

# **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

(July 7, 2013)

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Sermon manuscript

## **Sermon Series: Cultivating a Knack for Life**

(Studies in Solomon's Proverbs)

### **The Wisdom of Ministry**

(Proverbs)

Study #3

#### **Introduction: Remembering a "launch"...**

On April 7<sup>th</sup> - three months ago today - we made an invitation at the end of both of our morning worship services for people to come up to the front to receive a ministry assignment.

Not knowing what was in store for them, a total of seventeen people came up on that morning to receive that assignment. Once at the front, here is what they were told:

**For the next three months, do what is on your heart to do for God outside the walls of this church.**

Then, as each volunteer was given \$100 of "seed money" to jumpstart their "Launch" project, we prayed for them, and they were off!

This morning marks the end of that three month period. Not that any of the ministry or planning or dreaming stops today (!), but we are going to hear from a few of those volunteers and listen to what has happened since April 7<sup>th</sup>.

Now, in the time remaining this morning, I want to do a couple of things. First, I want to share some thoughts with you from Proverbs. Second, and if there is time, I want to speak with you about our church's mission.

As we have seen over the past couple of weeks, Solomon wrote Proverbs to give us practical advice that would lead to a God-honoring life. And he says that the way to get to that life is through WISDOM.

Wisdom, which begins with a fear of the Lord, equips us to be great friends. Solomon says that wisdom also equips us to make great investments.

All of us want to make wise investments, the kind of investments that give good return over the long haul.

And, since we all have *limited* resources of time, energy, and money, we certainly don't want to waste either time or energy or money!

Take money.

Smart financial investors will scour the markets for the best return on investment (ROI). They will invest in gold, silver, pork futures, real estate, or mutual funds to get a good ROI.

We apply wisdom to where we invest our money for home buying, kids' college, and for retirement. We do the same for investments of time. Same thing for energy.

Well, Solomon has a word to the wise when it comes to making investments with a really good rate of return. He whispers an insider's tip, "*People. Invest in people.*"

He says that it is wise to invest our resources in meeting the needs of men and women, young people, and boys and girls. Wisdom says, "*Nurture a ministry mindset as you walk through life.*"

Solomon says that there is no wiser way to invest a life than in service to people for the glory of God.

That was certainly the mindset of Jesus. He came to earth for the express purpose of dying on a Roman cross as a sacrifice to bring us to God.

Before He died and as He walked from place to place He served, He healed, He fed people, He cast out demons, He cleansed lepers, He washed feet.

At one point Matthew records Jesus' response to the status of all people everywhere.

***[Matthew 9:36] And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd.***

Jesus saw humanity as shepherdless sheep - and shepherdless sheep are pretty pitiful.

They are always running around eating grasses that aren't good for them, grazing too near the cliffs, drinking water from fast-running streams that could drag them under, lying down in pastures where they could be attacked.

Jesus looked at the masses and saw messes. Needy people. Emotionally and psychologically, physically, relationally and socially, and especially spiritually.

All around us we see people who are hurtin' units.<sup>1</sup> And we know needy people.

We know those who battle debilitating physical ailments or life-threatening illness.

We know those who experience deep needs of spirit and soul. We know some who face chronic loneliness and depression. There are others, people we love, who are facing great material need.

And the list could go on. Some live in intolerable marriages, others work at unfulfilling jobs, or go home to an empty house, or are subjected to cruel mistreatment.

Human need is everywhere evident.

And into this maelstrom of human need walks YOU, a serious disciple of Jesus Christ. What are you going to do about the neediness you see all around you?

Now the New Testament is clear that we who have tasted life in Jesus are to use the resources God has given us to meet needs in Jesus' Name.

It is our privilege and our honor to share the Good News that Jesus saves with people who are far from God. We are each to do the work of the evangelist, and seek to touch people, spiritually, at their point of greatest need. (2 Timothy 4; Colossians 2; 1 Peter 3:15)

But we are also to meet the material needs of people. Those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ (Romans 12; Hebrews 13), as well as the poor in society at large. (Galatians 2; Galatians 6; 1 Timothy 6; James 1)

Predating all of these New Testament exhortations is Solomon, in Proverbs, telling us that the proper response to that world of need is for us, God's people, to use our resources, to meet those needs to the glory of God.

Daily, we are confronted by needs that can be met by our energy, time, money, work, blood, sweat and tears. In one two-verse passage, he tells us that we should view other's needs as invitations to action.

