NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Meet My Friend, Wisdom

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Well, I had the privilege of launching and leading our first multisite campus, it was over at Ballston Mall in Arlington, Virginia. And yeah, it was fun, we had this young congregation and it was an honor to have my mom a part of this launch. And so, you know, she would every week come and she would sit in the same seat and she was about 25 years older than the next oldest person that would come on Sunday. So I would get up and its young congregation, I'm this young pastor and I was trying to, on a weekly basis in service, I was trying to impart wisdom to this young congregation. And so then service would end and people would begin to congregate around my white haired, gentle spoken mother over in her seat. And I love introducing people to my mom because she had this motherly and grandmotherly affect. She had this calming influence on the people that would come and would talk to her, and people just enjoyed and they were drawn and they were almost attracted to her. And she knew things like Proverbs 15:1 *"a gentle answer turns away wrath"*. She knew  it because she lived it, and she had people that had come to her angry and upset and frustrated over time, and she lived through those moments and she learned to know what the faithfulness of God was. Proverbs 16:3 she could tell you about, *"commit to the Lord, whatever you do, and he will establish your plans"*. She could encourage people because she had some hurt in her past. She had some hurtful people come into her existence and slow her down, ruffle her up sometimes, but she knew that even when her plans were thrown off a little bit, that God's plans were not stunted and she had something to say. But here's the thing she didn't have just the statement of wisdom to share with somebody that would come to her. No, she exuded wisdom. She was the presence of wisdom to those that were around her.

The book of Proverbs is a collection of short wisdom statements and sayings and poems, but when we read Proverbs one through nine we see that wisdom is not just a collection or statement of sayings, but it acts as a divine being that the scripture would call lady wisdom. That wisdom isn't just sought in a statement or in a saying. It's sought in seeking out a person and a friendship with a person. Proverbs 1:20, 21 says,

*"20Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the street plaza she raises her voice;*

*21at the head of the noisy streets she calls out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:"*

In Hebrew she's called *Chokmâh,*in Greek she's called Sophia and English she would be called wisdom. And she's found in Proverbs one and three and four and seven and eight and nine. And she seems to be kind of all over the place and she's this fascinating character that we see and she is the essence, she is the presence of wisdom within the book of Proverbs.

Let's take a look a little bit more and let's get to know her. Proverbs chapter three verse 13 through 18

*13Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding,*

Verse 14 *she is profitable and brings you return*

*Verse 15She is precious*

*Verse 16 She brings long life and honor.*

*Verse 17 She is pleasant and brings peace.*

Listen, I want this kind of friend, right? This is the kind of person I want to know and I want in my life.

Verse 18She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed.

We had a tree farmer that actually attended this location for awhile and you know, I'm not particularly interested in trees, not, my passion, you know, but I like this guy, he's my friend. And he's passionate about trees and he's planting them, he's cultivating them, he's learning about them. And so in my friendship with him, I've learned that the life of a tree is not just self-contained, it's not just for itself. The life of a tree is for everything around the tree, everything it touches, everything. A circumference around that tree is affected by the life of that tree. And so the tree, you know its root systems goes out into the soil and it breaks up the soil and it works and it intertwines together with other things. And then it provides shelter and it provides shade to the grass that's underneath it to be able to grow. And then the cows come along and they're able to graze on the grass that was growing underneath the tree. And then we get whole food and we get that really good organic grass fed beef. You know what I'm talking about? And this all works together for our good. Does it not? But here's the thing all of these things work together it's a cycle that is created of giving life all around the tree. This is Lady Wisdom, she brings life to all that is around her honor and blessing and peace comes to everything that she touches.

So the question is not just how do we get wisdom, but how do we get to know this person of wisdom? I love the way my wife said it. Nina said, it's not one singular act of overcoming that leads us to wisdom it's a life pattern that we have to develop. You'll pray, you'll read God's word, you'll seek counsel, then you'll courageously try to walk and live it out and you'll grow in wisdom. We're cultivating a relationship with God, with wisdom.

Our friend over here, Peter loves to quote Einstein. Einstein said, I want to know God's thoughts, the rest are details. So we can get to know God a little bit and we're going to get to know wisdom a little bit more today. And we're going to take a look at Proverbs chapter nine and we're going to read through the first six verses. We start in verse one it says,

*1 Wisdom has built her house; she has set up its seven pillars.*

*2She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table.*

*3She has sent out her servants, and she calls from the highest point of the city,*

*4    “Let all who are simple come to my house!” To those who have no sense she says,*

*5    “Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed.*

*6Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of insight.”*

This person called wisdom is not hiding off in the corner, not doing her own thing; she's not up in our ivory tower away from everyone else enjoying what she has cultivated. No, this person of wisdom, Lady Wisdom is generous, is welcoming, is hospitable, invites you in, invites you to experience a party with her. She goes out into the street and she collects and she received these things but it's not for her. She actually collects things so then she can go out into the street and give them away. Everything she has is not for her. Everything she has is for the betterment of those around her.

