

*Proverbs 3:5–6 (NIV)*

<sup>5</sup>Trust in the LORD with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
<sup>6</sup>in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight.

*Proverbs 15:29 (NIV)*

<sup>29</sup>The LORD is far from the wicked,  
but he hears the prayer of the righteous.

*1 Corinthians 3:1–3 (NIV)*

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup>I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. <sup>3</sup>You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?

*Philippians 4:4–7 (NIV)*

<sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

*Which path will you take?*

Take a moment and read the above passage from 1 Corinthians 3. Infants? That's how Paul sees the believers in Corinth? And it's not the only time he takes that route. To the believers in and around Ephesus, he wrote, "God's goal is for us to become mature adults—to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ. As a result, we aren't supposed to be infants any longer who can be tossed and blown around by every wind that comes from teaching with deceitful scheming and the tricks people play to deliberately mislead others. Instead, by speaking the truth with love, let's grow in every way into Christ, who is the head" (Ephesians 4:13b-16a).

Really . . . who wants to be called a baby? When I was in elementary school, those were fighting words. But that is pretty much how Paul sees the Christians in Corinth and Ephesus. He pulls the punch just a bit with the Ephesian believers by saying "we must no longer be children, tossed to and fro" but the sharp point still hits home. To the Christians in Corinth . . . well, no punch is pulled. Again to the Corinthian believers, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. (1 Corinthians 13:11). These believers have clung to their childish ways, refusing to grow up. Have we?

Is Paul *trying* to be insulting? I don't know whether Paul was going for a little shock value or not, but his point was well taken. These Christians were infants in the faith, Christian novices, fresh enlistees in the body of Christ. Now Paul doesn't call the Colossian Christians infants or children, but he says that he prays for their growth, that they will "produce fruit in every good work and grow in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:10). He knows how far all these new believers have to go on their journey to a deeper faith.

When we began work on this series, the idea was to talk about the things any Christian parents would want to teach their child, as Arthur and Becky will with their son, Sam. But Paul reminds us that this work is not just about teaching children. Many of us are

also novices in the faith. Some novices are newly minted Christians, but even believers who have been going to church their whole lives may still be a “child” in the faith. And, besides, is there any among us not striving to grow in their faith? So, in the coming weeks we are going to look at some of the essential early lessons in growing to be the disciple God hopes we will be.

The book of Proverbs is going to be our context for this series. It is easy to see Proverbs as little more than a collection of “mom-isms” passed down to us. And, yes, it is the collected common-sense wisdom of God’s people about the practical skills needed to live a successful and happy life. But it is far more. Proverbs challenges us to grasp that true wisdom comes only from God, that our too-often held belief in our own self-sufficiency is no more than folly. There are two paths ahead for all of us . . . only two. God’s way and our own way. The two paths are labeled Wisdom and Folly. As Proverbs puts it:

“Out in the open Wisdom calls aloud, she raises her voice in the public square;  
on top of the wall she cries out, at the city gate she makes her speech”  
(Proverbs 1:20-21)

The question for us is whether we listen to her. And to whom would we be listening? To God . . . to Jesus . . . to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For the ancient Israelites, Lady Wisdom was the personification of God’s empowering presence in and among his people, or as we’d put it, the Holy Spirit. Wisdom was a way to speak of God’s work to teach and lead his people toward and down God’s path, Lady Wisdom’s path.

There is other wisdom literature in the Bible: Ecclesiastes, Job, and Song of Songs. Such literature was common in ancient cultures, as it still is on ours. Just think about how many books and talk show hosts offer you advice on how to better your life. But what distinguishes the biblical wisdom literature is that all of it begins with the “fear-of-the-Lord.” In the Hebrew, this is a two-word phrase with a single meaning, like “mass transit.” To possess the *Fear-of-the-Lord* is to be in awe of God’s majesty, to be overwhelmed by it, much like you would be overwhelmed standing at the bottom of Niagara Falls or on top of Pike’s Peak. That, according to Proverbs, is the beginning of wisdom (1:7).

### *Prayer*

We can come to any topic and ask ourselves, “What is God’s way, the wise way?” Take prayer for example. The wisdom literature is in line with all of Scripture: pray, pray, and pray some more. Pray without ceasing, as Paul put it. God hears you. Your prayers matter. And, yes, your prayers can even change things. In his book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard wrote:

God’s response to our prayers is not a charade. He does not pretend that he is answering our prayer when he is only doing what he was going to do anyway. Our requests really do make a difference in what God does and does not do. The idea that everything would happen exactly as it does regardless of whether we pray or not is a specter that haunts the minds of many who sincerely profess belief in God. It makes prayer psychologically impossible, replacing it with dead ritual at best. And of course God doesn’t respond to this. You wouldn’t either.

Part of the problem is that we fail to comprehend how God has freely chosen to work in this world. God works through us. Going back to the creation story, we were the ones tasked with filling the world and subduing it. It is a mistake to think that when it comes to life, we do part A and God does part B. Or that we “let go and let God” waiting for God to do it all. Or that we try to do it all. Rather, we do it all *and* God does it all.

The way of the wise is to know this, to hear God well, to trust God completely. We might resist, we might rebel, but if we are blessed, then we will turn from our own way to God’s way, from our folly to Lady Wisdom.

## Daily Bible Readings

*This week: More on growing to be truly wise*

**Monday, Proverbs 1:20-33** Lady Wisdom offers her teachings.

**Tuesday, Ecclesiastes 3:1-8** There is a time for everything.

**Wednesday, Proverbs 9:1-9** Wisdom has made her house ready.

**Thursday, Job 38** God confronts Job's ignorance and arrogance.

**Friday, Ecclesiastes 7:19-29** The teacher reflects on wisdom.

**Saturday, 1 Corinthians 3** Grow so that you can see the truth: the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight.

An archive with more than 700 of these studies can be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org)

## Scott Engle's Bible Classes

**Monday Evening Class** (no class on April 16)

We are studying the gospel of John.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

**Tuesday Lunchtime Class** (no class on April 17)

We are studying the book of Samuel.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

*About the weekday classes:*

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org) to make sure the class is meeting.

**Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Smith Worship Center**

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

**Beginning this week: *Jewish History*, a six-week series with faculty from UTD's Ackerman Center for Holocaust Studies. The April 8 presentation will be by Dr. David Patterson, "Ancient Israel: Written and Oral Torah."**