

I. Introduction

[Greeting]

Why don't you grab your bibles and get your eyes on Proverbs 4:1-5.

When I was in high school my dad and I did not see eye to eye on what it meant to "have a good time." I was interested in friends and dating and music and that was pretty much it. My dad, on the other hand... spent a lot of time with his goats and chickens. Still does, actually. Truthfully, my dad pours his time and talent into a lot of worthy projects and people, but for him his hobby farm is an outlet for rest. And in high school I was a strong back living under his roof, so that meant that if there was ever a project for the hobby farm, my dad and I tackled it together. Now, you have to understand, to this day I couldn't really care less about goats and chickens, but there are moments from those projects that I look back on and treasure - not because we were building a chicken coop, or driving fence posts - but because I was spending time with my dad. In particular I remember a few occasions when we would walk the fences. He had electric fences that would short out if they were touching any weeds or brush, so we would walk the fences and cut down any offending brush. And while we walked we would talk. We would talk about God or girls or things I was perplexed about or struggling with. I don't care for farm animals, but I will forever treasure the wisdom my Dad shared with me in those moments. My guess is that you've had moments like that and people like that. A family member who really saw you and cared about you. A coach that shaped your life. A mentor who gave you their time and friendship. **Deeply significant. Incalculably precious.**

Our world tells us a story about our lives. And it's a story that says the pinnacle, the mountaintop, the end goal is when you as an individual finally reach the peak of your potential, your desire, your ambition, your dreams. But the gospel gives us a different and better story. It's a story that says abundant life comes not when we reach the height of our potential, but when we pour ourselves out for the sake of others. And those moments - walking the fences with my dad - those people who we cherish because of how they poured into us - they're so significant and precious because whether they know it or not, they are little shadows that outline for us the shape of the gospel.

Over the summer we've been considering what it means to walk through our tangled up, confusing, grief filled, polarized, tribalized world with the wisdom of Christ, because wisdom - seeing the world rightly (as God sees it) and acting in the world rightly (as God defines it) - is the path God has given to an abundant life. When we began this series we started with Proverbs 4:7, "The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom" and now as we come to the close of our series, we're going to end by saying, "Get wisdom.. and then pass down wisdom," because when the seed of Wisdom takes root, it inevitably reproduces. **Wisdom, when it is conceived, gives birth to the passing down of wisdom.**

Let's look at our passage for today: Proverbs 4:1-5...

¹ Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight,

² for I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching.

³ When I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in the sight of my mother,

⁴ he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live.

⁵ Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth.

This is the word of the Lord. [Thanks be to God]

Would you pray with me?

Father in heaven, you are the source of all wisdom and we can only know you through your Son Jesus Christ. So Father, please send your Holy Spirit to show us the Son - the wisdom of God. Lord, we need to behold you in your word and be transformed in the beholding. Help us, Lord. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

II. Wisdom: The *Path* to Abundant Life in Christ

Alright, the message today is about passing down wisdom to others. But in order to get to a place where we can talk about that, let's build a foundation for where we're going by noticing what these verses in Proverbs say about wisdom.

Here in Proverbs 4 these five verses culminate in verse 5 with a command: "Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth." In a sense that's where the message today will culminate. There is a wise practice that I want you to grasp and take with you. That's where we're going to land. I want you to *get wisdom!* But we need to see that the proverbs aren't just spouting off baseless commands. Look at the reasons why the writer of Proverbs values wisdom. In verse 2 it says, "...be attentive, that you may gain insight,² *for I give you good precepts...*" And in verse 4 it says something similar: "...keep my commandments, *and live.*"

In those verses the writer of Proverbs is brushing up against an underlying assumption behind the whole book of Proverbs and even though this is the last sermon in the series and we've said it before, we need to return to it again. Here's the fundamental assumption: living in God's world in God's way is the path to the good life! God isn't calling us to wisdom and asking us to pursue it blindly. Followers of Jesus aren't called to obey God out of begrudging obligation. 1 John 5:3 says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome." The narrow way that God has laid out - the way that puts folly to death and embraces wisdom - is the way to wholeness. His precepts are good. His law is loving. His wisdom is for our abundance.