We tend to equate wisdom with knowledge. We think of wisdom as something to achieve, right? In our western competitive mindset, we acquire knowledge. Knowledge is something that we go get and it's something that's almost a competitive advantage for us isn't it? Okay, I've got this knowledge and now I can do this or I've gained this knowledge, I've acquired this knowledge, so now that's how I got my job, that's my worth, what I know or that's why I was hired in the other person wasn't or that's why I was promoted because I have this amount of knowledge about this specific thing and it almost becomes our distinctive, doesn't it? It becomes our uniqueness. It becomes a thing that separates from others and it becomes a very personal thing. Knowledge is for you, but wisdom is not just for you. Wisdom is found when the whole of those around you are improved. It's a rising tide. Wisdom always remains active in love.

What's your point? My point is you don't get wisdom, the receiving of wisdom, unless you're giving it away. You don't get wisdom, the intellectual understanding of wisdom, you don't get wisdom unless you're giving it away, unless you're pouring it out and you can't keep wisdom, you can't hoard wisdom to yourself. No. It actually grows in the giving and the giving away of it. Isn't that what we read all over scripture? You are graced so that what? So you can grace others. Second Corinthians one, you are comforted so that what? So that you can comfort others. Proverbs three we just read it. You are blessed so that you might give generously to those around you. This is the story of the scripture God pours out to you so that you might pour out on somebody else. This is the story of Christ and his goodness and the good news, that's the story of the Gospel.

I wonder how many of us here today have received a blessing from God at some point in our life, right? Are you with me today? How many here today have received some grace from the Almighty? Come on, that's in our story. Think past, think back into your history, where has God's shown up? Where has he taken you out? Where has he redeemed you? Where has he saved you? Where has he brought you up? Where has he given you life that you couldn't find it anywhere else? We look back sometimes and sometimes we got to give a right now praise for a back then blessing, right? We think and we thank, but we can't fully be thankful just by thanking, can we? Its Matthew chapter 18 it's Jesus tells the parable about the man who comes to the king and the king forgives his great debt. Then the man goes out and he finds someone who owed him a minor debt and he won't forgive that debt, so he comes back, it's in verse 32 and Jesus calls him evil, he calls him wicked. Gills Exposition reads, he calls him an ungrateful creature.

True gratitude happens when you re-gift what you have been given. True life in Christ happens when you start seeing your fruit on somebody else's tree, right? All that God has done in you is not just for you, no, when you live life in the Spirit and you produce fruit, think of an apple tree. You know those apples are not just for the tree itself. They work to replenish the tree, but the apples are for somebody else's enjoyment to come along and enjoy the fruit of the spirit within you. Isn't that true? But listen, it's not just so somebody can enjoy the fruit no, the seeds in that tree are actually then planted and the fruit from one tree is the seed for another tree to rise up and give its own fruit off. So our fruit on somebody else's tree is the end goal. God pours into us so that we might pour into somebody else.

So in the middle of this Proverb series, can I turn things upside down just for a minute today and say, this is not just about how we get wisdom, it's about how we give wisdom. How are we living a life of generosity, of giving away? We're going to keep pressing in here from the very beginning. God's chosen strategy to bless the world, to bless all of humankind, to restore humanity was to pour into us and for us to pour into those around us. He chose to co-mission with us.

Look back at Genesis chapter 12 verses two and three. God says to Abram,

*2“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.*

*3I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*

God doesn't just bless us for us, we know this, God blesses us so that... (where ya at? I know you know where I'm going here.) God blesses us so that we can be a blessing; you know this more than I do. God pours into us so that we can pour out onto somebody around us.

There's an interesting study that was done called 'blesses versus converters'. I wanted to just say blesses versus curses, but I didn't say it. It's blesses versus converters and it's about two different groups, missional groups that go out and groups of missionaries they go to Thailand and one goes with the sole intention of evangelizing, the other goes with the sole intention of blessing. And the results were, were interesting. So, the blessers the study finds that the blessers of course added large elements of social value and social good to the area, to the community, to the city around them. The converters did not; they didn't have much of an impact in terms of social value. But here's the interesting part. It's the second part of the study that I found interesting. The blessers reaped 50 times the amount of people coming to a faith in God, than the converters. Then the people who their sole intent was to evangelize others, the brass tax is this to reach out and help people find their way to wisdom, to find their way back to Christ we've gotta be blessers, we've got to receive from God and live a life of blessing that pours out blessing onto others.

