

# Wisdom Hunt

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Preacher: Rev. Dr. Russell Herbert

[ 0 : 00 ] I can ask you a question. If you were going in search of wisdom, where would you go?

There's one of Aesop's fables that's told, you've probably heard it before, about a father and a son on their way to market with a donkey. And they set off, and it's not that long before they meet someone on the way.

And somebody says to them, you fool. So a donkey, what are you doing walking along with a piece of rope? A donkey is to be ridden.

Why don't you ride it? So they both shrug their shoulders. The father picks up the son and sits him on the donkey. They walk for a bit longer, and they meet somebody else.

And this time they scowl at the father, and they say, you're a bad parent. He says, how are you bringing up your son? I mean, he's just going to be encouraged to be lazy.

[ 1 : 01 ] You should be on the donkey. He should be walking. Father shrugs his shoulders, lifts his son off, climbs on, and they ride on a bit further.

Until that is, they meet somebody else, who says, you're a really, really, really cruel parent. I mean, what are you doing making your son walk all this way while you have the luxury of sitting on the back of the donkey?

So this time, the father turns to the son, and he picks him up, and he sits him on the donkey with him, and then they ride on. Until that is, they meet somebody else, who then says, how cruel can you possibly be to that poor animal, two of you, riding on one donkey?

So at that point, the father and the son get off the donkey. They somehow, and I don't quite know how, lie it on its side, and they tie its feet together. They find a very strong stick, and they thread it through the donkey's legs, and then they pick it up, and they walk along, one behind the other, carrying the pole on their shoulders with this donkey kind of swinging between them.

Well, the donkey himself isn't that impressed by what's going on by now. So he starts to wriggle and try and escape, and just as they're coming into the town where the market is taking place, people begin to laugh at this sight until the donkey, in trying to get out of it, actually breaks free, falls off the pole, into a river, and drowns.

[ 2 : 32 ] Who laughed? It's not a true story, but it's a story that's been told over the centuries to, I think, essentially try and make the point that if you try to please everyone, you'll end up pleasing no one.

But I think there's an even more fundamental point that that story makes. In fact, two points that I want to think about over these next few minutes, and they're very closely related.

The first one is simply that when it comes to wisdom, there's plenty of it around. When it comes to advice givers, there is no shortage of them in the world.

And for as long as that story has been told, and far longer than that, indeed, as long as there have been human beings on this planet, there have been as many claims to wisdom as there have been human beings on this planet.

There's loads of it. So where do you go when you need some wisdom? When you've got a decision to make, whether it's a little one or a big one, where do you go?

[ 3 : 54 ] That phrase, too much information, is kind of normally used in certain different contexts.

But, you know, we have too much information now because I think in this generation, I'm referring to myself, to my own memory of growing up, I think the biggest cultural change for our generation has been, of course, the birth of the internet.

Now, I can remember when there was a time that if you said you were going to go online, it meant that you'd go into your, sit at a desk, and you'd turn on the dial-up thing, would come on. I can't impersonate a dial-up modem, but you remember those?

And you'd wait, and then you'd go online. Then, of course, came broadband, and then devices got smaller and smaller. So if I ask the question, where do most of us go for our wisdom, I think, without wanting to sound like I'm making presumptuous judgments about everybody else, but I suspect I know the answer to that question.

That's where we go. Yeah, it might be a slightly bigger device, but that's where we go. You see, the big difference, there's always been loads of wisdom or claims to wisdom around, but the big difference now is that we have access to it.

Our fingertips within seconds. It's too easy. Apparently, it's reckoned that every second of every hour, there are no fewer than 40,000 Google searches made.

[ 5 : 31 ] So is that where we go for our wisdom? Well, I want to think about that question. When you have a decision to make, where do you go for your wisdom?

See, in our reading from Colossians, there's a very profound awareness of this, that just because there's loads of claims to wisdom out there, not all of it, in fact, an awful lot of it, is bad wisdom.

Do not be taken captive, says Paul, by hollow arguments. By hollow philosophies.

We need to be very, very careful when it comes to wisdom as to what it is that we're actually digesting. And I think it's there that we find perhaps that deeper truth that actually lies deep inside that old fable from Aesop about the donkey.

That we are all, as human beings, in search of wisdom. Paul says that true wisdom, as that treasure, godly wisdom, is hidden in Christ.

[ 6 : 50 ] Now, how are we to make sense of that? If we believe in a gospel that says that God loves you and me, and wants us to know that he loves you and me, and that God loves us so much and wants us to know him so much that he puts on human flesh and comes into the world in a human being, Jesus, lives, dies, is crucified, is dead, is buried, is raised.

That God who is on our side, that God whose desire is to make himself known to us, how then do we reconcile all of that with this claim that Paul says that wisdom is hidden in Christ.