And you have to remember, in the Bible wisdom isn't just a set of principles or a collection of wise sayings – it's a person. Proverbs 8 says wisdom is present with God at the creation of the world, ordering the cosmos, delighting in creation, and laying out the path to true life. And when we come to the New Testament, we see that Jesus is the Logos - the ordering principle of the universe, made flesh. He's not just a wise teacher, he's God's wisdom in a person. Paul calls Christ in 1 Corinthians 1:24, "the power of God and the wisdom of God." Jesus doesn't just point us to wisdom, he is the wisdom of God personified.

So in John 10:10, when Jesus says, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly," he's not promising material wealth, or success, or comfort, or protection from suffering. He's saying, "the way to living in God's world in God's way; the path for experiencing the fullness of joy, peace, purpose that transcends our circumstances comes in through me."

And all of that means that in the gospel - the message about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus - we're being shown the ultimate expression of God's wisdom. The greatest expression of the wisdom of God is the gospel message.

Alright? Now all of that is a necessary starting point. Wisdom is the path to abundant life in Christ. Now here's the next step I want to take together: wisdom is not just the path to abundant life. Wisdom is the *tradition* of abundant life.

III. Wisdom: The *Tradition* of Abundant Life in Christ

Let's look back at the passage so I can show you what I mean.

¹ Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight,

² for I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching.

³ When I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in the sight of my mother,

⁴ he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live.

⁵ Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth.

So here in Proverbs 4 we're listening in as a father speaks to his sons, calling them into wisdom. And how does he coach his sons into wisdom? He tells them how he learned wisdom from his dad! (See verse 4). So not only do we have a father speaking to his sons, but we have a grandfather who taught the father, who is now teaching his own sons. Three generations, each one helping the next to walk in wisdom. So can you see where I'm pulling this word, "tradition" from? The Bible isn't just shouting at us out of the distant past, reverberating through empty time and space, and coming to us isolated individuals gathered here today in 2024 and saying, "Hey you! You there, get wisdom! Do it all on your own! Pull yourself up by your bootstraps! Get it done by yourself!" Not at all! We're being invited into a tradition of wisdom!

Now, depending on where you're coming from, "tradition" might be a synonym for "stodgy" or "rote" to you, but that's not what I mean. Tradition is the passing down from one generation to another things of weight and significance.

Let's think about how we got here, friends. You and I are here in a school cafeteria in Michigan, in North America, two-thousand years after the resurrection of Christ. And in order for the gospel to reach us from an insignificant back corner of the Roman Empire it had to travel across borders, across continents, across oceans... It had to be handed down from person to person, from church to church, from generation to generation across thousands of miles and two millenia.

If we're not careful, we can easily slip into a mindset that thinks of our faith as having shallow roots. Maybe they reach as far back as our own stories, or maybe as far back as our parents' testimonies, or maybe as far back as the last fifty years. It's easy to think of ourselves as isolated islands of faith, but we are not! We aren't just individuals out here on our own, we're the latest in a long tradition of abundant life in Christ that has been handed down from generation to generation. We are situated in a rich storyline that reaches back through the ages and grounds us here today. We exist, the church perseveres, the gospel continues to go forward because we are the latest in a long tradition of passing down the wisdom of the gospel from person to person, from church to church, from generation to generation.

And the reason that's true, the reason we are one link in a long gospel chain is because wisdom never contents itself with staying put in one place. Wisdom always gives birth.

IV. Wisdom Gives Birth

The passage here in Proverbs 4 gives us an example of three generations who are passing wisdom down from one generation to another and that example isn't limited to this one chapter. The whole book of Proverbs is written as a book of instruction from a parent to a child (a father addresses their son directly over 25 times throughout the book). And that tells us that the point of wisdom isn't to gather up wisdom for ourselves and squirrel it away for when we need it. The joy and of wisdom is fully experienced, not only in the process of acquiring it, not just as we put wisdom to work in our lives, but in the planting and cultivating of wisdom in others. And this is why I'm arguing to you, friends, that wisdom, when it is conceived, gives birth to the passing down of wisdom. When wisdom

takes root it produces in a person an inclination, an instinct, a disposition toward cultivating wisdom in others.

So let's just step back for a moment and connect some dots on some of the things we've said.

- Wisdom is God's path to abundant life.
- Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God in a person
- The message about Jesus Christ - the gospel - is, therefore, wisdom in a message.
- Wisdom is meant to be passed down.
- We're here today because the gospel wisdom about Christ has been handed down throughout the ages and has reached us.

