

We're reflecting on Proverbs and some references to the New Testament, including Jesus' wisdom. We struggle to use time we're given. How does God want us to spend time? Ephesians 5:15-17 "Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." 2 Timothy 3:16-17 "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be completely equipped for every good work." Since the word of God says it's able to equip man for every good work, it's only natural to assume that it provides us with some sound advice as we walk through our daily lives. And indeed it does, so today I want to talk to you about being wise--not that I know that much about it, but I'll tell you more that I know probably, and how to spend your time not as a fool, but as a wise man. So first off, what is wisdom? Wisdom may be defined as a realistic approach to the problems of life. Homer Haley offered this definition, which requires some wisdom to understand what he is saying: "wisdom is insight into the underlining causes and significance of or consequences of things which insight enables one to apply to the best and the knowledge which he has," so it's kind of complicated, but I think we understand that the premise of wisdom is that we apply knowledge to our lives--and reacting. What would we do when we come upon certain situations.

So how is wisdom gained? It's gained mainly in two different ways. One is through trial and error. I have a friend who, a long time ago, asked me hey I want to run a really long race. What do I do? Well, he didn't really ask me; he just told me he was going to run and I was really encouraging--this is going to be great-- he decided to do his own thing and yet had all these injuries along the way. He ran his race and man, he was hurt by the end of it. About a month later he said I want to do this again. I asked him what did you learn from running your race? He said well I learned a lot of things not to do. I'll get to the rest of the story here pretty soon, but for this friend of mine. It was interesting. He went through this on a trial and error basis. He said I want to do this and then sort of followed his own wisdom. That's kind of what trial and error is--I'm going to try this; if it works great; if it doesn't work, I'll try something else. There's many disadvantages to this trial and error. Much of one's life can be wasted trying to learn through this trial and error, and one is forced to live with the consequences of the errors. My friend had several injuries. In life we can really injure ourselves applying trial and error as our way of logic and wisdom.

So the second way to acquire wisdom is through the proven experience of others. My friend, after running his first really long race, ended up surrounding himself with other runners, he ended up reading runners' literature. He ended up buying new shoes(which is completely unrelated to what I'm talking about). But he ended up doing several things that were right, and along the way he had fun doing it, and he was much more successful. It was kind of neat seeing him do this, surrounding himself with the runner culture. It was kind of neat. What I'm suggesting here's that if you want to do something,

surround yourself with people that know how to do it. There are clear advantages to gaining wisdom in this way. You can avoid the years of your life that can be wasted through trial and error, and that's living a life to its fullest measure. You experience life unburdened by the consequences of the earlier mistakes. Basically, let them make the mistakes and share the advice and you can reap the benefits. So clearly this method of getting wisdom is far superior to the other. That's one thing that makes the book of Proverbs so valuable is it's a source for this information. Instead of wasting our short time here on earth trying to discover wisdom through the process of trial and error, we can go straight to the book of Proverbs. There we find wisdom that is first off divinely inspired by God and --we're going to get to that soon. Also, it's proven to be true and sure and profitable by generations of righteous men and women who have lived out their lives from the teachings found in it.

The book of Proverbs is very useful. Also, it has concise, easy ways of remembering some of this wisdom. I found this way of phrasing it, "a short sentence based on long experience." In other words, after someone lived a long life, they put this into a little short quip and we can take that little quip with us. The value of the book of Proverbs is that it provides the wisdom of God himself. That is not to say that it is easy. If you're paying attention to what Robert was reading, there are so many "if" statements in Proverbs chapter 2--that **if** you receive my words, **if** you treasure up my commandments, **if** you call out for insight, **if** you seek it, like silver, and search for it like hidden treasure--I like that last one because I can sort of picture these people that, you know, spend their lives trying to gain money, to gain fortune, or treasure hunters going out there and investing time and money and doing death-defying feats in order to get whatever this next treasure is. I just think of all that energy that is being consumed towards fortune--if all that could be harnessed and sort of put towards attaining God's wisdom--how awesome that would be. But for those of us who look to God through his word and prayer to the promise of God is that wisdom will be granted to us. In James 1:5-8 it says don't be like a wave of the sea that's driven and tossed by the winds--so going back and forth--but instead ask God for wisdom and faith with no doubting, and you'll be given it generously. (I probably should have just read the verses--would have been much easier to say). I feel that so many people, not just in high school that I'm around, but so many people I just encounter --friends and relatives and everything --they're going through life kind of like a ping-pong ball going back and forth trying to figure out maybe this is what's going to satisfy me--oh no that didn't work, so let me try this. Along the way there's these big peaks--that was really fun, that was great, or that was really disappointing and let me try this instead. Those are the trials and errors in life, and they have a lot of disappointment and lots of consequences, not just time, but the true consequences. Going straight to the source of real and actual truth is a far better way to gain wisdom, to find wisdom than the way most people do it.

