

Sources

Proverbs 22:17-21, August 16, 2020 by Pastor Jerry R.A. Johnson



Please read Proverbs 22:17-21 before going further in this transcript.

As a pastor, I sometimes shudder, when I learn about some of the sources that people consult, when trying to make a wise decision. I want to be careful today not to unnecessarily offend anyone who likes a particular news agency, radio personality, political leader, spiritual leader, or otherwise. That said, I urgently plead with each one of us, as we talk about his topic of “Sources” today, to agree that ALL OF US need to be humble about the possibility that we are being misled. And, I urgently plead with all of us, including myself, to honestly critique the sources that we consult, when we’re trying to find out the truth about something. What I mean by truth, is any kind of information, truth in any area of our lives. So, not just theological truth but also the truth about culture, history, politics, science, and so on. I’m referring to truth very broadly and very practically. In every area of his/her life, a fully devoted follower of Jesus needs to WISELY discern, and live out, the truth. Today God’s Word is calling us to reconsider, VERY carefully, what is our source of wisdom? For example, more specifically, who is informing our decisions about things like COVID-19? Who is giving us an accurate representation of what happened to George Floyd? What is our source of truth for deciding whether to vote, or who to vote for, this November? How are we discerning whether a particular online preacher, is accurately representing God’s Word? And so on.... These are not small considerations; these are life-altering considerations. Some of us today, may need to admit that our sources for information, are NOT good sources. We may need to STOP listening to some of our favorite sources, as interesting and compelling as they might be. Some of us may need to REPENT for passing along bad information that did NOT come from a good source. ALL OF US, need to prayerfully plead with God for discernment. Proverbs is a book of Wisdom & Warnings. It offers us help in finding the wise sources that we need, for everyday living, in these uncertain times.

The book of Proverbs repeatedly makes one particular point over and over and over again. “Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or turn away from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.”¹ (Proverbs 4:5-7) But how, how do we discern whether a particular source is genuinely wise? What sources do we draw from, in order to find the wisdom that we need, for every day, practical decisions? Let’s cut to the chase, what is our source for local news, national news, and global news? Should we read the Bemidji Pioneer, the St. Paul Pioneer Press, or USA Today? How do we know whether we should trust CNN, MSNBC, or Fox news? Or any one of the other many news agencies out there? Should we trust MN Public Radio, or National Public Radio, or the BBC? If our friend shares a link on Facebook, does that mean that we can trust it? What about Twitter, or any of the other social media platforms? How do we discern whether a particular source is genuinely wise? God has given us the Book of Proverbs to help with this very practical, modern-day concern.

Proverbs urges us to... 1. Turn toward wise sources. Proverbs 22:17 begins, “Pay attention and turn your ear to the sayings of the wise...”² Proverbs gives us some helpful hints for discerning wise sources. Let me share four of them. First of all,

Wise sources... 1 > Listen. Proverbs 18:13 tells us, “To answer before listening—that is folly and shame.” Have you ever had someone give you an answer to a question you weren’t asking? They may go on for 5 minutes straight, waxing eloquently and pouring out all kinds of knowledge on the subject. The only problem is, the entire time they are answering the wrong question. They didn’t listen long enough to even know what was being talking about. That’s not wisdom, that’s foolishness.³ If you have sources in your life that are communicating information, without first understanding the issue, you need to find a better source. Good sources listen BEFORE speaking.⁴ James 1:19 urges us, “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”

¹ Proverbs gives a lot of time and attention to this; it invests a lot of ink and parchment. Instead of using this space to give us more specific wisdom teachings, it chooses to say it over and over again, in various ways: **GET WISDOM**. Check out **Proverbs 1:2; 8:1, 4; 16:16; and 23:23**.

² Proverbs 21:28 says, “A false witness will perish, but a careful listener will testify successfully.” Proverbs 18:15 says, “The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, for the EARS of the wise seek it out.”

³ Proverbs 26:9 says, “Like a thornbush in a drunkard’s hand is a proverb in the mouth of a fool.”

⁴ Consider Matthew 6:7.

Wise sources also... 2 > Hold up under cross-examination. Proverbs 18:17 says, “In a lawsuit the first to speak seems right, until someone comes forward and cross-examines.” Wise sources don’t run and hide from questions or give empty denials. They answer the tough questions with real facts and honesty.⁵ So, you and I need to make sure that our sources are citing their own sources. We need to make sure that they are telling us where they are getting their information. Then, cross-examine those sources.

