

Proverbs 16:20-22

Sunday 6/19/2016

I told my wife, my wife said, "Happy Father's Day." And I said back to her, "Happy Father's Day to you." She says, "I am not a father." And I said, "No, I wanted to thank you for all the times that I was not the right father and you were." And the boys need to take a lesson from that, if you would.

I want to get with you in the book of Proverbs today, and I want to tell you going in that there are some key things that you probably want to write down today. I have tried to make this book a balance between the historical and the doctrinal, and then emphasizing on the practical. The last couple of weeks, we have been in some real good practical stuff. You remember last week we had a great practical lesson out of Proverbs 16. I talked about the four key words in our lives as Christians. I told you that success or failure will be based on not only just our understanding these four words, but implementing them into our lifestyle.

You remember that those four words were:

1. To choose, how that everything in life is based on the choices we make.

I deal with a lot of problems in a lot of people's lives, and certainly my goal is to try to help them. But I have learned something. I think this is probably the first thing you want to write down. I think the first thing you want to remember is this: Long-term problems always start with short-term bad choices. That is so true. Our long-term problems, whether it be in our lives, or our marriage, or with our families, or kids, always start with short-term bad choices. It is one of those great things to understand that the life that we have is about the choices we make.

Then you remember I talked about the highway of life, our little fun time we had with the side trips of side roads and getting off the main highway that God has you on. We talked then about the spirit of pride, how that leads to an unteachable spirit, and talked about people that you just cannot teach anything to. Then we talked about how to be humble and have a humble spirit, and how that always equates into a teachable spirit, being able to take somebody and give them everything that God wants them to have. It was based on the verse there that basically said—and I am paraphrasing now—how much better it is to get wisdom and understanding than silver and gold. In other words, God's wisdom versus the world's standard of what they think wisdom really is: building a strong core value system based on biblical truth, and to use wisdom to get the understanding of any issue that you are going to face in life.

I want to tell you something: I do not know where the idea ever got started that once you got saved, all your problems would be over. Truly, all your problems are over as far as your eternity is concerned. But once you get saved, the devil is going to make sure that he throws everything in your way to keep you from being whatever God wants you to do. God gave us the Bible. We have talked about this many, many times, and through that Bible, because of the wisdom and the understanding that we get, we can understand any issue and face it and get past it that the devil throws our way.

Now today, we are going to again look at some really practical material, and I am going to tell you, there is some of this stuff in here you just need to really try to get down. It will really help you.

Proverbs 16:20-22

Whoso handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the LORD, happy is he.

The wise in heart shall be called prudent: and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning.

Understanding is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools is folly.

Father, I come to You today, Father, and ask You to give me what I need today to lay out the Word of God. Help me to have the clarity of thought and to have the clarity of speech, and to work around this old infirmity, Lord, of a cold and sickness that comes into our lives because of man's original disobedience to You. I pray, Father, that You will fill me with the Holy Spirit of God today, because in that presence of the Holy Spirit of God, there can be no sickness. I pray, Father, that You will give me what I need to do and what I need to say. I pray for these people here today, Lord. I love them very much. There is no greater bunch of people to me on this planet. Lord, I care for them very much, and I care for their children very much. Lord, there is a lot riding, Lord, that we have got to work on in the next couple of weeks or next couple of months. I pray, Father, that every parent will dial in their attention span and their focus on what we need to do. I love You, Lord, and I pray that today You will make it clear and plain to these good people. We will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

I. The Bible as Our Owner's Manual

The Bible fundamentally is the owner's manual for a working, functioning child of God. It gives us everything that we need. It is our ultimate support system. Today, I want to put together last week's message with today's message and kind of help you glean some great practical truths out of here.

Last week, and today, we are going to continue with the fundamental concept that the choices we make in life will constitute how we have to deal with things. Without a doubt, the greatest aspect of our Christian witness and our relationship with Christ is, I think, what we do and how we handle things when we do not know people are watching us. We all put up a front to some degree when we know people are watching. I know I do. I know when I go someplace and I know that people know I am a pastor, I may not do some of the goofy things I normally do just because of the fact that I know people get a mindset of what a pastor should be. I like to have fun, and everything around you guys that do not matter because you are stuck with me. But it is a thing where you always try to be aware of other surroundings around you. Real Christian character qualities are a constant. They are a lifestyle. They are not something we put up for show because we know somebody is watching.

I think the great example of this in the Bible was over there in John 11 and Luke 10 with the great story of Mary and Martha. Mary and Martha are, inspirationally, a picture of two types of Christians. Mary is always worshipping God. Martha is always working for God and looking

around to see who is watching her. When Martha is out doing her thing and she thinks the Lord is not watching her, she says, "Hey, Lord, I am over here. Are You not seeing what I am doing?" There are a lot of Christians like that. Mary, on the other hand, she is sitting at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ. You know the greatest quality about sitting at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ? He can never miss where you are at. Mary understood that. There are two great examples, and I could go on this morning. But the real test of our walk with God is when we are faced with issues when others are watching us, and we do not always see and know that they are watching.

Romans 14:7

For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

In every given scenario of your life and my life, there is always somebody watching. Your children are watching you, how you handle things right now when they are little. It will be the forging outcome of how they deal with things in life as they get older.