Based on that, couldn't it be fair to say...

- When the Proverbs say "pass down wisdom," is that not a command of the same substance and species as when Jesus says "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all I have commanded you?"
- Therefore when Jesus gives his church a mission: Go and make disciples, is he not saying that we are to be a people who orient our lives around the passing down of the wisdom of Christ from person to person, church to church, and generation to generation?

Friends, let me try and say something to tie together this whole series on Wisdom. Most of us are used to feeling out of our depth; uncertain how to navigate the uncharted waters ahead. So the longing for wisdom comes naturally to most of us. Everyone wants a guru, a Yoda, a Gandalf to guide them on their hero's journey. And there are hosts of Tik Tok influencers, leadership gurus, mom blogs, health coaches, MLM's, and spiritual teachers lining up to take that place in your life, all of them promising to lead you to the mountaintop of self actualization.

But this is a cheap counterfeit to the Christian journey. Jesus came that we would have life and have it abundantly. Just like the counterfeit guides, he promises to lead you to the mountaintop. But unlike our cultural narrative, in the life of discipleship to Christ the path to joy and peace isn't one of choosing your own adventure on the way to "the best version of me." In Christianity, the path toward abundant life is found in laying down one's life, surrendering one's autonomy, trusting in the authoritative voice of another - namely the voice of God in Christ.

And while the cultural story culminates in the mountaintop of self-actualization, the Christian's journey finds its fullest expression in cycles of reproduction. The wisdom of Christ is received. The wisdom of Christ takes root. The wisdom of Christ bears fruit. The Wisdom of Christ sews more seeds. **Our cultural story leads us into the culdesac of ourselves. Christianity compels us toward an ever-growing storyline which did not begin with us and will not end with us, but will be passed down *through us* to generations to come.**

So we began our series in wisdom trying to shine a light on the true and better wisdom of Christ for everyone and we're bringing the series to close with an exhortation that you obey Christ and see yourself as one who has the honor and the calling to plant the seeds of wisdom in others. As Christ has loved us and poured himself out for us, so we ought to love others, pouring ourselves out so that others might know the wisdom of Christ.

Parents, Christ has given you the glorious mission to pass the wisdom of Christ down to your children. You who are aged, the world invites you to work hard so that you can selfishly coast at the end, but in Christ you have been given the mantle of sages and teachers. (This is why Titus 2 calls older men to walk with younger men and older women to teach younger women.)

And no matter your age, if you are in Christ, you are called to be a witness, a guide, a teacher who makes disciples of all nations. That means that no matter if you are old or young, if you have a family or live on your own, in the gospel you have been given a wisdom that the world does not know and you have been given the high calling to teach that gospel wisdom to the world. No matter who you are, if you are in Christ, there are people who are thirsty for you to pass down the wisdom of the gospel to them!

V. Application

So if that is the imperative; if passing down the wisdom of Christ is the direction the scriptures are pushing us toward, then we should spend some time thinking about how. How do we pass down the wisdom of Christ?

There are two institutions that God has created that are greenhouses for the passing down of wisdom: the family and the church.

Let's talk about the family first. I know that a family is more than the parent-child relationship, but since Proverbs assumes a parent teaching a child wisdom, let's focus there. How can parents teach the wisdom of Christ to their children?

In our passage today, verse 1 says, "Hear, O sons, a father's instruction..." In verse 4 it says "He [his father] taught me..." So that gives us a place to start. That means that no matter where you send your kids to school, every Christian family is a homeschool family when it comes to matters of wisdom and discipleship. You can't farm out the training up of your children. And there are volumes that have been written about the ins and outs of discipleship in the home, but for our purposes today as we get practical let me just lay before you **two baseline rhythms** for instructing your children in wisdom:

1. Daily time in the word and prayer, caught and taught

- Believer, you need to hear from God in his Word every day and you need to converse with him in prayer everyday. And your kids need to catch that habit from you. Passing on wisdom doesn't work if we take on a "do as I say, not as I do" mentality. Wisdom is found in a love of the scriptures and communion with God in prayer and we will not pass on the wisdom of Christ if we do not model that for our children. A daily dependence on the word and prayer should be modeled and implicitly caught in our homes.
- And it should also be explicitly taught in our homes. Now some of us have toddlers at home, some of us have elementary age kids, some of us have middle school and high school kids. We're all going to have to think about how to teach the wisdom of Christ to our kids in age-appropriate ways. But the point is to do the work, make a plan, and engage with your kids in the scripture and in prayer.
 - If you have young kids and don't know where to start, the mission of Union Kids ministry is to support you, parents, in your discipleship of your kids. So if you reach out to Dana Ezikian, our Union Kids coordinator, she would be happy to help you get started.

