

Sermon – Navigating Relationships (Series Kick-Off Message)
Sunday July 14, 2024

I want you to think about a relationship you have. It could be with family, a friend, a boyfriend or girlfriend. It could be with coworker or neighbour. Just picture that relationship in your mind. Now, What do you love about this relationship? What is one word you would use to describe it?

Now turn to your neighbour and tell them your word.

What word did you use? Maybe you used words like: fun, loving, supportive, life-giving, safe, warm, trusting.

Now I want you to think about a relationship again. It could be the same relationship or a different one. But this time, What do you find challenging about this relationship? What's one word you would use to describe this?

Now turn to your other neighbour and share your word with them.

What word did you share? Maybe you used words like: draining, difficult, disrespectful, distant, dysfunctional...

Now How is it that relationships can be both life-giving and draining? And not only that, some of you were thinking about the same relationship. This means that the same relationship can be both a source of joy and a source of pain.

How many of you know what I'm talking about? How many of you have felt this tension in your own relationships? How many of you are feeling it right now?

So what does this mean? Are people just weird and hard to get along with? Yes. But there's also a deeper reason.

In the book of Genesis, God creates human beings in his image. What does this mean? Among other things, it means that you and I were created to be relational beings. In other words, we need relationships.

- We need them to thrive, to grow, to be loved.
- We need them to find meaning, fulfilment and joy.
- We need them to discover our identity, to belong, to be part of something bigger than ourselves.

You and I need relationships. First with God and then with others. We see what this is supposed to look like in Genesis 2.

First, human beings have a close relationship with God. They trust him, serve him and obey him. They go on walks with him and share their hearts with him.

Human beings also have a close relationship with each other. The Bible says they were naked but felt no shame. What does this mean? It doesn't mean they have an overconfident body image.

- It means that there's perfect love and acceptance between them.
- They enjoy complete trust and transparency.

- There's nothing blocking their relationship with each other.

This is how relationships are supposed to be. But all that changed after the Fall. Because after they disobey God, sin enters into the world and it damages all relationships. Relationships that were meant to be life-giving are now broken.

We see this in Genesis 3. Humans used to walk with God in the garden. They used to trust him and obey him. But now when they hear God, what do they do? They run and hide. Why? Because they're afraid.

Humans used to be naked and feel no shame. But now what do they do? They sew fig leaves to cover up. Why? Because they're ashamed. Now, because of their brokenness, they blame each other, they attack each other, they hurt each other. In other words, we make a mess of our relationships.

Here's the thing - this is the condition of human relationships. And this is the dilemma we all face: Deep down you know there's something wrong with you. And you want to be known, you want to be loved but you're afraid. What are you afraid of? You're afraid that someone will see who you really are and they won't love you.

Don't you see?

- That's why you hide in your from relationships.
- That's why you cover up and present a certain image.
- That's why you blame, attack and hold grudges.

Maybe you talk at each other but no one listens.

Maybe you use words to hurt others.

Maybe you get angry and lash out.

How many of you can relate? Your relationships have been hard. You feel broken and hurt. You're tired and drained. You're cynical and jaded. And all the while you feel empty – why? Because deep down you long for meaningful connections but you're frustrated because you don't know how to make it work.

So how do you overcome your fears? How do you overcome the messy relational challenges that keep you from the deep connections you long for?

We're kicking off our summer sermon series called *Navigating Relationships: Wisdom from the Book of Proverbs*. The Book of Proverbs is an Old Testament book that consists of short catchy sayings. These sayings offer God's wisdom on topics like character, work and money. But the topic we're focusing on in this series is relationships.

Now Proverbs is wisdom literature. There are different types of literature in the Bible. The Law is what God commands us to do. Prophecy is what God speaks to his people. But Wisdom is how God tells us to live so that we can live well.

Who wrote the Book of Proverbs? King Solomon. Solomon was the son of David and the third King of Israel. His reign is considered Israel's Golden Age – why? Because Solomon led with great wisdom. How did he get this wisdom?

One time God invited Solomon to ask him for anything (2 Kings 1:7). And do you know what he asks for? He asks for wisdom.

God was pleased by this request so he gives Solomon great wisdom. His wisdom was so great, the Bible says:

Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. ³¹ He was wiser than anyone else... and his fame spread to all the surrounding nations... From all nations people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom... (2 Kings 1:30-31, 34).

