

Chapter 13

Don't Take Your Wisdom With You

There are things you understand today that you understood differently at twenty-five. Someone could have explained the importance of protecting your marriage, of listening before speaking, or of refusing to make permanent decisions in the grip of temporary emotions. You might even have listened. But some lessons gain weight only years of living can give them.

You understand work differently after realizing that professional accomplishment cannot answer every question you hoped it would. You understand time differently after burying someone you expected to outlive. You understand grace differently after needing it desperately. And you may have come to trust God in ways you could not have imagined, even during a season you once prayed He would simply remove.

Those lessons may have come through years of prayer, mistakes, repentance, and watching decisions bear consequences. Some remain unfinished. You may still be living through the difficulty rather than looking back from the other side. Even so, something you are learning about following Jesus may help another person take his next faithful step.

In the previous chapter, we considered the gift of knowing and being known. In those relationships, we may also have something valuable to offer. The question is whether we will offer it with enough humility to serve the person receiving it. We do not need an audience for everything we have learned. We need to notice where a lesson, a skill, or a word of encouragement could be a gift.

Experience Does Not Automatically Become Wisdom

Age alone does not make us wise. A person can repeat the same mistake for forty years and become experienced at it rather than wise enough to stop. We can grow older without becoming humbler, more discerning, or more like Jesus. Wisdom requires more than accumulated years.

Proverbs says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10, NASB 2020). Biblical wisdom begins with recognizing who God is and responding to Him with reverence and obedience. Experience becomes useful when it is submitted to His truth. We examine our failures without excusing them or letting them define us. We allow Scripture to correct the conclusions we reached on our own. We become humble enough to recognize that some things we were certain about at thirty may need reconsideration at sixty.

Humility is part of wisdom. A wise man often becomes more careful in his answers. He knows that people differ, circumstances matter, and motives can be mixed. God's truth does not change to suit our preferences, but faithfully applying it requires more than assuming another person's situation is

identical to ours. We may need to ask questions, study further, or admit that an answer lies beyond our knowledge.

It also helps distinguish what Scripture teaches from what experience suggests. “This is what God commands” carries a different authority than “This is what worked for me.” Both may belong in a conversation, but confusing them can burden another person with a rule God has not given. We serve him better by explaining the difference and remaining open to having our judgment tested.

The Knowledge That Walks Out the Door

Organizations sometimes discover the value of experience when a longtime employee retires. The procedures remain, but some of the judgment leaves. A manual can explain what to do in ordinary circumstances. It may not capture the question an experienced person knows to ask when the situation does not fit the usual pattern. That judgment can be useful to others when we explain what we noticed, what we considered, and why we chose a particular course.

The same principle applies beyond work. A couple who have learned to seek forgiveness may help younger spouses understand what an honest apology requires. A man who has experienced financial failure may be able to explain how pride kept him from seeking help. Someone who has cared for an ill family member may know how to offer practical support without assuming the caregiver’s needs.

None of this makes the experienced person automatically right. It gives him something to consider and, when appropriate, to share. The recipient may face different circumstances or notice something we have missed. We need enough humility to listen and enough generosity to speak.

Some knowledge will remain unspoken if we never make room to pass it on. That is a reason to act, not to panic about preserving every lesson before we die. Much of our influence may already be present in those we have served. We can be grateful for that while asking whether there is something useful we have been keeping to ourselves.

A Prayer for the Later Years

The writer of Psalm 71 looked back over a lifetime spent with God and asked for one thing more:

“God, You have taught me from my youth, And I still declare Your wondrous deeds. And even when I am old and gray, God, do not abandon me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to all who are to come.” — Psalm 71:17–18 (NASB 2020)

He does not ask for more years to enjoy them. He asks to be kept until he has told the next generation what God is like. That is a prayer worth making our own. It treats old age as a time with a purpose and places that purpose in declaring God's strength, not our own accomplishments.

