

“WISDOM FOR LIVING WELL FROM PROVERBS.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Text for Sermon: Proverbs 3:5-8; 4:23; 9:10; 16:3, 9; 22:3

Introduction.

Last week I introduced us to the book of Proverbs as the beginning of a sermon series on wisdom for living well in a foolish world. I gave some background to Proverbs, spoke about what a proverb is and what wisdom is. Then I gave five steps for getting wisdom, get wisdom.

Last week I said as a rule of thumb or general principle for interpreting the Proverbs they are true but not necessarily absolutes or guarantees or universal truths.

But even that statement is not absolutely or universally true. Some of the Proverbs are absolutely and universally true without exception and are to be taken absolutely. One such proverb is our text this morning. It is absolutely, universally true.

Proverbs 3:5-7 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

7 Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.

8 It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

There is a good chance many of you know these verses by memory, it is right up there with John 3:16. It is no doubt the most well-known and memorized text in Proverbs.

I am setting these verses before us at the beginning of this series to be our guiding light, our North Star for every Christian.

You know what the North Star is. At the end of the handle of the Little Dipper is Polaris which sits almost directly over the north pole. For centuries it was everyone's celestial GPS.

Because Polaris remains completely stationary while the rest of the night sky rotates around it, it provides a reliable, fixed compass for celestial navigation.

Our text is the foundational text for getting and keeping our bearings for a straight path through life. This is not a formula for an easy life. It is a description of the wise life, for living wisely.

God and His wisdom is the fixed point, the center of the universe and of our lives. He serves as the unchanging, fixed point of truth, and eternal focus for believers as they journey through life.

Wisdom comes from God and is found when we turn to God and trust with our whole heart, soul, and mind, and submit all our ways to Him, every area of our lives, and walk in His ways.

I. Trust the Lord — Wisdom begins with dependence (v. 5a)

Trust is our child-like, unwavering confidence in our Father God's wisdom, power, faithfulness, goodness and love. It is trust in His providence, His presence with us, in His grace and mercy, as the dispenser of every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

Trust in the Son of God; who is the wisdom of God incarnate. "In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:2–3).

Trust in the Holy Spirit, who works in our hearts to open our hearts to the wisdom of God.

Wise living begins not with mastering techniques but with resting in God's character, trusting God really is God, that He really is in control, that He really does rule and reign over all the affairs of man and all the affairs of our lives.

We must trust in the Lord with all our hearts; believing He is able to do what He will, wise to do what is best, and good to do what is best for us. This trust must be exclusive, forsaking trust in all others and in anything else.

II. Do not lean on yourself — Wisdom rejects self-reliance (v. 5b)

Everyone leans on something, the question is what? Is what you are leaning on able to bear the weight? Human wisdom is not all bad, human wisdom comes from God, but human wisdom is not able to bear the weight of our ultimate trust, hope and confidence. You go to the doctor, but you trust God.

This is not natural for us. As fallen sinful, selfish, proud human beings we default to leaning on ourselves, our resources. Our own understanding is our god.

Think how rare it is to find a person, especially a younger person, completely submitting their wisdom and will to God in all things. As soon as they encounter something from Scripture that contradicts their own wisdom and they fall back on their own understanding.

Why can't we trust our own understanding? Because since the fall it has become corrupted, it is no longer a reliable guide. Since we ate the forbidden fruit, we keep eating, doing stupid things.

Sin makes us fools because it makes us want to be our own god. The essence of folly is not low intelligence but autonomous self-rule.

We notoriously underestimate how seductively deceptive wrong choices or evil actions can actually seem wise or beneficial to us. Sin is why we are proud or defensive or why we lie or cheat or act selfishly, especially when we are afraid or angry or suffering or threatened.

We need to be reminded how untrustworthy our own wisdom is. Don't be wise in your own eyes.

We trust our feelings more than God's Word. We make decisions based on comfort, success, or approval rather than obedience. We assume we know what will make us happy. We resent God's providence when His path is difficult.

Our culture tells us “Follow your heart.” “Be true to yourself.” “You define your own truth.” “No one can tell you what is right for you.” “Do what makes you happy.”

This is the exact opposite of Proverbs 3:5–8. Wisdom rejects self-reliance. Wisdom begins with surrender, not information. Forsaking all others.

We have more information than any generation in history and yet less wisdom. We consult Google before God. We listen to influencers before Scripture.

Renounce your trust or dependence on your resources, your own strength or wisdom. Renounce your dependence on your own benefits, blessings, privileges in life, your background, your education. Renounce your dependence on your own works, achievements, successes.

Talk back to yourself. Body, you are not strong enough. Brain, you are not smart enough. Will, you are not constant enough. Resources, you are not sufficient enough.

This does not mean Christians should stop thinking. Of course, you think, you reason, but you don’t trust in yourself. You don’t just trust the doctor or the financial planner or the odds or statistics. You don’t take any of that to the bank.

The fool says: “I know what is best.” “I can manage my life.” “I don’t need God’s direction.” The question is not, “What do I think?” but, “What has God said?”

When we trust our own understanding we are saying we are smarter than God, wiser than God, that we can figure things out better than God. That is the definition of insanity. It is insane to trust our limited understanding when we can trust the unlimited understanding of God.

What are you going to do when we come to some Proverbs that you don't like, or you disagree with, or that are out of touch with modern times and modern wisdom? Are you going to say, "Yeah, but."

