

“Wise Up”

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1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14

Psalm 111

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:51-58

If you were to looking for some information on the internet, most likely you would begin with a search on Google, which would, most likely, direct you to Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.com). The name “wiki” which is the name of a software tool that allows for collaborative writing and editing, (and is also the Hawaiian word meaning “quick”), and encyclopedia. Created by 39-year-old Jimmy Wales in 2001, Wikipedia’s mission is “to provide a free encyclopedia to every single person on the planet in their own language”—and they currently have over 1 million entries in English as well as Spanish, Japanese, even Bahasa Indonesian, and hundreds of thousands of contributors and editors from all over the world. Just about anything you would want to know about can be found on wikipedia (and lots of things you wouldn’t)—there are entries about current events (from the cease fire in Israel/Lebanon, to the death of the Maori queen in New Zealand) or historic ones (from the French Revolution to the Boston molasses disaster)—people, places, events, facts...it’s all there on Wikipedia.

The only problem is that all the information you find there might not be totally accurate. You see, Wikipedia is a collection of entries authored and edited by anyone who cares to go to the website and create an account but the site’s virtues are also it’s liabilities. The idea is that the wikipedia community is self-regulating because if you are using it and come across something that’s inaccurate, you are encouraged to correct it. And all content is supposed to be view-point neutral, verifiable and previously published. But, as a recent article in the New Yorker magazine put it, this online community is “no more immune to human nature than any other utopian project. Pettiness, idiocy and vulgarity are regular features of the site. Nothing about high-minded collaboration guarantees accuracy, and open editing invites abuse.” Still, Wikipedia is the 17th most popular website on the internet, and receives more daily traffic than MSNBC.com and The New York Times and Wall Street Journal online put together. (*The New Yorker* magazine, July 31, 2006, p. 36-43)

We human beings are, by nature it seems, hungry for knowledge and information. I think it’s part of how God created us. That desire to learn, to be “in the know,” is a good thing because it keeps the human race and human societies moving forward. But we need more than just access to large amounts of information. We need discernment, judgement, prudence, what the Bible calls WISDOM. Wisdom helps us figure out what information is good and useful, and what is not. Wisdom helps us decide what to do with that information; wisdom determines how our knowledge will shapes us and be translated into action.

More than knowledge, God desires for us to have is wisdom—because the source of wisdom is our faith in God and faithfulness to God’s ways.

According to Wikipedia:

Wisdom is the ability, developed through experience, insight and reflection, to discern truth and exercise good judgment. It is sometimes conceptualized as an especially well developed form of common sense. Most psychologists regard wisdom as distinct from the cognitive abilities measured by standardized intelligence tests. Wisdom is often considered to be a trait that can be developed by experience, but not taught. When applied to practical matters, the term wisdom is synonymous with prudence. Some see wisdom as a quality that even a child, otherwise immature, may possess independent of experience or complete knowledge.

The status of wisdom or prudence as a virtue is recognized in cultural, philosophical and religious sources. Some define wisdom in a utilitarian sense, as foreseeing consequences and acting to maximize the long-term common good.

That’s a pretty good entry on wisdom—and, in fact, it’s not that much different from the one that Solomon himself might have used. Solomon was just a young man when his father David died and left him to be king of Israel. As king, he had to discern between his allies and his enemies, even within his own family; he was the political as well as the spiritual leader of God’s people and had to establish good religious practices and construct a Temple for God; he had to develop peaceful alliances with some kingdoms, and prepare for battle against others. In other words, Solomon had a big job, and big shoes to fill. That’s why his first prayer to God as king was one of great humility, and Solomon’s one request was for “an understanding mind to govern the people...”. And God was so impressed with this humble request, that God easily granted it, and even gave Solomon things that he didn’t even ask for: riches, honor and long life.

Although most of us aren’t granted wisdom in a moment, it is still true that God is the source of wisdom. When we put prayer, worship, study, service to God at the center of our life as the letter to the Ephesians urges us to do; when we “abide in Jesus” as the Gospel says, that is how we become wise. We don’t gain wisdom simply by acquiring more information, because wisdom requires not just our heads, but our hearts as well. We learn to be wise through obedience to God, or as the Psalmist says, through “fear of the Lord.”

