

Victory of the Lamb

January 19, 2020

Sermon series: Seeing 2020

Sermon theme: The Community of wisdom

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Have you given up on your New Year's resolution yet? By now, most people have already given up on their habits and goals for the New Year. Why is that? Why can't we stick to the good habits and goals that we planned on? Well, I don't think it's because we are weak. And I don't think it is because we lack willpower. I don't think it's because we don't have enough information or the right plan.

I don't know about you, but I think I know the main reason that I don't stick with good and godly habits and goals. There is one thing, that when I do it, it makes all the difference. It is something very powerful and it is found all over the book of Proverbs.

We are continuing our sermon series through the book of Proverbs called **See 2020**, and today we are going to talk about the one of the main reasons that we don't stick with our habits and goals.

Here is the question I want to answer today: **How can we continue to walk in wisdom?** In other words, how can we continue to live a life of wisdom without constantly falling into bad habits?

Let's dive into Proverbs chapter 1, and see what Solomon has to say,

**Listen, my son, to your father's discipline,
and do not forsake your mother's teaching,
because they are a garland of grace for your head.
They are jewelry for your neck. (Proverbs 1:8-9 EHV)**

A couple weeks ago, I mentioned that the first 9 chapters of Proverbs is Solomon talking with his son. He is having a heart-to-heart conversation, pleading with his son to walk in wisdom. And that's what he is doing here. He is saying, "My dear son, listen up. I'm about to tell you something very important. The teaching that your mother and I am giving you, is like a piece of jewelry you are to wear every day of your life." But what is that teaching? What is the instruction that Solomon and Mrs. Solomon want to give to their son?

**My son, if sinners lure you,
do not go along with them. (Proverbs 1:10)**

Solomon is saying, "Be careful who you hang out with. Choose your friends wisely. If a group of wicked people lure you in, don't go with them." What does Solomon mean by "lure you"? He goes on to explain:

**If they say, "Come with us.
Let's lie in wait to shed blood.
Let's hide and ambush an innocent person for no reason.
We will swallow them alive like the grave.
We will swallow them whole like those who go down to the pit.
We will find all kinds of wealth and treasure.**

**We will fill our houses with loot.
Cast your lot with us.
We will all share one bag of money.” (Proverbs 1:11-14)**

Solomon imagines a group of friends saying, “Come hang out with us. Let’s go after this gullible person for fun. Solomon knows how enticing this kind of temptation sounds. We all long to be part of the in crowd. We want to feel included, part of a community. So, when a group comes along and says, “Come with us!” we are eager to follow no matter where their paths lead. Peer pressure is powerful.

Looking still at Proverbs 1, this group of wicked people seems to have a sure-fire plan. They say that they are going to be able to swallow their victim whole like the grave, leaving no trace of evidence. They say that they are going to get all sorts of money and treasure to fill their houses. And it’s all going to go into one bag and get split evenly. Everyone is going to be on the same team, working together. What could possibly go wrong?

But Solomon warns:

**My son, do not walk along the road with them.
Do not set foot on their path,
because their feet run to do evil,
and they hurry to shed blood. (Proverbs 1:15-16 EHV)**

Solomon is using the metaphor of walking along a path. When we give our allegiance to a wicked crowd, we are putting our foot on a path that leads to destruction. We are no longer walking in the way of wisdom, but we are rushing, hurrying, running with those who do evil and hurt others.

In his book, *Atomic Habits*, James Clear talks about the importance of our daily habits, our daily decisions. He says that our little decisions have a compounding impact on our lives. He gives the illustration of a plane leaving Los Angeles flying to New York. He says that if you are flying out of LA towards New York City, and if before the flight the pilot points the nose of the plane three degrees to the south and stayed on that path, then instead of ending up in New York City, you would end up in Washington D.C. 225 miles away from your desired destination.

Then Solomon makes this statement:

**How useless to spread a net in the sight of any bird!
Yet they set up an ambush for their own blood.
They hide in ambush to take their own lives. (Proverbs 1:17,18)**

Why does he say this? Well it’s useless to spread a net out in the open to catch a bird. Even foolish birds can spot when someone else is setting a trap for them. They will not be caught by something so obvious. But these wicked people are not as smart as foolish birds. They set a trap for themselves. They are ambushing their own lives. And they are not wise enough to see it. In other words, they will not get away with their wickedness. They are only hurting themselves.

Solomon concludes by saying,

**This is where the path leads for everyone
who is greedy for stolen property:
It takes away the life of those who possess it. (Proverbs 1:19)**

Solomon concludes by explaining where the life of this group leads. He is saying, *My son, this group of people that are selfish and want to take advantage of people, doesn't end well. They will not get away with their wickedness. Their path leads to destruction. And if you walk with them, that's where you will end up as well.* Solomon was teaching his son that his friends will influence his future.

Solomon wants us to know:

1. Our friends influence our future.

This is just a wise and true statement. We can't really get around it. We will eventually become like the people we hang out with. No matter how strong our willpower is or how wise we are, we eventually follow the pack. We eventually fit into the culture that surrounds us.

We see this played out in the life of Solomon's son. Now, I wish I could say that Solomon's son listened to his father's clear warning to choose his friends wisely, but he didn't. In 1 Kings 12, Solomon's son, Rehoboam, takes the throne after Solomon dies. Rehoboam then goes up to northern Israel to claim his throne. The leaders of Israel tell Rehoboam, **"Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us and we will serve you."** (1 Kings 12:4 NIV) The Israelites are asking Rehoboam to be a gentle and wise leader.

Rehoboam consulted with the elders who served during his father's reign. He asked them, **"How would you advise me to answer these people?"** (1 Kings 12:6) The wise elders that served Solomon told Rehoboam to listen to the people and be gentle with them. And they will be your servants forever. This wise elders are giving Rehoboam good advice.

