

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Wisdom of God

Pastor Scott Dudley

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Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

²⁰ Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Transcript:

Well, hello, Belle Pres. So glad that you are joining us for worship. I am Scott Dudley. I'm the lead pastor here, and we want to welcome you here. I also want to encourage you to join us on Tuesday night at 7:00 for vision night, where we will talk about some next steps for us as a church in the next couple of months and even beyond, into the fall and beyond. So encourage you to join us online on Tuesday night at 7:00 for vision night. Thank you for joining us this morning. Thank you for being here for worship.

Our scripture comes from I Corinthians Chapter one, and it says this, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise.' Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who

believe. Jews demand signs, and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Gentiles. But to those whom God has called, both Jew and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and wisdom of God, for the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom. And the weakness of God is stronger than human strength."

So, Holy Spirit, I ask in these next few minutes, you help us understand these words and apply them to our lives. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Well, let me start with a question of what is a foolish thing you've done, either recently or in your past. What's a foolish thing you've done? For me I always get a little bit paralyzed by that question, because in my case, there's just so many options to choose from. It's sort of like a Cheesecake Factory menu, and I have to sort all my options into categories, but what's a foolish thing you've done? Maybe at school, or work, or with friends or a spouse, or as a parent, a foolish thing you've done. Maybe you've already done a foolish thing already this morning?

In the text I just read the words foolish and wisdom come up over and over again as contrasts. And wisdom is important because it's what guides our decisions, it's what keeps us from doing foolish things. And we're all guided by something. We're all being guided by something. The question is what is it? Usually it's the conventional wisdom of our culture rather than God's wisdom. So if you're a student, what is guiding you in how you think about grades, or college, or what friends to have? Is it God's wisdom or the conventional wisdom of our world? What wisdom guides you in your career decisions? Or if you're retired, decisions about how to spend your time? What wisdom guides you in how to parent or how to be a spouse? What wisdom guides your decisions so that when you get to the end of your life, you can look back and say, "I made the right choices. I lived a fulfilling life."

Is it God's wisdom or the wisdom of our culture? And right about now you may be feeling some stress as you listen to this list of all the choices we have to make every day. "What if I get them wrong and screw it all up?" So what wisdom guides you with the stress that your pastor causes you by reminding you of all the decisions you have to make every day? And by the way, don't screw it up.

In the text I just read, the apostle Paul is writing a letter to the church in the city of Corinth. And the reason he has to write this letter is because they are messing everything up. They're suing each other. They're coming to church drunk. They're sleeping with their stepmother, fighting and factions, because they are following their wisdom, and the wisdom of their culture, rather than God's wisdom. So today I'm going to deal with three sections. There's going to be three sections to this sermon, three kinds of questions we're going to be looking at. What is God's wisdom? How do we get it? And how does it change our life?

Because it's God's wisdom that guides our decisions toward a meaningful, fulfilling, joy-filled life. But before I do those three, let me talk first briefly about what God's wisdom is not. God's wisdom is not the same thing as intelligence or knowledge. Corinth was one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire. It was at some crossroads of some major trade routes so there was

a lot of prosperous, wealthy people, a lot of very educated people, a lot of thought leaders, philosophers, kind of TED talks going on all over the place. A lot like Boston, maybe, or the Seattle area, Silicon Valley. And they prided themselves on their knowledge, on what they knew. And knowledge is a good thing. It's just it's not the same thing as wisdom.

I spent years at Stanford, with some of the top scholars in the world whose lives were radioactive train wrecks. Broken relationships, misery everywhere. They had a lot of knowledge, but they did not have wisdom. And neither did they even live out the things that they said they knew. One professor always complained that they should hire more graduate students to teach more classes because you don't have to pay graduate students very much so that she could teach fewer classes and be paid more. Here's the kicker. She was a Marxist. She was a Marxist scholar. So she was like, "Let me get this straight. You want to have cheap labor and you reap the profits. Isn't that what you're supposed to be again? Oh, nevermind."

Now there are also wonderful people at Stanford, but I saw no correlation between knowledge and wisdom and living a good life. You can have knowledge or not have knowledge. It doesn't have an impact on whether or not you have wisdom because wisdom isn't just knowledge. Wisdom is applying the knowledge you have correctly. Knowledge is knowing that tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad. God's wisdom is not knowledge.

So first section, what is God's wisdom? Well, first God wisdom is a person, Jesus. Paul says to the Corinthians, "When I came to you, I did not come with human wisdom, for I resolve to know," there's that word, knowledge, "nothing while I was with you, except Jesus Christ, and him crucified." So he uses the word know, but it's not head knowledge he's talking about? What does he know? He knows Jesus, a person, a relationship. He says, "We preach Christ, the power of God, and wisdom of God." And we're doing a sermon series on the names of God and one of the names for Jesus is wisdom of God. Wisdom is a person.

