

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Holy Curiosity

Dr. Mark Batterson

Well, welcome to all seven of our campuses. Well, thank you. And can I just say happy anniversary to the DC Dream Center? It was two years ago that the mayor came out and cut the ribbon. And listen, we are all about advancing the Kingdom of God. So we don't look back a whole lot around here, but sometimes you just got say, look at what God has done. We have an incredible Dream Team and then so many of you volunteer; you love and serve this city. And so maybe one more time let's give it up for the DC Dream Center.

When I was a senior in college, I did something I had never done before. I bought a book that was not assigned for a class by a teacher. This is that book, I don't know that I've ever shown it to you an 800 page biography on Albert Einstein and I think I fell in love with reading right around page 755, I think we have a picture of this. I'm going to put it up on the screen and here's what Einstein said. "The important thing is to not stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existence. One cannot help but be in awe when one contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries the merely comprehend a little of this mystery each day." Then Einstein said something that would become a mantra of mine ever since, five words "never lose a holy curiosity". I love the juxtaposition of those two words, Holy Curiosity, and that's the title of this message.

This weekend, wrap up a series on the book of Proverbs 'Get Wisdom'. Thanks to our campus pastors, our teaching team, amazing series. We've got one more download and so if you have a Bible, you can turn to Proverbs 25:2 and we will get there in a minute.

Two weeks ago, our family was vacationing in Keystone, Colorado. Can I show you a picture? So beautiful and I've got to say there's a little back-story to this picture. There it is, that's my daughter Summer. And check this out, her fiancé, Austin, unbelievable. My daughter's getting married. You pray for me. There is no way that I am not gonna cry, but a beautiful, beautiful picture. The base elevation and keystones, 9,000 feet but we hiked and bike above the tree line, which is about 12,000 feet. Absolutely breathtaking and I mean that literally. We never acclimated to the elevation and here's why. There's an equal amount of oxygen in the atmosphere at all elevations. But there is a decrease in air pressure at higher altitudes, which means we don't get as much of it. So at 12,000 feet, the effective oxygen percentage is 13.2%.

And I think that may be what triggered a flashback to my freshman year at the University of Chicago. And I have taken a lot of classes in a lot of subjects, but my all time favorite was a class in immunology at the University Of Chicago Hospital Center. One class in particular, our professor was describing the way hemoglobin facilitates aerobic respiration by transporting oxygen to the rest of the body. Pretty amazing. The heart pumps about six liters of blood through about 60,000 miles of veins and arteries and capillaries. Listen, the circumference of the earth, 24,873 miles that means there's enough blood vessels in your body to circle the earth twice. Come on, turn to your neighbor and say, you're amazing, right. Now, I remember walking out of

that class praising God for hemoglobin, we are fearfully and wonderfully made, Psalm 1:39. And at high altitude, the body acclimatizes by producing more hemoglobin. And so here's my point, at 12,000 feet, you have even more reasons to praise God.

Long story short, I walked out of that class with a conviction. Now, I'm not sure I would have said it this way back then, but here's the big idea. Every 'ology is a branch of theology. In other words, all truth is God's truth. I think dividing things into sacred and secular is a false dichotomy so, is thinking in categories like miraculous and not miraculous. Listen every breath we take and we take about 23,000 every day is a miracle in and of itself. And I don't think anybody could have said it better than Einstein. There are only two ways to live your life. One is as if nothing is a miracle, the other is as if everything is. Do I believe in miraculous healing? Absolutely, after 40 years of asthma, God healed my lungs. 1,148 days ago. I still can't believe it. But here's the deal, the healing process itself, everything from blood clotting, to cells regenerating, to bones repairing is no less miraculous. Here's what I'm getting at. It doesn't matter whether you're studying theology or psychology or biology, one of my new favorites, dendrology those sciences reveal a dimension of who God is.

Romans 1:20 says it this way.

"²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and his divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made."

Now, church made a mistake 400 years ago, an Italian astronomer named Galileo proposed a heliocentric solar system and the church called it heresy. What it really was was cognitive entrenchment. The church got scared, the church got defensive. And I think the powers that be a Pope Urban VIII in particular, turn allies into enemies. Listen, science is our friend. Okay? Science is our friend. Einstein said, "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind".

Well, one more fun fact and then we're going to unpack this Proverb. During my sophomore year of college, I transferred from the University of Chicago to a little Bible college in Springfield, Missouri. And that's where I would preach my first sermon in a homiletics class. And I look back on it and, and it's kind of interesting. I chosen an interesting text as the very first sermon I would preach. It's first Kings four and I'll put it up on the screen, it says,

"²⁹ God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore."

"³² He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five." But who's counting?

"³³ He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He taught about animals and birds, and reptiles and fish."

"³⁴ Men of all nations people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom."

