

Ten Principles of Common Sense

Proverbs 8:1-5 HCSB Doesn't Wisdom call out? Doesn't Understanding make her voice heard? (2) At the heights overlooking the road, at the crossroads, she takes her stand. (3) Beside the gates at the entry to the city, at the main entrance, she cries out: (4) "People, I call out to you; my cry is to mankind. (5) Learn to be shrewd, you who are inexperienced; develop common sense, you who are foolish.

The French philosopher Voltaire once lamented, "Common sense is not so common." Let's define what we mean by "common sense". Common sense is sound practical judgment that is independent of specialized knowledge, training, or the like. A fellow by the name of Robert Ingersoll said, "It is a thousand times better to have common sense without education than to have education without common sense." Solomon would agree with Mr. Ingersoll. He said in Proverbs 18 that a fool does not delight in understanding, but only wants to show off his opinions.

So what are the characteristics of common sense? How do we develop this elusive but apparently critical skill? I would like to propose ten principles.

1. **Make every effort to foresee and forestall the harm that may result from an action we take or neglect to take.** (Deuteronomy 22:8)

- a. **Deuteronomy 22:8 HCSB** If you build a new house, make a railing around your roof, so that you don't bring bloodguilt on your house if someone falls from it.
- b. In the ancient Near East, houses usually had flat roofs. In hot weather, it was cooler on the roof than in the house, so roofs were sometimes used for sleeping and for entertaining guests. So we see that common sense would dictate that if your house had a high porch, you needed to ensure that those who would enjoy it would be safe.
- c. **Application:**
 - i. Do not raise or keep a vicious animal.
 - **Exodus 21:29 HCSB** However, if the ox was in the habit of goring, and its owner has been warned yet does not restrain it, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox must be stoned, and its owner must also be put to death.
 - ii. Do not leave potential dangers like deep holes around without taking steps to make them safe.
 - **Exodus 21:33-34 HCSB** "When a man uncovers a pit or digs a pit, and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, (34) the owner of the pit must give compensation; he must pay money to its owner, but the dead animal will become his.
 - iii. Do not keep a rickety ladder around.
 - iv. Do not share powerful prescription medicines with others.

2. **Don't speak when words are unnecessary or potentially harmful.** (Ecclesiastes 3:7)

- a. **Ecclesiastes 3:7 HCSB** "there is... a time to be silent and a time to speak."
- b. Ethics of the Fathers (4:18) recommends "Do not try
 - i. to pacify your friend in the hour of his anger
 - ii. nor comfort him while his dead lies before him
 - iii. nor question him in the hour of his vow."
- c. In each case above, the person would be in the throes of powerful emotions: great anger, great sorrow, or zealous passion. In any of these cases, a person will not be very likely to listen to even the most calm and rationale entreaties.

d. **Application:**

- i. Allow the appropriate expression of emotion to take place.
- ii. Don't value your personal comfort over their needs.
- iii. Timing is everything. If you can wait till the heat of their passion has abated, then try to help them.
- iv. By intervening at the wrong time, the person who lacks common sense brings about more harm than good.
- v. As often as not the best thing you can do for someone who is upset is to give them your undivided attention. Very often nothing need be said.
- vi. And whatever you do, don't mouth platitudes like "Don't feel bad – he's in a better place now."

3. **Don't tempt or test yourself.** (Ephesians 4:27; 2 Samuel 11:1-2; Deuteronomy 25:13-15; 1 Thessalonians 5:22)

- a. [Ephesians 4:27 HCSB](#) and don't give the Devil an opportunity.
- b. [1 Thessalonians 5:22 HCSB](#) Stay away from every form of evil.
- c. **Example:** [2 Samuel 11:1-2 HCSB](#) In the spring when kings march out *to war*, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah, but David remained in Jerusalem. (2) One evening David got up from his bed and strolled around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing--a very beautiful woman.
- d. Just as you'd build a fence around a high porch or a deep well, take care to build fences around yourself.
- e. **Application:**
 - i. If you struggle with alcohol or drugs, don't hang out in bars with people who are still partaking of these things.
 - ii. If you struggle with pornography
 - install a net nanny on your computer
 - be accountable to someone
 - leave your door to your office open
 - keep your windows open
 - iii. Don't even have the instruments that could either tempt you to be dishonest or leave you vulnerable to accusation.
 - [Deuteronomy 25:13-15 HCSB \(13\)](#) "You must not have two different weights in your bag, one heavy and one light. (14) You must not have two differing dry measures in your house, a larger and a smaller. (15) You must have a full and honest weight, a full and honest dry measure, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

