

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Get Wisdom

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Well, welcome to all seven of our campuses, as well as our extended family listening via podcasts. This weekend we kick off a new series titled, "Get Wisdom" not to be confused with Get Smart, love the TV series, whole different deal. Okay. Over the next six weeks, we're going to unpack the book of Proverbs, but let me give you a little bit of a backdrop, a little bit of a back-story before we do that. This weekend, of course marks the 50th anniversary of one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind, unbelievable. That Moon shot took the collective wisdom of more than 400,000 hidden figures. Astronauts like Michael Collins who went all the way to the moon but didn't get to set foot on it because someone had to stay in the car, right? Engineers like Jerry Griffin who had served as a flight director for all of Apollo's manned missions, mathematicians, Katherine Coleman Goble Johnson who helped rendezvous the lunar module with the command module. You've got computer scientists like Jack Garmin who memorized every alarm code on the Apollo 11. And then there are the seamstresses like Eleanor Foraker, who of course were the ones who were very nervous when they saw Armstrong and Aldrin hopping, skipping and jumping on the moon because they needed their seams to hold tight, and they did. Listen, every one of those hidden figures stood on scientific shoulders of previous generations and how apropos that the crew of the Apollo 11 would take a piece of wood and a piece of fabric from the Wright brothers' original airplane to the moon with them. In fact, if you just go over about a couple blocks from here, you will see it at the Air and Space Museum. Long story short, the moon landing took the collective effort of a nation. It took the collective wisdom of a generation, but the genesis, oh, the genesis was a dream. May 25th, 1961, here's the crazy thing, president Kennedy was just going to send over the report and let a clerk read it to whatever members of Congress wanted to hear it, but instead the day before decided to cast a vision to this country that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal before decade is out of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth. The rest is history, mission accomplished 50 years ago today.

The book of Proverbs, it represents the collective wisdom of a nation, the collective wisdom of a generation. Now, King Solomon is the key contributor, but there were quite a few collaborators including a mystery man named King Lemuel. This anthology of axioms and idioms, it has stood the test of time, it is as relevant today as it was 3000 years ago. Now, the book of Proverbs is broken up into 31 chapters and I might note that a chapter a day might keep the doctor away. Here's a thought, a whatever day it is, what if you just read that corresponding Proverb? I think it would be a great way to supplement this series to supplement your Bible reading plan. In fact, I kind of liked to think of Proverbs as a probiotic. I won't ask for a show of hands, but I know a few of you take some probiotics and in my thinking Proverbs is a daily dose of wisdom that fills some of those nutrient gaps that may exist in our spiritual diet. The book of Proverbs, it's a collection of wisdom and not unlike the moon shot that we celebrate this weekend; the genesis was a dream and that dream was the defining moment of Solomon's life.

First Kings three gives us the back-story. It says; *"At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, (imagine this) "Ask what I shall give you."*

Now listen, if you had a dream, if God asked you that question, what would your answer be? I think for many of us we have no idea what we want. Can I push a little bit right here? Listen, you have gotta set goals. You have got to establish priorities. You have got to define success. If you don't know what you're aiming at, how in the world do you know if you hit it, you will not accomplish a hundred percent of the goals you do not set if you do not establish priorities, plenty of people who will do it for you, yes? And I would say that if you don't define success for yourself, we usually then default to a cultural definition, and so let me lay a little bit of groundwork for the rest of this series.

Two things up front, if you're taking notes, one, the title of this book is Proverbs, not pronouns. Let me explain what I mean. There is an action orientation to these Proverbs, wisdom is not disembodied data. Wisdom is not ivory tower information, it's not book smarts as much as it's street smarts. Jesus said it this way, wisdom is proved right by her children, in other words, the proof is in the pudding. Spirituality is practicality, so knowledge is a noun, but I think wisdom is a verb. At the end of the day, God is not going to say, well thought, well said, well planned, good and faithful servant. No, there is one condemnation, commendation that a very different thing right there. There's one commendation and it's this well done, good and faithful servant. Now, no doubt well done is a derivative of well thought. You've got to measure twice so that you only have to cut once, but faith without works, wisdom without action is dead on arrival. Think of it this way, that Saturn five rocket that took those astronauts to the moon it came with a guidance computer that mapped their 240,000 mile journey to the moon. Guess what? That guidance system was worthless on the ground. Until it took off there was no value to it. I think that's true of wisdom. Wisdom is a verb, a proverb. It's not passive. It's proactive. Helps us get where God wants us to go.