Now, this text is probably the tip of the iceberg, but Solomon evidently was into philosophy, musicology, dendrology or anthology entomology, herpetology, ichthyology, and I think there are probably a few more, but I think it's fair to say that Solomon was the patron saint of holy curiosity. And it was that same Solomon that then penned these words in Proverbs 25:2. It said this;

"² It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings."

Here's the big idea of this weekend; God doesn't hide things from us, God hides things for us . Now, I don't think anyone gets any more excited than the Creator when we make new discoveries about his creation. Sometimes we fail to give credit where credit is due. We make the same mistake referenced in Romans 1:25 we exchanged the truth for a lie and we worship created things rather than the Creator. But that doesn't make what I'm about to say any less true. Listen, the astronomer who charts galaxies, the geneticists who maps the human genome, the oncologist who's trying to cure cancer, the oceanographer explores barrier reefs, the chemists who charts molecular structures and the theologian who studies God have one thing in common. All of them are simply fulfilling a very ancient instinct, and we'll come back to that.

In the 16th century, Francis Bacon the father of empiricism and of the scientific method, he had to say this about this particular Proverb, and I'll actually put this on the screen so you can read it.

"Solomon, although he excelled in the glory of treasure and magnificent buildings, of shipping and navigation, of fame and renown, yet he maketh no claim to any of those glories, but only to the glory of inquisition of truth; for so he saith expressly, "The glory of God is to conceal a thing, but the glory of the king is to find it out;" as if, according to the innocent play of children, the Divine Majesty took delight to hide His works, in the end to have them found out; and as if kings could not obtain a greater honour than to be God's playfellows in that game"

I rather like that. It's almost like God is playing hide and seek. It's almost like this cosmic game of cat and mouse and it is as old as Eden. Long before the Great Commission there was the Genesis Commission. God blesses Adam and Eve and he gives them a curious command and I mean that literally and figuratively. He says, "*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth*". Now, everything outside of Eden was uncharted territory. They could travel 24,873 miles in any direction and never see the same landscape twice. And God says, go fill the earth and subdue it. Now the Amplified Version says it this way. "*Use all of its vast resources in the service of God and of man*". In other words, God commissions us to take care of his creation. It's our job to steward every square inch and that is a tremendous challenge.

The Amazon you've probably seen is in great jeopardy right now. I think it's a soccer field and a half every minute that's getting burned down. And you know, sometimes out of sight, out of mind, it's so far away but listen, the Amazon rain forest, it covers about 40% of South American. And check this out, it produces 20% of the earth's oxygen. Okay, that's why it's called the planet's lungs. So this probably affects us more than what we think. So what do we do with that and what do we do with this Genesis Commission? Well, let me zoom in and then we'll zoom back out.

A few years ago, Dan and Chip Heath wrote a brilliant book titled *Decisive*. In that book, they talk about four villains of decision making, one of which is called narrow framing, narrow framing. Simply put, it's the tendency to define our choices too narrowly. It's thinking in either or categories. It's gotta be A or B, true or false, black or white. Now there's a classic example in John 9 the disciples encounter a man born blind and they asked Jesus a question that narrow frames the situation. They say Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind. And so they framed the problem as A or B. In their minds, it's gotta be one or the other. But Jesus comes at this from a totally different angle. He says, neither this man nor his parents sinned, so it's not A or B. He says this happened so that the glory of God might be displayed in him.

Now we're going to come back to that story in a little bit, but we do this all the time. We narrow frame people based on political party or personality type or past mistakes. We reduce them to a label. We put them into a category, but by boxing people in, we box God out and we end up playing the blame game. Who sinned, this man or his parents? Cause that's the category that we think in but maybe God is working out his plans and purposes in a way that we cannot discern with a dualistic mind. Wisdom is not either or dualism. Wisdom is both and Binary. Job 11:6 true wisdom has two sides. Listen, truth is found in the tension of opposites. I'll give you a classic example of the sovereignty of God and the freewill of man. Theologians have been debating this for 2000 years and usually end up in one to two camps, right? And so what happens when the unstoppable force, the sovereignty of God meets the immovable object, right, the free will of man. You want to know? No idea cause that's past my pay grade. But here's what I know for sure it's not either or it's both and. And I think one of the ways that we box people in and box God out is legalism. I think its adding human amendments to divine commandments. And we kinda think we're doing God a favor, right? But the reality is we're shooting ourselves in the foot. And that's what the Pharisees did with the Sabbath.