A pastor friend of ours, Dave Ferguson, he breaks down the word blessed in a very practical way and I just want to upload it to us today, something for us to think about. If you've got a pen, could I ask you just to jot these things down? It's really simple, but I think maybe it's a great reminder and a guide to your week this week to just step out and try to be a blessing to others. The goal is just simple its to do one of these things every single day. Okay. And it's simply spells the word blessed. So we're just gonna walk through this together. It begins with prayer.

Prayer is the birthplace of vision in our lives. It's the birthplace of the mission of God in our hearts to incarnate it where we live. It comes, God reveals through prayer. Let me tell you a quick story. Adam and Amy Hammond, they began to pray years ago that they could be a blessing. And as they prayed, God drew them to pray over those in our city who didn't have anybody in their life. And so then they began to dive into foster care and they a through DC127 began to foster in the city and they fostered three different kids. And it was awesome because all three kids, they were able to help reunite with their birth parents. And it was a beautiful story where they became a part of somebody's story. In fact, one of the kids' mothers asked them to be a godparent; they're godparents of this child that they fostered. And they were just a part of helping that parent to get her high school diploma when her family didn't show up to the graduation, they were there and they're a part of their extended family.

So they're fostering kids in the city. Well, years ago they fostered a little girl named D'Maya (sp?) and it was weeks and then it was months and it turned into years and they learned to love this little girl. And after a couple of years of being in the system with no option to reunite with the birth parents and then encouragement from counselors, they started to consider and to pray, okay, maybe we could be permanent family for little Maya. And you know, I don't know if you work much with DC government, but sometimes it's a little challenging, right? And so they're working and they're working hard and it's difficult and it's kind of a mess if we're honest and just frustrating. And they just come to a point of desperation not long ago, about a month and a half ago, it was over at our consecration service, our worship and prayer night, and they're there that night and they're praying and praising God and desperate. We actually took pictures that night and there was this one picture where Amy all around her, it's almost like just just black and dark and then there's her just desperate before God. And so they're praying that and then they go outside and in the circles that we had drawn, we ask people to write prayers in those circles and they wrote, we pray that this would be the D'Maya's permanent church home, just a desperate prayer. Everybody else, she's like, everybody else was praying for everyone else and completely unselfish and I don't care I'm just going to be selfish for a moment and this is my prayer, God and she writes that. The next day she gets a call, she gets a call the next day and we as a church got a miracle the next day that no longer is a DC agency the guardian of Maya, but now Maya has a home. And now she has somebody to call Mommy and Daddy permanently, she's got an address and God showed up in their life. But listen, can I tell you the second part of the miracle? That's not the end of it, they understand that they're not just adopting a little girl, they're adopting a birth mother, a birth father, they're adopting a whole family and one of the first people to call them so happy was the birth father. I'm so happy that is happening and the birth mother's in great relationship and has actually started attending National Community Church and is a part of our church body now. This is the work that God is doing. Where did it start? It started through prayer. Their mission started with a prayer and it ended with a family.

Come on. If you're going to give God praise, go ahead and give him some praise.

We got some right now praises for some back then blessings but we got some right now praises for some right now blessings too, don't we? When you enter God's presence with praise, he enters your circumstances with power. Prayer is both how you discover your mission and it's how you accomplish your mission at the same time. Try praying on the metro or on your bike, on your way to work, try a prayer, walk in your neighborhood. You know what, we received a dog a couple of years ago that was not my choice, but I love this dog. And every night I walk that dog but it's turned into a great thing for me because every night I have a prayer walk with our dog and I've learned to prayer walk our neighborhood, 11:00, 12:00 PM at night, our neighborhood's getting some prayers over it. I pray over my neighbors. Do you know I pray over some of you guys? I pray the Lord prompts names in my spirit and I pray for those things and I find myself praying all over the place in these walks. And even one night I was over by Indigo that incredible Indian food place over on K Street and so I'm walking by and they had received some vandalism one night. And so the owner was sharing with me about it so I've redirected my prayer walk, so now I prayer walk and I prayer watch at the same time over their restaurant. But here's what happens when you pray in the Spirit, God will open up your eyes. There will be no shortage of opportunity to bless those around you. When you step out in prayer, it begins with prayer; prayer is the start of a storyboard of open doors to bless those around you. It begins with prayer.

