

Understanding: The Missing Bridge Between Knowledge and Wisdom

Scripture describes God's creative order through three interlocking gifts: wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. *"The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew."* (Proverbs 3:19–20, ESV). Proverbs 24 follows the same pattern: *"By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches."* (Proverbs 24:3–4, ESV).

Knowledge

Da'at (דַּאֵת) — perception, acquaintance with reality

Truth, fact, and reality. Da'at carries the idea of intimate knowing — not merely information held at a distance, but truth that has been encountered and perceived. It gathers the truths, facts, words, actions, emotions, and circumstances involved.

Understanding

Binah / Tevunah (/בִּינָה, תְּבֻנָּה) — discernment, perceiving how things connect

The ability to discern how truths, facts, circumstances, emotions, motives, histories, and people relate — and what they mean together. Binah sees between the lines. It connects what is known to what it means.

Wisdom

Chokmah (חֹכְמָה) — skill, the ability to separate good from bad

The skill to judge and act fittingly in light of what is true and properly understood. Chokmah is not merely knowing what is right — it is the practiced ability to apply truth with discernment to the situation actually before you.

What is striking about these passages is the order. God begins with wisdom — and from that perfect wisdom, understanding and knowledge flow outward into creation. He does not arrive at wisdom by first gathering facts. He possesses it completely, and everything else proceeds from it. His wisdom establishes purpose. His understanding orders how everything fits together. His knowledge governs every detail — simultaneously, perfectly, without sequence.

We, as His creation, move in the opposite direction. We begin with what we can hear and observe. We gather knowledge — the truths, facts, words, actions, emotions, and circumstances before us. We then connect what we have gathered through understanding — discerning how things relate, what they mean together, and what lies beneath the surface. Only then do we answer or act with wisdom. Where God moves from wisdom downward into knowledge, we move from knowledge upward toward wisdom. Understanding is the missing bridge — between what is known and what should be done, and between what can be seen on the surface and the heart beneath it.

The Heart Beneath the Action

"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."

Proverbs 4:23 (ESV)

"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick; who can understand it?"

Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)

*"The **purpose** in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out."*

Proverbs 20:5 (ESV)

Notice what Proverbs 20:5 says precisely. It is not the heart that is like deep water — it is the purpose, the motive, of the heart. The heart itself is the source. The motive is what lies beneath even that — the driving intention behind what the heart produces. This is the level at which understanding operates. Not merely observing what a person did, but drawing out why — the motive beneath the action, beneath the emotion, beneath even the words they use to explain themselves.

Biblically, the heart is not merely the place of emotion. It describes the inner person more broadly: our thoughts, beliefs, desires, loves, fears, loyalties, intentions, motives, and will. What eventually becomes visible in our words, choices, reactions, relationships, and behavior flows from what is happening within us. And because the heart is deceitful above all things, even the person themselves may not fully understand what is driving them.

The Visible Question

What did this person do?

This is the question most naturally asked. It focuses on the observable action — the word spoken, the decision made, the behavior displayed. It is not a wrong question. But it is an incomplete one.

The Question of Understanding

What is the motive of the heart — independent of whether the action appears good or bad?

A person may do something that looks right from a wrong motive, or something that looks wrong from a wounded and misguided heart. Understanding does not stop at the action. It draws out what is beneath it.

James 4:1–3 makes this explicit: *"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?"* (James 4:1, ESV) The presenting argument may concern money, leadership, respect, or a ministry disagreement. But beneath the presenting issue may be a desire for control, recognition, comfort, security, approval, vindication, influence, or protection from shame. A helpful picture of the movement: **Deep belief, desire, fear, or wound → shapes what we seek or protect → influences how we interpret what is happening → produces a reaction or action → our conscious reasoning then explains or justifies the response.**

This is why understanding is not optional for those who seek to love others well. If a person does not understand their own motives — and the heart is deceitful, so they may not — it is still our calling as men and women of understanding to seek to draw out the motive of the heart. Not to expose or accuse, but because love rejoices with the truth. When we can speak to the truth of what is actually in a person's heart, as Jesus consistently did, it is ultimately the most loving thing we can do. But it must be done in a way that makes truth receivable — commending knowledge rather than pouring it out.

