

Welcome

Welcome by the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus!

Thank you all for joining us. We want this to be a safe place for you to know and experience God’s love and grace. If we can help you on the next step of your spiritual journey, please speak to me after the service.

We’re in a series, seeking ways to find Joy in Simplicity and Generosity. Today, we will explore what God says about being wise, giving you some tools to help look at your personal goals and practices. Our goal is to help you to follow Jesus, wholly and completely, so you will live with freedom, not fear. God’s perfect love chases away fear, so we can live with confidence and peace.

Peace of Christ (Nepali) Khrīṣṭakō śānti

Prayer

Lord of hosts, we marvel at your faithfulness. You keep your promise to remain with us by your Holy Spirit. Help us to trust you in every difficulty. Empower us to share the good news of your abiding presence with our neighbors and friends. Accept all that we give – our prayers, presence, giving, service and witness. Use them to build up this community of faith so that we may serve others with the love of Jesus. We pray in his name. Amen

Message: Spiritual Wisdom

What is wisdom?

Google defines wisdom as a desirable quality. It’s “the soundness of an action or decision with regard to the application of experience, knowledge, and good judgment.”¹ Those are great words, but difficult to understand or follow. Wisdom is different from knowledge, which involves information. Have you ever heard the term “common sense”? That’s a good way to describe wisdom.

What does it mean to be wise, to live wisely? Last week, we looked at ways the American Dream has become the American Nightmare. We considered two problems - affluenza and credit-itis, which reflect a deeper, spiritual issue: our unwillingness to trust God. In a nutshell, the more we try to keep up with our neighbors, borrow against our future, enjoy more than we can afford and indulge ourselves, the more we’re robbed of our joy, made slaves to debt and desire, and kept from following Jesus wholly and completely.

The Bible tells us we need a heart change. We need to pray for God to help us be who God wants us to be, free from temptation and things that bind and limit our lives. When we seek God, we begin to sense a higher calling, a call to live simply and with generosity. There are benefits: as we free ourselves from debt and unhealthy desires, we’ll find ways to make a difference. Life has meaning. We’re able to do good in Jesus’ name when we let God work in us. That leads us to wisdom.

The Bible has a lot to say about *sophia*, the Greek word for wisdom.

The book of Proverbs is filled with wisdom sayings. Proverbs 3:13-14, “*Happy are those who find wisdom, and those who get understanding, for her income is better than silver, and her revenue better than gold.*”

Wisdom is priceless. It’s the gift Solomon asked God for when he became king over all Israel. Proverbs 4:7-8 teaches, “*The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever else you get, get insight. Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her.*” That’s a bit of a “you’ll know it when you see it” answer, but there’s a truth revealed there. Wisdom is gained with practice.

¹ www.google.com

Pastor Greg Laurie uses an illustration related to flying to teach wisdom. Most of us have been on an airplane and heard the flight attendant briefing. You know how it goes: “In the event there is an emergency, oxygen masks will drop from the ceiling. If you’re traveling with small children, put your oxygen mask on before you put your child’s mask on them.” That’s wise advice. Why? It’s simple: if you aren’t getting enough oxygen to think clearly, you could pass out before you help your child, which would be bad for both of you.

In the same way, if you aren’t doing what is important spiritually, then others aren’t going to listen to you. If you don’t read your Bible and pray, why would your child want to? If you don’t go to church regularly, why would your spouse want to? If you don’t follow good financial practices, how would teach them to someone else? If you never serve others with love, when would those who are lost ever see you loving your neighbor? If you never invite anyone to church or share your experience of God, how would we know you’re spiritually mature? Today’s generation is very aware of the ways we adults don’t “walk the talk.” Authentic, genuine faith is a requirement. Without it, we’re quickly classified as those who embody the “do what I say, not what I do” mentality and are then ignored.

We grow spiritually when we’re active in our faith, when our love for others is seen in what we say and do. That’s what generous living means. In the 1997 movie “Good Will Hunting,” Matt Damon’s character – Will Hunting, is brilliant and gifted, but he lacks experience and direction in life. God gives all of us spiritual gifts. Everyone: those sitting here, our spouses, children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and extended family members and friends have gifts. What we often lack is the experience and direction to use those gifts to make a difference in our life and the lives of others.

