

BATTLE STRATEGY

Series: Battlefield
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Wisdom
1 Cor. 9:19-27

Where does the wisdom of the old come from? The writings of the Book of Proverbs classify people into 4. The simple, the fool, the scoffer and the wise. Basically, the first 3 are all unwise categories and then there is the wise.

But the simple is unwise because of lack of experience, young age, not having lived much. There is a wisdom that comes with age and living. So there are those in the wise category simply because they have been a live a bit longer. Where does that come from?

The wisdom of the old comes from observations over time. The old have seen life long enough and have seen patterns and where they lead. They have seen this repeat themselves over and over again and so they can trust what will happen. The old know that patterns are strong predictors of outcome. And we will be looking at some of those observations and patterns today as they will be great determinants of our futures.

The wisest man that ever lived said that as a person thinks so they are. So we have spent some time in the battlefield of the mind. Because our minds are the tips of the spear. The arrowhead. Where our minds go so will the rest of us.

To get to better ends of the year, we must decisively choose different or better thought patterns. Last Sunday we talked about defining what wins are in the areas of life that matter most.

Especially in these areas because they are often very poor competitors of our time, energy and resources. God and people. Those are the things that matter and often the crown is life. What kinds of parent you are, what kind of spouse you are, what kind of disciple you are being. In these areas the crown is life.

Have you also realized, however, that some of the wisest people you know make some of the dumbest choices? Rather they end up in places you never thought they would have. Why is it that when we hear where some people ended up we go, "No way! They did not" Because we thought them wise enough not to be there.

For example, the wisest man that ever lived made some very bad choices and ended up in the worst place. The story of Solomon starts with him in God's presence full of the Holy Spirit and asking for wisdom over riches so that he could rule God's people wisely. A choice that ended up making him equally very rich.

The story of Solomon ends with a disillusioned man worshipping the many gods of the many different wives he had married. Why?

But how do even wise people end up where they never expected? How many times have you ended a season and you know too well, it is not where you wanted to be? How did you

end up where you did not want to be financially? How did you end up where you did not want to be in your marriage?

You are trying to fix things from last year out of a realization that you are not where you want to be. Just like Solomon despite all his wisdom.

It's because of this life principle that is reliable and true; direction, not the intention, determines destination. How this year will end has nothing to do with how brilliant the win you and I defined last week is but really the patterns of our mind and the direction of we live in. No matter how badly we want and desire to see things get to a good place we can only find ourselves where the direction we have taken leads.

And the challenge is, we cannot pray ourselves into the right destination. We cannot sing ourselves into the right destination. We cannot fast ourselves into the right destination we can only walk ourselves in the right direction. That is what will determine the destination we find ourselves. Whether it is in the next five years or the next year or the next few months. You will arrive at where you are currently walking towards.

And the flip side of the coin is, when we arrive at the wrong destination, there is not a switch that simply changes things. When marriages fall apart, they are not like computers where you just press, restart or take it to be fixed. When you are in a terrible financial place, you don't just wake up the next morning and it's all gone. When your body is now addicted to what started as an enjoyable habit, you cannot just fix it.

So then it becomes increasingly important to then watch the direction in which we are leading our lives especially in the areas that matter most. Because it is that that determines what the destination is.

Let's Pray

Jesus told often taught using stories. And these stories were powerful because, for one, they were resonating with the soul of human beings because that is what truth does. You just deeply know that is true. And two, some of them were upsetting the order of things in how they spoke about the Kingdom of God.

Here is one of his wisdom stories that everyone just knows how deeply it makes sense.

Those people who are listening to Me, those people who hear what I say and live according to My teachings—you are like a wise man who built his house on a rock, on a firm foundation. When storms hit, rain pounded down and waters rose, dams broke and winds beat all the walls of that house. But the house did not fall because it was built upon a rock. Those of you who are listening and do not hear—you are like a fool who builds a house on sand. When a storm comes to his house, what will happen? The rain will fall, the waters will rise, the wind will blow, and his house will collapse with a great crash.

Matthew 7:24-27

So 2 different builders and very different philosophies. This was a great investment in time and money. They both had great intentions, which we all often have, from both of them. All of them had in their mind to get to very great destinations, a great house that will last.

Some things about the story, the storm will come. God makes the sunrise on both the wicked and the righteous. God makes the rain fall on both the wicked and the righteous. If there is one thing we can count on is that there will be trying times. Not just for the good but also the wicked. Fresh starts, yeah, brace yourself for some storms aside.

