Twelve Wise Skills for Christians in Ministry

By John Edmiston

(Matthew 10:16 NKJV) "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

(Romans 12:1-2 NKJV) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (2) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

(Philippians 4:8 NKJV) Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy; meditate on these things.

Theological Underpinning

When Jesus sent His disciples out He knew He was sending "unlearned men" out to face hostile Jewish and Roman authorities with the task of establishing the Kingdom of God and founding His Church. They were truly "sheep in the midst of wolves". In the natural sense they were totally vulnerable and stood no chance. He then says "therefore..." And connects the perilous situation they were facing with the need for "Christian craftiness" - "therefore be as wise as serpents". It is an exhortation to the gaining of practical wisdom, insight and thinking skills within the bounds of godly restraint ("and as innocent as doves").

True Christian thinking confounds the wisdom of this world. It operates on a higher and much more strategic level under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The disciples after Pentecost were able to confound the wisdom of the Jewish and Roman authorities so that they become enraged when faced with wisdom they could not resist. This was promised by Jesus (Luke 21:14-15 NKJV) "Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; (15) "for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. And fulfilled in the lives of Stephen and the apostles (and numerous Christians down the years) (Acts 6:10 NKJV) And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.

The term "innocent as doves" may be referring the reader to the Holy Spirit which is symbolised by a dove and which implies that godly wisdom partakes of the innocent purity of the Holy Spirit along with His clean, sharp (Heb 4:12,13) and creative wisdom which pierces through to the real issues. (Hebrews 4:12 NKJV) For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

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The irresistible godly wisdom that Jesus said would be characteristic of His persecuted followers flows from a Spirit-informed (1 Cor 2:10-16, 1 John 2:20,27) and renewed mind (Romans 12:1,2) focused on good Kingdom purposes (Phil 4:6-8, Matt 6:33,34) and which is stabilized by the peace of God (Colossians 3:15-17, James 3:13-18). Wherever we turn in this discussion we find two constants 1) The need for the Holy Spirit to reveal things to us 2) The need for us to renew our minds to receive His wisdom. In the New King James Version there are 6 NT references to renew or renewal and five of them refer to to the renewal of our minds or our natures while the sixth is the reference in Hebrews 6 about being "renewed to repentance". Tackling these references....

(Romans 12:2 NKJV) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

(2 Corinthians 4:16 NKJV) Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.

(Ephesians 4:23 NKJV) and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,

(Colossians 3:10 NKJV) and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,

(Titus 3:5 NKJV) not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,

These verses indicate that at conversion we receive a "new man" with a new renewed mind called the "mind of Christ" (see 1 Cor 2:10-16) and that the regeneration of the Holy Spirit leads to a renewing of the nature and a radical change in the way we think. This new nature and new mind is "renewed in knowledge" that is knowledge is a key component to personal change. That knowledge is knowledge of Christ and what He has done for us. Its result is that we are transformed into "the image of Him who created him...". The new man has a Creator and is being made into the image of that Creator - Jesus. Therefore a Christian should called the "mind of Christ" (see 1 Cor 2:10-16) and that the regeneration of the Holy Spirit leads to a renewing of the nature and a radical change in the way we think. This new nature and new mind is "renewed in knowledge" that is knowledge is a key component to personal change. That knowledge is knowledge of Christ and what He has done for us. Its result is that we are transformed into "the image of Him who created him...". The new man has a Creator and is being made into the image of that Creator - Jesus. Therefore a Christian should.

Practical Thinking and Communication Skills Demonstrated in Scripture

1. Black and White, Light and Shadow. This is the technique of defining an issue by saying both what it is and what it is not e.g. love is patient and kind, love is not envious or boastful etc. Define the issue in terms of what it is (white) and what it is not (black). It can help to add what it always is vs. what it never is. (see 1 Cor 13) We see this employed when things need to be portrayed clearly e.g. love in 1 Cor 13 and godly wisdom in James 3:13-18. When we have an issue we want to communicate to others clearly we can try this and say "I am saying A & B...but I am not saying X or Y". It helps eliminate confusion and promote unity on the issue.

2. Weighing Up The Cost. Jesus and Paul both exhorted people to weigh up the cost of Christian commitment and a number of parables demonstrate the advantages of figuring out whether a tower can be built or an army confronted and the folly of lack of calculation in the amount of oil needed for lamps etc. A simple way to weigh up the cost is a technique called PMI that has been popularised by Edward de Bono. Three columns are drawn up marked Plus, Minus and Interesting respectively. The positive aspects go under Plus, the disadvantages under Minus and the intriguing aspects under Interesting. After this is done the individual items in each column can be "weighted" according to importance. The resulting balance sheet is often a very good and effective tool for wise decision-making.

