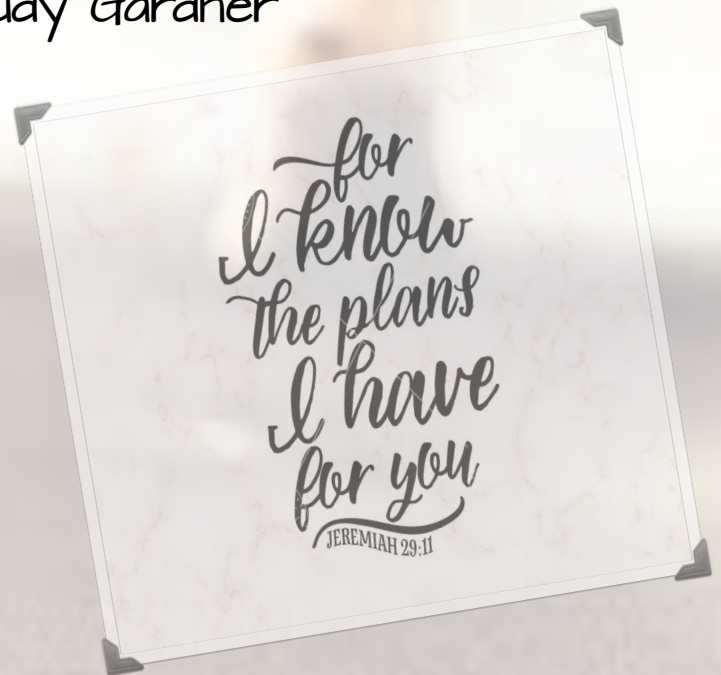


August 1-5, 2022 Edition Following The Year Of ^Jesus Part 31

Blooming Where I'm Planted

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: This week we will be looking at the concept of wisdom and developing a working definition of wisdom from the book of Proverbs:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Proverbs 3:5-6 (NLT)

Wisdom is all about knowing which path to take. It is about competence in regards to the choices and decisions we make every day. These choices may not have an obvious right or wrong answer (on the surface) and yet make a choice we must. And since these choices often are incredibly important and have a lasting impact on our lives wisdom would seem to be pretty important, am I right? Or am I right? Or am I right? (if you weren't at church this weekend then that didn't make any sense to you at all but if you were there and watched the video clips [this week all from Bill Murray's Groundhog Day] then you're either smiling right now or shaking your head- you're welcome ;o)

This week we're going to look at the importance of our hearts when it comes to developing wisdom. The heart is a concept that comes up over and over in the book of Proverbs and really in the entire Bible. We've already seen in the scripture we started out with today that the key to wisdom is trusting the Lord with all of our heart. But what does it mean to trust Him with all our heart? What do you think of when you think of the human heart? We generally think of the heart as the seat of emotion and the mind as the seat of the intellect. We have that idea because that was what the Greeks believed. They believed humans were a duality made up of heart (emotions) and mind (intellect).

It's everywhere in our culture. People will talk about leading with their hearts or making decisions based on emotion rather than reason. Emily Dickinson is famous for saying that "the heart wants what the heart wants". What does that mean exactly? Nobody's sure but it sounds pretty good and gives English professors something to do with their time. I think it's supposed to mean that we can't control our hearts, but is that true? We'll spend this week looking at that very question (spoiler alert!!!! The answer is yes... and no...). But let me leave you with this scripture to ponder today:

The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? Jeremiah 17:9 (NLT)

It's true you know. But it's not the whole truth. The human heart is responsible for some of the most dysfunctional and destructive things that have ever taken place in the history of our planet. The human heart is also responsible for the most beautiful things that have ever happened. What's the difference? Why does one heart destroy and another create? Why does one heart hurt and another heart heal? Why does one heart bring ugliness and horror and another bring beauty and transcendence? Great questions that wisdom has a lot to say about.

Tuesday Reflection: This week we are focusing in on Proverbs chapter 4 which describes what the journey to wisdom looks like in our lives. Each day we'll focus in on another part of that journey but for today we'll start where Proverbs 4 starts- with the truth.