"it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth."

— 1 Corinthians 13:6 (ESV)

"The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly."

— Proverbs 15:2 (ESV)

When Good Actions Hide Mixed Motives

An outwardly good action does not automatically prove that every motive beneath it is healthy. A person may work hard from faithful stewardship—or because achievement makes him feel significant. A person may serve from genuine love—or because he needs to be needed. A person may confront sin because he desires restoration—or because he wants control, relief from frustration, or the satisfaction of winning. A biblical label does not automatically purify the heart beneath the action.

"'Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?' He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief."

John 12:5–6 (ESV)

Judas's words sounded principled. The stated concern sounded righteous. But John tells us that the stated reason was not the deepest reason. The perfume did not create the condition of Judas's heart. It exposed it. Circumstances often do the same with us. Criticism, conflict, money, success, failure, recognition, rejection, uncertainty, losing control, or watching someone else receive praise can bring hidden things to the surface.

Motives Can Be Mixed

The heart can conceal its motives even from the person whose heart it is. *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9, ESV).* We can sincerely believe we are acting for one reason while another desire, fear, or wound influences us beneath our conscious explanation.

Behavior Change ≠ Heart Change

A person may stop yelling while remaining bitter. He may stop pursuing significance through business and begin pursuing the same significance through ministry. He may learn to speak politely while carrying contempt. The goal of sanctification is not merely better-looking behavior—it is God exposing, pruning, and transforming the heart.

This does not require us to become suspicious of every action or paralyzed until every motive is perfect. Believers are being sanctified progressively, and motives can be mixed while real obedience and real good fruit are present. The point is that no outward activity—not even Scripture knowledge, leadership, ministry, justice, service, or generosity—removes the need to examine the heart.

When the Heart's Desires Block Belief

We tend to think of belief as primarily an intellectual matter — a question of whether the evidence is sufficient or the argument is sound. But Scripture reveals something more unsettling: what we desire shapes what we are able to believe. The heart does not merely respond to truth. It filters it. A desire deep enough, a fear strong enough, or a wound unexamined can cause a person to resist truth not because the truth is wrong, but because believing it would require the heart to let go of something.

"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. I know that you do not have the love of God within you... How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"
— John 5:39–40, 42, 44 (ESV)

Notice the connection Jesus makes. He does not simply address what they believe — he points to what they seek. *How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another?* The seeking and the believing are directly linked. What the heart is oriented toward — what it actively pursues and desires — shapes what it is capable of receiving as true. Jesus is drawing a correlation: the desire of the heart is not separate from the capacity to believe. It is the very thing that determines it. Their hearts were set on receiving glory from one another. That orientation was not incidental to their unbelief. It was the cause of it. Jesus is not accusing the Pharisees of insufficient study. They searched the Scriptures. They had the knowledge. What they lacked was not information — it was a rightly ordered heart. Their desire for glory from one another was the very thing preventing them from believing truth that was standing directly in front of them. Jesus identifies the motive of the heart — the desire for human approval — as the root of their inability to believe. This is Jesus displaying his perfect understanding of the Pharisees' hearts. He does not only address their refusal to come to him — he speaks to the full condition beneath it. He acknowledges what they believe about the Scriptures. He perceives that they do not have the love of God within them — whether revealed divinely or through what their actions and orientation have made plain. And then he draws the deepest connection of all: he ties their inability to believe directly to what they ultimately seek. What they desire so deeply has become the filter through which all truth must pass.

What the Mind Presents

The evidence. The argument. The Scripture. The correction. The truth spoken clearly and correctly. This is the level at which most engagement stays — assuming that if the truth is clear enough, belief will follow.