Second observation, the title of the book is Proverbs not promises. Bible's a big book actually 66 books, credits include more than 40 human authors, including farmers and fishermen, poets and prophets, doctors, lawyers, kings. You've got the whole combination written on three different continents, in three different languages, over 15 centuries. Some books are penned in prison, like Paul's letter to the Philippians, others penned in palaces like the book of Proverbs. But the thread that ties the whole thing together is the simple fact that these writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Second Timothy 3:16; *"All scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness."* Second Peter 1:21 says that these writers were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Here's the amazing thing; the same spirit that inspired these writers as they wrote inspires us as readers as we read. Now, here's the catch, you have to read it the way it was meant to be read. And in order to do that, you have to understand some of the original context, and that's where Hermeneutics, fancy word comes into play. It's a science of interpreting scripture, and there's a simple rule of thumb, texts without context is pretext. If you take it out of context, it's gonna mean something different. When you walk into a bookstore, there are lots of different sections in that bookstore. You don't go looking for fiction in the history section right? No, there are different literary genres and the same is true of scripture. You've got law and

history and prophecy, you've got gospels and epistles, but what we're looking at over the next six weeks is something that is a part of what is called wisdom literature. Now, it includes one of the oldest books in the Bible called Job, it includes a rather esoteric book titled Ecclesiastical by the same Solomon. But then you have this crown jewel if you will, the book of Proverbs and that's what they are proverbs not promises.

And let me tell you why I'm taking a few moments at the outset to make this point. Proverbs 22:6 says, *"train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it."* I know a lot of parents who've interpreted that Proverb as a promise and paid the price. These Proverbs are principles, not promises. They are guidelines, not guarantees. Why? Because there is a free radical called free will that alters the algorithm of life. I think one of my favorite Proverbs used to keep me up at night made no sense to me because it seemed contradictory. Proverbs 26:4 says, *"answer not, answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him."* Very next verse, *"answer a fool according to his folly, lest he wise in his own eyes."* Well, which is it? Well, if you think in Cartesian categories, if you are a dualist, if you think in either or ways then these seem like conflicting statements that really test the validity and integrity of scripture, but I would suggest there is both and wisdom that is binary. Job 11:6 says it this way, *"True wisdom has two sides."* In other words, truth is found in the tension of opposites. Where there is no tension there may be no truth. Here's the bottom line. I think what the writer of this Proverb is saying is if you're dealing with a fool, you can't win. Doesn't matter either way, it's a lose lose proposition because their foolishness doesn't allow them to reciprocate your wisdom. You have to consider the source. That's why this has saved me so many times. If you want, just write this down, it's going to help you. A compliment from a fool may actually be an insult and an insult from the fool, oh, it may be a compliment. You have to consider the source.

All right, back to King Solomon. In his dream, he asks for wisdom. He said, *"you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties."* He's in over his head. He's past his pay grade and so what does he do? He asked for wisdom. It says the Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this.

¹¹ So God said to him, *"Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself,*
¹² *I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.* ¹³ *Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings.*

Okay. If Will Smith were to pop out of Aladdin's lamp and offer you three wishes, I just had this sneaking suspicion that wisdom is not number one or number two or number three. The reality is we live in a culture that values 15 minutes of fame, more than a lifetime of accumulated wisdom. We prize youthfulness, the ancients honored age, they esteemed gray hair. They valued hard, earned hard learned wisdom. Why? Because they understand that wisdom is the key to everything else. Listen, wealth without wisdom is a disaster waiting to happen. Yes? Knowledge without wisdom, power without wisdom, something's going to get used and abused. If I had to reduce the book of Proverbs to a least common denominator it would be the two word title of this series 'Get Wisdom'. And so that's where we start this weekend. So simple, so succinct, so significant. We'll put it up on the screen.

