

**July 4, 2021**  
**How to Live Your Life: A Manual of  
Step-by-Step Procedures for the Compleat Idiot**  
**Proverbs 1:1-7**

My first car was a 1972 VW Van. They are about the simplest vehicles mechanically. So I bought *How to Keep Your Volkswagen Alive: A Manual of Step-by-Step Procedures for the Compleat Idiot* (c.1969), a bunch of tools, and prepared to do a tune-up (the original "Complete Idiot book"). In the end ... I returned most of the tools and took the van to my neighbourhood mechanic. When the clutch went in Bruce Crossing, Michigan, the local mechanic was bamboozled. I drove 400+ kms to Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario – without a clutch – to the nearest VW dealer to find a mechanic who would touch it (it turns out you must remove the entire engine to replace the clutch throw-out bearing). Sometimes, going back to the manufacturer is best. You respect someone who really does know their stuff. You recognize, "This is the expert." You appreciate their wisdom. You take them seriously.

In the Old Testament, several books could be categorized as *How to Live Your Life: A Manual of Step-by-Step Procedures for the Compleat Idiot*. Technically, scholars call these "wisdom books" – the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs (Song of Solomon). These contain the collected reflections and writings of wise sages, like David and Solomon. We'll be looking at some of this wisdom for life over the summer.

In the Bible, wisdom comes when we recognize we are God's people (created by Him) in His world (created by Him). We seek His guidance for our lives. And we live it out. Wisdom challenges us to think, "How do I live as a person of God in this world."

Proverbs begins: *"These are the proverbs of Solomon, David's son, king of Israel. Their purpose is to teach people wisdom and discipline, to help them understand the insights of the wise. Their purpose is to teach people to live disciplined and successful lives, to help them do what is right, just, and fair. These proverbs will give insight to the simple, knowledge and discernment to the young. Let the wise listen to these proverbs and become even wiser. Let those with understanding receive guidance by exploring the meaning in these proverbs and parables, the words of the wise and their riddles. Fear of the Lord is the foundation of true knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline."* (Proverbs 1:1-7).

"Fear of **the Lord** is the foundation of true knowledge," writes Solomon (Proverbs 1:7). Who made the world, with all its intricate natural systems – incredibly complex, yet finely-tuned, to perfectly support life? God, of course (Genesis 1:1). Who "made" us? Who made our bodies, hearts and souls? God, of course: *"You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous – how well I know it"* (Psalm 139:13-14).

The source of wisdom, then, is God. To understand the creation around us, to comprehend life in all its complexity, to deal with the big questions of relationships, meaning, and

purpose, our ultimate source of wisdom is the Maker, God, designer and creator of it all. When we need wisdom, it's good to come with profound respect and humility, recognizing God is the expert. To appreciate His knowledge and wisdom. To take Him seriously.

**"Fear of the Lord is the foundation of true knowledge"** writes Solomon (Proverbs 1:7). The Hebrew word "fear" does not mean "terror." "Fear" of God in Scripture can be translated as "reverence," "awe," "honour," "respect" and "obedience." "Fear of the Lord" recognizes God is all-wise, all-knowing, all-holy, all-powerful, and, in humility, admits we're not. Because we believe God is the Creator, because we know He is the One who knows what is right, true, and best, and because we love Him, we honour Him, worship Him, AND obey Him.

In general, when we follow God's wisdom, when we are living as we are meant to live, things MAY go well for us. This is not an ironclad guarantee, for we live in a fallen world. However, in general this principle holds true.

### ***Wisdom versus Folly ...***

Proverbs 1:7 goes on: *"Fear of the Lord is the foundation of true knowledge **but fools despise wisdom and discipline.**"* Think about your car again. Foolishly, I can ignore the manufacturer's guidelines for my car. I can never change the oil. I can abuse it. When it goes wrong, I can blindly tinker with it. If my car ends up with serious issues, should I be surprised? Should I blame the maker?

In the Bible, the opposite of a wise person is a fool. A fool, in Scripture, isn't a joker or clown. *"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'"* (Psalm 14:1). A "fool" is someone who deliberately rejects God, the Maker. A fool relies only on their own "smarts." This is the car owner who says, *"I'm going to ignore the maker's instructions and do what I want to do for maintenance, etc.; I certainly will not going to go to the manufacturer for advice or help ..."*

When you live with the premise there is no God, there are logical consequences. Without a belief in God, there is no purpose or rationality: life is empty and pointless. There's no basis for ethics: we look out for ourselves, and only for ourselves. There's no reason for love, mercy, compassion, honesty, integrity, or forgiveness – unless they help us get ahead. There is nothing wrong with lying, cheating, violence, racism, or sexism, if they help us succeed. The results are a society that is selfish and violent, with hopelessness, lies, scams, crime, fear, racism, sexism, escapism. It looks like my daily news feed on July 4, 2021.

