

## Creative Submission



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### If I Were a Wise Man

Darrell Muth.<sup>1</sup>

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What does it mean to be wise?

What is the relationship between wisdom, knowledge, and information? And to be Pentecostal in one's mind? We who are Pentecostal make peace with a caricature: two hands in the air and praying for the divine to intercede. We may be that, but we are also more, inhabited by the Holy Spirit in one's body, soul, and mind.

Rod Dreher Author of *Living in Wonder: Finding Mystery and Meaning in a Secular Age*, says, "I am convinced that the only way to revive the Christian faith which is fading fast from the modern world, is not through moral exhortation, legalistic browbeating, or more effective apologetics but through mystery and the encounter with wonder." We who are Pentecostal are at our best when we live in a state of mystery and wonder, living in what I call the "nowness" of the Holy Spirit. And A Spirit-infused wisdom is Pentecostalism at its best.

First, A foolish (and Pentecostal?) story.

I travelled to Africa with two friends, Mark and David (David Hazzard, my dear deceased friend and PAOC denominational leader), to hike Mt Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. We stopped first in Nairobi, Kenya. David had two days of work to attend, which left Mark and me free to roam. Mark had never been to Africa, so we rented a car and driver and explored Nairobi.

One of the largest slums in the world, Kibera, is in Nairobi. The Official population is 170,000, and the unofficial population is 1 million. There is no plumbing; it is home to the flying toilet. Poop in a bag and throw it on your roof. Robert, our driver, pulled off the main road to a high point overlooking Kibera. Mark was busy taking pictures and returned to the car to grab his iPhone.

It was gone.

He realized he had dropped it when he first got out. We scoured the ground. We quizzed the children who had gathered around us. They thought they might have seen someone pick it up. We finally gave up the search, got in the car and headed for supper.

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I felt this urge to pray for the return of the phone; I also felt foolish, maybe stupid, to even consider praying. I told Mark, and he agreed it was foolish.... I prayed.

We ate, returned to the guesthouse, and Mark emailed home to have his phone disconnected. He received a response immediately, "Haven't you read your emails? Someone is calling from Africa saying they have your phone." This person had called the last number dialled. Mark's friend thought it was a prank. The person in Nairobi had to call more than once to convince her.

Hiring a car and driver, we drove to the edge of Kibera. A night watchman handed the phone over. No questions asked, no reward requested. A phone returned where the average salary was less than the phone's value.

Phillip Britts, a farmer, poet, and philosopher from the 1940's, reflected on wisdom, knowledge, and information:

One aspect of the essential conflict between life and death is the subtle conflict between worldly knowledge and simple truth. Knowledge appears so powerful and virile that man sees in it an attribute of life and pursues it as one of his greatest hopes. Knowledge thrives and multiplies. Knowledge of one thing leads to another until a mighty apparatus is built up, which brings the whole creation under the power of man. It has been seen and said by wise men in many ages that all this is vanity.

He followed up with this parable:

A farmer once owned a large farm where many people worked. He gave them the care and management of the fields, woods, streams, and buildings. He charged them to produce many good fruits. One day, he walked among them and gave them practical instructions about how they should work. After he had gone, they began arguing about what he had meant. Instead of hoeing the crops, they leaned on their hoes and held long discourses.

His instructions about hoeing had been simple –to keep the crops free of weeds and cultivate the soil. But in their discourses, they sought to improve by classifying the weeds into those most dangerous and those that could be allowed in certain places.

They discussed whether the weeds should be cut with a sharp, glancing blow or whether they should be lifted with the corner of the hoe blade. They produced long theories on what was a weed and what, under certain circumstances, could be termed a useful plant. They measured the growth of the weeds and found it more rapid than the crop growth; after many discussions, they decided that it was more profitable to let the weeds grow than the crop plants.

By this time, the weeds had almost smothered the crop, and one could only find a few spindly plants here and there. The hoers, however, had now learnt a great deal about weeds and the theory of hoeing and were able to prove to themselves, and to many newcomers, that the farmer saw all green plants as valuable and those that were easiest to grow were the best, and that if one only allowed the weeds to mature, they would produce fruits entirely satisfactory to all concerned.

(Theologians may want to pass over this last bit) Theology has provided us with armour, thick and strong, to protect us against any sharp arrows of the spirit which are aimed at pricking us into any practical Christian action... After years of careful study, a theologian can produce a book which will give a most minute examination and explanation of something which Jesus said in a few words. But whereas the few words of Jesus are a direct and pointed challenge to some very definite line of action, the many pages of the theologian are an attempt to explain what Jesus

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meant, which usually ends by obscuring the issue or offering so many alternatives that action is effectively blocked. A theologian is like an armadillo.<sup>ii</sup>

T.S Elliot also questions the futility of knowledge and information in the absence of wisdom in his poem "The Rock."

...Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?  
The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries  
Bring us farther from God and nearer to the Dust.

I am reminded that our relentless drive for and reliance on knowledge and information is familiar.

The Apostle Paul was in Greece when it was still the primary intellectual and philosophical source of the known world. His response to pure intellect and philosophy? "Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" (I Corinthians 1:20)

Elliot and Britts made their observations in the 1930s and early 1940s, responding to a world in disarray and conflict, desperately seeking answers and solutions.

James, the brother of Christ, the Messiah, taught, "The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere." (James 3:17)

Henri Nouwen, one of my faith heroes, was a Dutch-born Catholic priest, professor, psychologist, and prolific writer. He taught psychology at the University of Notre Dame and pastoral theology at the Divinity Schools of Yale and Harvard. He left this world of rarified intellectual pursuit to become a pastor to a community for people with intellectual disabilities. He says,

For a long time, I sought safety and security among the wise and clever, hardly aware that the things of the Kingdom were revealed to "little children"; and that God has chosen "those who by human standards are fools to shame the wise." But when I experienced the warm, unpretentious reception of those who have nothing to boast about and experienced a loving embrace from people who didn't ask any questions, I began to discover a true spiritual homecoming means a return to the poor in spirit to whom the Kingdom of Heaven belongs. The embrace of the Father became very real to me in the embraces of the mentally poor.

Wisdom makes the profound simple and provides clarity amid chaos.

Don't worry - we may not need to give up everything to be wise. While Wisdom and intelligence are not synonymous, neither are they mutually exclusive. King Solomon, often called the Wisest person, was also knowledgeable and wealthy. You can have it all. I know people like that.

How does one become wise? It is straightforward.

Ask for it.

Act on it.

Hang on for the ride (and find a phone)!