

Smart Mouth or Wise Heart

What makes us smart enough to live well and not relapse into insanity? In our addiction we've made bad choices and walked down paths that have caused us and others pain and harm. Along the way we've picked up a lot of "street smarts" as we have tried to find ways to deal with our circumstances. These are ways we've developed of "getting what we want when we want it" as well as our own coping mechanisms around personal pain. They are things we "know" and things we've relied upon, but they are not necessarily truths that heal and support healthy living. They tend to resurface after the initial cloud of confusion lifts a few days or weeks into recovery. They form part of the dialogue that goes on in our head when we hear new information that challenges our old way of doing things. If we give them much attention we'll soon find ourselves discontented and well on the way to a relapse. Relapse prevention requires that with God's help we learn to think and act in new ways and develop the wise heart that God knows is essential for us.

On the street a person is often considered smart when they can get whatever they want in any situation. We often think a person is smart when they are able to talk their way out of trouble. It might require lying or blaming or criticizing others but if it manages to "get us off the hook" then we've been smart or the person who's helped us has been smart. In the legal system we look for loopholes to help us "beat the rap" rather than looking at the truth and dealing with the consequences of our actions on victims and ourselves

We feel smart when we are able to compare ourselves to others who are doing similar or worse things and make ourselves seem not so bad. When someone has hurt or disappointed us and we are able to "get them back" with a smart remark we feel good, especially if others are around to hear it and encourage us. When we make remarks that make others laugh at what we've said we feel smart, even if what we've said embarrasses or degrades another person or ethnic group. Sometimes we share gossip and pass on negative information and feel smart because we know something others didn't know.

We've sometimes felt smart when we managed to get in and out of a store and shoplift without getting caught, or ripped someone off without them knowing it was us. Now we don't do that but we tell stories of great problems and hardship in order to get help at the welfare office and feel successful when we get some financial help to cover what we've lost through drinking or drugging.

This is what the Bible says about this kind of "wisdom": ***Jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom.***

Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and motivated by the Devil. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and every kind of evil. (James 3: 15-16).

It is God's plan to replace our self-centered ways of being smart with His Godly wisdom. Relapse prevention is about developing a habit of humility that says, "I don't know what's best for me in this situation and I'm willing to learn and live in God's new way." ***Reverence for the Lord is the foundation of true wisdom. The rewards of wisdom come to all who obey him. Only fools despise wisdom and discipline.*** (Psalm 111 & Proverbs 1) God has revealed what is good and right about life in the Bible. The starting place for principles of living can be found there and anything that contradicts those principles is "worldly wisdom" that we would do well to lay aside.

Tune your ears to wisdom and concentrate on understanding. The Lord grants a treasure of good sense to the godly. He is their shield, protecting those who walk with integrity. Wise planning will watch over you. Understanding will keep you safe. (Proverbs 2)

We need to seek daily advice from people who walk with God, and whose desire is to see God's kingdom expressed in every aspect of daily living because straying into areas forbidden by God's word is a sure path towards relapse. We don't need to hear people who sound like us and who simply speak things that we want to hear. We need to hear from people who are not afraid to contradict our crooked thinking and to tell us truth that is perhaps difficult to hear but necessary for experiencing a new way of life. ***Wisdom will save you from evil people, from those whose speech is corrupt. These people turn from right ways to walk down dark and evil paths. They rejoice in doing wrong, and they enjoy evil as it turns things upside down. What they do is crooked, and their ways are wrong.*** (Proverbs 2)

Our wisdom can be judged by whether or not our actions conform to God's instructions. ***Anyone who listens to My teaching and obeys Me is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against the house, it won't collapse, because it is built on rock*** (Matthew 7:24-25). Filling our minds with Jesus' words and instructions will help us turn away from the harmful things forbidden by God and find the wisdom we need to walk steadily toward wholeness.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How have "street smarts" affected my choices and life?
2. Where have I struggled with making appropriate and Godly choices and how has that led to relapse?
3. In what ways do I need to have my thinking and actions changed in order to not start down the road to relapse?
4. Where do I seek guidance today for the decisions I need to make?