

“WISDOM FOR SEEKING COUNSEL, RECEIVING CORRECTION.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Text for Sermon: Proverbs

Introduction.

Proverbs is about living life Coram Deo, before the face of God, in the presence of God.

Proverbs is about gaining wisdom through the fear of the Lord, through the love of the Lord.

Proverbs is about intentionally and practically applying God’s wisdom to our lives every day.

Proverbs is about playing the long game, not instant or immediate gratification, but a long obedience in the same direction, toward a glorious goal, toward eternity.

Proverbs is about getting wisdom. Whatever you get, get wisdom.

Proverbs 4:7-8 The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom.

8 Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her.

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.

This morning we consider another step on the path to wisdom, not being wise in our own eyes but seeking counsel and receiving correction from wise people God has put in our lives.

How important is this step? Over 30 proverbs address this topic, it’s that important.

1. The wise person knows he needs wisdom

Proverbs 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

The wise person isn't the person who thinks he knows everything; he is the person who knows he doesn't, so he seeks counsel, welcomes correction, and allows God to use others to make him wiser.

A wise person has a true and humble knowledge of himself. He knows he has blind spots, weaknesses, flaws, and he is teachable. He wants to grow, to mature, to gain wisdom.

This seems reasonable enough so why is it so hard for us? Because of what we talked about last week. Pride makes this week's wisdom hard to receive.

Let's face it, we generally don't like to be told what to do or be corrected for something we are doing wrong, or ask for help or directions.

If we could do back and interview your parents or teachers or bosses or most of all your spouse, what would they say about how well you took instruction or correction? How many of us only turn to the assembly manual after we have tried to do it without it?

Pride is the great hindrance to wisdom. The proud person needs no direction, he asks no advice, he stubbornly insists his way is right. He is deluded, deceived, full of himself.

"I can do this on my own. I can do this my way. I don't need any help. I can figure this out."

And we usually most resent or resist what we most need to hear. Pride makes us foolish and keeps us foolish. The proof of wisdom is a teachable spirit.

2. The wise person actively seeks counsel before acting.

A wise person seeks to be teachable and finds every opportunity to be instructed.

Proverbs 15:22 Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.

Wise godly counsel is God's gift to fools, which is what all of us are, me included. The wise person doesn't merely seek advice after things go wrong. He seeks wisdom before making important decisions.

The foolish person acts, then discovers the error of his ways, then gets defensive and tries to cover up, and only then does he maybe admit he needs help and accepts correction.

There is wisdom in many counselors. This is why in the wisdom of the reformers they instituted a church government made up of a plurality of elders. Not one, but several. When our elders meet there are eleven men in the room each with equal voice and equal vote.

I love it when in an elders meeting or a council meeting, I hear different points of view I hadn't considered, perspectives I didn't have, that help open up the issue to greater wisdom.

No one knows everything, no one has all the insight and perspective. We each have a piece of the puzzle but not all of it. Hearing from others is important.

A husband is a fool if he won't listen to the advice and counsel of his wife, who has been given to him as a gift from God to help him. God knows he needs the help, and wisdom receives it.

Teenagers are fools when they won't listen to the advice and counsel of their parents. The same for students with teachers, players with coaches, employees with employers.

It is the mark of wisdom not to trust yourself alone, but to test our ways to see if we are wrong.

I will never forget and forever be grateful for the wisdom and counsel given me by Len Honcoop about a decision I was considering. I sought him out, laid it out and then listened to his counsel. After hearing it, I weighed it and

changed my course of action. Later it came out he was right and I was spared from making a terrible decision. He had wisdom to see the matter more clearly than I could.

Seeking counsel gives us another set of eyes and ears on the matter at hand, it gains us greater perspective. You will be blessed if you have a few people like that who can speak wisdom into your life, if you seek it out and listen to it.

3. The wise person loves correction

Proverbs 12:1 Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.

Proverbs 13:18 Poverty and disgrace come to him who ignores instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is honored.

Hebrews 12:5-7, 11 “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. 6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” 7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ... 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

God is loving us when He disciplines us and if we are wise we will love Him for it, knowing it is for our good.

Everyone of us can think of a time when someone corrected us, called out a sin or fault, and we chaffed, we bristled, we got defense and pushed back. Oh yeah, well what about you.

I can think of a few of those times in right now. And I have lost count of how many times my wife has corrected or rebuked me and I didn't like it. Pride, not loving God's gift.

What do you think about Solomon's strong language? Who wants to be called stupid? It is a word used for a stubborn mule.

He who hates reproof is stupid. He who doesn't listen to his wife is stupid. He who doesn't listen to his teacher, coach, boss, elder, pastor or friend is stupid, is a fool.

There are two kinds of pain in the world, *divine pain and dumb pain*. Divine pain is ordained by the sovereign God for our good, for maturing us, humbling us, refining our faith and building our character into Christ-likeness.

Dumb pain is pain that I have brought on myself and with some wise counsel and correction could have been avoided. Don't be stupid.

