



Sunday  
August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024

**Pentecost 13B**

# Wisdom

**Breaking Open the Word**

**Pentecost 13  
Liturgical Year B**



**St Peter's by the Lake  
PAYNESVILLE**

Anglican Diocese of  
Gippsland



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from Lumo Series



## READINGS

Proverbs 9.1-6  
Psalm 34.9-14  
Ephesians 5.15-20  
John 6.51-58



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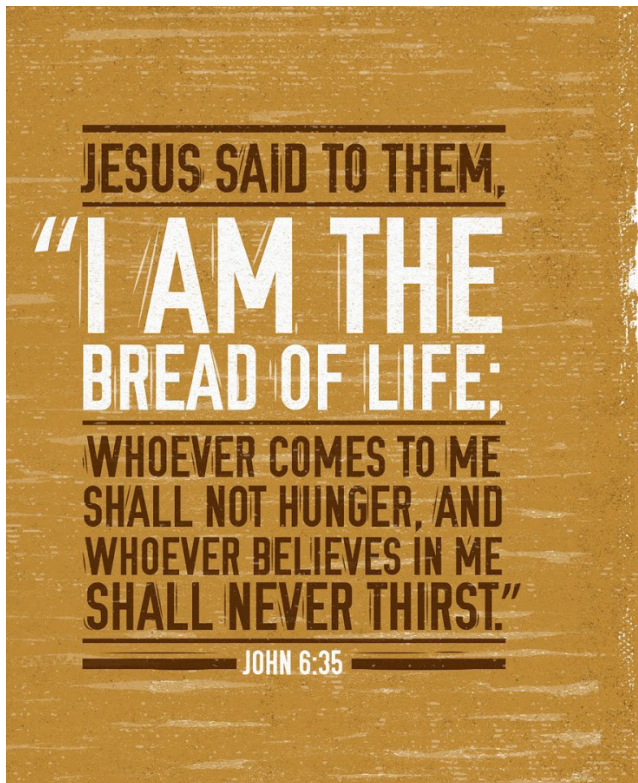
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## Summary



“

I AM the bread of life

”

John 6

Almighty and everlasting God,  
who art always more ready to hear than we  
to pray,  
and art wont to give more than either we  
desire or deserve:  
Pour down upon us the abundance of thy  
mercy:  
forgiving us those things whereof our  
conscience is afraid,  
and giving us those good things which we are  
not worthy to ask,  
but through the merits and mediation of  
Jesus Christ,  
thy Son, our Lord. Amen.



# INTRODUCTION

In the “Wisdom” sermon from the “Bread of Life” series, Dennis unravels wisdom’s virtue as portrayed in the book of Proverbs and its significance in our lives. Dennis begins with interpretations from Proverbs 8:12-14, citing wisdom as dwelling with prudence, holding knowledge and discretion, and despising evil, pride, and perverse speech. Through the narrative of Jesus feeding the crowd and proclaiming himself as the ‘true bread from heaven’, Dennis beautifully intertwines the concept of wisdom.

To him, wisdom is a foundational gift personified as Sophia, always present and life-giving. The word of God, or the true bread, becomes a metaphor for wisdom and life sustenance. The sermon further discusses the lack of wisdom observed in those who question Jesus and his teachings, focusing too narrowly on literal interpretations. These authorities, obsessed with maintaining control, fail to understand the profound meaning behind Jesus’ words, contributing to his crucifixion. Transitioning into the concept of the “seven pillars of wisdom” - not explicitly listed in Proverbs - Dennis suggests wisdom is a learnable trait that cannot be confined or controlled.

Referencing T.E. Lawrence’s memoir, he acknowledges these pillars reflecting Islamic principles as a wisdom foundation: submission to God, maintaining purity, prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage. Finally, the sermon concludes by emphasising the potential influence of embracing wisdom’s seven pillars within a community - leading to growth, peace, and goodness.

Drawing from the book of Proverbs, especially Proverbs 9, the preacher portrays wisdom as linked to prudence, knowledge, discretion, reverence for the Lord, counsel, understanding, and power.

