

# The Way of Wisdom

**A Biblical 3<sup>rd</sup> way, when neither isolation *from* culture nor domination of culture through political means resonates with the Spirit of Christ within you. How you can be impactful without losing your faith or your values.**

By Dr. Greg Leman  
April 2024

## Abstract

The Church as an institution has been in turmoil over the politicization of its mission. Some far-right voices claim that support for the Republican Party in general, and Donald Trump in particular, validate the authenticity of a believer. Moderate voices, including Russell Moore, a former leader of the Southern Baptist Convention, and Tim Alberta, respond with equal conviction that it cannot be right to embrace personas so antithetical to Christ in order to promote Christian causes. Believers and their institutional leaders can feel torn between two unacceptable choices: to use politics to try to prescribe culture at the expense of their standards for behavior or to cloister into Christian huddles and engage culture only from a distance. The “price of engagement” can seem to be the abandonment of values. A “third way” is needed.

I articulate a Biblical 3<sup>rd</sup> Way for highly impactful engagement of culture that amplifies rather than diminishes the need to carry the very aroma of Christ. This path, which I have called The Way of Wisdom, is a strategy for relevant, transformational partnering. It is built upon the entire historical arc of human-divine collaboration to advance the purposes of God in the earth. At its core, it is a re-embodiment of the role of Solomon as the successor of David to his throne, even as we, the Body of Christ and inheritors of His mission to advance His kingdom, are seated with Him upon His throne. Kings of the earth came to Solomon because of his heaven-imparted wisdom and visibly saw the presence of God’s Spirit across the temple courts because he had solutions they needed. We have the same opportunity for impact by carrying the wisdom we are collectively granted through access to the mind of Christ and will fulfill our calling to disciple the nations by following this path. This central declaration is a theological reframing of the mission of the Church in society, offering a transformative vision for the future.

As is the case in *The Malachi Moment*, this presentation will include very practical means of coming together as a community of believers who are assigned to roles in Christian ministry, other institutions, and the full spectrum of marketplace settings. The path forward features both prophetic and practical impetus for an as-yet-unseen level of unity among the generations. It calls for a recognition of the “front lines” of the kingdom being *within culture*, not in the pew, and calls for a new expression of the 5-fold ministry roles in support of those called to serve outside the church walls.

Revelation 21 paints a picture of the end goal of discipling the nations – each having a fully expressed and unique glory to present to the King of kings. In light of how far the

nations are from that readiness, we must reexamine and recontextualize our mission in ways that are both challenging and compelling. This paper is meant to spur just that.

### Body

The excruciating journey of much of the Evangelical movement and many Jesus followers, as deep concerns over the direction of modern culture drove them into the fray of mean-spirited politics and forced them to choose partisan sides and political tactics, has been well chronicled by the recent publication of *The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory*, by Tim Alberta, as well as numerous authors interviewed in his seminal work. It captures well the anguished protests of many of Christ's followers who know that we need to make a difference in culture and yet cannot see how doing so in reliance upon the same weapons employed by the broken culture we want to see transformed can be what Jesus has in mind. Recent podcasts from *The Holy Post* and *Truth over Tribe* echo this same assertion that "This can't be right!" adding to a rising, collective voice encouraging to those of us seeking a 3<sup>rd</sup> way. Thankfully, at least we know we are not alone.

My personal journey of faith commenced in earnest in 1973 at age 16. I have been seeking the path of having influence as a Christ follower called to marketplace settings (not vocational ministry) for nearly five decades now. This journey led me to publish *The Malachi Moment* in 2022<sup>1</sup>. It reframes the mission of the Church and presents a call to higher (not lower) levels of healing and transformation of our planet and all its peoples. The essence of the path espoused in this work for such impact from a Christlike people dispersed in the nations as salt and light is to re-embodiment Solomon's role after his father, King David, finished establishing the physical kingdom promised to Abram in Israel. This model for impact takes as its premise that since Solomon followed David, and Jesus is a parallel figure in the scriptures to David, it would be logical that the Church (commissioned by Christ after He finished establishing His spiritual kingdom) can do well by applying Solomon's distinctives to itself. *The Malachi Moment* explores this idea's implications in some depth, which can be summarized in the following observations.

