

How long does it take to become truly wise?



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I was hoping, at this stage of my life, to be wise beyond my years. That isn't the case. It's not for a lack of trying, mind you. It just seems that as soon as I get a handle on things, the universe steps in and changes all the rules. It's left me confused, almost like I'm in a fog. Wisdom? Learning from our experiences? It is not what happens to us. It's what we do with what happens to us. There are times when I'm alone in the car and I experience a cascade of feelings in my brain. I don't know if they are sparked by a sound, smell or song, but I can feel shapes. I have the overwhelming feeling I'm experiencing a point in my life, a flashback or frozen scene from my personal movie. And yet I can't put my finger on the time and place. Maybe it was a leftover bit floating around from a recent dream. Or, a rehash of real and TV-land events. There are times, my friends, I resemble the man in Edvard Munch's *The Scream*. I hope I'm not alone. If I were, it would be a cause for concern, and I don't want any more of those at the moment. As a seasoned professional, both in my line of work and at the home front, there are several expectations. Running around screaming, with my hands pressed against my cheeks, isn't one of them. While I wholeheartedly agree that reflection and introspection are healthy at several stages of life, they seem to come when only a few chapters of our story remain. I have tried to approach everything every new task, every encounter through my job as an opportunity to learn something new. I've met literally thousands of people over the course of my career, and have picked up tidbits from most of them. Boy, you'd think I'd be as wise as Buddha at this point. My son, the rebellious young man who questions everything, wonders why we've created such a subservient society. We're not really free, he argues, since we're tied to what society and modern economics dictate. He's right in a way. We follow our path, whether it's typical or slightly askew. Many of us end up married with children, working hard to provide for our families. We guide, encourage, protect our children, even show them tough love on occasion. It's not always easy, and in fact, the last few years have put a strain on everyone. Our youth are definitely feeling it. I'm not sure how well me and my peers would have done if we went through the pandemic at 17 or 20. And my son is right in that we're tied, almost chained, to convention, to the way society operates, its rules, the economy, the government of the day, and much more. We're subject to the whims and greed of multinational corporations, bank rates, the housing market, and tending to our homes, automobiles and one another. Yes, it can be a not-so-merry Merry-Go-Round. And there have been many times I just wanted to get off. I have been on rides like this one, holding my cheeks just like Munch's screaming man. All to no avail. My two youngest are at crossroads and I often feel helpless in giving them the direction they need. To be honest, I have no idea what profession or career would be solid at this point. The world is changing much too fast. I can tell them to get into tech; consider the trades; try veterinary care or even consider youth counselling. But again, parents out there know how hard it is to convince our teens and 20-somethings, and force them into a path. They need to find themselves, find a journey and find a purpose. For us Boomers, it was a bit easier, I think. We chose from maybe a dozen careers (not the 300 available to students today), graduated, got a job and followed a rather straightforward path. For most of us, it worked. Are we all thrilled with our choices? Do we have regrets? Rumi once espoused that when we are young, we want to change the world. But today I am wise, so I am changing myself. And parenthood changes a lot, too. It also doesn't really allow for any regular soul-searching, because we're far too busy putting out fires and responding to our kids' SOS. Despite being told, over and over, to live for today, we don't. We tend

to concentrate on our past failures. And we worry about the future. There are only 24 hours in a day, and we should use them wisely. How many of us do? Another thing I've learned is to enjoy the simple things in life. And to laugh as often as you can. My wife and I constantly deliver wise cracks to one another, keeping each other on our toes. There are times I glance over at her on the couch, and laugh because of a look, a giggle or smile. It wish those moments could last the entire 24 hours. Nightbirde, a former American Idol contestant, once said: "You can't wait until life isn't hard anymore until you decide to be happy." Some of us jump from challenge to challenge. I tend to be plagued with negative thoughts, so I am still waiting for the day when life stops being hard. There's no question that we all need to choose to find joy and the good in our lives, even in the face of pain. I told my kids recently that while I can't call myself "king" at home, I can assume the throne. The reason is my life experiences have filled my bucket with knowledge. Try as I may to pass on these nuggets to my offspring, I'm often met with reluctance and obstinance. So, the self-proclaimed king and queen of our household are reduced to servants, serfs and commoners. Maybe we're not meant to know it all. Perhaps it takes a lifetime (or two) to become really wise.