So let me go back to this story in John 9 Jesus heals the man born blind. I better footnote this real quick because remember every 'ology is a branch of theology. Listen, if you don't understand a little bit of neurology are not going to appreciate this miracle. And I'll tell you why, because this is not Jesus healing and astigmatism. This is a man who is born blind. That means there are no synaptic connections between the optic nerve and the visual cortex in the brain. This is synaptogenesis. This is Jesus' installing a synaptic pathway in a blind man's brain, are you kidding me? And that's why they say no one has ever heard of a miracle like this. And so Jesus heals this man and the Pharisees get all bent out of shape. Why? Because he does it on the Sabbath, which I kinda love cause he could've done it any day of the week, he just knew it'd be more fun to do it on the Sabbath. Let's kill two birds with one stone. Let's heal the blind man and confront the legalism and the dualism of the Pharisees, right? The Pharisees couldn't conceive of a God who would violate their Sabbath rules. They could not see the miracle through the trees. And so here's what happens with legalism. It boxes God out and it boxes people in until eventually, that box is so small, you're the only one who can fit in it.

Let me flip that coin. I think we also box God in and thereby box people out. Here's what I know for sure. Your God is too small. Newsflash, God does not fit within the confines of the cerebral cortex. If he did, he wouldn't be God. And so here's the challenge. In the beginning, God created us in his image, we have been creating God in our image ever since. And when we create God in

our image, what we end up with is a God who, I mean, first of all, it looks a lot like us, shocker. But, Tozer said this, when we create God in our image, we end up with a God who can never surprise us, never astonish us, never overwhelm us, never transcend us. Why? Because we narrow frame God. He also said a low view of God is the cause of a hundred lesser evils and a high view of God is the solution to 10,000 temporal problems. And GK Chesterton said, how much happier you would be, how much more of you there would be if the hammer of a higher God could smash your small cosmos? Wouldn't that be wonderful?

Well, let me push the envelope a little further. Isaiah 55 *"as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts declares the Lord."* This is ground zero. This is square one. This is my starting point theologically. God likens the difference between our thoughts and his thoughts to the expanse of space. And I'll give you the short version. Last time I checked the co-moving distance of the universe, 93 billion light years. Light travels 186,000 miles per second. That equates about 5.88 trillion miles per year. We can't even comprehend one light year, let alone 93 billion. And God says it's about the difference between your thoughts and my thoughts. So here's my thought.; your best thought on your best day is about 93 billion light years short of how great and how good God really is. Everybody at all of our campuses, you walked in this weekend underestimating God by 93 billion light years. Can we just praise God right now for that?

And so I think this is where holy curiosity comes into the equation. If you're into legalism, your world's getting smaller and smaller, God is getting smaller and smaller. But I think true spirituality; true pursuit of Creator God is fueled by this. If the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, then holy curiosity is its first cousin. One theologian put it this way; it's not the task of Christianity to provide easy answers to every question, but to make us progressively aware of mystery. God is not so much the object of our knowledge as the cause of our wonder. The more you know, c'mon, the more you know how much you don't know. It's why I quote First Corinthians 8:2 all the time, *"the one who thinks he knows does not yet know as he ought to know."*

And what does any of this have to do with following Christ? I think the answer is everything. The word disciple in the Greek language literally means learner. By definition, a disciple is someone who never stops learning, its loving God with all of your mind. It's cultivating a holy curiosity.

So how do we do that? Let me just share a couple of quick thoughts. Jesus said,

(Matthew 7:7&8) *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."*

Now, I think it's important to know these are present imperative verbs. In other words, keep asking, keep seeking. Keep now, you never get there and that's why we have this core value. If you stay humble and stay hungry, there's nothing God can't do in you or through you.

I remember coming across a study years ago by Ralph Smith. He found that children ask on average about 125 questions per day. Adults ask six, so somewhere between childhood and adulthood we lose 119 questions per day. Listen, I think we've got to get some of those back. Now the estimates vary, but Jesus asked a lot more questions than he answered. Now you know, it's tough to know which questions to include but I think asked about 307 questions in the gospels and he was asked 183 questions. Do you want to know how many questions he answered? Three, I think what I'm getting at is keep asking questions. May this be a church, a safe place where you can ask questions with integrity, with curiosity. Listen as soon as I'm omniscient, I'll let you know. But I would not hold your breath.

Now we're getting ready to kick off a small group semester. I think we'll have about 200 groups across our campuses. Now, all of them are an incredible way to just kind of continue to ask and seek and knock. But I know there may be some of you here this weekend who maybe you're curious about Christianity, but you have more questions than answers. Well, I think first of all, welcome to the club, right? But the other thing I would say is we have a group that I think is so perfectly designed for you. It's called Alpha. And I love the motto of Alpha. No question is too big, too small or off the table. And so keep asking, keep seeking. God is a rewarder of those who earnestly seek him. Hebrews 11:6 and then keep knocking.

And you know, I think, let me just share this little piece because remember this book I started reading and crazy, I'd never stopped. Now, part of it I think was a, well I read about 3000 books before I wrote one and two reasons for that. One is that I'm not naturally gifted as a writer, in fact an aptitude assessment basically said whatever you do, don't write. And so I knew I had to reverse engineer books by reading them if I was going to fulfill the calling to write. But, I also think it was just a holy curiosity. I'm pretty much interested in everything because again, I think every 'ology is a branch of theology.