### **Context – Where is our Focus?**

The Biblical narrative of God's plans for man is consistent from Genesis to Revelation, from Eden to the New Jerusalem. Humans are given a royal role as stewards of God's ways on the earth in Genesis – pictured as the human couple walking and talking each evening with their Creator, discussing the tasks given to them. At the conclusion of this present age, we see, via John's revelation, a parade of kings bringing their unique glory into the New Jerusalem to offer the King of kings. This parade would not be possible if godly kingship expressed in locales throughout the earth ceased to be "a thing." The founding of the nation of Israel under David and then passed to Solomon, is part of an old covenant that serves to provide the examples we need in the new. A kingdom of priests is God's declared intent, and through Jesus and those who knew him, he makes it clear that all are welcome to take their place at this royal family table.

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.malachimoment.com](http://www.malachimoment.com)

When considering the pervasive use of the word we translate "Kingdom" in Christ's teaching, we need to note that Jesus uses secular Greek terms of government to describe his work on earth. He is announcing the *basileia* (his kingdom), which connotes a *right* to rule more than an "in power formally" domain, and he says he will build his *Ekklesia*, a term borrowed from Greek, meaning city councils. He does not pick religious words like synagogue or rabbinical cohorts. So, we are correct to expect that fulfilling our commission on earth as Christ's people connects to the way our world operates. We are called to express a new reality in an old (the earth) context, not simply be about a spiritual or future expression of His message.

### **Character – What is this Kingdom about?**

Jesus talked almost universally about "his kingdom", which was the basis for the Jews accusing him of inciting rebellion against Rome in hopes of getting him executed. Despite this, when Pilate asked Jesus if he was a king, he responded (paraphrasing) that his kingdom does not operate the way the Roman kingdom does. If it did, he says, His followers would be up there with him, resisting with the swords he made sure they had along. This character of the rulership Jesus was announcing, and which he conferred on his *Ekklesia*, saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me," and making us his Body in the earth was not widely understood by Jesus' friends any better than it was by his enemies. Everyone, it seems, expected Jesus to carry out an overthrow of Roman rule. His pharisaical enemies *feared* this would happen and bring down the wrath of Rome upon their heads, and his followers *expected* it to happen and jostled for the best seats in the new Cabinet. Jesus won, instead, by appearing to lose (being executed). Then, he undertook no action to "speak the truth to power" in the way we mean that phrase after he victoriously arose from the dead. So, we know that while our commission connects to governing how things are done, we must execute it in a way that is confounding to the natural mind of man and how we tend to envision power at work. His last instructions are parallel to David's instructions to Solomon: David said to build a temple where the Spirit of God would dwell for the first time in a fixed physical location; Jesus said to wait until the Holy Spirit indwells you, marking the first time He has taken up residence *in* human beings instead of resting *upon* them. This first parallel with Solomon, then, is the colocation of ruling authority and the visible presence of God in a human context.