The Old Testament as a whole pretty much teaches that wisdom comes by first of all finding/hearing/learning the truth. Look at how Proverbs chapter 4 begins:

My children, listen when your father corrects you. Pay attention and learn good judgment, for I am giving you good guidance. Don't turn away from my instructions.
Proverbs 4:1-2 (NLT)

It was believed in ancient Israel that the way to wisdom was to first find/hear/learn the truth and you can see that clearly in Proverbs chapter 4:

My father taught me, "Take my words to heart. Follow my commands, and you will live. Get wisdom; develop good judgment. Don't forget my words or turn away from them. Don't turn your back on wisdom, for she will protect you. Love her, and she will guard you. Getting wisdom is the wisest thing you can do! And whatever else you do, develop good judgment. If you prize wisdom, she will make you great. Embrace her, and she will honor you. She will place a lovely wreath on your head; she will present you with a beautiful crown." Proverbs 4:4-9 (NLT)

This is very familiar language when it comes to the Proverbs- listen to wisdom, seek wisdom, find wisdom, get wisdom, develop, embrace and follow wisdom. And that advice is not at all different from the rest of the ancient world. No matter what corner of the world you traveled to the advice was the same- start with the truth and the truth will guide you. The trouble is- what happens if you know the truth but don't care to follow it? That was me. I grew up in church and though it may have had its issues the people there loved me and did their best to point me to "the truth". My understanding of that "truth" was skewed (I can see that now) but I still had a pretty good idea of what the "rules" were. I had a pretty good idea of what not to do and to do. I just didn't really care.

I lived my life in whatever way was going to be the easiest or most fun. If I needed to avoid getting in trouble or doing something I didn't want to I'd lie, cheat or steal to get out of it. If I could get something that I wouldn't otherwise get by lying, cheating or stealing then I lied, cheated and stole. I lied about anything and everything. I lied to get out of trouble. I lied to make a dull story more exciting. I lied to get things I wouldn't otherwise have gotten. Often I lied just because I was so good at it. My poor mom had no idea what to do with me. Where did this little troublemaker come from? She had two perfect little angels with my brother and sister who were 7 & 8 years older than me (ok- they weren't perfect but I'm sure they seemed like it to my mom who had no idea what she had gotten herself into when God sent one heckuva surprise into her life 7 years after she thought she was finished having children).

The point is, I knew the truth but I didn't care. My heart just wasn't in it. In fact, my heart was "in" with something else and it was causing all sorts of issues for me and my poor mom. We'll talk more about this as we go along this week but take some time today and think about how much of the things that go wrong in your life are because you didn't know what the "truth" was and how much you knew but you couldn't find it in you to follow through on what you knew.

Wednesday Reflection: So the Bible first and foremost identifies wisdom with character. The next logical question is, then how do I grow my character? If what I want is to

grow in wisdom (so I know what choices to make in a given day) and I know that wisdom comes through character/integrity then how do I grow my character?

One step at a time.

The Bible is constantly comparing our lives to a journey. And if you're on a long journey then most of your steps are going to be small, methodical and purposeful. Eventually the steps may come to seem almost monotonous:

I will teach you wisdom's ways and lead you in straight paths. When you walk, you won't be held back. Proverbs 4:11-12 (NLT)

On a long journey most of our steps are small and slow. Most long journeys are not a sprint (and if you've ever wondered why just ask the guy that sprinted to Marathon to warn the Greeks that the Persians were coming- he dropped dead. YIKES!)- they're a walk. The same thing is true with our character. Our character is not set by the momentous events that happen in our lives. For the most part our character is set by the small, mundane, methodical decisions we make on a moment by moment basis every single day. These small decisions may not seem like much of a big deal in the moment but added up over time they are the choices that will set the trajectory of your life for good or bad:

The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day. But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble. Proverbs 4:18-19 (NIV)

The path of the righteous isn't one where when you decide that you want to live a life of "righteousness" (which is nothing more than deciding you want to do the "right" thing in and with your life) God flips a switch and your path is flooded with light. It's a gradual process that Solomon compares to a sunrise. Have you ever sat and waited on the sun to come up so you could start moving again? We don't generally have this issue in our modern world with all the light we live our lives taking for granted. Heck, even when I went on the Crow Creek trail with a group from the church we had flash lights to find our way when the sun went down. But imagine you don't have access to flashlights or street lights or the little light on your phone that you can bring up when you can't see. Can you start to imagine why light would be SO important? The people of the ancient world could. And Solomon told them that wisdom/character development was like waiting on the sunrise.

At first you can't tell much difference from walking in darkness but pretty soon you think maybe you see a hint of light on the horizon. After a time (it seems like an eternity if you REALLY NEED light) you start to notice a pinkish hue. That hue still doesn't do much to illuminate your path but at last you have hope. Then as the sun starts to peak up over the horizon you can start to move about with confidence. That's what a life dedicated to wisdom/character/integrity development looks like. And according to the Bible you can't separate wisdom from character or integrity- they're opposite sides of the same coin.

What does that mean? That if you and I want to grow in wisdom the only way is to grow in character. In the New Testament we are constantly being told to "become more and more like Jesus". I always wondered what that meant but I'm pretty sure now we're not being invited to be the savior of the world (which Jesus is). And I'm pretty sure we're not being invited to be

omnipotent (all powerful), omnipresent (everywhere at once) or omniscient (knowing everything). Nope- the "omnis" are off the table for us. I will never be all powerful, all present or all knowing (and neither will you) and really we should all say a prayer of thanks for that. Why? Because we may think we know what's best but none of us really does. And if I (or you) were all powerful I have a sneaking suspicion I'd have done something pretty stupid by now thinking I was totally in the right only to find out later how wrong I was.

