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# WISDOM FROM ABOVE

## My Final Sermon

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

*This article is taken from a note prior to Daniel's final sermon (found on CTW website—[ctw.coastlands.org](http://ctw.coastlands.org)) as Senior Pastor of The Coastlands.*

### I'M OUT OF TIME, NOT WORDS

The countdown has begun in earnest to conclude my tenure as your pastor, and though it was in my heart to leave you with messages built from the primary Bible texts and stories that have sustained me through the years, I have run out of time! The rapid pace of time—unnaturally accelerated during my sermons—has always tortured me, but I am happy to finish my preaching career having more to say, rather than quitting because I ran out of things to say!

I hope the surplus of words I want to send your way is due to one of the most consistent prayers I have prayed through the years:

“Lord, give me the ‘tongue’ of a disciple that I may know how to sustain the weary one with [just] a word.” (Referencing Isaiah 50:4)

I had hoped to include, in my farewell messages, a passage that formed the basis for many prayers early in my college days and throughout the years as pastor of The Coastlands—especially in the several months before we moved from Van Nuys to Santa Cruz. Since I had no idea who (or how many) would come to my church, I focused my prayers on changing the one person who had already become a member—me! You’ve probably picked up on one of my core beliefs; we minister spiritual transformation to others mostly as a result of changes that first happen in us. Way back then in 1984, I prayed for something to happen in me that would benefit and change my (whoever) congregation:

*“So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” ~1 Kings 3:9*

## WISDOM AND AUTHORITY

Interestingly, many of the remaining passages I had wanted to pass along to you cluster around one of the most vital understandings for our spiritual life: the nature of true wisdom and authority. They go hand in hand, and they were never meant to be separate pursuits or isolated attributes in the Kingdom. Spiritual authority emanates from godly insight.

In fact, the Greek word most often translated authority is best understood in our vernacular by the words competence, expertise; when someone truly knows how things work they're considered an authority in their field. Jesus knows how everything works: *“in heaven and on the earth”* (Matthew 28:18). That's why *“He was teaching as one having authority, and not as their scribes”* (Matthew 7:29). What a tragedy when people in churches get elevated to positions of authority without the corresponding wisdom to make best use of that positional authority.

Of course, I'm talking about spiritual wisdom and understanding, not street smarts, book learning or native intelligence. By all means, may we each get smarter, get better grades, become savvier in business, learn more useful facts and truths—and have better natural memories! I'm all for smarter rather than dumber. But just remember that smarts are like dollars, intelligence like wealth; very often they are roadblocks that keep people from fully entering into Kingdom ways and means. It's hard for smart people to get saved because they have learned to rely heavily on their own abilities. They miss the need for grace. Did you know that God intentionally hides His plans from *I'm smart enough people?*

*“At that time Jesus said, ‘I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.’”  
~Matthew 11:25*

*“For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.” ~1 Corinthians 1:21*

## WHEN SMART ISN'T

Two episodes during my graduate days at UCLA forever remind me about the potential handicap of smarts. Shortly after being filled with the Spirit and starting a Bible study (that eventually grew to be the first church I ever planted), I received a pictorial message from the Lord: I saw a yellow

colored filter slipped onto the front of a stage light; everything took on a shade of yellow, eclipsing all other colors. *“If you insist that I filter everything through your brain color,”* warned the Lord, *“you will miss most of the colors I want to show you!”*

The second incident took place when several of us PhD candidates gathered socially at a professor’s home in Malibu. I had prayed for God to open a door for evangelism that evening, and did He ever open it wide! The two hours of intense conversation—about why Jesus died on the Cross—began with the professor inquiring about my “weirdness” (i.e., believing in God), and ended with the dozen students and professor begging me not to tell any of their colleagues what we had talked about.

As a whispered preface, almost every time I spoke, the Lord kept reminding me, *“Keep it simple; they’re smart and won’t easily understand.”*

The Bible warns that our intellectual, physical and financial assets can tug us dangerously toward self-reliance. Smarts, strength and wealth can be handicaps in the Kingdom unless they are brought into spiritual submission through surrender and sacrifice for the sake of others. A nice way to say that I’m neither wealthy nor physically strong is to say that I’m more tempted to think my way through life than to buy or bully my way through...

## **WISDOM THAT LEADS TO LIFE**

Perhaps that temptation explains why numerous verses about wisdom (and spiritual insight/authority) are in my spiritual bedrock. I believe we mature spiritually as we grow in wisdom... and, thereby, authority. Wisdom—is knowing what to do, say or think. Spiritual wisdom or maturity is having a biblical perspective, informed and empowered by the Holy Spirit, on what to do, say or think. That doesn’t mean that mature spiritual leaders will see everything alike.

In the early 1980’s, when I traveled to numerous churches in my role as College Relations Director for LIFE Bible College, I learned that each church and minister has a unique way of giving expression to ministry. I could not gauge leaders’ spirituality based on their style, ministry philosophy, worship music preferences, length of services, etc. Too many godly leaders had too many widely divergent perspectives to allow for anyone to decide upon a “most spiritual” way.

Likewise, shortly before I left C.O.T.W. to plant The Coastlands, I came to understand that misunderstandings and disappointments can occur between mature believers simply because they are called (by the same Lord) to separate journeys. Just as Paul and Barnabas failed to find common ground in a dispute, Pastor Jack and I had two significant misunderstandings (later resolved). Wisdom isn’t an exact, formulated step-by-step operational handbook for Christian living. That’s

why three wise men brought three different gifts to Jesus. Wisdom urges us to bring a gift to Jesus—it doesn't dictate which one to bring.

The wisdom that leads to spiritual life, deliverance and salvation comes (only) from the word of God, and I have been a blessed man to have been taught that truth from my earliest days on the planet:

*"...From childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." ~2 Timothy 3:15*

*Wisdom from Above—read James 3:13-18*

*Spiritual Authority—read 2 Corinthians 10:8-18*