

Clever Is Not Wise

Wisdom and Counsel • Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)

THE SITUATION

“Did you pilot the quantitative survey?” Professor Smith asks it evenly, without looking up, and nobody answers for a second. Your team built it over one weekend: forty-two questions, skip logic, branching, and wording you are proud of. It is clever.

You didn’t pilot it. Piloting costs three days, and anyway you’re confident it works, because you wrote it. On the walk back you keep answering her in your head, and every answer is a reason you didn’t need the pilot.

BIBLE ANALYSIS

Nobody on your team asked for a pilot, because the survey felt finished. Proverbs knows that feeling. A father instructing a son about to leave home spends chapters telling the boy to get wisdom and chase it down, and then says where the weight goes: **“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5, NIV)**. A hand on a railing and a whole body leaning on it are different things, and verse 6 adds: submit to him in all your ways.

Biblical wisdom starts with the fear of the LORD, which in practice means recognizing that God is God and your analysis is not. In business it shows up as a pilot, a second reviewer, a control, an audit. Prayer does not replace those checks. God answers a prayer for wisdom through his Word and through a neighbor who saw what you missed.

Self-reliance hides inside competence, and we resist testing work that has become evidence of how smart we are. The pilot stops feeling like a method and starts feeling like a threat. Somewhere a product team is explaining away the one focus group that disliked the name, and the box will go to print with that name on it.

There is someone who can carry the weight. Christ is God’s wisdom for sinners, and he carried our proud certainty to the cross. The Spirit hands that forgiveness out through the gospel and creates the faith that receives it. A believer can survive correction: no draft has to be defended to stay loved.

Catastrophic failures rarely come from a shortage of intelligence. They grow when intelligent people get insulated from information that disagrees with them. So make it safe to ask the basic question, and thank whoever finds the flaw early. Christian wisdom never claims that a group decision is God’s specific will. It works with partial knowledge and revises. A careful decision can still turn out poorly, and faith refuses to rewrite history and call the failure a blessing. It confesses, repairs, and keeps going under a mercy that covers bad calls as well as bad motives. No standing before God ever rode on a survey or a grade. God puts his name on the baptized, and he keeps it on the day someone proves you wrong in front of the class.

ACTION PLAN

The Decision. Pilot the survey with eight people, because watching someone hesitate or quit halfway is cheap information. Then ask Professor Smith the question, ready to hear an answer that changes your design. Hand the revised instrument to your team and say which assumption the pilot killed. On the next project, build review time in from the start.

The Inner Person. Pay attention to how criticism lands in your body, and give it no divine meaning. A tight jaw might be pride, or stress, or five hours of sleep. Scripture names self-reliance as sin and condemns the sinner who trusts himself. The jaw only tells you to slow down and look. Confess what God's Word exposes, and hear the forgiveness Christ won for sinners.

Try This. Run three steps before the next significant decision. Pray first, with a passage in front of you. Then ask one wise person to argue against what you are leaning toward. Then decide on time with what you have.

THREE TAKEAWAYS

- Wisdom chases understanding hard and still refuses to lean its whole weight on what it knows.
- Pilots, controls, and counsel are humility with a process attached.
- Christ's forgiveness makes correction and uncertainty bearable.

APPLY IT

Which part of your design are you most certain about, and least willing to pilot?

PRAYER

Father, forgive our proud certainty. Your Son carried it to the cross and rose again, and for his sake you count sinners righteous. Give us wisdom through your Word and through counselors who tell us the truth. Hold us in Christ, so that correction arrives as a gift and not a threat. Amen.

Going Deeper. Roland Cap Ehlke, *Proverbs, The People's Bible* (Northwestern Publishing House), on 3:1-12. Siegbert W. Becker, *The Foolishness of God: The Place of Reason in the Theology of Martin Luther* (Northwestern Publishing House, 1982).