

## Wisdom to Win - AM + PM

In **1 Corinthians 9:24** the apostle Paul said, **“Run in such a way that you may obtain the prize.”** Literally, **“Run in such a way as to win – to be successful!”** The current series is designed to teach you how to weave “success principles” into the very fabric of your life. It’s intended to provide a powerful toolkit with which you can build your greatest dreams. A truly successful life is never an accident; you must have **wisdom to win**.

Note, if you’re intolerant of the present you’ll stand a better chance of creating a rewarding future. You should always believe that the present is subject to change for the better. This is real “hope” – which is a fundamental element of faith. Faith brings into existence that which you’ve **hoped** for. But your journey down the road to success also requires practical application, and this means gaining knowledge and understanding. And more importantly, it requires wisdom! Today we’ll be studying the *seven characteristics of wisdom*.

A study of one Princeton graduating class showed that only 3% of the grads had a clear idea of what they wanted to achieve. Follow-up revealed that this tiny minority went on to achieve more, in terms of personal wealth and achievement, than all their contemporaries put together. In God’s plan, genuinely knowing what you want to achieve takes *wisdom*. I’ve met too many people who think they know but in fact don’t have a clue! It’s going to take desire and know-how, but it is also going to need a large measure of **wisdom**.

So what is wisdom? Nelson’s Bible Dictionary says it’s the ‘*ability to judge correctly and to follow the best course of action, based on the knowledge and understanding received*’. Therefore, the biblical concept of wisdom is quite different from the classical view of wisdom, which sought through philosophy and human rational to determine the mysteries of existence and the universe. According to scripture, **“The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10)**. Wisdom begins with an acknowledgement that God is the ultimate Supreme Being.

There are two Greek words translated wisdom, “*sophia*” and “*phronisis*”. While *sophia* is the insight into the true nature or state of things; *phronisis* is the critical faculty of applying this insight. One kind of wisdom is spiritual and the other is practical. You need both in order to fulfil your destiny and triumph over life’s challenges - for you to navigate through the storms of life. Yet, wisdom is not sought after or truly appreciated in today’s modern society. Wisdom combines everything needed for success and happiness (**Prov. 3:13**), but few seek it.

As Christians, we must recognise and acknowledge (first and foremost) that all wisdom comes from God. Wisdom is as infinite as God Himself. King Solomon’s reputation for wisdom springs not only from its practical results but also from the words of its very Source. In **1 Kings 3:12** God says, **“There has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any arise after you.”** In **1 Kings 4:31** Solomon is called **“wiser than all men,”** with the names of many other wise men cited in direct comparison.

In **1 Chronicles 1:11, 12** God says to Solomon, **“Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked riches or wealth, or honour or the life of your enemies, nor have you asked for long life - but have asked for wisdom and knowledge for yourself that you may judge My people over whom I have made you king - wisdom and knowledge are granted to you; and I will give you riches and wealth and honour....”**

Now notice this, riches and wealth and honour didn't just fall out of the sky! Solomon was the first king to trade commercial goods profitably to other nations. He entered into trade agreements with a number of countries, increasing his wealth and prestige. He also negotiated a system of treaties in order to keep the peace (even with his enemies). The shrewd application of what Solomon had received from God caused him to be successful and receive great honour. Through Jesus Christ, we all have access to the very same source of divine wisdom. **James 1:5** states, ***"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach; and it will be given to him."***

There is just one source of all wisdom, and that is God. However, we have two teachers. The one teacher is the Word of God and the other is experience. You have probably heard that experience is the best teacher, but that's not totally true. You can learn from experiences, of course, however experience is not necessarily the best way to learn. Experience alone is not enough to teach you wisdom. Everyone has experiences but not everyone profits from them! It's the Word of God that you put to good use in your experiences that actually teaches you wisdom. The Word is like a nail, and experience is like a hammer, driving that nail home (time and time again). The tougher the experience the more you should lean on the Word, and the more wisdom is driven down into your heart. One day it will be so deeply embedded that it becomes an inseparable part of you. **Proverbs 2:10**, ***"For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul."***

**Proverbs 4:7** declares, ***"Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom."*** Let's follow this advice and examine the Seven Characteristics of Wisdom:

[1] **Wisdom is built upon wisdom**. Proverbs 24:3 says, ***"By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established."*** Wisdom creates, and it has a compounding (ever increasing) effect. If you are prepared to be instructed in knowledge and understanding, and in wisdom that's passed on by others, God will take that strong foundation and build upon it. This learning process, if followed through, can make you wiser than your instructor. Wisdom is as infinite as God Himself, and it was present when He created the world. As you increase in it, it will increase in you! So accept that it can be passed on from one to another, from age to age, growing and expanding with each succeeding recipient. **Job 32:7** declares, ***"Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom."***

[2] **Wisdom can be obtained by simply asking for it**. Many of you don't have sufficient wisdom because you've never really asked for it. Solomon got wisdom by merely asking for it, ***"Now give me wisdom and knowledge."*** James 1:5 says, ***"If any of you needs wisdom, let him ask of God."*** If you need wisdom to deal with a specific situation in your life, then why not ask God for it? He promises to give without reproach – that is, without God reminding you of your deficiencies. Solomon desired wisdom, but he wanted it NOW! How eager are you to receive wisdom? According to James, the only requirement or stipulation needed when asking God is ***"faith."*** ***"...But let him ask in faith, with no doubting."*** **James 4:2** states, ***"Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it."***

[3] **Wisdom is developed through discipline and self-control**. An undisciplined person cannot function in wisdom. A wise man will be conspicuous by the degree of control he displays over all his actions. **Proverbs 1:3** tells us to ***"receive the instruction of wisdom."*** The Hebrew word for "instruction" means *discipline*. Therefore, in order to succeed in life, you must willingly receive (or embrace) the *discipline* of wisdom. Note it

takes discipline to find and then to administer wisdom! The ability to make wise choices and the right decisions is not something you were born with; it's something you must be taught. Wisdom is not a natural gift it is an acquired virtue! The more you administer wisdom in a disciplined (and controlled) attitude the more evidence of its beneficial effects you will see.

[4] **Wisdom pays extra-large dividends.** Proverbs 8:35 says, ***“For whoever finds wisdom finds life, and shall obtain favour from the Lord.”*** The benefits of wisdom are; blessings, life and favour from God But you must first diligently seek wisdom in order to find it. **Proverbs 8:11** states, ***“Wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.”*** Wisdom has much worth, and like all valuable commodities, the search for true wisdom is not easy, it demands time and effort. You may have to dig deep to find it. Wisdom is not automatic, and its not always placed within your grasp, but it is placed within your reach. How badly do you want wisdom – this is the question? If you want it badly enough then the results of wisdom are well worth all the time and effort. For with wisdom comes the favour of God, and God's favour pays extra-large dividends – always! *You will never possess wisdom if you are unwilling to pursue it.*

[5] **Wisdom mocks the proud.** Wisdom counteracts pride. Proud people are never wise people they just think they are! Wisdom, speaking in **Proverbs 1:26**, says, ***“I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear comes.”*** Note the word “also.” If you have laughed at wisdom, one day it will laugh at you! Wisdom warns you that if you refuse to pay attention to her now, a time will come when disaster will befall you; and then it will be her turn to refuse to pay any attention. **Romans 12:3** states, ***“Don't think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but think soberly.”*** Thinking more highly of yourself is in fact a distortion of reality – it's like being drunk. Hence, pride is rooted in deception, but wisdom is rooted in the truth.

[6] **Wisdom protects and preserves the wise.** The wise will always listen to wisdom and follow her leading, and their reward is complete safety and freedom from fear. **Proverbs 1:33** says, ***“Whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure without fear of evil.”*** If we are to prevail, the times we live in demand that we listen to wisdom intently. Those who are wisdom's disciples will enjoy the abundant life! They will escape the sufferings, sorrows and shame that shadow the footsteps of a fool. If you follow after wisdom and listen to her, when the world doesn't have the answers, you will know exactly what to do. And what's more, you will be safe and secure until you emerge victorious. Everything you put your hand to will prosper. In times of famine you will be fed; and in times of conflict you will be protected. In times of trouble you will be preserved.