3. Eternal vs. Temporary. Biblical decision-making takes the eternal into account. Anything that is eternal outweighs anything that is temporary just as a mountain outweighs smoke. Everything that is eternal is substantial and precious. The eternal mustard seed of faith is thus "bigger" and more powerful than any earthly obstacle. In evaluating a decision it needs to be asked "Am I sacrificing the eternal to gain what is temporary?". Do not be like Esau who sold his inheritance for a bowl of soup. If we must sacrifice then let us sacrifice the temporary to gain the eternal.(Matthew 6:19-21 NKJV) "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; (20) "but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. (21) "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

4. Pearls Before Swine. Character and receptivity need to be taken into account when dealing with people. Wise people do not take a uniform approach to people and situations but they discern them to see whether they are wasting their time, talents and teachings. Jesus told his disciples not to cast their pearls before swine i.e. not to try to teach ignorant, hostile and aggressive people. This may seem "undemocratic" but it is the best use of resources. Likewise Paul moved on from hostile areas and stayed a long while in places that valued what he had to say.

5. The Jesus Pattern. Paul used the life of Jesus as a pattern or paradigm for solving ordinary church problems. Particularly the incarnation. When there was a problem with giving Paul pointed to Jesus and said... (2 Corinthians 8:8-9 NKJV) I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. (9) For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. And when there was a problem with quarrelling and the development of a church pecking order Paul appealed... (Philippians 2:3-7 NKJV) Let nothing be done through selfish
ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. (4) Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (5) Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, (6) who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, (7) but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. Whatever the church situation there is nearly always a good answer when we use the life of Jesus as our model and as our thinking paradigm.

6. The Conversation Of The Heart. Teaching should be aimed at what people are thinking and saying in their hearts. Jesus, Peter and Paul all seemed to address the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Malachi does this quite explicitly... (Malachi 2:17 NKJV) You have wearied the LORD with your words; Yet you say, "In what way have we wearied Him?" In that you say, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, And He delights in them," Or, "Where is the God of justice?" When your teaching addresses the thoughts and intentions of people's hearts it gains a cutting edge that makes it powerful and effective. It is important to deeply listen to others so that we can know the deep and troubling thoughts of our congregations and address them.

7. Thinking In Pictures and Diagrams. In a church business meeting one good word picture can win agreement faster than a long discussion. Most people operate by intuitive assent rather than by strict logic. A well crafted picture will get this intuitive agreement and help them to recognize the merits of what you are saying. For instance rather than offering an elaborate formal analysis of the faults in the church structures it could be said that the church is like a train with a wonderful engine and great carriages but the coupling between them is broken. This focuses attention on the problem in a recognizable way. Jesus used parables and Paul used types and all bible authors used vivid metaphors to get their points across. Pray for God to give you a picture of the situation then fine tune it and hone it until it is crystal clear. It will be an enormous help.

8. Aim High And Plan Everything With That In Mind. Jesus and the apostles thought and planned in terms of the highest and the best. They did not plan to preach the gospel to one-third of the world. They planned for the WHOLE world to hear, they planned in terms of ULTIMATE PURPOSES and IDEALS. We need to ask "what lofty ideal is this moving towards," "what godly purpose is this contributing to," "what lofty ideal is this moving towards," "what godly purpose is this contributing to," "what lofty ideal is this moving towards," "what godly purpose is this contributing to," "what lofty ideal is this moving towards," "what godly purpose is this contributing to." Sometimes we get bogged down in the short-term purposes and ideals such as a building program. We need to ask "what is the ultimate purpose of the building program" and keep asking that question until we get a final answer such as "to provide a facility so that people can hear the word of God, grow and become like Jesus in love". The building is not the ultimate purpose or the ideal. The people are. If the program is not contributing towards the ideal then it must be adjusted. Learn to think, plan and communicate in terms of ultimate goals and purposes.

9. Never give an order without giving a really great reason. The phrase "in order that" appears often in Scripture and frequently in the epistles. Christians are not just told to be good because that is the right thing to do. They are told to be good because it serves a great and good purpose. Here is just one example.(Philippians 2:14-16 NKJV) Do all things without complaining and disputing, (15) that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, (16) holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or laboured in vain. After each command there is a statement of the ideal or purpose that it is helping to achieve. This is wise leadership. Tell people why!

10. Global Vision, Local Adjustments. The Great Commission is a very flexible plan towards an ultimate ideal. It can be carried out by many and varied methods e.g. by radio, or by preaching or by one on one witnessing. Yet it is not all flexibility. The important ingredients are clearly specified and included in God's plan e.g. baptizing and "teaching them all I have commanded you." This is a good pattern for our plans. We need to have great and lofty plans and be able to implement them in many different ways depending on what is appropriate at the local level. You may need to have a "Jerusalem Council" (Acts 15) in order to decide what belongs to the global ideals and what is able to be adjusted at the local level. Success often hinges on getting this right. Get everyone to draw three columns, Global (non-negotiable), Local (adjustable), Unsure (important but is it that important) and then share what they have and talk it through. Keep your purposes and ideals prominently before you as you do this.

