

SEQUOYAH HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Everyday Wisdom: Trusting the Catcher”

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*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.*

Proverbs 3:5-6

*Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD.
They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.*

Jeremiah 17:7-8

Today, we begin a new sermon series on wisdom literature. This is primarily defined as: Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Proverbs, but can also include a few Psalms.

Wise people continuously find God in all these instructionally-rich Old Testament books. For now, though, our series looks at Proverbs. Today’s sermon and the next 4 sermons will be stand-alone themes, so if you should miss a sermon, you will not be lost in the overall series.

In general, Proverbs speaks of everyday things: managing money, avoiding foolishness, getting along in marriage, raising children, soul-tending, overcoming fear, and much more. I used to think Proverbs included only moral instruction/discipline in life, but for the contemporary church, it also challenges us to: respect God, value all of life, and keep equality and justice in the forefront.

Most of the Proverbs are written in a basic pattern so that there is an action and consequence. If / then, as it were. God’s sages of ancient Israel believed that God created an orderly universe, and wisdom consists of learning to live in harmony with God’s order. Therefore, foolish behavior—gluttony, laziness, idolatry—violates the order of things and brings harmful consequences. “If you play with fire, you’ll get burned!” On the other hand, wise living and behavior—diligent work, careful speech, generous giving—brings rewards. “It’s easier to row with the current than against it!”

Though we sometimes interchange intelligence and wisdom, obviously they are not the same thing. Very smart people can be anything but wise; wise people are often those with no formal education. Knowing facts is a good thing, but wisdom is more than information. Wisdom is born of life experience and deep reflection on that experience. Wisdom is often rooted in all we have learned in our walk with God.

Compared to the other 65 Biblical books, Proverbs is unique. The emphasis remains on humanity's search for God, not the other way around. Most of Scripture looks at life in terms of what God has done, does, or plans to do, so that it reads like the history of the mighty acts of God. For example, our recent Revelation series foreshadows God's plans, but in Proverbs the author seeks to discover God.

Proverbs are bumper-sticker length. They can give the impression achieving this goal of wisdom is actually possible. Wisdom feels attainable; like an arm's length away.

Some of wisdom literature can almost seem secular, humorous, and not even related to a journey towards God. Proverbs 6:6 says "Go to the ant, you lazybones; consider its ways and be wise." But, mysteriously in living out proverbs like these, we often discover we're searching and finding our Maker.

Today's two readings from Jeremiah 17 and Proverbs 3 illustrate this searching and finding God.

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

This is the Bible's most familiar passage on trusting God. It inspires us to lean on God as true; a firm foundation.

As a teenager, I especially needed to know what grounded me. I didn't need a wise sage, rather how to align myself with God as a solid rock. Just before middle school my parents divorced and by 8th grade both of my parents remarried to different people within months. I inherited a stepmother, a stepfather, three older stepsisters, a younger stepsister and stepbrother in what felt like overnight. Ironically, in my own home(s) I felt rather lonely, and it didn't help that my biological brother had just left for college.

I was starting puberty and (confusingly wandering around like the Israelites in the desert) experimenting with this thing we call dating. I was searching for love and attention, but my belief in lasting relationships had faded.

Life at that point was spinning out of control. I was primed for an easy-to-grasp, reliable guiding principle. My small group Bible study leader, Dr. Gilliatt, was the one God placed in my

life to meet my needs. He encouraged me to memorize Proverbs 3:5-6. He suggested it while I was in the midst of chaos, when I needed a way to connect to the Rock of Ages. Since that time, I don't know how many times I've needed these two great verses.

Proverbs 3:5-6 implores us to trust in God so we give him a chance to put us or keep us on the right path. Trusting in the Lord gives him an opportunity to fulfill his desires for our welfare, plans that bring about a future with hope.

Henri Nouwen says, "Trapeze artists offer a beautiful image of trusting. Flyers have to trust their catchers. The fliers can do the most awesome doubles, triples, or quadruples somersaults, but what finally makes their performances spectacular are the catchers who are there for them at the right time in the right place."

Much of our lives is flying and can sometimes feel like flipping around with no way up. Nouwen would say, "trust the Great Catcher."

God proved trustworthy when Abraham was on the mountain with Isaac with what seemed to be an impossible task. And, with Ruth as a widow with little family support and a bleak future, God was working behind the scenes and provided for her needs. Her descendant, Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, taught us this complete trust in word and deed. Paul echoed saying, we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). In all this, God puts things in order and makes them right.

Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Lean not on your own understanding, self-reliance, fortitude, savings, or possessions. There is no true wisdom without humble recognition of our limits and of God's transcendence (Ps. 131).

The Message translation refreshingly puts it this way, "Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track."

Sit with that, "...in everything and everywhere, acknowledge God." Notice the exhaustiveness of the text. In ALL our ways, involve God. All "Ways" refers to literally everything we do. With our emotions, finances, failures, worries, set-backs, planning our vacation, in all of life, acknowledge God who can transform us.

For example, God can change our perspective doing the most mundane chores. As we wash the dishes and acknowledging God, we allow for the Spirit to help us remember God cleansing us of sin with our Baptism.

With how we're claimed as one of God's own children! How God chose us, dearly loves us and gave up his life for us.

We can disregard an identity based upon what people SAY about us. We can abandon an identity based upon what you DO. We can forget about an identity based upon what you possess or don't possess.

We can trust in the one who says our identity is based upon being beloved. Deeply, undeniably and truly loved. We can remember God has selected us to be recipient of his devotion. God can use this when we feel: unclean, unworthy, sinful, weak, broken, or feeling alone. In the waters of hope, God can unite us with himself when we feel: unloved, rejected, and nobody's favorite. Through the act of acknowledging him in our chores, God can prove his reliability and give us peace. Peace that our names are permanently written in the palm of his hand. We are his children, and God never takes his eyes off of us.

What life all comes down to is that God is the ultimate reality we have to deal with. Do we dare completely trust God? The Bible doesn't present a quick and easy answer to really challenging questions like: natural disasters, why nearly 100 people perish in collapsed buildings, or the complexities of a broken relationship. Rather, God's involvement in these difficulties sometimes is a mystery to us. Serious problems exist even when we're God-dependent people.

Yet, the consistent biblical answer to all these problems is trust. A trust that we can't fully understand, but, often, in the process of wrestling with it, we find God putting us on the right path. We trust because God is utterly dependable.

If trusting and acknowledging God in all things doesn't seem easy, remember Erik. Erik is remarkable! He was in the Junior Olympics as a teenager. He grew to become an amazing athlete, adventurer, author and motivational speaker. Among other things, he has become one of fewer than 300 people on the planet to peak 7 Summits i.e. the tallest mountain on each continent. Twenty years ago, Erik Weihenmayer conquered Mount Everest. And, Erik is blind! Yes, he achieved all of this without eyesight! The reason he can do this, in large part, is that he is really good at trusting, trusting his guides to be his eyes. His trust is deep with every step he has ever made. You'll hear Erik readily acknowledge he didn't reach those summits without a trustworthy guide.

What is your mountain? Imagine if you trusted God with your biggest challenge right now. Envision how that mountain is made low. Consider how you do not have to lean on your own understanding, rather acknowledge God and watch your path become straight. Imagine it!