4. **Don't rely on miracles.** (Daniel 3:17-18; Matthew 24:15-18)

- a. **Illustration:** A flood is expected to wipe out a small town and evacuation is begun. A jeep is driving through town and comes across a guy standing on his front porch. "Hop in," they said, "The flood will be coming in any minute."
"Don't worry about me," the man replied, "I have faith that God will save me." Unable to change his mind, they drove on without him.
Soon the flood waters began to roll in, and a rescue team drifted by this man's house in a boat. "Hop in," they requested, "We'll get you out of here."
"Don't worry about me," was the man's reply, "I have faith that God will save me." Unable to change his mind, the rescue team continued on without him.
Not long after that, the flood waters had completely covered this man's house, and he was hanging from the chimney. A rescue crew in a helicopter

spotted him and dropped him a ladder. The man refused the ladder insisting that God would save him. Unable to change his mind, the helicopter went on without him.

The water continued to rise and the man drowned. On his way through the pearly gates, he met up with God and exclaimed, "You really let me down! I had faith that you would save me and look what happened!"

"Well, let's see," was God's reply. "I sent you a jeep, a boat and a helicopter."

- b. We believe in miracles. We rejoice when they take place. But they are not ours to command. The vast majority of the time Hashem allows the natural world to take its course. We must not rely on Him to miraculously come to our rescue when we have a clear obedient path laid out before us and we neglect it.
- c. **Example:** [Daniel 3:17-18 HCSB](#) If the God we serve exists, then He can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and He can rescue us from the power of you, the king. (18) But even if He does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up."
- d. **Application:**
 - i. Don't take undue risks and say things such as "God will protect me."
 - ii. A dangerously ill person or someone who struggles with anorexia should not fast.
 - iii. A poor person should not refuse charity.
 - iv. As we said before, an addicted person should stay away from temptation, but also anyone should be careful in hanging around the wicked lest they too fall.
 - v. When a society becomes too evil, we must leave it. When Hitler rose to power and the vast majority of the Germans began to follow him, it should have been clear to our people that they should leave while they still could. There was a famous saying back in that day: "The pessimists went into exile. The optimists went to the gas chambers." When the Day of the Lord approaches, Jesus advised His followers:
 - [Matthew 24:15-18 HCSB](#) "So when you see **the abomination that causes desolation**, spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place" (let the reader understand), (16) "then those in Judea must flee to the mountains! (17) A man on the housetop must not come down to get things out of his house. (18) And a man in the field must not go back to get his clothes.

5. Don't make excessive demands on others that may cause them to fail. (1 Samuel 14:24-32)

- a. **Example:** [1 Samuel 14:24-32 HCSB](#) and the men of Israel were worn out that day, for Saul had placed the troops under an oath: "Cursed is the man who eats food before evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies." So none of the troops tasted *any* food. (25) Everyone went into the forest, and there was honey on the ground. (26) When the troops entered the forest, they saw the flow of honey, but none of them ate any of it because they feared the oath. (27) However, Jonathan had not heard his father make the troops swear the oath. He reached out with the end of the staff he was carrying and dipped it into the honeycomb. When he ate the honey, he had renewed energy. (28) Then, one of the troops said, "Your father made the troops solemnly swear, 'Cursed is the man who eats food today,' and the troops are exhausted." (29) Jonathan replied, "My father has brought trouble to the land. Just look at how I have renewed energy because I tasted a little honey. (30) How much better if the

troops had eaten freely today from the plunder they took from their enemies! Then the slaughter of the Philistines would have been much greater." (31) The Israelites struck down the Philistines that day from Michmash all the way to Aijalon. Since the Israelites were completely exhausted, (32) they rushed to the plunder, took sheep, cattle, and calves, slaughtered them on the ground, and ate *meat* with the blood *still in it*.