Second. God's wisdom is upside down and inside out and often doesn't go along with our culture. It goes against our conventional wisdom of our culture. And we love this. Like we admire people in history who went against the conventional wisdom of their culture and proved it was possible to do something that everyone said was impossible. Like in 1903, when everyone said it was impossible, two brothers proved that it was possible to fly. They were right. See what I did there? Oh, yeah. Rhetorical genius, that was. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. That was good. Yeah. I hope you're enjoying that. We love that. We love the unconventional thinkers, unless of course they go against our conventional wisdom.

Paul says God is the most unconventional thinker of all. He says, "Jews demand signs, and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews," better translation would be scandal, "to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. But to those whom God has called, Christ, the power of God and wisdom of God, for the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." The Jews wanted a conquering general to come and kick out the Romans and end their oppression. But instead Jesus was crucified. Didn't deliver them from Roman oppression, but was crushed by it. But He actually undid so much more than Roman power. He undid death when He rose from the grave, which undoes the power that every oppressive empire rests on, the power to kill you.

But because what happens when people aren't afraid of your little death weapon anymore? Because they know they're going to rise again, just like Jesus? You can torture them. You can even kill them. And they're just going to keep talking about Jesus. You can't stop them. You undo an empire with that kind of power, which is what happened. The brutalities of Roman culture faded away as more and more people became Christians. It's upside down from the conventional wisdom of culture.

Our conventional wisdom of cultures says power is what's powerful. God's wisdom says, "No. The weakness of Jesus was more powerful than Roman power." Greeks wanted a philosopher, but Jesus was a carpenter, not someone they would've considered wise. And yet Jesus' wisdom has changed the world. God's wisdom is not the conventional wisdom of our culture. And sometimes it's harder to follow God's wisdom, but here's the thing. It just works. It just works. Because it aligns with the way God designed the world.

I have a friend who is a Christian and he's COO in a company that's also owned by another Christian, and they messed up. My friend's company messed up on delivering a service to this other company. So they said to this other company that they messed up with, they said, "Criticize us. Give us some feedback." Which the other company did. And then my friend met with representatives from that company and walked through the five steps of biblical reconciliation that I've told you about before, which are, here's what I did to hurt you. Here's what I did. Here's how I think that hurt you. Here's how I feel about having hurt you. Did I miss or minimize anything? Tell me. And then I'm sorry. Will you forgive me?

So my friend said to the representative of these other company's, whose order they'd screwed up, said, "Here are the things we did wrong. And we here are the ways we think that hurt not just your business, but you as individuals, with added work and stress. We feel terrible about having done that. Did we miss or minimize anything?" And they listed all this stuff they'd done. "Did we miss or minimize anything?" The representatives of the other company said, "No." And then my friend said, "We are so sorry. And here's how we're going to try to make it more right for you. Kind of repair the damage we did." And the representatives of this other company were like, "Wow. And thank you." And then they said, "Could you do this whole kind of here's how we hurt you thing for our entire management team?"

So they gathered 20 of the top paid people in this company. That's a big, expensive meeting. My friend walked through those five steps again. And then the company said, "This is unheard of. You got to understand in our industry, what you just did, that doesn't happen. Usually vendors just make excuses and shift blame. You are clearly people of integrity. This is your distinctive in a very crowded market. And we are not ever working with any other vendor again."

In an industry where excuse making was the conventional wisdom, my friend followed the unconventional, upside down, wisdom of Jesus, owned his company's failure outright. The Bible calls that confession, and they didn't do it as a marketing ploy to keep the other company's business. They did it because it's God's wisdom, and they're following His wisdom, not their own. And so even if that other company had said, "I'm glad you understand your

mistake, but we're never working with you again." My friend would still have the satisfaction of knowing that he and his company did the right thing and showed that other company who Jesus really is. God's wisdom is unconventional, but it just works.

That brings me to the second section of this sermon. How do we get it then? How do we get God's wisdom? Well, first you got to ask for it. The apostle Paul says that, "The person without the spirit does not accept the things that come from the spirit of God, but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the spirit." In other words, it's supernatural. The Holy Spirit helps us think differently than we would normally think. So ask for God's wisdom in prayer. And listen. Listen is important to the nudges and the thoughts He puts in our head. And as we've said throughout this series, your homework this week is to start every prayer with this name for Jesus, Wisdom of God. Every prayer you pray, start at wisdom of God, and ask God to give you his supernatural wisdom.

