

Proverbs (Part 2) – Wisdom and the Fear of the Lord

Steve Hardin – August 3, 2014

Bless you tonight. It's great to see you. I'm always grateful for the way the Lord stirs in our hearts to be a part of kingdom work. Just a couple of things really quick. Praise the Lord for what he did through Young Life Camp. A couple of weeks ago we had Capernaum, where we had special needs kids... We had that camp we were hosting up here. Praise the Lord that that's what you're a part of and that's what you're doing, whether or not you're physically here. I'm grateful for that.

A group of our kids and adults just got back from a mission trip up in Canada, sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. In fact, one of our high school girls was told, "You're crazy for believing that Jesus gospel stuff. You've been brainwashed." She got a lesson in knowing what it looks like to suffer for Christ's sake. That's part of how the Lord used you. You sent them up there. We just had a group get back from Guatemala, from India, from Romania a couple of weeks ago. I'm so thankful for all the Lord continues to do in you and through you for the glory of God. I just can't be thankful enough.

Yesterday I was part of a funeral for another young man in my neighborhood where I live. It's not anything unlike the neighborhoods where you live, but we had another young man who went to Hill, my son's junior high, who was out on a Monday night way too early in the morning, just walking to a convenience store. Some gang members, they believe, drove by and fired out of their vehicle over to Christopher Gordon.

Christopher was struck in the head, taken to the hospital, and died early Tuesday morning just last week. Yesterday was his funeral. The family had no means whatsoever to be able to pay for that. What you give is unto the Lord. We took that as from the Lord, and we were able to help offset costs so we could properly bury Christopher. I think about how the Lord stirs in your hearts, and I can't tell you enough as your pastor how thankful I am for you and how proud I am of you in a right way.

To God be the glory. I praise him for you, for your lives, and for how you have heard the voice of the Holy Spirit here in this city, how you want to worship the Lord. I can't tell you enough. I just want to

say thank you. We had an opportunity yesterday to share the gospel with several who were there, particularly one young man at the end. It was a great one-on-one opportunity to talk to that young man about the Lord.

I am sick of what the Enemy is doing to steal, kill, and destroy teenagers and young lives in this city, and I want us to continue, by his grace, to do our part in pushing back darkness and being faithful to run to the city of Dallas and literally live as those who are a living sacrifice unto the Lord, which is our worship. Some worship is song, which we do in here, and a lot of worship is how we live through the week as salt and light, laying it down for the sake of the gospel, for the One who laid it down for us. I want to see more of that.

Transform was a huge kickoff to the year of being able to be in the schools, which God has given us crazy favor to be in. They've invited us in. It's just another means of grace and God's blessing and favor on us to jump in the middle of those schools. Not that your school is any worse than any other school. I graduated from Bryan Adams, and it's just... Enough said about BA. Hey, let me tell you something. You go down to Highland Park, they have their junk there too. You name your school in this city... Every school is in need. Every house in this city is in need.

I'm begging the Lord to continue to dispense the grace necessary and for us to be about those things that are primary, namely the worship of his Son and properly fearing the Lord, that inform our hearts on how to live in this city for the kingdom of God and for his glory. There's a lot of work to be done, and the next couple of weekends we get to be a part of that. It's the beginning of a school year of being able to pour more time and energy into that school.

Proverbs, chapter 1, verses 1-7. That's where we're going tonight. I want us to continue to grow in wisdom, brothers and sisters. I want us to keep growing up in wisdom, the art of skilled living. That's what wisdom is. It's really walking in understanding, discretion, and discernment, all of these words. Solomon has layers of these words so we can continue to get a picture, namely through the book of Proverbs, what the wise, skilled kind of living looks like.

God wants Steve at 51 to continue to grow in wisdom. There were things I did as a younger man I did as a *foolish* younger man, I did as a foolish younger *married* man, I did as a foolish younger pastor. At a young age, there were things I needed to learn, that I needed to grow in wisdom in. Like when you first get married at the age of 20, you don't serve your wife by washing her clothes on hot and drying them on hot.