- b. By the way, from Aijalon to Michmash was a good 15 miles. So they fought in hand to hand combat while covering 15 miles over about 10 hours! Small wonder they were exhausted and starving!
- c. **Illustration:** The US government in a misplaced sense of goodness tried the Prohibition, but they were unable to enforce it. There were too many people who liked alcohol and were willing to flaunt the law. As they flaunted this law, they were led into flaunting others. One of the results was the proliferation of organized crime.
- d. **Application:**
 - i. If your child brings home a good grade, be careful of questioning why the grade is not higher lest they come to believe that anything less than perfection is a failure.
 - ii. If your husband makes romantic comments, don't say "It doesn't sound to me like you really mean it. You're just saying it because you think I want to hear it." He may hesitate to say ANYTHING romantic to you out of fear of being rebuffed.
 - iii. Elders mustn't push the people too hard in their various ministry tasks lest in their exhaustion they give up all ministry.
 - iv. We must watch carefully over those among us who have a hard time saying "no" lest they burn out and we lose them completely.

6. Don't be gullible. (Proverbs 14:15; 19:2; 20:16; 22:3; Matthew 7:6)

- a. **Proverbs 14:15 HCSB** The inexperienced believe anything, but the sensible watch their steps.
- b. **Proverbs 19:2 HCSB** Even zeal is not good without knowledge, and the one who acts hastily sins.
- c. **Proverbs 20:16 HCSB** Take his garment, for he has put up security for a stranger; get collateral if it is for foreigners.
- d. **Proverbs 22:3 HCSB** A sensible person sees danger and takes cover, but the inexperienced keep going and are punished.
- e. **Application:**
 - i. Don't lend money without a witness and then when the person defaults on the loan cry out to Yahweh Shaphat for justice! If you are going to take dangerous financial risks then be willing to live with the results; unless of course you can get the government to bail you out to the tune of \$700 billion!
 - ii. Don't allow people to manipulate you by using your religious sentiment. A Jewish charity fund gave out interest free loans for extended periods of time. To ensure that the fund would not be depleted, the funds' stewards required that each loan have a guarantor. An unknown rabbi asked for an unusually large sum of money and on the form, on the blank requesting the name of a guarantor he wrote "God." The head of the fund replied "In that case, God will have to be your lender as well."
 - iii. Also, not everyone deserves another chance. Judging someone fairly doesn't mean that you discount all their bad behavior. If we have been

burnt before, we can still love that person and yet remain cautious in our dealings with them.

- **Matthew 7:6 HCSB** Don't give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before pigs, or they will trample them with their feet, turn, and tear you to pieces.

7. We should not follow the letter of the law if it will lead to the opposite of the law's intent. (Mark 2:23-28 cp Matthew 12:2-7; 15:1-3; Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-6)