### **Mode of Operation – How do we do that?**

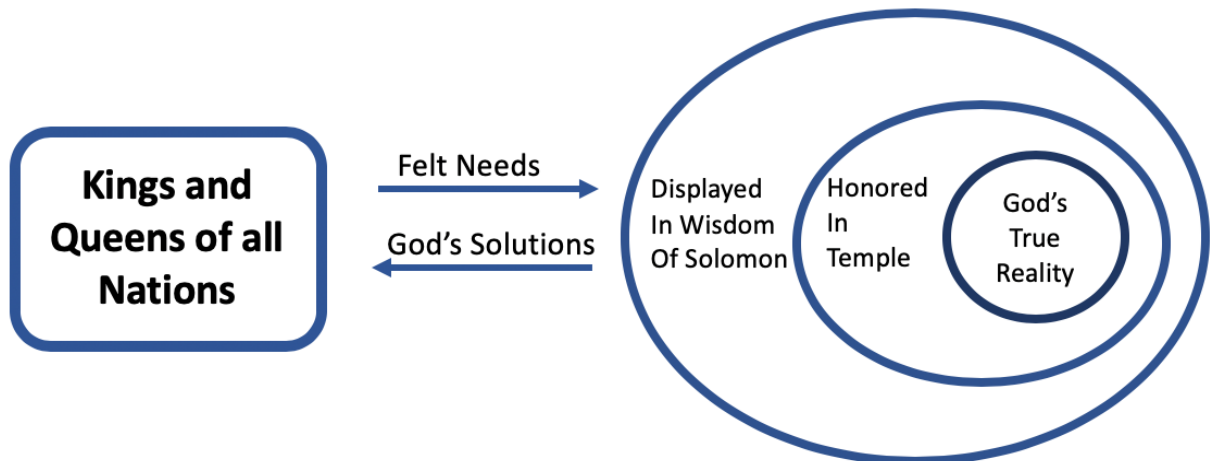
We – Jesus' followers – are instructed to "have an answer ready" for anyone asking about the hope that lies within us (1 Peter 3:15), and this could be an indication that we are not to initiate, but wait. However, since no one would be asking us anything if our lives were not visibly different and we were not engaging with the world around us, the implication is that something happening inside us and through us is intriguing to them. Solomon took this to a unique and distinctive level. Bible readers know the story – A young king who has assumed the throne with his legendary father's blessing within earshot of the shouts from his big brother's party naming *him* to be David's successor is understandably a bit less than confident. In a dream, he is offered whatever he asks for and chooses wisdom – specifically, the wisdom to rule God's people well. It seems God deemed the request to be a bit on the smallish side and granted him wisdom for, literally, all realms of nature, science, and human conflict resolution as a bonus (read Ecclesiastes to see a range of

wisdom gained). Known as a man of peace, Solomon does first things first – establishes and dedicates the temple and then builds his palace across the courtyard from this keeper of the flame.

And then it begins. As a byproduct of interactions with the kings of all the known lands regarding trade relations and other alliances, the stories of Solomon's wisdom start to get around. All the kings (and queens) around him come to Jerusalem to benefit from this wisdom (see 1 Kings 10:23). We are only given details of one such encounter, and it is very instructive for us today. The Queen of Sheba comes, observes, and then declares that her beyond-words amazement is an indication of God's favor and presence. In other words, what begins in a demonstration of gracefully carried heavenly wisdom leads to the acknowledgment of God. This sequence is exactly backward from what the Church has largely assumed is needed, as illustrated below:

### **Solomons Sequence**

The journey to faith in God started with a felt need that was most likely not spiritual or even personal but experienced as a government-troubling problem. Wisdom was offered and received, stunning in its insight and clearly originating from somewhere beyond a human source. That source is visible because the temple and palace are next to each other (not because Solomon preached conversion to Judaism to these kings). The departing kings and queens were forever changed by this encounter unless they intentionally shut out what they had seen (which, of course, some did.) It looked like this:

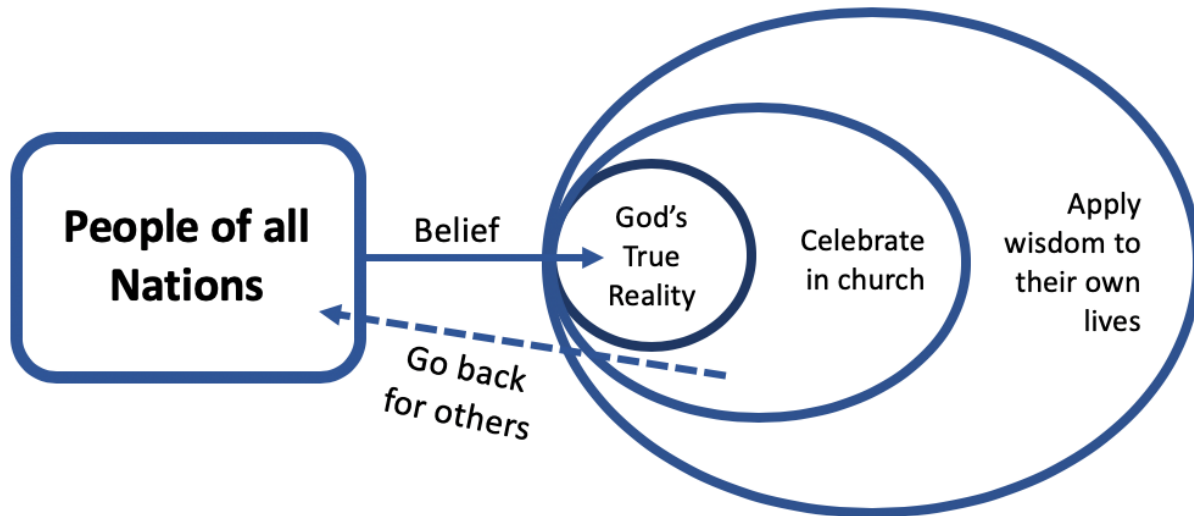


For those who were not hard-hearted, the journey migrates from a painful problem solved with Godly wisdom to awareness of the source via the visible presence of Spirit to personal faith, and perhaps a change in the way people were governed back home.

### **Traditional Evangelistic Sequence:**

In the traditional evangelical pathway to wisdom and impact on earthly things, we assume the journey starts with a personal choice to accept the reality of God's presence and his plan for their lives, beginning with a personal faith in his son Jesus, who is the Christ. This

ushers in a new reality of being filled with the Spirit of God, who is commissioned to lead the believer into all truth, as well as many other transformative roles. Eventually, the relationship grows in depth and breadth to understand a specific assignment and calling. Through that calling, perhaps wisdom may be dispensed within a sphere of influence in culture and society, as shown below, but the primary focus of maturity is, implicitly at least, evangelism.



In the highly politicized and, in my view, distorted version of the Evangelistic Sequence that is so polarizing in the American church today, the **"Go back for others"** arrow instead becomes **"Put people in office"** with the expressed intent to rule over the nation(s) in a literal sense. This has not only led to deep division inside the Church but has also driven unchurched people and people of different faiths further from our lives and any opportunity to have an influence on their hearts and minds. It is not an effective model, among other reasons, because it minimizes our chances of being the salt and light that heals the nations and readies them to offer their glory to God.

The second and crucial parallel with Solomon, then, is access to heaven's wisdom applied to the felt needs of the ruling authorities of the day. There seems to be no indication of Solomon trying to convert other kings and queens to become Jews, nor any indication that he used his influence and renown to make them subject to his rule. One can certainly see that he failed to guard his foundations of faith and worship, costing him and all Israel dearly as he became enamored with the women of other lands as well as the gods they worshipped. As pointed out by Alberta, idolatry and sensuality have been all too prevalent in modern churches seeking influence through political power as well. But taking the clearly God-anointed success of Solomon's model, as well as the ways it ultimately failed, into account leads to the Way of Wisdom that I believe is so needed in the world and in the church today. What would this mean? A few keys include:

1. Each believer's highest priorities remain their own personal walk with God, becoming conformed to the image of Christ, and understanding their identity and assignment.

