

EHC Week 4
"Go Out"
Assorted Proverbs
6/19/22

Introduction

PROVERBS.

Honestly, all week I had something different planned than what I'm going to preach right now. It's not often but occasionally these things get a Sunday morning rewrite.

I was going to preach on some different passages that still speak to this idea of where we're heading today, but for the past few weeks our teaching team kept suggesting I should preach from Proverbs instead of what I had planned, then all week I've been out of town for our annual Citizens Ministry Team retreat and so I had one plan for a sermon, then I woke up this morning, opened up my laptop and my first thought was - "Crap, we should do Proverbs."

So I say that to say three things:

1. I'm really glad, at least today, we meet at 5pm.
2. If it's good, give the credit to the Holy Spirit and our Teaching Team.
3. I'm so incredibly grateful this has nothing to do with my eloquence and ability but everything to do with the power of God to save us and change us. Amen?

Pray.

"The Slap". My junior year of college was an absolute mess. My life was a wreck. I was bar hopping 4-5 nights a week, chasing after girl after girl after girl, running every which way trying to find something or someone to make me happy and fill what I thought was this void in my life. And all at the same time was leading a small group much like the Community Groups we do here at Citizens.

Living a boldly double life. I'd say hidden but it wasn't. As a group we would meet on Thursday nights, and I would actually leave in the middle of the group to make sure I could meet friends downtown in time.

Now if you were to ask me how I was doing in the midst of that year I would've said I was doing just fine. I would've told you that I was walking closely with the Lord. I would've told you that I was being a faithful group leader. I would've told you that I wasn't hurting anyone hopping from one relationship to the next to the next.

I was living, to be honest, in a state of unreality. I thought my head and my heart were one way, but in all actuality my life was nothing like I was convinced it was.

And these guys I was in a group with - they were some of my closest friends. I had walked with them for several years at this point. I was in a number of their weddings, a bunch of them were in mine. They had been through the ups and the downs.

And finally one night at group, in the middle of this tumultuous year, one of them, who will remain nameless, still my friend to this day - he had had enough. I sat down. I said, "Guys, I met this girl. She is not about Jesus at all, but I think it could be a good thing. I'm going to ask her out."

And the next thing I know - "WAM". Right across the face. He actually slapped me. In the middle of a church community group, he was so fed up with my stupidity and sin he actually slapped me.

Now, before you freak out I am 0% advocating for slapping people at your Community Group. (Some of you are like - "dang it!") No one should be slapping anyone at group. If that happens, you call me. Ok? This is not an immediately applicable illustration.

But here's why I tell you that story. I learned two valuable lessons in the weeks following that moment:

1. No one is better at lying to me than me.

And that's true for you too. An essential truth you have to realize as you step into this journey of discipleship to Jesus and emotional health is this - **no one is better at lying to you than you.**

When our emotions get spinning within us, one of the first things we do is begin to live in **unreality**. We begin to live in a world we've fabricated in our minds.

- **Where things are better than they actually are or worse than they actually are.**
- **Where we are better than we actually are and worse than we actually are.**

Our ability to deceive ourselves and then to deceive ourselves about how we deceive ourselves is astounding. Our emotions, our hearts, our thoughts - they lie to us all of the time.

The Scriptures are clear on this:

Jeremiah 17:9 - The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick; who can understand it?

What does this mean? **It means because of sin we always think we're right.** We always think our view of our lives or our world is the correct one. And in order to be an emotionally healthy person, we've got to realize our ability to lie to and deceive ourselves.

But here's the 2nd thing I learned:

2. One of the key tools God uses to shape us into spiritually and emotionally mature people is community.

In those moments of unreality - where we are lying to ourselves about the state of our lives, the world, our hearts - we need God, certainly. But we also need God's people. We also need the gift of others who love Jesus and love us.

We need other people.

If we're going to move forward into emotional maturity - that is feeling the right emotion, at the right time, with the right amount, for the right duration, because of the right reason - namely, love - that is going to take other people.

To say it another way → **Emotional health, like all of our discipleship to Jesus, is a community project.**

We need some people who are going to bring truth into our lives. Who are going to come alongside us to say - Hey, this is off. This is wrong. This is not real. God is still good.

So that leads us to our 4th movement - **We must go out to go forward.**

We must take our emotions outward into the context of a loving, committed, Jesus-centered community in order to move forward into emotional health. You need other people in this fight. You need other people who are going to help you stay grounded in what is real and what is true. Other people to help you stay rooted to Jesus.

This is a community project.