That's not wise. "Hey baby, I did your clothes. They're *that* small, honey." Then there are parts of your wife's clothing you never touch in the wash. Come on now. I'm just helping you out for one of these days. Some things need to hang dry. As a young man, I needed to learn those things. Thirty-one years later, by the grace of God, Daddy has learned. I have grown in wisdom. You come over to my house now whenever I get ahold of clothes and washing, and stuff is hanging all over the house.

I love it. The neighbors come in. "Yeah, you got that. That's what that is." It's so fun. I still have a long way to go. I wish the way I handled finances... You know, nobody... I'm going to take that back. I think I had a lot of people who tried, but I was such a foolish, naïve young man. I'm sorry to say I didn't listen to good wisdom when it came to finances when I was younger. I would just go out, "We need that. We need that." I was foolish as a young man. The Lord is growing me in wisdom. Some of that wisdom has been done through correction.

I want us to grow up... As your pastor, at the age of 51, I just speak as a shepherd and as a dad and as one who has been given the authority and the right by God and Scripture to be able to share the heart of God with you tonight about this idea of walking in greater wisdom and letting all of that permeate. All of that wisdom really comes from one thing foundationally. That one thing permeates all of Scriptures. It's not just the theme of Proverbs; it is the theme of the entire Bible. It is this understanding and idea and teaching on the fear of God.

It really is having a proper view and understanding of who God is. The fear of God is not the kind of fear we run from as Christians; it's the kind of fear that drives us *to* the Lord because he is so gracious in it. Proverbs, chapter 1, verses 1-7: "**The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom...**" These proverbs we're studying in these days are for us to be able to know wisdom. He's laying these before us so we could know and walk in wisdom.

"...and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth—let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction."

In Proverbs 9:10, Solomon says again, "**The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.**" I want us to think about...*What is wisdom?* It's hard to give one good biblical definition of what *wisdom* is. The Hebrew word literally means it is the art of skillful living. It means to grow in skilled living.

As opposed to just giving a clear-cut definition, the Bible provides a picture of wisdom. It provides different words that describe wisdom. It provides a description of what wisdom looks like and how wisdom acts throughout the book of Proverbs and throughout the Word. In these verses, like verse 2, there is the word *instruction*. It literally can be translated *discipline*. These are layers and layers of helping us get a glimpse and an understanding of the fullness of what God is after when he's calling us to wisdom. These words help describe what wisdom looks like.

Instruction is the idea of being educated through correction. How many of you have been educated, have become wise, through correction? You were corrected. All five of us. That's great. Washing clothes. I could start naming them and go down the list from the little insignificant examples to the crazy, deep, significant examples of how the Lord has used correction in my life, and that is loving. I just want to challenge you, young brothers. You don't have to be young to be foolish. I know older men and women who are fools and naïve. It's a shame. They haven't grown in wisdom.

The Lord uses this word *instruction* as an example of what it means to grow in wisdom. When a brother or a sister comes to you and attempts in gentleness (that's the key) and in grace and love, always led by the love of Christ, to correct something that may be off in your life thinking or in your speech or in your habits, that is love. It would bid you well to hear their wisdom and their grace and, by the help of the Holy Spirit, correct your movement or your form or your habits.

Here's another picture of wisdom: *discernment*. This is the ability to look at two different things and see what God sees, and to be able to tell the difference between what is good and what is evil. That's growing in wisdom. You have the ability to see, "That's good; that's *not* good. That thing, that activity, that thought, that direction, that propensity, that habit... These are good things, and that is *not* a good thing." That's what God grants to the wise as time goes by. That's what wisdom looks like.

Here's another one: *understanding*. It not only implies discernment, but it's the ability to understand why God even prefers one over the other. You begin to get deeper into the heart of God.

You begin to understand. There's nothing like being around a woman or a man of understanding. Those are wise people.

I'm thankful for this campus, because I know there are a lot of you who walk in a lot of understanding. In fact, you've been good counsel for me, as your pastor, and I'm really grateful for that. The church needs understanding. This area of wisdom is what the church at large lacks. We run so fast with a lot of activity and action and a lot of energy and zeal, but there are times we lack knowledge and understanding. Steve Hardin does.