- a. When one obeys the letter of the law but not the spirit, he is obeying the literal interpretation of the words (the "letter") of the law, but not the *intent* of those who wrote the law. Conversely, when one obeys the spirit of the law but not the letter, he is doing what the authors of the law intended, though not adhering to the literal wording.
- b. **Working on the Sabbath:** Mark 2:23-28 HCSB (cp Matthew 12:2-7) On the Sabbath, He (Jesus) was going through the grainfields, and His disciples began to make their way picking some heads of grain. (24) The Pharisees said to Him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" (25) He said to them, "Have you never read what David and those who were with him did when he was in need and hungry-- (26) how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest and ate the sacred bread--which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests--and also gave some to his companions?" (27) Then He told them, "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. (28) Therefore the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."
- c. **Washing Hands:** Matthew 15:1-3 HCSB Then Pharisees and scribes came from Jerusalem to Jesus and asked, (2) "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they don't wash their hands when they eat!" (3) He answered them, "And why do you break God's commandment because of your tradition?"
- d. **Healing on the Sabbath:** Mark 3:1-6 HCSB Now He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a paralyzed hand. (2) In order to accuse Him, they were watching Him closely to see whether He would heal him on the Sabbath. (3) He told the man with the paralyzed hand, "Stand before us." (4) Then He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. (5) After looking around at them with anger and sorrow at the hardness of their hearts, He told the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. (6) Immediately the Pharisees went out and started plotting with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.
- e. Most people are turned off by legalism. Laws, rules, and regulations can bog us down. They can curtail our freedom. There are times when we want to do something, and can't see any wrong in doing it, but we are told that it is against a regulation, a rule, or a law. It is attractive to think that we can do away with a lot of laws and legalism.
- f. If we use our imagination, however, it is difficult to see how a society or organization could work without any rules. People would drive along whatever side of the road took their fancy. There would be no such thing as property, and so there would be no such thing as theft -- you could simply take what you liked. You may have a personal moral code to live by, but you would have no recourse against someone who lived by a different code.

- g. A balance has to be found. We need some rules in order to build some kind of society. The right amount of law should make our life free and easier. A good balance of law should free us to exercise our rights, and to fulfill our obligations. A good system of law should enable us to live the good life.
- h. Too much law, however, is stifling. We are then often not allowed our rights, and we can even be stopped from fulfilling our obligations. The spirit of the law should encourage us to claim our rights and fulfill our duties, but too many rules, or the wrong rules, can have the opposite effect.
- i. Remembering the spirit behind a law system should discourage its misapplication or its over-application. A good beit din (council of elders) will be able to realize when a particular rule or case contradicts the spirit behind the rule or law, and have the moral courage to repeal the law or throw out the particular case.

8. Don't be a pious fool. (Matthew 15:2-9; Luke 13:10-17)

- a. **Matthew 15:2-9 HCSB** "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they don't wash their hands when they eat!" (3) He answered them, "**And why do you break God's commandment because of your tradition? (4) For God said: Honor your father and your mother; and, The one who speaks evil of father or mother must be put to death. (5) But you say, 'Whoever tells his father or mother, 'Whatever benefit you might have received from me is a gift committed to the temple'-- (6) he does not have to honor his father.'** In this way, you have revoked God's word because of your tradition. (7) Hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied correctly about you when he said: (8) **These people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. (9) They worship Me in vain, teaching as doctrines the commands of men.**"
- b. A pious fool is someone who is high-minded but has misplaced priorities.
- c. **Illustration:** In the second century BC, when the Maccabees launched a revolt against Antiochus, the Hellenic king of Syria, a large group of pious Jews, Ch'assidim, refused to fight on the Sabbath. They believed that doing so, even in self-defense, desecrated the holy day. To no one's surprise, Antiochus' troops quickly wiped them out. Judah, the leader of the Maccabees, responded to the incident with admirable common sense: "If we all do as our brothers have done...then [the Syrians] will soon wipe us off the face of the earth." On that day, the Book of Maccabees records, the Jewish soldiers "decided that, if anyone came to fight against them on the Sabbath, they would fight back, rather than all die as their brothers...had done" (1 Maccabees 2:40-41). This has been the universally accepted Jewish law ever since. In 1973, when Egypt and Syria jointly attacked Israel on Yom Kippur, the reserve army – in addition to the standing forces – was immediately repulsed and Israel's enemies were humiliated.
- d. **Luke 13:10-17 HCSB** As He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath, (11) a woman was there who had been disabled by a spirit for over 18 years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. (12) When Jesus saw her, He called out to her, "**Woman, you are free of your disability.**" (13) Then He laid His hands on her, and instantly she was restored and began to glorify God. (14) But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, responded by telling the crowd, "There are six days when work should be done; therefore come on those days and be healed and not on the Sabbath day." (15) But the Lord answered him and said, "**Hypocrites! Doesn't each one of you untie his ox or donkey from the feeding**

trough on the Sabbath, and lead it to water? (16) Satan has bound this woman, a daughter of Abraham, for 18 years--shouldn't she be untied from this bondage on the Sabbath day?" (17) When He had said these things, all His adversaries were humiliated, but the whole crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things He was doing.

