

CHAPTER 3

THE SIMPLE (OR NAIVE)

“How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?....”
Proverbs 1:22(a) (RSV)

*The naive believes everything,
But the sensible man considers his steps.*
Proverbs 14:15 (NASB)

*The naive inherit foolishness,
But the sensible are crowned with knowledge.*
Proverbs 14:18 (NASB)

*O simple ones, learn prudence;
O foolish men, pay attention.*
Proverbs 8:5 (RSV)

....for the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

Luke 16:8(b) (RSV)

*My son, if sinners entice you,
do not consent.*
Proverbs 1:10 (ESV)

*The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;*
Psalms 19:7 (RSV)

*The unfolding of thy words gives light;
it imparts understanding to the simple.*
Psalms 119:130 (RSV)

“Strike a scoffer and the naïve may become shrewd....”
Proverbs 19:25(a) (NASB)

“When a scoffer is punished, the simple becomes wise.....”
Proverbs 21:11(a) (RSV)

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it have a good understanding.....*
Psalms 111:10(a) (ESV)

Who are the simple or the naïve?

The words *simple* and *naive* mean the same and can be used interchangeably. The simple or naive person falls in between the categories of the fool and the wise. They are in the middle and are not fools, but they are not wise either. They do not deny or ignore God's existence or reject His values. Neither do they generally live as if God didn't exist. Therefore, overall, they have quite a bit to commend them.

However, they still cannot be classified as wise, as they have not yet acquired knowledge, understanding, prudence, insight, discernment, discretion or the fear of the LORD. At least, they do not yet have *enough* of those things to be considered wise, even if they are Christians. Thus, the naïve do not yet have the habits and attitudes that this book seeks to help you to develop.

The majority of Christians, even genuine ones, fall into this category because very few people are wise, even within the real Church. That is one reason why there is so much apostasy and false teaching today. There are too few wise people in our churches to challenge it and the naïve, although numerous, cannot see what is going on.

The main problem of the simple is that they lack discernment. In particular they are unable to judge accurately the character of other people.

The simple person is too gullible, naïve and trusting. Therefore, as well as being unable to identify false teaching in the churches, he regularly misjudges the nature, motives and intentions of others. He will believe what people say, and trust them, whoever they may be. He does not realise that there are different types of person in this world, and that he is meant to try to differentiate or judge between them.

However, let me make clear that there are two main words for ‘*judge*’ or ‘*judging*’ in the New Testament, *diakrino* and *kreetace*, and they have very different meanings. There is one kind of judging which we are *commanded* to do and another kind which is *forbidden*. So, when I say that we *must* judge other people, I mean in the sense of ‘*diakrino*’. That means to distinguish, assess or differentiate, all of which we are commanded to do.

I do not mean ‘*kreetace*’ type judgment. To ‘*kreetace*’ others would mean assuming a position of superiority, acting hypocritically, and usurping Jesus’ role as the judge of the whole world. It therefore involves condemning others and doing so invalidly and self-righteously. For much more detail on the important distinction between these two Greek words, please listen to my audio teaching on Matthew’s gospel or see my written commentary on Matthew which I hope to write shortly.

However, the naïve person doesn’t know *how* to assess people anyway, or how tell them apart, even if he knew that he was supposed to try to do so. In particular, he does not understand the way in which the wicked operate. Therefore, he tends to believe everything he is told because he is unaware that there are people out there who would actually want to deceive him, or who are deceived themselves. Above all, he has no idea that such deceivers are so numerous:

***The naïve believes everything,
But the sensible man considers his steps.
Proverbs 14:15 (NASB)***

There is nothing virtuous about trusting people whom we do not yet know and whose character and fruit we have not yet measured. In fact, the Bible positively tells us *not* to trust them. We are commanded instead to critically appraise *everything* we see and hear and to form a judgement, in the sense of ‘*diakrino*’, *not* ‘*kreetace*’. That applies to *everyone* we deal with. We have to find out exactly whom, and what, we are dealing with before we even considering trusting anybody. (See my Book 6, concerning the wicked, for a much fuller discussion of this.)

Naivety is a fault, not a quality. Jesus does *not* want us to automatically trust everybody - not even fellow Christians.