Fear is a concept that we are well acquainted with these days. Things like Code Red and Al Qaeda; illnesses such as AIDS, or cancer, or even the avian flu; gang violence, identity theft. There are lots of things for us to fear.

Wikipedia has an entry on fear, too:

Fear is an unpleasant [feeling](#) of perceived [risk](#) or danger, whether it be real or imagined. Fear also can be described as a feeling of extreme dislike towards certain conditions, objects, people, or situations such as: fear of [darkness](#), fear of [ghosts](#), etc. It is one of the basic [emotions](#) and is linked heavily to the [amygdala](#) neurons.

Fear may underlie some [phenomena](#) of [behavior](#) modification, although these phenomena can be explained without adducing fear as a factor in them. Furthermore, application of aversive stimuli is also often ineffective in producing change in the behaviour intended to be changed. Fearing objects or contexts can be learned; in animals this is being studied as [fear conditioning](#), which depends on the [emotional](#) circuitry of the [brain](#).

Fear inside a person has different degrees and varies from one person to another (see also [phobia](#)). If not properly handled, fear can lead to social problems. People who experience intense fear have been known to commit irrational and/or dangerous acts.

Some philosophers have considered fear to be a useless emotion; other thinkers note the usefulness of fear as a warning of potentially unpleasant situations or consequences. Still others consider that fear is the fuel that feeds the ego's (as in "separating/judgmental agent") engine.

"Neither a man nor a crowd nor a nation can be trusted to act humanely or to think sanely under the influence of a great fear." - [Bertrand Russell](#)

It might also be useful to note that "fear" in the sense of 'God Fearing' means "To regard with reverence and awe". (OED)

The emotion of fear is not the same as Fear of the Lord. Fear of the Lord is reverence, trust, knowing that ultimately God is in control—that there is a larger plan. And yes, bad things happen, even to good people, but basically life is good and God is good, and beyond this life we have the promise of life eternal. Fear causes us to be more isolated, timid, fearful of our neighbors and of the future. But Fear of the Lord helps us live bold and faithful lives and to be wise.

When I became a parent I was introduced to a whole new world of fear: SIDS, poisons in the home, drownings in the bathtub, children killed by airbags....God forbid you give your child a blanket or let them eat a peanut before they are a year old. A recent Parent's magazine said on the cover: Drowning Dangers—read this article right now! It made me feel like I should never go near the water. But Marcus and I decided from the beginning that our attitude toward parenting was going to be *wise*. We put our kid in the car seat, immunize her, make sure she get enough sleep and good nutrition (most of the time). Worrying and being afraid doesn't make us better parents. So watch your kids, love them, and relax.

A recent Newsweek magazine (August 14th, 2006, p. 37-43) about Billy Graham talked about how time, life experience and the nearness of death have changed his perspective on many things theological and political. The article is a very brief retrospective on this evangelical icon, but it doesn't shy away from reflecting on

his failures as well as his incredible contributions. Throughout his life, Billy Graham has inspired millions to accept the Christian faith with a message of grace and truth. Even as a close religious advisor to many presidents, he has struggled with where to align himself politically in the midst of a rapidly changing society.

These days, in the midst of failing health, he still spends many hours each day still pondering scripture. He's not afraid of death, although is still a little apprehensive about the process. And Although he remains steadfastly committed to the fundamentals of our faith, he also seems to have grown more comfortable with mystery—taking a less literal view of scripture and becoming even more open to the power of God's grace. He said, "It would be foolish for me to speculate on who will be [in heaven] and who won't. [God] gave his son for the whole world and I think he loves everybody regardless of what label they have."

As Jews and Muslims struggle violently in the Middle East, as terrorists misuse Islam to justify hatred and violence, as fundamentalists of every faith seek to define God by their own narrow view—Billy Graham's view seems very wise to me. As the article says, "[His] tranquil voice, though growing fainter, has rarely been more relevant." We need more religious leaders with this kind of wisdom in our world today.

Wisdom is so important because it determines how live in the world. When we fear the Lord, we know that we can trust God and believe that our faith is sufficient. Knowledge is good; it informs us, but wisdom helps us grow in faith and faithfulness. So let us once again seek to put God's wisdom at the center of our lives. May our worship, praise, prayers and songs fill us with the Spirit of God today, that we might go into the world a little wiser. Amen.