So many examples of this in Scripture:

- Jesus in the Garden
- King David + Jonathan
- Paul (end of ministry) - 2 Tim 4 > bring me my books, my coat and John Mark

We need folks in the ups and downs, brokenness and suffering, sin and emotional turmoil.

PROVERBS

So if you would turn with me to the book of Proverbs.

Our typical practice here at Citizens is to pick a chunk of Scripture and teach through it, dissect it, talk about how it points us to Jesus and applies to our lives. But today I want to do things just a smidge different. Still want to teach the Bible, but I want to look at a handful of verses from the book of Proverbs.

Now, Proverbs doesn't really operate like a "pick a chunk and teach it" kind of book.

If you're not familiar with Proverbs - **Proverbs is a genre in the Bible called wisdom literature.**

The Bible is one book made up of a collection of 66 smaller books all with various genres - there's some historical narrative (Genesis, Matthew, Acts - stories of what happened in history), there are letters/epistles (Rom, Gal, 1+2 Thess), there are poems and songs (Psalms), Prophecy (Isaiah).

One of those genres is wisdom literature. Wisdom literature is there, given by God, inspired by the Holy Spirit - **to show us how life with God is supposed to work** - how do we live well as followers of Jesus within the complexity of the world?

And Proverbs has a lot to say about how we live well in relationship to others and I think speaks directly to what it would look like in our lives to go out to go forward.

So I want to look at just a handful of Proverbs together and see what it is that we might learn about how to go out to go forward. How to embrace the God-given gift of community for moving forward into emotional health.

Pastor Tim Keller - "Deputizing other people" - how do we utilize or take best advantage of the gift of God-given community to help us, not only how we want but how we need, and how do we step in to be that for others as well?

A few practical steps for going out to go forward.

1. Cultivate Christ-Centered relationships.

Proverbs 11:14 - Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.

Let's just start with the obvious - **you need other people.**

Proverbs 11 - when you've got people speaking into your life, you've got guardrails and safety. If you're on an island - that's a recipe for disaster.

You were not meant to live life alone. This is the simplest and most basic of all ideas in the Christian faith. It has roots all the way back in Genesis 2:18 - It is not good that man should be (what?) **alone**.

At the very core of our wiring as humans is a relational need. We need other people. We need folks who are going to come alongside us and care for us, and help us, and confront us.

If you try to go about life as a Christian on your own - you're going against the very fabric of Scripture, you're going against God's design, and you can be guaranteed of this - **you will not grow**.

You need interpersonal, committed to Jesus and to each other, relationships to make it as a follower of Jesus and to grow into emotional and spiritual health and maturity. Because your ability to deceive yourself is just too great.

Dominoes - "Right there".

You need other people. And other people need you. That's a part of how God works in our lives. How he matures us. How He grows us, is us showing up for other people and other people showing up for us.

Hebrews 3:12-13 - 12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

I love the way Joseph Hellerman puts it. He has a book called *When the Church was Family*. If you want to know what we mean by "family" when we say that Citizens Church is a Jesus-centered family on mission with him, you have to read this book - *When the Church was Family* by Joseph Hellerman.

He says this, **"Long-term interpersonal relationships are the crucible of genuine progress in the Christian life."**

The path towards spiritual and emotional maturity is not a path we can walk alone. You need to commit to some folks and say hey - I'm going to encourage you when you're down. I'm going to confront you when you're off. I'm in on this with you. I'm not bailing. I'm going to show up. I'm going to fight for this type of community. I'm asking that you do the same for me.

2. Seek Gospel-fueled Humility.

Proverbs 12:15 - The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

This step is absolutely crucial. We need to be humble people. Humility opens our hearts up to be wrong. Opens our hearts up to not always think we know what's up or what's best.

John Stott, British theologian - "Pride is your greatest enemy, humility is your greatest friend."

Nothing buffers us against the work of God in our lives like pride. Self-assuredness. A pervading sense that we see everything clearly and have everything figured out is a core danger to emotional health and maturity.

My Pride. I've got deep pride issues. I'm an off the charts Enneagram 1 (healthy and unhealthy). And if you don't know what that means, it just means I really like and trust my opinions on everything. Including, often the state of my heart and emotions.

But that pride keeps me from the work of God through others. So if I'm entering into Community Group, and I'm puffed up with pride - "I'm awesome. I'm getting a doctorate in applied theology. I'm a pastor. These guys are idiots and I know best." (which isn't true, the guys in my group are awesome)

But if that's my heart posture - how am I supposed to receive and welcome correction and love.