What the Heart Decides

Whether to receive it. A person whose heart desires approval, control, comfort, or self-protection may hear truth clearly and still be unable to receive it — not from intellectual failure, but because belief would require surrendering something the heart is not yet willing to release.

And yet how many people lack the self-understanding to even know what their heart is holding on to? How can the heart release something it is not even aware it is gripping? This is perhaps the most sobering reality: the desire may be fighting against truth from within — and the person it is fighting against may not even know the battle is happening. It is not an enemy they can see and confront. It is an enemy already inside, shaping what they receive, what they resist, and what they are willing to believe.

This is why understanding is not merely a relational courtesy — it is a prerequisite for genuine help. If we engage only at the level of argument and evidence while the real resistance is rooted in a desire, fear, or wound beneath the surface, we will pour out truth that cannot land. The man of understanding draws out the motive of the heart — not to win an argument, but because until what is beneath is named and brought into the light of God's Word, the heart may remain closed to the very truth it needs most. *"The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out."* (Proverbs 20:5, ESV)

Jesus makes this even more explicit in John 15. Speaking to his disciples about the world's rejection of him, he does not attribute that rejection to insufficient evidence. He points to something far deeper — a heart that has seen, and still chosen to hate.

"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you... But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin... If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'
— John 15:18–19, 21–22, 24–25 (ESV)

The Greek word translated "hated" here is *miseo* — to hate, detest, reject; to have a strong hostility or aversion toward. The Pharisees and the world did not reject Jesus from a lack of evidence. They had seen the works no one else had done. They had heard the words no one else had spoken. The issue was never the evidence. The issue was what their hearts desired — and what receiving Jesus would have required them to surrender. Their desire for control, for religious authority, for the approval of one another, and for a Messiah on their own terms made them unable to receive the one who stood before them.

They Had the Evidence

Jesus had done works no one else had done and spoken words no one else had spoken. The evidence was not the problem. *"Now they have seen and hated both me and my Father."* (John 15:24, ESV). Seeing did not produce belief — because the heart was not oriented toward receiving what it saw.

The Heart Filtered the Truth

What we desire shapes what we are willing to receive. A heart oriented toward human approval, self-protection, or control will filter truth through those desires — accepting what confirms them and rejecting what threatens them. This is not primarily an intellectual failure. It is a heart condition.

Understanding Asks the Deeper Question

Not just: what do they believe? But: what does their heart desire so deeply that it has become a filter? What would they have to surrender to receive this truth? Until that is drawn out and brought into the light of God's Word, engagement at the level of argument alone will not reach what is actually driving the resistance.

This is the work of understanding — and it is ultimately an act of love. To engage only at the surface, presenting truth without drawing out the heart, is to treat a person as an argument to be won rather than a soul to be reached. Jesus never did that. He saw what was beneath. He named it. He spoke to it. And he did so in a way that made truth receivable — or exposed, with clarity and without cruelty, why it was being refused. That is the model we are called to follow.

When Knowledge Is Mistaken for Wisdom

One of the most difficult people to recognize as lacking understanding is not the ignorant person. It is the person who knows a great deal. He may be scripturally grounded, disciplined, decisive, competent, and effective at turning principles into action. Because the principle is correct and the proposed action may ordinarily be appropriate, he appears wise. But wisdom is not merely true knowledge put into motion. Wisdom is true knowledge applied fittingly to a reality that has been properly understood.

1

Knowledge Applied Directly

Knowledge → Action (understanding assumed, situation unread)

2

The Biblical Movement

Knowledge → Understanding → Wisdom → Action

Without understanding, a person may see the rule but miss the person. He may identify visible behavior without drawing out the heart beneath it. He may be correct about the standard while wrong about the diagnosis. He may recognize a real sin while failing to perceive the fear, hurt, weakness, history, or relational injury contributing to the conflict. He may offer the correct solution to the wrong problem. Paul makes this clear by commanding different responses to different people: *"Admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all."* (1 Thessalonians 5:14, ESV). A person with biblical knowledge may know all three responses. Without understanding, he may admonish the fainthearted, encourage the idle, or demand strength from the weak. Understanding does not make truth less clear. It prevents clear truth from being aimed at the wrong condition.