So, the book of Proverbs. I looked through it. I used one of those books where you look up a word and it tells you all the verses that go with it. If you look at "wisdom" or "wise" you get more than 50 verses; if you look up "fool" you get more than 40 verses. If you look up any other words that are related, it quickly balloons to well over a hundred verses. For me, I try to summarize each of these points. I read the verse, I wrote some

things down about each one. I really tried getting these together for four good points. My four quickly turned to seven and it kept going, and I was like, man! So I have four and I have some add-ons at the end. So the first one--Keep good company. Physically surround yourself with wise people. I'm going to read several verses. I'll tell you the chapter and verse. So if you are jotting them down that is fine and if you want to turn to it that's fine, but I will read it to you. Keep good company. Chapter 22 verse 17 says "Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise and apply your heart to my knowledge," so first off, listen to what I'm saying and-- one of the ideas that I really liked was-- apply your heart to it. Basically, invest your whole self into it. Listen to what I said and make it yours. Chapter 13 verse 20 says "whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm." I think most of these people were walking around in their day-to-day life and who do they walk with? Who do they spend their time with? I imagine these journeys being quite long, and if you're around someone who is wise, you have wise, good conversations, hopefully. But if you're around fools the whole time, they're going to be bringing you down, they're going to make you more foolish probably. Chapter 23 verses 19 through 23--it's a little bit long, but it says, "Hear, my son (sounds like what a father might say) Hear, my son, and be wise and direct your heart in the way. Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat for the drunkards and the glutton will come to poverty and slumber, will clothe them with rags. Listen to your father who gave you life and do not despise your mother when she is old. Buy truth and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction and understanding." So what are you really investing in? It's wisdom, instruction, and understanding. Those are the things that you should acquire. I like the way it points out a mother and a father. They've lived a whole life and they care about you, probably more than anyone else here in this world-- listen to their advice. Listen to them no matter how difficult it might be.

The second thing that I grab from the book of Proverbs was basically have humility. Some people go into a situation asking for advice, and they really don't want to listen to the advice. They go in--well, I already have all these preconceived notions--I already know what's right --I'm just asking you so that you can have a say in it, I guess. I don't even know why people ask for it then. But basically go into it with humility. Realize that you don't know everything, realize that your cup is empty, and hope that the person is going to fill it up. I think that's just the way to do it. Chapter 3 verse seven says, "Do not be wise in your own eyes, fear the Lord and turn away from evil." Do not be wise in your own eyes--I like that. Chapter 12 verse 15 says, "The way of the fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice" so listen to advice, have humility with this. Don't rely on yourself and your own understanding, your own knowledge, really rely on other people. Have some humility along with it.

The third point that I gain from the book of Proverbs was to seek, to thirst for, and to store up knowledge. Chapter 10 verse 14: "The wise lay up knowledge, but the mouth of the fool brings ruin near." So what is this person storing up? Instead of storing up grain in a silo or anything like that, they're storing up knowledge. They're gaining this and they're keeping their hold of it. Chapter 18 verse 15 says, "An intelligent heart (again it talks about heart) acquires knowledge in the ear of the wise seeks knowledge." So again we're linking this to the heart, and really knowledge is what we're seeking

after. So what are you seeking after ? What is your goal? If you're running this race that I was talking about, what's at that finish line? What's there?

The fourth thing I gleaned from the book of Proverbs was to receive and internalize what you hear. Don't just hear it and let it go, but really hear it and then do it. We talked about that already today and we'll talk about it again. Chapter 8 verse 33 says, "Hear instruction, and be wise, and do not neglect it." So once you have this wisdom, act on it. Don't just have it and then let it go and act however you felt before you have this wisdom, act on it. Chapter 10 verse 8 says, "The wise of heart will receive commandments, but a babbling fool (I love this) a babbling fool will come to ruin." Someone who really listens and puts it in their heart and takes it in and really internalizes it, is going to be the wise person here, but someone who sort of hears something and they have to have an immediate retort or they have to say something or change the subject --they just didn't really even hear it-- is going to start babbling or talking in order to receive some glory. Chapter 21 verse 11 says or ends, " when a wise man is instructed, he gains knowledge." So there are certain times in our lives that we are receiving instruction; there are certain times when we are supposed to be gaining something. And I think going into situations, knowing that this is the time for instruction will help you because maybe you'll ask the question ahead of time and prepare yourself- - say okay I'm going to learn something. What is it that I'm going to learn and when you leave, okay what did I just learn? Okay here it is. And if you can walk away and say I learned absolutely nothing, maybe listen better next time. I don't know--do something different .