11. Consult others often. Proverbs reminds us that we do not have all the answers in our own heads, God expects us to ask those around us for advice.(Proverbs 15:22 NKJV) Without counsel, plans go awry, But in the multitude of counsellors they are established. One way of doing this is with a focus group. Get together a small group of say 6 godly and competent people from reasonably different backgrounds. Ask them to do a "SWOT analysis" of the idea - its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This is powerful and has helped many people get a perspective on their ideas.

12. Pray with your pen in hand. "Write what you see in a book" was the Lord's instructions to the apostle John who was in exile on the island of Patmos. David seems also to have prayed with his pen in hand and recorded his prayers in the Psalms. Writing down the insights we get in prayer can be very valuable and the basis of much further ministry. It saves us from forgetting things and we can review the ideas later with others in the light of Scripture. God imparts His wisdom to those who treasure it . Writing down the ideas that you receive from Him is one way of treasuring His wisdom. You can go too far with this and some think they are getting "revelation". There is a large gap between God imparting wisdom and scriptural inspiration. Despite its abuses this is a good and wise technique for retaining your godly wisdom after the prayer hour and I have found it very valuable indeed.

Conclusion

Christian leaders should be clear thinking clever people filled with the irresistible wisdom of the Holy Spirit and able to handle life's tricky situations with peace, poise and power. This was certainly the case with Jesus, Stephen, Peter and Paul. They were clearly able to be masters of their situations even when they were harsh and adverse situations. They did not always solve the problems. In fact all eventually became martyrs. But they lived wisely with a wisdom that was not of this world and founded the movement that has transformed so many lives and brought hope to the world. ●

(GlobalChristians.Org 1997—taken by permission of the writer)
Leadership Development Newsletter—page 4

**B O O K  R E V I E W**


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Although the Seventh-day Adventist Church has, from its beginning, had a very clear self-understanding as an end-time movement that fulfills biblical prophecy, there are very few systematic books on Adventist ecclesiology, i.e. the doctrine of the church. Reinder Bruinsma’s recent book, therefore, satisfies a great need. It is issued in the series ‘Library of Adventist Theology’, edited by George Knight and Woodrow Whidden, and published by Review and Herald. Three books have now emerged, viz. *The Cross of Christ* (Knight), *Sin and Salvation* (Knight), and *The Body of Christ* (Bruinsma).

Bruinsma covers the topic thoroughly and well: the biblical foundations, the ‘marks’ of the church, the Spirit in the church, the government of the church, ordination, the doctrine of the church in history, the church and ecumenism, the church and social justice, the mission of the church, and the future of the church.

For the readers of LDN, the chapter on ‘The Government of the Church’ is particularly noteworthy (pp. 89-108). Adventist church leaders do well to understand and know the church organisation where they are placed to give leadership. It is explained in the *Church Manual* and in the GC Working Policy. Bruinsma’s summary is a good introduction to these. He deals with the aspects of the visible and invisible church, church authority, local church leadership, a biblical model of church governance, discipline, and church and state.

In the section on a ‘biblical model of church governance’, the author describes three models of church governance: the *episcopalian* type, where the bishop (*episkopos*) is the key person in a hierarchic system of government, the *presbyterian*, type, with a graduated series of councils from the congregational to the national level, and the *congregationalist* model, where the local church exercises the final (human) authority in the church.

Bruinsma points out that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has adopted a model of church governance that has elements from all three traditional models. He says: ‘This model steers away from an undue emphasis on a hierarchy with a clergy that differs fundamentally from the other people of God and from the congregationalist option that shortchanges the importance of interconnectedness of congregations.’ He also highlights the fact that Adventist model is geared towards satisfying the need for effective mission to the whole world.

This book is well worth the reading and provides a comprehensive overview of a much needed topic for church leaders. This is not boring reading. Those of us who know Bruinsma expect that he will raise critical questions and provoke the reader to think more deeply about the matters and he does not disappoint us in that regard. ●

—Bertil Wiklander

**TED Diary—June 2010**

11-13 Zagreb, Croatia—Evangelistic Preparations

20 London (Central), UK—Postmodernism, training

**To Think About…**

*And he blessed Joseph and said, ‘... The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; Let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.’*  

*Genesis 48, 15-16*

Not everyone you influence will think the same way you do. You have to help them not only believe that they can succeed, but also show them that you want them to succeed. How do you do that?

**Expect it:** People can sense your underlying attitude no matter what you say or do. If you have an expectation for your people to be successful, they will know it.

**Verbalize it:** People need to hear you tell them that you believe in them and want them to succeed.

**Reinforce it:** You can never do too much when it comes to believing in people.

Once people recognize and understand that you genuinely want to see them succeed and are committed to helping them, they will begin to believe they can accomplish what you give them to do. ●

*Becoming a Person of Influence*