by saying that all our knowledge comes down to knowledge of God and the self. The more we truly know God the more we can see who we are as created in God's image, fallen, redeemed, and destined for eternal life. We then know our need of knowledge, wisdom, and grace to live our lives.

2. Be Teachable

The humility that comes from properly fearing the Lord leads to a lifelong hunger to learn. Wise people are always teachable. They never feel like they have arrived. Note the following verses:

- [Proverbs 3:7](#): *"Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil."*
- [Proverbs 9:8](#): *"Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you, reprove a wise man and he will love you; give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser. Teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning."*

The wise desire to learn more knowledge, and they are also open to correction and reproof. Wise reproof is like an accurate mirror which gives a clear reflection of how you really look. The wise are always teachable intellectually and practically, although discernment is necessary.

3. Learn from the Wise

There is a tendency to learn from and model the people we are around the most. For instance, Scripture warns us about associating with a habitually angry person. [Proverbs 22:24-25](#) says: *Do not associate with one given to anger, and with a wrathful man do not keep company lest you learn his ways and get yourself in a snare.*

On the contrary, associating with and listening to the wise is highly commended. I'm reminded here of two verses, again from Proverbs:

- [Proverbs 11:14](#): *"Where there is no guidance, the people fall. But in abundance of counselors there is victory."*
- [Proverbs 15:22](#): *"Without consultation plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed."*

Cultivate relationships with wise people, then consult them on important decisions.

4. Watch Out for Spiritual Entropy

As long as we keep listening and learning, we can continue to gain wisdom. Once we stop listening, things tend toward disorder, as with the thermodynamic law of entropy.

Solomon started out as the wisest of kings, but later in his life he did some very unwise things. How was this possible?

I believe that he forgot the teaching ascribed to him (see [Proverbs 10:10](#)), as recorded in [Proverbs 19:27](#):
Cease listening, my son, to discipline, and you will stray from the words of knowledge.

If you cease to listen, you will stray. Perhaps we all know those who seemed wise but have done foolish, life-altering things. In many cases, they fell in private before they fell in public. Spiritual entropy took over when they stopped listening to wisdom.

5. Seek Wisdom Every Day

One of my favorite Old Testament passages is [Isaiah 50: 4-5](#):

The Lord God has given me the tongue of disciples, that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens me morning by morning, he wakens my ear to listen as a disciple, the lord God has opened my ear; and I was not disobedient.

Wouldn't it be tremendous to gain a wise tongue so we could speak the right word at the right time in the right way? It's possible to speak with the "tongue of disciples." How?

Whether your best time is early in the morning or later in the day, it is important to orient your life to the Lord when you wake up. Unless we spend time with the Lord daily we will not grow or gain wisdom. We need him to open our hearts and minds on a daily basis, enabling us to taste the goodness, power, and beauty of the Scriptures and pray in the Spirit ([Ephesians 6:18](#)).

6. Note the Difference

Wisdom notes the differences. What does that mean?

We face many different situations throughout our workdays. Just because you have experienced similar situations in the past doesn't mean that the present one is exactly the same.

The wise person perceives the similarities and the differences in each situation. The wise realize that they never experience exactly the same person, people, dynamic, or circumstances twice. Although past experience may be very helpful, it is essential to ask "how is this situation different than anything I have experienced?"

7. Ask God for Wisdom

Solomon asked for wisdom and received it. We are urged to do the same. [James 1:5](#) says, "*But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given him.*"

Often we have not because we ask not. While we must ask God to provide wisdom, we are not to forsake the disciplined process by which we gain it.

We are to work, study, pray, fast, and fellowship to the best of our ability, but realize we have God to thank when we make progress.

8. Recognize That Wisdom Leads to Flourishing

Those who gain wisdom are compared to a tree firmly planted, that yield fruit in abundance in due season, whose leaves do not wither and who thereby prosper ([Psalm 1:3](#)).

They experience the Lord's blessing ([Psalm 1:1](#)) which entails the Lord's favor and peace in every direction of their lives.

Above all, remember that we are being made like him, conformed to his image, who is the power and wisdom of God ([I Corinthians 1:24](#)).

I hope you find these eight steps helpful along the path to wisdom.