God will share His wisdom (as well as His power, His presence and His knowledge) with us only to the extent that we are growing into the character of His Son, Jesus. And here we find the answer to the question, "what does the Bible mean when it asks me to become more and more like Jesus"? Grow in His character. As we do God will share His wisdom (and power and presence and knowledge) with us increasingly- just like a sunrise on any given day. We'd love for it to be a faster process but I think God knows what He's doing (I know... understatement of the year but if you're like me you've wondered if He was as smart as you are based on how long it was taking Him to do whatever you KNEW was the right thing to do).

And one final thought- have you ever thought it was unfair that God would only share His wisdom/power/knowledge/presence with people who were actively developing the character of Jesus? Ever wonder why that is? I know I did. It turns out it's because if you gave someone the power/wisdom/knowledge/presence or of God who didn't share His character it'd be an awfully dangerous combination. So God is picky about who gets His power/wisdom/knowledge/presence- not in terms of only picking certain people and leaving others out but based on only sharing it with people on a certain path. So the path we're on turns out to be pretty important when it comes to not only wisdom but so many of the other things we desperately want and need.

So... what path are you on today?

Thursday Reflection: Ok... so if I want to grow in wisdom it turns out I first need to grow in character/integrity/truth. Seems pretty simple, right? But there's a problem- I can't just change my character/integrity by trying really hard. It just doesn't work. Why not? Because there's this little problem that all human beings share- it's our hearts:

The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? Jeremiah 17:9 (NLT)

So what, you say? What does that matter? Well, it matters because it's what's in our hearts that determines the little day-in, day-out decisions we make (which in turn set our character for either good or bad) in response to the dozens/hundreds/thousands of choices we face every single day of our lives. Jesus said it like this:

"Don't you understand yet?" Jesus asked. "Anything you eat passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer. But the words you speak come from the heart- that's what defiles you. For from the heart come evil thoughts... These are what defile you. Matthew 15:16-20 (NLT)

In other words- whatever is in our hearts will eventually come bubbling out of us through our words or actions. I can't have a deceitful/wicked heart and just try really hard to force myself through the strength of my own will to do sacrificial things. And if I'm not choosing

Christ-like actions throughout my day then I'm not growing in character/integrity and therefore God will not share His wisdom/power/strength/knowledge/presence with me. That's why Solomon in the book of Proverbs puts so much emphasis on what's in our hearts:

My child, pay attention to what I say. Listen carefully to my words. Don't lose sight of them. Let them penetrate deep into your heart, for they bring life to those who find them, and healing to their whole body. Proverbs 4:20-22 (NLT)

It's fascinating that before he ever starts telling us what to do differently (which is sort of what the wisdom literature in the Bible is all about- describing what wise actions/thoughts/emotions/words look like) he tells us to let his words penetrate deep into our hearts. He finishes this section of Proverbs 4 with what might be the best advice you'll ever read:

*Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.
Proverbs 4:20-23 (NLT)*

Guard your heart. Remember, the heart in the Bible's vocabulary is not about emotions verses intellect. It's both of those combined. It's the thing that drives everything we do. Everything. That's why guarding my heart turns out to be such an important concept. Because it governs every single thing we do, think and say (and what else is there to us really?). In fact I love the older translations of this verse that read:

"Guard your heart with all diligence, for out of it is the wellspring of life."

A wellspring wasn't just a hole in the ground with dirty, warm water in it. A wellspring was a gushing spring that created a stream. It was cold and clear and refreshing. People in the ancient world LOVED a wellspring. So when Solomon says that our hearts are a "wellspring" the people of the ancient world got a vivid picture in their brains of exactly what he meant. How about us? Do you have a picture in your mind of what a wellspring is meant to do? It's meant to bless not just me but overflow and bless the people around me too:

And may the Master pour on the love so it fills your lives and splashes over on everyone around you, just as it does from us to you. 1 Thessalonians 3:12 (MES)

And that's what a life that is pursuing and cultivating the heart of God looks like. This is what that kind of heart can do. It can change the world. But now we're back to the original question- if wisdom comes through character and character comes through the little choices we make every single day and that's what sets my heart but I can't just change the little choices I make every single day because those choices are going to flow straight out of my heart and not out of my "will" then how do I change my heart (is your head spinning yet?)? We'll talk about that tomorrow but for today know that God wants to change your heart:

And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. Ezekiel 36:26 (NLT)

That's your future- if you want it. More tomorrow.