The simple person’s excessive and premature willingness to trust others and to “*see good in everyone*” may seem endearing. I have often heard that approach praised, as if it was a virtue. However, it is not something that God ever praises. God views it as *gullibility* and regards that as a major fault. It will

lead the simple person into a great deal of trouble, such that he will regularly become prey for others, especially the wicked.

Apostle Paul therefore tells us to be innocent *ourselves*. But, at the same time, we are meant to be completely realistic about the evil that is in *other people*, or likely to be in them, or even that might possibly be in them. That must be our approach, however unlikely it may seem to us that the person is bad, based on what we currently know and believe:

Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.

1 Corinthians 14:20 (NIV)

Jesus did not trust everybody. Far from it. He was entirely realistic and knew all about the hidden malice in men's hearts:

²³*Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name.*²⁴*But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men.*²⁵*He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.*

John 2:23-25 (NIV)

If a simple/naive person does not take steps to acquire wisdom, he is in danger of going the other way and descending into being a fool himself. The membership of each of these four groups is not static. People move up and down, and it is rare to stay in the same place, at the same level. We are all travelling along the spectrum, either upwards from simple to wise, or downwards from simple to fool and then on to being wicked. That said, for most people, the direction of travel is downward, i.e. from naive to foolish, rather than for fools to move up to become simple and then wise:

***The naive inherit foolishness,
But the sensible are crowned with knowledge.***

Proverbs 14:18 (NASB)

Having become a fool, a man can easily degenerate even further, until he becomes wicked.

If we are currently simple, but do nothing to try to become wise, we are likely to end up as a fool. The very act of choosing not to pursue wisdom is foolish in itself. It is also *disobedience*, since the Bible commands it. Going downwards is easy and automatic, like drifting downstream, but we will never go up unless we *consciously try to do so*. Upward movement is not automatic, whereas we will inevitably descend unless we actively seek not to. We have to be moving in some direction, as the option of standing still is not available. Thus, if a fool does nothing to try to change, he is likely to end up wicked:

***For a fool speaks nonsense,
And his heart inclines toward wickedness***

Isaiah 32:6(a) (NASB)

Simple people lack prudence and caution so they 'sleepwalk' into danger or into being deceived, used or manipulated.

Because the simple don't understand other people, especially the wicked, they are generally unaware of the danger they are in. They do not see others as a threat, even when the danger would be obvious to a wise person. The simple go through life with their guard down and their 'carbon monoxide detectors' switched off. Unlike Jesus, they are not alert to the falseness in other people's hearts and are generally unaware that it exists at all. Accordingly, they are not expecting to be deceived today, or by whoever they are with at the moment.

Therefore, they are not being careful and vigilant because they do not even realise that they need to be. A man who does not realise there is any danger is not going to brace himself or be ready for it. Therefore, the simple sleepwalk into situations in which they are then used or exploited. Even afterwards, they are slow to realise what happened to them. They still can't see the manipulation, even after it has become obvious to others. The simple/naive person therefore walks into the traps that are set for him:

*A prudent man sees evil and hides himself,
The naive proceed and pay the penalty.
Proverbs 27:12 (NASB)*

The simple person generally doesn't learn, even from repeated bad experiences and mistreatment by others. Therefore, even after those experiences are over, he still doesn't know what went wrong or how he got into the mess. He doesn't realise that he was deceived or manipulated and makes little or no attempt to figure it out. Therefore, he often emerges from the fiasco still trusting, and even confiding in, the very person who has deceived or used him. I know, because I have done so myself a number of times.

That inability to see how the deception or manipulation occurred prevents the simple man from learning from his errors. Thus, he is doomed to repeat them over and over again. He may never come to understand the nature of the problem, because he doesn't even know he has got a problem. At any rate, it doesn't occur to him that his own naivety is one of the causes of his difficulties. He assumes he is just unlucky. Therefore, being naive is obviously less damaging than being wicked or foolish, but it is still likely to result in us being harmed.