Wise sources... 3 > Consult multiple other wise sources. Proverbs 15:22 tells us, “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”⁶ Throughout the Old and New Testaments we see a consistent pattern of establishing truth through the testimony of at least 2-3 witnesses.⁷ In today’s landscape, we might call this factchecking. Deuteronomy 19:15 teaches us, “One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” Quoting Deuteronomy, 2 Corinthians 13:1 agrees, “...Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” If we don’t consult multiple other wise sources, we place ourselves in a foolhardy, “self-isolating, echo chamber.”⁸

Wise sources... 4 > Guard against questionable motives. Proverbs 18:1-2 speaks to this, “An unfriendly person pursues selfish ends and against all sound judgment starts quarrels. Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions.” In other words, one of the ways that we can sniff out foolish sources, is by their selfish motivations and by their quarrelsome conduct. Rather than seeking to wisely inform and serve the needs of others, “fools delight in airing their OWN opinions.”⁹ We humans have a tendency to turn toward sensational sources, toward loud and clamoring sources, and toward the entertaining sources in our society. But God’s Word encourages us to turn toward WISE sources.

Proverbs 17:27 says, “The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint, and whoever has understanding is even-tempered.” Some of us might even say that they’re a little BORING! But boring can be a very good thing. Oftentimes a little BORING is a sign that someone has genuine knowledge that is coming from a wise source. In our day and age of media blitz frenzy, scathing rhetoric, and extroverted personalities, words like “restraint” and “even-tempered” may even seem out of place. But, when it comes to finding wise sources, “restraint” and “even-tempered” words, will be found in the mouths of those who’ve found genuine wisdom. Now, that’s not to suggest that Jesus never knocked over a few tables. But those times were few and far between. And those times were never just empty hype, or a strategy for financial gain, or a ploy to increase His popularity. A source should never be considered wise, just because it has the loudest voice, or the most words, or the biggest audience, or EVEN... the largest pulpit. Some information sources, capitalize on fear/frustration. Some information is swayed by unbalanced partisanship or by End Times prophecy hype. Or any number of other reactionary motives.

There is great danger to ZEAL of ANY kind, when it comes w/o knowledge. Proverbs 19:2, “Desire without knowledge is not good—how much more will hasty feet miss the way!” Romans 10:2, “For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.” In other words, many of the voices that claim to be a wise source for information, are not basing their wisdom on knowledge. It’s a lot of zeal with “hasty feet missing the way.” We might say they generate “more heat than light.” But if we want the truth, we need light. Even sources who SEEM “zealous for God,” who may even quote Scripture, need to be vetted for bias and questionable motivations.

To summarize, turn away from sources that DON’T 1) Listen. 2) Hold up under cross-examination. 3) Consult multiple other wise sources. 4) Guard against questionable motives. If any of your sources, are showing these warnings signs, you’d be wise to turn AWAY from them, and turn TOWARD wiser sources.

Let me share something personal with you. A couple of months ago, I began to realize that I needed to take a break from all the news stories about COVID-19, George Floyd, and so on. I was on information OVERLOAD. So, I made a decision that I would fast every Monday. Not a fast from food, but a fast from the news media. No radio, no social media, no news feeds on my smart phone. I decided to give my heart and my mind a much-needed break, from all of the drama and anxiety that I was feeling. Perhaps some of

⁵ See Proverbs 24:26.

⁶ Proverbs 11:14 agrees, “For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers.” **Proverbs 24:5-6 says**, “The wise prevail through great power, and those who have knowledge muster their strength. Surely you need guidance to wage war, and **victory is won through many advisers.**”

⁷ See Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; Hebrews 10:28.

⁸ Joe Forrest, *Why Your Christian Friends and Family Members Are So Easily Fooled by Conspiracy Theories*, ~ page 5.

⁹ See Proverbs 17:24 and 24:7.

you would benefit from something similar? What would it look like for you to take a break from all of the data and conflict and stress that is being communicated to you? To just spend one day a week, intentionally resting, from all of it? Just spend that day hearing from the Bible and talking to God in prayer.