And David in one of his psalms notes that sometimes it looks like the wicked are having a great time. They are cutting corners. They go anywhere they want to go. They are doing everything and anything they want. It seems sometimes like they are having a ball. They are living the dream now.

Yet one thing to surely count on is that the winds and the storms come for all of us.

Something else about the story. That the longevity of what is built has nothing to do with how beautiful it is. The two could have both built very beautiful houses or even the foolish one might have had a more beautiful one. That did not count. The size did not help either. What mattered was the journey they took in building the houses.

Here is the thing, you could be living in the wrong direction and it feels great. You are making wrong business decisions and it looks like it is working out now. We could be in the wrong relationship or leading our relationships down the wrong paths but at the moment, it feels great, that will not count. Or it might be feeling terrible already, in the end, it is not the feeling or the appearance that counts, it is which direction you have taken that does.

One guy builds their house on a rock. What that represents is that they do the hard work. They dig deep. It takes a longer time and more resources. A lot more waiting for gratification.

Then the shaking comes. Not for one, but for both of them. The problem with building in the wrong direction is that when you realize you are lost, you cannot just fix it, you have to start again. To the extent to which you have gotten lost you have to drive all the way back. You have to rebuild.

But the problem is by the time the house is down, it is costly on relationships, it is costly on time and resources. You have no idea what is at stake. You have no idea what is at stake, what will be crashed when the house comes crumbling down.

So if you felt a bit lost in 2019 and some of your resolutions are about fixing that, good intentions alone don't work. If 2019 ended with your marriage and finances where you hoped they would be and you want to keep the streak, that desire alone will not help neither will a lot of prayer and fasting, it is the patterns and direction of your life.

And don't get me wrong. Does prayer change things? Yes of course. God intervenes. The Kingdom breaks through in our lives. But unless the direction in which we lead our lives to change, even miraculous interventions won't do any good.

But let me take the example of our country's economic strain because of the amount of debt. And trust me, I am not trying to wade into politics. Let us say we pray hard and by divine action, China forgives our debt and so do other countries. We get a fresh start.

Unless the direction in which the country is living changes, we will end up in the same place is not too long. We got here largely because of mismanagement and corruption. It is direction and patterns that determine the destination.

And here is another thing, you get unlost the same way you got lost. If you were driving and you lost your way and went 30 kilometres in the wrong direction, you have to drive 30 kilometres back to where you lost direction. You get out of the wrong destination, the same way you get to the right destination, by beginning to move in the right direction.

We have to put in the hard work and it takes time. It is like the house of the foolish builder crumbling, he has to rebuild. In the places we have found ourselves in the wrong destination, we cannot just get a fix, we have to undo the mess and rebuild. And that takes hard work and commitment.

Some of us have to commit to living on less to pay off a debt we got ourselves into while living in the wrong direction. Some of us have to cut their working hours and make sure we find professional help for our marriages. Some of us have to start making calls to ask for forgiveness.

To get unlost we must walk back the wrong direction we took and do the hard work of rebuilding. Otherwise, your intention to be at a better place will not matter. Your feelings of remorse for having led in the wrong direction won't change the destination.

So how do we check on which direction we are leading our lives?

Invite people in

Invite people who love Jesus and genuinely love you to speak into your life. To speak into the decisions you are making. To speak into the direction you are living in now. There is already someone who around you who is saying, "This will not end well" Or you can see them in the future saying, "I told you so"

All of us have said this before, "I should have seen this coming!" The reason we could not see it is that when it involves us, it is emotional and we get a bit blinded. So we must invite people in who can see clearer. Because they are not blinded by our emotional fog. Everyone else is seeing it but you.

Or if that does not make sense, how were you able to see where your friends decision will get them and they were not? It works the same for you too.

Or there is someone we are not telling about the decision you are making about money or about your relationship because we already know what they will tell us. We can hear their voices.

And I am not saying that they are always right, but they will offer some very good insight into the situation and show you things you may have not thought about because it is emotional for you.

If they have a problem with you taking a certain job where one of your friends from the past is working at, maybe you need to hold up. Because the direction you lead your marriage at that point is what will determine where it ends up.

Some people say, "Well I prayed about and it and God said" Great, yet isn't it great that God does not just speak to you. The practice of discernment should not be done in isolation. Listen to God together with your spouse and even when you are fairly certain, give them time.

Invite others in. Practising co-discerning.

