

Proverbs 3:5-12
The 'How' of Wisdom

Intro: So far in our study of wisdom in Proverbs we've learned 2 things: First, the opening verses of chapter one taught us **the 'what' of wisdom** as we saw it defined as the fear of the Lord embraced with a humble heart. The rest of chapter one and chapter 2 showed us **the 'why' of wisdom** – how rejecting it leads to dire consequences, but embracing it leads to great blessing. Today, we come to the third foundation stone of our study: **the 'how' of wisdom**. How can we make such wisdom our own? VV. 5-12 of chapter 3 answer that question. The only way to become wise is to **trust in the Lord**. Without God-focused trust, none of our attempts to put the wisdom of this book into action will do any good. On the other hand, the more godly trust defines us, the more we'll experience the blessings that flow from wisdom.

So, if the 'how' of wisdom is trusting the Lord, **how** do we grow in that? This text gives 3 answers. We become wise by making God the focus of our hearts, our resources, and our pain. First,

A. Our trust in the Lord increases as we nurture self-suspicious hearts.

Verses 5b & 7a make that clear (read). As most of us grow from childhood to adulthood our inclination to trust only ourselves grows as we feel the sting of people letting us down, driving us to build fortresses of self-protection around our hearts and lives. The result is often a deceptively exalted view of ourselves, reinforcing our sense of pride and independence. Examples of that are all over the Bible.

Illustr: One is the story of **Gehazi**, the servant of the prophet Elisha in 2 Kgs. 5 when Naaman the Syrian general came to Israel to be healed of leprosy....Gehazi's plan involved an ugly web of sin – including multiple lies, greed, and misrepresenting God – making him out to be a mercenary God who needed to be paid off, rather than a God of grace. And every one of those sins flowed from the fact that he didn't trust God. To clarify, it wasn't Gehazi's desire for nice things that was the problem. As we saw two weeks ago, we serve a generous God who loves to delight us with joy. But had Gehazi trusted God, he would have had the honesty to say to Elisha, *"Can't we have some of the reward?"* and be ok with Elisha's answer. Trust of God always goes hand in hand with two virtues: honesty and contentment. Let me visualize it for you...[slide 1]. And that emerges from a deeper disease: a prideful, exalted view of ourselves and our own judgment [slide 2].

So, to become wise and nurture Godward trust, we need to stop **"leaning on our own understanding"**. We need to stop **"being wise in our own eyes."** And the way we do that is cultivating self-suspicious hearts that don't put much stock in our own perspectives, motives, opinions and affections. So, how do we do that? Three practical suggestions come to mind. Try these and see if they don't make a difference.

1. Ask your family and a good friend, "Do I have any opinions and perspectives about which I seem to be equally or more passionate about than God's will clearly revealed in the Bible?" (e.g. the vaccination debate)

-> Nurture the spiritual discipline of saying, *"I might be wrong about this."*

2. Study the stories in the Bible which highlight God's faithfulness in the face of doubt.

(e.g. Sarah and Isaac [Gen. 18], 12 spies [Num. 13], J the B [Mt. 11])

-> Truth of God in the present grows when we remember his faithfulness in the past.

3. Study your own lack of faithfulness and be humbled by it.

Illustr: This week I was reminded of a book by Romanian novelist **Herta Mueller** I read a number of years ago. It's a collection of short stories, the first of which is called **'The funeral sermon.'** It's shocking and painful to read because it is the opposite of every funeral you've ever attended....

-> What kind of rocks would be piled up on your casket? How many times have you and I been wrong over the course of our lives? How much pain have we caused others? In light of that, how could we ever implicitly trust our own judgment and be wise in our own eyes? It doesn't make sense.

God's wisdom alone is our hope, but we'll only embrace it when we first nurture hearts marked by humility and self-suspicion. Verses 9-10 add to that how

B. Our trust in the Lord increases as we put Him first with our wealth (read vv. 9-10).

In ancient Israel honor was shown to God a number of ways but none more emphasized than offering the best of one's livestock and produce on the altar in sacrifice. Devoting a portion of one's wealth to God was the primary way the Israelites worshiped. Not music. Not preaching. Not Scripture-reading. Not prayer – though all those were present. The **main thing worship looked like** was sacrificial giving. Why do you think that is? Jesus gives the answer in Mt. 6:21 when he told his disciples, **"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."** Worship is all about exalting what we most love, and nothing reveals that better than how we spend our money – which is probably why Jesus talked about money more than he talked about heaven and hell combined. One reason the Lord blesses us with money and possessions is to test our hearts. Do they reveal us as generous stewards or fearfully possessive owners?

