

An introduction to unlocking wisdom



Education in schools should involve academic and intellectual development toward the acquisition, not only of knowledge and understanding, but of wisdom: how to live. Wisdom is more than just experience; it is gained when the events of life are combined with a range of knowledge and understanding which brings insight beyond man's limitations. Wisdom is available when relevant values and truths are applied to shape decision-making for present and future life choices, including work and leisure.



Wisdom is not just a key – it is, we believe, the true aim of education.

The English government has focused on three aims that the national curriculum should fulfil for its pupils: that they should be successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens.¹ There is a missing ingredient in the National Curriculum and indeed it cannot fully achieve these aims without it.

Good education needs to involve academic and intellectual development toward the acquisition, not only of knowledge and understanding, but of wisdom: how to live.

'Knowledge without wisdom is like a pile of books on an ass's back' (Japanese proverb)



What is wisdom?

Wisdom is 'the know-how'

Wisdom is knowing *how* to apply and use your knowledge in the right way.

Wisdom is how to work *with* the grain rather than *against* the grain. In any profession there are the right ways to do things and the wrong ways to do things. If an electrician does not disconnect power before he deals with live cables he could be killed. If a pilot disregards the safety procedures he endangers his and others' lives. There are principles in life which can help us go *with* the grain of life rather than against it.

Knowledge without wisdom means a pupil is only partially equipped. To know the theory of how to drive is not the same as driving. We need to apply our theory and we usually need an instructor. We earn money but we need an advisor to give us the benefit of their experience and wisdom in order to make the most of our finance.

¹ Qualification and Curriculum Authority DfE

It is generally believed that, if we teach pupils knowledge of the dangers of smoking, drugs, unprotected sex etc. they will be equipped. Whilst instruction and knowledge is important it will not prevent abuse. Human nature is such that, for the majority of us, whenever we are told *not* to do a thing, we automatically want to experience it,

Unless we give pupils a taste for wisdom – how to live rightly – through vision and purpose so that they steer clear of such abuses, they will experiment and pay the penalty.



Fleetwood Mac

Part of wisdom is understanding that we are all uniquely gifted with certain abilities and motivations. This is because, we believe, that we are created beings who each carry aspects of God's image. He has created us to know him but also for purpose. There is a plan for our lives which, when found, will totally fulfil us. Mike Fleetwood, whose band Fleetwood Mac has sold tens of millions of recordings, struggled totally at school and yet was intelligent. His dream was to be a drummer. After much frustration and unhappiness it was only when, as a teenager, Mike followed his 'vision' that he found who he was meant to be. He tells it like this: "One day I walked out of school and I sat under a large tree in the grounds. I am not religious, but with tears pouring down my face, I prayed to God that I wouldn't be in this place anymore. I wanted to be in London and play in a jazz club. It was totally naïve and ridiculous, but I made a firm commitment to myself that I was going to become a drummer."² A series of 'breaks' happened and the rest is history. Mike had found purpose.

'Man's wisdom delights in seeing himself as resourceful, self-sufficient, self-determining and not utterly dependent on God's free grace.'³ Mike Fleetwood prayed, reaching out beyond himself to God and accessed God's grace – his kindness and help.

Wisdom has little to do with the educational establishment's methods of assessing 'intelligence'. Whilst such tests have some limited value they cannot recognize the uniquely gifted way in which people are made and who need to find their 'element' or area of giftedness. Winston Churchill is a prime example. He failed consistently at school but in later life found his motivational gift of creative wisdom and courageous leadership, becoming an international hero.



Isn't wisdom all to do with experience and science?

Experience can give us some measure of wisdom, although it may also make us too hesitant to try things again. Thomas Edison, the inventor, failed hundreds of times before he

² Ken Robinson: The Element p.29

³ John Piper: Think p.149

succeeded in inventing the light bulb. He said: "*Genius is one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration. Accordingly, a 'genius' is often merely a talented person who has done all of his or her homework.*"

Maturity can provide some aspects of wisdom but may also make us too cautious to try new ideas.

Consequential thinking is a key aspect of wisdom. We need the ability to perceive the likely consequences of our actions. If, however, we remain limited to human understanding we may miss creative solutions.

'The wisdom of 'the wise and understanding' has produced remarkable scientific advances. But it leaves out the most important reality, namely, God. From one side it is stunning in its achievements, and from another side it is stunning for its stupidity in missing the main thing.'⁴

Wisdom is available when the right values and truths are applied to shape decision-making for present and future life choices, including work and leisure.



How can we find the wisdom we need?

We believe we need to look beyond ourselves. Every one of us needs access to an ability and a perspective beyond ourselves. Just as Bilbo in *Lord of the Rings* needed Gandalf's greater wisdom and instruction, so we need mentors. (See HighLight Key: Mentoring)

Wisdom, we believe, is found when we live life *with* the grain i.e. God's way. Life is most fulfilling when we find what his plan is for us. 'I know the plans I have for you: plans for your welfare and your good.'⁵ 'We are God's workmanship created...to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.'⁶



Wisdom from the greatest teacher

Wisdom – the way to live life as it is meant to be lived – is found in the life manual made available to us from the principles that Jesus, the greatest and most effective teacher in history, taught to his students. His teachings have been applied increasingly throughout the world by millions of people for the last two thousand years. Paul, the famous New Testament apostle and missionary wrote that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in him.⁷

⁴ John Piper; Think p.151

⁵ The Bible: Jeremiah 29:11

⁶ The Bible: Ephesians 2:10

⁷ The Bible: Colossians Chapter 2:3

Jesus' wisdom addressed how to be a successful learner: the issue is the quality of the teacher and the heart and vision of the learner. His relationship with his heavenly Father, from which he directed his life choices, was the source of his wisdom.⁸

His wisdom addressed how to be a confident individual: the issue is to place our confidence in the God who made us so that our 'confidence' is not arrogance but humility. Humility is a key ingredient of wisdom.⁹ As the Greek poet Cicero said: 'Many could have attained wisdom if they had not thought they already had it'.

