



A PORTRAIT OF CHRIST-HONORING WISDOM

by Brad Hambrick, M.Div., Th.M.

Stupid. Gullible. Naïve. Short-sighted. Impulsive. Impressionable. People-pleasing. Foolish. Timid. Double-minded. Inconsistent. Undependable. These are the labels that are often used (by themselves and sometimes by others) for those who lack wisdom.

“I never seem to do anything right... I regret so many of the decisions I’ve made... I don’t trust myself to know what to do in difficult situations... It feels like everyone else got a copy of the ‘unwritten rule book of life’ except me... Hindsight is a synonym for shame in my world...” these are the thoughts of those who dislike or mistrust themselves due to a lack of wisdom.

Wisdom may be the least intuitive synonym for self-esteem in this series. Confidence, identity, security, and purpose are more obvious things people want when they say they have a low self-esteem. However, for many people, it is a series of unwise choices that cause their low self-appraisal. They will not feel better until they choose more wisely; nor, in many cases, should they. To feel good about chronic bad choices would be a worse condition.

This chapter is intentionally last. In order for it to be anything more than a series of proverbs (generic wisdom principles) it must come at the end of discovering one’s identity in Christ and purpose in life. In order for it to have any lasting impact it must come as an extension of possessing the confidence to face failure and the security to endure rejection.

The reality is that we do not tend to make bad choices because of a lack of information. Sure, we may buy a car with a bad track record because we failed to consult Consumer’s Report or Car Fax, but the kind of lifestyle, relational, and impulsive decisions that most frequently damage our self-perception are related to our character more than the need for additional research.

There are many whose experience of low self-esteem is actually regret, guilt, or shame from the inconsistent application of wisdom in their daily choices and relationships. The solution, therefore, is not rehearsing self-affirmation statements, but beginning to organize their life around the values and principles of Scripture. As this is done, the encouragement that is produced will be more sustainable and real than the artificial boost of motivational statements without actual change.

When depression is rooted in poor decision making or inadequate skills, offering encouragement without addressing the decision making approach or skill training has two effects: (a) short-term there is a boost in morale from the pleasant statements, but (b) long-term the despair is intensified as life reinforces negative messages more intensely than the words of another person can counter. This parallels what it is like to try to correct low self-esteem without equipping someone to live in biblical wisdom.

Defining “Biblical Wisdom”

Biblical Wisdom refers to the principled pursuit of pleasure, not to fill a void, but to fulfill a calling. Wisdom requires fearing (seeking the approval of) God more than fearing (seeking the approval of) man. The restraint of wisdom does not diminish the intensity of pleasure, but prolongs the time frame in which pleasure can be savored and the freedom of conscience with which it can be remembered.

Wisdom cannot be reduced to a set of principles or propositions because it is an expression of God’s character in the midst of relationships. Wisdom is a virtue that allows all other blessings to remain good rather than spoiling into burdens.

Wisdom does not belong to academia and does not require a high IQ. Brilliance is, in many ways, capable of more folly than ignorance. Wisdom, in its essence, is simple. It is often because solutions are less complex than our problems that we



dismiss wisdom. No one wants to hear that finances boil down to spending less than you make or dieting is only burning more calories than you consume. But we're glad to get into a complex pyramid scheme or fad diet.

Wisdom is not against action, passion, speaking, and ambition, but wisdom is willing to forego these without feeling cheated and does not consider them "higher virtues" than their alternatives. Wisdom requires things like patience, self-control, listening well, and contentment. The absence of these virtues will destroy whatever can be created or obtained through the strategic implementation of massive quantities of knowledge.

"There are three classes of men—lovers of wisdom, lovers of honor, lovers of gain." – Plato

Wisdom allows the "risks" we take in *confidence* to fulfill our *purpose* to be "acts of faith" instead of blind folly. Wisdom allows us to adapt to the preferences and culture of others without surrendering our *identity*. Wisdom allows our sense of *security* to withstand the criticism or misunderstanding of others without us giving way to being calloused or closed-minded.

In this chapter we will examine three obstacles to biblical wisdom and their remedy.