God is very sensible, and He knows how much grief is caused merely by naivety, i.e. the absence of wisdom, even where there is no sin or transgression. That's why it's so crucial to pursue wisdom. You can't just wait for it to come to you automatically, as you get older, merely by the passage of time. It has to be actively pursued. Proverbs portrays wisdom as if it was a person who is calling to you and to whom *you must go*, because wisdom never comes to you, no matter how much time passes:

*¹Does not wisdom call,
does not understanding raise her voice?
²On the heights beside the way,
in the paths she takes her stand;
³beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud:
⁴"To you, O men, I call,
and my cry is to the sons of men.
⁵O simple ones, learn prudence;
O foolish men, pay attention.
⁶Hear, for I will speak noble things,
and from my lips will come what is right;
⁷for my mouth will utter truth;
wickedness is an abomination to my lips.
⁸All the words of my mouth are righteous;
there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.
⁹They are all straight to him who
understands and right to those who find knowledge.
¹⁰Take my instruction instead of silver,
and knowledge rather than choice gold;
¹¹for wisdom is better than jewels,
and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.
¹²I, wisdom, dwell in prudence,
and I find knowledge and discretion.* *Proverbs 8:1-12 (RSV)*

*I love those who love me,
and those who seek me diligently find me.
Proverbs 8:17 (RSV)*

Again in Proverbs chapter 9, wisdom is spoken of as if it was a person. Here it is portrayed as a woman calling to the simple/naive person and urging him to spend time with her and, thereby, to gain understanding. We are to pursue this 'person' called wisdom and to become thoroughly acquainted:

*¹Wisdom has built her house,
She has hewn out her seven pillars;
²She has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine;
She has also set her table;
³She has sent out her maidens, she calls
From the tops of the heights of the city:
⁴"Whoever is naive, let him turn in here!"
To him who lacks understanding she says,
⁵"Come, eat of my food
And drink of the wine I have mixed.
⁶"Forsake your folly and live,
And proceed in the way of understanding."
Proverbs 9:1-6 (NASB)*

Absolutely anybody can stop being simple and start to become wise if they really want to

There is always hope for the simple person. He can stop being naive and start to become wise if he really wants to. His condition is not unchangeable. If he pursues wisdom he can fully expect to get it. Moreover, he can get as much of it as he wants, and is willing to work for. God would not command us to stop being naive and to become wise if it could not be done. Therefore, being wise is entirely a matter of *choice*, not something which randomly happens to you, or a natural ability you are born with. It is something you build or grow as a matter of your own *decisions*:

*Leave simpleness, and live,
and walk in the way of insight."
Proverbs 9:6 (RSV)*

There is a way for even the most naive person to become shrewd and discerning, provided he realises his need to change, and is determined to do so. Being naive is nothing to boast about, as it is only one step up from being a fool. God is therefore urging us all to wake up, to leave our naivety and gullibility behind, and to get wisdom:

*"How long, O naive ones,
will you love being simple-minded?
Proverbs 1:22(a) (NASB)*

*Hear instruction and be wise,
and do not neglect it.
Proverbs 8:33 (RSV)*

*⁵ do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth.
Get wisdom; get insight.
⁶ Do not forsake her, and she will keep you;
love her, and she will guard you.
⁷ The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom,
and whatever you get, get insight.*

⁸ *Prize her highly, and she will exalt you;
she will honor you if you embrace her.*
⁹ *She will place on your head a fair garland;
she will bestow on you a beautiful crown.”*
Proverbs 4:5-9 (RSV)

The simple also lack knowledge.

Another major problem for the simple person is sheer lack of knowledge. There are so many things that he just doesn't know. He doesn't know how wicked people operate, or what the Bible warns us of. He doesn't know the techniques that people use to control and manipulate us, or the tell-tale signs of deception and malice. Therefore, he isn't looking for them. Lack of knowledge alone can cause us to be destroyed, quite apart from lack of wisdom. Our lives may be damaged or even ruined, simply because we lack knowledge of the Bible and of other people's evil characters and schemes:

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge..."
Hosea 4:6(a) (RSV)

Perhaps you are now beginning to realise that you belong to this group called the simple and not to the wise and are even willing to admit that you are prone to being deceived, used and manipulated. If so, then resolve to see these things as faults, and to start to address them. Begin by recognising what you really are at present. Then set your face to seek the knowledge that you lack, and to keep searching until you have it. Even then, continue pursuing knowledge permanently, because you can never really finish the job or get too much of it:

"Wise men lay up knowledge ..."
Proverbs 10:14(a) (RSV)

The simple are easily used and manipulated by the wicked.