His wisdom addressed how to be a responsible citizen with respect for authority and a desire to serve one's community, rather than love for one's self.

In all three of these aims his own example was the key for the learners.

To the Greek, knowledge was the main way to virtue; the path to the good life was through the intellect. But to the Hebrew, wisdom went beyond intellectual pursuit; it was practical. The Hebrew word often used for wisdom is *hokmah*, meaning dexterity and skill. Wisdom was established upon God-given principles of right and wrong. This is illustrated by that famous biblical book of wisdom: Proverbs. These principles had to be fleshed out in a relationship of obedience to God in daily living; in the common-sense dimensions of personal relationships.

*'In Israel the distinctive understanding is that wisdom is rooted in adherence to God. For the Hebrew, wisdom depends on right conduct in obedience to the will of God, rather than theoretical insight'...In Hebrew understanding "One becomes competent and expert as far as the orders of life are concerned, only if one begins from knowledge about God."*¹⁰

Thus the Hebrews never divorced wisdom from life. They never viewed wisdom as abstract, cerebral theory or as purely cognitive. Rather, it was skill in applying knowledge to any specific area of life; all of which areas the Word of God (Torah for the Jews and both old and New Testament for Christian believers) addressed and to which it was relevant. God is concerned with the whole human being and the whole of life.¹¹



Wisdom – practical and spiritual

Christians believe wisdom is derived both from the Word of God (which for them includes the teaching of Jesus and the rest of the New Testament) and the help of the enabling power and counsel of the Holy Spirit, often called 'the Spirit of wisdom', who is given to help

⁸ *Ibid.* John's Gospel: Chapter 5: 19, 30

⁹ *Ibid.* Proverbs 11:2

¹⁰ G. von Rad: Wisdom in Israel. p67

¹¹ Marvin. R. Wilson: Our Father Abraham

all believers.¹² Jesus addressed ethical and practical issues of honesty; being a responsible citizen; being a good employer and employee; business principles; stewardship of money; how to have healthy relationships; forgiveness; care and consideration for neighbours and property; respect for governing authorities and the law; care for children, the elderly, the vulnerable and our responsibility to the poor, to name just a few. We recommend an open and unbiased search of the truths he taught and a willingness to try them out and apply them, both in daily life and in education. Jesus said, “If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God, or whether I speak on my own.”¹³

World-renowned youth teacher, Bill Gotthard, says, “Wisdom is seeing God’s principles are universal and non-optional and how every civilization and individual will succeed or fail in direct relationship to how they follow them.”¹⁴

Many independent Christian schools (some of whose stories are recorded¹⁵), and many others with a Christian ethos, have proved that these principles build better school communities where bullying, violence and drug abuse is minimal and the adult pupils make a positive contribution to society, confounding accusations that these schools produce bigoted adults. Rather, healthy character and good academic results are the norm.¹⁶



The fruit of wisdom

Wisdom is proved by its fruits. The fruits resulting depend on the foundational assumptions on which we base our security. Often so-called ‘wisdom’ in the world is rooted in the selfish ego: it is motivated by selfish ambition and is self-promotional. Such ‘wisdom’ is usually short-lived and shallow. So often the ‘experts’, to whom the world looks, are disqualified by the fruits of their lives. Author Paul Johnson exposes the appalling records of many so-called ‘experts’; educationalists like Rousseau who abandoned all his illegitimate children and now is regarded as a source of wisdom for the raising of children and the training of teachers!¹⁷

The above points about a wisdom derived from faith in God do not deny that there is a wisdom learned by experience and by practising all sorts of skills without religious faith. But, if there is a god of greater intelligence, as Christians believe, it makes sense to learn wisdom from him: why not ask him? This will take humility and searching and a willingness to practice and test the validity of these principles. HighLight believes that such wisdom is

¹² The Bible: John’s Gospel: Chapter 14:26

¹³ *Ibid.* John’s Gospel chapter 17:7

¹⁴ Bill Gotthard: Basic Youth Conflicts

¹⁵ S. Baker & D Freeman: The Love of God in the Classroom. Focus Publishing.

¹⁶ S. Baker: An Investigation of the new independent Christian Schools. (PhD thesis:2009)

¹⁷ Paul Johnson: The Intellectuals

desirable and possible for the pupils and teachers in our schools and, indeed, that it is tragic for them to be deprived of access to it.

**We need to be aiming for WISDOM in
COMPETENCE, CURRICULUM and CHARACTER**

HighLight offers **Keys of Wisdom** for developing competence and character in the teacher, their teaching and those taught.

Wise teachers still have a huge and positive influence on their pupils and therefore on the future culture.

See the website www.highlightonline.org for more details on how to access these other resources and our keys through becoming a Friend of HighLight.