

## Proverbs: Wise Leadership

**Big idea:** Follow wise leaders.

**Purpose:** To help people reflect on the leaders they follow and to equip them to discern wise leaders.

**Passage:** Proverbs 8:12-21      **Verse:** Matthew 11:19b

**Overview:** We must follow wise leaders. According to Proverbs, wise leadership is marked by humility, justice, mercy. Jesus is our compass for wise leadership. Let's follow him.

Hey there New Hope! Thanks for joining us today! My name is Hannah and I'm one of the pastors here.

I want to begin by telling you a little Bible story. Story time with Hannah. In the New Testament, there's this interesting character named John the Baptist. John was a prophet, born just months before Jesus. His role was to prepare the way for the long-awaited Messiah, the anointed leader that God had promised the Jews for hundreds of years.

**John was to proclaim: "Hey, the leader we've all been waiting for is coming. The one who is going to make everything right again is near."** It sort of reminds me (if you've seen or read Chronicles of Narnia) of Mr. Beaver who proclaims, "Aslan is on the move!" John the Baptist started this ripple effect of whispers and rumors, "God is on the move." You can imagine the hope and curiosity it stirred up.

The only problem was, Jesus wasn't quite the leader the Israelites were looking for. The kind of power Jesus led with wasn't the kind of power they were used to. They were living in the Roman Empire with Caesar as King. The kind of Kingdom Jesus was establishing (and the way he was establishing it) wasn't the kind of Kingdom they were expecting.

Even John the Baptist—who baptized Jesus and witnessed the heavens opening up—even he had his doubts as things went along. After a series of unfortunate events, John ended up in prison and sent some of his followers to find Jesus and ask him, "Hey, are you really it? Are you really the leader we have been waiting for?" You can imagine the fear behind those questions...

*Did we get it wrong?*

Jesus replied to them, *"Go back and tell John what you see and hear:  
The blind see,*

*The lame walk,  
Lepers are cleansed,  
The deaf hear,  
The dead are raised,  
The poor of the earth learn that God is on their side.*

He talks for a little bit more to the people, as He usually does, and then He has this great little line: He says, *“Wisdom is proved right by her deeds.”*(Matthew 11:19b)

### **Wisdom is proved right by her deeds.**

We are in the midst of a series on Proverbs, looking at the way of wisdom. What do the sages—the wise guides of scripture—have to say about wisdom and foolishness, about speech, friendship, money, and justice? We’ve looked at how **wisdom is a way, a path, that leads us into not the good life, but a life that is good.** Today we are talking about leadership. What do the sages of Proverbs have to say about wise leadership?

In the story I just shared about Jesus and John the Baptist, John has this question about leadership: *How do I know you’re someone worth following?* Jesus answers it with a statement about wisdom: *What do you see and hear? Look at my deeds.*

Turn with me in your Bibles to Proverbs 8:12-21. We’re going to look at some of those deeds of wise leadership. Our scripture reader for today is Portia Manjengwa.

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 8:12-21

*“I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence;  
I possess knowledge and discretion.  
To fear the Lord is to hate evil;  
I hate pride and arrogance,  
evil behavior and perverse speech.  
Counsel and sound judgment are mine;  
I have insight, I have power.  
By me kings reign  
and rulers issue decrees that are just;  
by me princes govern,  
and nobles—all who rule on earth.  
I love those who love me,*

*and those who seek me find me.  
With me are riches and honor,  
enduring wealth and prosperity.  
My fruit is better than fine gold;  
what I yield surpasses choice silver.  
I walk in the way of righteousness,  
along the paths of justice,  
bestowing a rich inheritance on those who love me  
and making their treasuries full.*

### **Scripture Commentary:**

Thanks Portia. Don't you love how wisdom is personified in the proverbs? It reminds me how wisdom is not this static, fixed thing that you either have or you don't have, but that wisdom is this relationship that we seek, that we pursue, that we put in dialogue with our own life and vision.

In this passage we see that a relationship with wisdom is what makes a good leader. ***By wisdom kings reign, rulers issue justice, princes and nobles govern.*** And then it sums it up in verse 16—*all who rule the earth*. In many manuscripts, that phrase is actually translated “all righteous rulers” as if to clarify that it's quite possible for rulers to not govern with wisdom, but the ones worth following, do.

We talked earlier about how wisdom is proved right by her deeds. As we look through this passage, and throughout the book of Proverbs, **we can see these key themes emerge**, describing the deeds of wisdom when it comes to leadership. ***These deeds are humility, justice, and mercy.*** We're going to look through each of those right now.

