

New Hope Sermon Spirit-filled Wisdom 1/7/18

One of the highlights of our worship service last Sunday on New Years Eve was when we went around the room and each of us shared a prayer request we had for the coming year. Again and again, the requests were for wisdom and discernment in making the decisions related to studies and each one's future. Wisdom and discernment. It is such a timely issue for all of our church members that I wanted to take this Sunday to deal with it directly and then on the 14th we will begin our series on "What it take to build healthy relationships."

To start off, we need to clarify the plans of God vs. the plans of Satan in our decision-making. Here's good advice: "God has a plan for your life. The enemy has a plan for your life. Be ready for both. Be wise enough to know which one to battle and which one to embrace." Os Guinness says, "The devil's stock-in-trade is in the world of half-truth and half-lies where the half-lie masquerades as the whole truth." (In Two Minds, IVP, p. 47). We can tell which is which by this comparison:

<u>Satan's voice</u>	<u>God's voice</u>
Confusion	clarity
Coercion and fear	still small voice of direction
Condemnation	Forgiveness
Discouragement	Encouragement
Stress and worry	Peace and security

Paul prayed for his converts in Ephesus to have God's wisdom: "*I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.*" Living by God's wisdom is critical to our Christian life. "Our text today is Paul's prayer for the colossians chapter 1:9-12

9 *For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,*

We can follow God's voice in 3 areas –
Wisdom from the Holy Spirit
Wisdom from the Word of God rooted in us
Wisdom from our spiritual elders

#1. Colossians 1:9 says we continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives. The Spirit's wisdom is defined as a *knowledge of God's will coupled with all wisdom and understanding*. The good news is that God makes that wisdom accessible to you when you ask. Listen to James 1:5-8

We ask in faith, confident that God will give wisdom.

But we also ask with a surrendered heart. Romans 12:2 *Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. THEN you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

The Spirit will reveal God's perfect will for you step by step when you ask and when you are surrendered, so you will do what God directs you to do. These are foundational principles of discernment – which comes when we choose to be tuned into God and seek from God what only God can provide.

It sounds simple enough but we know that choosing God's way often requires great courage. Let me tell you a story:

On April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson became pro baseball's first black player when he debuted with the Brooklyn Dodgers... Branch Rickey was the Dodger's baseball executive who eventually signed Jackie Robinson. Rickey's pastor was Wendell Fifield, from the Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims in Brooklyn. (This church, at one time pastored by Henry Ward Beecher, had a history of working with the "underground railroad" to help free slaves.) While Rickey was trying to decide if he should sign Jackie Robinson, he paid a visit to Rev. Fifield. He barged into the pastor's study and told Fifield, "Don't let me interrupt. I just want to be here. Do you mind?" According to an eyewitness report the two men passed the time without words. The pastor continued his work and Rickey energetically paced the floor, stopping occasionally to look out the pastor's window. For forty-five minutes he continued pacing, pausing, pacing, and then pausing. Finally, Rickey broke the silence by pounding his fist on the pastor's desk as he shouted, "I've got it!" "Got what, Branch?" the minister asked. Rickey finally relaxed on a chair and told his pastor, "This was so complex, fraught with so many pitfalls but filled with so much good, if it was right, that I just had to work it out in this room with you. I had to talk to God about it and be sure what he wanted me to do. I hope you don't mind...I've decided to sign Jackie Robinson." Then Rickey straightened his bow tie, donned his hat, and left the room as he said, "Bless you, Wendell." In a couple of interviews from 2011, people who knew Rickey reflected on this story. Rickey's grandson said that when a well-known journalist told Rickey that "all hell would break loose" when Jackson took the field, Rickey quietly countered, "I believe all heaven will rejoice." Also, Jackie Robinson's widow Rachel had this to say about Rickey's need to pray about the decision: "He knew he was going to be pretty well isolated in making it, so he needed all the strength he could summon up, to be able to take the step." *Jamie Crawford, "How church helped sign Jackie Robinson to Brooklyn Dodgers," CNN (4-14-11)*

Knowing God's heart for justice and freedom from oppression, I believe it was the Holy Spirit who led Rickey to that decision. I expect also it was the presence of his pastor with him as he grappled with God that also gave him the silent affirmation and courage he needed.

