

# The Dispatch

## June 2021: Where Can Wisdom Be Found?

The Biblical book of Job asks this profound question, a question no less urgent in our day than long ago. So, in this issue of the Dispatch, the three of us take up the question of what wisdom is and where we might be able to find it. Davon helpfully distinguishes wisdom and knowledge, with several family business examples. Lance talks about two kinds of wisdom in our own lives as we age. Finally, Bill looks at a verse in Proverbs that yields an unexpected result about acquiring wisdom. As always, send us your feedback and your own thoughts.

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### Knowledge versus Wisdom

[Davon Cook](#)

I have a magnet on my refrigerator that says, "*Knowledge* is knowing that tomatoes are fruit; *wisdom* is not putting them in fruit salad." While it brings a smile, I find it more than a pithy saying. It's relatively easy to inventory all the facts and skills we learn from reading, talking with other people, or the hard knocks of life experience. It's entirely different to temper that knowledge into actual wisdom applied to life situations, taking the reflection time to transfer those experiences into better *judgment*. Here are several examples of knowledge relative to wisdom in family business:

- Knowledge is researching all the new products to find the precise fertilizer cocktail that's most promising. Wisdom might be applying it on only 20% of your acres the first year to stay within an acceptable risk tolerance and see how it plays out.
- Knowledge is collecting relevant information about a significant deal underway. Wisdom is judging when to share and seek input, and when to hold it closely confidential.
- Knowledge is having done a thorough analysis to explain why your farm should stop producing its legacy crop. Wisdom is presenting that information at the right time and tone to be impactful.
- Knowledge is having a written policy to guide family employment decisions. Wisdom is knowing if and when a particular situation ought to be an exception to that policy, and navigating the process of making that exception.
- Knowledge is having done all your homework for the big meeting and then sending out the agenda. Wisdom is calling your sister beforehand to ask how she's feeling about the meeting and seeing what questions she has in advance.
- Knowledge is being confident you're right. Wisdom is deciding if it's a battle worth fighting.
- Knowledge tends to talk. Wisdom takes time to listen.

Every day brings new opportunities not just to gather knowledge, but also to learn to season that knowledge into wisdom.

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### Happiness is Sharing Your Wisdom

[Lance Woodbury](#)

[Arthur Brooks](#), former President of the [American Enterprise Institute](#), wrote an article for *The Atlantic Monthly* two years ago titled "[Your Professional Decline is Coming \(Much\) Sooner Than You Think.](#)" His summary of research pointed out that many people in their midlife – around the age 45-50 – feel that their professional skills

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and abilities are on the decline. Since I turned 50 years old in the last year, the premise of the article caught my attention!

One of the concepts Brooks discusses is the difference between “fluid” and “crystallized” intelligence. He draws on the work of British psychologist [Raymond Cattell](#), who defined fluid intelligence as “the ability to reason, analyze and solve novel problems – what we commonly think of as raw intellectual horsepower.” It peaks in early adulthood and diminishes beginning in our 30’s and 40’s.

As evidence, Brooks quotes a Harvard Business Review article from a few years ago demonstrating that companies valued at \$1 billion or greater tend to have founders in the 20-34 age range. His point is that the “young guns” have the intellectual capacity to create unique solutions to big problems. Think how often we look fondly on the key decisions, challenges, and significant work we took on in our early years.

Crystallized intelligence, on the other hand, is the *use* of knowledge gained from past experiences. “Think of it as possessing a vast library and understanding how to use it. It is the essence of wisdom.” This is the type of intelligence Davon is pointing to in her article.

The key to feeling professionally satisfied in your years after age 50 is to focus on *sharing* your crystallized knowledge. In other words, find ways to apply your years of experiences, instead of trying to do significant technical or analytical work. Teaching, coaching, explaining, facilitating, and encouraging are all activities that draw on your crystallized intelligence. The longer you live, the more crystallized intelligence – the more wisdom – you have. And a key to enjoying life is sharing it!

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### **Wisdom: Well, Go Buy It!**

[Dr. Bill Long](#)

#### **“The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever else you get, get insight,” Proverbs 4:7**

We often think of Biblical wisdom as a spiritual concept, something that is given to a few special people probably as a result of long labor, study and learning. Its inaccessibility at first attracts us, but then we throw up our hands and say to ourselves, ‘I really don’t know what this Biblical wisdom is or how to get it.’

Making matters worse is a verse like the one above: “The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom.” For years I read and re-read that verse, wishing it had defined the steps, ‘The beginning of wisdom is this: step 1, step 2, step 3. . .’ But it maddeningly just says that wisdom is the most important thing—and we better get it. Apparently no help.

This dilemma of acquiring wisdom was swimming around and around in my mind until I decided to look more closely at the (Hebrew) text. I noticed, surprisingly, that of the eight words in Proverbs 4:7, three of them were taken from the same Hebrew verb: [qanah](#). Though people often translate it as “get,” the most frequent translation of *qanah* elsewhere in the Bible is “buy.” So we would have: “The beginning of wisdom is this: go buy it.”

Now I felt I was getting somewhere. Rather than looking at wisdom as a rarefied and inaccessible concept I began to see it as a sort of commodity we could acquire. And then the question arose: What are you willing to spend money on to learn? What do you need to acquire now for your spirit? What insights are you willing to buy? What teacher would you be willing to hire? That is the nature of Biblical wisdom—and our task is to go out and buy it!