- Every sin I confess will have an excuse.
- Every suffering I'm facing will be exactly how I view it.
- Every unhealthy emotion will be completely valid and reasonable.

I'm buffered against anyone being a God-sent gift to me to course correct me away from my stupidity and back into reality and more and more into becoming like Jesus.

If we're going to have others help us grow, if we're going to step into this community-project of formation into the image of Jesus, we will need humility.

But here's the key → It must be gospel-fueled humility.

The only way we learn, with any amount, to be humble is through the good news of the gospel. Because the gospel levels the playing field. The first and necessary step of the gospel is to own for ourselves - I'm wrong. I'm a sinner. My heart is wicked and deceitful. I'm messed up and screwed up and I need a Savior.

There is nothing more humiliating (and I mean that in the positive sense) than the gospel of Jesus Christ which necessitates we come to the cross empty, broken, and unable to fix or save ourselves - throwing ourselves onto the mercy of Christ that by faith and grace washes us clean and makes us new and right with God.

That gospel means we can say "I don't know." That gospel means we can say "I'm wrong." That gospel means we can say "I'm probably not seeing this clearly." That gospel means we can ask - "will you help me?"

3. Welcome God-sent and Godward encouragement.

Proverbs 19:20 - Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future.

Listen → hear, receive, welcome

Advice → Heb: "Counsel" - think like a counselor or a trusted friend or mentor - the guidance they would give.

There can be such a temptation in emotionally tumultuous and painful seasons. Seasons of suffering, pain, sadness, grief, anxiety, worry - to self isolate. To pull back from our Christian community.

To believe the lie - "I'm alone. No one understands me. No one gets what I'm going through."

Because suffering and sorrow and anxiety tells us two lies.

Lie #1 - That God is not good.

Lie #2 - That we're alone.

We need some folks around us who are going to encourage us, be steady for us, ground us back in reality when we feel like the bottom is dropping out.

We need God-sent and Godward encouragement. Not cheap, false encouragement - "Everything is going to be ok! Keep your head up!" That's cheap. We need Godward encouragement - "Let's look at God together. Let's turn our eyes on Jesus together."

- In those moments of **anxiety** - "Hey, you're not living in reality. I know that meeting you're about to have tomorrow is stressful and you're worried about it. But let's remember God's faithfulness together."
- In those moments of **sadness** - "Hey, I'm here with you. What happened is so broken and not how God designed the world to work. Let's weep together. And let's run to God together."
- In those moments of **loneliness** - "Hey, God is present. We are in this together. God never leaves. I'm going to do my best to not leave. Let's press in towards Him together."

I can't tell you how many folks man - and it just breaks my heart as a pastor - how many people will just disappear for a few months. Stop showing up, won't answer calls or texts, just MIA. And then they come back around and you're like - "So great to see you! Where have you been?" And the response more often than not is - "We were just going through a hard season and needed some space."

And it breaks my heart because the pattern of the Bible and the invitation of God is that that's the complete opposite of what you actually need in that season. You need to press more in when it's difficult. More in when you're suffering. More in when you're sad. More in when you're anxious.

That's where the healing comes. When we're in that state of - Man, I'm just beat up. And I'm sure that because my emotions are all over the place I'm just not thinking clearly - I need some folks to remind me of the promises and faithfulness of God. To sit with me. To show up for me. To help lead me back to the rock of Christ.

4. Embrace God-sent and Godward rebuke.

Proverbs 27:6 (NIV) - Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

We need to be open to people who love Jesus and love us saying the hard things, bringing Godly conviction, telling us when we're off, when we're in sin, when we're blind. AND we need to be willing to believe them. Because the thing about blind spots is that, well, they're blind spots. We can't see them.

And people who love Jesus and love us being willing to put our feelings, and our reaction, and their necks on the line to say the hard thing to point us back to Christ → That is such an incredible grace gift from God.

Ax vs. Scalpel. And when we're struggling and blind to the reality of life or our hearts - and someone tries to point that out, let me just give you this heads up - **it's going to hurt. AND that doesn't mean it's wrong or bad.**

It's the difference (and I've used this example before I think) between an ax and a scalpel. Someone uses an ax or scalpel on you - it's going to be painful. Both cut. Both can hurt. Both aren't pleasant experiences. BUT one chops things to remove them, one is a tool in the hands of a caring person to help and to heal. BOTH are going to hurt - one hurts to destroy, one hurts to heal.

But if you label everything that hurts as an attack to destroy, or as disloyalty, or as being mean, or as judgment, or as a legalism - or whatever you want to call it - you cut yourself off from so much of the work of redemption and healing God wants to use other people to do in your life.