### **Solomon on the Wisdom of Ministry**

#### **The Eagerness Factor!**

***[3:27] Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in your power to do it.***

***[28] Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go, and come back and tomorrow I will give it,' When you have it with you.***

This proverb says that there is no time like the present for doing good to others. Don't put it off!

- The resources of our **energy** can be expended in serving our immediate family, our best friends, and our Christian brothers and sisters.

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<sup>1</sup> The apostle Paul makes the same point in his writings. WITHOUT Christ, he says that people are ***"dead in their trespasses and sins"*** and have ***"no hope and [are] without God in the world."*** (Ephesians 2) There's a pretty large, gaping need.

- The resources of our **time** can be put to good advantage in serving our community, our neighbors, or our Lord.
- The resources of our **money** can be invested in meeting the material needs of those around us, helping those who are down and out, and carrying on the Lord's work, locally and around the world.

We all have resources of time, energy, and money. And we all need to determine when we are saving up for a rainy day and when we have crossed the line into hoarding.

But at a certain point, the wise person loosens the purse strings on his resources, considers those resources expendable (loaned to us by God), and gives to help others in Jesus' Name.

Another piece of living with a ministry mindset is seen in the repeated comments about generosity scattered throughout Proverbs. Listen as I read one out of many from which to choose.

### **Generous Hearts!**

*[14:31] He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker,  
But he who is gracious to the needy honors Him.<sup>2</sup>*

That verse (and tons of others like it) highlights the wisdom of helping others by giving our material possessions and our money.

You will note that this verse has nothing to do with giving money to the church or temple. Support of God's work in the world is an important issue - and it is one that we will deal with in a couple of weeks - but it is not what is at issue here.

What Solomon is urging today is the cultivation of a generous heart toward those with genuine material need. It is putting on a set of bifocals that brings into focus both my abundance and another's lack. Such a focus energizes compassion.

And here is one more piece of wisdom from Solomon that speaks to the issue of living with a ministry mindset. He wants us to know that wisdom has a heart for justice and mercy.

### **Justice and Mercy!**

*[23:10] Do not move the ancient boundary,  
Or go into the fields of the fatherless;  
[11] For their Redeemer is strong;  
He will plead their case against you.  
[24:11] Deliver those who are being taken away to death,  
And those who are staggering to slaughter, Oh hold them back.  
[12] If you say, "See, we did not know this,"  
Does He not consider it who weighs the hearts?  
And does He not know it who keeps your soul?  
And will He not render to man according to his work?  
[25:26] Like a trampled spring and a polluted well  
Is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked.  
[29:7] The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor,  
The wicked does not understand such concern.  
[29:10] Men of bloodshed hate the blameless,  
But the upright are concerned for his life.*

There are myriad ways to demonstrate a concern for justice and to practice mercy.

### *Personal integrity*

For starters, we can be sure that we are personally never guilty of practicing injustice, ourselves.

If we find ourselves in a supervisory position - at work, home, school, neighborhood association - we'll bend over backwards to make sure that we don't take advantage of our power by running roughshod over those under us.

If we are placed in a position of influence, we'll take care that we don't unfairly penalize the person or the group who disagrees with us.

If we are trusted with a stewardship over money or assets, we'll be sure that we never abuse that trust by taking unfair advantage and using that stewardship for personal gain.

<sup>2</sup> See also 11:25; 19:17; 22:9; 28:27 and other verses scattered throughout Proverbs.

As well, any of us may find that we have opportunity to stand up for justice, against injustice, and to provide care for the underdog, the oppressed, the one who suffers.

*Stand up and be counted!*

Think of Chuck Colson. Colson was the Watergate scoundrel who was born again (the title of his first book) and founded Prison Fellowship. Colson worked tirelessly for the rights of inmates in prisons around the world for decades before he died last year.

There is a grand example of standing up for mercy!

But add to that the person who volunteers at the San Antonio Pregnancy Care Center, or the mentor with Youth for Christ, or the friend who helps a friend in his struggle with Internet porn or the family that gives a compassionate response to homelessness by loving our Bread and Water friends, or the person who donates a bag of groceries every month to our Food Pantry, and you begin to get a picture of what standing up for justice and mercy could look like.<sup>3</sup>

For at least two reasons, people (like you and me) who are serious disciples of Jesus Christ find time and energy to stand up for justice and to stand against injustice.