The sermon ends by inspiring listeners to celebrate the wisdom they gather and to integrate it into their daily lives. In summary, Dennis’ sermon on wisdom intricately combines biblical interpretations, stories, and critical themes, challenging listeners to incorporate wisdom as the driving force in their lives.

## THEMES

### **How do I perceive wisdom in my own life?**

Reflect on the role of wisdom as more than just knowledge but as a guiding principle that shapes decisions and actions.

### **What does it mean to see Jesus as the ‘true bread from heaven’ in my spiritual journey?**

Consider how understanding Jesus as the embodiment of wisdom changes your relationship with Him and your approach to spiritual nourishment.

### **Am I open to learning and growing in wisdom, even if it challenges my current understanding?**

Reflect on your willingness to embrace wisdom that may push you out of your comfort zone or challenge existing beliefs.

### **How do the seven pillars of wisdom resonate with my life?**

Think about how the principles like submission to God, prayer, and charity manifest in your life and how they contribute to a wise and balanced existence.

### **In what ways can I bring wisdom into my community?**

Reflect on how you can be a source of wisdom in your community, promoting peace, growth, and goodness through your actions and words.

God of Creation, breathe into us, made of clay,  
your gift of life so that we, made in your image  
may be your eyes, ears, hands and voice.



Give us this bread always!

Give me this water so I don't have to come  
and draw it out.

Feed me now!

"I wisdom, dwell together with prudence;  
I possess knowledge and discretion. To  
fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride,  
arrogance, evil behaviour, and perverse  
speech. Counsel and sound judgment are  
mine; I have understanding and power."  
(Proverbs 8.12-14)

The story so far!

Jesus feeds the multitude with bread and fish. They realise he is a man from God and try to make him King by force, but Jesus escapes to the hills, sending the disciples to the other side of the lake by boat. Taking the shortcut, Jesus startles the disciples as he walks on the water past them. The crowds are awake to what Jesus has done and seek more. They want the bread that will never give out! So, Jesus changes the tune by preaching that he is the true bread from heaven. Immediately, the authorities work on discrediting him. He repeats the teaching. This time, they murmur amongst themselves as this is saying that Jesus is better than the manna and quail during the Passover. Jesus triples down now, and the word changes from discredit to murmur and now to dispute. A showdown is coming, and will the authorities be wise enough to see where this will end up?

Wisdom is a beautiful gift, and according to the book of Proverbs, the Wisdom of Solomon, it is the foundation of the house that the Holy Spirit builds. According to the scriptures, Wisdom is seen as the beginning of everything. It is the foundation on which the Church is built, the Temple of Solomon and even our own very lives. Wisdom, Sophia hovered gently over the void between the sky and the water, bringing forth life from there. Sophia gave the word, and all things came into being. And that very word of God,

the breath of God, became flesh and dwelt among us, the true bread, the trustworthy source of life and sustenance, was, and is, in our midst.

In the journey through John 6, we see the lack of wisdom in how people question Jesus, his authority and origins, argue the Torah with him, and then refuse to see beyond the literal understanding of what is being said to them. Jesus is asking the authorities to look beyond the black-and-white jottings and take on board what is being said to them. Instead of loving and worshipping God, they had made the law their captive and used that as the means to control and manipulate their comfortable existence. Any threat outside the text was seen as a direct threat against the nation. By raising questions about their authority, already diminished under Roman occupation, this young whipper snapper from a village in dem hills was not to be accepted, let alone tolerated. In his preaching, the path to Calvary had been well and truly chosen.

Many people wonder what the seven pillars of wisdom are as the Proverbs do not list them (as Paul tends to list things). The Wisdom literature requires the reader to look at the text and enter into the spirit of what is offered. Wisdom cannot be regulated or controlled but can be learned and applied. Looking for sustenance in wisdom, a search on the online world, which is the internet, for "Seven Pillars of Wisdom" immediately took me to the memoir of T. H. Lawrence of Arabia. I was not prepared to take that rabbit hole of Lawrence's memories of World War I or any of the multitude of commentary on his somewhat embellished life in the Islamic world of the time.