The Bible makes an important distinction regarding wisdom. James 3 (paraphrase): *“There are two kinds of wisdom: earthly, unspiritual wisdom and heavenly, spiritual wisdom. Earthly wisdom shows up when we are envious, selfishly ambitious, surrounded by chaos and indulging ourselves in unhealthy things. Spiritual wisdom shows up when we are, first of all, pure – when we keep our mind, body and heart*

free from unhealthy, immoral things. What follows is peace, gentleness, a willingness to yield. We're full of mercy and good spiritual fruits, without partiality or hypocrisy.”

Earthly wisdom teaches us how to do unhealthy things well.

We learn how to get ahead ... even if means we need to lie, cheat and steal or use “trash talk.” Earthly wisdom teaches us the end justifies the means. Spiritual wisdom teaches us how to do healthy things well. We “walk the talk.” We learn how to be honest, loyal and honorable, living with dignity and respect. We learn how to be disciples of Jesus serving God in all ways. The means and the end are important in the kingdom of God. The way we follow Jesus impacts our witness to God's love.

How do we find spiritual wisdom? Proverbs 2 gives us a lot of help (paraphrase), *“If you accept God's Word and value the commandments, listening with your ears and heart, asking and seeking insight, God will give you wisdom, knowledge and understanding. Then you will understand what it is to be right with God, to seek justice and know God's promise. Your heart will be filled with wisdom, your soul will be content and you will be guided by prudence and understanding.”*

The source of wisdom is found first in Scripture, second in the teaching and traditions of our church, third in the experiences of God we share with each other, and, last but not least, in the way we reason and make decisions. When our conscience is informed by God's Word, we're being wise. When we make decisions in this way, we can be sure we're on the right track. Rather than going with our gut, acting on impulse, we're diligent. Proverbs 21:5 affirms this, *“The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to want.”*

I have a question: if wisdom is so desirable, why don't we all have it? Why do we hold back? I believe the answer is related to fear. We're very aware of our limits. We only have a certain number of years of life. Our bodies are subject to illness, disease, overuse and exhaustion. Our minds can be forgetful, confused, tired and filled with anxiety. We're a walking encyclopedia of faults, fears and feelings. And, because we often feel like we're alone, we worry and we're afraid.

Do your fears ever get the best of you?

Pastor Joel Osteen tells a story about a time when worry got the best of him. He lives in a Houston suburb with his wife and children. A few years ago, the city decided to put speed bumps in their neighborhood. Joel and his wife thought it was a great idea, since they had young children. That is, until they did some research. They found out the city was going to put up a big sign warning people about the speed bumps. It looked like the sign was going right in the middle of their front yard!

As you might expect, this was a cause of some worry and concern.

Joel thought about it and thought about it until he finally came up with an answer: a tree. He'd plant a tree in their yard to block the view of the sign from the house. The sign would be there, but they wouldn't have to look at it. So he went out and bought an 8-foot tree. He planted it in the middle of their yard, a very odd spot. He diligently began to water and feed the tree, worrying about how it would grow, how tall it would get and whether or not it would really block the sign. It became known as “the worry tree.” Two years later, the city finally came through and put in the speed bumps. By then, the tree was 10-feet tall. However, to Joel's surprise, the city put the sign in another yard, four houses down! All that time, money and effort was put into worry for more than two years. And it was all for nothing.

Joel says, “Are you waiting for your circumstances in life to line up just right before you'll have peace? Well, you may be waiting your whole life! The truth is, life is full of ups and downs. Every day we have opportunities to get upset, be worried and live offended. Many people live life worried each day, but most often, these worries never even happen. Instead, all worry does is rob us of our joy, creativity and focus. Jesus tells us there's a better way to live in Matthew 6:34, *‘Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have enough worries of its own.’* We're not supposed to go through life weighted down by worry, stress and anxiety. You can make God bigger than your circumstance. As you release your cares to God and enter into God's rest, you'll live life with greater joy, ease and fulfillment.”²

² www.joelosteen.com. Message #684: Peaceful on Purpose

What’s your worry tree? Is it your job? Illness? Money? A family member? Those are all valid reasons to be concerned. But what good comes out of worrying about them? Jesus tells us we can’t add even one inch to our life by worrying (Matthew 6:27). Too often we try to live with one foot in the past and one foot in the future. Live in the present, today, here and now. The same God who was for us in the past and who will be with us for all of eternity is present with us, here and now.