"The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly."

Proverbs 15:2 (ESV)

Understanding is what makes knowledge commendable—receivable. It is not enough to possess truth. The wise person reads the person, the moment, and the condition, and delivers truth in a way that can actually land. Without understanding, even correct knowledge can be poured out rather than commended.

Emotion: A Window into the Heart

What is emotion? Why did God create it? It often appears that emotion is treated as a byproduct of life — not necessarily unwelcome, but preferably dismissed or bypassed, with a greater emphasis on action. Yet emotion is part of God's purposeful design for embodied human life — a built-in signal system that registers the condition of the heart in response to what we believe is happening around us.

In God's perfect design, emotion is perfectly aligned with truth. Difficult circumstances produce appropriate grief. Answered prayer and genuine blessing produce joy. Injustice produces righteous anger. Affection produces love. When the heart is rightly ordered — rooted in truth — emotion functions as it was designed to: as an accurate, God-given signal of what is real and what matters.

But when the heart becomes poisoned by a lie — a deep false belief about God, self, others, or the world — the signal becomes distorted. The emotion is still present and still real, but it is now reporting a condition shaped by something untrue. This is why emotion must be understood, not simply followed or dismissed.



The Dashboard Analogy

Every warning light on a dashboard is there for a reason. You do not admonish the light itself — it is a signal pointing to something deeper. But you still have to deal with it. Every emotion present in a person is there for a reason. The question is what it is signaling, and whether the signal is accurately reading the condition beneath.



What Understanding Asks

What is this emotion signaling? What does the heart presently believe is happening? What does it reveal about what the heart loves, fears, or believes is at stake? Is that interpretation accurate? What does God's Word say is true?



The Proper Posture

Every emotion should be acknowledged. It should be considered against the truth of God's Word. Emotion is valuable information about the condition of the heart — in yourself or another person. Understanding it helps align a person's thoughts, actions, and heart to what is true — ultimately rooted in and aligned to God's Word.

Two Distortions of Emotion

One distortion makes emotion sovereign. The other treats emotional disconnection as strength. One hands the dashboard the steering wheel. The other disconnects the dashboard. Both produce distorted judgment. Neither reflects God's design for the mature, complete, lacking-nothing believer.

"And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

— James 1:4 (ESV)

When Emotion Moves Beyond Truth

The person governed by emotion treats the signal as the final interpretation of reality and as permission to act. Fear becomes proof that danger exists. Hurt becomes proof that another person is guilty. Anger becomes permission to accuse, punish, control, withdraw, or wound. A person can be truly hurt and still draw a false conclusion. A person can experience real fear and still misidentify the danger. Truth must remain the guardrail. The answer is not emotional suppression—the signal should be acknowledged, the heart beneath it drawn out, and the interpretation tested against Scripture and the fuller facts. Where emotion and truth conflict, that conflict is itself an indicator — something in the heart needs addressing. A lie or false belief is rooted deep within, and the emotion is faithfully reporting it.

When Detachment Is Mistaken for Strength

This person may appear calm, controlled, rational, and productive. Because he can identify the rule and determine what seems reasonable, he assumes the condition of his own heart is irrelevant. But detachment does not mean those influences are absent—it may mean he has lost awareness of the signals that could expose them.

Disconnection does not remove the influence of the heart. It removes awareness of that influence. Unrecognized hurt can still shape an action. Unacknowledged fear can still create urgency. Hidden resentment can still sharpen a tone.

This applies equally to ourselves and to others. When we view emotion as a byproduct — something to cut through rather than learn from — we tend to disregard it as useful information from the person in front of us. We push past it toward action, when the emotion itself is the very signal that could help us draw out the motive of their heart.

