

How do we decide who is the greatest? The cleverest? The best?

If you're in on a Saturday night – x factor, strictly come dancing – judges and public vote. In sports, by who wins competitions.

Jesus' disciples trying to decide who was the greatest –

Yet again, they've missed the point, so Jesus sets them straight. The very thing of wanting to be first and greatest, shows that they really haven't 'got it' yet.

This story always reminds me of my beautiful friend Ida – one of the most beautiful Christians I've ever met – even in her 80s often said, 'I so want to be closer to Jesus and be more gracious' – The Godly heart. She never thought she'd 'arrived', because it was Jesus she was aiming to be like. (I thought she was already there...).

James tells the Church that those who truly seek God and honour God in their lives, will find their priorities and their behaviour change. Instead of arguments and pettiness, they will find

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. ¹⁵ Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. ¹⁶ For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

They won't have to panic about decisions and practicalities – the wisdom of God will flow through them, and in so doing – will result in gentleness, purity, straight forwardness, acts of mercy, kindness, compassion – because that's what happens when you soak your life in God's presence.

So when we are looking for wisdom, we look to God. And if we're looking for wise people, by all means find someone clever, but ensure they are also wise.

The bible has different words that get translated in English as wisdom:

Sophia – type of wisdom that 'sees the true nature of things' – not about practical 'what shall I do?' wisdom – it's deeper wisdom – it's God's wisdom – in reality, if you have this kind of wisdom, the other follows – if you can see the true nature of things, you will end up doing the right thing.

Phronimos or phronesis – is about being wise in practical things – like being sensible with money, or choosing a good insurance company –

Phronesis can happen when you HAVE Sophia. Without Sophia, you may make a practical decision that is good in its own context, but it's like getting the absolute best insurance for your empty yogurt pot collection. It's great insurance – well done – but you've misjudged what is important in the first place.

Sunesis is wisdom which is understanding, intelligence, which again is very useful. But only if the core values have the correct understanding of things. Otherwise you could make very clever summisations which hurt people, or lead you in a bad direction in life. Cleverness isn't enough on its own.

The 2nd two are great - being practical and sensible, making good decisions, is fab; being intelligent and being able to understand things is fab.

But as Christians, we want that to be coming from, and led by Sophia – God's wisdom, the 'wisdom from above'.

Then, being able to 'see the true nature of things' – we can set good priorities, make good decisions, show good understanding.

Sophia is the foundation for true wisdom. It comes from soaking our lives in God, honouring God, seeking God.

So what?

Next time decision, remember this, and remind me too please! – being still with God is more likely to help you find the way forward than panicking, writing 'pros and cons' lists, or worrying about it. I have a suggestion, based on our bible passages today.

Sit, take a deep breath. Be still in yourself (even if there's noise about). Stop. Be aware of your priority – God. Remind yourself that the honouring of God is the beginning of wisdom. And that it is wisdom we are looking for.

If you are comfortable with the idea of internal discussion, perhaps picture these different kinds of wisdom as figures around a table who you are having a discussion with.

Let pronesis – sensible practicality – be heard in your internal discussion.

Let sunesis have a say – the cleverness, the intelligent response – the result of study, research, facts and figures. Hear that.

Let your own preferences be heard for what they are – your preferences. Which may have a bearing on a decision, and may not. But hear them and acknowledge them.

And come back to Sophia – the wisdom of God – the core of truth resides here. Let Sophia be the one sat beside you, deciding with you, sharing the 'driving seat'.

Hear the others. But in the still small voice that comes with purity, gentleness, kindness, mercy, peace...
hear. Like

Milne's characters in the Hundred acre wood – we're all different characters – and like them perhaps we all show wisdom in different ways – but we can ALL BE WISE – in our different ways, but if from the wisdom of God – that will show in our lives of gentleness, purity, peace, full of mercy, kindness.

(Psalm 111, esp. Verse 10: The way to become wise is to honour God;
God gives sound judgment to all who obey his commands.
God is to be praised forever!; Mark 9: 30-37; James 3: 13-18.