Wisdom from the Holy Spirit involves listening to God and maybe pacing it out and pausing in the presence of God over a period of time. We need to take that time, beloved, to be in God's presence, with His Word and listen to how God speaks to us. Major life decisions are not the time for "arrow prayers – 'Lord, help. Please give me wisdom!' – and then go on with our day. Listening involves taking the time to let God speak with His still small voice. I believe many of us, in our frenetic lifestyles, lose it right here – before we even get to first base. An old hymn captures this so well so let's sing two verses of it right now to get our mind on track with God's ways of revealing wisdom:

"Dear Lord and Father of mankind forgive our foolish ways. Reclothe us in our rightful mind; in purer lives thy service find, in deeper reverence, praise. ..Drop thy still dews of quietness till all our strivings cease. Take from our souls the strain and stress, and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of Thy peace." (words John Whittier, music Frederick Maker).

The beauty of Thy peace. The freedom from the strain and stress and multiple distractions that keep us from hearing the Lord. Since this is not our normal lifestyle, let's take some time right now for silent reflection and prayer. Time to let God's peace flow over you and clear your mind. (Given plays)

Notice next in our passage that when the Spirit give us wisdom and direction for God's will, the outcome is *SO THAT we might live a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power...giving thanks to the Father.* Col.1:10-12. This combination of pleasing God, bearing fruit, being strengthened and giving thanks is the progressive outcome of being led by the Spirit. If your decision do not lead to that outcome, then most likely God is not the one doing the leading.

I. So then, the question is, 'how does God generally speak? Through the Scripture. This is principle #2.

We will access and understand God's wisdom to the extent that His Word is rooted in us. Without our immersion in the truths of God's Word, chances are you are left to your own thinking, your own perspective, your own desires, your own wisdom. But, beloved, this kind of wisdom is basically faulty.

We often don't see our own misconceptions, or self-centered thinking. We are not as smart as we think. So scripture admonishes us to *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean NOT on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. Prov.3:5-7.*

Let me give you an illustration.

Science writer Hope Jahren shares an interesting fact about plants, especially how a tiny seed starts to put down roots—the most essential thing for a plant's survival. She writes, No risk is more terrifying than that taken by the first root. A lucky root will eventually find water, but its first job is to anchor ... Once the first root is extended, the plant will never again enjoy any hope of relocating to a place less cold, less dry, less dangerous. Indeed, it will face frost, drought, and greedy jaws without any possibility of flight.

She calls taking root a big "gamble," but if the seed takes root it can go down twelve, thirty, forty meters. The results are powerful. The tree's roots can "swell and split bedrock, and move gallons of water daily for years, much more efficiently than any pump yet invented by man." If the root takes root, then the plant becomes all but indestructible: "Tear apart everything aboveground—everything—and most plants can still grow rebelliously back from just one intact root. More than once. More than twice." *Adapted from Hope Jahren, Lab Girl (Kopf, 2016), pages 45-46*

The seed's connection to water is essential for its survival and growth. Then its growth can remove all kinds of normal obstacles in its pathway.

That's a great analogy for us. We must be connected to the Holy Spirit – who is our well of water within.

When Marti and Alex helped me take down the Christmas tree on Monday, the first thing I did as I rearranged the living room was to restore my little corner. There are many places to sit in this house (which is so great since we live in community), but I have created my little corner so I have a reminder of my need to take time with God each day and to listen. I have my Bible there, I have a Biblical concordance there when I need to find a verse, I have my notebooks there, for writing Shepherds Daughters and my sermons and my new book with Alex. I do NOT have my Day Timer there or my iPhone. I have a cross-stitch Laurie made me with the last words Daddy wrote me "Press On" to keep me focused on God's call on my life, and I have a statue of dolphins playing in the surf to remind me of the joy of life and laughter and fun as a needed balance. My little corner for listening.