And then second, learn to listen. James says, be slow to speak and then quick to listen. Listening's kind of hard, isn't it? And actually it is very physically hard. A University of Minnesota studies show that immediately after this sermon you will already have lost half of this sermon. So I'm going to speak twice as long today, okay, terrible idea. Part of the problem is that we speak at an average of 125 words per minute. Yet our brain has about 13 billion cells within it and it's so much more complex than that. And so, our brain is working so much quicker than we're able to receive information. And so sometimes our brain actually gets a little bit bored and inattentive. So in their studies they found that there's four mental activities that good listeners engage in. I just thought this was interesting, so I wanted to share it with you because I want to grow as a listener. And here's the four things.

* Number one, the listener thinks ahead trying to anticipate where the dialogue will lead. Remember where I tried to lead you there a moment ago and you just left me hanging in, right? So I'm a little worried that you're listening tonight.
* Number two, the listener weighs the evidence that is being shared.
* Number three, periodically the listener reviews and summarizes what has been said.
* And then four and this one really caught my attention. The listener listens between the lines in search of meaning that is not necessarily put into words. Paying attention to nonverbal communication, facial expressions, and gestures and tone to see if it adds meaning to the spoken word. You know what I call that? Discernment isn't that spiritual discernment?

When we're in prayer, when we're listening, we will hear things in between the lines. We're a city full of talkers, aren't we? This city's hot isn't it, air, I mean, but it's hot. We all love to talk in our city. But what if we were listeners? What if we decided to listen and let me ask just a probing question or two to help us assess if we're really listening. What are you learning from those that God has placed in your path? So if you had to write it down right now, take out a pen and a paper and you had to write down what you're learning from those that God has placed in your life, what would you begin describe? Are we gaining wisdom from the story of our neighborhood? Our neighborhood has ups has downs, it has a crazy past to it, it has incredible opportunity. Are we listening? Are we listening to the wisdom and the history of our city? Just think about the amount of experts that we have in our city. Are we listening to the wonderful resources that we have in the city that God has placed us with?

In my year of mentorship with Dr Foth, one thing he taught me was that everyone is my mentor. If we really believe that every person is made in the image of God, then I can learn something about God through every person that I meet that I need to be a student of those that God has placed in front of me. Before you're ever going to be a blessing to someone you got to hear, begin to understand, are we listening to our city? Are we listening to those around us? So, pray for, listen to, eat with.

 2017 University of Oxford research led by experimental psychology department professor Robin Dunbar reveals the more often someone eats with others, the higher likelihood of happiness. I don't need a study to tell me that, right? You and me, we go over to Bonchon for some wings after service and we're going to be happy are we not. You know, we go over to Hill Country for some ribs, I'm telling you, me and you are going to be good friends. That just happens, I guarantee it will happen cause I just like you, I like food better than you, but I will like you if you're around the food, right? This is my favorite eat with, I'm really passionate about this one right here. One of the primary findings of the study though was the correlation between social eating and connection to their community. There's something about sharing a meal that leads to deeper level relationship and it leads to a level of intimacy and vulnerability that you don't find otherwise.

You know what I did though? The week after my dad passed away and I'm a young college kid and like to sleep in, got up at 6:00 AM that day, I still remember it and I went over to him.  I got up at 6:00 AM and I went over to McDonald's. Disgusting, right? It's our breakfast place and we used to get up and we'd go get a hotcakes and sausage and on a daily basis we would read through the Proverbs. We would soak in the wisdom of Proverbs while our pancakes were soaking in that sugary syrup and the melted butter. I got an amen right there and now you're talking to me, right? Of course, it would hit me later in the day when I was at basketball practice and I was like, Dad, what are you doing to me? You're killing me right now. I got pancakes; they don't go anywhere, do they? They sit in your stomach. But here's the thing. I learned to appreciate that and listen, I now, if we go to McDonald's, there's not a single item on the menu that I'll buy. I just have a block there, but except for hotcakes and sausage because I grew up learning faith, being invested and finding relationship over the context of some hotcakes of a meal. There's something that happens in us when we eat with, when we share life with somebody around us, there's a level of intimacy that has reached that isn't otherwise reached. We see it all over the scriptures too, don't we? Proverbs nine Lady Wisdom throws a party for a city. It's Luke Chapter 14 the theology of the banquet. Its gusto semantics, the understanding that tastes speaks to culture and history and values. We learn something about people when we eat their food with them. Invite a neighbor to your house for dinner. Grab a coffee with a coworker and then do something when you do ask questions, get curious. Get curious about their past or their history or how they're wired or maybe about their family and doors will open up. Pray for, listen to, eat with, serve.