The New Testament gives the same season a recognizable shape. As we saw in Chapter 6, Paul wanted older men to be “temperate, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance” (Titus 2:2, NASB 2020). The verses that follow describe older women teaching and encouraging younger women (Titus 2:3–5). Paul assumes that maturity in one generation is meant to benefit the next and puts character first. A younger man is helped less by our opinions than by seeing sound faith, love, and perseverance in someone further down the road.

Entrusting Truth to Others

Paul wrote to Timothy:

“The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful people who will be able to teach others also.” — 2 Timothy 2:2 (NASB 2020)

Paul was concerned that the teaching entrusted to Timothy would continue to be faithfully taught. Timothy was to pass it on to trustworthy people who, in turn, could teach others. The verse looks beyond a single teacher and a single hearer. It also stands alongside Paul's call for Timothy to draw strength from the grace found in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2:1). This responsibility was to be carried out in dependence on Christ.

The subject is the apostolic teaching Timothy received, not every conclusion an older man has reached about life. Our personal experience does not carry that authority. Yet the passage offers us a pattern of faithful transmission that should shape how we think about what has been entrusted to us. We receive truth, seek to live by it, and help others understand and pass it on accurately.

Notice the attention to both faithfulness and the ability to teach. A large platform is not required, but willingness alone is not the whole responsibility. What is taught matters, as does the person's ability to help others understand it. When we read Scripture with another man, we should be willing to study carefully, ask for help, and correct ourselves when we are mistaken.

This is part of what we mean by multiplication. The good entrusted to us can continue serving others beyond our involvement. We hope the person we help will eventually help someone else. We cannot require that outcome or make it a measure of our importance. We can faithfully offer what is ours to give and leave room for God to work in ways we may never see.

Jesus Prepared His Disciples to Carry the Message

Jesus taught His disciples over time. They heard His words, watched His actions, and were corrected when they misunderstood. Their preparation involved shared life, not merely the transfer of information. As we saw in the previous chapter, His calling of the twelve was part of His unique mission. We can learn from His patient investment without reducing that mission to a method for developing people.

After His resurrection, Jesus commanded His disciples to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey His commands. He grounded that commission in His authority and promised His continuing presence (Matthew 28:18–20). In Acts 1:8, He promised the Holy Spirit’s power for their witness. The spread of the gospel depended on far more than the preparation or determination of a small group.

That gives our efforts both purpose and proportion. We serve the risen Lord; we do not take His place in another person’s life. We can teach, encourage, and set an example, relying on Him to accomplish what our experience and influence cannot. A mentoring relationship may be one way to serve within the wider life of Christ’s church.

Mentoring Is Not Making Someone Like You

There is a danger in mentoring that deserves attention. We can begin to believe that the goal is to reproduce ourselves. The younger person does not need our personality, career, hobbies, political opinions, or every conclusion we have reached about life. He needs to know and follow Jesus. Our example is useful only when it helps him do so.

Paul told the Corinthians, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1, NASB 2020). The preceding verses speak of God’s glory and of seeking others’ good rather than one’s own advantage. Paul’s invitation directs attention beyond himself to Christ. That is a fitting test of our influence: does it help someone follow Jesus, or does it mainly teach them to seek our approval?

We can explain what helped us in our careers without claiming it is the only path. We can talk honestly about marriage without assuming every couple faces the same challenges. We can describe a decision we regret while acknowledging that we do not know enough to make someone else’s decision for him. Our task is to help him grow in discernment before God.

That growth does not mean he will eventually need no one. Christians continue to learn and receive counsel throughout their lives. It means he should not become dependent on our permission for

every decision. A mentor whose identity is secure in Christ can welcome another person's growing judgment and rejoice when that person's gifts surpass his own.

Listen Before You Teach

Older men sometimes wonder why younger people do not seek their advice. There may be many reasons, including responsibilities or relationships we know little about. But one question we can ask ourselves is whether we have made it easy to talk with us. If every conversation becomes a lecture, people learn to keep their questions to themselves.