But Rehoboam rejected their advice and went to the young men that he grew up with. These young men advised him saying, **"Now tell them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's waist. ¹¹ My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.'"** (1 Kings 12:10-11) These young men told him to be harsh and rule with an iron fist and control the people with fear and punishment. And Rehoboam listened to his friends. He choose wicked friends. And his friends influenced his future. He walked with the wicked and followed their path. As a result, the northern tribes of Israel rebelled and broke away from the southern tribe of Judah. And the kingdom of Israel was split in two, never to be restored again.

Have you seen this play out in your life? Think back to a time when you were farthest from God. Maybe there was a time when you struggled with drinking or lust. Maybe there was a time when you struggled with gossiping or foul language. Who were your friends at the time? Who were you letting influence you? Maybe you are struggling with those sins right now? Who are your friends right now? Who are you letting influence you?

Now there are two things that I need to make clear before I move forward. First of all, you might be thinking, "Does this mean that I can't associate with people of this world?" The Apostle Paul answers this question. In 1 Corinthians 6, he says that we can associate with people of this world, or else we would have to leave this world. But he does give this warning be careful that you don't associate with

people who claim to be followers of Jesus, but are corrupt. So when you are establishing friendships, watch out for those who claim to be Christians but are arrogant, selfish, and corrupt and could lead you astray.

Secondly, the power of peer pressure doesn't take you off the hook. Solomon is not saying that you and I are sweet little angels. And if we would just stay away from the bad people out there, then we would stay pure, innocent, and wise.

In fact, in the book of Proverbs, Solomon asks this question:

**Who can say, "I have kept my heart pure;
I am clean and without sin"? (Proverbs 20:9)**

Have you ever worked with a tuning fork? I remember using them in science class. I'm not a musician, but I'm told you can tune your guitar or violin with a tuning fork. You know how it works, right? You strike the guitar string and then you strike the tuning fork. And if the guitar is in tune then the tuning fork will resonate with the string. It will have the same sound. The same vibration.

That's what's going on in our hearts. You see it's not just the bad people out there that is the problem. The reason we follow the path of the wicked. The reason you might go with the wrong crowd and drink too much or watch that dirty movie or start gossiping like the rest is because there is a sinful nature in all of us that resonates, like a tuning fork, with sinful nature in others. The evil inside of them is "in tune" with the evil inside of us. That's why didn't doesn't take much convincing to get to walk on the path of wickedness.

But that's why we come to church each week. Most people in our culture don't go to church. But just the fact that you are here is making a statement. Just by being here, you are saying, "I don't want to be like the rest of the world. I want to be different." That's why we start out every church service with the ancient practice of confessing our sins. Collectively we call out, "Forgive me, I have given into my culture. I have walked down the wrong path."

And each Sunday, we speak a word of forgiveness. And I want to repeat that word now. You are a forgiven child of God. The whole world has gone astray. All of us has turn to our own way. So Jesus came and our sin was laid upon him.

Now as forgiven children of God, what do we do now? If peer pressure is one reason that we got into the mess we are in, then what should we do to get out of it? Should we become more isolated? Should we go live on some deserted island all by ourselves? If hanging out with the wrong crowd caused us so much problems, then should we just hang out with no crowds?

Let's see what Solomon says:

**Walk with the wise and become wise,
for a companion of fools suffers harm. (Proverbs 13:20)**

Wisdom is not individual sport. They know that we are better together. We are more likely to make wise decisions if we are surrounded by wise people. We will follow our crowd. If our crowd is wicked, we will eventually follow them. If our crowd is wise we will follow them.

AA understands this. Weight Watchers gets this. CrossFit gets this. Now it's time for us as Christians to get this.

How can we continue to walk in wisdom?

2. Walk with the wise and become wise.

Find some wise people and get around them. And they will start rubbing off on you. I used an illustration in one of my first sermons here that seemed to help people, so let me use it again. Growing up my dad used a charcoal grill. And when he would warm up the charcoal, he would put it in this metal ring. The charcoal was packed in tight and it would get really hot. Then he would take the ring off and spread the charcoal all over the grill and it would heat up with the grill.

I believe that is what Solomon is telling us to do. We need to be around wise people who are on fire for the Lord, filled with wisdom and the Holy Spirit. We do that when we come to worship but also when we get together in things like small groups. These wise people rebuke us, love us, challenge us, encourage us, and most of all, point us to Jesus. Then we go back out into the world to heat up the world. Then we come back again to worship and our small groups to heat each other back up again.

This is what it's looked like in my own life. In the past, I followed people like Pastor Nathan Strutz and the previous pastor of this church, Pastor Ben Kuerth. Now, I follow people like Pastor Bill. And I also follow Pastor Ben Blumer who lives near the Twin Cities, and Pastor Ben Zak, who is a pastor at St. John's in Milwaukee. These men have lovingly rebuked me when I walk down the wrong path. They guide me when I don't know which way to go. And I become a better, wiser person just by being around them.

How about you? Who are your 3 to 5 friends or mentors? Do you know some people who follow Jesus and walk in wisdom, humility, and love? If not, I would encourage you find a few wise followers of Jesus. Maybe start by joining a small group. Maybe consider being part of our leadership mentoring program at Victory. Maybe consider some wise Christians that you serve with here at Victory, and intentionally spend more time with them. We all need a group of wise people that can guide us in the right path because we easily go astray.

I believe this is key. I know we love good advice. We love lifehacks. We love information and ideas and podcasts. But maybe all we need is a good Christian friend. Maybe you just need someone who loves you enough to listen to you, rebuke you, love you, and most of all, someone to point you to Jesus. Do you want to see really change in your life? Walk with the wise and you will become wise.