The fact is, we are living in unprecedented times in 2020. We are still wrestling with exactly how to apply wisdom, to the new and particular challenges that we're facing. James 1:5-6 reminds us, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind." But we also hear from many human sources about truth or wisdom, and they are wide open to flaws and defects. It's our human nature to hear, what we WANT to hear.¹⁰ Consider the Apostle Paul's warning to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:3-5, "For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations..." That is some GREAT advice, "keep your head!" In other words, don't let the crazy train ride over the top of you. This is important, not only for our own mental health and wellness, but also for the sake of others. The fact is, each one of us, has the capacity to be either a wise, or foolish, source.

This is why Proverbs urges us to... 2. Be a wise source for others. Proverbs 22:20-21 declares, "Have I not written thirty sayings for you, sayings of counsel and knowledge, teaching you to be honest and to speak the truth, so that you bring back truthful reports to those you serve?" As Christ-followers, who proclaim the life-changing truth of the gospel, we need to make sure that we speak the truth in ALL things, that we bring truthful reports. This is why it's SO important that we CONSULT wise sources, so that we can BE a wise source for others. This is part of our witness, part of being children of the one, TRUE God. If we teach things that are untrue, or if we post things that are inaccurate, it impacts our Christian reputation. As one writer puts it, "posting and endorsing conspiracy theories makes Christians look like idiots... And it reinforces the public perception that Christians will fall for anything and seriously puts the object of our faith into question by outsiders...."¹¹ He then goes on to note, "If you don't have the time nor patience to fact-check an article or video, you have no business sharing it. Because you're bearing false witness."¹² Brother or Sister in Christ, we dare not bear false witness. We dare not become guilty of spreading lies. We need to be a credible witness in this world. This is VITAL to our gospel mandate! In order to be a credible witness, we need to keep the LORD Himself as our ultimate source.

Proverbs warns us to... 3. Trust in the LORD as our wise source. Proverbs 22:19 says, "So that your trust may be in the LORD, I teach you today, even you." Last Sunday, Pastor Eric brought us a great message about the Sovereignty of God. If you missed it, I urge you to go online and find it in our sermon archives. **Sovereignty** = "God's right and power to do all that He decides to do."¹³ To put it more simply, sovereignty means that God is in control. To be a Christ-follower, it means that we TRUST His Control. But the question is, DO WE trust His control? REALLY? When we run out in search of other answers, and other solutions, to the chaos all around us, it demonstrates a lack of trust in God.

If each of us were to be honest, there are times when we don't like God's sovereign plan. We think maybe He should be doing things differently. But rather than saying that to God's face, we may instead just turn to a different source for wisdom.¹⁴ In other words, we may try to find another way of making sense of all the chaos around us. Part of the draw of conspiracy theories, is that they help us regain a sense of control. When the world around us stops making sense, they become our attempt to make sense of it.¹⁵ As one Christian writer puts it: "People believe conspiracy theories because it is psychologically

¹⁰ While some of us rely mostly on others, who say what we want them to say, there are still others of us, who rely mostly on our own intelligence and ability to reason. We see ourselves as the smartest person in the room. We may figure that we are at least as smart, or probably much smarter than, the people around us. So we can figure it out by ourselves, what's true and what's not true. Proverbs 28:26 warns us, "Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe."

¹¹ Joe Forrest, *Why Your Christian Friends and Family Members Are So Easily Fooled by Conspiracy Theories*, ~ page 11.

¹² Joe Forrest, *Why Your Christian Friends and Family Members Are So Easily Fooled by Conspiracy Theories*, ~ page 12.

¹³ John Piper interview. https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/are-gods-providence-and-gods-sovereignty-the-same?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&gclid=Cj0KCQjw7Nj5BRCZARIsABwxDKlwt8BsgjsbbxFob10dokiQAnPfvBB1xreKhq2lv4udvtTDFPnX8YEaAtg0EALw_wcB

¹⁴ The Bible is filled with examples of this. This is what the Israelites did in the desert when Moses was taking too long getting the 10 commandments. What did they do? Set up a Golden Calf! This is what the Galatian Church did. What did they do? Abandoned the gospel of grace and went back to a religious system of works salvation.

¹⁵ Read more in the helpful article by Joe Forrest, *Why Your Christian Friends and Family Members Are So Easily Fooled by Conspiracy Theories*.

easier to believe a singular unlikely narrative rather than engage in a hard and complicated reality where your own, long-term participation, is needed.”^{16 17} It’s a coping technique.