One of the hallmarks of Satan and his demons, and also of wicked people, is that they seek to *dominate*, *manipulate* and *control* others. To succeed in that they have to go in search of suitable victims who are likely to fall for their devious tactics. The wicked know that other wicked people will rarely allow themselves to be used, manipulated or controlled, as they themselves are seeking to do all those things to others. Therefore, they can easily see through anybody who is using the same methods against them.

Therefore, albeit for different reasons, neither the demons nor the wicked will get very far by seeking their victims from among the wise. The wise do not use such devious tactics themselves but they have, nevertheless, learned how to see through the wicked when they engage in them. So, the only groups left for the wicked to prey upon are the foolish and the simple. That said, a high proportion of the foolish are already well on the way to becoming wicked themselves and so they often have at least some understanding of the crafty schemes that the wicked use.

That means, therefore, that the prime target group that the wicked have left to focus on is the simple. They are easy prey, even when the same tricks are used against them repeatedly. Any contest between the wicked and the simple generally results in victory for the wicked man, mainly because he is the only one who even knows that there is a contest going on. There is therefore an inbuilt inequality, because the wicked can understand and recognise the simple, but the simple cannot do the same with the wicked.

The simple are easily recognised by the wicked. It is as if they have a neon sign on their head advertising what they are.

The tricks that are played on the simple are remarkably repetitive. They are deceived, manipulated and used over and over again and in the same ways, even by the same people. That is not just a coincidence. One reason for it is that the wicked are very skilled at recognising the simple and can immediately spot them, even across a crowded room. In part, the wicked person's ability to see a victim so quickly is because they have their own native cunning, also aided by years of experience.

However, on top of all that, they also have the help of demons. The overall effect is that it is as if the simple have a neon sign on their heads saying "*easily deceived*". I have a particular person in mind as an example of this, but I could also think of many others who are repeatedly manipulated. In fact, I was in that group myself, when I was younger. The particular person I am thinking of used to live in one part of the country where he was repeatedly deceived, used and taken advantage of.

He was tricked into helping false, unworthy people, for example by lending them money. He kept falling for the same old tricks again and again. Then he moved to a different part of the country, but within a matter of days, he had fallen into the clutches of two new manipulators, quite separately, neither of whom knew each other. It was no coincidence. It was due to the 'neon sign' on his head. He had brought that with him when he moved towns and the wicked saw it.

Therefore, he immediately stood out to the wicked as someone who would be easy prey. So, one of our first tasks, if we want to stop being simple, is to remove that neon sign from our heads. We must stop sending out those signals which tell the wicked that we are gullible and available to be used and deceived. As soon as we realise this problem, and start to send out a different kind of signal, the wicked will notice straight away. You can be quite sure of that, because they notice everything.

The simple allow themselves to be walked on

The simple are easily walked on and pushed around by others. Fools and wicked people develop a thick, leathery skin, and are brass-faced when challenged. Simple people do not have that thick skin, and find it hard to grasp the fact that other people do. That being so, they tend to try too hard to avoid giving offence. In fact, they need not be so concerned about it, because the wicked, and also fools, are not easily hurt whatever one does.

They can certainly be *angered* at being challenged, resisted or caught out in a lie or a scheme. But it would be wrong to think of them being *hurt*. That is the reaction of simple people. Fools, and especially wicked people, feel outrage, fury, temper etc, but rarely hurt feelings. Therefore, in their effort to avoid offending others, the simple frequently fail to show enough assertiveness and are insufficiently direct.

Their wish to avoid offending others, causes them to stay silent when they should defend themselves and to tolerate things which ought not to be tolerated. However, that concern for the feelings of others is not shared by the wicked, or even by fools. Thus, the simple often end up going through the battles of life with one hand, or even both hands, tied behind their backs, while the wicked use both hands, elbows, and their feet as well.

The simple can't discern what the 'time' is.