- Example of Mom sitting in the chair and sitting at the table with us.

2. Weekly time with the gathered church, caught & taught

- Our conviction, based on the scriptures, and backed up by modern research is that faithful discipleship to Jesus includes making the local church a "big rock" in the jar of our lives. Parents bear the primary responsibility for instructing their children in wisdom, but the community of the local church plays an irreplaceable role in cultivating a faith that endures.
- And just for clarity, when you look up the Greek work for "weekly," do you know what it

means? It means *weekly!* It means *every week!* And that's what I'm urging you toward. Now, I'm not laying the law on your shoulders. We're people of grace. Your salvation doesn't depend on your church attendance. But I'm trying to teach you godly wisdom. And when Hebrews 10 says, "do not neglect meeting together as is the habit of some." It's teaching us that the neglect of gathering with the church is foolishness that will hurt you!

- And prioritizing gathering with God's people is more important than your kid's sports schedules, more important than your travel plans, more important than how you feel about church when you wake up on a Sunday morning. As researchers get deeper and deeper into studying the deconstruction movement we're witnessing in the church, one of the things they are identifying are the practices and habits that tend to make for "resilient disciples" who remain strong followers of Jesus. Do you know what one of the key habits is? Regular connection with the local church. What if you made it your goal to be at church 40 Sundays out of the year? That gives you one grace day a month. That's the kind of practice that is totally counter-cultural, and totally in harmony with wisdom's design for you and your family

Alright, so the family is one sphere where wisdom is passed down. But what if you aren't married? What if your kids are grown and out of the house? What if you're estranged from your family? The good news is that because of the blood of Jesus that binds us together the church is God's family! This body of believers is an institution that God has set up for you and I to pass down the wisdom of Christ to others!

I hope you get that! That when we gather, I'm not coming to just get enough "God-chills" and "lightbulb moments" and "church hugs" to give me a spiritual boost so that I can make it through the week again. That's a selfish, individualized lens to view church. But you are members of a *body!* You have an individual role that contributes to the whole! God gives us pastors and teachers and leaders in the church to equip the saints - that's every believer - for the work of ministry. And the work of ministry is the making of more and deeper disciples. Being a part of the church necessarily includes you as a follower of Jesus engaging in passing down the wisdom of Christ to others.

So with the aim of being a people who actively engage in the tradition of God's church: passing down wisdom, let me suggest three practical ways to pass down wisdom in the church:

1. Bible Studies
2. Kids Ministry
3. Generations (Our Ministry Students)

Passing Down Wisdom Missionally

The essence of mission is inviting friends and neighbors into the rhythms and teachings of these two institutions: the family and the church.

VI. Land the Plane

Now, I've just spent the last few minutes emphasizing practical ways that we, as God's people, can engage in our calling to make disciples and pass down wisdom. And the danger of ending a message there is that you would leave with a burden to engage in the *practices* of wisdom, but forget that all of it flows from the *person* of wisdom.

Friends, Christ calls us to pass down wisdom, but it is not the practice of passing down of wisdom that saves us or makes us worthy. Thank goodness. Because you and I will never practice wisdom

perfectly. There will always be a measure of sinful foolishness muddying the waters. No, it is not the practice of wisdom, it is not the passing down of wisdom that saves us and gives us hope. It is the person of wisdom, Jesus Christ.

How has he loved you, beloved? You and I dwelt in the darkness of sin, not knowing our right hand from our left. Blind, deaf, and dumb in our foolishness. And into that darkness shone the Wisdom of God made flesh. Jesus is the better wise guide. And through his death on the cross for our sin, he leads us into the abundant resurrection life that he has purchased for us!

How do we persevere in wisdom? How do we endure in passing wisdom down? We look to Jesus. He is the source of our strength, he is the one who secures for us a salvation. He alone is the wisdom the whole world needs.