

***The Beginning of Wisdom***  
**Proverbs 1:1-7; 3:1-8      July 12, 2015      Dr. Sharlyn Gates**

### **Worship in the Park**

In the next four weeks we will turn our focus to the Wisdom Writings in the Bible – to Proverbs this Sunday and next; then we will hear wisdom from Ecclesiastes and finally, from that racy book called Song of Solomon.

Wisdom literature seeks to give common sense to those who will listen and follow. It teaches how to live well. You won't find any stories of burning bushes here in Proverbs but you will find little wise sayings that are meant to be a guide to everyday life.

In Proverbs 1 – which is written as a prologue to the rest of the scriptures – we hear these words:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;  
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

We talked about the fear of the Lord when we first began this summer series with the Psalms. We hear throughout the Old Testament, especially, that we should have fear of the Lord.

First of all, that word “fear” in the Hebrew writings can often be translated as “reverence” - to revere the Lord.

Kathryn Schifferdecker, who is an Associate Professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary, writes these words in a commentary about the fear of the Lord.

“When we are faced with the power that called the universe into being, that scattered the stars in space, and that sustains the world every moment of every day, our proper response is awe, reverence, and yes, even (to some extent) fear.

Hebrews 10:31 says: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

It's the fear of the LORD that Mr. and Mrs. Beaver describe to the children in this scene from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*:

“Aslan is a lion -- *the* Lion, the great Lion.”

"Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he -- quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“That you will, dearie, and no mistake,” said Mrs. Beaver; “if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or just plain silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver ... "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."<sup>1</sup>

The fear of the LORD, the fear of the God who created the universe but who deigns to be in relationship with us, is the prerequisite for wisdom. Such proper fear teaches us our place in the world and how to live well in it."<sup>2</sup>

This is the kind of fear that reminds us that God is God, and we are not. And I say “hallelujah!” to that, don’t you? We recognize that we are small next to the God of the universe.

We know that God is all wise. God is the ultimate wisdom. And we can never come close to that kind of wisdom by ourselves.

And this all wise, all loving, all powerful God wants to be in relationship with us. This is a God we can trust. He is faithful to keep his promises even when we don’t. He is full of mercy and forgiveness.

And so we come to the key verse this morning. From Proverbs 3, verses 5 and 6. It is the first verse I ever memorized and it has been my life Scripture forever:

“Trust in the Lord, with all your heart. And lean not on your own understanding. Acknowledge him in all your ways and he will direct your paths.”

Easy, huh? Since we have read it; since it’s in the Bible, then it should be an easy thing to do. Trust in the Lord. Don’t rely on your own ways – your own understanding of how things should be. (There’s that wisdom thing again).

In everything you do, just acknowledge God – that he is able to lead you in the right way. Just do that, and he will direct you, he will guide your path – lead you in the way you should go.

Well, it should be easy. But, think about it. In your life, when things go really wrong and you’re very upset, what do you do? You probably pray, asking God to help. But then, if help doesn’t show up immediately, if you are like the majority of people, you start trying to take things into your own hands.

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York: HarperCollins, 1950), p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> Kathryn Schifferdecker, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN, [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org)

And you wouldn't be the first to do it either. In fact, we see it happening clear back in the Old Testament. Look at Abraham. He and Sara were up there in their senior years and they were childless.

And God promises they will have a baby. But, when that doesn't happen fairly soon, Sara thinks Abraham should help God along. So she tells Abraham to have a baby with her servant Hagar.

And rather than waiting on the Lord, Abraham did as his wife said, they had a baby whom they named Ishmael. But God said, that wasn't what I had in mind.

We can find incidents like that with David and numerous other important people in the bible. So we aren't the only ones.

I said this was my life scripture. And in some ways, at times, I have found it fairly easy to trust in the Lord and let him direct my paths. I trust that God directed my path from Parsons, Kansas to Holly, Michigan. And before that there were other places. Sometimes our family thought we were nuts, but we truly believed God was leading us.

But I will say, there are some things that are I find harder than others, to put my trust in God and not try to take control. It's harder at times, when the bottom seems to fall out from under you and everything you thought was so good, and took for granted, suddenly changes – sometimes waiting on God to direct your path can be a grueling experience.

Anyone here ever had this experience? I know I have. In fact, just one little phone call about something going on with my children Friday night had me up most of the night lamenting and having a hard time even breathing.

Finally, we get so faint from being upset that we either just roll over and collapse or we do what we should have done in the first place – and that is to say:

“Lord, you are the one who is God. You are wisdom. I am not. I give it to you. I trust you (sort of, but will continue giving it to you). I know you will show me the way – what to do; what to say; and when to do it.”

The beginning of wisdom, my friends, is the wisest things we can do. That is to trust in the Lord with every part of our being.

He is trustworthy. He does love us. He is wisdom. Let us find our wisdom in Him. Thanks be to God!