Prudence is the next layer. It's a Spirit-born cleverness. Now there's a word for cleverness in the New Testament that is a negative word. This isn't the word for cleverness we're talking about. This is a Spirit-born cleverness that understands the trend of events and inherent dangers before us and avoids the pitfalls of life.

It's able to look ahead and understand the trend of events and inherent dangers. We need to walk by God's grace in greater prudence. It's looking down the road by God's grace and going, "That's not a good direction. There are things about that or about those decisions that's not going to be good for me."

Then there is *knowledge* (verse 4). This is more than possessing information. It is a knowledge that is deeply personal and experiential. Have you ever been around those people (and I've been that guy) who can talk a lot about something but you get the feeling they don't have much of a knowledge or experience of that thing? A lot of talk.

When I studied the mountain of Pikes Peak up in Colorado Springs, Colorado, back in college and longed for being able to go to it... I preached at the Colorado State Baptist Youth Camp, and I remember always talking about, "Man, I love the mountains." I'd only been to the mountains once in my life. Ol' boy from East Dallas. I'd gone up on a Young Life ski trip because the girls loved Jesus so much, and I wanted to be around them. I'd been up there one time, so I became an expert on all things mountain region. I didn't know anything about mountains.

Then a guy said, "Do you want to go up on top of Pikes Peak?" "Yeah man, let's go." Let me tell you, 14,000 feet later... The tree line ended at 11,000 feet. By the time you hit 11,000 feet, you're in a vehicle... Now we could have walked it. I wasn't going to do that. I have the body to do it, but I wasn't going to do it.

I got in a vehicle, and we started driving up. At 11,000 feet, he was driving and I was looking over the side of the mountain. It freaked me out. You're looking down. There are no trees to stop you, no rocks to stop you, no guardrail to stop you. I could have died on the scene. Then when we got up there in the middle of July, it was freezing. It was snowing up on top of that thing. I didn't know anything about Pikes Peak.

I certainly don't want to presume upon the wise life or upon the fear of the Lord as if I have great knowledge of either. Do you hear what I'm saying, church? There are some things about the Lord you just won't know. He's too unfathomable. He's too deep. He's endless. There are some things about experience that the man or woman who walks in wisdom God grants knowledge, and the beautiful thing about the knowledge of the Holy One is that knowledge is the knowledge of God himself that he grants to you. That's an insight about him that he gives.

The last thing is *discretion*. This is huge. There is something we need to continue to grow in wisdom in on this campus. I say this lovingly. We need to grow in wisdom, and one of those areas of wisdom that needs to continue to be understood is this idea of *discretion*. That's the idea of avoiding harm by foolishly proceeding with ill-advised plans.

That's knowing that down the road there is danger, and we know it's not wise, we know it's not good, we know that activity will rob from us an affection for the Lord, or that group will rob from us an affection for the Lord, or those late hours might rob from us an affection for the Lord, or that place or that particular restaurant or that drink or too many of those drinks or that look or that touch or that gaze... I could go on and on and on about what's in my own heart.

Wisdom is calling out from the streets of God and saying to us, "Walk with discretion, my young brothers and old brothers and young sisters and old sisters." God is calling us to walk in wisdom, all that wisdom. There is a wisdom you will walk in that one day will be your destruction if it's not based on the fear of the Lord. There is a wisdom that is a worldly wisdom.

We think we've been walking wise and knowledgeable in an understanding, and Romans 1 makes it clear we've been walking in our own understanding. We've been orbiting our mindset and philosophy of life and theological presuppositions around *our* ideas, *our* thoughts. We have been worshiping the created as opposed to the Creator. Outside of Christ, many will find out there is a wisdom they were living in that won't lead to life; it will lead to destruction.

The wisdom we're talking about is the wisdom that's founded in the fear of the Lord. So let's look at that for a moment. What is this fear of the Lord? "Steve, when you talk about the fear of the Lord, that kind of goes against the grain of all I've known about the Father, who has shown himself to be loving and gracious and merciful, and this Son who has loved me so much he has laid his life down for me. This talk of fearing the Lord... I'm a little uneasy with that."

Don't be uneasy with that. It is the fear of the Lord that, as a follower of Jesus Christ, has given you, by God's grace, the knowledge of the Holy One. It is that fear God has used to teach you and to draw you and to open up your eyes. It is the foundation of what real wisdom is. True wisdom is a knowledge of God himself. That's a gift from the Lord.