I mean, you know, the God that we read of in the gospel, the God of Jesus Christ, is not a God who hides behind a corner. He's not some esoteric, mysterious, well, secretive sort of God. So, how do we make sense of that claim, then, that wisdom, the treasures of wisdom, as Paul puts it, is somehow hidden away in Christ?

I think the only way we can make sense of it is something like this. Think of that old picture of Christ standing by the door. And he's standing outside of that door, but the handle that is used to open the door cannot be seen because the handle is on the inside.

In other words, God never forces himself upon us. If we want to know God through Jesus, we have to open the door and let him in. So, when Paul is talking about the wisdom of God being hidden in Christ, I think it makes a statement not about God wanting to purposefully and deliberately withhold his wisdom and his truth from us, but rather it's a reference to the sort of things that can go on in our own lives that make us resist and therefore conceal ourselves off from the wisdom of God.

[ 8 : 49 ] What sort of things might happen in our own lives? What sort of things about us might conceal wisdom from us? Well, I think of a number of things.

When I take a look at my humanity, I think of a number of things that actually cause me to be concealed from the wisdom of God. Not because God wants to conceal himself from me, but because of the way I misuse my own human freedom, I somehow prevent myself from accessing it. One thing is impatience. You know, part of the culture within which we live, the culture of having information at our fingertips, is that we want wisdom in a soundbite way.

We want quick answers. You put in any question to, you know, on Google, and very quickly, usually before you've even finished putting it in, it comes up with suggestions of the question, but then it will isolate quick soundbite answers to that question.

Now, that may be okay if you want to know where's the nearest supermarket or whatever, but it's not so good when we're asking deep searching questions.

[ 10 : 08 ] And I'd like to suggest that we've become accustomed to having so much information at the ready, that when it comes to wisdom, we want and we actually expect soundbite answers to deep searching questions.

And this is why church leaders often come unstuck in public when asked profound questions, because there is an assumption that somehow we will be able to provide soundbite answers to deep searching human questions.

Truth. The truth of God. is profound. And whilst sometimes it might be possible to give a snap answer, very often we can't.

And it's very easy for us just to write it off and say, well, it can't be wisdom then if it's not soundbite. But, you know, we all know that about ourselves, that life is complex. We are complex.

Perhaps sometimes one of the things that causes us to shut ourselves off from the wisdom of God, such that it is essentially concealed from us, is because we're too impatient and we expect wisdom to come fast.

[11:18] Another thing can be that when we do hear God's wisdom, whether it's reading from the Bible, whether it's maybe somebody that has prayed about a situation and we've talked to them and they share what they think God might be saying to us, one of the things that may cause us to resist that, that may make that wisdom hidden, apparently concealed from us, is that we frankly just don't like the sound of what we hear.

And sometimes we can give up on what we regard as Christians, as God's word, the Bible, because it doesn't make for comfortable reading. The other thing that goes kind of hand in hand with that can be that what we read in the Bible and what Christian tradition would say to us can seem to us to be somewhat weird.

There's some weird stuff in there. Weird because it's so counter-cultural. When the Bible will say certain things about how we should live our lives and how we should not live our lives that we don't like the sound of, one, because it makes us feel uncomfortable because it's challenging, but two, it seems weird in the culture that we live in.

Weird because it contradicts and anything goes culture. weird because it very often will fly directly in contradiction with what everybody else around us will be saying and doing is right.

Now, the series that we're looking at at the moment on wisdom is actually called Growing Older and Wiser. And we need to be really clear about this that in the Bible, whilst culture, our own contemporary culture may simply seem to apparently prize only youth, biblically, the opposite was the case.

[13:13] It was older age that was respected. To live older, to come of age, denoted wisdom. And we need to rediscover that value, but we need to understand that value properly.

because growing older and wiser do go hand in hand within scripture. But we need to understand that wisdom is not something that in the Bible comes by default simply by getting older.

It isn't. You see, as long as we're in this world, we're all growing older. We're all older than when we walked in this morning. but we don't necessarily grow wiser.

Age is not necessarily accompanied with wisdom by default. The point in scripture is that wisdom does go hand in hand and will go hand in hand with age if we root ourselves in the wisdom of God. But that is something that takes time. And I think this is one of the most wonderful, profound, and joyous things about being a Christian. And I don't say this glibly or lightly, okay, in case it's going to sound that way, but actually growing older is something to look forward to.

[14:34] It is. It is because it means that we become more and more rooted in God if that's our desire. Which means those things that may seem weird and strange and therefore isoteric and obscure when we're younger actually make sense as we mature and get older.

Now I know now in midlife there are things that when I was a teenager made no sense to me whatsoever in the Bible. I was tempted to write them off completely. And I can't put a time and date but I know that gradually, gradually, many of those things that seemed weird and concealed to me, out of reach when I was younger, now make an awful lot of sense.

Likewise, there are also things that I read of in scripture that still seem weird and I still struggle with. Perhaps not quite as weird as they once seemed. But I look forward to the day and my hope and my prayer is that if I can manage to continue to be rooted in Christ then God will help me understand that more and more.