Serving is the heart of Christ, isn't it? We truly know Christ when we know how he lived his life, he lived a life of service and he modeled leadership by serving. It's how his life was ended before coming back to life, by serving those around him and by serving us. Serving when you serve somebody else, it'll change your life and it'll change their life at the same time. I like the way John Ferguson said it. He said listening before the serving insures that the serving is about the person being served and not about the person doing the serving. Serving should be regular practice if we want to lead like Christ and if we want to live like Christ, who do you serve this month?

If you've prayed for someone, if you've taken time to listen, if you've had a coffee, if you've served somebody, chances are that that'll lead to this moment, which is you'll have the opportunity to share your story and not just an opportunity maybe they would have already asked you at that point, Hey, what's your story? And you'll have the chance be ready in that moment.

Can I just pause here for just a minute to say, I want to encourage you to take some time to learn how to tell your faith story if you haven't done that before and you can talk about it after service today, and maybe one simple question that might help, what's the difference Jesus has made in your life? Just start right there. What difference has Jesus made in me? How am I different from before I knew Jesus till after I knew him and what has changed in me overtime? Just start there. Talk about that with a friend today and cultivate your story. Understand the story of grace that God has written in you because God will use that. Simply sharing your story about God's grace in your life is an apologetic that nobody else can share. Do you know that? The story that God has written through your life, it's a gift that has just waiting to be given to somebody around you.

Be in prayer, listen, eat, serve, story. Here's the challenge. Do one of these missional practices every day. You can do that, can't you? You can do that. Just take one. Maybe you pray for somebody today. Maybe tomorrow you grab a coffee with somebody. Maybe it's listening to somebody the next day, but do one of these things every single day. May God grant us the courage to pour out, to grace, to bless our neighborhood, we're not just here to build a church. We're here to bless a community, right? We're here to throw parties like Lady Wisdom threw in Proverbs chapter nine. You know what's interesting about this passage that we see in the first six verses the story of Lady Wisdom telling the story, or excuse me, throwing this party in and throwing a meal but right after this passage, there's actually a discussion about folly and folly actually has a meal as well. And there's one difference between the two meals though Lady Wisdom's meal, it ends by people receiving food and receiving life. The second meal from folly ends by people dying.

And here's the reality of these applications that we just walked through. You can put these applications in practice and they can actually make no difference in your life or in the lives around you if the Spirit of God is not at work within you. It's the spirit of God who enlightens, right? It's the spirit of God who pours out meaning and life and love and purpose and so we've gotta be seeking the spirit of God to fill us and listening to his voice. We can do all the listening and eating with others that we want, but unless we have his spirit at work within us, the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of God, he equips, he empowers. The love of God wants the best for us, the wisdom of God knows the best for us, but it's the power of God that enlightens revelation. It's the power of God that pours out grace and understanding and accomplishes everything that is previous before it. I don't have a great story about somebody evangelizing me. I got a lot of great stories about people who loved God, loving God and loving me and teaching me about the love of God. To share God, you got to know God and you have to get to know God. To know God you've got to cultivate relationship with him in prayer and in his word to share assumes that you have something in your possession. To get something from the Lord, you've got to be in him daily. You've got to enjoy his word. You've got to receive from him in prayer, cultivate God's blessing then give those blessings away.

First Thessalonians 2:8 I love this passage. "*We are privileged to share the gospel and our lives as well*". Sharing your faith is giving an answer. Sharing your life is living an answer. Fill your tank in the morning with word and prayer and be persistent in pursuit of wisdom and then get out and bless.

Ecclesiastes 11:4 "*Farmers who wait for perfect weather, never plant. If they watch every cloud, they never harvest".* We're not a church that sits around. Do you know that? I'm just going to let you know if you don't know that today, we're not a church that watches the clouds. We're not a church that waits for the perfect weather pattern. No, we're a church that gets up, we're a church that stands up, we're a church that has something to say about the redemption of Christ. We're a church that understands that we will love people when they least expect it and least deserve it. That God, he is not done, that his story has not ended, that he has not put a period at the end of that sentence has he? No. He continues to work. We are a church that continues to receive blessing and get up and get out. We're a church that grabs the handful of seed and starts throwing it around and cultivating and pouring out blessing on those around us.

It's Colossians chapter two, we'll end with this scripture. You guys can go ahead and come. Colossianshins two verses two and three.

*2 "My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."*

Amen.