"The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out."

— Proverbs 20:5 (ESV)

When we are strong in truth and action, we can numb ourselves to our own signals — our own heart. This leaves us in a compromised position: making decisions and taking actions without proper connection to our own heart and motives. If we cannot understand and draw out the motive of our own heart, how can we ensure that our actions are truly aligned with what God commands — done with a pure heart? The man of understanding does not bypass the deep water. He draws it out — beginning with himself.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"

Psalm 139:23–24 (ESV)

Self-control and detachment are not the same. Self-control perceives the signal and governs the response under truth. Detachment refuses or loses contact with the signal. When we are disconnected from our own emotions, we do not become neutral—we become partially blind to the present state of our own hearts. A person who has learned to dismiss his own emotional signals will often discount the signals of others as well. Acknowledging emotion is not the same as affirming every conclusion attached to it. A person can say **"I understand that this hurt you"** without saying **"Every conclusion you formed because of that hurt is true."**

The emotion belongs there. It is not the problem — it is the signal, and it is there for a reason, pointing to something beneath that needs to be understood. A man of understanding perceives this and responds accordingly. He does not dismiss the signal, nor does he let it drive. He reads it. He draws out what it is pointing to. This is precisely what Jesus did — perfectly understanding each person he encountered, whether Pharisees concealing pride beneath religious precision, those caught in sin carrying shame, or the hurting and the grieving. He never bypassed the signal. He always saw what was beneath it, and he responded to what was actually there.

Drawing Out the Deep Water— Beginning with Ourselves

"The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out."

Proverbs 20:5 (ESV)

The Hebrew word *tevunah*, translated "understanding," carries the idea of discernment, perception, and distinguishing how things connect. A person's words are visible. His actions can be observed. His emotion may rise to the surface. Beneath those things may be a belief, fear, wound, expectation, insecurity, desire, or motive. Emotion may alert us to the deeper water—revealing that the heart believes something important is being threatened, lost, denied, exposed, or desired. Understanding draws out what lies beneath. We ask. We listen. We do not assume or project — we draw out what is actually there.

Beneath every response, every urgency, every conflict — there is a question worth asking: What am I actually fighting for?

1 Am I fighting for restoration — or for control?

2 Am I fighting to be heard — or to be right?

3 Am I fighting to protect something true — or something wounded?

4 Am I fighting for this person — or against them?

Jesus warned against examining another person while remaining blind to ourselves: *"Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" (Matthew 7:3–5, ESV).* Jesus does not say to ignore the speck. He says self-examination is necessary in order to see clearly enough to help remove it. A person who investigates another person's motives while refusing to examine his own has not completed the work of understanding. Trust often has to be built before walls come down and the deeper heart can be drawn out. Trust is often built or rebuilt through truthfulness, ownership, patience, consistency, repentance, and demonstrated understanding.

Hearing, Demonstrated Understanding, and Relational History

The common statement that a person "just wants to be heard, not given a solution" can make listening and solving sound like competing alternatives. But the deeper complaint is often not *never help me act*—it is *you are trying to solve something you have not yet understood*. Proper hearing is not the opposite of a wise solution. It is the necessary foundation for one. *"If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame."* (Proverbs 18:13, ESV). The answer may contain something true. Scripture still calls answering before hearing folly and shame.

1	2	3
Quick to Hear Listening is not merely a relational courtesy. It is the work by which relevant knowledge is acquired.	Slow to Speak Demonstrated understanding means listening long enough to restate the person's experience accurately and distinguish the emotional signal from the conclusions attached to it. It also means resisting the urge to fill in the gaps with assumptions — waiting for what is actually there rather than completing the picture with what we expect to find.	Slow to Anger The person who assumes he already understands may reverse this order—hearing enough to recognize a familiar category, then becoming frustrated when the other person does not receive his answer.