2. Believers sharing a common arena of assignment (be that education, banking, healthcare, or whatever) in a region come together to collectively engage heaven for wisdom to transform the deepest pain points in that arena. Many are the promises to God's people that no needed wisdom will be withheld.
3. Wisdom, in the form of transformational solutions, is offered and implemented where received, allowing God's ways and wisdom to be demonstrated and attract those suffering for lack of them.
4. The 5-Fold offices (Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor, and Teacher) in a region are deployed to support and encourage these efforts and the people involved. This shift requires replacing the concept that the pew is the "front line" of kingdom advancement with an understanding that the front lines are located in society, where the carriers of God's wisdom and grace are deployed.

Wisdom carried humbly as a means to serve others and heal the brokenness of the land is hard to resist (see James 3:17). The kind of authority that emanates from it is invited, valued, and unifying. This is the way forward – to be fully engaged with the culture around us, having an impact that is both humbling and affirming. It's propelling ourselves forward in our assignment by living out the Sermon on the Mount rather than being out of step with it to acquire the kind of power the kingdoms of this rely on to get things done. It is instructive to quote King Solomon, who said

***"Do you see a person skilled in his work? He will stand in the presence of kings. He will not stand in the presence of the unknown"*** Proverbs 22:29 CSB

### **The Imperative for Paradigm Change**

Using the framework of paralleling King Solomon's assignment with the commission of Jesus' followers, by itself, can simply be a way of looking at things differently. Perhaps doing so is indeed helpful and opens a "Third Option" for those of us caught between a binary choice we do not like. But, if we examine the endpoint for our "Church Age" journey as shown to the Apostle John, it is closer to an imperative. In Revelations Chapter 21, we are allowed to see what I have dubbed a "Parade of Nations" as the kings of every ethnos on earth come into the New Jerusalem and present *their* glory to the King of Kings, Christ Himself. This visionary "trailer" showing us what is to come has some inescapable implications, including:

1. God has assigned each ethnos a particular glory to carry and to display on the earth. His plan is not to have one form of glory, one way of displaying righteousness, or even one model for governance emerge and then form a single global Supernation but rather to show forth his manifold wisdom through many strong, healthy, righteous nations.
2. The "Great Day" we await is one we are not ready for, because most nations and peoples of the earth today are mired in oppression and injustice and are inarguably coming far short of the splendor they were created to display.
3. Those of us who want to speak of "American exceptionalism" are missing the point. America is undoubtably exceptional – she has been given a unique place in history and in the earth by the Father of Lights Himself – *and so has every other nation on earth!* We are right to lament our degradation and our sins, and right to labor to see

them righted, for justice to flow like a river in our land, and for all who are at home here to have life and have it abundantly. In other words, we are woefully short of completing our work of doing what Jesus commanded us to do – to *disciple* our nation. We do not have to choose between acknowledging the hand of God on our formation and our history or denying it. We can love our nation and its origin story while also acknowledging how far we are from fully embodying our calling and God's ways.

4. To take that a bit further, we cannot claim to have accomplished the task of "making disciples of the nations" simply because there are disciples of Christ *in* every nation. We must enable each nation to be discipled in the "the Way" to the point of having a unique glory causing other nations to give them their due respect and the heart of God to rejoice.

Some of my all-time Biblical heroes are the men who found favor in the eyes of Kings and Pharaohs, and through whom great blessing came to those pagan nations as well as the Jewish nation. Joseph and Daniel are my go-to guys when I want to understand what it looks like to serve in the way of wisdom *without needing to take over*. These examples showed us how to serve and how to carry the glory and authority which comes from great wisdom flowing through trustworthy hands. They also show us how to limit our egos and walk humbly with our God as we do justly and love mercy even at the highest levels of influence.