You see, being a Christian is a lifelong process and that's the exciting thing about it. Growing older can mean growing wiser if we plant ourselves in the right place.

I've got an onion here. Does anybody like onions? I love onions. I love the smell of onions cooking but there's one thing I hate about them and it's cutting them up.

[16:07] I can't stand it. Why? Because it always makes me cry even more than the first time I saw E.T. And I read recently that there is a reason why onions can make you cry or rather why some onions can make you cry more than others why they vary in their strength.

There are lots of different factors apparently but one of the key things has to do with the type of soil within which it grows and apparently it's to do with the sulfur level in the soil.

The higher the level of sulfur in the soil the more the onion will extract as it grows as nature's way of protecting itself from insects. And so therefore if you have a very sulfur rich soil and you grow onions in it then that's going to be more pungent.

Somebody somewhere has managed to find a way of growing onions in an almost sulfur free soil and apparently you can virtually eat them like you can an apple. Don't know about that. But it's an interesting thought isn't it?

That the thing that defines its quality, the strength of this thing, this onion, is defined not so much by the onion itself but the thing within which it grows.

[ 17 : 23 ] Now I put this question to you once more. Where do you go for your wisdom? And if growing older is something that we dread and that we fear and we think is a negative thing we need to think again.

Because it could just be that that fear has to do with putting those roots in the wrong place. If we put them in the right place, and I'm not oversimplifying things here and I make no apology if it sounds like I am, but if we put those roots in the right place, whatever age we are, it means that as we look to our life ahead of us, then every bit can be seen as an opportunity to grow more deeply in Christ. Christ. It means as we come to know his word more, as we come to pray more, as we hang out with other Christians more, not in a cozy ghetto kind of way, but in a way that just takes seriously the fact that we can learn from each other.

If we can do this kind of stuff more, if we can root ourselves more deeply in him, then wisdom, wisdom is the thing that will no longer seem concealed and hidden, but something that actually will make sense because our own resistance to it drops.

Apparently, when he built his first factory, Henry Ford contracted, I forget his name, but he was reckoned to be at his time one of the greatest electrical engineers in the world to install the generators within that factory.

[ 19 : 07 ] Everything was going great. great. The Ford business was growing great guns until one day the factory ground to a halt. Why? Because the generators had broken down. Henry Ford put his best engineers on to the job to try and get these things started and up and running again, but they just couldn't.

Every day they were losing a fortune because production had stopped. eventually he contacted this electrical engineer who had designed, built and installed these generators and said that we can't manage this.

Can you please come yourself personally and tend to it? This engineer came in and for a couple of hours he was just tinkering around until he then flicked a switch and everything was up and running again.

Ford was back in production. A few days later, Henry Ford received an invoice from this engineer for \$10,000. Now, this was a long time ago, so \$10,000 was quite a lot of money for a couple of hours' work.

And so, although he was not exactly poor, Henry Ford wrote back and questioned the invoice and said, thank you for helping us out, but I fail to understand how tinkering around for a couple of hours can be valued at \$10,000.

[ 20 : 35 ] Could you send me an itemized invoice? A couple of days later, he received the itemized invoice and it said this, cost for tinkering around, in inverted commas, for a couple of hours, \$10.

Knowing where to tinker around, \$9,990. There's plenty of wisdom around.

There's plenty of people longing to dish it out. And it takes a fraction of a second to lay our hands on it. But as Paul says, a lot of it is hollow stuff.

If we seriously want to grow and to grow in wisdom, we need to know where to look. So as we come to pray, I want to come back to that question and I want to put it to every single one of us and I put it to myself as well.

As a practical challenge, where do we go for wisdom? What might we be able to do? What might we be able to set in motion? Starting from now, by way of the way in which we search out wisdom.

[ 21 : 56 ] Now that's a purposefully open-ended question and there's a number of things that we might do. But here's some ideas. Maybe starting from today, we might resolve that we're going to set aside more time each day to pray in a systematic way.

It may not be a long, long time, but there's a thought. Maybe we feel that, and again, I don't want to go on the kind of guilt-mongering crusade or anything like that, but maybe, maybe if we need to spend a little bit more time just reading the Bible.

That doesn't mean reading chapters and chapters and chapters, it may be just a small bit, but at least a small bit meditatively in a focused way each day. Maybe the practical step for you might be to join a home group, to get together with other Christians midweek and to discuss the sort of things that we hear presented here on a Sunday morning in a bit more depth and detail during the week. It might even be that you come along to this place maybe once every four, six weeks or so, and maybe, maybe this could be God saying to you, just come a little bit more.

Look, coming to church is not what makes you a Christian. It's not. Clive and I say this over and over again. Coming to church, being a Christian is not about coming to church, and coming to church is not what makes you a Christian.

[ 23 : 18 ] But when we root ourselves more deeply in Christ, then we find that the very soil within which he wants us to take root is the very thing that we take root in.