Experience delivered without curiosity can be exhausting. A younger man may face pressures we did not encounter at his age. Before explaining what he should do, ask what he hopes to accomplish, what concerns him, and what options he is considering. Listen long enough to understand the question. You may find that the advice you were preparing does not address his problem.

Then ask whether anything from your experience would be helpful. A simple question such as "Would it help if I shared what I learned in a similar situation?" leaves room for an honest answer. If he welcomes it, explain the lesson without taking over the conversation. If he declines, respect his decision. Your care for him should not depend on his willingness to accept your advice.

When a relationship evolves into a mentoring relationship, discuss what you both hope it will entail. Agree on a realistic way to meet and on the topics you want to explore. Revisit that understanding as circumstances change. Clarity helps the relationship remain useful and prevents unspoken expectations that either person must always be available.

Share the Mistakes Too

If we are going to offer wisdom to another generation, we must resist editing our history to make it always look wise. A younger person can learn from our successes, but he may also learn from where we were wrong. Tell the truth about the opportunity pursued for the wrong reason or the argument won at the cost of a relationship. Explain what pride kept you from seeing and what changed when you finally listened.

Most importantly, tell where Jesus met you in those failures. This is where Chapter 2 becomes useful again. Regret brought under grace can become wisdom to share with someone else. We do not need to make the mistake seem admirable or pretend its consequences disappeared. We can acknowledge the harm, describe the repentance and repair that followed, and speak gratefully of God's mercy.

Such honesty requires care for those who share our history. A story about our failure may also expose a spouse, child, coworker, or friend. Share only what is yours to tell, protect what is private,

and seek permission when another person's story is involved. At work, exercise sound judgment and avoid disclosing information you are responsible for protecting.

Nor does teaching a lesson replace living it. If we continue in the conduct we warn against, we need to seek help and address it. A candid admission can be a beginning, but a mentoring role must not become a way to avoid accountability. Sometimes the wisest thing we can model is accepting correction and taking responsibility for change.

The People Who May Welcome What You Have Learned

The people we invest in need not be our biological children. Some men have children who naturally seek their counsel. Others have adult children whose lives take different paths, and some have no children at all. There may be a coworker, a man at church, or someone who is beginning a responsibility we understand. He may be younger, or he may simply be new to something we have spent years mastering.

We need not wait for someone to bestow the title of mentor on us. We can express interest, extend an invitation, or offer help with a specific need. A man may welcome company long before he wants advice. He may already have trusted counselors. Taking an interest in him begins with learning who he is, rather than deciding in advance what role we should play in his life.

If no one readily comes to mind, consider asking a church leader or someone in your field whether there is an appropriate opportunity to help. A shared project, a small group, or teaching a practical skill can be a natural starting point. You can also share a useful lesson in writing if conversation or travel is difficult. The form should fit the people involved and the resources available to you.

When You Do Not Feel Qualified

Some readers may still think, "I am not the person who should be mentoring anyone." Perhaps your failures loom larger than your strengths. Awareness of failure can produce humility, but failure itself does not qualify us to guide others. The question is what we have learned, whether we are responding faithfully now, and where we can serve honestly, given what we know.

You do not need a perfect marriage to encourage a younger husband. You do need to distinguish what you have learned from what you are still struggling to practice. You do not need to be wealthy to teach contentment or to admit a financial mistake. And you do not need the training of a seminary professor to read Scripture with another believer, as long as you remain willing to study carefully and seek help with questions you cannot answer.

Ordinary encouragement is distinct from accepting responsibility for a teaching office or offering specialized counsel. Some roles require training, demonstrated character, or qualifications we do not

yet have. Recognizing that distinction does not make our contribution worthless. It helps us offer the right kind of help. “I do not know, but I can help you find someone who does” can be a faithful answer.

You do not need to be finished. None of us is. You can begin with one lesson you understand, one person who welcomes it, and a willingness to keep learning. There may be seasons when receiving care takes most of your strength. Your worth in Christ does not depend on how many people you mentor, and the good God has done through your life is not erased when your capacity changes.