II. Responding Versus Reacting

I teach people the great principle of, in any scenario, responding versus reacting. I think that is so key. When I react to something, it is spontaneous, usually in the flesh. It is based on an emotional knee-jerk reaction. Anger, when somebody says something and you get angry, that is a reaction. When somebody says something in harsh words and you say them back, that is a reaction. When somebody wants to pick a fight and you are willing to go into the fight, that is a reaction, see? Bickering and all of the things, that is all reaction. In some cases, no reaction is a reaction. Some people just cannot stay in confrontation, and they will be in a situation where people will say something or do something. They will never say something one way or the other. All that is reaction. Somebody says something to you and you say something back. Somebody does something to you and you do something back. That is the first instinct that we have. Somebody makes a crack at us and you want to make a crack back. That is reaction.

Most marriages, fundamentally the bottom line of their problems, will be this very thing right here: they react instead of responding, based on everything they do on a reaction mindset. I know this is true in my own world, and I know it is true in you. You know, guys, when you hit that point, they call it in the military the point of demarcation. You are going to make an assault on a beach, and you get in your landing craft, and you circle for a while, and everybody softens up the beach with the artillery, and then you head into the beach. There comes a point where you pass a line that you are not going back to the ship. That is the point of demarcation, and you will hear the command at that point. After this point, they do not even let you load your weapon because they do not want you shooting each other. But at that point, you are going to hit the beach. You get the command to lock and load, and that tells you that you are past the point of demarcation, and now you are going to go into a conflict.

You know, in every marriage there is a point of demarcation. In every relationship there is a point of demarcation. There is a point where you will just circle around for a while, but there comes to a point where you as the husband know if I say the wrong thing now and react, we are going to

go hit the beach. We are locking and loading. The real key to any circumstance in life, whether it is marriage or whether it is just dealing with people, the real issue is to respond, not react. Respond is following the principles of Proverbs 16:20. It is one of the things that come along with understanding and wisdom.

I am not telling you that there is not a time to be a Christian. You do not have to take a stand and fight for things. But I am telling you, wisdom and understanding gives you the ability to pick your battles. Most problems come because of the wrong battles that we picked. Most problems come because we are in a mode that you say something to me, I am going to say something back. You come home, you are tired, your wife says something to you, it hits you the wrong way, you say something back to her. It hits her the wrong way because she is just as tired as you are, so she says something back to you. Hey, you know what you just did? You are in that landing craft, you just passed a line, and somebody ditched you out, "Lock and load, we are going in!" And the battle starts.

The Bible says, "Whoso handleth a matter wisely." Responding is following the principles of the Word of God, handling something the right way. When you respond, you have the biblical principles in your life. As Proverbs says, you know what the right thing is to do. Responding is allowing what somebody just said to you or did to you. Instead of causing a reaction, the biblical principles act as a filtering process, but by the time it works through those principles and gets to you, it takes the edge off that you do not react. You respond the right way. Understanding is not taking some things personally in your life. Now, that is a hard thing to do because we all like to take things personally. The key to not taking things personally is to have understanding, to realize why the person said what they said, love them enough to look beyond what they said, and tell the coxswain who is driving the landing craft, "Turn this thing around, we are not going to the beach, we are going back to the ship." That is what responding is.

III. Controlling Situations, Not People

Most people—I should not say most people—but we all know people in life who like to control people. When I have marital problems come in... I am feeling a lot better now that I am filled with the Holy Spirit of God. We may just stay here all day so I do not get sick again. I was preaching, some of you were with me back then when—this has been 35, 40 years ago—we were preaching in Prairie, Kansas. We were down to help a church down there; we were having revivals at night. After the first, second night, I completely lost my voice. I had three more nights to preach, and I had absolutely completely lost... I could not say anything, and I did not know what I was going to do, and I just told the Lord. I said, "Lord, You know what?" I said, "You got us down here. I mean, I did not lose my voice at a Chiefs game or a Royals game; I lost it doing Your work. Now, if You did not want me to preach hard like that, then You should not have fired me up the way You did. But here I am, I have got to preach tonight." You know what? I could not say a word. I got in that pulpit, prayed, my voice came back just like that. I preached the whole night. When I was done preaching, I got off that pulpit, I could not say a word. That happened the next two nights to me. Now, I am not charismatic, kind of. That, my friend, is biblical healing, see? Nobody laid hands on me; I did not speak in tongues. But it is a thing where God's

Spirit, when He... You know, in the Bible, whenever Jesus showed up, nobody ever stayed dead, did you notice that? Just one of those little things. You may be dead when He showed up; there can be no death in the presence of the Lord. There can be no sickness in the presence of the Lord in the sense that if you are up there and have something to do, man, or you are preaching, I mean, God just does it. I am just glad He did. Now watch, I am going to throw up over the front row here in just a minute to make God make His point.

A lot of people like to control people. I will get husbands and wives come in, and they will say, she will say, "He is just a control freak. He tries to micromanage and control everything that I do." I have known women who were worse than men. I have known women who, they go through three or four bad marriages, and all they ever do is pick men whom they can run around and they can lead around and control. I told them we had a couple—they do not live across the street from us anymore—but she was a lady, and she had a little husband. This guy, it was typical, it was Mutt and Jeff, it was typical. He had little sticky legs, he wore goofy shirts, and he wore white socks with dress shoes. Now, you know there is something really wrong with a guy who wears Bermuda shorts with white socks and black dress shoes. And I would watch him, and I would stand there. She had this little chihuahua, and she was a rather large lady. I am just saying, that way. She took this chihuahua out, and I would stand over there. Her husband would come out, and he would walk around, and she would say, "Come on, potty. Come on, potty. Come on, potty." And that little chihuahua would look up at her, and he would dare not potty. A couple of times, I would say, "Come on, potty. Come on, potty." And the husband looked over to her like, "Are you talking to me?" She was wearing that little guy everywhere. There are some women like that.