First, because we follow Jesus, the One who came to preach the Gospel to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind and to set free those who are downtrodden. (Luke 4:17-19).

Second, because the book of Proverbs tells us that if we want to walk in wisdom we will nurture a ministry mindset, part of which involves helping others.

This morning we have heard from several of our brothers and sisters who volunteered on April 7<sup>th</sup> to be involved in “Launch.” What about the rest of us?

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<sup>3</sup> We can become educated about the needs of those in the inner city, of the children of the streets in underdeveloped nations, of our brothers and sisters who are being persecuted for their faith in many countries, in jails in Bexar County, of the off-the-charts rate of teenage pregnancy in San Antonio and how to help - and more.

What are you going to do to be “on mission” for Jesus’ Great Commission?

I am frequently asked - most often by folks newer to the church - “*What does your church do to reach out to the community?*”

That’s a great question! And it deserves a thoughtful answer. In the time remaining this morning, I want to say something about what Northwest is doing and will do to serve our community.

## **II. Ministry at Northwest**

### **A. Church Ministries**

First, as you are aware, we, like most every other church you could name, has certain ministries that are core to who we are.

We have worship services and a prayer ministry and Care Groups and ABF’s (Adult Bible Fellowships), kids Sunday Schools, and music, and a youth ministry.

These are ministries designed to equip those who attend our church to passionately pursue life-changing relationships with God and with others in the church.

Elders, pastoral staff and ministry staff are to work hard at engaging the congregation to grow in their involvement with worship and in their experience of community.

But what about outreach? Our Mission Statement says that aim to passionately pursue life-changing relationships with people in our world, too.

Well, fulfilling the third part of our Mission Statement will consist of two major emphases.

### **B. Outreach**

#### *1. Outside of San Antonio*

First, we will continue to have a very active cross-cultural Missions ministry emphasis.

This ministry emphasis will be funded by the congregation through the annual church budget.

We will continue to have a standing Missions Committee, will actively support missionaries, will solicit funding for special Missions projects, and will encourage people in the church to take part in short-term Missions trips.

And what about inside and right around San Antonio?

*In San Antonio*

### The point of “Launch

Well, this is what “Launch” has been all about. We want to see everyone in our church “launched” into the passionate pursuit of life-changing relationships with our world by promoting and praying for the ministry initiatives that the Spirit of God places on the hearts of our members.

### YOU - “on mission” for the Great Commission!

When more and more of Northwest’s regular attenders are “on mission” for the Great Commission (either inside or outside the church), our church of hundreds can easily impact tens of thousands.<sup>4</sup>

We are here to build the Kingdom - and the advance of the Kingdom is always more important than the growth of our church.

Our strategy for impacting the community for the Kingdom is to proclaim loudly and often that each Christian is released into the field of physical and emotional and spiritual need, locally and globally.

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<sup>4</sup> Many of those who are impacted will never pass through the doors of our church. That is not a problem. Our mission from God has never been to grow a church numerically. He has, however, given each of us a mission to impact and to penetrate our culture with salt and light and to infiltrate our culture for Jesus like leaven in a lump of dough.

### The QUESTION

So, in answer to the question, “What are we doing with respect to local outreach?”

Here is what we are doing. WE are doing what YOU are doing.

On this Launch testimony Sunday, here is the message to you:

You have been enlisted (drafted!) into God’s Kingdom force to be “on mission” for Jesus’ Great Commission. Further, God has equipped you with ministry gifts and passions.

Some of those gifts and passions will be used within the confines of the church. And that is great.

Some of them will be used outside of the church. You will shine for Jesus at work, at school, and in your neighborhood and at your gym. You will serve in small or large ways. You will serve randomly or you will organize a formal 501(c)(3) ministry. You will serve along or you will enlist others to join you in what you want to do for God.

But know this. There is nothing standing in the way of you doing what you want to do for God.

The Launch volunteers you’ve heard from this morning didn’t pass by me or the Elders what was on their hearts to do. They just did it because they knew that they had been empowered to serve by Jesus.

And so have you been empowered to serve by Jesus.

### The request

Here is one request, though, as you launch into Great Commission ministry. If you find yourself involved in some service where people’s needs are being met (social, emotional, spiritual, material) in Jesus’ Name, would you please let the Elders know?

We would love to pray for you regularly and to be your biggest cheerleaders and to get the word out about what you are doing so that others might join you.