1. Impulse Control – the rushed pleasure obstacle
 - Remedy: Delayed Gratification
2. Fear of Rejection – the social perception obstacle
 - Remedy: Wise Vulnerability
3. Fear of Failure – the guaranteed outcome obstacle
 - Remedy: Reasonable Risk

As you walk through these sections you should be able to do three things: (a) assess the character struggles that impede your implementation of biblical wisdom; (b) learn the most pertinent skills or principles of biblical wisdom for your life; and (c) identify the situations when the implementation of these skills or principles is most important. As you grow in these areas, the negative self-assessments rooted in absence of wise decision making should dissipate.

Parameter I: Delayed Gratification

Let's start with a very basic question, "What is it that causes people to make the largest number of unwise decisions? What distracts people from implementing the wisdom they already know and believe?" One answer, that at least deserves to be in the top three, is impulse control – we do not want to wait for pleasure.

- Going into debt because we do not want to wait until we can afford something.
- Being willing to restrain the expression of anger until more information is gathered.
- Eating when you know you're not hungry and you will feel guilty about it later.
- Buying something you do not need and cannot afford simply for the emotional boost.
- Numbing yourself with television or internet when you know something needs to be done.
- Acting without considering the consequences of that action.
- Allowing a romantic relationship to develop too quickly (emotionally or physically) because it feels good.
- Not being able to "cut your losses" in a bad investment or relationship.
- Obsessing about things being perfect resulting in an inability to enjoy the moment.
- Unwillingness to focus on the "best thing" out of commitment to a "good thing."

In most of these situations, if not all, if we paused to ask the question, "Is this wise?" we would see that it is not. The problem is either (a) we are so rushed by our impulse for pleasure that we fail to ask the question, or (b) we want something more than wisdom so we prefer not to ask the question.



The first part of wisdom is wanting wisdom more than wealth, honor, revenge, or its other alternatives. We will not accidentally get wisdom. The gravity of our sinful hearts and fallen world pull us towards folly. We have to see wisdom as being more valuable than the blessing wisdom can garner or we'll trade the chicken for eggs and the cow for milk.

Consider this conversation between God and Solomon in II Chronicles 1:7-12.

⁷ That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

⁸ Solomon answered God, "You have shown great kindness to David my father and have made me king in his place. ⁹ Now, LORD God, let your promise to my father David be confirmed, for you have made me king over a people who are as numerous as the dust of the earth. ¹⁰ Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

¹¹ God said to Solomon, "Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, possessions or honor, 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, ¹² therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, possessions and honor, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have."

Without this kind of character we may amass a great deal of education, but we will lack wisdom. However much we are driven by something other than wisdom we will experience insecurity or pride that clouds a healthy sense of self. In order to pursue wisdom with this kind of impulse control, an individual needs to be competent at emotional regulation.

Emotional Regulation

We will either manage our emotions by the way we manage our life or we will respond to life on the basis of our emotions. This does not mean that we have direct control over how we feel. Neither does it mean that we can administrate our life into a state of perpetual bliss. But we can, and should, seek to manage our time, budget our money, prioritize our interest, and conduct our relationships in such a way that we are not having to "cheat" in order to bear up under our "normal life."

So the first part of emotions regulation requires answering these kinds of questions; which you should have already considered in previous chapters.

- Do you have realistic expectations for your time?
- Do you get good amounts of sleep, exercise, and have a healthy diet?
- Do you have a budget that allows you to make good use of your money?
- Do you know your personal strengths and seek to live out of how God gifted you?
- Are you willing to admit and live within your limits even when friends want more from you?

Life management is "step one" of emotional regulation. No latter step will be more effective than step one is stable. We must put ourselves into a position not to have to consistently manipulate life for it to be stable. When caffeine, limited sleep, perpetual recreation distractions, working overtime, half-truths, and dump truck conversations become necessary or normal, emotions will over-power impulse control to the detriment of wisdom and a satisfying self-appraisal.

After wise life management, understanding the role of emotions is vital to emotional regulation. There are two opposing extremes when it comes to emotions. Some view emotions as the relatively insignificant "caboose on the train of life;" believing if you think the right things your emotions will necessarily follow and be pleasant. Others view emotional expression as the key mark of life's highest virtue – authenticity; believing to stifle emotion or act contrary to your feelings is the lowest sin – hypocrisy.