We're not talking about this kind of fear that drives us away from the Lord, but this kind of fear that, by God's grace, drives us *to* the Lord. It's that filial fear the Puritans talked about, a childlike fear in a righteous good way. It's to have this beautiful glowing love for God on the one side and this unbelievable holy, reverential fear and awe of God in the right way on the other side. The two are not incompatible. The two complete one another.

That's what it means to be a man or woman who are the recipients and benefactors of the grace of God. It is the grace that has taught my heart to fear, to know that I need him, to have my life orbit around him, to have my life believe his Word. God is so good to show me his Word is true. His Word is absolute. He is faithful to his Word. This Word is believable, and what he says he will do.

That's what the fear of the Lord is. It's believing in the words of life, Jesus himself. God gives that, and it's orbiting my life around that reality, that Word, saying, "I am subservient to him, and I joyfully, willfully..." I see the "Godness" of God, because he has opened my eyes to see, and I see the graciousness of God. He has opened my eyes to see how gracious and beautiful and wonderful he is. That is a beautiful gift from God, and I praise him for that. Bless his name.

I think about Noah. I'm not talking about Russell Crowe Noah. I've been waiting on somebody to make a movie about Noah forever. I'm serious. You know, two by two by two. How awesome of a movie that would be. I mean, to see that...creeping things, walking things, flying things, big things, little things. I'm going to write a song. I'm going to put a rap together. (I'm just kidding.)

I just could not wait for a movie to come out about Noah. God, in his mercy, destroying the history of mankind that was evil and, in God's sight, at enmity with God. Then God called out the Christ-type man, Noah. He said, "Noah, I want you to build an ark." Now when Noah heard that, at first he was... I mean, think about that. I would have been terrified. "You're going to destroy the earth, and you want me to build an ark? Yeah, okay."

The Bible says in Hebrews, chapter 11, that Noah, out of reverent fear, a holy fear, out of relationship with the Father, the Holy One... See, the true fear of God is relational. He's our covenant-keeping Lord. That covenant-keeping God who has called us into a binding relationship with him through his Son, Jesus Christ...

God said to Noah, "You do this," and Noah, out of a holy fear, a reverent fear, out of a relationship with the Holy One, said, "Okay, I've got you." He built that ark. He honored the Lord, and all of humanity has been saved. Not spiritually saved, that's Christ's work, but we've been saved through that act of a righteous man. The fear of the Lord.

When you consider wisdom, how it is built on the fear of the Lord, think about these verses. Psalm 25, verse 12: **"Who is the man who fears the LORD? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose. [...] The friendship of the LORD..."** I'm praising the Lord that no longer am I an enemy of God, but I am a friend of God through Jesus Christ.

"The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant." I rejoice in that tonight. **"Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love..."** Think about it tonight. **"Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing."**

Psalm 103:13: **"As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him."** To those whose eyes have been opened, whose lives are subservient to his Word, who have had their eyes opened to the knowledge of the Holy One, who understand he is true in all of his ways.

Then he says in Proverbs 14:26, **"In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge."** That's just blessing after blessing after blessing. **"The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death."** The call of God on

the Dallas Campus is to fear the Lord, to honor him, and to worship him in truth and in spirit. Let's continue to walk in great wisdom.

I think about how the fool runs to reckless living. I think about how the fool envies evil, loves evil. I think about how the fool leads a trapped life. I think about how the wise live joy-filled lives because they're satisfied in the knowledge of God, how they live useful lives, and how they live intentional lives. How good is God.

As we consider every week as we run to his Communion Table, there's no one you and I have met who has absolutely demonstrated a life of perfect wisdom and a perfect understanding of what it means to honor his Father at all fronts like Jesus Christ. That's why every week I love for us to run to the Table of the Lord. That's why I love for us to consider this Communion, this Table God set for us on the night Jesus Christ was betrayed.

I think about how there's no one who walks in full, total, absolute wisdom whom I want to lay my life under like Jesus Christ. I exhort you to keep running to the Holy One, to keep finding your life under the shadow of the cross. Where we have not walked in great wisdom, let's ask the Lord for greater wisdom. Where we have not walked with discretion and discernment, let's ask the Lord to enable us to walk in greater discernment and discretion.