### **Wise leadership is marked by humility.**

Let's zoom back in on Proverbs 8, verse 13:

*To fear the Lord is to hate evil;  
I [wisdom] hate pride and arrogance,  
evil behavior and perverse speech.*

*Wisdom hates pride and arrogance.* Another way of saying that is *ego leaves no room for wisdom*. The antidote for ego is humility. Humility is about how you see yourself—**it's all about having a right-sized, true view of who you are and who you are not.** Wise leaders know they don't know it all. Instead, they seek wisdom. By wisdom, kings reign and leaders lead, not by ego.

Proverbs 21 describes wise leadership as *a river of water directed by God*; that God guides to wherever He chooses.

**Wise leaders see their position as a way to serve, not just a way to succeed.**

They take the posture of a servant and see themselves as a part of a bigger story. The Apostle Paul wrote about this kind of humility in Philippians 2 when he described the leadership posture of Christ:

*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*

*Who, being in very nature God,*

*did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;*

*rather, he made himself nothing*

*by taking the very nature of a servant,*

*being made in human likeness.*

*And being found in appearance as a man,*

*he humbled himself*

*by becoming obedient to death—*

*even death on a cross!*

*(Philippians 2:5-8)*

Wise leaders see their position as a way to serve, not to succeed. Wise leadership is marked by humility.

Second,

**Wise leadership is marked by justice.**

*I [wisdom] walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice...*

(Proverbs 8:20)

Last week Pastor Mike talked extensively about wisdom and justice, so I won't do that deep dive here. If you missed last week, I encourage you to go back and give it a listen.

But I will just say that when it comes to looking for the deeds of wisdom in leadership, justice is a nonnegotiable. Wisdom walks along paths of justice, and wise leaders do, too. **Justice can be understood as *making things right*.**

Justice is about identifying where there is hurt or brokenness or shame or wrong, and moving towards it with healing love. Justice is about saying "no more" to that which prevents human flourishing.

Proverbs 29 says,

*When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice;  
when the wicked rule, the people groan... .  
By justice a king gives a country stability...*

Wise leaders promote justice. The phrase “gives a country stability” is kind of a tricky one in the original language. It’s not just about creating law and order, it’s about establishing *shalom*. It’s about promoting peace and right-relationship. Wise leadership is marked by justice.

Finally,

### **Wise leadership is marked by mercy.**

The last book of Proverbs has this great little section called *The Sayings of King Lemuel*—things that his mom taught him as he was growing into his leadership role as a young king. It’s a bit long, but I think we need the whole thing for context, so here we go.

*The sayings of King Lemuel—an inspired utterance his mother taught him.*

*Listen, my son! Listen, son of my womb!*

*Listen, my son, the answer to my prayers!*

*Do not spend your strength on women,  
your vigor on those who ruin kings.*

*It is not for kings, Lemuel—*

*it is not for kings to drink wine,  
not for rulers to crave beer,*

*lest they drink and forget what has been decreed,  
and deprive all the oppressed of their rights.*

*Let beer be for those who are perishing,  
wine for those who are in anguish!*

*Let them drink and forget their poverty  
and remember their misery no more.*

*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,  
for the rights of all who are destitute.*

*Speak up and judge fairly;*

*defend the rights of the poor and needy.*

(Proverbs 31:1-9)

Ok, so—what’s all this about alcohol? Is Lemuel’s mom literally saying to give the poor beer and wine? Honestly, I’m not sure, but I don’t think so. **What I do think Lemuel’s mom is doing is calling him to mercy:** “*Lemuel, don’t abuse your power and your privilege. Comforts can blind us to the plight of the*

*poor. They can keep us from the vulnerabilities of the oppressed. Instead, Lemuel, use your power to practice mercy. Comfort the hurting. Come through for the suffering. See and respond to the needs of the poor.”* Sounds like a wise momma. Wise leadership is marked by mercy.

### **Life Lessons:**

Ok, now that we have a bit of an overview of how the sages described wise leadership, I want to explore, ***what do we do with that?*** What are some next steps for us? First, as we seek to follow in the way of wisdom, we must choose to **follow wise leaders.**

### **Follow wise leaders.**

It's becoming more and more regular these days to hear: “I just don't know who to trust, I don't know what to believe.” There is so much going on in the world right now and it's not easy to figure out who to listen to or who to give power to. Maybe you've been feeling like that? That's why I take some comfort in the story of John the Baptist. Even he had questions about leadership, about who he could trust—especially when things weren't going as he had planned. But, remember what Jesus' response was: ***Wisdom is proved right by her deeds.***

The trouble is, we often look for the wrong “deeds” when it comes to leadership. We tend to look for the people with the answers, the people promising security. We gravitate toward people with charisma or power. We follow the beautiful people, the popular people, the people with influence and degrees. Those things aren't wrong in and of themselves, but they are not the deeds of wisdom.