People sometimes like to control other people. Pastors many times, I will be honest with you, like to control their people in churches. They will tell you what you can listen to, and what you cannot listen to. I have known pastors that, if you listened to certain other preachers' tapes, they were all over you, because they did not want you thinking anybody knew the Bible more than they did, and yet most kids in the junior high knew the Bible more than they did. But sometimes people like to control people.

Yet in a biblical sense, now hear me on—this is something else you probably want to write down—you never control people. But when you have wisdom and understanding through the principles of the Word of God, listen to me now, you learn to control situations for the glory of God. You do not control people, but you learn through the principles how to control circumstances so God always gets the honor and glory out of it, not so you can win the fight. Let me tell you something: nobody ever wins a fight. You do not want to win. Your goal should not be to win the fight; your goal should be to win the brother. When you want to control something, quit trying to control people and learn how the principles of the Word of God, for the honor and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, teach you how to control the circumstances so God always gets the honor and glory.

Let me tell you something, leadership, we talk about it all the time. I build leaders; that is what I do. That is my best thing that God has given me to do. Leaders take control and lead. But

leadership is the ability—listen—leadership is the ability for you, through the wisdom and understanding, to lead out of a bad situation, not lead deeper into it. Get yourself out of it.

Romans 15:1

We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

We as God's people should use the principles of the Word of God to fix things, not continue to break them. In any given situation, any problem, all it takes to really begin to fix it is just one person who wants to do what is right. You get both people that want to do what is right, you are in, man. A child of God who has wisdom and understanding, he will never lose control of the situation because he wants God to get the honor and glory. He is going to realize that what he does, whether he responds or he reacts, is going to be the outcome of it. I call this—you have heard me say it many, many times—being smarter than the problem. It takes two to have a fight. If you remove yourself from the conflict, you have one. You do not have one. A Christian with understanding and wisdom—what two incredible words here—will always be able to take any issue and put it into a biblical perspective.

When it comes to problems, I just teach three fundamental little things. You probably want to write this down: three little steps.

2. Identify the problem. Understand what it really is.
3. Understand the problem.
4. Then fix the problem.

You see, identifying it is the key to understanding. And understanding is the key to fixing it. You follow those three things biblically, and you are going to fix things instead of breaking them. It is our ability to take a very bad situation and develop it through the principles into a positive plan to solve it. It is the ability for you and me to be in a situation where somebody is angry, but you are able to disarm somebody from that anger who is fighting over something that has happened.

Anger is a reaction in most cases. I am not saying there is not a sound biblical case for anger; there is. The Bible says that there has to be a cause behind your anger. Most anger does not have a real legitimate cause with it.

Proverbs 25:28

He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.

In the Old Testament, the cities were protected by walls. The walls kept the undesirables from getting in; it was their protection. In the New Testament, you are likened to a building, a house, a city. The church is supposed to be a bunch of individual temples built into a city with all the lights turned on by the Holy Spirit of God that people can see. He says that walls are our protection. Now for you and for me, the walls that we build are based on Bible doctrine. It is our protection. We are protected from emotion. We are protected from reaction by the principles of the Word of God that dictate in your life and my life how I should respond to a situation versus how I should react to it.

I will tell you, and you know this is true. I am not telling you anything. You are all smart people here today. Our number one issue that causes us to react instead of responding is our emotions. We emotionally react to something instead of biblically responding to it. Many times, we get in trouble along with that because of tunnel vision. All we see is our immediate problem. All we see is our immediate crisis at hand. We cannot see or begin to understand what God may be trying to do with the situation. Remember this: in any given situation, no matter what, there will always be something that you can do to fix it.

Many times, if not almost every time, when a couple comes in and deals with me, I have a couple coming in next week that Chris Zabowski works with. They are having some problems, and he gave her my phone number. I want you to pray for this couple. She called, and they have some issues. Her boyfriend, and they are not married, have a child, and they are going to come in next week. I want to get an opportunity to talk with them. But I do it all the time. You know, they will come in, and it is such a predictable thing, and I love them because I want to help them. I hate people that are struggling, especially when I know how easy it is to fix it. She will come in, and they will always do the same thing. She will lay out her side. He will lay out his side. It is like it is at an impasse. There is no way that it cannot be reconciled. That is not true. But they are going to come in there, and they are going to lay it out. And then, almost every time, one of them will look at me after they have laid both sides out, and my upstairs office looks like a battlefield with all the carnies or everything. They will say to me, "Well, that is it. Do you think there is any hope for us?" Or they will say this, "Is there anything you think we can do?" "What do you think?" "What do I think?" "Is there anything that you can do?" is never the question. In any given situation, folks, there is always something that you can do. You know what the real question is? Will you do what you need to do? The question is, "Is there not anything we can do?" The question is... I am feeling really good. I think I am just going to stay around here for a while. The question is, "Will you do what you need to do based on the Bible?" That is what I think.