The title of "Seven Pillars of Wisdom" more than likely did not point to the writings of Solomon, but rather, the Shahada, the statement of faith is a foundation on which the seven (or five if you are Shi'ite) of

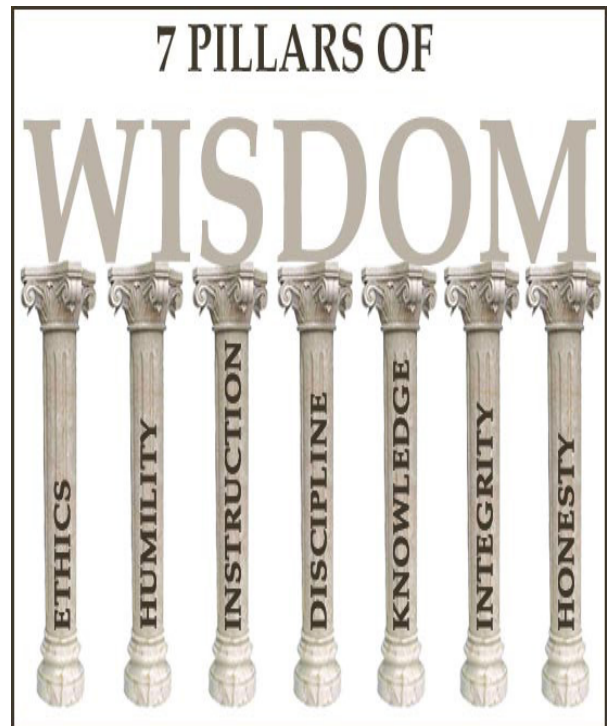


## Seven Pillars of Wisdom

Proverbs 9:1

1. **Tree of Life** - Proverbs 3:13-18
2. **Fear of the Lord** - Proverbs 9:10
3. **Humility** - Proverbs 11:2
4. **Counsel** - Proverbs 13:10
5. **Presence of God** - Proverbs 17:24
6. **Discipline** - Proverbs 29:15
7. **Kindness** - Proverbs 31:26

The Torah



Islam. Those pillars are Submission to God, maintaining Purity, Prayer, Charity Fasting (Ramadan), and Pilgrimage (Hajj). The Shi'a also add guardianship of the Sacred words and Jihad, the protection of the faith against infidelity. Churchill described Lawrence's book as one of the best books on warfare ever written, and others noted it was a novel masquerading as an autobiography.

Proverbs 9 begins, "Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars." Wisdom, Sophia, is a feminine attribute of God, and this is not the first time that this has been known in the ancient scriptures. The permanently structured building contrasts the tents of the desert wander. She has cut her house out of the rock.

The first of the qualities of Wisdom is prudence. I have a goddaughter called Prudence, and I remember the Rev'd Liam Matthews saying at her baptism of her parents, Mark and April, that it was well and good that they finally had a little Prudence in their relationship! The first thing that Wisdom does is prepare food for her people and set the table for fellowship. In doing so, the plans have been developed, and the material needs have been obtained. The table is set. Come, sit with me and dine, says Love.

The table is set out of knowledge and discretion. A godly person is aware of the world and current issues in the community. Some of that knowledge is dealt with discretion. Knowing when to use or when to refrain from expertise is essential. Sometimes, we only need to know on a need-to-know basis. Only some things are out there for our use or command.

The third pillar is the most quoted and, honestly, most misunderstood. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." Fear, in this case, means a deep reverence for what the LORD requires. Paul expressed that in being committed to God's purpose. This third pillar calls on us to wisely serve, worship, obey, and love the LORD our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

In doing so, we take counsel. David had wise counsellors to help administer the kingdom. Moses had magistrates. Jesus consulted his disciples. Later, in the book of Proverbs, chapter 19.20, this is made explicit: "Listen to advice and accept instruction; in the end, you will be wise." Another translation represses counsel and discipline as prerequisites of wisdom. It is a two-way action: to listen and to advise. Neither is good without the other.