In other words, when unexpected events like COVID-19 occur, “there’s always an initial vacuum of precedent and context as we try to make sense of how and why something happened.”¹⁸ But, as believers, we don’t need to respond to the unexpected with fear and anxiety. It doesn’t need to shake us, because our confidence and strength are in our sovereign LORD. Our ultimate source for wisdom in these uncertain times, is the LORD Himself: His Word and His Spirit are our wise sources.

God’s Word is a wise source. That’s why we gather each Sunday to hear a message from God’s Word. We’re not here to listen to Jerry; we’re here to listen to God’s Word. I’m just the mouthpiece for this particular week. Acts 17:11 says, “Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”¹⁹

This is another compelling reason to consider becoming part of a Life Group. They are a natural way to “Be A Berean” every week. Life Groups help sharpen and confirm our understanding of the truth, the truth we are discerning on Sundays, as well as the truth that we are hearing all throughout the week from various sources. Check out this week’s YELLOW INSERT in the bulletin to learn more.²⁰ I challenge you to be a Berean. To be on your guard when you listen to me preach, or anyone else behind this pulpit. Or, anyone else behind a different pulpit, or behind a computer screen, or behind a news desk.

We need a strategy for sifting out the bad stuff. 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 urges us, “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.” Brother or Sister in Christ, we need to do an excellent job of fact-checking and cross-examining our sources of truth. Even if it’s a pastor or speaker that we dearly love and admire. Even if their fervor and spiritual insight stirs our hearts. We need to carefully, diligently, and thoroughly make sure that their words, match up with God’s Word. Let’s also remember that

God’s Spirit is a wise source. John 16:13 reminds us, “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth...”²¹ The Christian band, Newsboys has an old song that describes the Holy Spirit “like a circuit judge in your brain.”²² Some of us remember the old circuit judge system. Abraham Lincoln did this for a while all over the state of Illinois.²³ A Circuit Judge would ride around on horseback and offer wise judgements in various cases all over the area. The idea here is that the Holy Spirit is like that, “a circuit judge (riding around) in your brain,” as we prayerfully ask God to guide us into truth. ***God’s Word & God’s Spirit are our ultimate fact-checkers.***²⁴

Brother or Sister in Christ, the year 2020 is “not a time for panic and fear; it’s a time for consulting wise sources that lead us to right responses.”²⁵ So let’s be discerning; let’s wisely consider our sources. For the glory of God. For the sake of His Kingdom. For the sake of the gospel we proclaim. Let’s make sure that any message that people see/hear/learn from us, is a message that lines up with God’s Word and God’s Spirit.

¹⁶ Joe Forrest quoting D.L. Mayfield, *Why Your Christian Friends and Family Members Are So Easily Fooled by Conspiracy Theories*, ~ page 6.

¹⁷ Another person notes, “It’s just that sometimes, the real-world explanation of a catastrophic event isn’t emotionally satisfying.... Dramatic events require dramatic explanations Joe Forrest, *Why Your Christian Friends and Family Members Are So Easily Fooled by Conspiracy Theories*, ~ page 6.

¹⁸ Joe Forrest, *Why Your Christian Friends and Family Members Are So Easily Fooled by Conspiracy Theories*, ~ page 5.

¹⁹ See also 1 Corinthians 14:29

²⁰ As your pastor, I strive to be trustworthy in the things I teach and say. I tremble when I think of the possibility of misrepresenting God’s Word in any way. Consider Jeremiah 23:25-32, especially verse 29 and James 3:1.

²¹ In Ephesians 1:17, Paul says, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.”

²² “It smells a counterfeit.” The Newsboys have a song titled “Spirit Thing.” Google the lyrics.

²³ “One of the most important periods in the life of Abraham Lincoln was the time when he “rode the circuit” in central Illinois in the late 1840’s and early 1850’s. Prairie lawyers and court officials traveled together from one county seat to another for sessions of the circuit court.”

<https://www.americanheritage.com/riding-circuit-lincoln>

²⁴ Galatians 5:22-23 tells us that the fruit of the Spirit is things like love, joy, peace, and so on. This kind of fruit lends credence to the wisdom of a source.

²⁵ Ed Stetzer, video greeting at <https://coronavirusedthechurch.com/>