

**Christ Presbyterian Church
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Lee Hanssen
Proverbs: Pursuit
Proverbs 2:1-5**

Good morning, everybody. My name is Lee Hanssen. I work on staff here and serve as Director of Student Ministries. I always count it a privilege and get very excited to come and preach and be here with you, so thanks for having me.

Many of you know that I went into ministry right out of college but a few years after serving with Campus Crusade for Christ, about three years in, I began to get a little bit restless. Thinking that God had been calling me into full-time ministry and fairly convinced of this fact, I wasn't quite sure that that was what I wanted. Being a guy who needs to know for himself, I thought it might be wise to take a year off from ministry and venture out into the professional world. All I knew was that if I wanted to be a senior pastor and lead a church full of people where most spend their days in the professional world, this would probably be a good idea. But as I was beginning this venture, I didn't know exactly what I might want to do. I was passionate about Jesus, fitness, and worship, but I wasn't really sure what else I was passionate about.

As I'm looking for jobs, not much is coming up. I happened to remember that I had a friend who worked for a company that dealt with nutrition products for horses, so I gave her a call and asked if they might have any job openings. In fact, they did and she set me up with the owner of the company. His name was Sean. Sean was a very winsome man. Raise your hand if you know what that word means, winsome. Good for you. I didn't but I looked it up and it means very attractive in character and personality. And this guy was winsome. I mean, you just want to like this guy.

I'm young, I'm 24 or 25, and Sean pulls up in his fancy BMW and his really nice clothes and takes me out to this swanky restaurant. I'm sitting across the table from Sean and he is talking about all these great plans he has for the company. He talked about how they are looking at expanding their product overseas. He talked about how we are going to travel together and pitch our products in Europe and swing by the Eiffel Tower as we do these things. He's telling me I'm going to get to choose my office in the Twin Cities and pick out my own furniture. He offers me this salary that after living off of what I lived on in college and in ministry was at least quadruple what I had been used to. You can imagine that my eyes are getting bigger and bigger and bigger. As I'm ending my conversation with Sean though, I'm still not really sure what I want to do. Everything in me is saying, "Yes, I'm in," but I am smart enough to at least pump my breaks a little bit. I said, "Sean, I think I need some time to process and to pray and ask wise counsel."

I left the meeting and told Sean I would get back to him. I have a good friend in the Twin Cities who is a very successful businessman, and I'm fortunate enough that he lets me spend time with him. I called up my friend and said, "Can I come in and see you?" He said, "Sure. Absolutely." So I went to his office and sat across the table with him. I'm sharing my enthusiasm

and I'm giving my best pitch. I mean, I am excited. I am really wanting to win this guy over and bring him into the fact that this is an awesome idea. But as I am trying my best, David isn't feeling it. In fact, he looked at me and said, "Lee, this is a horrible idea. In no way are you qualified, and this man is incredibly irresponsible to even be offering you this job." Not exactly what I wanted to hear.

So what do you suppose I did? Do you suppose I left that office and called Sean and said, "Sean, thanks for the opportunity, but I'm really not qualified. In fact, I know nothing about sales or being a spokesperson for a company, much less your product or the health food industry." No! No! I called Sean and said, "Sean, buddy, I'm in. Let's book those tickets to California." This is a picture of us on my very first and only business trip on the beautiful bay of San Diego. But shortly after the oooh and the ahhhh of the travel and the salary and the pictures being taken and the exciting literature with my name shown as national sales manager, it all wore off. I found myself alone in a cubicle in Stillwater completely anxious, overwhelmed, and miserable because I knew that not only was I walking in complete disobedience, I had made a very poor and horribly unwise decision.

As I look back at that process and that situation, which I can laugh about now or I'll cry, what was really happening was that I was giving the appearance that I wanted to make a wise decision. I was trying to convince Sean that I needed time to process and to pray. I was trying to convince the world that I wanted to seek wise counsel. I went to David's office and sought his advice. I was trying to not let people know that I had completely allowed my emotions take over any sort of logic that might have been begging for my attention. I gave the appearance that I was trying to be wise, when really what I was doing was making my own choices, saying that I knew best and that my way was going to be the wise decision.

While you may not have this exact story, I would argue that you often find yourselves or have found yourselves in a similar story. Maybe you have been overspending because you're convinced that in three years, the economy is going to turn around or because you believe there is going to be a better job offer. But it is killing you now. Maybe you stay in a bad relationship because you are convinced that you can change him or you can change her or that you can change yourself. Maybe you are stuck hanging out with the wrong crowd at school and they pull you into poor decisions and cause you to act out in ways that are totally not appropriate or Godly or good. Or maybe, just maybe, year after year, you turn on the TV and give the Vikings your heart, and they let you down every single time. Every time! But here is the reality. On our own and in our flesh, we are prideful people. We don't want to be seen as not knowing the right answers. We think that our way is the best way, don't we? Proverbs 14:12 sheds some light on this.