Here it is, Proverbs 4:7 *"The beginning of wisdom is this: get wisdom"*. Now, I kinda liked that because I happen to like the Department of Redundancy Department. Okay. And I think what Solomon is doing is doubling down and making sure we understand the significance. It almost sounds like circular reasoning, but he says whatever you get, get insight. Listen, there is no school like the old school and wisdom is the pearl of great price. The NIV says; *"Though it cost all you have, get understanding"*. The question is how do we do that? And that's really what this series is about. And so this weekend I want to talk about three or four things depending on how much time we have. And I want to talk cause there are a hundred ways to get wisdom. But let me talk about a few of these ways. And if you're taking notes, you can jot these down.

Number one, listen to your life. About 25 years ago I picked up a book by Frederick Buechner called 'Listening to Your Life'. And in that book he says this, if I were called upon to state in a few words, the essence of everything I was trying to say, both as a novelist and as a preacher, it would be something like this. Listen to your life. Now, I know lots of people and you do too, who have followed Christ for 25 years, but they don't have 25 years of experience, they have one year of experience repeated 25 times. Why? Because they aren't listening to their lives and because of it they're making many of the same mistakes. Listen, failure is poorly managed success and success is well managed failure. Okay, it's about learning the lessons that life is trying to teach us. It's about cultivating the character in these present circumstances that we're going to need in the next chapter of life.

I had a professor in Grad school loved asking this question, what makes you cry or pound your fist on the table? In other words, what makes you sad? What makes you mad? He said if you know what makes you cry, what makes you pound your fist on the table you are getting very close to a God ordained passion. Now I would add one thing to the mix, what makes you smile? In other words, what makes you mad or sad or glad? Frederick Beachner said it this way, the voice we should listen to most as we choose a vocation is the voice we might think we should listen to least and that is the voice of gladness. He said, what can we do that makes us the gladdest? I think this is psalm 37 this is God giving us the desires of our hearts. And he said the place where our deep gladness meets the world's deep need. Oh, *that* is a place where you will make all the difference in the world.

This past week, Lora and I watched the four part series When They See Us. It's the story of the Central Park five who were found guilty of a crime they did not commit. It was gut wrenching. It was heartbreaking. And then we watched the Oprah interview afterwards with Ava DuVernay, the director, as well as the now exonerated five Yusef, Kevin, Raymond, Antron and Korey. And I mean, this is what goes through your mind as you're watching it, how do you endure false accusation? How do you overcome a verdict that robs you of your reputation that robs you of your freedom that robs you of your teens and your 20s? Hold that thought.

Many years ago, Dr. Martin Seligman, who at one point president of the American Psychological Association Association wrote this classic book called 'Learned Optimism', and in that book he talks about something called an explanatory style. He says, explanatory styles, the manner in which you habitually explained to yourself why events happen. He says, your way of explaining events to yourself determines how helpless you become or how energized you become when you encounter everyday setbacks as well as momentous defeats. Two people can go through the exact

same circumstances and one becomes bitter in the other becomes better. Same circumstances, I would submit different explanation. Here's what I know for sure; your explanations far more important than your experiences.

I think a man named Joseph is exhibit A. He was the victim of injustice, not unlike the exonerated five. He did nothing wrong, in fact, he did what was right and then spends 13 years in an Egyptian dungeon. How do you survive that? Well, I think it's an explanatory style that we find in Genesis 50:20. Listen, you could come up with a lot of explanations for this experience. Could you not? And I think too at the top of the list would be God has forgotten me or God has forsaken me, but here's what Joseph says to the brothers who sold him into slavery and then left him for dead, he said, you intended to harm me but God, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done the saving of many lives. God does not play checkers, God plays chess. He was setting Joseph up, but it took a setback to get him where he needed to be and the process somehow Joseph does not grow bitter, grows better. He could have given up, but refuses to call it quits. This is someone who evidently listened to his life and learned the lessons and cultivated the character to become second in command behind the Pharaoh himself.