Lean not on your own understanding, means be more humble, you are not as smart as you think you are. Don't be proud, don't be wise in your own eyes. It is a fool's errand to think you can sort out what is best and right and good and true in all matters.

III. Acknowledge Him in all your ways — Wisdom is comprehensive (v. 6a)

You know in your head that God is God, that God sees everything, knows everything, knows every thought, every action, every secret, every sin. You know that. So start living that way, living more consciously aware of that.

Make it a habit to live Coram Deo. Coram Deo is a Latin phrase meaning "before the face of God" or "in the presence of God". It means living your entire life—in every moment and place, in every circumstance and situation—under the conscious awareness of God's presence.

Whether you are cleaning house or mowing the yard, paying bills or surfing the web, driving, working, playing, teaching children, camping or talking to a stranger, it is all spiritual, it is all from God, for God and to God, in whom you live and move and have your being.

Make it a habit in every opportunity, every moment, every decision, every question, doubt or anxiety, every conversation, every trial, every new choice, to say: "God, I acknowledge you, that you are sovereign over every detail of life, I know you are present here and now, and I am wanting to draw you into this situation, this need, and I am saying I want you to rule and reign, to direct this with your wisdom, not mine."

There is no aspect of your life that God's wisdom doesn't touch or have application. Ask yourself, "What does faithfulness look like in this relationship, decision, habit, or responsibility?"

Don't compartmentalized your faith into Sunday mornings or religious activities, but live *all* your life—whether at work, at home, at school, or at rest—as sacred and meant to be lived in communion with God.

In all your ways means all your ways. Not some ways, not just the big ways, not just the spiritual ways, not just the ways you want to. All your ways.

Live even the ordinary, most mundane matters of your day before God, conscious of God. God loves this, He delights when we live for Him and aware of Him in all things. Consider no circumstance or situation too big for God, or more to the point, too small for God.

Or even too clear or too plain for God. In other words, even when you have complete confidence in what to do, take it to God, first. "Lord, it seems obvious to me that this plan or action is the best one, but I know my ways and thoughts are not yours and I can easily deceive myself." (some of you are deceiving yourselves in how you are living contrary to God's ways)

Live life captivated by God and captive to the Word of God. Live a life that doesn't put God in a box on Sunday morning and then live as a practical atheist the rest of the week. And let's be honest, most of us do that to some degree or another.

As a result our lives are fragment, marked by inconsistency, disharmony, confusion, conflict, contradiction, and chaos. Doing what we don't want to do and not doing what we want to do. Going to bed at night with regrets, disappointments, frustrations, tensions.

When things in life go badly, and not according to your mind or desire, acknowledge Him, submit to His sovereignty; and be still and know that He is God, who does all things right, wisely and well, for His own glory and our good (Psalms 46:10; Romans 8:28).

And when things go well and you have enjoyment and success, give Him all the glory. Acknowledge that it is from His hand, that we have nothing that we have not received out of His grace and goodness.

IV. He will make straight your paths — Wisdom rests in God's providence (v. 6b)

Straight paths do not promise an easy life or a trouble-free journey. It promises God's faithful guidance and providential direction as we walk under His wisdom.

The crooked road is straight for the person who has faith to see God's good hand in it. How sweet is the hand of providence to them that have faith to see it! The straight path is not the easiest path, but it is the path that leads home.

Remember the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. Remember it was their sin that created that problem. They didn't trust God, they didn't lean on Him but on their own understanding, so they wandered until that generation died in the wilderness.

But were they abandoned by God? No, at all.

The pillar of cloud and fire were the Israelites North Star, their fixed point for navigation, when to move, when to stay still, where to turn. They were a reminder of God's unwavering guidance, presence, and protection, encouraging believers to trust in His divine plan and timing. It guided them all the way to the Promised Land.

Do we wish we had a giant pillar of cloud and pillar of fire to show us the way, to guide us on the straight path? We do, we have Christ and His Word, and we have the fire of His Holy Spirit in us to teach us from Scripture, what is true, good and right, what is the way in which we should walk.

Jesus lived this text in the flesh and set an example for us. He trusted the Father completely, He sought to do the Father's will, more than His own. He turned from evil and lived Coram Deo.

Implications and application.

Thomas Brooks, "The greatest wisdom in the world is to know the will of God and to do it."

Pray, cry out for wisdom. Be earnest. God is the God of all wisdom and He delights to give wisdom to all who ask.

Seek, dig, press in, read, don't give up too soon. Ask yourself these five questions.

- Where am I currently leaning on my own understanding or feelings or wants?
- What decision am I trying to make without serious prayer?
- What area of life have I not acknowledged God in?
- Am I wise in my own eyes?
- What evil do I need to turn away from today?

Imagine standing at a trailhead in dense fog. One path is wide, familiar, and crowded. The other is narrow, hard, but with a Guide who knows the mountain perfectly.

Proverbs 3 says:

- Don't trust your instincts alone.
- Don't follow the crowd.
- Don't make yourself the guide.

Trust the Lord. And the One who calls you to trust Him is the One who has already gone before you, walked the path perfectly, died for your foolishness, risen for your justification, and now gives His Spirit so that you may learn, day by day, to live wisely in a foolish world.

Prayer: I Peter 5:5-7 God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.