[7] **Wisdom cultivates strong personal relationships** Wisdom understands the power of good friendships. Cultivating friendships is like cultivating any other crop. You reap what you sow! You can only reap a harvest of friendship by first showing yourself friendly. The world out there is starved of *friendship* because most people are waiting for someone else to do the sowing. Wisdom would say to such people, ***“In order to have close friends, you must pay the price of friendship; you must make yourself a true friend!”*** The word translated *friend* in **Proverbs 18:24** (***“a friend that sticks closer than a brother”***), is derived from a primitive root word meaning “to have affection for.” This kind of friendship is what David and Jonathan shared... ***“And Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”*** They were true soul mates! When was the last time you showed affection to a friend?

But why is it wise to value **friendships**? Here are some reasons for you to consider:

\* *Two is a powerful number.* Friendships are beneficial. In **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12** it gives three reasons why. (a) *Two are better than one.* (b) *Two have a good reward for their labour.* (c) *Two shall prevail against any attack.*

\* *A friend corrects in love.* **Proverbs 27:6** says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." God uses your friends to correct you and put you back on course. So be willing to be disciplined by a close friend.

\* *A friend counsels from the heart.* **Proverbs 27:9**, "Ointment and perfume delight the heart, and the sweetness of a friend gives delight by hearty counsel." The counsel of a good friend will always motivate you to move in the right direction.

\* *A friend supports.* **Proverbs 27:10**, "Better is a friend nearby, than a brother far away." Blood relatives may live far off and not be able to help. But a friend is usually always close by! Ever-ready to provide support and comfort when needed.

If problems have become so much part of your life that everywhere you turn you are on the verge of falling, be strengthened in knowing that you have a friend who stands by your side – Jesus Christ. This is wisdom for you but it's also the greatest reassurance you can have.

Nothing characterises our modern age more than fractured, dysfunctional personal relationships. Indeed the initial breakdown started not long after the creation of human life itself. Adam and Eve became alienated from God; their elder son killed his brother, and such breakdowns continued from there right down to our modern age of disjointed dysfunctional human relations.

Britain's chief rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, described the general state of our relationships. "*Today many parts of Britain and America are marked by vandalism, violent crime and a loss of civility; by the breakdown of the family and the widespread neglect of children; by an erosion of trust and general loss of faith in the power of governments to cure some of our most deep-seated problems, and by a widespread sense that matters crucial to our future welfare are slipping beyond our control.*"

We don't trust each other anymore. Relationships have lost their permanence. Lifelong marriages have ceased to be the accepted norm. Lasting careers are quickly disappearing. Not so long ago a person could expect to work for one corporation for 40 years and then retire with a company pension and perhaps a gold watch. No more! Just to survive, young people can now expect to have to learn several professional skills in their lifetime - with the added disruption to their relationships. The cure is very simple. Research shows that good relationships are usually based on 'common rules,' but to be stable and enduring, they need to be **cultivated by wisdom**. This is God's will for you and your loved ones.

When standards become vague and people cannot agree to accept and adhere to the same values, society goes astray. Hence, there must be *agreed-upon* Biblical principles for human beings to follow. Otherwise we will continue to experience chaos in our relationships. And the most important ingredient is love. Love breeds affection and affection keeps people together. So why not display affection in all your personal relationships? This is wisdom in action!

Now let us go back to our overall theme - **Winning Ways**. As mentioned before, this series was designed to teach you how to weave success principles into the very fabric of your life. However, everything must begin

somewhere, and in this instance, it begins with the *fear of God*. This is the highest summit! **Proverbs 9:10** says, ***"The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom."*** The starting point for all wisdom is fear of the consequence (aftermath) of breaking or disobeying God's laws. Actually, this is where successful ways start! It is truly **wise** to be fully aware of the fact that disobedience or rebellion will cost you dearly. Does God still love you? Yes, He does! But He will not bend His laws to accommodate your foolishness. **Proverbs 15:33**, ***"The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom."*** Whether you like it or not, in the context of God, *fear* is a good teacher! Therefore, adopt winning ways by fearing God and accepting practical instruction.

So go now - get wisdom - it's yours to gain and yours to use! **Proverbs 19:8**, ***"He who gains Wisdom loves his own life; he who keeps understanding shall prosper and find good."***