Emotions are neither the caboose nor the head. Actually, no single metaphor will capture the role of emotions in the life of a wise, healthy individual.



- Emotions motivate – pleasant (passion) and unpleasant (fear) emotions can fuel perseverance in difficult actions.
- Emotions bond – shared emotional experiences have a unique way of cementing friendships and romances.
- Emotions enhance – emotions are often the “color commentary” on the black and white events of life.
- Emotions warn – often we can feel “something is just not right” before we can articulate why.
- Emotions memorialize – memories are often made vivid and lasting by the emotions that attach to them.
- Emotions express – there are some things that are not articulated best through words (Rom. 8:26).

People who live wisely will allow emotions to play each of these roles in their life. Emotions will be used as assets for the activities and relationships; not as hazards or liabilities which must be “guarded closely” because they’re “dangerous.” However, we must be as clear about what emotions do not do as we are about what they do.

- Emotions do not decide – “going with your gut” is not a wise short-cut in important decisions.
- Emotions do not adjudicate – “feeling good” about something does not make it moral.
- Emotions do not confirm – “feeling good” about an outcome does not necessarily mean it was wise.
- Emotions are not absolutely trusted – our emotions fluctuate based upon a large number of variables and, therefore, we cannot rely on our emotions like we do a thermometer or scale.
- Emotions do not change life – artificially manipulating our emotions does not change our life circumstances.

A person who relies on emotions for roles for which emotions are not well-suited will become like the person who relies on knowledge for things for which knowledge is not well-suited. Both become one-sided people who have a hard time relating to the world and people around them. Unless they see their error, they retreat further into their preference and become increasingly imbalanced.

As you manage your life well and use emotions for their intended purposes, the result is that you will be able to (a) master impulse control with (b) a lifestyle of delayed gratification that (c) still allows you to enjoy the moment.

It is vital that these three pieces come together. We have discussed the first. Let’s examine what it means to live in a lifestyle of delayed gratification. In its simplest form living a delayed gratification lifestyle means expecting to work before receiving the reward of your labor.

What do all impulse control problems have in common? They expect the benefit before the sacrifice. We distract ourselves with the goodness of the outcome and forget to consider whether we have earned it. In modern self-esteem language we change the language to whether we “deserve it.” Saying “No” is said to be evidence of a low self-esteem. However, we neglect that folly (i.e., debt, pre-marital sex, intoxication, obesity, approval from dare-devil activities, etc...) are not things to be “deserved.”

When we try to enjoy the benefits of life without first making the sacrifices they require, life becomes short bursts of joy within a life of drudgery. Most of life is spent “paying for” (financially, emotionally, consequentially) our pleasures. We feel punished for enjoying life.

However, when we commit to the sacrifice before enjoying life’s pleasures, life is filled with anticipation interspersed with reward. For those with a strong work ethic (part of the character of wisdom), anticipation is its own pleasure. Kids enjoy making their Christmas list; not just opening presents. Good athletes enjoy practice, film study, and working out; not just game day and victories.

Admittedly, anticipation is a weaker pleasure than the reward itself. But, even the weaker pleasure of anticipation makes for a more enjoyable life than the drudgery of “paying off” already consumed pleasures. As you live out this principle, the overall enjoyment level of your life and personal self-respect you gain will provide a satisfaction that no amount of mere positive thinking could ever rival.

But we must be careful that “delayed gratification” does not mean “non-gratification.” For some people, a fear of being ruled by impulse results in an aversion to pleasure. Wisdom’s “delay” in gratification does not mean “do not open until Heaven;” as if God sent us earthly pleasure packages labeled “do not open until Christmas.”



Impulse control does not just involve the capacity to restrain a desire, but also the freedom to release and savor it. If the latter is not present, then you will be a burden on those who “do life” with you and you will have a tendency to look down on others as “weak” or “unspiritual” who cannot live “up to” your emotionally stunted life.