Now, one more thing Second Corinthians 10:5 take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ, lots of ways to do this, but one of the best ways that we're just kind of bringing this to a very practical level is journaling. Now I know journaling, not everybody's jam, right, but I don't know how you capture thoughts in another way cause the shortest pencils longer than the longest memory. Let me take two minutes and just kind of show you a little bit of how I journal. So, I generally get a mole skin, I like a little bit oversized and I generally do something kind of like this with the pages that are unlined, to each his own. And what I do is for me it's a gratitude journal. It's a prayer journal, it's a dream journal and then it's a journal journal, I vary. If I meet with you and I don't have my journal with me, you should be insulted. Listen, since I read Dale Carnegie's how to win friends and influence people and read something that Ralph Waldo Emerson said, every man is my superior in some way and in that I learned of him. I have always tried to enter into every conversation, every situation with a journal handy so that I can write down what I need to learn from you. And so what I do is I fill that journal with thoughts and then once that journal's full, then what I do is I go back through it and I circle anything that I think maybe I should try not to forget this, that I need to think a little bit more about this. And what happens then is it goes into a second journal, it's a double entry. And then at the end of the year, what I do is I go back through my double entry journal and make sure that I am listening to my life. And I'm going to tell you why, because I have a tendency like you to forget what I should remember and remember what I should forget. And so what I need to do is make sure I'm listening to my life learning the lessons, cultivating the character.

Alright, number two, how are we doing? You doing good? Now I know I'm talking fast and that's because it's when I have more notes than I know I can get through, okay, so we're going to keep trucking. Number two, surround yourself with the right people, so you've got to listen to your life, but then you have to surround yourself with the right people.

Now in 1979 Andy Meltzoff stuck his tongue out at a baby. What happened next rocked the world of infant psychology. The baby stuck her tongue back out at him. I love it. He deserved it. Now Meltzoff did some groundbreaking studies that came to an amazing conclusion. Check this

out. Imitative behavior in infants begins as early as 42 minutes. Now, neuroscientists have since traced this imitative tendency to a unique set of neurons called mirror neurons and those neurons fire whether you are performing a certain action or if you're simply observing someone else performing that action. That has some profound implications and ramifications. Do you know what it does? I actually was thinking about it, it jogged my memory to back in Sunday School when I was a little kid. {singing} Be careful little eyes what you see. Be careful little eyes what you see {end singing} Now, I don't know about the whole theology of the whole song, but there's some truth to it. And listen, this is why Romans 12:3 is so hard, "*do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world*", that's hard. Why? Because we are surrounded by culture and often we consume it without any kind of filter, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Now, let's break this down a little bit more. Proverbs 12:26 Solomon says, "*the righteous should choose his friends carefully for the way of the wicked leads them astray*". I think what Solomon is saying is show me your friends and I'll show you your future. You have to surround yourself with the right people. Now, does that mean surrounding yourself with people who are just like you? No it does not. In fact, that's not a way to gain wisdom, that's a way to insure ignorance, okay? You have to put yourself in situations where you are with people who have differing opinions, who don't think like you do, right or wrong, you got to get out of your comfort zone. Why? So that you can gain wisdom. And the goal of those conversations is not winning an argument; it's understanding the other person. Listen, I think this is where it starts. I think what I'm trying to say is wisdom; it's not homogeneous, okay. If all you ever do is hang out with people who are like you, I think you're one dimensional, love ya, but I think you're one dimensional.