We gain wisdom as #1 we ask for wisdom from God and listen to God's voice. We gain wisdom as we sit with the Lord and #2 allow His word to be deeply rooted in our hearts and minds.

II. And we gain wisdom #3 as we seek interactions and counsel from people who walk with God in our community.

Scripture says *"There is wisdom in a multitude of counselors."* (Prov.15:22) This advice is our red flag to keep us from making unilateral decisions. We need to always check our leading and perceptions against the wisdom of our elders. *"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked"* (Jer.17:9), and we can easily rationalize our carefully thought out plans. When several counselors give us the same advice, especially when it contradicts our own thinking, we can thank God for that wisdom and then take it!

One of the recent examples of that wisdom came with the tsunami that devastated parts of Asia in 2004. It was demonstrated by the Morgan sea gypsies living in Thailand at the time.

"The Morgan sea gypsies are a small tribe of 181 fishermen who spend much of the year on their boats fishing in the Andaman Sea from India to Indonesia and back to Thailand. In December, though, they live in shelters on the beaches of Thailand. In December 2004, in the

hours before the killer Tsunami crashed ashore, the Morgan sea gypsies were living on those beaches. They were in harm's way and would have likely all perished—had they not listened to their elders. For generations, the elders of the tribe had passed along one piece of wisdom. The tribe's 65-year-old village chief Sarmao Kathalay says, “The elders told us that if the water recedes fast it will reappear in the same quantity in which it disappeared.” And that is exactly what happened. The sea drained quickly from the beach, leaving stranded fish flopping on the shore. How easy it would have been for those who live off of the sea to run down where the water had been minutes ago and fill every basket available with fish. Some people did just that in other areas of South Thailand. Not the Morgan sea gypsies. When the water receded from the beach, the tribal chief ordered every one of the 181 tribal members to run to a temple in the mountains of South Surin Island. When the waters crashed ashore, the 181 sea gypsies were safe on high ground. *"how 'Sea Gypsies' Survived the Tsunami," Associated Press.* They listened to and obeyed the directives of their elders even when their instincts told them their livelihood could have been greatly helped by the buckets of fish they could have caught on the beach. The circumstances and the wisdom of their elders clashed and they are alive today because they chose the elders!

Another example of life direction coming from an elder is in the life of William Wilberforce. In the British Parliament he was known for his integrity. John Newton, the former slave trader turned priest, became Rector of a church in London in 1779. His advice was sought by many influential figures in Georgian society. In 1785 after his conversion to evangelical Christianity, William Wilberforce was contemplating leaving politics for the ministry. But Newton encouraged him to stay in Parliament and "serve God where he was". That scene is powerfully depicted in the movie *Amazing Grace*. Wilberforce took Newton's advice and persevered with the strength of God despite the setbacks and even opposition toward the abolitionist movement as public sentiment for abolition fluctuated greatly. It wasn't until 1807, after a long, emotional debate, that the Abolition Act was finally passed. Newton was one of the “elders who played a pivotal role in Wilberforce's vocational decision and ultimate role in history. Wilberforce listened and became a key figure for God in history.

Who knows how God wants to lead each of us individually and as a church this coming year? If we will listen and choose to follow Spirit-filled wisdom, have His Word deeply rooted in us, and listen to the advice of wise counselors, God's will pour out the wisdom and discernment we need. What a glorious and very practical prospect for this year. Let's pray.

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Song of Response: “Lead me Lord. Lead me in Thy righteousness. Make Thy way plain before my face. For it is Thou Lord, Thou Lord only, that makes me dwell in safety. Amen.” (Samuel Wesley)