Where we have not feared the Lord, let's ask the Lord, "Teach me. Unite my heart to fear your name." Let's ask the Lord, and let's continue to grow up in great wisdom here on this Dallas Campus. You may be 25 years of age, 28 years of age, 30 or 40... As we do life together, to continue to grow in great wisdom, following the One who is perfectly wise.

As John the Revelator says, for those who fear the Lord, there's going to be a feast one day around the throne of God. It's going to be an unbelievable scene, where people from every tongue, tribe, and nation... There will be people there you didn't even know their nation, their people group, that language, even existed.

We think we know all there is to know about all of the languages and people groups out there. There are things happening out there, people the Lord has created, we don't even know. I'm serious. They're going to show up in heaven, and we're going to go, "Whoa, whoa, what is this language?" All of the linguistic people are going to go, "What? Hey, hey, we didn't quite understand that language."

They're going to be singing. There are going to be languages. There are going to be people coming from all over who have, by God's grace, had their hearts opened by the Spirit of God to believe in Jesus Christ. There's going to be a throne room party you can't even fathom, and I can't wait. When we come to the Table, that's what we're coming to the Table to remember. Not only the grace of God through Jesus Christ and the work of the cross on our behalf, but we're also rejoicing in the great beautiful feast that's to come.

What a day. We're going to be totally healed, totally removed from all of this. The bride of Christ from the ages past is going to celebrate the Lamb of God, and it's going to be unhindered. Nobody is going to have to initiate anything. Nobody is going to have to slap music on the screen. There are going to be songs sung, instruments... I don't even have words right now. I can't wait.

I implore those of you who are in this room tonight, before we come to the Table... When I think about the funeral yesterday of Christopher Gordon over in our neighborhood, Forest Meadow... I think about when the psalmist said in Psalm 90:12, "Teach me to number my days." Your days have been numbered. They've been decreed by the Lord.

He says, "Teach me to number my days so that I may apply wisdom to my heart. Let me see the brevity of life. Let me see how important this is. Let me see where my life really is." I implore you and encourage you and beg you tonight, if you're not a believer in Jesus Christ, have never committed your life to Christ, where you have turned away wisdom and insight and, namely, the gospel, let me put this before you: be reconciled to God.

I don't know of any greater thing I can ask you to do than to be reconciled to God. I pray that God would open up your heart and your eyes. Ask him. "Lord, show me. I want to know more of what this man Steve is talking about and what I know I long for and I don't even know I long for it. I'm finding it in a hundred other things that are failing me. There is no one who can satisfy my heart, and I've come to see that."

Who can? Jesus. Is that you tonight? I call you to cry out for mercy tonight and run to the cross of Jesus Christ. I pray God grants you eyes to believe and faith to turn from sin and repentance to say, "No longer my way, but your way." I pray God grants you that, and I believe he will. For you who don't know the Lord, be reconciled to God.

Brother and sister in Jesus Christ, rejoice in the grace of God that has come to you. Praise him that the Wise One, the Holy One, continues to keep you in covenant relationship by his faithfulness and his perfection. His love for you is steadfast and unending. We rejoice in that tonight. If you're a follower of Jesus Christ, as we take these elements tonight and consider the goodness of the Lord...

Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took the bread with his disciples and said, "This is my body. It's going to be broken and bruised and battered for you." He said, "I want you to do this, church, every time you gather. As often as you gather in my name, I want you to remember all that I've accomplished for you." We've been doing this for 2,000 years, and we've done it for 5 years together. I love it. A few of us at the beginning and now, a bunch of us. I say to you, this is the body of Christ. Let's eat the body of Christ in the name of Jesus Christ. Praise be his name.

In the same way, he took the cup of wine and said, "This is the cup of the new covenant, this new relationship I am calling you to, that I have established between my Father for your name's sake, for your good, for your deliverance, this new covenant, this new kingdom I'm calling you into, where I'm the King and you follow me. This is the blood of my new covenant. As often as you drink this, you drink this in remembrance of me." Praise be the name of the Lord.