Now, we have camp coming up in a couple of weeks, or about a month. It is coming up. I am not sure when it is. I will be there, I promise you. We are going to talk the month before, and I am going to ask you some pointed questions. "Do you really want your kid to be everything you want him to be?" Now, what parent would not say yes? "Do you want your kid to obey you, to love you, to do good in everything that he or she does? Do you want them to be focused and do everything?" And what parent would say no? And my next question is, "How bad do you as the parent want to fix that?" Do not put this on the kid. I know he has some responsibility in it, but the bottom line is, how bad do you? Now, if I had a worthless church, and it was a church of people who did not care about things but God, I would ask myself the same question. "Do I want a church that loves the Bible and loves God?" Yes, I do. "Okay, Bob, you are the pastor. You are in charge. How bad do you want it? What are you willing to do to get the people that God has given you where they are ready to be?" Because all of them are responsible. Everything rises and falls on leadership, and I will tell you how you start that: you preach the hell out of you. That is how you start. And then you bring you back to the Bible. You have to get out of some things before you can get into some things.

You know, that is the number one problem with most Baptist preachers, and I have a lot of problems with most Baptist preachers. Most Baptist preachers will stand up at the top of the stairs with you down at the bottom with your problems, and they will yell and scream at you to get up where they are at. They will never think about walking down those stairs and putting their arm around you and walking you up those steps one at a time. There is always a big deal about what you have to give up. Now, I want to tell you, if you have some problems in your life, there are probably some things that you have to give up. I am really feeling good now, Dre. Keep it going, buddy. You know what a real problem is? They will scream and yell for you to give up things, but they will never give you anything to replace what you are giving it up with. Then they get mad at you because you do not make it. They get mad at you and castigate you because your marriage fails. My job is not only to get the bad things out of your life; my job is to put some really good things in your life after we get the bad stuff out. I keep feeling this way. I might be able to play that guitar here in just a few minutes.

From a Bible standpoint, in the Old Testament, there were grounds for divorce. If a husband found some uncleanness in his wife, he could legitimately, under the Mosaic Law, because of the hardness of their heart, give her a bill of divorcement. We as God's people use that in such an easy way today to get out of a marriage relationship. Let me tell you something: there may have been grounds in the Old Testament for divorce, a bill of divorcement, but there are no grounds in the New Testament for divorce. There is a bill of divorcement, but you get that from your lawyer, not from God. You see, the reason why in the New Testament there are no grounds for divorce is because God thought for sure there would be no reason, no problem, no issue that two people could not work out.

Some of you have problems—I said this Thursday night—some of you have problems with other Christians. We talked about this Thursday night with one of your questions. I understand sometimes they are legitimate, but you know that that person is saved and you are saved. You have to spend an eternity together? Do you think you will get along then? Well, you will, in case you have not figured that out. You know why you will? Because you will have everything that God wants you to have, and you will have the mind of Christ, and in that day, you will be able to do it. How ridiculous it is! You have all that right now, and you cannot do it. See, where a problem lies. The reason why you have no grounds for divorce, but you have reason for divorce, comes back to what we are talking about: one or both parties simply will not do what they need to do. In time, through the process, you try to get them to that point.

Now, look at verse 20, the middle part. Here is another great concept most people fail to see. "Whoso handleth a matter wisely shall find good." You know, there is something that is good in everything that we go through. No matter how bad it is, there is a lesson in it.

Romans 8:28

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

You know what? "And we know." No, we do not know that. We should know that. All things work together for good. Everything. We talked about Thursday night, the book of Job, how that

what he went through. But there was good in it. There is an old saying that you do not hear much, but you older folks will understand it: "Never throw the baby out with the bathwater." How many heard that? I just forgot that verse when I was young, and I quit giving my kids a bath because I did not want to violate that Bible principle. What it means is this: you wash the baby in a tub, the dirt comes off, you are going to throw it out, but you not only throw the water out, you accidentally throw the baby out. In other words, just because you have the dirt in the same tub with something that is good—the baby—you do not throw them both out. There are lessons in everything that we go through. That is why I never, never look down on you for making mistakes. I never look down on you. No matter what it is, no matter what happens in your life, I do not care. We all make mistakes. We all have a history. People like to sometimes point out other people's history. That is because you do not want somebody looking at your history. We all have a history. Your list is no better than mine; mine is no better than yours. We all have problems. Whatever in life comes your way, whether it is your fault or not, when you handle it wisely, biblically, respond to it and not react to it, then you will see the good that comes out of it.

In any tough time, do not miss what God is trying to do. In any tough time, you want to write what I am about to say down: In any tough time, do not miss what God is trying to do. You got your salvation through His suffering on the cross. You get your teaching from Him, and learning from Him, and wisdom from Him by the sufferings you go through bearing His cross. It does not come any other way. In 45 years of dealing with people, I would say that probably 98% of the issues could have been solved in four, five, six weeks, or at least well on their way to being fixed, if they just would follow Proverbs. But they just drag it out. That short-term problem is expanding to a long-term issue.