Consider the example of a family vacation. The person with low impulse control will want to go into debt to prematurely take the vacation the family “deserves.” While on the trip they will try not to think about the consequences of their spending. After they return home, the joy of the trip will be soured by monthly payments with interest that reduce day-to-day pleasures the family could enjoy. Even in this good activity their sense of self is damaged with the awareness they are living a lie.

The person with excessive impulse control will save for the trip, but have a hard time enjoying it. The proverbial “rainy day” for which he/she should be saving will hang like a cloud over their sunny days at the beach. Their emotional restriction will diminish the bonding effect emotions should have on this kind of trip. Again, even in this good activity, their sense of self is damaged because “being good” didn’t “work” and they feel cheated or broken.

For those who have balanced impulse control (relatively speaking), they will both save for the trip and release themselves to the trip. Memories will be made without the tarnish of guilt over pleasure or fear of paying for them later. This is the only way for the good activity, like a family vacation, to contribute to a healthy and satisfying sense of self. The positive experience builds the motivation to begin anticipating (i.e., working towards) the next pleasure with an expectation it will be both personally enjoyable and relationally bonding.

Parameter 2: Wise Vulnerability

For many people it is not the driving force of pleasure that impedes their wise decision making, but the controlling fear of rejections. It is not what they want that obstructs wisdom in their life, but what they want to avoid. One of the main problems with this mentality is that living for what you don’t want has all the power of negative emotions, but none of the benefits of pleasant ones.

Many of us spend a great deal of time and energy hiding our weaknesses and failures. This has several effects on our lives.

- Our focus remains intently on the things we are least fond of in ourselves.
- Our time is siphoned away from things that would be productive and satisfying.
- The most tangible expressions of God’s grace in our life are declared “off limits” for ministry.
- We feel less known by those who love us, which renders their encouragement less effective.
- We feel fake and live in fear of being “found out” when others discover what we’re hiding.
- Our weaknesses take on a much greater emotional significance than they would have if they were known.

The cumulative effect of hiding is an increasingly unhealthy and unsatisfying sense of self. We begin to realize we are not living authentic enough lives for the gospel to provide tangible relief in our day-to-day lives and relationships; not because of its lack of power, but because we refuse to apply the treatment. We are like the child with a “boo-boo” on his arm who will not uncover it to allow care to be provided.

Take a moment and write out your answers to the following reflection questions.

How many “heroes” in the Bible had profound weaknesses or failures that are key parts of their story?



How many of your friends are more real and approachable because of their weaknesses or failures?

How could we ever fulfill the command of II Corinthians 1:3-5 if our weaknesses or failures remain “off limits”?

“And what is this valley called?” “We call it now simply the Wisdom’s valley: but the oldest maps mark it as the Valley of Humiliation (p. 125).” C.S. Lewis in *The Pilgrims Regress*

What did you learn about making an impact for God and the level of disclosure in his ambassadors (II Corinthians 5:20)? Hopefully you could begin to see that wise vulnerability begins with a greater concern for God’s glory and the benefit of others than it does for our reputation.

For many the word “vulnerable” is a negative word; meaning “allowing the possibility of being hurt.” If this is what vulnerability means, it will be hard to ever view it as “wise.” So here is a fuller definition:

Vulnerable: a state of being made possible by the security and identity found in the gospel so that every event and emotion of one’s life is “on the table” when it is useful to glorify God by encouraging a fellow believer, enabling others to care for you, or sharing the gospel with an unbeliever.

Notice that vulnerability is not a synonym for voyeuristic. Being vulnerable does not mean sharing everything with everyone. You can be both vulnerable and emotionally modest. The parallel of emotions and clothing can be helpful. The person who is pre-occupied with modesty is as controlled by their body as the person who dresses provocatively. Freedom is found in knowing what is situationally-appropriate to share/reveal.

It is not a virtue to be modest in intimate moments with one’s spouse. Freedom is the virtue in that moment. Similarly, it is not a virtue to play life “close to the vest” in moments when God wants to use parts of his work in your life to impact others or further his work in you. Wise vulnerability is both the ability to be emotionally-modest to in developing relationships or unsafe relationships and the ability to be emotionally-free to honor the closeness of safe friendships.