Relational conflicts rarely occur in isolation. Repeated harshness, excessive directness, instruction without listening, dismissiveness, inconsistency, broken promises, or controlling behavior can create real hurt and mistrust. A single statement is no longer heard as a single statement—a present correction carries the memory of past dismissal. The person who contributed to the injury may focus only on the other person's present unbiblical reaction. His defense of truth may be correct. But if he refuses to understand the history, examine his contribution, and draw out the heart beneath the reaction, he repeats the pattern that helped produce the mistrust. **Pain does not justify sin. Truth does not justify harshness, haste, self-blindness, or relational carelessness.** Reconciliation requires truth about the whole relational reality: confession, repentance, forgiveness, patient rebuilding of trust, demonstrated understanding, and wisdom that addresses the people actually present.

Jesus: Perfect Understanding and Perfectly Ordered Emotion

Jesus is the perfect integration of truth, emotion, knowledge, understanding, motive, and wisdom. He was neither emotionally detached nor governed by emotion. His grief, compassion, anger, joy, and zeal were accurate and perfectly aligned with truth. At Lazarus's tomb, Jesus did not merely possess correct information about death and resurrection—he accurately perceived and entered the grief before him: *"Jesus wept. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!'"* (John 11:35–36, ESV). When confronted with hard hearts, Jesus experienced righteous anger and grief together (Mark 3:5). His emotions were never rooted in false belief, incomplete knowledge, wounded pride, disordered desire, or mistaken perception. They were perfectly proportionate to reality.

The woman caught in adultery provides an especially clear picture of knowledge, understanding, emotion, and wisdom operating together. The scribes and Pharisees presented her as a legal problem while using her to trap Jesus. Jesus understood the woman, the accusers, the law, the sin, the shame, and the deceptive motive beneath the confrontation. His response—**"Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more"** (John 8:11, ESV)—holds mercy and moral clarity together without compromise. His mercy does not erase responsibility. His moral clarity does not reduce the woman to the worst action she committed. Jesus also exposed outward righteousness concealing an unhealthy heart: *"You are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones."* (Matthew 23:27, ESV). The Pharisees demonstrate that outward correctness, Scripture knowledge, religious activity, and principled language do not automatically prove health within. We cannot imitate Jesus' omniscience. But we can imitate his refusal to stop at the surface.

Understanding in Marriage

Peter commands husbands to live with their wives *kata gnōsin* — according to knowledge (1 Peter 3:7). But true knowledge of a person includes the condition of their heart, and emotion is one of the clearest indicators of where that heart currently is. How can a husband lead and disciple his wife if he does not understand where her heart is — or how to make truth receivable to her? Generic knowledge knows what a wife is. Relational understanding learns who this wife is, what she carries, and how to speak in a way she can actually receive.

The Wise Tongue

"The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly." (Proverbs 15:2, ESV). The wise tongue presents knowledge fittingly, intelligibly, credibly, and graciously. **People do not always reject counsel because they hate truth — sometimes they distrust a counselor who has demonstrated that he has not understood them.** In the end, it comes down to trust. When a person has repeatedly answered before hearing — to his own folly and shame — it leaves a mark. It affects the other person's willingness to open up, to receive, and to believe that what is being offered is truly for them. Trust, once damaged by being unheard or misunderstood, must be rebuilt before truth can be received. Understanding is not just the path to wisdom — it is the foundation of the trust that makes wisdom welcome.