One of the things, and I will be very honest with you, I have a real disdain for quote-unquote Christian counseling. The professional guys you go to are so interested in you right up to when your insurance runs out. In the professional world of counseling, their goal is to deal with your issue and to keep you coming as long as they can, or as I said, until your insurance runs out. It is amazing how many times you have this big problem, and he has to see you and see you and see you for 60 bucks an hour, and then suddenly, the day you tell him your insurance runs out, you are cured. Congratulations! You see, that is how they make their living. They make their living off of your problems. I call them bottom feeders. That is a southern term that is not very flattering. In the Bible, you get the person out of their problem as quickly as you can. Let me tell you something: there is no profit for you wallowing in what you are dealing with when you have a book that will help you get out of it as quickly as you can. The Bible way, there is no money involved, so there is no alternative—or there should not be—no alternative motive. I do not do what I do because it is the way I make my living. I do what I do because it is my way of life. We as God's people take what God has given us, freely give, freely receive, you freely give.

Listen, whatever issue you find yourself in, whether it is your fault or not, there will always be a way out of it. But you have to handle the matter wisely. You cannot do it your way. That is what got you in the problem in the first place. You have got to handle the matter wisely. You know what all I do in helping people is just three simple things. It looks complicated. It sounds complicated. I know we go through a lot of stuff in the people ministry, but you boil it all down.

When you work with somebody who has got issues, you just simply add three needed ingredients to their issue.

5. You add wisdom to it because they do not have any.
6. You add understanding to it because they cannot see it.
7. You add perspective to it.

When you give them wisdom, they will see the problem. When you give them understanding, they will understand the problem. They will get it. And when you give them perspective, now they see how to fix it. Just that simple, not complicated.

IV. Trusting the Lord and Finding Happiness

Now, look at verse 20, the last part of the verse: "and whoso trusteth in the LORD, happy is he." Now, that is a great thing to think about and ponder. Hey, I know a lot of people that would argue with you and me all day long that they trust in the Lord, yet they are the most miserable people you ever met in life. There is no victory in their life. There is no happiness. Many of them are not even in church today, but they would argue with you all day long, "Oh, I trust the Lord. I trust the Lord." You see, the key word is understanding. Understanding that happiness in life is not based on my standard of how I see it, but it is based on trusting God from His standpoint how He sees it. Why so many of God's people are not fulfilled and happy in their life? They want everything on their terms. "Oh, I trust the Lord as long as I get what I want the way I want it." There is no happiness in that. You can go through life and trust God your way and not be happy, or you can trust God His way and always be happy. Here again, it is your choice. You get to choose.

Now, in Proverbs, our great book, the definitive passage on Proverbs 16:20, the last part of that verse, "trusting the Lord, happy is he," will be Proverbs 3:5-6, where he says:

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

There is the key. In all your ways acknowledge Him. In all your ways, lean not unto your own understanding. That is what a mess we are in. Every problem I got into in my life, every problem that I will get into in the future of my life, will simply go back to me putting my understanding of the situation over God's understanding of the situation.

V. Prudence and Christian Example

Now, look at verse 21: "The wise in heart shall be called prudent; and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning." Oh, that is a great one. What a great thought. Wow. "The wise in heart shall be called prudent." Let me ask you a question: What do people call you? That is a loaded question, I understand. As a Christian, what are you known to people as? I think the greatest compliment on earth for you is when I deal with somebody, and I am working with somebody, and somebody is going through some things, and I say, "Okay, I am going to put some people

around you, or I am going to put a girl around you, or a gal around you. I am going to put this person around," and they ask for you by name. They say, "Could I have so-and-so?" There have been many people that, like a little girl, we just moved down here from Nebraska, and she wanted to get down here and get into the Word of God. She was up there without a church, without anything going on, but she knew, she knew and remembered Nikki Halliburton—Nikki Brown now, Nikki Brown. She knew there was a name she could call. There are people that I work with, and they will simply say, "Hey, would so-and-so be able to disciple me? Would so-and-so be able to take me through this, do this?" They ask for you by name. I think that is the most incredible testimony to where you are at with God. I think that is the greatest compliment on earth for you, and it is one of those things that when I deal with somebody, and they call for you by name, hey, as God's people, we should be examples and ensamples to others of the faith that we have.

I am going to tell you something: some of your personal lives are a great example for the younger Christians in our church. They really are. Some of you men and women in this church, some of you couples, your life is a great testimony for the young guys and gals that come here. When I say young, I mean in their 20s, and the other new people that come. They have been out there and maybe been booted around in a church, got no place to go. Nobody really thinks they care for them, and they come here, and they see you, and you love on them. They see your relationship and what God is doing with you, and they want that. Do you know why people go out to the world? Do you know why they gravitate to people who smoke dope or smoke cigarettes or go out and party on Friday and Saturday night? You know why? Young kids growing up your age, you singles, gravitate to that because they have never had anybody in their life ever give them a real quality, consistent Christian walk relationship example that they say, "I would rather have that than the world." And I will be honest with you, they are either going to get the world or they are going to get God. And if you think that it is my preaching that turns the corner, you are wrong. If you think it is Bob Alexander on Thursday night answering all your Bible questions, you are wrong. You got the first one Thursday night, by the way. If you think it is me up here, you are wrong. You know where it starts? It starts with everyone. I am really feeling good now so we are in it. Hang on now. It starts with every one of you in the seat that you are sitting in this morning, letting the love and light of God shine through you, and somebody says, "I want what they have got." I am a nothing. You do not have to say amen to that. I am not the key here. You are. God can replace me in a heartbeat. We could never replace you. We could never replace the men and women in this church who let God use them. I do not go to work with you tomorrow. I do not see you in your neighborhood. I do not see you where you work. It is your light shining that people see.