Once we receive good counsel, the next thing to do is to understand God's source of wisdom, how our understanding of the Bible and faith informs us to honour what is required, and finally, how to discern the best path, whether good or evil. Today's reading is "lay aside immaturity and live, and walk in the way of insight."

The last pillar is power. It might seem strange, but power is about action. Power is about strength. Applying power is essential in terms of how wisdom grows in the community. The power that is self-serving or ingratiating is not wisdom but, rather, evil. The path of power can be used for good and for evil. Sadly, the second one is the most common.

This is why Paul writes to the Ephesians, "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand the will of the Lord. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to one another, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph 5.15-20)

The authorities have excellent knowledge but lack wisdom and the seven foundations of God's reality when criticising Jesus.

Imagine if, as we enter the Church's new year, we set out our Parish Mission Plan based on the seven pillars of wisdom. What could we achieve? We would have a community of the Psalmist. The immature will still seek power and sustenance, but the Lord will provide for the wise. Taking counsel and listening to God, the Lord will teach us to live according to ways that encourage growth. We all desire the best for ourselves, and keeping our tongues from evil and deceit can benefit us all. Do good, sings the Psalmist. Depart from evil, do good, seek peace and pursue it.

If that is the beginning of wisdom, may this song never end, and may we continue to make melody to the Lord within our hearts.

Endnotes:

#### End Notes

Munássir Ebrahim, The Seven Pillars of Wisdom (www.academia.edu) Universidade Lusofona de Humanidades e Tecnologias, Ciências das Religiosas.)

Wikipedia: T.H Lawrence; Bedouin; Pillars of Islam; Pillars of Wisdom.

## Icebreaker!



If you could instantly become an expert in any hobby or activity, what would it be and why?





# GROUP DISCUSSION

## Question 1

### **How does the story of Jesus feeding the multitude and walking on water relate to the concept of wisdom?**

Dennis connects these stories to the theme of wisdom, showing how the crowd and the authorities failed to see the deeper meaning behind Jesus' actions.

Can you imagine a situation where you failed to see the deeper meaning or wisdom behind an event or teaching?

## Question 2

### **Why is wisdom considered a foundational gift?**

In the sermon, wisdom is described as the foundation on which the Holy Spirit builds the house, the Church, and our lives, and it has always been present since the beginning.

How can you incorporate wisdom into daily life as a foundational guiding force?

## Question 3

### **What are some of the characteristics of wisdom according to Proverbs 9?**

In the sermon, Pastor Dennis highlights qualities of wisdom such as prudence, knowledge, discretion, fear of the Lord, counsel, understanding, and power.

Which qualities do you think you need to work on most, and how can you do so in your own life?

## Question 4

### How does the 'seven pillars of wisdom' concept relate to Christianity and Islam?



The sermon touches on the Islamic pillars of faith, which can be a foundation of wisdom in Islam, while also discussing the qualities of wisdom found in Proverbs 9.

How can we learn from other religious traditions and incorporate their wisdom into our spiritual journey?

## Question 5

### What can be the potential impact of embracing the seven pillars of wisdom within a community?

Dennis concludes the sermon by emphasising that the community can experience growth, seek peace, and do good by following wisdom.

How can you promote wisdom in your community and foster growth and peace?

## End notes and further reading

N.T. Wright, **Paul for Everyone, Ephesians**, Westminster John Knox Press

Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of John

Sacra Pagina

Author Francis Maloney

Publisher Liturgical Press, 2016

Pray...

- Let's start by sharing any prayer requests we have for today.
- Ask God to help us apply the principles of wisdom and prudence in our decisions this week.
- Pray for the strength to serve and worship God with a humble heart.
- Seek guidance in using our power and influence wisely for the good of our community.



Brabarlung Totem  
This is produced on  
Gunaikurnai Land, and our  
respects are paid to the First  
Nations people everywhere.



# August continues

This five day devotional will be taking a deeper dive into the sermon from this weekend. We will explore the wisdom presented in the story of Jesus feeding the multitude, walking on water, and declaring Himself as the true bread from heaven.