12 There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.

We have been in this Proverbs series for a couple of months now and if you feel like this idea of wisdom and making wise choices is a bit repetitious, it is. But if you are anything like me, I need a lot of repetition because **repetition aids learning**. We promised to share our *know* and our *do* statements in each sermon. Here is what I want you to know. Know that **we aren't wise left to ourselves. But God is.**

Today we are going to spend some time looking at Proverbs 2:1-5. It's on page 946 in the pew Bibles. Leading up to this text, John Crosby talked a long while ago as he began this series

about the fool in Proverbs, what that means and how we play the fool. Proverbs, chapter 1, sets us up and talks about fools who are gullible and easily deceived. It talks about fools who actually begin to enjoy their foolishness, this pattern of living in foolishness that they find themselves in. And it talks about the fools who are stubborn, who repeat their foolishness because they are too proud to admit they were wrong and to seek wise counsel and change their ways. On any given day, I can be any one of these fools and on really special days, I am all three of these fools but I don't want to stay that way. I'm so tired of seeing the pain that I cause and the harm that I inflict on myself and on my relationships and the wedge it drives between me and God when I continue to make unwise, ungodly poor decisions. I want to make wise decisions, don't you?

A few years ago I was processing a lot of life change and a lot of different opportunities that were in front of me. A lot of them resulted in really good decisions, but I'll never forget, a friend of mine, Laura Mulliken, asked me this question as I was processing with her. She said, "Lee, a lot of these are good decisions, but what is the wise decision? What is the decision that's going to bear Godly fruit and bring peace and allow you to bring the Kingdom as you live out your life?" Those are the kinds of decisions that I want for all of us. Amen?

So page 946 in your Bibles, Proverbs 2:1-5, says this.

1 My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, **2** turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding-- **3** indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, **4** and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, **5** then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.

Interesting note: About ten years ago when I first started walking with God, this was one of the very first passages I memorized, a seemingly obscure Proverb and not a very popular one. I never really gave it much thought until this summer when John mentioned that we were going to do a series on Proverbs. He asked me what I'd like to speak on and I said I'd love to speak on this Proverb. As I processed and asked God, "Why would You have had me memorize and learn this Proverb right off the bat as I was just beginning my journey with you?" The only reason I could come with, though I'm not sure, was that God just might have been wanting me, a 21-year-old, over-zealous, young man, to know how unwise I can be left on my own and how intently I'm going to have to pursue His knowledge.

Important note: The author makes it very clear that this idea of obtaining God's wisdom and knowledge and understanding the fear of the Lord is going to take relentless pursuit and energy on our part. It's not just going to happen upon us. I think about when I first met my wife and knew that I wanted to pursue her. I did crazy, stupid things to see her. I spent inordinate amounts of money flying around the country to be with her. I was all in. That is pursuit. The author of Proverbs makes it clear that if we want to know God and if we want to pursue His wisdom, we need to be *all in* because when we pursue something, we go after it. We seek it. We crave it.

There is no foolproof strategy but what I'd like to do is offer you three principles that I think can help us get under way toward being the types of people who pursue wisdom and pursue the knowledge of God. The first principle I'd like to offer is that **the pursuit of wisdom begins with humility**. The humility to admit that maybe, just maybe, we *don't* know. Maybe we *aren't* right.

Just maybe there is a better way than I think. Now I know that this is hard. This is really hard. Sometimes I think it physically hurts me when I have to admit that I'm wrong. It hurt when I had to call Sean. I knew that I had cost him a lot of money and that I had set his company back. It hurt and it was hard. But you know what? In those moments when we have the courage to admit that we are wrong and admit that we don't know and admit that there is a better way, we create quiet spaces for Jesus to speak into our lives. We create room for Jesus to teach us His way over the way the world teaches. We create spaces for His voice to offer us His wisdom and instruct us in which way to go.

I love the pattern that God uses to teach us. God is kind enough to let us make our own decisions and in those decisions, He offers to teach us and guide us and be with us. He always offers us a choice because that is the loving way to do things. I think about the way that my parents raised me. I'm so grateful that my parents set good boundaries for me. They instructed me and offered me advice, but they always let me make my own decisions. For example, my mother would say, "Lee, you can behave or I'm going to smack you." Often I would choose to get smacked but at least I knew what was coming. In a similar yet very different way, I believe that God allows us to make our own choices and in those choices, he offers us a choice to become humble people.