Can I just pastor you for a minute? Stick with me ok? I love you guys so much.

Acceptance and validation are not the core of Christian community.

Yes, the Church should be a place where you come as you are. A place where brokenness is not just a goal, it's a necessity. We're all works in progress helping other works in progress. I want this church to be a place where you can bring questions, bring doubts, bring struggles and brokenness. Where it's ok to not be ok.

But acceptance and validation is not the core of Christian community. **Jesus is the core of Christian community.**

Which means in this family. The family of God - we care more about helping each other look like Jesus than we do about validating every whim of feeling of the person sitting across from us.

We must must must love each other enough to not let someone live in unreality. We must love each other enough to say - "This is off, and I want Jesus for you. Can I help you grow?"

And we need some folks in our lives who love us enough and care about us enough to give us some wounds that are going to help heal us towards Jesus.

- Hey, you're **angry** here and it's actually prideful and unjustified. This is an opportunity for you to repent and forgive.
- Hey, you're **anxious** here and it's just a blatant distrust in God. This is an opportunity for us to lean together back on Him.
- Hey, you **put that person down** to make yourself feel better and make others laugh and like you more, that was not ok - you need to apologize.

Wounds from a friend can be trusted...The Bible says it's actually these people who are the true friends. The ones who only ever validate you, applaud you, never push to help you be better or more like Jesus - those are the fake friends.

5. Stick it out with each other.

Proverbs 18:24 - A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

*The problem of preaching sermons like this is that the temptation for all of us is to throw a pity party - "I don't have this sort of community. I don't have these sort of friends."

So let me just encourage you - These types of relationships take sacrifice and work. It sounds so incredibly cheesy but the old elementary school saying is true - "To make a friend you have to be a friend."

So many of us, myself included, love the idea of deep, rooted, lasting, flourishing Christian community. I'm just not always so fond of the sacrifices it would require of me to have it.

- So I want to have family-like friends in Charlotte - deep, beautiful, call at any time sort of community - but when an opportunity comes up to care for members of my community group or a neighbor in need, I have 10 things we'd rather do instead.

- I want to be fully known and fully loved and embraced and feel safe in our Community Group, but so often I feel a pull to zone out when other people are sharing, or not engage in discussion, or not press into the very space created for that.

Deep friendships take deep work. Sacrificial committed friendships take sacrifice. And this rubs at the grain of all things 2022 Western Culture.

Alan Noble (Friendships and Belonging in Middle Age - he starts - "I'm skeptical anyone over age 35 has close friends.") - **"Deep friendships require great sacrifice. They demand you set aside your preferences, goals, and hopes (at times) for the good of someone else. If that sounds like too much work, you'll live a sad and lonely life."**

If you want to continue to grow into emotionally healthy, emotionally mature individuals - it's going to take sacrifice and it's going to take **time**. It's going to take some long-haul. It's going to take some grit to not quit.

This is essential. We don't bail. We don't throw in the towel. We just keep showing up for each other.

Joseph Hellerman - **"Long-term interpersonal relationships are the crucible of genuine progress in the Christian life. People who stay also grow. People who leave do not grow. We all know people who are consumed with spiritual wanderlust. But we never get to know them very well because they cannot seem to stay put. They move along from church to church, ever searching for a congregation that will better satisfy their felt needs. Like trees repeatedly transplanted from soil to soil, these spiritual nomads fail to put down roots and seldom experience lasting and fruitful growth in their Christian lives."**

There is an incredible amount of spiritual and emotional health waiting on us when we just refuse to bail. I'm just not going to give up on this.

Emotional immaturity bounces from one convenient relationship to the next. Emotional maturity comes from sticking it out.

Gospel Conclusion

Go out to go up.

DESPERATE FOR THE GOSPEL.

GOSPEL CONCLUSION - How beautiful is it...

- That Jesus does not give up on us?
- That He doesn't throw in the towel when we're rebellious, annoying, or go against Him?
- That He is a good shepherd who picks us up and holds us in His arms when we're suffering, broken, depressed, beat down?
- That He is a faithful Father who disciplines those He loves? Who shows us our sin and leads us to Godly conviction, brokenness, and repentance?
- That He doesn't just call us servants, He calls us friends?

That He welcomes us, loves us → And gives us not only Himself, relationship with God forever - he gives us His Church. He gives us others to live life with, walk with, care for, receive care from - and to help along the journey as Citizens of heaven finding their way home.

Communion. Pray.