Romans 14:7

For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

Your name is Prudent. People see you. They see your life. Some of your marriages are absolutely impeccable testimonies for young couples of what a marriage should be. Some of your kids, they are absolutely the perfect model for what you want your kids to be when they grow up. They will be out there on the street this afternoon. They will be going to camp. And yes, they will learn a

lot, but they will help me do what I need to do with all the other kids there. Your ability to give and to work with others, your success with people, your ability to help them—people ask for you.

Listen: there is good in all of our problems. You may not see it today. You may be so far into it and so struggling with it. Hey, I get it. But I am here for you. But I am telling you, there is good in your problem. And when you fix it right, and you learn from it, and you get wisdom from it, you are invaluable. You know how you are invaluable? You are invaluable because down the line, God will use you to help somebody else that is going through exactly what you are going through right now. And when you get the victory, when you get a handle on it, when God gives you what you need, look around you today. Look in front. Look in back. Turn your head. Do not look behind you right now. Everybody look behind you. Now look to the left. Look to the right. Pat the person on the head in front so I know you are paying attention.

Let me tell you something: everybody in this church, when you came in, had problems. Everybody. Everybody, when you came in here, had issues. Everybody. Look what God has done with you. People see that. What is your name? Your name is Prudent. People see it. They want what you have got. Your name is Prudent. What a great word. It means cautious. It means diligent. It means circumspect. It means wise in a practical sense. When others are jumping in and making mistakes and doing goofy things, you have learned to prove all things. Follow the pattern that God has set, not trying to create your own. You use truth and wisdom.

I look around at this church, and I will see some of you who—most of you—I could not do what I do without you. I know I do not tell you enough. Most pastors want to take all the credit and think that the church is what it is because of him. What a sorry state of mind that is! This church is what it is because of you. And I look around you, and I will see some of my key people that I just love that just do everything. And the older I get, the less I can do, and the more you jump in and you do it. It starts with my own family, and then it works right on down the line. But you know what I also think about? I will see 10 or 15 of you out there: guys, gals, couples. I will see 10, 15 of you out there. There may be one person in this church over the course of four or five years who invested in your life to build you where you are at today. I have some of you couples that you look across this church, and there are eight or nine couples that are in here that are solid today because you spend time with them every week and invested in them. I have some of you singles that you have taken people, and you have helped them and worked with them, and you have brought them along. They had trouble just like you did, and you know why you were so good? Because yes, you all had problems. I have problems, but you learned the good in your problem, and now the good comes out of it as you can help somebody else, and the best part of it is that you are willing to do it. And God, your name is Prudent this morning. You are Prudent.

And yet, you know as well as I do, you will have people that you start to work with. I have this all the time. We had a lady one time, a husband and wife—it has been years ago—they were in this church, and she had some real problems. She is nuts. Let us just put it that way. She is nuts. She has some real issues. Her husband and I got... She was a nice lady, but she was just off the wall emotionally, and I tried to help her, and it was one of those things where I got so sick and tired. I must have put 10 of you ladies—and if you remember this situation, keep your mouth

shut. But I must have put 10 or 11 of you ladies with her. Every other week, somebody would go to work with her, try to help her. They would come over, and she would say, "I do not like so-and-so. She is not... We just do not have a good match. Put her with somebody else." A couple of weeks later, "Well, I do not like this person either because they just do not understand my problem." Now, I am looking at this, and I am thinking, "These are the best ladies I have got." These ladies have worked with 8 or 9, 10, 12, 15 different ladies, and they all turned out good. Now I have one lady who just cannot get along. Finally, they left the church, and I think it was probably something I said. Her and her husband came over for the 11th time to complain, and I was nice and I am kind because I want to help people, but I get a limit, man, especially when it is... I am very protective of you guys, and when I have you working for me, and I have a string of 12, 15 people that you are solid with, and then some goofy person comes in, male or female, and says, "Well, I just do not like that person." When 15 other people were right, and now they are all wrong, because you do not even go there with me. But I think it was what I said. I looked, and she came in again, and her husband, he was already looking for something to fight, I think. And I will be honest with you, I was not... I was in the flesh. I had no reason to disarm this guy at this point. I figured I would pick my battle. In fact, I heard as they walked up the steps, the Holy Spirit of God say, "Lock and load." I knew we were going in. So anyway, she starts the same song and dance, and I let her go, and he is looking at me. He wants my response, you see, because he wants me to put her with somebody else. And I just said, "Well," I said, "I do not know what to do for you." I said, "I am out of ladies. You ran through every good woman I have got. I do not have anybody left." She took offense to that. I think she finally got the message that I was trying to say, "The problem is not us; the problem is you." They left the church. I do not know where they are at today. But it better be a big church because it needs a lot of women. A lot of women.

Look at the last part of verse 21. The Bible says in Proverbs 31:23—I am talking about the virtuous woman:

Proverbs 31:23

Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.

Now, historically, that means that this virtuous woman was such a good woman that the whole city knew how good her husband was based on how good she was. Now, let us put it in a practical application. Jesus Christ is your Bridegroom. He is your Husband. Do the people in this town know how good He is by the virtue that comes out of you and me? Do our lives make people talk about my Bridegroom? That is a good verse, man.