In other words, Solomon knows what he's talking about. So if there's anyone who's qualified to share God's wisdom on relationships, it's Solomon. Please turn with me to our **Bible Passage– Proverbs 1:1-7.**

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

**² for gaining wisdom and instruction;
for understanding words of insight;
³ for receiving instruction in prudent behavior,
doing what is right and just and fair;
⁴ for giving prudence to those who are simple,^[a]
knowledge and discretion to the young—
⁵ let the wise listen and add to their learning,
and let the discerning get guidance—
⁶ for understanding proverbs and parables,
the sayings and riddles of the wise.^[a]
⁷ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools^[a] despise wisdom and instruction.
(Proverbs 1:1-7)**

In this sermon series, we'll be addressing common challenges you face and talk about how you can overcome them to build and maintain life-giving relationships. We'll be talking about:

- The Power of Words
- The Gift of Listening
- The Restraint of Self-Control
- The Selflessness of Humility
- The Benefit of Loving Rebuke
- The Prudence of Discretion
- The Importance of Keeping Good Company
- The Healing of Forgiveness

Today, we're going to kick-off this series with an introduction. What I want to do is show you that common sense isn't going to help you have the relationships you want. Self-help books, advice from friends and social media won't cut it as well.

Why? Because people didn't create relationships. God did. So to have the relationships you long for, what you need is God's wisdom. Today we're going to explore this by talking about:

1. What is wisdom?

2. What's the requirement for wisdom?
3. How do you become wise in your relationships?

First, **What is wisdom?**

Verse 1 says, **The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel are for gaining wisdom... (Proverbs 1:1)**

Most people think wisdom is the same as knowledge. That it's acquiring information, concepts and facts. But is that what the Bible says?

The Hebrew word for wisdom is *chokmah*. Everybody say *chokmah*. Doesn't it sound like you're getting ready to hork?

One place we see this word is in Exodus 36.

So Bezalel, Oholiab and every skilled person to whom the LORD has given skill and ability to know how to carry out all the work of constructing the sanctuary are to do the work just as the LORD has commanded." (Exodus 36:1)

Is *chokmah* here about knowledge? No, it's a skill. In building the tabernacle, Bezalel and Oholiab certainly have knowledge. They have knowledge about the properties of building materials and the methods of their craft.

But God gives them wisdom to *apply* this knowledge to create something beautiful. Wisdom is the skill that enables you to do something well.

In relationships, knowledge is about understanding relational dynamics, emotional intelligence and communication. But God gives us wisdom to apply this knowledge. To use it in real-life interactions to develop healthy relationships. **Wisdom is the skill that enables you to do relationships well.**

For example, Solomon had knowledge of conflict-resolution strategies. But God gave him wisdom to apply it.

One time, two women came to him claiming to be the mother of the same baby. So what does he do? He proposes a solution: cut the baby in half. Why would he suggest that? Because Solomon knows that the true mother would rather give up the baby than let any harm come to him. That's wisdom. Wisdom is the skill that enables you to do relationships well.

Throughout this series, we hope the messages will provide you with God's wisdom and equip you with the skills to do relationships well.

Do you know what a really important skill to have is when it comes to relationships? Knowing how to have difficult conversations. But here's the problem. Most of us have never learned how. We don't know how to ask for what we want, confront a behaviour we don't like or have an honest conversation without losing it.

So how do we grow in this skill? It's out of the scope of this series to teach it here but here's what we're going to do.

[Note for VW Operator: Please use attached slide of Relationships Resource Page for the resources below.]

We're offering a **Crucial Conversations Workshop**. This is a two-part workshop that will teach key insights and strategies to help you to connect with people and have difficult conversations. So go to our resource page and sign-up for this workshop using the QR code on the screen.

This workshop is based on the book **Crucial Conversations** which you can also find on our resource page and purchase on your own.

Another great resource is the book **How to Have That Difficult Conversation**. This book has been tremendously helpful to me over the years. It's helped me to grow in this skill as well as train and coach leaders on things like: confronting well, setting healthy boundaries and improving relationships.

All these resources can be found on our **Relationships Resource page**. So check out the page, sign-up for the workshop and purchase the books.

What is wisdom? Wisdom is the skill that enables you to do relationships well.

Second, **What's the requirement for wisdom?**

There are many places you can find wisdom – from friends, from books, from the internet. And the advantage of this is you can access them easily.

But how do you access God's wisdom? Proverbs says there's a requirement.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge... (Proverbs 1:7)

How do you access God's wisdom? Fear of the Lord. But what does that even mean? Does that mean you're supposed to be terrified of God?

Throughout the Bible, that was often people's response whenever they saw God's presence. But in those moments, what were they always commanded to do? Do not be afraid. You see, fear of the Lord doesn't mean you're supposed to be afraid of God. It means:

- You have reverence for God.
- You recognize that God gets to decide what is right and wrong.
- And therefore, you submit to his authority and wisdom.

The Bible is clear, you can't have God's wisdom without having God. His wisdom is accessed only in relationship with him – in fearing him, obeying him and loving him. What's the requirement for God's wisdom? Fear of the Lord.

But why do you need this? Can't you just take his ideas and choose the ones you like?

Do you remember earlier when we talked about the Fall? Relationships were broken, but how did that happen? It happened because:

- People had contempt for God.
- They wanted to decide for themselves what is right and wrong.
- And so they disobeyed God and tried to find life on their own.