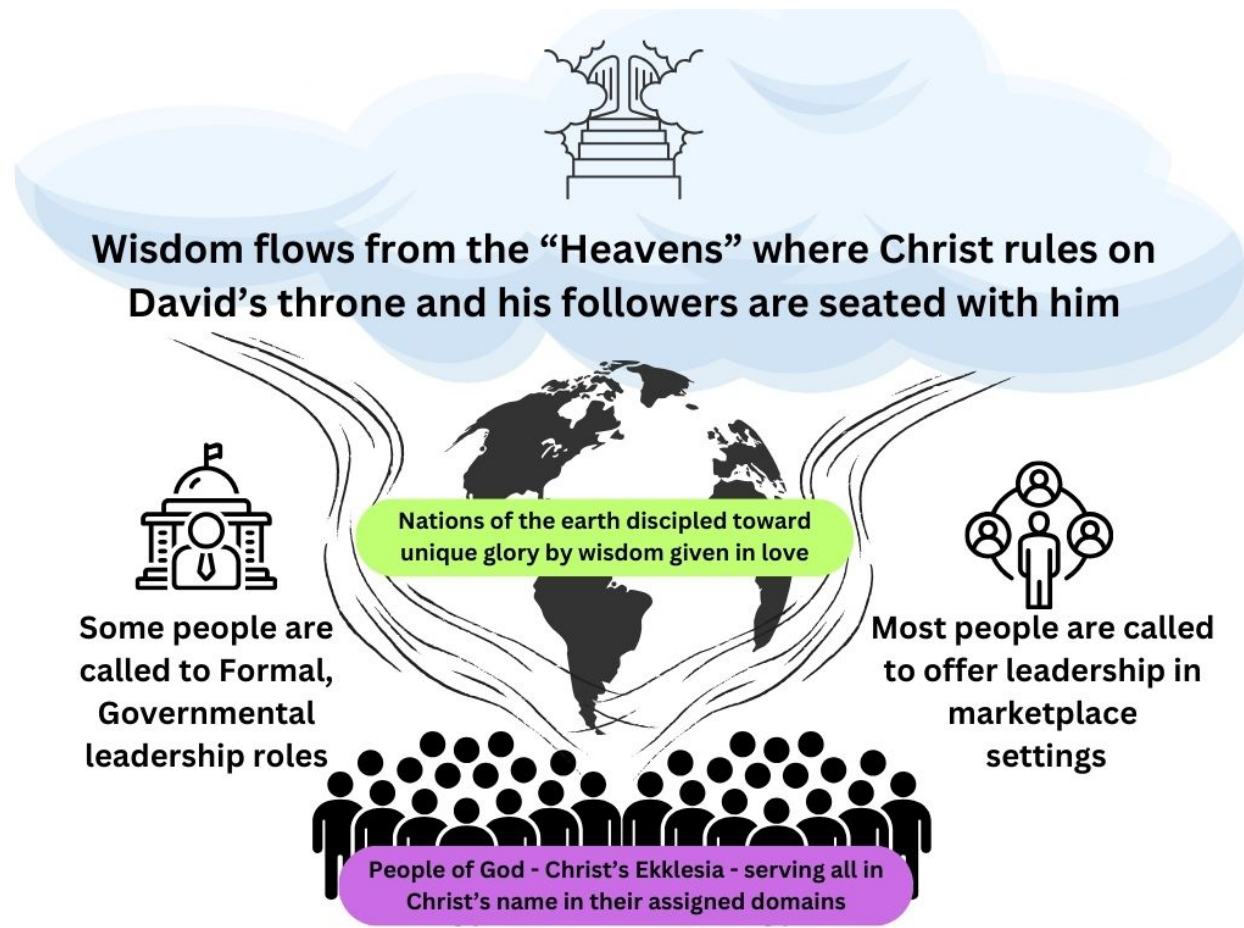
It is my hope and prayer that in this time of great consternation and dangers, we find the Way of Wisdom for the sake of all nations and the God who created them.