So the question becomes, “How much of my life is it wise to share in a given situation?” The answer to this question is dependent upon the nature of the relationship and the reason for sharing. The short answer is – share the amount that allows you to be known enough to earn the trust to provide care or be known enough to be cared for.

One of the reasons people, not just Christians, often feel so alone in their struggles is because of the silence of their co-strugglers. Like the awkward moment after a teacher asks a hard question, silence breeds more silence.

This may be as innocent as acknowledging a quirky sense of humor you find embarrassing or a struggle to manage time. You might have an ongoing struggle with depression, anxiety, or processing a traumatic event. You may need to gain control of your temper to engage more with your children. You are not alone and as you keep these things hidden several things happen: (a) you feel a greater sense of shame, (b) the struggle gets worse, and (c) you enable others to live in silence.

But the question becomes, “How do we share information like this in a way that is healthy for us and beneficial for those we want to serve by sharing our story?” Consider the following points.

- Start with those with whom you already have trust. If vulnerability is unnatural for you, start where it is safest. Close friends, a spouse, or pastor are people with whom “being more honest than usual” is wise. Your goal is to



be more known, so that the truth of Scripture and encouragement of friends can touch areas of your life which have been, to this point, off limits.

- Share enough to build trust and continue the conversation. We are talking here about conversations with friends, not counseling. In most cases you'll be sharing your experience of moments: "This makes me uncomfortable...It's hard for me to take complements, but I appreciate your encouragement... I usually don't tell people, but in moments like this I feel self-conscious." We usually fear telling the whole narrative – "It all started when I was nine years old..." – so we avoid the daily opportunities to make ourselves known.
- Your story should not overpower their story. Unhealthy friendships tend to develop when there is an imbalance in the level of disclosure or dependence between the two people. "Over-disclosure" is not usually about what is shared, but the pace at which it is shared. When you are more known than you know the person you are talking to you are either in a professionalized-friendship (trying to get the quality of counseling assistance with the convenience of a friendship) or in an unhealthy, imbalanced friendship (where one or both people will begin to feel drained by the friendship).
- Understand the benefits that do and do not come from wise vulnerability. Vulnerability makes our burden lighter because it is known; this removed the weight of shame and secrecy. However, vulnerability does not remove the weight altogether or transfer it to our friend. If this is our expectation from vulnerability, then we are creating codependency not friendship.
- Understand the risk of the information you're disclosing. Wise vulnerability is not blind faith that anything you share will be kept confidential. As you decide what you are willing to share, weigh the definite cost of the burden of carrying that information alone against the potential cost of that information being shared with someone else.
- Be clear about how private you consider the information you're sharing. If the information you're sharing is something you desire to remain confidential, be clear with the person with whom you share. Assuming the other individual will perceive the information to be as private as you intend it to be, makes the probability of you feeling betrayed much higher. If you are unsure how private the information should be kept, ask the trusted friend what they think. This will give you a gauge of how much your sense of shame is magnifying your desire for privacy.
- Consider the implications for other people who are part of what you're sharing. If making yourself more known also makes others more known, this should be considered in how much you share and who you share it with. For instance, sharing about how a parent's unfaithfulness affected you, if that unfaithfulness is unknown to others, could impact both your mother and father. In these instances, seeking guidance from a pastor or counselor, who frequently handle confidential information, is advised.

With these parameters in mind, it is advised that you settle what is "on the table" now. Otherwise, in a moment when sharing is possible or advisable, you will feel pressure to decide in the moment. This pressure will increase the likelihood that you will either not disclose or over-disclose.

Consider the following questions to help you think through wise vulnerability?

- Is it my tendency to under-disclose or over-disclose?
- What are my weaknesses or quirks for which I feel ashamed or embarrassed?
- What are the experiences of suffering which I keep secret and make me feel less known?
- What are the sinful or destructive choices I've made which make me feel less lovable?
- Who are the trusted people in my life with whom it would be wise for me to be more vulnerable?
- How much of the "off limits" portion of my life am I currently willing to make available if beneficial to influence others for God? Do not answer "all of it" simply because it is the right answer. Rushing yourself to where you ought to be out of guilt usually results in you not staying there long. Grow in wise vulnerability at a pace that is sustainable so that it becomes a lifestyle instead of a reaction to reading this material.