Even if we are beginning to wake up and to discover some facts and principles that we did not previously know about, there is still a difficulty in knowing *when* to apply a particular principle and when not to. Timing is vitally important. One might learn of a new factor which may need to be considered, but still be unsure as to whether or not it is applicable at this *specific time*. For example, there is a time to be firm and a time not to be.

There is also a time to ask probing questions and a time not to, a time to give or to lend money and a time not to, a time to confront and a time not to. The same can be said of every principle that we see in Scripture. For each one, wisdom is needed to work out *whether, when, how, and to what extent*, it ought to be applied *in the particular situation that you face*. Solomon identified this vexed problem when, as an old man, he wrote the book of Ecclesiastes:

*¹For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven:
²a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant,
and a time to pluck up what is planted;
³a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down,
and a time to build up;
⁴a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
⁵a time to cast away stones,
and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace,
and a time to refrain from embracing;
⁶a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep,
and a time to cast away;
⁷a time to rend,
and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence,
and a time to speak;
⁸a time to love,
and a time to hate;
a time for war,
and a time for peace.*

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (RSV)

If we have been simple, or still are, we may not have been aware until now that certain principles even existed. Now we might know of them, but still be unsure as to when to apply them and when not to. On many occasions I have come to learn of some principle but have then applied it prematurely. Other times I have applied it too late, or with the wrong people, for whom it was not applicable. This is something we just have to learn gradually, from painful experience. There is no other way.

However, we can speed up the learning process by praying on each occasion and asking God to guide us as to timing and as to whether or not the principle is applicable at this time and in this particular situation. I know of no short cuts. It inevitably takes years to learn. I have therefore discovered many new factors or considerations over the years that may potentially be of relevance to a situation I am facing. But deciding whether and when to apply principle A, or whether and when to apply principle B instead, can be quite bewildering.

One can find that one was too vigilant in one situation and/or that one acted too hastily, and/or went too far. Therefore, on the next occasion one adjusts, only to find, in that different situation, that one has over-compensated and therefore was not vigilant enough, and/or was too slow to act, and/or did not go far enough. It is due to having misread the timing or wrongly assessing the nature and gravity of the circumstances, or because one is not yet experienced enough at applying the various principles one has learned.

It is just as with learning any new skill. We might learn a new recipe, but the first time we try it, the dinner is overcooked. Then the next time it is undercooked until, eventually, after several attempts, we

get the hang of it. The precise timing of difficult situations, knowing when to start, how far to go, and how vigorous to be, especially when handling the wicked, is rather like that. Realistically, the only way to learn is by trial and error, which means being willing to risk making mistakes. If you are not willing to make those you will never get anywhere and will certainly never learn the art of ‘telling the time’.

A simple person is often humble enough to be willing to be corrected without resenting it. Thus, they are much more open to the Gospel than fools or wicked people are.

In my experience, most people who get saved seem to come from among the simple. They tend to have tender hearts and are not too proud to be corrected or to see that they are at fault. We see an example of this in the case of the Samaritan women whom Jesus met by the well:

⁵ So he came to a city of Samar'ia, called Sy'char, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. ⁷ There came a woman of Samar'ia to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samar'ia?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

John 4:5-15 (RSV)

Note how open the Samaritan woman was. When Jesus spoke of this living water her immediate reaction was to take Him seriously and to ask Him for it. A hardened person would have sneered at Jesus' words, but she wanted what He was speaking of, and did not try to pretend that she already had it. Moreover, she did not object when Jesus pointed out some of the sins in her life, in particular that she had lived immorally with many different men. A fool or a wicked person would have been enraged, but she just continued to question Jesus and was not at all resentful:

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly." ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

John 4:16-26 (RSV)

She also took Jesus perfectly seriously when He told her that He was the Messiah. In fact, she not only believed Him, she went immediately to tell others:

²⁸ So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" ³⁰ They went out of the city and were coming to him.

John 4:28-30 (RSV)

Do not build your life on sand.

Here is one of Jesus' statements which has entered into the English language:

²⁴ "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

Matthew 7:24-27 (ESV)

Jesus commands us to build our lives on *Him*. He, and His Word, are solid rock, and can be depended on, whereas *everything else is sand*. That, in a nutshell, is what wisdom is all about. We have to make Jesus, and *obedience to His commands*, the very foundation of our lives, upon which everything else has to be built. If you don't then you cannot claim to be His disciple, in which case, you cannot hope to become wise either, as that is a pre-condition to doing so. Therefore, Jesus asks this stark question in the parallel passage in Luke about building on the rock:

"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?"