Place your cares and concerns on Jesus. He’s ready and willing to help us. Jesus said, *“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”* (Matthew 11:28-30). Jesus was born as a baby in a manger so God could show us how deep God’s love is for us. God became human to show us his willingness to be with us when we’re fearful, when we suffer, when we hurt and when we die. God is present with us when we’re fearful and vulnerable. That’s when God’s perfect love is strongest, because it drives our fears away, giving us comfort and *“the peace which passes all understanding”* (2 Cor. 12:9; 1 John 4:6). That’s spiritual wisdom.

How does spiritual wisdom apply to our lives? Spiritual wisdom is a key to living life with peace and joy. Those with spiritual wisdom have a purpose in life. They aren’t adrift, looking for direction but seem to always land on their feet. One of the questions we often ask ourselves is, “Where did all our time and money go?” Wisdom helps us understand and to make good choices. Those with spiritual wisdom know where their money is going and how they spend their time.

Sadly, the more we have and make, the more we tend to waste.

It seems the more secure we become, the less we worry about spending here and there. We waste a dollar on this or that, and we forget where it went. Money just seems to flow through our fingers. We’re not as careful with our time as we should be. There are many ways we waste time, but I’d bet most of us spend too much time in front of the television, on our smart phones or in other ways, like playing video games or on social media.

I’m not condemning any of those things. They aren’t bad. It’s not necessary to eliminate these things all together, but we should think more carefully about how we spend our time, money and abilities. For example, are we spending time really talking to our family members? There are a number of studies showing most spouses speak to each other about their relationship for less than thirty minutes a week. I’m not telling you this to make you feel bad, but to give you an example of how we need to rethink our priorities and where we might choose differently.

Let’s begin by setting worthy goals. Being able to accomplish the greater purposes God has for our lives requires some measure of planning. Taking the time to set goals related to our lives and our finances is crucial if we’re to become wise stewards of our God-given resources. We invite you to pray about your life purpose and goals, and then identify two short-term financial goals, two mid-range financial goals, and two long-term financial goals aimed at helping you to accomplish your broader life purpose. At least one goal in each category should relate specifically to our faith.

God wants us to be clear about our purpose and calling. Society tells us that our life purpose is to consume: to make as much money as possible and to spend it. The Bible tells us we’re created to care for God’s creation. We’re created to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We’re created to care for our families and those in need. We’re created to glorify God, to seek justice, and to do mercy. God gives us time, money and abilities to help us fulfill our calling. Let’s use our resources to help care for our families and others - to serve Christ and the world through everyday opportunities. We have a life purpose that’s greater than our own self-interests, and how we spend our God-given resources reflects our love of God and our neighbor.

I invite you to seek wisdom in your relationship with God.

The covenant relationship we began at our baptism spans five aspects of our life. They’re listed on the inside of your bulletin. Please turn there and read with me what it says below the date: “we dedicate to God our prayer, presence, giving, service and witness.” I invite you to pray for God to give you insight and wisdom this week, so you may more fully live your covenant with Jesus and share God’s love with the world.

Let us pray,

Lord, help me to be the person you want me to be today. Take away the desires that shouldn't be there, and help me be single-minded in my focus and my pursuit of you. Help me to follow you and be transformed by your love so I may serve others with that same love.
In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Psalm 19:7-10 (NRSV)

The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the decrees of the LORD are sure,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is clear,
enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;
the ordinances of the LORD are true
and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey,
and drippings of the honeycomb.

1 Timothy 6:9-12 (NRSV)

But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Proverbs 2:1-11 (NRSV) Lesson on Wisdom

My child, if you accept my words
and treasure up my commandments within you,
² making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to understanding;
³ if you indeed cry out for insight,
and raise your voice for understanding;
⁴ if you seek it like silver,
and search for it as for hidden treasures -
⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;
⁷ he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
he is a shield to those who walk blamelessly,
⁸ guarding the paths of justice
and preserving the way of his faithful ones.
⁹ Then you will understand righteousness and justice
and equity, every good path;
¹⁰ for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
¹¹ prudence will watch over you;
and understanding will guard you.

James 3:13-17 (NRSV) Two Kinds of Wisdom

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. ¹⁵ Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. ¹⁶ For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.