Answering these questions gives you freedom from self-monitoring (“Am I going to disclose part of my life and, if so, how much?”) during conversation when disclosure would be beneficial. This freedom from self-monitoring frees you to be other-minded in those conversations, which has two benefits: (a) your fear or insecurity do not bias you to read the situation as more “dangerous” than it is, and (b) your increased attention to the moment allows your words to fit that moment better.

In the end, we want to get to the point where we long for ministry more than we fear rejection. Like every other Christian virtue this will have to become increasingly true of us. The first step in wise vulnerability is being able to admit that this desire is not completely present without beating yourself up in the process. Admitting weakness and sin without self-abasement is a freedom that only the gospel gives because of our acceptance in Christ and recognition that changes happen over a life time.

Parameter 3: Reasonable Risk

People fearing failure is like birds fearing flying or penguins fearing ice. It is not that we were made to fail, but that we were made to learn from our failures. This is what allowed the Wright brothers to invent manned-flight and Thaddeus Sobieski Constantine Lowe to invent the ice machine. Every great thing a human being has ever achieved was the by-product of failure.

The fear of failure is rooted in the human tendency to root our identity in an activity; we tend to turn verbs into nouns. If we run (verb), we call ourselves a runner (noun). If we enjoy studying (verb), we are called a nerd (noun). If we fail (verb), we consider ourselves a failure (noun).

One problem with this logic is that verbs are temporal and nouns are permanent. Runners are not always running; even Forrest Gump took time to talk to Jenny. Nerds are not always studying. No one fails constantly. If you want to argue with me, realize by reading this chapter you’re proving you’re taking a wise step.

Another problem with the fear of failure is that it fails to see our responsibility to steward, not master, our experiences. God does not call us to be sovereign – in complete control and mastery of all things. That is his job. God does call us to be a steward of the possessions, events, and challenges of our lives – striving to use them for his glory and, thereby, our enjoyment or the benefit of others.

When our expectations for ourselves (to master every moment) exceed God’s expectations of us (to steward each moment) the possibility of failure can become overwhelming. Initially we are given to the excesses of pride as we try to do what we believe is expected. Then we are given to despair as both life and God seem to be against us.

The ultimate problem with the fear of failure is that it does not appropriately fear passivity or God.

Some people view passivity as the alternative to failure; believing, “If I do nothing, then I cannot do it badly. It is better not to try than to try and fail.” This mentality was what God rebuked in Jesus’ parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30, especially verses 24-30). Fear of failure reveals a lack of faith in God to either (a) enable us to do what he has called us to do, or (b) redeem the mess of our failure in a way that is still better than our passivity.

Other people view performance as the way to be independent of God. They treat grace as if were an emergency savings account they never want to have to tap into. They fear failure because it would reveal their need for God. God to them is more like a mean uncle than a loving father. You might ask him for help, but only if you were in a desperate situation. This fear of God is void of a recognition of God’s goodness and desire for a personal relationship in the midst of life’s successes and failures.

But these critiques of the logical and theological fallacies incumbent to a fear failure, fail to answer the practical question, “How do I assess what is a reasonable risk of faith?” Without an answer to this question the concepts of faith and folly



begin to overlap. Then people attempt great but foolish things for God, and when those attempts fail assume God doesn't love them, God isn't real, or they're a failure. Any of these beliefs damage a healthy Christian identity.

Here are some guidelines to help you think through decisions where the fear of failure inhibits your thinking process.