From personal experience, it's a bleak existence. *"(Those who don't believe in God) are overwhelmed with dread ..."* (Psalm 14:5). Dread of? The tension of having a sense of right/wrong and yet no logical foundation. Living in an ethical vacuum, where, logically, people can use and abuse one another, can trust no one, and the world is not safe. Death is the great unknown. In the end, a worldview without God has no purpose. No values. No justice. No ethics. No care and concern for others. No hope. It's bleak, painful world.

In general, when we reject God and His wisdom, things MAY NOT go particularly well for us. This is not an ironclad guarantee. However, in general this principle holds true.

## ***What is "Wisdom"?***

Wisdom comes when we recognize we are God's people in His world. We seek His guidance. And we live it out. Charles Spurgeon, a famous preacher of the 19th Century, said, "*Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. But to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom.*" Faith, lived out in life, is wisdom. Faith, not lived out in life, is just an opinion.

The key to wisdom is that we do put it into practice. Paul Washer tells a story of being late for a meeting (hypothetically). He tells his boss his excuse – he got a flat tire, got out to change it, took off a lug nut, then was hit by a logging truck. But there he is at the meeting perfectly fine: no broken bones, no hair out of place, clean clothes. Clearly, he is mad. Or he is lying. You cannot have a close encounter with a logging truck and not be changed. Washer then asks the question: "*Which is bigger – a logging truck or God?*" Would we not expect a genuine encounter with God to make some kind of difference in our lives?

If we genuinely listen to God's wisdom, it will change us. It may not be quite like getting hit by a logging truck, but genuinely following God inevitably shapes our values, priorities, and way of living. For instance, you can't read the Bible and not be struck by how different the culture of the Kingdom of God is from the culture around us. Where our culture focusses on wealth and status, Jesus says, the first and greatest command is "*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.*" Where our culture preaches personal success and blind ambition, Jesus says, "*A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'*" (Matthew 22:37-39).

Jesus modelled those values perfectly. Our challenge is to try to live them out, too. To live as Jesus would live if He were in our place, as well as we possibly can.

How do we do that? Paul puts it this way: "*So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you*" (Romans 12:1-2 *The Message* translation).

What does "well-formed maturity" look like? One possible way to think about it is to think about the end results. When we allow Him to shape our inner being, the Spirit of God grows good fruit within us: "*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*" (Galatians 5:22-23). Those are not values treasured in culture at large. But those are Kingdom of God values.

Where do we start? Because we believe God is the Creator; because we know He is the One who knows what is right, true, and best; and because we love Him, we start by listening to AND obeying God. We need to genuinely hear from Jesus. So we look to a higher moral

authority than our social media feed. As a church, we come to Jesus. We seek to hear from Jesus. We seek to life for Jesus.

A good place to start thinking about this are what Jesus says are the greatest commands:

First, He says, *"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind."* What does that mean in practice? Living out Romans 12:1-2, we let God remold us from within, rather than letting the world squeeze us into its mold. We prioritize listening to God. We internalize His values. AND we allow Him to transform how we live.

We can go back to basics, like the Ten Commandments: (1) we make Him number one in our lives (no other gods), (2) we base our decisions and values on His Word (no idols), (3) we honour Him as our King (don't misuse His name), (4) we give Him time and space in our lives (keep the Sabbath). How can I put that into practice?

*"A second is equally important."* Jesus says. *"Love your neighbor as yourself."* (5) We love, care for, and honour people around us (honour your father/mother), (6) we protect people's well-being treating them with dignity and respect (no murder), (7) we honour our commitments (no adultery), (8) we protect people's rights and property (no stealing), (9) we are people of integrity and truth (no lying), (10) we are thankful for God's goodness to us and live modestly (no coveting). How can I live that out?

Jesus calls us to be an alternative counterculture to our society, not an echo of itself. He describes it as being "salt and light." Salt preserves the good things. Salt adds spice to life. Light brings hope. Light shows us pitfalls to avoid. And it shows us the path to life. As French philosopher Simone Weil puts it: *"If I light an electric torch at night out of doors, I don't judge its power by looking at the bulb, but by seeing how many objects it lights up. The brightness of a source of light is appreciated by the illumination it projects upon non-luminous objects. The value of a religious way of life is the amount of illumination thrown upon the things of this world."*

God's wisdom lights up the landscape of reality, allowing us to see things as they really are. In God and His Word, we have a step-by-step guide to life. When we live it out, we offer a whole new, wonderful, alternative way of living. A way that, first and foremost loves and honours God. That loves and care for one another. That's unique.

What about me? Does my faith in Jesus make a difference in how I live? How might Jesus be challenging me to change, more and more, so that I live out His vision for my life?

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