Tools for Wise Leadership

A programme of TWR-Africa, produced by TWR-Zimbabwe, presented by Rev Dr Roy Musasiwa

Series 12: Self-Leadership
Talk 07: The Leader's Understanding and Wisdom

Welcome to the programme **Tools for Wise Leadership** where we are focusing our attention on the important issue of self-leadership. We have repeatedly said in order to lead others well you have to lead yourself well first. The heart, the head and the hands must work together to effect true Christian leadership. In the last programme we focused on the head. By this we mean the importance of knowledge, understanding and wisdom among leaders. Without knowledge a leader might work really hard without working smart. Much of the leader's energy might therefore be wasted because of not being properly directed by knowledge. Solomon, Ezra, Daniel and Paul all emphasized the importance of knowledge – its acquisition and its dissemination.

We ended the last session by emphasizing that knowledge without love will not build. Today we are emphasizing that knowledge must go along with understanding and wisdom. These three could be regarded as a three-legged stool. All the legs need to support each other in order to achieve a balanced life. And all these three ultimately come from God. As Solomon says in Proverbs 2:6, "The Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." So all three: wisdom, knowledge and understanding are listed in one verse as coming from God.

Let us now focus on understanding. While knowledge is an awareness of reality gained through experience and study, understanding is insight arising out of interpreting that knowledge. Both secular thinkers and especially the Bible emphasize the need for understanding. For secular thinkers I point to Socrates who said, "The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being." In other words you can accumulate facts without examining their implications for our living. That means we can have knowledge without understanding. And that's what Socrates meant by saying, "The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being"

In the Bible Solomon in Proverbs 4:7 talks about the importance and preciousness of wisdom and understanding and says, "Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding." Solomon is actually saying, "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance!" In other words don't spare anything to get understanding. Even if it costs you all your money, your house and other possessions you will be better off without those things as long as you get yourself understanding. He supports that idea by saying in Proverbs 16:16, "How much better to get wisdom than gold, to choose understanding rather than silver!"

But understanding does not just need material investment. It needs effort – especially the effort to listen. Our God gave us two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice more than we speak. May leaders love to hear their own voices. They do too much speaking and too little listening. And yet the Bible says in James 1:19, "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." So here is a question for you leader: Do you have a mentor to whom you listen in order to get understanding? Proverbs 4:1 says, "Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding." This is talking about listening to someone more mature than you are in the area that you are being mentored. Then do you also listen to your peers? Do you also listen to your juniors? In life I have discovered that everyone has something valuable to teach me if only I am willing to listen. It requires humility to gain understanding through listening and learning from others, no matter who or what they are.

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Then understanding needs time investment. You need time to think about what you see, hear and experience in other ways. This meditation should especially be centred on what the Lord is saying to you through his word. That is why Psalm 1:2 says of the blessed man that "his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night." Day and night! That is a lot of time investment. The word "meditate" is used numerous times in the Bible, 8 times in Psalm 119 alone!

The New Testament is equally emphatic on the need for meditation. Philippians 4:8 says of all things that are good, that are excellent or praiseworthy that we must think about such things. Then Paul says in 2 Timothy 7, "Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this." Insight is an aspect of understanding. It does not come effortlessly. No. It requires reflection, and reflection requires time and effort.

What we have said above regarding understanding is also true of the need for wisdom. When we translate our understanding into a way of life that corresponds with our God-given purpose we have acquired wisdom. Hence James 3:13 says, "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom." You see wisdom is the bridge between the activity of the head (thinking, knowledge and understanding) and the way of life. It is a life that reflects one's God-given understanding.

Solomon longed to have such wisdom, and indeed became well known for his wisdom. How did he acquire his wisdom? 2 Chronicles 1 tells the story of how God appeared to Solomon and said to him, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." Solomon answered God, "Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?" God said to Solomon, "Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches or honour, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, riches and honour, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have." You see when you acquire Godly wisdom you get a lot more with it.

Now the great pitfall is to have knowledge and understanding and then live a life that is contrary to that knowledge. That is a classical lack of wisdom. Imagine a doctor who is a smoker. That doctor knows all about smoking as a big cause of lung cancer but he smokes anyway. Imagine a person who knows that unprotected sex is the biggest cause of the spread of HIV/AIDS but still sleeps around anyway.

Proverbs 7 is a call for wisdom. "My son, keep my words and store up my commands within you. Keep my commands and you will live." Then the passage calls on the son to have a very close relationship with wisdom. "Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister,' and call understanding your kinsman; they will keep you from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words." From there the passage talks about a young man who lacked judgment. He walked in the direction of the adulteress. "Then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent… She took hold of him and kissed him, and with a brazen face she said, 'I have covered my bed with coloured linens from Egypt. I have perfumed my bed... Come, let's drink deep of love till morning; let's enjoy ourselves with love! My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey. He took his purse filled with money and will not be home till full moon.' With such persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk. All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter; little knowing it will cost him his life. .. Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death."

I hope it is now clear that without leading yourself you cannot successfully lead us. We have talked about ensuring that your heart and your head are in tune with God's will. The next time I meet you

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on this programme we will be talking about the use of our hands – the need for applying appropriate skills if we are to be the kind of leaders God desires. So until then why don't you practice these **Tools for Wise Leadership**.

Discussion Questions for: Series 12 - Talk 07 - The Leader's Understanding and Wisdom

For this series of *Self-Leadership* you can use the following study questions to guide you in deepening the impact of this series:

Study Question 1: for Personal reflection
What does this episode mean to you personally as a leader?

Study Question 2: for Group Discussion
What does this topic mean you as a group of leaders?

Study Question 3: for applying the topic
What can you apply from this topic in your role as a leader?

Summary:

Knowledge has value: Solomon became a great leader and was greatly blessed because he desired wisdom and knowledge to be a good leader above all things.

Discussion Questions:

Study Question 1: Personal reflection

Does knowledge, understanding and wisdom bring balance to my life and leadership style? Is wisdom and knowledge a priority in my life?

Study Question 2: Group Discussion

How do we prayerfully seek God to help us mature in knowledge and wisdom? Do we accept and believe that God will give these abilities to those who sincerely ask?

Study Question 3: Applying the topic

Who is wise and understanding? Will we let our lives and deeds reflect wisdom through humility? Are we willing to let Christ work through us?

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