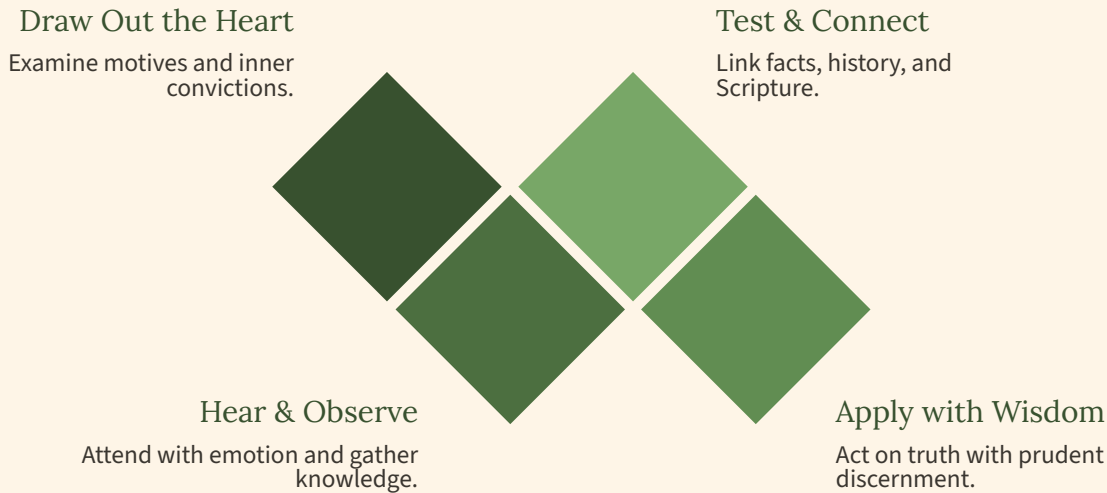
Wisdom from Above

"The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere." (James 3:17, ESV). Truth and understanding are not enemies. Christlike wisdom makes the messenger approachable without making the message negotiable.

The Complete Movement

"The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out."
Proverbs 20:5 (ESV)

Emotion is not a fourth category placed beside knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. It is part of what must be heard and observed—one of the created mechanisms through which the embodied heart registers and responds to the world. Emotion reports what the heart perceives. Knowledge gathers the relevant truth, facts, words, actions, history, circumstances, and signals. Understanding connects and tests what has been gathered. Wisdom determines the fitting action under God's Word.



Knowledge (Truth) Without Understanding

With themselves: This person is disciplined, principled, and decisive. They know what Scripture says and move quickly from truth to action. But they rarely pause to examine what is driving them beneath the surface. They assume their motives are sound because their actions are correct. Unrecognized hurt, pride, or fear can quietly shape their decisions while they remain confident they are simply obeying God's Word.

With others: They see the rule before they see the person. They identify the sin, name the principle, and offer the correction — and they may be entirely right about the standard while being entirely wrong about what the person actually needs in that moment. They may admonish the fainthearted, encourage the idle, or demand strength from the weak. This person is not malicious. They simply have not drawn out the heart beneath the behavior. People often feel unseen by them, even when they are correct.

Understanding Without Knowledge (Truth)

With themselves: This person is emotionally perceptive and relationally attuned. They feel deeply, read situations well, and are genuinely moved by the pain of others. But without truth as an anchor, their understanding has no direction. They may excuse patterns in themselves that need to be confronted, interpreting their own emotions as sufficient guides. Empathy becomes self-justification.

With others: They are warm, present, and easy to talk to. People feel heard by them. But they struggle to bring truth to bear when it is needed most. They validate feelings without testing them against reality. They comfort without confronting. They accommodate rather than help. Their counsel leaves people feeling understood but unchanged — because understanding without truth cannot lead anyone toward what they actually need.

The Complete Picture — Knowledge, Understanding, and Wisdom

Jesus is the only perfect example of knowledge, understanding, and rightly ordered emotion operating together without distortion, and the example we have been given to follow.

With himself: His motives were pure. His emotions were perfectly proportionate to reality — never rooted in false belief, wounded pride, or disordered desire. In Gethsemane, he expressed real anguish and a genuine desire for another way, and submitted it entirely to the Father's will. He did not suppress what he felt. He did not let what he felt override what was true.