How did that work out? Their actions brought sin into the world. As a result, all relationships are broken. First our relationship with God and then our relationships with others.

- Sin brought shame, guilt and fear.
- Sin brought blame, anger and gossip.

We were created for relationships but we're no longer able to make them work. Why? Because we're broken. That's what sin does. It damages our relationships.

So how do we become unbroken? Fear of the Lord.

- Instead of having contempt for God, we have reverence for him.
- Instead of deciding for ourselves what's right and wrong, we recognize that only God can do that.
- Instead of rebelling against God in an attempt to find life on our own, we submit to God and do what he says – in our relationships and in every area of our lives.

And what happens when we do that?

The fear of the LORD leads to life... (Proverbs 19:23)

In other words, we become who we were meant to be and we begin to experience relationships the way they were meant to be as well.

There are a lot of opinions about relationships. The world says:

- Look out for yourself instead of putting others first.
- Express every authentic emotion instead of exercising self-restraint.
- Hold grudges instead of forgiving others.

How's that working out for us? Not very well. Because people didn't create relationships. God did. So only God has the wisdom to make relationships.

This means that unless you submit to the one who created and sustains all things, your understanding of relationships will be wrong and every advice you follow will fall short. But when you're in a right relationship with God, that's when you begin to live the way things really are. That's when you experience relationships the way they were meant to be.

So what's the requirement for wisdom? Fear of the Lord.

Third, How do you become wise in your relationships?

I want to share three principles for all of us to keep in mind as we head into this series. These are three things you need to be doing each time you listen to a message and during this whole series.

First, **Listen for God's wisdom.**

In the Book of Proverbs, listening is crucial to gaining wisdom and living well.

Out in the open wisdom calls aloud, she raises her voice in the public square... whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm. (Proverbs 1:20, 33)

Is wisdom really that hard to find? Not according to this passage. In fact, wisdom is actually raising her voice and calling out to you. She wants to give you God's wisdom.

So why can't you hear it? Because of all the noise. The image here is of a loud public area with loud voices calling for your attention. So to listen, what do you need to do? You need to pay attention. Because listening isn't the same as hearing.

Have you ever talked with someone who heard what you said, but they weren't really listening? That's because listening and hearing are two different things.

Hearing is unconscious. It's just the passive act of sound coming into your ear. But listening is intentional. You're consciously choosing to silence the noise, focus and pay attention.

During this series, God will be speaking to you, he'll be calling out to you, he wants to give you his wisdom. So how do you receive it? You listen for his voice. You silence the noise, focus and pay attention.

Second, you need to **Give up unwise relational habits.**

Many of us don't have the relationships we want because of our bad habits.

- We make passive aggressive comments.
- Talk without listening.
- Lose our temper.
- Think only of ourselves.
- Gossip.
- Hold on to resentment.

But to be wise, listen to what God says: **"Come, eat of my food...Forsake your folly and live (Proverbs 9:6)**

You'll never have the relationships you want, as long as you continue your unwise relational patterns. So what do you need to do? Identify these patterns and ask God to help you give them up. Forsake them so that you can live and enjoy life-giving relationships.

Finally you need to **Walk with people who are wise.**

Do you realize it's impossible to become wise on your own? If you want to be wise, what do you need? You need wise people in your life.

Walk with the wise and become wise... (Proverbs 13:20)

During this series, identify some people you can talk with about the messages. Get together so you can share, discuss and pray about what you're learning and struggling with.

Find some wise Christians you can talk to about your relationships. Maybe you're struggling with your marriage, your parenting or with your friends. Part of becoming wise includes learning from others who've gone ahead and can share their wisdom and life experiences. So reach out to others and spend time talking with them.

Relationships are our greatest source of joy and yet they can also be our greatest source of pain. As we go through this series, our hope is that you will:

- Listen for God's wisdom
- Give up unwise relational habits
- Walk with people who are wise

As you do that, you will gain God's wisdom for navigating your relationships and you'll experience the joy, healing and life that God wants to give you.

Let's pray.

Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Your word says that wisdom is more precious than gold and those who seek it find life.

We come to you now seeking your life. We seek healing, wisdom and strength for our relationships. We need your guidance and perspective. Teach us to navigate the complexities of our relationships and show us how our sin and messiness get in the way.

Grant us discernment to understand the hearts and minds of those we love. Help us to listen with empathy and speak with kindness. May our words be filled with wisdom and grace, building up and encouraging one another.

Teach us patience and humility, that we may seek reconciliation and forgiveness where there is conflict. Give us grace to forgive as we have been forgiven by you. And help us to honour one another as people loved by you and made in your image.

We pray this for ourselves, for our relationships and for our church. We pray for humility and unity. May we learn how to have difficult conversations so that we might speak the truth in love. May we be strengthened in our relationships and our mission to Make Space for you Jesus. And may our interactions and conversations be filled with your love so that the world would see Jesus and be drawn to him.

We pray this for the sake of your mission.

Amen