- **Know yourself** – Are you naturally a risk taker or risk averse? Do you usually perceive challenges as opportunities or obstacles? Is this something you really want (possible positive bias) or don't want (possible negative bias) to do? Too often we only try to “read the moment” and fail to consider the most frequent interpretive error of the reader.
- **Be known by others** – Objectivity and wisdom are hard to achieve in isolation. The steps you took to overcome the fear of rejection (wise vulnerability) are vital to assessing reasonable risk. Seeking the guidance and perspective of those who know you well is an important part of any faith-step.
- **Manage the basics well** – The opportunity to make good “big decisions” is built upon a history of making good “little decisions.” That was Jesus' point in Luke 16:10, “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.” Managing your time, money, and relationships well provides you the clarity and stability to think clearly about risk decisions.
- **Know what's at stake** – Often we perceive situations to be more dangerous than they really are. Too often when we fear failure, the only thing that is really at stake is our reputation. If our moral reputation is at stake, then it's an obedience question and not a faith question. If it's only our performance reputation, then we need to set our pride aside to assess the issue more clearly.
- **Remain humble** – The degree to which we value our pride will distort how we weigh any decision. When we are humble, it reduces pressure always do well. We must realize the humble person is more free than the prideful person. A large part of overcoming the fear of failure is learning to value humility more than achievement.

“Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call ‘humble’ nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all (p. 128).” *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis

- **Study and pray** – If you have honored the prior guidelines well, you will have a well-worded question to take to God in prayer and the Bible for study. You should be reading your Bible and praying throughout the process, but too often we practice these disciplines with our questions too biased by our fears. These earlier steps allow God to change the question, before we ask him to answer it.
- **Choose boldly and act decisively** – When the time for decision comes and you've given as much attention as time allows to the steps above, God calls you to choose. Do not allow your hesitancy or timidity to be the reason that your decision fails; no self-sabotage. After the decision is made, faith looks like a whole-hearted commitment to the success.

“Sometimes God grants us abundant time to decide, sometimes only a split second. But the season of decision making is under God's control, and so when it comes, it comes by his plan (p. 239).” James Petty in *Step by Step*

- **Assess and learn** – By God's grace failure is not fatal. Undoubtedly there will be something you would do differently in most situations; even if you are thrilled with the outcome. Choosing boldly is no reason to live blindly. Faith as “reasonable risk” involves real risk and a faulty decision maker. For these reasons, it is always wise to assess and learn from the decisions we make.

- **Additional resource** – If your struggle with wise decision making requires more attention than these bullet points, then consider the seminar “Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage: Decision Making” (www.bradhambrick.com/gcmdecisionmaking). Even if you are not married, chapters 2 and 3 outline how to think about God’s will and the process of making wise personal decisions.

Conclusion

Too often impulse control, fear of rejection, and fear of failure are mistaken for low self-esteem; as if “loving yourself more” would provide the clarity to make wiser decisions in the contexts where these struggles arise. Hopefully, you have seen in this chapter that these struggles are real, but that they do not have their origin in a deficient self-appraisal.

Knowing how to make wise decisions and having the strength of character to execute that knowledge in the face of these struggles is the key to a healthy sense of self. A more positive self-outlook without a more effective approach to life results in an ineffective form of denial.

Wisdom is required in order for identity, purpose, confidence, or security to be lasting. Without the content of this chapter, the sincere application of the first four chapters would likely result in being performance-driven (rooted in a fear of rejection) which would lead to exhaustion (exacerbating a fear of failure). We need wisdom to regulate even our good impulses.

As you complete the final exercises at the close of this chapter, use this material to cement the changes you’ve been making throughout this material. Wisdom should not be the last item on a list of things you’re checking off, but the framework that holds all the other changes in place, so that they remain the blessing God intended them to be.



Checklist for A Portrait of Christ-Honoring Wisdom

Place a check in the blank for each item you for which you regularly exhibit this attitude, behavior, or character trait. If you struggle to be able to give a fair self-assessment of an item, ask people who know you well.

The items left unmarked should become your agenda items for developing Christ-honoring wisdom. These should help you identify the times and places in which you would grow in a Christ-honoring wisdom. Consider this a scavenger hunt in your spiritual maturity.

Give thanks to God for the items you were able to check. Pray for God to grow you in the areas you could not, while also inviting friends to encourage you and hold you accountable in those areas.