Let me switch gears a little bit. According to the science of social networking, if you have a friend who smokes, there's a 61% greater likelihood that you'll smoke. If you have a friend who becomes obese you're 45% more likely to gain weight over the next two to four years. And if your friends are happy, there's a greater likelihood for you to be happy. Now, I'm not sure we needed a scientific study for that one, right? But there is a ripple effect that these studies have found. Check this out, if you have a friend who has a friend who has a friend that has happy - three degrees of separation. And again, I don't know, I don't know exactly how social scientists do this. Okay? But according to this one study, there is a 6% greater chance of you being happy. Now, that may not seem like much, but another study found that a 10% raise in salary results in just the 2% bump in happiness. What I'm getting at is the people we surround ourselves with have a much greater impact on us than we are aware of consciously, sub consciously, and we don't just impact our friends. Check this out for better or for worse, you are impacting your friend's friend's friend. That's the kind of influence that you have.

So what does that have to do with wisdom? Well, if you want to get better at tennis, what do you have to do? You got to play against someone who's better than you are, that's the only way you're going to get better. I don't care what we're talking about. You know what I try to do? I tried to bump into different people's anointings, that's what I call it. And I try to get around people that stretch my faith, that just when I think I'm dreaming big, make me feel like maybe I'm dreaming a little too small. You've got to get around those people, but here's the thing that takes humility because it's putting yourself in a place where you're with people who are a little bit better at what they do than you do. And then it takes some intentionality.

Can I tell you why we put so much effort into small groups at National Community Church? It's because, yeah, we want to grow bigger and bigger cause we want to reach more people, no doubt. But we also want to grow smaller and smaller at the same time through small groups. Why? Because that's where disciples should have and that's where the life change happens. Listen, spirituality is a team sport. You cannot get where God wants you to go all by yourself. Even the Godhead represents relationship, Father, Son and Spirit in this beautiful triad.

Let me share one of the turning points of my life and I'm, I'm just dropping things a little bit this weekend and hopefully something's landing. When I came up with my first life goal list, and I probably would have actually been early thirties, I didn't do this out of the gate. I would have to say that that life goal list was really all about, are you ready? Me, myself and I. Something happened, I realize that achieving those goals all by my lonesome wasn't all it was cracked up to be. And so I added a relational component to just about every goal that I set. Why would I just run a triathlon when I could run a triathlon with Parker and cross the finish line together; swim the escape from Alcatraz with Summer; raft, the Colorado River with Josiah. And why would I want to go to the top of the Eiffel Tower by myself when I could kiss my wife? Know what I'm talking about? I would go so far as to say this, the goal isn't even the goal anymore, it's the relationship. It's not about getting somewhere, it's about how am I growing with the people that I love around me in the process. And so you need to choose your friends wisely and this is where you're going to need the discernment of the Holy Spirit. I want to be really careful right here because some of you need to lose a friend or two while continuing to love them. Listen, if they are tearing you down more than you are building them up, in other words, if there's more negative influence coming this way than positive influence going that way, no one's doing anybody any favors, you're not helping them, they aren't helping you. There might be a season where you need to establish some boundaries.

But then at the same time, I want to say not just choosing friends wisely, but let me take it one step further. 24 years ago, I had a failed church plant on my resume that was about, it, had a couple of graduate degrees, but not much life experience. And that's when two people saw a little bit of a potential in me. Bob Roden and a guy named Dick Foth, recognize that name? And they invited me to be a part of a group of young leaders who would spend two days with the two of them and they downloaded wisdom. I was like, I've gotta spend more time around them. Well, its two years later, Dick and Ruth Foth would be part of this core group of 19 people. And you know, for years I called Dick a mentor and then one day I apologized because I realized that he was so much more than a mentor. Let me frame this Biblically, First Corinthians 4:15 says, you may have countless instructors in Christ, but you don't have many fathers. Paul says, I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel. That's how I feel about Dick; I think that's how Dick feels about me. And sometimes I'll playfully say that I'm 17% Dick Foth. You know, I hope that percentage keeps going up, stick with me, okay.