Think about how young people are, how teenagers in their parents' home think. They chafe under the rules, under the lack of freedom to do what they want, when they want. Like a dog straining against a leash, or a horse against the bridle, wanting to be free.

When finally they are free, out from under those oppressive restraints, at liberty to do whatever they want, they cast off instruction and wisdom, and what happens?

Like a train that gets off its tracks. Yes, it is free, but that freedom ends in ruin, in destruction.

Young people longing to be free to do your own will, give sober consideration to the wisdom of those older and wiser, who have experienced their own mistakes, bad choices, learn from them.

Have a fear of being left completely to your own choices, your own devices. Be humble enough to admit you don't know everything, you aren't smarter than everyone else, especially those older than you.

Yes, I know the power of our pride, it doesn't want to be told what to do, or what we are doing wrong.

The mark of maturity and wisdom is to be able to receive and accept correction. It is even a greater sign of maturity and wisdom to seek correction, to ask for it.

A fool thinks correction is an attack; a wise person recognizes correction as an opportunity.

The question isn't, "How dare you correct me?" The question is, "What might God be teaching me through this?"

Discipline and correction are signs of love, care, concern, looking out for your wellbeing, best interests. It means you are loved. Love those who love you enough to correct you.

4. The wise person listens for life-giving reproof and changes when the correction is true.

Proverbs 15:31-32 The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise.

32 Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence.

Correction is like the ***warning light***, or the warning sign of trouble ahead. To reject correction is to reject wisdom. To refuse to listen to the warning beeps and flashing lights is to invite trouble. A closed ear and a closed mind lead to making a shipwreck of your life.

To resist or reject correction is a form of self-harm, despising yourself. It is a path that leads to ruin, to misery, to destruction, to the ruin of your soul, to death. Like King Solomon's son Rehoboam when he became king and rejected the wisdom given him, to the destruction of Israel.

The wise welcome instruction the way a sick person welcomes medicine.

A pagan Pharaoh accepted the counsel of a wise Israelite, Joseph, and saved his nation from starvation in a seven-year drought.

Remember Moses, the God-ordained, Spirit-filled leader of the people of Israel and he humbly accepted the wise godly counsel of his father-in-law, Jethro.

Remember David listening to the restraining advice of Abigail when he was about to shed blood in anger.

Remember when Paul admonished and corrected Peter to his face in Galatians 2:11. Remember Peter was rather brash and impetuous, a loud mouth, a bragger. He pushed back and disagreed with Jesus when Jesus rebuked and corrected him. So how did he respond to Paul?

In his letter II Peter 3:15-16 he called Paul his beloved brother. Peter matured, he grew up, he became humble and teachable.

Proverbs 19:20 Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future.

Someone who loves you enough to tell you you're going in the wrong direction may be saving you from danger. Your future may depend on your listening to advice and accepting instruction when you are young. If you are stubborn, proud and unteachable, your future is doomed.

I was talking to a friend a couple of months ago about a child of his. I knew it wasn't going well, and he used a word I hadn't heard often and wasn't sure of the meaning.

Intractable - obstreperous, recalcitrant, obstinate, bullheaded, got it. Someone who is stubborn, rebellious, resistant to any counsel or instruction or correction. And it is not going well for them. Don't be that person. Don't be intractable,

Working on this sermon brought back a high school math class memory. I got a test back and one of my answers was marked wrong I didn't think should have been. I went to my teacher to argue my case. We went round and round, my pushing back, until finally he said, "Robert, you go put the score you think you should receive on the test and bring it back to me." He nailed me. He exposed my stubborn pride that wasn't willing to submit to my teacher. I was the clay challenging the potter. I left it.

This our posture when we stubbornly, rebelliously refuses to submit to those God has put in authority over us, who are given as a gift for our folly, to make us wise. God has filled our lives with these gifts of His grace to help us. Love them, seek them, listen to them.

How the Gospel helps us seek counsel and receive correction.

To confess Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord is to confess we are not lord, we are sinful, rebellious, foolish. Our very proclamation of our need for a Savior frees us from the shame and guilt of acknowledging our shortcomings, weaknesses, our foolishness. It is already obvious, so why be so proud? Paul boasted about his weaknesses. Be humble, teachable, and less offended when God lovingly corrects us by His Word and Spirit and by those He has put into our lives to make us wise.

Because I have been accepted in Christ, I can admit I am wrong. My identity doesn't depend on me being right or on what you think about me. I already know who I am, a foolish, proud, sinner saved by grace, by a God who loves me.

Implications and application.

How many of us lament what we see going on in our country and yet don't see the same behavior or attitude in our own hearts?

Think about how you have listened to and received this sermon. Are your ears open to it or closed to it? Do you think there is wisdom for you in it, or do you think it doesn't apply to you, just to other people?

We are not made to live in isolation, independent from everyone else. Man is not made to be alone. We are social beings, born into families and communities and churches. We grow and live in community with the benefits of learning from each other and leaning on each other.

The wise honor and respect those who are honest with us and show us our sins, our faults.

Proverbs 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend.

Proverbs 27:17 Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.