Impulse Control // Delayed Gratification

- I have a plan for my money (i.e., budget) that wisely regulates my pleasure and necessity spending.
- In moments of upset, I can resist allowing my emotions to damage relationships or give into despair.
- I avoid eating for comfort, but can enjoy eating as a part of good self-care and social interaction.
- I use my preferred modes of entertainment to be restorative and not as a way to escape / avoid life.
- I consider the consequences of my actions and have a track record of assessing well what they will be.

Fear of Rejection // Wise Vulnerability

- I can acknowledge my weaknesses and failures to myself without allowing them to define who I am.
- I can acknowledge my weaknesses and failures to God without a sense of condemnation.
- I can acknowledge my weaknesses and failures in a way that allows others to assist or encourage me.
- I am able to receive love and compliments without looking for a reason to deflect them.
- I am able to wisely regulate how much information I share when I disclose personal experiences.

Fear of Failure // Reasonable Risk

- I am aware of my level of risk aversion or enjoyment and use this to weigh the wisdom of my “instincts.”
- I have a track record of accurately assessing what is at stake in a given decision or challenge.
- I remain patient when gathering information and obtain important information when possible.
- I enact decisions with the confidence necessary to give them a reasonable opportunity to succeed.
- I am able to learn from my mistakes without getting defensive or wallowing in the failure.

Biblical Wisdom refers to the principled pursuit of pleasure, not to fill a void, but to fulfill a calling. Wisdom requires fearing (seeking the approval of) God more than fearing (seeking the approval of) man. The restraint of wisdom does not diminish the intensity of pleasure, but prolongs the time frame in which pleasure can be savored and the freedom of conscience with which it can be remembered.

*** The items left unmarked should become your agenda items for developing Christ-honoring purpose.

Approach to Individual Decision Making

Step One: Live with Your “Yes” on the Table for God

- Do you believe your sin and folly require both the gospel and God’s continual guidance for a satisfying life?
- Do you believe that honoring God in your decision making is the only way to lasting joy?
- Do you believe that God is good and, therefore, can be trusted to guide your life?

Step Two: Identify What You’re Stewarding for God

- Make a prioritized list of your (a) relationships, (b) responsibilities, (c) talents, and (d) passions.
- What areas on your list are in transition or when do you anticipate the next transition in each area?

Step Three: Manage the Basics with Excellence

- Do you have a family budget that each of you understand, honor, and consider as you make decisions?
- Do you have common expectations for your time that protects your family and guides your decision making?
- Do you anticipate future decisions and transitions in light of these two basic life resources?

Step Four: Watch for Challenges and Opportunities

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Daily Opportunities | 3. Transitional Opportunities |
| 2. Daily Temptations | 4. Transitional Challenges |
- Do you have “normal” that mentally frees you to look for daily opportunities to obey God’s positive commands?
 - What daily temptations most commonly make following God’s will seem complicated or unrealistic?
 - What are your the next anticipated transitions? What opportunities and challenges will they bring?

Step Five: Pursue the Necessary Information and Counsel

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Those Who Know You | 3. Those Whose Character You Trust |
| 2. Those Who Know Your Situation | 4. Those Whose Wisdom You Trust |
- Who knows you and your life well enough to speak into a significant decision?
 - Do you have the humility to seek guidance when it is needed? Is pride or insecurity your obstacle to transparency?
 - How well do you listen when seeking guidance? Does fear or impatience serve as your obstacle to humble listening?

Step Six: Seek God’s Guidance through Study and Prayer

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Spiritual Awareness | 4. Church Awareness |
| 2. Self-Awareness | 5. World Awareness |
| 3. Family Awareness | 6. Spirit Awareness |
- Do you pray and read your Bible regularly so these are not new disciplines during a time of decision?
 - When you read your Bible do you reflect and when you pray do you pause to allow God to speak?
 - Do you view yourself as belonging to your family, church, and the world in a way that their concerns impact your prayer life and decision making process?

Step Seven: Decide with Confidence and Freedom

- When the point of decision comes do you usually feel a sense of freedom and confidence?
- Can you resist the sense that you have been “demoted” to God’s “Plan B” when a decision goes poorly?
- Do you feel God’s love in the freedom He grants to allow you to make decisions based upon His design for your joy?

An explanation of this resource is available on video three at
www.bradhambrick.com/gcmdecisionmaking