Another Pastor Hannah story: When I was in college, we had a pretty decent cafeteria. Some people weren't fans, but I loved it. Here's the thing though—I hacked the system. Most students would walk in, grab their tray, and get in the first food line they saw and just kind of bumble on through. But not this girl right here. Whenever I sat down at my table after going through the cafeteria, my friends always asked, “Wait, where did you get that!?” **Here's how I did it.** I got my tray, but I didn't get in the cattle-lines of college students right away. I walked the room. I checked the pizza station, I checked the grains bar (yes, that was a thing). I checked the soups. I checked the salad bar. ***I got a lay of the land first, figured out what I wanted, and THEN, with a VISION, I went through the cafeteria lines.***

Friends, we live in this remarkable time and place where we get to choose who we follow. We don't have to just get into the first line with our lunch tray. **Walk the room. Let wise leadership be your VISION.** Leadership marked by humility, justice and mercy. Our choices mean something and make a difference in who we are becoming and how our communities are forming. We have an awesome responsibility to bear. Steward it well.

Follow wise leaders.

I want you to think with me. Who do I follow on social media? What authors do I read? Which news anchors do I watch? What politicians do I follow? What theologians, teachers, business leaders do I turn to?? **Am I following leaders who promise the good life? Or am I following leaders who point us to the life that is good?**

It's not always clear, is it? But we have a responsibility to follow with our eyes wide open. Look for humility, Look for justice. Look for mercy. Only follow wise leaders.

It's crucial we do this work of recognizing and following wise leaders. At the same time, we must also remember that no leader, no pastor, no politician, **no human has the power—or the calling—to lead and heal our world like Jesus does.** Above all, we must follow Jesus first.

**Follow Jesus first.**

Proverbs 29 reads:

*Fear of man will prove to be a snare,  
but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.  
Many seek an audience with a ruler,  
but it is from the Lord that one gets justice. (Proverbs 29:25-26)*

For followers of Jesus, our primary allegiance, our primary devotion is to Him. It's not to party lines, not to our ideologies or opinions, it's not to a nation, not even to ourselves. **We follow Jesus first.**

There is so much noise out there, right? Is anyone else feeling the burden of that? There is so much to argue about, to agree with or disagree with, to form an opinion on. **Friends, it's too much.** It's too much to think that we can have the corner on truth, that we can figure it all out. That if we assemble all of our opinions and arguments just right, we can feel secure and justified in our convictions and beliefs. **Remember, wisdom is a way,** it's not just this static list of answers and facts. I know it sounds cheesy and trite, but I can't

shake this truth that **only Jesus can and will give us the security and peace that we seek.** We must follow Jesus first.

Now, following Jesus first doesn't mean that we ignore everything else. Jesus is deeply involved in every single aspect of our life together. Jesus is deeply involved in the work of justice and righteousness, of earth looking more like heaven. Following Jesus means that we have to make prayerful, discerning decisions, about who we **vote for**, what we **believe**, about the things we **fight for**. AND... Following Jesus first means that our confidence, our devotion, and our allegiance is first and most deeply to Him. We let Jesus take the lead in shaping all those other decisions and convictions.

I'm sure you'll recognize these words the sages from Proverbs 3:4-5:

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight.*

In all our ways submit to Him, yield to Him, align with Him—and He will lead us into the life that is good. Jesus embodies wise leadership. Let's follow Him first.

I want to take a minute right now for a little check-in. I put together a list of questions for us to reflect on as we seek to follow Jesus first. As I read through them, I want you to take few seconds to just reflect with Jesus. Talk to Him. Invite Him to help you see where and why there might be resistance to let go and follow Him first.

1. Jesus, in what ways am I following You first?
2. Jesus, in what ways have other allegiances surpassed my allegiance to You?
3. Jesus, how can I more faithfully follow You first this week?

This check-in activity isn't about being bad or good, or right or wrong. Jesus knows how we struggle and the things that burden us along the way. He wants us to live in the freedom of trusting Him.

In Matthew 11, right after He talks with John's followers about how to recognize true wisdom and leadership, Jesus extends this invitation:

*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle*

*and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

This invitation never ends. We can trust Him. Let's follow Jesus first.

**Closing:**

Friends, we're in a vulnerable time. We have to steward this responsibility to discern and follow wise leaders; to determine: Who will we let influence and shape our lives? Who will we let influence and shape our communities?

We have to go beyond words and arguments and look for the fruit, look for the deeds. Where do we see humility, justice, and mercy? Follow wise leaders. And above all, follow Jesus first. He is the way, He is the truth, He is the life that is good.