Luke 6:46 (ESV)

Jesus is even blunter in Matthew's gospel where He makes clear that those who do not do the Father's will are not going to enter the Kingdom of heaven:

²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Matthew 7:21-23 (ESV)

Don't build your life on unrighteousness – the means are more important than the ends

Building your life on unrighteousness means doing things, and making decisions, which are motivated by, or based on, some kind of sin rather than on obedience to what Jesus has said. So, for example, we might be motivated by pride or greed or envy. Or we might cut corners in our lives and seek to build our career, business or relationships with the 'help' of lies or sharp practices or by manipulating or dominating others. The potential list of such sinful methods or techniques is endless. But they are all the opposite of what God wants us to do.

Anything we build by using such carnal or worldly methods is built upon a foundation of iniquity. It might appear to succeed in the short term, but it will not last, because God was not involved in it and it was not achieved in *His way*. God is far more interested in *how we go about things* than in *how much we succeed or achieve*. To Him, the means are more important than the ends. He will only bless and give His approval to those who build things *His way*, based on godliness and righteousness, not in their own way, or in the flesh, or by using worldly practices:

⁹Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm! ¹⁰You have devised shame to your house by cutting off many peoples; you have forfeited your life. ¹¹For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the woodwork respond. ¹²Woe to him who builds a town with blood, and founds a city on iniquity!

Habakkuk 2:9-12 (RSV)

It is therefore stupidly short-sighted to try to cheat in this life by doing things in an unfair or dishonest way. Likewise, being wilful and impulsive and going faster than God wants you to go, or doing more than He wanted, is carnal and He won't support it. It may bring the appearance of success, in the short term, but it will produce nothing in the long term, and certainly not in eternity. Dishonesty, in particular, will only bring woe upon yourself, i.e. God's curse. Then He will dismantle everything that was built by any other means than *obedience to Him and in accordance with His principles*.

Like the partridge that gathers a brood that she did not hatch, so is he who gets riches but not by justice; in the midst of his days they will leave him, and at his end he will be a fool.

Jeremiah 17:11 (ESV)

⁵ *The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance,
but every one who is hasty comes only to want.*

⁶ *The getting of treasures by a lying tongue
is a fleeting vapor and a snare of death.*

Proverbs 21:5-6 (RSV)

*Wealth hastily gotten will dwindle,
but he who gathers little by little will increase it.*

Proverbs 13:11 (RSV)

In fact, do not build anything at all unless God is building it. If you do, it will just be a work of the flesh.

Another lesson I have learned through many bitter experiences is that we should never do, or build, or join, anything at all *unless God is in it*. Over the years I have initiated, or got involved in, all sorts of apparently good causes or worthy sounding activities that seemed good to me. But I later realised they were just my own 'bright ideas', and that God was never in them, or at least that He never told *me* to get involved in them.

God has never promised to assist us with tasks or projects which are merely our own ideas, or which we have embarked on solely by our own initiative, due to our own wilfulness or impulsiveness. If we attempt such things we may find that God will leave us to do them on our own, without His help. If so, they will inevitably come to nothing and we will find that we have laboured in vain:

*Unless the LORD builds the house,
those who build it labour in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the watchman stays awake in vain.*

Psalms 127:1 (RSV)

Therefore, even if a thing sounds good, always ask God whether *He* is involved in it, and whether He wants *you* to be doing it, before you get involved. This simple measure will save you from a lot of wasted stress and effort and enable you to focus exclusively on those things which God *is* calling you to. That is very liberating and will also greatly increase your effectiveness. One would imagine this to be obvious, but how many of us actually think and act in this way, rather than just pressing full steam ahead, pursuing our own ideas, opinions, and even pipe dreams?