So those are the four points. I said to keep good company, to be humble, to seek and thirst after knowledge, and then to receive and really internalize that knowledge. There's also some additional points. You can notice wisdom just in the world around you. Proverbs chapter 6 verse six talked about the ant --basically what can you gain from just seeing the ant and the way the ant works. It talks about a father's instruction throughout, especially chapter 4 verse one. Also it says that wisdom is life-giving; it talks about it being a fountain of life in chapter 13 verse 14. It talks about how reproof is life-giving in chapter 15 verse 31. Also that there is a certain quietness about wisdom, a certain quietness, not again this babbling fool I was talking about, but there is a certain quietness. And I like chapter 17 verse 20 it says, " even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise. When he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent." This is something I think I need to work on. Oftentimes I sort of see a situation--people are sort of quiet--a quiet room is a little awkward for me, so I'll sometimes just spout out something in order to get something going. Sometimes I don't really think about what to say first and that's problematic. So instead, take a moment, think about what really needs to come about in a conversation --what will be really useful? What would be really life-changing?-- and then say something. If you don't have anything good to say, then don't say anything at all. That's my mom speaking there. So the book of Proverbs is great for short little juicy-- I just want to call them-- sausages of wisdom, something really small and nutritious and good for you, I guess. I also enjoy the book of James for this, and I quote the book of James a lot through my sermons and in this one as well. I guess it is also closely related

to Jesus' wisdom that he shared in Matthew chapters 5 through 7 called the sermon on the mount.

So let's turn to Matthew chapter 5 and we'll kind of look through the sermon on the mount. He told this to crowds of people. They sort of knew that Jesus was coming; they'd heard of Jesus. They've sort of heard some things about him; they were kind of trying to figure things out. Jesus, seeing the crowds, went up on this mountain and he talked to his disciples. I sort of imagine this crowd sort of getting a little closer and sort of like listening-- this guy is pretty smart and sort of thirsting after what it is that this guy is saying, and he talks for a long time. It doesn't say anything about the crowds saying "ah not this again" and sort of leaving, but they really stuck around. What he was saying was wise, and they could tell that. It says at the very end that he was speaking with authority, that the scribes weren't even having. We're there in chapters 5 through 7; obviously, I'm not going to read the whole thing, but we can glean a lot from studying this. I think going over all these chapters and just reading through them--there's so much. I'll give you a quick sample of what's there if you don't remember. I had 13 major points. There are clearly more than that. I'm just going to say them right now: Jesus told us there to lay up treasure in heaven, not on earth; to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; to avoid being misled by false prophets; to stay on the straight and narrow way that leads to life; to build a life to fulfill the law and the prophets; to receive what good gifts God desires to give his children; that our lives will not be judged by some inconsistent standard. He tells us the necessities of life are provided for. He tells us the treasure of treasure that cannot rust or be stolen, and he tells us of the acts of righteousness that are well pleasing to God; Jesus tells of the righteousness that surpasses the scribes and Pharisees, and he describes the beautiful attitudes, the Beatitudes, for every Christian to emulate.

After all this wisdom, Jesus draws his sermon to a close with a parable, so he tells all these things, speaks with this authority. He draws this to a close with the parable of the wise man and the foolish man, so turn with me there, Matthew 7 verses 24 through 27. The source is fairly familiar. There's a song about it--I'll try not to sing the song as I'm doing this--but there's a song that we even tell our children because this is such a basic truth. Yet those basic truths are sometimes those things that we really need to hear as well. So Matthew 7:24-27 it says, "Everyone then who hears these words"--Jesus just gave the sermon on the mount--"hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain fell and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand, and the rain fell and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against the house and it fell and great was the fall of it." I like how much emphasis was put on the end of this--" great was the fall of it." So let's examine the verses. Jesus had just given his sermon on the mount, so the things that he's talking about. Did you just hear what I talked about? Did you just hear chapters 5-7? Did you hear all this stuff? If you heard them, that's great, but hear them and do them. So let's examine this. The houses represent our lives and the building of them points really to our priorities in life. What is our foundation in this life? What do we seek

after? What is most important? What do we listen to? Each of us is building a life, a life that will respond to the many ups and downs that come our way through the seasons of life. We must build our house, our life upon some sort of foundation. This foundation is really whatever teachings, whatever doctrines, whatever philosophies to which we subscribe. It may be a philosophy or doctrine of the world; it could be one that we've developed ourselves, or it could be from God. Really, the choice is ours. What is it that we're basing our foundation on? The foolish man, he took several shortcuts, he did what was easy, he just said "Oh, here's some sand. I'll build a house there." Done. It was quick. It was easy. How many times do we do what is quick and easy? Oh, this will get the job done; this is good enough for who it's for; it's fine; I'll come back to it later. How did that turn out for the foolish man?