## Day 1

### Proverbs 8:12-14

The first day of our devotional focuses on wisdom and understanding. Proverbs speak of wisdom as a companion of prudence, harbouring knowledge and discretion. Jesus, as the embodiment of divine wisdom, challenges those around Him to look beyond mere words and seek a deeper understanding of God's will. Wisdom prepares us for the journey, setting the table for fellowship and inviting us to dine with love.

The story of Jesus feeding the multitude demonstrates His ability to provide physical and spiritual nourishment. His miracle of walking on water reassures us of His omnipotence and willingness to guide us through life's storms. We are reminded to seek wisdom, not just knowledge, and to trust in His provision in our lives.

How do I seek wisdom in my daily life?

In what ways can I trust Jesus more fully?

How can understanding Jesus' miracles transform my faith?

Pray for a heart that seeks wisdom.

Ask God to help you trust Him more deeply in all circumstances.

## Day 2

### John 6:35

Jesus declares, "I am the bread of life." This statement challenges us to understand that true spiritual fulfilment comes only through Him. The crowds seeking another miracle were focused on their physical needs, but Jesus offered something much more significant: eternal satisfaction through a relationship with Him.

Reflecting on this declaration, we recognise that Jesus fulfils our deepest hunger. Worldly pursuits and temporary pleasures can never offer lasting contentment. Only in Jesus, the bread from heaven, can we find enduring peace and joy. This day, let us shift our perspective from temporal to eternal, recognising Jesus as our ultimate source of life.

What are the "breads" in my life that I rely on for satisfaction?

How can I prioritise my spiritual nourishment over physical or worldly desires?

How can I deepen my relationship with Jesus as the bread of life?

Thank Jesus for being your spiritual sustenance.

Seek guidance on how to rely more on His provision and less on worldly sources.

## Day 3

### Proverbs 9:1

"Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars." This verse invites us to consider how wisdom is foundational to a life honouring God. Just as a house needs a solid foundation, our lives need the grounding of knowledge to stand firm against challenges and temptations.

The "seven pillars" mentioned can be seen as the essential qualities that support a wise and godly life. These include prudence, knowledge, discretion, fear of the LORD, counsel, and power. By cultivating these attributes, we build a life that is pleasing to God and beneficial to ourselves and our communities.

Which of the seven pillars of wisdom do I need to develop more in my life?

How can I apply the wisdom of God in my daily decisions and actions?

What steps can I take to build a solid spiritual foundation?

Ask God for the wisdom to build your life on His principles.

Pray for the strength to live according to the seven pillars of wisdom.



**Day 4****Ephesians 5:15-20**

“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil.” Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesians reminds us of the urgency to live wisely and intentionally. Wisdom manifests in our thoughts and actions as we make choices that honour God and reflect His love.

Living wisely involves understanding the will of the Lord and being filled with the Spirit. This means not being swayed by the world’s distractions and temptations but focusing on what is good, right, and true. By doing so, we can make a positive impact in our communities and draw others to Christ through our example.

In what ways is God calling me to live more wisely?

How can I make the most of every opportunity to serve others?

What steps can I take to understand God’s will for my life better?

Pray for discernment to recognise and seize opportunities to do good.

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in living a life that reflects God’s wisdom and love.

**Day 5****Psalms 34:14**

“Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.” The Psalmist calls us to a life of active goodness and peace-seeking. Wisdom is not just about knowing what is right but doing what is right. It involves distancing ourselves from sin and actively pursuing what is honourable and pleasing to God.

This pursuit of peace requires ongoing effort and dedication. It means reconciling with others, promoting harmony in our communities, and living out the love of Christ in our daily interactions. By seeking peace, we align ourselves with God’s heart and contribute to a world that reflects His kingdom’s values.

How can I actively turn from evil in my daily life?

What actions can I take to promote peace in my relationships and community?

In what ways can I embody the love and goodness of Christ?

Pray for the strength to turn from sin and pursue goodness.

Ask God to help you be a peacemaker in your community and relationships.

Prepared by Rev’d Dennis Webster, Rector of the Anglican Parish of Paynesville, Diocese of Gippsland for personal or small group use.

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