

My name is Steve Hardin, I'm one of the pastors here. Just as Tom and Brenda Bailey poured life into a lot of young guys, just as Josh Patterson poured life into a lot of young guys in the old days, Julie and I had a ministry similar to that down in Abilene, Texas for 6-7 years. We started a Bible study called "Grace" for college kids, and we loved it. We just love that town. My heart is for the college community and that culture, and I just dig it. I don't have the mind for it really, because I'm half idiot and half and half man. So I don't really pick up things well. Seriously, I'm not a good scholar. How I graduated with my masters really is miraculous. Nonetheless, God has been very gracious to put me in those kind of communities, in the college community to just talk much about Jesus Christ, to get beat down by the intellectual guy, by the scholar guy, and then to take it and come back with just words of wisdom from the Lord (not from me), scholarly words that would never be found in by myself alone. But God was gracious to do it. So we moved out there and started this ministry and had the opportunity to disciple and pour into a lot of guys, like Blake Chilton our student pastor. I just love Blake. And then Matt of course was one of those guys in one of those groups for a couple of years who we got to love and encourage and just pour life into. So this last summer when we were just seeking the Lord about other things to do, out of nowhere God (through Matt) just called and he just said, "Steve, I need you and I want you back into my life." And I tell you, that couldn't have come at a better time. In fact, he said, "We really need some older guys on staff." So I came to join Gilbert who is the other token older guy on staff. So at 45, I'm one of the token older guys on staff here to love and encourage all these guys who are leading you, to love and encourage these young ladies who are leading you. So that's who I am. It's not a big deal. I'm just thankful that I'm among you. And the thing that I notice in the life of this church is something that I don't ever want us to lose. It's something that was in my heart in Abilene. I see so much of it here, and that is this absolute fear and seriousness for and of the Lord, the good fear. I don't ever want us to lose that. And I don't want you to blow me off these next five minutes. You can, but I don't want you to. And I don't have relationship with you enough to come hard on a Sunday evening when we've all had a great weekend and say some things of the things I'm going to say, but God has put it on my heart. And so I must honor Him. And by honoring Him, I think it's going to bring you some pleasure down the road if you really take seriously some of the things that God's put on my heart to hear.

So turn to Proverbs 1. Again, this is going to be quick, and I want you to get it. Because it's serious and it's heavy and it's something that I don't ever want to lose. The word "proverb" means to be like or to rule. These are sayings and truisms being given by the wisest man on earth outside of Jesus Christ, Solomon. Solomon came 960 years before Christ came to the earth, and before Christ came, Solomon was the wisest man on the earth. One night Solomon had a dream and in that dream God comes to him and says, "Ask anything that you wish of Me and I'll grant it to you." He also did that of David. I love that. If He came to us, if He came to you or to me, if He said, "Ask anything that you want whatsoever," what is it that we would respond back to God? Solomon responded back to God, "I need Your wisdom. I've got 4 million people that I need to exercise mercy and justice and equity with and among. So I need Your wisdom, Lord." And God was gracious and said, "Yes, because you haven't asked for long life or riches, I'm going to grant you what you've asked. And not only that but you're going to be known as the wisest man in history. People are going to know of your wisdom down through the ages." And guess what? I'm even talking about him in 2008. God was true to His word. He's the wisest man outside of Christ. This guy walked with incredible wisdom, and out of that wisdom he writes this, starting in verse 1, "*The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom...*" That's what we're to know, wisdom. The word "wisdom" means that we would know what it means to live with success in our life and with favor in our life and that we would know the knowledge of God in our life. This word "wisdom" means that we would be literally granted by God skill so that we could live this life for the glory of God. This wisdom, it doesn't come from earthly, demonic powers. As James says, this wisdom comes from God. That's what we're after. "To