e. **Application:**

- i. We shake our heads in amazement at this man who would have preferred that this disabled woman continue to suffer and not witness a miracle rather than violate the Sabbath. Yet today there are many well-meaning but foolish pastors who would (in a desire to maintain the sanctity of marriage) advise an abused woman to stay in a loveless, abusive and even potentially dangerous marriage!
- ii. Or there are some pastors who would marry a young couple because they had sex out of wedlock and she got pregnant. These pastors would urge the couple to marry even if they do not love each other simply because of a misplaced idea of "doing the right thing", condemning the young couple to a loveless marriage, possible abuse and probable divorce.

9. **When you have a problem, consult with people you know to be wise.** (Genesis 2:18; Proverbs 11:14; 12:15; 10:21; 5:11-14)

- a. **Genesis 2:18 HCSB** Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is like him."
- b. One of the reasons "it is not good for man to be alone" is that we are forced to make major life decisions without the counsel of a loving and sympathetic friend!
- c. **Proverbs 11:14 HCSB** Without guidance, people fall, but with many counselors there is deliverance.
- d. If you truly want to be the best that you can be, you need to envision yourself as a wise king. Surround yourself with good advisors. Search for the godliest, wisest people you can find and consciously make them your counsel. Ask them if they would be willing to be a part of your life. Let them know what you are doing. Pay them if you have to – but get the best.
- e. **Proverbs 12:15 HCSB** A fool's way is right in his own eyes, but whoever listens to counsel is wise.
- f. **Proverbs 10:21 HCSB** The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of sense.
- g. **Proverbs 5:11-14 HCSB** At the end of your life, you will lament when your physical body has been consumed, (12) and you will say, "How I hated discipline, and how my heart despised correction. (13) I didn't obey my teachers or listen closely to my mentors. (14) I was on the verge of complete ruin before the entire community."
- h. **Application:**
 - i. We often forget that we are not the only ones to have gone through these circumstances. There is nothing new under the sun. What we are going through is common to man. Find those who have "been there done that" successfully and pick their brains.
 - ii. When you are looking for advice, don't go to the worldly. Don't go to those who are unsuccessful in life. Don't go to those who will just tell you what you want to hear. Find the godly. Find men and women of character. Find people who are strong and have a servant's heart. They will guide you well. If you listen to fools, your destruction is assured.

10. Don't speak about what you don't know and don't offer advice in areas in which you are not qualified. (Proverbs 15:7, 28; 18:2; 1 Timothy 1:3-7)

- a. **Proverbs 15:7 HCSB** The lips of the wise broadcast knowledge, but not so the heart of fools.
- b. **Proverbs 15:28 HCSB** The mind of the righteous person thinks before answering, but the mouth of the wicked blurts out evil things.
- c. **Proverbs 18:2 HCSB** A fool does not delight in understanding, but only wants to show off his opinions.
- d. **1 Timothy 1:3-7 HCSB** As I urged you when I went to Macedonia, remain in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach other doctrine (4) or to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies. These promote empty speculations rather than God's plan, which operates by faith. (5) Now the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. (6) Some have deviated from these and turned aside to fruitless discussion. (7) They want to be teachers of the law, although they don't understand what they are saying or what they are insisting on.
- e. **Application:**
 - i. If you are asked by a Lowlander (an unbeliever) about a difficult biblical concept for which you do not have a ready answer, beg for time to pray and research before you give an answer. "Be slow to speak and swift to hear" in such matters.
 - ii. Do not claim technical knowledge that you do not possess. Someone may attempt to rely on you for that supposed knowledge and come to resent you when they find you unreliable. As the Master taught, it's best to place ourselves at the foot of the table and be called up, than to place ourselves at the head and be called down!
 - iii. Do not instigate nor engage in conversations on matters concerning which your knowledge is deficient. Content yourself to listen and learn until you are ready to enter the conversation with confidence.