With others: He saw the woman caught in adultery — her shame, the accusers' motives, the law, the trap — and held mercy and moral clarity together without sacrificing either. He wept with those who wept. He rebuked those whose hearts were hard. He spoke differently to the Pharisee, the disciple, the grieving, and the sinner — because he understood each one. He never compromised truth to be received, and he was never so committed to the principle that he missed the person. As Jesus said to Matthew, 'Follow me.' We have been given the example. Jesus continually drew out the motive of the heart as a man of perfect understanding, and thus acted with perfect wisdom in how to handle each individual. In the same way, we are called not merely to know truth, but to understand the person before us — and to apply truth with the wisdom, care, and discernment that Jesus himself modeled.

Christian maturity is not learning to feel nothing. It is not learning to obey everything we feel. It is learning to bring the whole person—mind, belief, desire, emotion, motive, word, and action—under the truth and rule of God. Jesus shows the complete integration. He was never governed by emotion, and he was never disconnected from it. His knowledge was complete. His understanding was perfect. His motives were pure. His wisdom was flawless. To grow in wisdom is not simply to feel less. It is to perceive more honestly, examine the heart more humbly, feel more truthfully, understand more completely, and act more fittingly under God. Actions are visible fruit. The heart is the root. Understanding draws out the deep water and connects the fuller reality. Wisdom applies truth fittingly to the person and situation actually understood.

Men and Women of Understanding

"The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out."

— **Proverbs 20:5 (ESV)**

Knowledge without understanding produces correct answers aimed at the wrong condition. Understanding without truth is not simply warmth without direction — it is not love at all, for love *"does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth."* (1 Corinthians 13:6, ESV). The complete picture is the person who walks in knowledge, understanding, and wisdom — whose emotion is rightly ordered, acknowledged, and held with truth as the guardrail — whose motives have been examined, and whose actions are fitted to the person actually before them. This is what God calls us toward. Not merely to know truth, but to understand. Not merely to understand, but to act with wisdom. Not merely to act, but to act from a pure heart.

This begins with ourselves. Until we are connected to our own heart — through honest self-examination, taking the log out of our own eye — which includes being connected and aware of our heart's signals as they manifest in emotion (neither detached from them nor overly driven by them, but submitting and acknowledging them through the filter of God's truth) — we cannot walk in confidence that our motives are pure. Scripture is clear about why this is so difficult:

"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick; who can understand it?"

— **Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)**

"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?"

— **James 4:1 (ESV)**

"Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep."

— **Romans 12:15 (ESV)**

"Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger."

— **James 1:19 (ESV)**

"Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then **you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.**"

— **Matthew 7:3–5 (ESV)**

We must examine ourselves honestly, identify what does not align with God's Word, and bring it into the light — confessing and repenting before God, and confessing to one another. *"Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed."* (James 5:16, ESV). Through that healing and self-awareness, we can then act with greater confidence in the purity of our own motives.

As we engage with others, we work to draw out the motives of their heart — being quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger (James 1:19), and being sure to hear before giving an answer (Proverbs 18:13). In doing so, we model what Jesus demonstrated: engaging each person with perfect knowledge of their reality and their state, and responding with perfect wisdom fitted to who they actually are. Jesus responded to the heart of people — even when the words of their mouth did not align with what was actually in their heart. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, people can present a version of themselves that does not reflect what is truly beneath. Our calling as men and women of understanding, following Jesus' example, is to draw out the motive of the heart and to understand the true condition of the person before us. Only then can we know how to act in wisdom — whether to admonish, encourage, or help the weak — responding to what is actually there rather than only what is presented.

With every action comes a motive. If we cannot draw out the motive of our own heart — and of the hearts of those we seek to help — are we not blind guides? *"They are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit."* (Matthew 15:14, ESV). To be a godly man or woman of understanding is to draw out the heart — not to assume the visible action, and not to allow the visible action to assume the intention. The action is visible fruit; the heart is the root. We are called to draw out the deep water, bring the truth of God's Word to bear on what is actually there, and act with the wisdom, care, and discernment of the One who perfectly modeled it.

"As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he rose and followed him."

— **Matthew 9:9 (ESV)**