VI. Sweetness of Lips and Teachable Spirit

And the sweetness of the lips, verse 21, last part, "and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning." How you use wisdom, what you say, will actually encourage others to learn. What a defining verse that is on people who really do not want to learn: the unteachables. When you use the Word of God, its principles, you help others. It encourages others, and it increases their ability to learn if they are teachable. Hey, teachable people want to learn like a hungry man who

has not eaten in three weeks. That is—you want to write that down—the key for understanding teachable. A teachable person will just take everything you can give them and want more. An unteachable will take everything you give them and complain. There it is. Mostly behind your back to other people. But there it is.

Now, do not misunderstand me. You have the Word of God, its principles, to help others. But do not misunderstand what I am about to say. When it comes to my preaching, I never want you to get comfortable. Now, a lot of pastors do; they do not want to rock the boat. They think if you make people mad, they will leave. I have learned the people that need to leave are the ones you may make mad. So just go ahead and do it. But I never want you to be comfortable with my preaching. I never do. And I do not say what I say here. I am not like a lot of preachers. A lot of preachers want to control your life. I do not want to control your life, but I would like to give you the Word of God so you could take control of your own life. It is just a lot less work for me. But I do want to create a comfortable atmosphere for you to learn the Bible if you choose to. I want to make it easy. I want to make it as fun as I can. We do a lot of fun things around here. We laugh a lot. We make fun of each other. We make fun of me. I make fun of you. Will and I are going at it all the time. He had a pair of shoes he wore one time that he had never worn since. I felt bad about those shoes. He had a pair of shoes one time. They were the ugliest shoes you ever saw in your life. And we were someplace. I think it was the 4th of July at your place last year. That is where it was. Are you going to have another party this year? I would love to come back. But anyway, I sat there, and I kept looking at those shoes. They were the ugliest shoes on the planet. And I asked him, I said, "How crippled was that guy that you chased down to beat him up and steal his shoes?" He never wore those shoes again. But we laugh with each other. He gets me all the time. We get each other all the time. It is fun.

You know what is wrong with most of God's people? They take themselves too seriously. You know what is wrong with most preachers? They take themselves too seriously. Now, some of you like to call me pastor. It is fine. Really, it is. I have got to tell you, when you call me pastor, I look over my shoulder to see who is standing behind me. My name is Bob. Now, I appreciate calling me pastor. I really do. Sam does it. I love Sam. Sam is my hero. He is my first sergeant in our church. I love Sam. Good veteran, loving the devil. And the little gal that he is bringing, she is a sweetheart too. Sam, I do not know how you ever did, but you did good. I just want to tell you that. But, and some of you do. And I love you for it, and I appreciate it. But you know what? And I do it because you do it out of it. But I learned a long time ago: there is no respect in a title. There really is not. I am just like you. See how guys like to be called "Reverend." They put it in front of, and their checks, "Reverend." Wherever they go, "My name is Reverend Alexander." Somebody says, "You are Reverend?" I said, "No, I am a reverend, but thank you very much." I smell sibaka.

I want to make it easy for you to learn the Bible. You have total access to me. Most churches, you want to talk to the pastor. You cannot approach him afterwards. He has this aura around him. Kind of like a force field from Star Trek II. You know, you get your fingers burned when you touch it. You want to call him, you have got to get a hold of his secretary. Her name would be Martin Bormann. She controls access to the Führer. You have got my cell number. Call me. If I

miss, she will call you back. But I do not call you back because I do not want to talk to you. I want this place to be a fun place. I want it to be comfortable for those who really want to learn. Hey, learning the Bible is not hard. It is finding people who want to learn that is really hard. But when I find them, I just give them everything I can give them. And I will be very honest with you, God has just blessed us with an overabundance of men and women who come in who want to learn the Bible. I do not care what your problems are. I do not care where you have been. I do not care where you are at right now. I care where you want to go, what you want to do. I will put that book right out there where you can get it if you want it. Anybody. You want to come? Come. You do not want to come? Do not come. Some of you, you would not miss church for anything on this planet. Some of you, you have got other stuff that comes up. Do what you want to do. I promise you I will be here every Sunday morning and every Thursday night, and I will be here when you need me. You want to learn it? You will get it. If you do not, you will not. I will get the Bible out and lay it out. I will not set the priorities in your life for you learning it. You have to do that yourself. I have got everything you need. You have got to know you need it. I want you to feel the freedom to ask, learn whatever you want about anything without being fearful of getting beat up or clobbered. A teachable spirit is what I am always looking for. Give you all you have got from the Bible. We are here to help you, not hurt you. I said it many times: you may hurt yourself, but we will never hurt you. My desire is to get you to the place and fulfill one of the greatest verses in the Bible on a teachable spirit. It is found in Proverbs 27:7, and it simply says this:

Proverbs 27:7

The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.

You will either be for the world, and the Bible will be a rejection to you, or you will be so hungry for truth that you take everything; even the things about you that need to change become sweet for you. There is a sermon you can go by that three or four of you will come up and say, "Man, you really gave it to me this morning!" And before I can even answer, you will say, "But man, I love you for it because that is what I needed." See, you have got to that point in your life. Hey, when you trust, obey, grow, learn God's way, it is all sweet. And once you get to that point in your life that the things about you that need to be changed become the sweet things, hey, your ability to learn goes off the chart.