The evangelical community in the US has seen itself become "radicalized" to a politicized stance that has been well documented and critiqued by Tim Alberta and Russell Moore, among others, as being understandable in intent (fighting moral decay in our culture) and yet untenable in its methods which appear to toss aside the requirements of Jesus himself, supposedly to preserve God's ways in our nation. Discovering these authors' and podcasters' thoughtful and provocative contributions has been an incredible relief to me; I am finally finding deeply spiritual, thoughtful voices that assure me I am not alone in my rejection of the recent directions. Nevertheless, I believe something critically important must be added to the conversation. I am the author of *The Malachi Moment*, and it contains what I believe are fresh insights into the strategies of God for this time in history. I want to offer people like me a "Third Way" when it seems like the choices are to a) pull back and engage culture only indirectly or b) join the Jesus-in-a-MAGA-hat poster carriers to protest election results. This third way is what I call The Way of Wisdom.

In short, I believe that since a greater than Solomon has appeared, a greater wisdom than his is available to God's people. Further, I am convinced that offering heavenly wisdom in the form of transformational help for the known and painfully felt brokenness of our world is the path we have been called to follow. Solomon was a unique character and came immediately after David established the physical kingdom of Israel, which was promised to Abram. We, the Body of Christ, came immediately after Jesus ascended, having completed the establishment of His kingdom as promised to Eve long before. When God gave wisdom



to Solomon, all the Kings of the earth came to him seeking it – and were not made subject to him in order to receive it. Yet they found – as Queen of Sheba exclaimed – "surely God's favor is resting on you." When we, the embodied Christ, carry the same wisdom, the rulers of every nation and sphere of society will likewise come to us to receive what only the Holy Spirit within us can offer them. We must do so as an offer to serve, not a demand to be their rulers.



This paradigm for the People of the Kingdom to effectively engage with and transform the world around us can be put into practice very practically. To expand on the key features I outlined earlier, I'll describe what it might look like in a specific locale with a specifically assigned focus: the neighborhood school. Suppose your neighborhood public education system mirrors many others in the US. In that case, it faces problems with low achieving students coming from very difficult home life settings, low funding for teachers, and policies that are difficult to comply with, while trying to be a transformational force in young people's lives. But even in "good" school settings, there are certainly more than enough challenges to go around. In other words, there are conundrums everywhere that need the proverbial "wisdom of Solomon" to solve. So, what if...

- A call went out from every pulpit and every PTA newsletter that a Wisdom Task Force was being formed, and all who wanted to see the transformation of the schools were welcome.



- Pastors and parishioners with prophetic giftings and intercessory callings were invited to join this group, which is chartered to call upon Heaven for the hidden insights needed to transform the schools.
- All the constraints that make "spiritual" impact difficult in a public setting were identified by regional superintendents and educators.
- This group met regularly to seek and collate insights gained in prayer and dialogue with the Holy Spirit, and to pray over every school facility in the region.
- The insights gained and ideas crafted were presented to the "Rulers" of the school system, who evaluated them for ways they needed to be adjusted before implementation, and then, once they were deemed to meet the needs and fit within the constraints, given a trial run.
- Local churches regularly invited members of the Wisdom Task Force to give updates and ask for additional prayer support, much like a returning missionary might be asked to speak.
- No one quit this journey until all the children and young adults were served with an effective education. The endpoint is "On earth as it is in Heaven."
- The needle moved from:
  - "Is this education adequate?" to "Does coming to this school transform lives?"
  - The challenge for Administrators changed from "How can I get teachers to stay?" to "How can I make the wisest choice among all who want to teach here?"
  - Education's goal moved from preparing students for their next phase of learning – college, vocational or whatever – to doing that while also preparing each student for life, with a true sense of worthiness, calling, and vision?
  - Public educators serving in isolation to leading a community partnership between the local governments, parents, and churches for the sake of the rising generations?
  - Christ-followers aiming to offer unquestionable value in service to the community instead of trying to make the public schools function like parochial schools funded by taxes?

My contention is that in this kind of world, the reputation of God's people in the community and the respect for their chosen path of faith will be dramatically higher than before, *in addition to* achieving a much-needed transformation of the education system itself. "Tell me more about the God you serve" will become a common request, because people have been honored, loved, and served in the name of Christ.