*know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, ...* That's what he's saying we're after. Instruction means discipline of the mind, to understand words of insight. That's what we want. We want to be able to live life with skill, we want to be able to live life with insight. This word "insight" translated literally means the ability to comprehend and to see. And what we desperately need in the life of this fellowship and in my own life and in my own heart, as a dad, as a husband and as a man, what I need more of is the ability to be granted by God the opportunity to see, to really see Him and to hear Him. That's what we're after. He says, "...to give prudence to the simple,..." I like that one because I'm simple. I'm not a guy with a high IQ, I'm simple. Even there, He gives us all who are willing, all of us who would come the fear of the Lord. Whoever would come humbly before the Lord, He's going to grant all of us manifest wisdom. In His prudence, He gives to all of us who ask. And you may be lacking, yet God says, "If you come to Me with humility, I will enable you to be able to see what you just can't see, to hear what you haven't been able to hear." He does that even for the simple. He goes on and says, "Let the wise hear and increase in learning," How many of you have followed Jesus Christ for 25-30 years? There's a few in here. There's some old people in here. I want you to know that. I love that. You know, don't put the Bible down. Don't ever put it down, because there's a lot more to learn about the Lord. We will spend an eternity getting to know more about Him and having things about Him revealed, and we'll never come to an end of seeing and knowing and savoring and delighting and hearing and understanding and comprehending more and more and more about God. Guys, it is incredible. So don't put this book down, but that's not where we're going tonight. He says, "...to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles." And here's where we're going to spend the rest of our time. "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.*" If you want to have wisdom and skill to navigate life, if you want to be able to walk as a man or a woman who's prudent, if you want to have great and keen insight to God and to you and to life and to understand what your life on this side of heaven is all about, if you want to have deeper intimacy with Jesus Christ, do you know where all of that begins? The fear of the Lord. And that fear of the Lord is not absolute terror before the Lord. There is that, and that's weighty. That's for a whole other night. That's some wild fear. We're talking about the fear of the Lord for those who know Christ. It's beautiful, it's wonderful. It's this absolute awe and revering and worshipping, it is that absolute submitting with all of our hearts solely to the authoritative voice in our lives. It is absolutely fearing God to the point that we say, "There is no other voice that speaks solely and absolutely over and in my life than Your voice. I hear and I receive and I listen and I long for that voice." It is the voice of the word. It is the word of God and this word that we have right before us. It is loving and cherishing and delighting in this word over every other word.

And here's my fear in American Christianity. There are churches across this country, some I know, many I've been in, that have absolutely turned a deaf ear to the voice of God. Oh, they're busy alright. It's like Shakespeare form and fury. There's a lot of movement and a lot of activity, yet there is nothing but death. This place has taken grace very seriously, this place has taken mercy very seriously, this place has taken these words very seriously, this place has taken compassion and truth telling very seriously. Josh got up two weeks ago and taught out of Ephesians about how we need to be men and women who tell the truth to one another and walk honestly before one another. Do you know how that happens here and why we have such a devotion and commitment to that? It's because this church by and large has a fear of the Lord in the right way. They take Jesus' words very seriously. Do you know why Brenda Bailey can stand on video and give testimony of how a small group just enveloped her and loved her and wrapped her up on her darkest day and how she found compassion and grace and the love of Christ right here? Because this church takes Jesus' words very, very seriously. They're fearing in the right way. There's a reverent intimacy that you have of God here. It's sweet. I don't ever want us to lose that. Do you know why we're able to love people? Because you take Jesus' words when He said in John 13:34, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved*

*you, you also are to love one another.*” Do you know why you take that seriously and why it’s done here and why there is such a community of grace and compassion and outreach? Because this church fears the Lord. Do you know why there’s such kindly brotherly devotion here? I had a guy come up to me last night after the 7:00 service, and he just wrapped me up and kissed me, right on the side of the face. And he lingered for a minute. I’m happily married 25 years, I love my wife. That’s a big ol’ boy too. He’s married and loves his wife. But there’s this seriousness about him to have kindly affection as Paul wrote about in Romans 12:9 that when he sees another brother, he just has this welling up in him and he’s just got to explode love on somebody. And he just came up to me with just everything that he had and said, “Man, I just want to tell you I love you.” And then he just kissed me on the face. It was awesome. I mean, that wasn’t awesome. Don’t get me wrong. But that kind of love and devotion is awesome here, because you take Jesus’ words very seriously because there is a fear of the Lord here. Many places have systematically, absolutely removed the ability to hear from the Holy Spirit in the life of their church, and it’s scary.