The wise man, knowing that storms would come-- I think that took some knowledge ahead of time-- knowing that storms would come, he dug down beneath the sand. He dug down deep. I was reading some things that said maybe 6, maybe 8 feet down in the sand. I don't think that would be an easy task to do--and he built upon the bedrock that he found down there. This would take some know-how. How would he know to do this? Probably he talked to somebody ahead of time; he didn't just start digging before he built a house. It took some know-how; it took lots of hard work, lots of hard work. And for us, when we are taking these things, we're going to need some know-how, we're going to need some hard-work. And maybe he even had the help of others. So when we're trying to do things, we might need the help of others. It was clearly not the easy way of doing things, the way the wise man did this, but it was the sure way. What I want you take from this is what type of builder you can be-- what type of builder are you today? What type of builder are you going to be this year? and from here on out?

Let's talk about the storms. Storms will come. If we look at it, life is basically a cycle-- we're either preparing for a storm, we're in a storm, or we're recovering from a storm. That's basically what life is about and storms can be literal. They can be tornadoes and fires and hurricanes and floods and whatever else, or they can be figurative. They can be illnesses. They can be the loss of loved ones. They can be financial setbacks of any kind. But how we respond to such tragedies is key. It reveals the quality of the building that we did all the way down to the foundation. Will we be able to stand strong, willing to continue without despair? Will we keep our faith and rely on God or will we be emotionally devastated? Will we blame God, turn away from him and go our own way? To illustrate this, I remember watching the news a lot. I don't watch the news a lot anymore, but in 1998 I was watching the news a lot and hearing a lot about some of the natural disasters that were going on in Florida. There were killer tornadoes. There were devastating fires; there were destructive hurricanes and impacted the lives of so many people and such disasters proved to reveal much about the building contractors. There were all these things coming up like months after this. Through the news we learned that some builders basically didn't do their job. They were unscrupulous; they were failing to build according to code and many of the homes and buildings were destroyed. Some of you might remember Hurricane Andrew destroyed thousands of homes in South Florida, yet in an area where the wreckage looked like a war zone, there was one house that remained standing. A reporter basically went to this person asked some

questions, asked the homeowner why his house had not blown away and he replied, " I built this house myself. I also built it according to the Florida State building code. When the code called for a 2 x 6 roof trusses, I used to 2 X 6 roof trusses. I was told that a house built according to code could withstand a hurricane. And it did." So what do we gain from these stories? One thing you can't judge a foundation by the look of the outside of the house. Likewise, you can't judge and see really what's going on in each one of us. A person who seemingly has everything together, everything is going good for this person on the outside, may not have their lives up to God's code. That's why it's crucial what we fill our lives with. We have this empty cup. What are we putting in that cup? What are we filling it up with? Man's wisdom or God's wisdom? What is filling us up?

Finally, obeying Jesus' words, the wisdom of God, is the key to withstanding the storms. We have the book of Proverbs. We have Jesus' teaching. We have the whole Bible for us to look through, to study, to glean from. And being a hearer only is not sufficient, such as foolishness, such as being on a shaky foundation. As James writes one is just deceiving themselves. James 1:22 through 24 says, "but be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves for if anyone is a hearer of the word, not a doer, he's like a man who looks intently at his natural face in the mirror for he looks at himself and goes away, and at once forgets what he was like. Well, that's just silly. The reason you look in the mirror is to make adjustments, to know what's going on, to gain some knowledge about yourself. If you just go away and don't react to it, don't change, what was the point of looking in the mirror? Like the unscrupulous contractors, the storms will reveal the true qualities of one's character. Instead, what we need to do is do what Jesus says. Those who follow God's wisdom, as Jesus delivered it, will be those who withstand the storms because their lives, their houses, are built upon a rock solid foundation. That's what we need. As James went on to write in it is the doer who is blessed by what he does. James 1:25 says, " for the one who looks into the perfect law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."

The choice is ours. What will we choose? The wisdom of the world seems sweet to us. Yes, even if it satisfies just for a little bit, it's only for a very short period of time and it's going to fade away quickly. It's false. The wisdom of God is sure, it's long-lasting, it's safe, and it leads to eternal blessings. And what else? It has a depth and an richness to it and you can spend an entire lifetime taking more and more and more and more from it, and you will be more than satisfied. The satisfaction will never end. You can spend an entire lifetime seeking God's wisdom and never get enough. It is the way to go. The choice is yours. Choose wisely. At this time, we're drawing to a close. If this congregation can help you make any decisions or help you in anyway, please come forward as we stand and sing.