Second way we get the wisdom of God is to be teachable. We cannot grow wise unless we let God and others correct us when we are not following God's wisdom. Because the opposite of wisdom isn't foolishness. The opposite of wisdom is arrogance. The opposite of wisdom isn't foolishness. It's opposite is arrogance, that insists on always being right, and never being corrected. To say I was wrong is simply a synonym for saying, "I have learned something and I know more now." We have to let the Bible correct us, and not wrestle it to try to make it say what we want it to say, but just let it correct us. So before you read the Bible, anytime before you read the Bible, always ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand it so that you get God's wisdom out of it, not your own wisdom. We have to be in community and let others correct us. We need to be in community with people who are different than us, politically, racially, generationally, in every other way, so that they can kind of expand our world and undo our confirmation bias. Ask for wisdom, be teachable.

And then, finally God's wisdom asks a different set of questions than our culture. So for instance, let's say your trying to decide whether or not to go to college, or where to go, or what job to take. Alongside the conventional questions that our culture asks like, "What will best prepare me for my future?" God's wisdom asks some additional questions, different questions. Like, "What decision, what place, will best mold my character to be more like Jesus?" Where does God most want to use me to make a difference in the world?" Additional question our culture doesn't ask. Or let's take another example. Let's say you have a conflict in a relationship and maybe between you and a spouse or a friend or a family member. When we're in conflict the question that is usually driving us is, "How can I get you to do what I want you to do so that I can be happy?" We never admit that. We usually gussy it up with "Working for what's fair." or something like that. But really the question underneath is, "How can I get you to do the thing I want you to do so that I can be happy?" Because the point of life after all is to be happy, right?

God's wisdom asks a different set of questions. See, because from God's perspective, the point in life, or the point of relationships, isn't to be happy. It's to be holy. And holy doesn't mean self-righteous and sanctimonious. It just means becoming more like Jesus. The purpose of life, the purpose of relationships, is to help us become more whole. And if that's your perspective then suddenly conflict in a relationship isn't a problem. It's an invitation to grow, and become more like Jesus. And I know it doesn't feel that way, and it doesn't feel that way when I'm in conflict

with someone. I'm not like, "Oh, look a chance for me to grow to be like Jesus." But really that's what it is. It's an invitation to grow to be more like Jesus.

And I'm not talking about when there's abuse in a relationship or something like that. But in general, in a conflict situation, if I ask the question, "How is God going to use this to make me whole?" Then I realize that this thing the other person is doing may just be a chisel in God's hands, and He is carving a statue out of me, and He's chipping away the stuff that doesn't belong. And He's using this conflict to help me become more like Him. Ask a different set of questions.

Which brings me to the last section of this sermon, we've talked about what God's wisdom is, how do we get it, and finally, now how does it lead to a more abundant, fulfilling, joy-filled life? Well, first, the first way it does that, is God's wisdom means you have what it takes. Understanding that wisdom isn't knowledge or a credential you have to earn, it's Jesus inside of you giving you supernatural insight. That gives you enormous courage and confidence. You don't need any other credentials. We are obsessed in our culture with credentials to prove that we have what it takes to be someone. "Look at my job, look at my grades, look at this, look at that. Now don't you think that I'm somebody." I mean, I've told you this before. There are parents who obsess over getting their kids into the right preschool. Preschool. Because it's important, right? If you get into the right preschool, then you get can get into the right elementary school, and then you can get into the right high school, and then you can get into the right college and get the right job and marry the right person and have the right kids and live in the right house and belong to all the right clubs and drive all the right cars. And isn't that what you want? Isn't that the point of life?

I want you to have all of these things because I want you to be happy. So little Susie, I know you're only four, but you need to brush up on your medieval French, because we need to get you into that preschool. And our culture calls that wisdom. Which proves our culture doesn't know shallot from shinola about wisdom. Paul says to the Corinthians, "Not many of you are wise by human standards. Not many of you are influential." Not many means some were, but most weren't. But God chose the foolish things of the world, or things the world thinks are foolish to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

In other words, Paul says, "You didn't to the right preschool, and you didn't go to the right college, and you weren't born into the right family, and you don't read the right books, and you don't have the right kind of job, and you don't know the right people, and you don't have the right athletic skills, and you don't have the right academic skills. You don't have the right kind of looks, you don't vacation in the right places. You don't have the right Tik Tok posts. You don't watch the right movies, and you don't drink the right cappuccinos." And yet, and yet God is using you to change the world because all of those right things are fine, you can have them or not. But it doesn't mean you're going to have wisdom. What gives you wisdom is Jesus. It is a radical democratization of the wisdom and power of God.

One of our staff people said this week that she sometimes doesn't feel qualified to talk to people about Jesus because she's never been to seminary. She said, "This passage makes me realize I didn't need to go to seminary. The Holy Spirit will give me the right things to say." Yes.

Yes. If we listen and lean into Him. And what would it look like for our entire congregation to really believe, for all of us to really believe that you have what it takes to change the world. If you have Jesus, you have what it takes. You don't need another credential because wisdom comes from Him.