I want you to hear this. I don’t ever, ever want us to take for granted the fact that has granted us His favor here. The psalmist says that the man who fears the Lord, he will be blessed and his generation after him. Please hear me when I say this. There’s a mantle of God’s glory, there’s a mantle of God’s favor on this fellowship. That’s huge. There’s a man named Rick Warren who writes a lot of books. And what Rick Warren is to guys my age, 40-50, he’s really just a guy that a lot of people of my generation have watched and listened to. Whether you agree with it or not, he’s just been the voice for that generation in terms of the Christian culture in America. And I’m not being dramatic here. God has blessed Matt and your leadership and you with that mantle here for people all over the globe, through the vehicle of podcast. It’s big. Do you hear what I’m saying? It’s huge. And I believe that God has done that because there has been the tenor and movement here of fearing the Lord. Several weeks ago a man came up to me and said, “Hardin, I’m so thankful and glad you get to be up there with all your old guys, that you get to be up there with that fellowship that you love, that’s so much of your heartbeat. That’s really cool. The Village is kind of the flavor of the day for today in Dallas.” And after hearing that and ten minutes of responding to him, with grace and love, I gave a defense of what this place is all about and that is that we are not a flavor of the day. The day that we become rock star, celebrity status driven and we become the little place that’s just cool and hip to hang out, trust me that’s the day that God’s going to take His favor and His blessing off this place. The reason why we can come in here so hungry week in and week out and sing our heart’s affections to God is because you take very seriously the words of Paul, inspired by the Spirit of God Himself, in Ephesians 5 when he says, “Don’t be drunk with wine but be filled with the Holy Spirit for that is the will of God. And then you’re going to manifest that and show what the filling of the Spirit looks like by the way that we sing songs and psalms and hymns to one another. Do you know why we take worship so seriously? Because we just fear the Lord. It’s heavy and I don’t ever want us to lose that ever. So whatever we have to do to continue to cry out to God for fresh mercy and for a sober seriousness. Do you know why we delight ourselves so much in the Lord here, why we talk so much about being happy in the Lord here and delighting much in the Lord? It’s not because John Piper’s disciplesd guys like Matt and me from afar through books and audio. It’s not because of that. It’s because we’ve read the Bible and because God is very serious about your delighting yourself in Him. So it’s a mantle that God has placed on you and on us. It’s a sober word, it’s a serious word. It’s not a jump up in the air word and say, “Oh wow, that was fun.” But it’s a word that I pray you would take very, very seriously and it would take deep root in your spiritual hide and in mine as well. I want to see more and more and more and more of the greatness of God and the favor of God on your life and on my life. I want to see more and more and more and more of God made much of and men and women here made little of.

Let’s pray. We can talk so much about the love of Jesus Christ here because we’ve taken His word

seriously, and I don't ever want to get over that. We talk so much about the cross here, the true gospel of Jesus Christ, not the false gospel. We talk about that here with passion, with fervor, and we take it sometimes with a licking from e-mail and phone calls and people who just don't like to hear the truth. But that's okay because we're always going to respond with grace and love. And I want you to pray right now as the Lord leads you to pray, but can I ask you to pray for your pastors here who love you as Peter describes in 1 Peter 2:5 that they don't serve you under compulsion, but they serve you willingly and eagerly and with patience and gentleness. Pray that they would continue to be men and women that live and serve and breathe the fear of the Lord in their life, that they are sober and serious, that they have a reverent intimacy for the things of God, namely for God Himself. Pray that we would run so far from being the flavor of the day for today in this city. Pray that we would be a people that are never lukewarm, never cold, never calloused. Pray that this would be a place that God just visits every time we get together, that God visits in our cars, that God visits in our homes, that God visits in our place of work, that God visits in the middle of getting ready to just give in to our besetting sin once again and He just says no and is gracious to pull us out and deliver us. Do you know why we're so serious about hating and fighting sin, that which destroys us? Because we really have taken serious the words of Jesus. If God has been gracious to bring you who don't know Christ into this place tonight and you're maybe still trying to figure this thing out, these tenets of Christianity and what Christianity is all about and you're still just not sure, I can't convince you. Keep coming. No man's not good enough to be able to make it really clear for you; that's the work of the Holy Spirit. So I'm going to continue to pray that you'll come, that you'll visit, that you'll hang out. Trust me, I'm not even good enough to give you a watertight argument for the existence of God. I've tried. I was a philosophy minor in college and I love philosophy, but I still can't convince you. But I can give you a watertight person, Jesus Christ. So if you're here and still seeking, I just know that God's going to find you. So thanks for coming. Body of Christ, please hear this word tonight.

Let's pray and go after Him right now. "Father God, have Your way in these moments. It's really big what You've put on our hearts tonight. We need an ear to hear it. We need the strength to obey it. So help us. We want to continue to be a people who walk in fear of You. Lord, just as the psalmist said in Psalm 86:11, unite our fragmented hearts to fear Your name. So where we're fragmented, where we're torn and where we're just kind of in that place, of life where we just don't know which way to go, first help us to just turn to you and to trust You and believe Your word is our life. Help us to listen to Your word over blogging and over filmmakers, that we would take and trust Your word as being the authoritative word in our lives. So Lord, if we're fragmented and we're just separated in our hearts, help us. God, You've got to help us, because we're weak and we're mere men and women. You know our frame, You've rigged it that way. Help us to run to You. And this week I pray that Your glory would be seen and revealed through our lives. And I pray that we would be Christ in the city that desperately needs stories to live and breathe among them. So we pray that we would suffer well this week well for You. We pray that we would speak well of You. We pray that we would talk the truth well. We pray that we would fight sin well. God, I need that in my life. Help me to fight sin well. In Jesus' name. Amen."