

Coach House Church BEACONS

WISDOM VS ITS LIMITATIONS

4TH SEPTEMBER 2020

A lot of us have a vested interest in our own opinions, and it's only human. We all do it. Superficially, it can make us feel important. It can make us feel like we're better than others, and depending upon our abilities, it may mean that we are right about something, and others are wrong. In a simpler way, we hold our perspectives dearly because it helps us to live a stable life. An existence where your opinions are constantly challenged and constantly have to evolve is exhausting and destabilising. Imagine waking up and questioning everything every day – it's simply unsustainable. For example: If you question God's existence, you question your abilities, you question your ability in work, your value in friendships, if your partner really loves you, if you're raising your kids right, if people like you and the list goes on. If this is a constant reality, it's likely your mental health is going to suffer and comes to be reflected in depression or anxiety.

If that was the full story, we'd be in a bit of a sorry state. We'd be left to choose between unstable arrogance or constant insecurity. It's easy to move between these two positions in different areas and struggle to find a sane middle ground. The book of Proverbs shows us how to avoid these extremes by taking our thoughts away from ourselves and focusing them on God. Let's read from

Proverbs 3:5-6:

"5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
6 in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight."

So a bit of context. The book of proverbs constantly talks about the need to gain wisdom, understanding, knowledge, discernment and insight. However, it's not the 'get smarter than the other guys, get above the other guys, get ahead' narrative you'd likely hear from a motivational speaker today. It turns wisdom on its head.

V5 – tells us “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;” We know understanding is important, yet this verse tells us not to rely on it. Understanding is important, but not as important as it is to trust God with our lives.

So here are 4 benefits that come to mind when we choose to trust God and not our own understanding:

- We can relax - because it takes the burden off us to understand EVERYTHING and make our lives turn out the way we want them to be.
- We avoid pride/despair - because we trust God more than our understanding, so we are free to let our feelings take the backseat.
- We become versatile - It helps us live with versatility in any situation, whether favourable to our understanding or not. This is because we are not depending upon circumstances to unfold in a particular way, but we trust that God will be at work in circumstances even when they seem to be terrible.
- We have a dependable foundation for life - Our own understanding (with its limitations) might lead in the right direction, trusting God always leads in the right direction.

So what do we need in order to trust God and access these benefits? Humility is central – if we think that we know better than God, it prevents us from trusting him. That is true, even if the thing that prevents us from trusting God happens to be our own understanding. Sometimes we can look back on past experiences or past failures and say ‘look at all the times I’ve failed before, how can God help me this time?’ or ‘where was God when I was struggling financially?’ or ‘I’m happiest when I rely on myself and trust my instincts, that’s always helped me to get ahead’. It is for this exact reason that the book of proverbs, particularly these few verses, does not give our own sense of understanding the last word.

Whatever experience we have gained from life, our perspective and understanding is limited. God’s is eternal. The challenge here is to lay aside our understanding when we are tempted to elevate it above God or to overrule something he is clearly telling us to do. An example: Proverbs 24:10-12 tells us to speak up for a person who has been unjustly condemned. If our ‘understanding’ means that we use our intelligence to worm our way out of it with clever excuses, we are not trusting God and we are not thinking about wisdom or understanding correctly. Real wisdom is found when we choose to be humble with God’s help, even when we make a painful choice (like risking reputation loss when challenging

the status quo) at an apparent loss to ourselves, all the while trusting that God will reward us in the end.

So how do we become humble? The letter of James gives us some hard, simple guidance on this. It says: "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up" (4:10 – the full section on humility is between verses 4-10). It might seem strange, but the passage focuses on action we can take – we are told to do the humbling. How do we do it? Practically speaking, we pray and acknowledge who God is and who we are. God knows best, about literally everything, and we don't. If we are willing to acknowledge that fact, and then apply it to our own lives and the situations we face – that is what humbling ourselves looks like. You are putting your life into proper perspective. Romans 8:28 also confirms this idea, saying "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who[i] have been called according to his purpose."

If you've listened to any of the other Beacons I've done, you'll know that I always say this: none of this humbling process is possible without God's help. It assumes we have a relationship with God, where he is changing us by the Holy Spirit. When we humble ourselves, we are choosing to say that we trust in God, and we need him in our lives.

These Bible verses apply right across our lives and in almost every circumstance we face. I find it personally challenging to apply to problems that haven't gone away over a long period of time. However, I want to say that the fight is worth it. From my standpoint, I know I've gained peace and lost a lot of anxiety as I daily fight to apply this to my life. It's tough! But every time, I have to admit that God is in control, and this reduces the pressure on me to solve every problem with my own understanding.



JONNY KNIGHT



Coach House Church

leadership@coachhousechurch.org // 0161 432 5604

the coach house church, 222 wellington road north, stockport sk4 2qn