In one of his books, Randy Alcorn asks the question, *"Do you see yourself as the owner of your wealth, or as God's resource manager?"* He tells about a Christian man from Boise, ID named **Jerry Caven** whose life was transformed when his perspective about that changed. By the time Jerry was 57 yrs. old he owned a successful restaurant chain, a cattle ranch and several real estate developments. He was thinking of retiring and buying a lavish home when a study of money in the Bible showed him that his money wasn't his – in fact **nothing** he had was his. It was all God's – so, what would God have him do? That question led Jerry and his wife into a season of prayer from which decided to use their excess funds to travel the world and pray for and assist discouraged missionaries in Central America, India, Pakistan, Africa and Bangladesh. Jerry writes, *"Once we understood that we were given God's money to do God's work, we discovered a peace and joy we never had."*

When we see the resources we possess through God's eyes, it's amazing how our trust in him increases, and that only makes sense, because who would have a problem being generous with someone else's money? And what's the use of worrying over what's not ours? What's the use of comparing my car or house with someone else's when it's not really mine in the first place? Being stewards and not owners not only brings us joy and trust, it brings liberation. I think of **John Wesley**, the great English preacher, who was met one day by a distraught friend, *"Mr. Wesley,"* he said, *"something terrible has happened. Your house has burned to the ground!"* After weighing the news for a moment Wesley replied, *"No. The Lord's house burned to the ground. One less responsibility for me."*

And think of this: If open-handed generosity was a hallmark of Israelite worship – don't we have even more reasons to be generous than them since we've received so much more? Honoring the Lord with our wealth should be one of our chief delights! It's a clear mark of godly wisdom. Finally,

C. Our trust in the Lord increases when we receive His discipline with hope (read vv. 11-12).

In verse 1 we noticed Solomon speaking of God's commandments as if they were his own (read). Now, as vv. 1-12 come to a close, we see Him connect his fatherly discipline of his sons to God. As he was compelled at times to apply his board of education to their seat of knowledge, he wanted to make it clear that his discipline was merely an extension of God's greater, fatherly discipline.

I wanted to do that, too, when my sons when they were young. So, I would often ask them **key questions** to reinforce a God-centered understanding of discipline, like *"Why must I discipline you for the sin you just committed?"* And they learned to reply, *"Because if you don't, God will discipline you."* That's right. Sometimes they'd ask, *"Daddy, how does God discipline you?"* I'd say in all kinds of painful ways. Discipline isn't just for kids, it's for all of us. It's for our good.

And our attitude toward it either sets us up to trust God and find peace in the midst of pain or despise it and invite more pain. So, what can we do to gain an attitude of trust and hope when we face moments of discipline – whether that’s at home, at school, at work, in a sport, or when you’re pulled over for speeding? Two things come to mind. 1st,

1. Remember that painful discipline confirms and strengthens our relationship with God.

Note in v. 11 who receives discipline, “*My son.*” Discipline confirms and strengthens intimate relationship. And v. 12 tells us why (read). **Illustr:** Since we’re talking about discipline, let me tell you the story of the **most memorable spanking of my life**....(lilacs). The neighbor kids played in the street all the time. Why did he spank *me*? Because he was my dad and he loved *me*. That’s exactly why God brings painful seasons our way – to confirm to us and declare to the world that we are His. So, it shouldn’t come as a surprise to find these verses quoted in the NT – in Hebrews 12 – to reinforce that this wasn’t only for the OT people of God. That writer adds this, “**If you are left without discipline...then you are illegitimate children....Our fathers disciplined us as they thought best, but God disciplines us for our good that we may share in his holiness.**” Just as my father’s discipline set me apart from my neighbors as “a Perry,” so God’s discipline of us sets us apart from the world as his. Not that everyone who suffers is a Christian, but every true Christian at some point will undergo suffering because our Father is making us like his Son. And that leads to the final point, how his discipline

2. Makes us wiser and stronger.

Hebrews 12 goes on to say, “**Therefore, lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees and make straight paths for your feet...strive for peace with everyone and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.**” Like a coach in a gym, God disciplines us to make us stronger, make us better, make us wiser. And the stronger we get, the more our trust in Him grows. If we want proof, we need look no farther than the apostle **Paul** sitting in a Roman jail in 62 AD. Our study last year in Acts taught us how he got there.... (Palestine...imprisonment...Caesarea...Rome). Paul knew pain, but with God there’s no wasted pain. Every trial Paul endured was part of God’s plan to make him wiser and stronger, and increase His trust. So much so that when he wrote the church in Philippi from that jail, he – a man deprived of his freedom, comfort, friends and former ministry – could write, “**Yes, and I will rejoice....it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or death. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.**”

I don’t know of anyone in the Bible who better exemplifies Proverbs 3:5, “**Trust in the Lord with all your heart**” than Paul. But that trust didn’t come in the Lazy-Boy of life. It developed over decades of painful discipline in the gym of God’s grace.

As we wrap up, I can’t help thinking of the Christians in **Sri Lanka** we prayed for last week – almost 300 of whom died when their churches were bombed by terrorists. More than 500 were also injured and now carry scars from those attacks. Think this text is relevant to what they’re feeling and the questions they’re inevitably asking, like, “*Why did this happen? How could God have allowed such suffering?*” Without texts like this one, such tragedies equal meaningless pain that brings depression and disillusionment. But knowing that our God is up to something meaningful and eternal in our darkest hours, gives us the strength to take his hand and walk through such dark valleys until he brings us out on the other side. And, because we can trust him, we know he will. On the road to wisdom there’s no wasted pain.