¹ *“Woe to the rebellious children,” declares the LORD,
“Who execute a plan, but not Mine,
And make an alliance, but not of My Spirit,
In order to add sin to sin;*

² *Who proceed down to Egypt
Without consulting Me,*

***To take refuge in the safety of Pharaoh
And to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt!
³ “Therefore the safety of Pharaoh will be your shame
And the shelter in the shadow of Egypt, your humiliation.
Isaiah 30:1-3 (NASB)***

The difference between a ‘*dream*’ and a ‘*pipedream*’ is that a dream is valid and is planted in your mind by God because He wants you to pursue it. By contrast, a pipedream is something of your own making, which you have imagined or invented, and which did not come from God. It is an ambition, or even a fantasy, which you pursue in your own strength, as a work of the flesh. That is why it is essential to know whether any idea or project is from God, or from yourself, or even from a demon. That is often difficult to tell, but we need to try hard to get it right, because there is a lot at stake.

If you have now realised that you are not wise, but simple, and that you need to change, then start to seek wisdom now, in every possible way

This book is not intended to flatter you. Neither is the Bible. The aim is to tell the truth and to help you to see the truth about yourself and about your lack of wisdom, your naivety, and perhaps even your foolishness. Wherever you may currently be on the wickedness to wisdom ‘spectrum’, if you have made some discoveries about what you really are, then resolve to *do something about it*, not just as a one-off exercise, but as a life-long project.

From now on seek to identify all the areas in which you are naïve, or foolish, or where you currently lack knowledge, understanding, discernment, prudence, insight, discretion or the fear of the LORD. Then set about putting things right and plugging all of the gaps. This book sets out many of the ways in which you can do that. However, I suggest that you begin by praying, as Paul prayed for the people in Ephesus, that God would grant you wisdom and revelation and help you to change:

¹⁵ For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might

Ephesians 1:15-19 (ESV)

Ask God to give you the wisdom that you lack and to build in you the right attitudes and habits. But you must also keep on and on asking Him, in your devotional times, but also as you face difficulties, trials and tests that you have not faced before. Above all, ask Him every time you read the Bible. Ask Him to open it up to you and to enable you to see its real meaning, to realise where it is speaking of faults that you have, or areas where your doctrines are mistaken. Also ask Him generally to give you new insights, of various kinds, that you have not previously seen.

I have done that for many years and God has answered my prayers remarkably. Often He does it by allowing me to see things in the Bible for the first time, or to see connections between passages. Or, He will give me insights into matters of doctrine or practice, or into my own character faults, or someone else’s, that I had not previously noticed. That is largely how my books have been written. I ask God to teach me things, mainly from Scripture, which I can then teach others, and He does. Indeed, He is glad to do so, as James told us He would be:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him.

James 1:5 (RSV)

However, when God gives you those insights, as He will if you sincerely ask Him to, and if you really want to know, then don't waste those discoveries by allowing yourself to forget them. Write them down *at the time* in a journal, or notebook, or in your Bible. Then you will have a permanent record and reminder of the lesson that God has just given to you, or the insight He has revealed. Don't leave it until later, or you will forget it, partly because it is in our nature to forget, but also because the demons will try hard to make sure that you do, by distracting you.

So, foresee all that and act sensibly by recording all such insights there and then. God also wants to know what you will *do* about any insight that He has given you before He will give you further ones. Therefore, don't despise, neglect, ignore or disobey anything that God has shown you, however small it might seem. Take it seriously, note it down and remember it. Above all, *act upon it* by immediately obeying it or putting it into practice in your life.

As God sees you doing that, and thus honouring Him, He will honour you in return by continuing to give you more and more insights, and on an ever larger scale. He will also correct your errors and misunderstandings about His Word and show you your own personal faults and character failings. That may not sound like a privilege, but I can assure you it is, and that it is one that you must not allow yourself to miss. If you don't do this, and instead you ignore or disobey God's insights and revelations, or even delay in obeying them, then they will dry up.

The Bible will then become for you a difficult, impenetrable book which you do not enjoy reading and get little from. That happens to people not because there is something wrong with the Bible, but because there is something wrong with their *attitude towards it*. In particular it is due to their failure to take seriously, and to act upon, the insights and revelations they have *already had*. In short, if you obey what you now know, then God will tell you more. But if you don't, then He won't. Or at least He will not do so until you repent and change your attitude.