In this text, the author of Proverbs uses the word *if* a lot. When you look back at the text, it says, *if* you accept my words, *if* you turn your ear, *if* you apply your heart, *if* you call out for insight, *if* you cry out for understanding, *if* you look for it, *if* you search for it. This implies a choice. We have to choose to pursue this. If I look at the humble people and the wise people I know, they haven't lived lives free of mistakes and failures. As I read through the Scriptures, I see a long list of men and women who loved God and wanted to follow Him. Sometimes when they stepped out in faith, they made huge mistakes. In those mistakes God formed their character and taught them life lessons that changed the way that we know God and the way that the church functions and the way that Christianity exists today.

I think of a wise man that I know, many of you know him, Steve Wiens. I've had the opportunity to be mentored by Steve for some six or seven years now. I remember a couple of years ago, Steve allowed me to walk into some mistakes. Multiple times. He could have prevented it. He could have stopped it, and I was really, really mad at Steve about this. I remember we were running, and I was screaming at Steve. I was so angry at him. "I can't believe you let me do this. I thought you loved me. I thought you cared about me." Steve looked at me and I'll never forget what he said. He said, "Lee, I do love you and I do care about you, and I will always protect you from danger, but I will never stop you from making mistakes." Steve knew and understood the benefits that come from stepping out in faith and making mistakes. In those mistakes and failures, we have a choice. We can turn our ears and apply our hearts and ask God what He might be doing. We can choose to be humble people in those mistakes and admit that we don't know and need God's help and that we need His wisdom. The pursuit of wisdom begins with humility.

Second principle: **The pursuit of wisdom must engage both our hearts and our minds.** Now I know this might be difficult for you to believe but I can have a tendency, yes, I can have a tendency to be a black-and-white person. Empathy is not at the top of the list of my strengths. I often think that I am right and I that have a productive, efficient way of doing things. On the Myers Briggs scale, it's a personality test, I'm a "T". That means I will most often make my decisions based upon what I think. Well, my beautiful, lovely wife happens to be an "F". That

means she is a feeler. She will most often make decisions based primarily on how she feels. Now people who think can feel, and people who feel absolutely can think, but how do you think our decision processes have gone these past couple of months as we have talked about our bank accounts and our future and having children? Not always super well because we speak different languages. Shameless plug for counseling. We decided to stay in marriage counseling because we enjoy it so much, but our marriage counselor would look at us and say, “You’re not even having the same conversation.” But we think we are because I give so much more credit to my intellect. I’m like “No, Hallie, it doesn’t make sense!” She says, “I don’t care if it doesn’t make sense. It’s how I feel!”

As I look at the Bible and the way that Jesus lived, I so admire the way Jesus was in awareness in any situation or moment of people’s thoughts and feelings. It can seem contradictory at times if you don’t know the whole story: how Jesus can be so truthful to some people and yet so kind and empathetic toward others. I don’t think it was Jesus changing His course of action or being different. I think Jesus fully understood what it looked like and what it meant to give credit to both feelings and emotions and thoughts in any given situation.

I’ve always loved that it says in our text, “If you turn your ear and apply your heart . . .” It talks about applying both our minds and our hearts to being wise people. There is a word that is used in the text, the Hebrew word *leb*. One commentator says,

To many people in our day, heart and mind seem mutually exclusive or contradictory. The word *heart* generally implies emotions or feelings, while *mind* implies reason or sense. However, the Hebrew word *leb* is more comprehensive and actually includes both ideas. Its root meaning seems to render to the inner or central part of a thing, most especially, to the central part of a person’s being or personality. It represents the total inner life of human beings—all their feelings and emotions, all their thoughts and intellect [God’s Word to the Nations, New Evangelical Translation].

The Hebrew Scriptures never regarded the head or the heart as the center of thought process or intelligence. They had a much more wholistic view of logic, reason, and wisdom that engaged both the heart and the mind. The Scriptures say that Jesus came full of both grace and truth. For so long I thought that was about finding a balance between the two. How do I balance those things? But as I grow in my understanding of what the Scriptures teach, I don’t think Jesus had a balance. Jesus came full of *both* grace and truth. That’s what the Scriptures say. So as we move forward, I want to have the wisdom of Jesus and I want to know, how can I be fully present to emotions and thought processes as I learn how to make wise decisions and respond wisely? The pursuit of wisdom must engage both our hearts and our minds. It sees the benefit of weighing a full measure of both.