Friday Reflection: So I'm assuming if you're still reading it's because you'd like to know how to go about changing your heart so that you can change the little choices you make every day. Choices that set your character which is what leads to God showering you

with His wisdom/power/strength/knowledge/presence or not. Alright. So we're all on the same page. Then how do I change my heart?

Well, you can't. That's it. That's the devotional for today. Goodbye. Aren't you encouraged?

Alright. We'll spend a bit more time on this but I'm not kidding when I say you can't change your heart- at least not on your own, by yourself. Theologians have been wrestling with this question for the last 2,000 years. Martin Luther was really freaked out over the fact that he couldn't change his own heart. The more he tried the worse things got for him. He drove his confessing priest crazy (obviously this was BEFORE he nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg church and turned Christianity upside down) and would often spend 6 hours A DAY in the confessional booth. His confessing priest, a man named Johann Von Staupitz lost his patience with this priest who was teaching at Wittenberg College and yet felt like he was powerless to change his thoughts and behaviors and eventually exclaimed, "Martin! It's as though every time you fart you must confess your sins. Quit coming to me with these puppy confessions, Luther! Go kill your father or something- then we'll have a sin to talk about!"

But something changed Luther's life not long after this. The thing that had been troubling him was the "path of darkness" that we talked about on Wednesday:

But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble. Proverbs 4:19 (NIV)

That path of darkness terrified Luther. He needed to know what to do to avoid it because he knew too well that that darkness was lurking in his own heart. How can a human avoid it? He found the answer one day when he was reading Romans 1:16-17:

I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes-the Jew first and also the Gentile. This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life." Romans 1:16-17 (NLT)

Luther was stunned. The church he had grown up in and become a part of taught a much different picture. The Catholic church at the time taught that people were saved by doing what they were told to do and confessing when they strayed. Salvation as a works based program that depended on a human's ability to "get with the program" and stay with the program. Paul was painting a much different picture in Romans chapter 1. It was a kaleidoscope moment for Martin Luther. Suddenly everything he had ever learned about Jesus was seen through a new lens- the lens of faith. Martin recognized finally that when Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" it was because Jesus had taken on the deep darkness that had so frightened Luther. The deep darkness from Proverbs 4:19. And because Jesus had taken that deep darkness upon Himself on the cross now those who are saved by Him are saved by faith from start to finish.

It gave Luther a whole new appreciation for what Jesus did for him and do you know what happened? That new appreciation transformed Martin Luther's heart. And suddenly not only was his fear gone but his ability to change the little decisions he had to make everyday- the decisions that would set his character and lead to more of God's wisdom/power/strength/knowledge/presence in Martin's life- was different. Suddenly he made new decisions almost

organically without really having to think about it. Why?

He had a new heart. How did he get that new heart? By seeing Jesus for Who He really is and clearly seeing what He had done for him. That. Changed. Everything. And Jesus told us over and over that that's what He had come to do. One day sitting beside a well in Samaria Jesus told a Samaritan woman:

Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life." John 4:13-14 (NLT)

I never saw it until this week but Jesus was using wisdom language. Literally what He told her was, "the water I give you will become a wellspring (hopefully you remember the importance of that word from yesterday's reflection on Proverbs 4:23) bubbling up within them, giving them eternal life". And on the night before He died in response to an assertion from one of His disciples (a guy we like to call doubting Thomas) they they didn't know the "way" Jesus said this:

"No, we don't know, Lord," Thomas said. "We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. John 14:5-6 (NLT)

Again, I never realized it til this week but Jesus was using wisdom language (this week was a bit of a kaleidoscope turning week for me as well- everything looks different now when I see it in light of Proverbs chapter 4), but He is. How? Well in ancient Israel everyone knew what God asked of them. Find the truth, follow the way that it pointed to and enter into life. It was drilled into them from the earliest of ages. Find the truth, follow the way, enter into life.

But here Jesus changes everything around. No longer is the progression truth to way to life. Now all three are found at the same time in Jesus because of what He has accomplished. Because of what He's done for me and for you. Don't know the way to life? Jesus IS the way (He doesn't point the way or show you the way or lead you into the way- He IS the way). Don't know what the truth is? It's not a program or a method- it's a person. Jesus IS the truth. Not sure how to find life? Got Jesus? Then you've got life by definition. If you want to find the motivation to change the daily little choices that are setting your character for good or bad you need to find Jesus and see Him for Who He really is. To understand what He's done for you (He took the deep darkness of Proverbs 4:19 so you and I wouldn't have to experience it ourselves).

The rest of Proverbs will give us tips on what to change to live a life of wisdom but none of the rest of what we learn will matter if we don't change our hearts and then guard our hearts.

So guard your heart well because it is the wellspring of your entire life.