And then I started pastoring this church and I was all of 25 years old. And so I, you know, I'd made 25 trips around the sun, didn't have a whole lot of life experience. And so I did a couple of things. One I tried to hang around people who maybe had been there and done that. And so Dick Foth kind of entered the equation and poor guy, I asked him a lot of questions and he patiently and wisely answered them. But then I came across something that I don't share very often, but it was a defining moment for me. I can't remember where I found it, but read that the average author about two years of life experience goes into a book. Now listen, there's an over and an under, I'm sure some books are worth far less and others are worth far more. But I did the math and I thought, you know what, at the end of this year, I'll be a year older. But if I read 250 books, I'll gain 500 years of life experience. And so when people asked me how old I am, sometimes I'll tell them 8,000 years old in book years. And I'm having a little bit of fun with this and I want to say this, I think the Bible is in a category by itself, cause you can't put a, that's eternity invading time. That's heaven invading earth. That's the spirit of God breathing into us in such a unique way. But I think what I'm getting to is this, learning is not a luxury. It's the definition of discipleship, its loving God with all your mind. And so I think my prayer for you, this weekend's pretty simple. May you never lose a holy curiosity.

I'll try to tie this in a knot, love the scene from Prince Caspian. Second book in the Chronicles of Narnia, children encounter Aslan, the lion who is the Christ figure in the book? And one of the

girls says, Aslan you're bigger. Aslan says that's because your older little one, she says, not because you're bigger, Aslan says I am not, but every year you grow you will find me bigger. So it is with faith. I think the more we grow, the bigger God gets. So just a little diagnostic question at the end of this message, at the end of this series; is your God getting smaller and smaller? Or is your God getting bigger and bigger?

Let me close with this, in the Hebrew language, there is no distinction between knowing and doing. If you don't do it, you don't know it. Knowing is doing, doing is knowing. Listen, the devil knows the Bible better than you do. In fact, he used it to tempt Jesus in the wilderness, that's crazy, right? It's not about knowing the Bible; it's about doing the Bible. Most of us are educated way beyond the level of our obedience already. We don't need to know more. Let's keep learning. We need to do more with what we know. And so I think talking about holy curiosity, looking at these Proverbs, I think the danger is that it can become a really heady exercise. And so I want to tell you a story, make a point and then we're done.

On Halloween night, 1900 a 10 year old boy named Ike wanted to go trick or treating with his older brothers. When his parents told him he was too young, he lost his temper, ran out of the house and punched an apple tree with his bare knuckles until they were bloody. Was sent to his room, was sobbing in his pillow. An hour later when his mom walked into the room, sat down next to his bed and quoted a Proverbs. Proverbs 16:32 *"He that conquereth his soul is greater than he that conquereth a city"*.

Self-Control did not come naturally to Ike. In fact, he ranked 125th out of 164 for discipline in his graduating class at West Point. And as his mother bandaged his hand, she told Ike that anger only injures the person who harbors it. At 76 years of age Ike would look back on his life and identify this moment, this Proverb as the turning point 66 years after the fact. He said, I have always looked back on that conversation as one of the most valuable moments of my life. Now, half a century later, he would be elected 34th president of the United States. Maybe even more significant he would serve as the Supreme Allied Commander during Operation Overlord. He would pull the trigger on D-Day, but long before Dwight D. Eisenhower could conquer the acts of powers a 10 year old boy had to conquer his soul. He had to put this Proverb into practice for many, many years before he was ready to do what he was destined to do.

I think it was General George Patton who said a good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan executed next week. Let me tweak that just a little bit. A good Proverb, violently executed now is better than a perfect Proverb executed next week.

Now listen, I hope you've read through the book of Proverbs during this series. If you haven't, you still can. The Proverb a day keeps the doctor away, but the goal isn't just to get through the Proverbs, it's to get the Proverbs through us. It's putting Proverbs 16:32 into practice day in and day out. It's conquering your soul over 66 years so that when the time comes, you can lead a country like Solomon or like Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Let me invite our worship teams to come and we're gonna close this weekend with a song. In 1225 AD St Francis of Assisi wrote a poem. He was cut from Solomon's cloth; he loved nature, loved nature's God, in fact, patron saint of animals. In 1225 he wrote a poem titled the Canticle

of the Creatures. It's one of the first works of literature written in the Italian language. According to tradition, he sang it as a song on his deathbed. Now the poem survived, the music did not. So in 1919 an English pastor named William Draper turned that poem into a hymn and titled it All Creatures Of Our God And King. Seems like an appropriate song for us to sing at the end of this message, at the end of this series. May you never lose a holy curiosity. Amen.