Third and final principle, **the pursuit of wisdom takes time and produces obedience**. If you look back at the text, this choice that we make, if we look for it, if we search for it, if we apply it, well, that takes time, doesn’t it? The Scriptures say that Jesus grew in stature and in favor before God and before men. It took time for Jesus to grow in stature and favor before God and before men. One of my favorite authors, Dr. Henry Cloud, wrote a book called *Changes That Heal*. In this book he talks about the growth model, how people grow. He says that people grow best when they experience “grace plus truth over time.” I’m great with the grace part. I’m okay with the truth part, but the time part gets me because I want things to happen yesterday. I want it right now. I don’t want to wait. Wisdom is not innate. It is obtained by relentless pursuit over

time, and there are no short cuts. But we are such a short-cut culture, aren't we? We want to lose weight so we do eight-minute abs. We have plastic surgery. We have lines at amusement parks where you can pay extra so you don't have to wait in line. We are a short-cut culture. When you think about the masters of life and the people who have mastered skills, think of Michael Phelps and Brett Favre. They were given this innate talent, yes, but they spent years and years learning. They hired coaches and they practiced. They changed the way that they did things and over time, they learned a different way and it changed their lives.

It has taken me a lot of time to know the difference between knowing the right things and doing the right things. Often times I know the right thing to do but sadly fewer times, I do the right thing. I think about perhaps the greatest contributor to the Proverbs, King Solomon. What a great example of someone who had a lot of wisdom for everybody else but none for himself. I think how tragic it is to know the right things, yet fail to carry them out and actually change by choosing obedience to God's Word over our way.

Charles Swindoll says this. "Wisdom occurs when knowledge produces obedience." People can be wise only when they behave wisely." John Piper says, "A good definition of godly wisdom, therefore, would be: hearing and doing God's Word." People can only be wise when they behave wisely. Another prominent Christian leader in our time, Francis Chan, talked about this idea of how the Christian church today wants to follow Jesus in their hearts which is a wonderful thought, but he gave the illustration of a childhood game, Follow the Leader, where you literally follow the person in front of you. He said how ridiculous it would be if you were to sit on the sidelines and say, "No, I'm going to play along with you in my heart." We have to actually engage in the process and be obedient to the rules and walk the way that Jesus teaches us to walk.

I think, how tragic if we, like King Solomon, end up knowing the wisdom of God in our hearts and our minds and yet fail to live it out in our lives. The pursuit of wisdom begins with humility, the pursuit of wisdom must engage both our hearts and our minds, and the pursuit of wisdom takes time and produces obedience. I don't know about you, but I want to become someone who knows how to navigate life with wisdom. The good news is, that's what God wants for us too. God wants us to be wise. He is not holding out His wisdom from us. In fact, Ephesians talks about how God *lavishes* it upon us. All we have to do is pursue. All we have to do is ask and seek and knock, show up time after time, and receive. I'd love to leave you with a few questions to process. They are going to be up on the screen. Here are my questions for you:

1. *Where have you tried and failed lately?*

If you can't think of a time, I'd encourage you to step out in faith. If you can think of a time, let God use that to change the way that you do things. Let God use that situation or that circumstance to teach you a wiser, better way.

2. *Who is one person you'd like to learn from and why haven't you asked them yet?*

Find someone who has done this journey. Find someone who has made wise decisions, who is living in a wise and Godly way, and spend time with them. Soak them up. I would bet it would be their desire to give you their knowledge. Find that person and ask them.

3. *What do you really want at the deepest place of your soul and are you willing to pay the price to get it?*

If you are caught in all these unwise choices, it might seem really hard to undo them, so before you can even begin, you need to ask yourself, what do I want more than anything? At the deepest soul level, do I want to be a wise person and make wise, God-honoring decisions?

4. *With whom are you exposing what is really going on in your actual life?*

Maybe you are like me and you want to put out that veneer of being a wise person like I did when I got that job. You might be meeting with people. You might be asking questions. You might be praying about it but you're still continuing in blatant disobedience. So, with whom are you exposing what is really going on in your life? Discern that one carefully because it's not appropriate to air your dirty laundry to everyone. Find that person who is a safe person and share what is really going on in your actual life and enter into this process with us, with me, of becoming wise people.

I need to let you know this is not the end of my message. It's a bit of a cliffhanger, if I can call it that. I was supposed to be preaching next weekend also, but due to some scheduling things, I am actually preaching again in two weeks. The second half of this passage is incredible. It talks about how we can understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God, how God holds victory in store for the upright and is a shield to those whose walks are blameless. I'm excited to come back in a couple of weeks to conclude and talk about what that looks like and how God blesses us when we make wise decisions. Until then, I want to leave you with this. Paul writes in Colossians 2:3 not that he hopes people will be wise, but that they will know Christ,

3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

That is my hope, too, that we would know Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge as we pursue this idea of being wise together. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.