And the second way God's wisdom changes our lives is it leads us to a different, more fulfilling life, because we make counter-cultural decisions. Decisions that are a little different than what our culture would maybe make, they lead to life, because God's wisdom just works. So a woman, who I'll call Joyce, told me a story this week about her and her husband, who I will call Steve. And Steve's brother is a very angry, unreasonable, controlling person. So when their dad died there was a lot of conflict between Steve and his brother over the estate. And eventually, through a lot of prayer, Steve decided that the right thing to do was just to give up his half of the \$750,000 house that was part of their inheritance, just give his half up to his brother. Not to appease his brother, but because Steve said, "I had everything, I got everything I needed from our parents when they were alive." So he decided to give over, just give his half to the brother.

But Joyce said, "My sense of fairness moved me to anger. It's not fair." I understand. You could hardly blame her. "It's not fair for Steve not to get his half of the inheritance, which would have helped not only us financially, but our kids." That's what Joyce said. And she said that caused Steve to feel kind of hurt and added stress because now he had this conflict in his marriage on top of having to deal with his unreasonable brother. So Joyce said, "I turned to the place where wisdom resides, my Lord and savior Jesus. And over the course of weeks spilled out my anger to Jesus and just kept saying in prayer, 'It's not fair. It's not fair. It's not fair.'"

But Joyce said, "The Holy Spirit started to ask me a set of questions. Different questions than our culture asks. The Holy spirit started asking me, 'Do you trust Jesus? And what's most important to you? Fairness? Money? Steve?'" And Joyce said, "Over time, in the back and forth of prayer and listening, keyword, listening, for God's wisdom, Jesus shifted my priorities. And I realized that Jesus is my highest priority, and following Him. And then next is Steve. And that Steve needed my support during an incredibly challenging time for him more than we needed any inheritance. Jesus changed my heart. And Steve began to feel a deeper level of love and support from me. And we were both able to acknowledge that we needed Jesus and that we needed each other to be better people."

And she said, "I've long since recognized we didn't need that inheritance. We have enough. We're just fine, financially." And she said, "I now have enormous compassion for Steve's brother, who is alone and who regrets many of the choices he's made in his life. It was a hard season, but it deepened our trust in Jesus and our love for each other." And just a PS to this story, a couple of years later, a friend of theirs who initially really didn't understand Steve's decision to give up his half of the house, this friend a couple of years later actually did the same thing for his sister because of Steve's example.

Now I can imagine another case where the right answer, the wise answer, would have been to kind of push for a more fair, equitable settlement and divide it equally. I can imagine a scenario where that would have been the right thing to do, but in this case, in this case, Steve and Joyce knew that wisdom isn't knowledge, it's a person named Jesus, and they turned to

Him. And they asked for supernatural wisdom from the Holy Spirit. They were both teachable, correctable. Joyce was able to let the Holy Spirit ask her those different questions. And the Spirit post questions that led her to realize what really was important and gave her wisdom. What's fair is not the most important thing here. And that led them to an upside down, counter-cultural decision, that gave them a more fulfilling joy filled life.

They didn't spend what could have been years fighting and bickering and the money and the trials. They didn't spend years doing that. They have peace. They're not bitter and angry, which they could have been if they'd kept fighting it. They are both incredibly joyful people. Conflict was the way that they grew, that it was an invitation to grow, and they took the invitation. They know Jesus better. Their marriage is better and they are just fine financially.

And no, it wasn't fair. But as one of our elders said this week, "The fair's in Puyallup. The abundant life is in Jesus." So what wisdom guides you? Or a better question would be, who is the wisdom that guides you, because we're all being guided by something? Jesus, or our culture. And so this week, how can you seek the supernatural, upside down, wisdom of God, knowing that you can trust Him? Because God in His wisdom did what we would consider a very foolish thing. He left the comforts and the perfection of heaven, came Himself in the person of Jesus, died the death that we deserve to pay the price for our sins and rose from the grave. That is a foolish thing by the world's standard. And he did it because he is a fool for love.

And He loves you. And He loves me. Which means we can trust Him and follow His wisdom because it leads to abundant life. So, wisdom of God, guide us in every decision we make. Wisdom of God, this week, guide us toward Your ends. Lord, we give our decisions to you. We give our hearts, we give our minds, we give our priorities. We give our calendar. We give You our checkbook, and everything else. Wisdom of God, lead us to Your abundant life. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions: Read 1 Cor 1:18-2:4

Opening Questions:

- Icebreaker: What's your favorite thing about the area / city / state you live in?
- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions -- Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions – Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- The Apostle Paul says that Jews sought a sign and Greeks looked for wisdom. How does Christ fulfill what both groups are looking for (v. 22-25), though not in the ways they expected to find it?
- What do you think are some of the differences between the wisdom of God and the conventional wisdom of this world?

Closing Question and Application:

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week?
- Who might you share this with?