But you know what happens over 25 years of friendship and mentorship and father-ship? You start thinking like that person, start loving like that person, you start praying like that person. You maybe start preaching like that person maybe you start leading that person and so here's what I want to say. Some of you are like, that sounds great, but how do I find my Dick Foth? Well, I think for starters you need to look around you because there might be someone in your life that's right there, but you have to take a step. In fact, here's what you do, set up a meeting

with them and tell them that you want them to mentor you the rest of your life. No, no, no, let's back off a little bit, okay. What you do is you set up an appointment and have coffee together and you see if God might be orchestrating a relationship and listen, if you don't know where to start, we've got this thing called Freshmen at the City, we'll kick it off again in the fall. And I want to say thank you because there are a lot of NCC's who have taken on this mantle of being a spiritual father and a spiritual mother and they are making a difference in hundreds of people's lives, so grateful for that.

Now, if you're a millennial or gen z let me may offer a little exportation, your day is going to come. And I was one of those impatient twentysomethings that like, I want it to happen yesterday, but can I just say this? I think one of the best ways to go after the dream that God has put in your heart is to serve someone else's dream. Maybe even in your twenties, maybe even into your thirties. You know how you learn leadership, you get around a leader that you actually respect them, you love them, and you learn from them. And so you gotta just kind of get your radar on and say, God, who is that person? And then if you're a part of this church and you're in the third quarter or the fourth quarter of life, I think what I would remind you of is that success is succession. Listen the true measure of Elijah's success was not 14 miracles. No, the true measure of success was that his successor, a guy named Elisha performed 28 miracles. He wasn't intimidated by Elisha's success. No, he was the one like, praise God. God is taking the Gospel further than I ever could of. Bottom line, listen, leadership, discipleship is growing fruit on someone else's tree and I have no doubt that there's someone that you need to make a difference in their life.

Alright, I'm going to close with this real quick, number three, ask God for supernatural wisdom. James 1:5 says this. *"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to you."* You just do what Solomon did, you ask for it and God loves to give wisdom. In fact, did you know Ephesians three says that his intent was that now through the church, that's you, that's me that the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms? How amazing is that? Can I remind you this weekend that wisdom has a name, three names, that wisdom is a person, three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Listen, God doesn't just give us a map, praise God for the Bible, but God gives us a two for God, somebody who dwells within us, who guides us, who empowers us, and who gifts us with what, with a spirit of wisdom and revelation.

I'll give Dick the last word, I remember him sharing a moment where he was preaching, he's preached for 50 years, he said this had never happened before. He said, he's in the middle of a message and he feels this sense that there's someone who is putting some pieces in place to make a very bad decision. And so he stops preaching from his notes and he says this, there's someone here this weekend, and this wasn't at NCC, it was at another church, but said, there's someone here who has set themselves up to have an affair. The pieces are in place and you are planning on making that decision today. Don't do it. After the message a middle aged man comes up to Foth wraps his arms around his neck and says that was me. Thank you. Can I tell you what that is? First Corinthians 14, it's the word of knowledge, it's a word of wisdom, it's a prophetic word, it's super natural wisdom that goes beyond conventional wisdom that is ours for the asking and God wants to give it to you.

This week my nephew, Sam had a little car issue. I've never been confused for a car mechanic. But he's staying with us this summer and so I felt a little responsibility. Now, listen the first time I drove my first car I ran out of gas, kid you not? And the first car, I didn't know you had to change the oil. And I remember, I can't remember, it was right before, right after Lora and I got married, but we had had a rental car, we were at our in-laws home and I couldn't get it started. And I was so embarrassed, like they're waving to us, waiting for us to take off and like, I just can't get this start. And so finally, like my father in-law comes over, gets in the car, I get out and he starts it right up and he says, you have to put your foot on the brake. I'm not car mechanic but I know a mechanic. I have a mechanic who took that Hondai apart and knew exactly how to get that starter working again. Are you picking up what I'm throwing down? Listen, listen to your life. Listen to it, okay. Surround yourself with the right people. But at the end of the day, ask for supernatural wisdom and God will give it to you in Jesus' name. Amen.