The other one arresting your thoughts

So back to wisdom? What is wisdom? Seeing the patterns and taking charge. Seeing the direction and changing course now before you get to the destination. Andy Stanley says that wise people know one thing that all of life is connected. The past is connected to the present which is connected to the future.

If it all starts in our mind, we have to identify the patterns of our minds that have to be broken. And here is the thing, our minds want to conserve energy. So they go to the paths of least resistance. It is easier to think the same way over and over again because it takes energy to change our minds.

And in an excerpt we will read shortly Paul talks about taking our thoughts captive. It is what scientists call cognitive re-framing.

The human being can control how they think. While other animals just act on impulse, Human beings have some similar impulses but can override them. And we have to make a habit of arresting our rogue thoughts when they first appear because they become action and action become a direction in which we are living lives.

You know when the thought to go out drinking comes up but if you have been down a path of addiction, that is thought to override. You know when the thought to text back comes up. You know when you should change your route to work. You can tell when bitterness is planting itself in your heart against your spouse or your neighbour or your parent.

It seems easier more exciting at the moment but we know too well that they lead down a very particular destination. Working to beat patterns of thoughts is hard work and uninteresting. I can imagine anyone in the crowd struggling to go, "Yeah it is not that easy" and I agree with you. It is hard work but work that must be done nonetheless.

Finally, following Jesus; The way.

We are talking about the principle of the path. That every direction leads to a certain destination, Jesus ultimately is the way that leads to the ultimate destination.

We could talk about the micro aspects of this. Your financial direction. The direction of your marriage, the direction of your company and all that. And the principle remains true, that the direction you are leading in now will determine the destination. Yet, when Jesus made this statement, there was a bigger overarching concern. There is a direction of life that makes you better at life in general and determines the destination of life in general.

Following Jesus, is the one direction that makes all the difference. He starts the story by saying that those who hear his word and live in that direction will be like the wise builders.

And it is not that all the other things do not matter. Jesus is saying, “Hey if you do your marriage in the way that he leads; if you do your finances in the way that he leads; if you do your politics in the way that he leads; if you do your sexuality in the way that he leads...the destination will be on of purpose and life” And even though it might seem to take longer and even appear to be harder and take up more resources.

Here is something wise Paul wrote

For though we walk in the world, we do not fight according to this world's rules of warfare. 4 The weapons of the war we're fighting are not of this world but are powered by God and effective at tearing down the strongholds erected against His truth. 5 We are demolishing arguments and ideas, every high-and-mighty philosophy that pits itself against the knowledge of the one true God. We are taking prisoners of every thought, every emotion, and subduing them into obedience to the Anointed One.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

That even in the daily living of this life, we do not do things the same way everyone else does them. We do not look at finances the same way the world does despite being in the world. We do not look at marriage the same way the world does despite living in the world. We do not look at parenting the same way the world does despite living in the world. We do not wage war on the battlefield the same way the world does.

Our primary goal is that God's Kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven and that impacts how we do life. So everything culture says about life we measure against God's truth and we bring it to submission to God.

Part of what we will have to do is to watch out for the patterns of our thoughts and our minds and take charge of them. But I am inviting you to an even better place. Don't just reflect on your thought and emotional patterns, reflect on them in light of the life of Jesus Christ. Don't just take charge of what you think about finances, marriage, parenting and other areas of your life including your weight and your politics but take charge of them in light of what Jesus is inviting you to.

And some of us are followers of Jesus, the invitation is that if we will have better lives and be better at life if we will keep following Jesus.

For some of us, we have never made the commitment to follow Jesus. To do life in the light of his love. And the invitation from him is, come follow me.

I am learning every day to make even very small decisions in light of following Jesus. Decisions about singleness, where to live, how to talk to people. Listen I am not saying religion or Christianity. I am talking about a daily conversation with Jesus about where he wants to lead me.

So I dare you to follow Jesus, 3 years later, 4 years later and later in eternity you will be better for it.

Let's rise as the band comes back on stage.

Community Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart;

test me and know my anxious thoughts.

See if there is any evil way in me,

and lead me in the way everlasting.

You know when I sit and when I rise;

you perceive my thoughts from afar.

You discern my going out and my lying down;

you are familiar with all my ways.

Before a word is on my tongue

you, Lord, know it completely.

You surround me in behind and before,

and you lay your hand upon me.

Search me, God, and know my heart;

test me and know my anxious thoughts.

See if there is any evil way in me,



and lead me in the way everlasting.

Let's pray