Jesus First in the Wisdom We Share

Our order remains **Jesus > Others > Self**. Knowledge can become a possession we use to assert importance. We may enjoy being the expert or hesitate to share what we know because it makes us hard to replace. When Jesus comes first, we remember that our abilities and opportunities belong to His lordship. Even hard-earned lessons were learned over years He gave us.

When others come next, the question is how what we know can serve them. We listen to their needs, speak honestly, and help them learn to discern. The selfless love of Jesus changes our reason for teaching. We can find joy in another person’s growth without insisting on credit or on continued dependence.

Self moves into its proper place. We remain responsible for learning, resting, and acknowledging our limits, but we no longer need to stay at the center. The wisdom identified in our Entrusted Inventory can become part of someone else’s preparation. We offer it faithfully, hoping it will serve beyond our involvement and trusting God to extend its reach.

Your Remaining Years Plan

My Multiplication List

Begin with what you have to offer, then consider who might welcome it. Draw on the wisdom portion of your Entrusted Inventory and the Investment Circle in Chapter 12. You do not need a new assignment if an existing relationship already offers an appropriate place to serve.

What I Have to Give

Consider lessons from marriage or other close relationships, work, money, failure, suffering, and following Jesus. Choose one or two that you can explain honestly. You may still be learning them; distinguish a settled conviction from a question you are working through.

An experience and the lesson I learned from it:

A second lesson or skill that could be useful to someone else:

What Scripture teaches about the lesson, including a passage to study in context:

What is personal judgment or preference rather than a biblical command:

What I still need to learn, verify, or put into practice:

People to Consider

Write up to five names that come readily to mind. One is enough to begin. Beside each name, note what might be useful and what you need to ask before assuming it would be welcome. The list is for prayerful consideration, not a roster of people you have appointed yourself to mentor.

Name or initials, possible contribution, and a question to ask:

If you do not yet have a name, identify one person or setting that could help you find an appropriate opportunity. You may leave the rest of the list blank.

A person I could ask or a setting I could explore:

One Relationship to Begin With

The person I will approach or an existing relationship I will build on:

Why I care about this person and what I want to understand about his needs:

What I could offer and what I should avoid assuming or promising:

One Thing I Will Begin

Choose one action to take within the next seven days. Initiate a conversation, ask whether a specific lesson would be useful, or seek help finding an appropriate opportunity. Do not try to transfer forty years of wisdom over breakfast. Begin by listening.

The action I will take and the date I will take it:

A question I will ask before offering advice:

If further conversation is welcome, a subject and rhythm we could agree on:

A limit, confidence, or area requiring other help that I need to respect:

My Multiplication Commitment

Write two or three sentences describing what you hope to share, with whom, and how you will remain teachable. Include your hope that what is useful may eventually help others, without requiring a particular outcome. Keep Jesus at the center of your commitment.

I will review this commitment alongside the rest of my plan on:

During that review, ask whether you took the step, listened carefully, and followed through on the agreement. If the relationship continues, ask the other person what has been helpful and what should change. Also consider what you have learned. Faithfulness includes accepting correction and recognizing when another person is better positioned to help.

The Story Behind the Lesson

There is more to offer than a conclusion. There is also the story of how we came to understand it. Telling someone that God is faithful can become more personal when we share a season when we learned to trust Him. Speaking about grace can carry different weight when we acknowledge a failure and describe how Jesus met us there.

We need not make every story end neatly. Some prayers remain unanswered in ways we cannot understand, and some consequences remain painful. An honest testimony can include those unfinished places while directing attention to the Lord we continue to trust. We are offering what we have seen and learned, not a formula that promises someone else the same experience.

Many of these stories have never been written down, and some have never been spoken aloud. We assume our families and friends know them, but they may know far less than we think. As we consider what wisdom to share, it is worth asking which stories could help those we love understand why our faith matters to us. We turn to that next.