VII. Understanding as a Wellspring of Life

And then verse 22: "Understanding is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools is folly." I do not know if you ever studied it or not, but there are two kinds of wells in the Bible. There are the freshwater springs that people can drink from, and then there is the bitter water that is undrinkable. Which are you? You are which one today based on the choices you have made, based on the wisdom you have allowed in your life, based on the mistakes that you made, and your ability—or your inability—to learn from them, grow through them, and get to where God wants you to be.

Wellspring of life. What a great choice of words to illustrate our life after we get to the place that all the Bible is sweet, and we get encouraged to increase our learning. There are some things in the Bible that are very negative, but to me they are sweet. I will tell you what, there was a time in my life, no matter what state I am in, how messed up I am, that I do not know that it is the best advice I could ever get. And I never get mad at God, or a person, or a Christian, or a preacher who lays it out to me and shows me what I need to change. I may not at that moment in time be willing to change it, but I am not so stupid that I get bitter against it. I know I have got the problem, not the book. Wisdom and understanding is like cold spring well water to a thirsty soul. The understanding of God and His Word that comes from the depth of our Christian life. And that is where spring water and well water comes. It is not surface water. You have got to dig down deep in the rock: the Bible doctrine, deep. It is not a surface Christianity where I just want the surface things of Christianity. It is getting down deep where the real water is that is really what people need. The deep things of God: our ability to discern, to understand, to get the perspective, to see the purpose, to see the good of any situation.

The end of that verse says, "but the instruction of fools is folly." When I deal with people, I am not so naive by any stretch of the imagination. I know that there are people who will play games. They will use you. They will complain about you. They will not do what is right. I get that. But I have got to tell you, I always look for the good in something. Because in this world of stupidity, with a lot of people who do not want to be taught, I want to tell you something: there are still a lot of people who want to be taught and learn the Word of God. And we have a tendency when we see a bad person over here that is not teachable, and a good person over here who is teachable, but in the early days they both have the same issues. It is easy to throw them on the same trash heap. You never find out what a person is really like by just focusing on all the bad things in their life. Now listen to me: you never really find out what a person is really like by just always looking at the negative. You have got to look beyond that, and you have got to see the good that is in there. And when you see it, you have got to help develop it. When I see somebody who has got the potential but has just messed up because of stupidity and making bad choices, who am I? You want to see stupidity of bad choices? Look at me. But they have got great potential, and they want to learn. I always focus on the good I see and try to develop it. I will prove all things, of course. I will put them under an accountability, absolutely. But if they have a teachable spirit, I will teach them.

You know, Romans chapter 12, each chapter in Romans has a different theme about it. And Romans chapter 12 is the Christians' relationship with other people. It is a great chapter on the Christian life and how we are to treat people. Romans chapter 12, verses 1 and 2, you will probably know the great two verses but probably never put it in the right context. It says that we are to be a living sacrifice, and we are not to be conformed to this world, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. You see, it starts out when it talks about our relationship to other people. The first thing that people should see when they see you and me is a living sacrifice. A living sacrifice that proves what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. They should, because there are people out there who are despondent. There are people out there that are hurting. There are people out there that have been beat up, run up, burned up with other churches that have just treated them terribly. There are people out there that

really are good people who want to learn. They are just looking for a place that somebody will give them what they really want. And it all starts with you being a living sacrifice, proving what God has done in your life by how you live. It is a great chapter that tells us not to be revengeful, which many of God's people are. It tells us to recompense no man with evil, which many of us do. It tells us to provide all things honest in the sight of all men. And it tells us not to be wise in our own conceit when we look at other brothers and sisters in Christ. But it says in chapter 12, verse 21, what a great verse:

Romans 12:21

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

And some people unfortunately are. But overcome evil with good. Focus on the good that is in somebody. I could spend all day long focusing on what is bad with all of us. I would much rather focus on what is good about you. We can overcome the bad if we just over-focus on the good. How do you know that, Bob? Because "be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Everybody here today who is where God wants you to be, and you are doing what you are doing in the ministry. You all got here because somebody took an interest in you when you were not very interesting. And that is what we are to do. Sometimes all people need is a chance to do right in the right environment with the right things in place, and somebody that will help them, encourage them, keep them accountable. Our job is to take them where we find them. And if they are teachable, that is the key. That we encourage them with the sweetness of the Word of God in our mouths and help them to get where God wants them to be. And in time, they will develop into a wellspring of life, telling others what God has done for them.

VIII. Conclusion: Attitude and Gratitude

You see, you definitely want to write this down: Christianity in the ministry. Are you ready? Christianity in the ministry is not just about attitude of heart; it is also about gratitude of heart. Real witnessing is not telling somebody what God can do for them. That is so impersonal. Real witnessing is simply telling somebody what God has done for you.

So far in this great practical chapter, last week and this week, we have seen that life is choices. We have seen the highway of life, the spirit of pride, the spirit of humbleness. Today we learned how to handle all matters with God's wisdom. We learned to look and find the good in every bad thing that comes our way, to see what God has us to learn so that we can be better for it. We saw that we have a testimony with others that see God in our lives—our marriage, our family—and then want what you and I have. The greatest witness we have: our lives, the way we use wisdom to encourage others to learn, and getting the understanding of God that is likened to a deep wellspring, sweet water, clear and clean. That leads to life, and for people who are unsaved, it leads to eternal life, and for people who are already saved, it leads to a full, productive life based on the Word of God, the water of life. Well, we will hold up there.