

Welcome to Neighborhood Church!

If you have a Bible with you, I invite you to join me in TWO areas:

- Proverbs 9
- 1 Samuel 25

We are in a teaching series titled FREEDOM.

- Last week, we talked about the Freedom God gives from Fear of the Future
- Today, I continue in the Freedom series as we discover how God gives us Freedom to GROW...
 - o to be changed.
 - o or we could say God gives us Freedom FROM being stuck, stagnant, and stubborn toward areas of our life that need attention...areas we need to grow in.

Proverbs 15:32 (NLT)

If you reject discipline, you only harm yourself;

but if you listen to correction, you grow in understanding.

- A wise person welcomes the opportunity to “grow in understanding.”
...to “GET” or “GAIN” something that will benefit them.

While the idea of “growing” sounds kind of cool, (business, family, church)...it’s not as pleasant as you might think.

- When someone says to you...or write on your evaluation “You have room to grow...”; it doesn’t feel good!
 - Student: “You’ve grown A LOT since the last time I heard you preach.”

To admit there is room to GROW means you have NOT arrived...you don’t have it all together, you have areas of deficiency in your character or performance.

We ALL have areas in our life and behavior that need attention.

- There are areas God has MORE for us or something BETTER for us.
- But if you’re like me, I tend to treat those areas with AVOIDANCE: I would rather avoid dealing with that area because it’s painful...it entails admitting that I have a deficiency and I could benefit from improvement.

Illustration: It’s like the guy whose car engine started making a loud, clanging noise.

But instead of taking the car to the mechanic, he took it to Best Buy and had them put in a LOUDER stereo system...so he wouldn’t have to hear the clanging noise anymore!

That is avoidance!

True Story: Woman who did not want to hear “anything negative.”

- Her head hurt as we offered counsel and correction.

It was like we were trying to pour in her hands life-giving wisdom, but her fists were clenched and were not open to what we had to give.

Now this was an extreme example...BUT we can be like that woman: Close-fisted.

For ME, I often believe the LIE that says

- “I have to be PERFECT, without error.”
- “I can’t make a bad decision. I can’t ever be wrong.”

These are CHAINS that God sets us free from!

- Chains of AVOIDANCE when it comes to areas we need to grow in.
- Chains of LIES that say I have to have it all together.
- Chains of PRIDE that won’t admit when I am out of line or I am in need of growth.

The TRUTH:

I am still learning...still growing. God continues his work of changing me, refining me, and shaping me to be more and more like His Son Jesus.

Remember: God wants us to LIVE...to THRIVE...to SOAR!

- He wants us to GROW.
- He breaks these chains of avoidance and pride so that He might do his sanctifying work in us.

One of the ways that God brings growth and change in our life is through other people:

How do YOU respond to the words of other people directed at your life?

- Counsel (Great!)
- Advice (OK..)
- Instruction (Uh...)
- Correction (Nope!)
- Rebuke (Oh Heck No!)

There ARE passages in the Bible that teach us HOW to give advice and correction TO others (speaking the truth in love, confronting someone that sins against us, or who is caught in sin).

But there ALSO many passages that teach us to RECEIVE advice and counsel and instruction FROM others....that we might become wise (or wiser still). Many of these verses are found in the book of Proverbs...and I would like to look briefly at a few of them:

Proverbs 9:8,9 (NLT)

⁸ So don't bother correcting mockers; they will only hate you.

But correct the wise, and they will love you.

⁹ Instruct the wise, and they will be even wiser.

Teach the righteous, and they will learn even more.

What do we learn about the wise/righteous person?

- They are TEACHABLE...able to hear unsettling truths about themselves.
- It is a mark of maturity to know there is always room for growth.
- It is also a mark of maturity, when stung by rebuke...to thank the rebuker!

Proverbs 12:1 (NLT)

To learn, you must love discipline;

it is stupid to hate correction. [NKJV: But he who hates correction is stupid.]

- Stupid: "brutish; like a beast."
- Those who pride themselves on knowledge often avoid correction.
- Yet those who love the truth WANT to learn when they are in the wrong.

Proverbs 27:5-6 (NLT)

⁵ An open rebuke is better than hidden love!

⁶ Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.

- What are these "wounds"? It is explained in verse 5 (parallelism)
 - "open rebuke"
- The NKJV says that wounds of a friend are "faithful"...they are BENEFICIAL for us; good for our growth in maturity.

Turn with me in your Bible to 1 Samuel 25 verses 30-35.

It is an episode in the life of David...

- The "David" who killed the giant named Goliath.
- The "David" who would later become the 2nd King of Israel.
- The "David" who was described as "a man after God's own heart".
- The "David" whose lineage would later include the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ.

- THAT David.

David had served as a general in King Saul's army, but Saul became extremely jealous of David and tried (on a few occasions) to kill David. So David fled and was hiding in the wilderness with hundreds of fighting men beside him. While David and his men were hiding out in the wilderness, they encountered a man named NABAL (which means "fool" or "foolish")...crude and mean in all his dealings, and his wife ABIGAIL, who is described as "a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance." (Opposites attract, I guess!)

It was sheep-shearing time...which is like a harvest festival, a time of generosity and giving (like Christmas time for us).

David sent some of his men to Nabal to ask for some provisions (after all, David's men had protected Nabal's shepherds when they stayed among David's camp) Nabal responds to David's request with hostility and disrespect!

- Who is this "David"? Nabal asks. I won't give him anything!

When David hears Nabal's response, he is FURIOUS.

- "Get your swords!" David tells his men.
- "May God strike me and kill me if even one man in Nabal's household is alive tomorrow morning!"

David and 400 of his men set off toward Nabal's house to take revenge.

- David wants BLOOD!

This decision by David was hasty, ill-advised, and unwise. It would have been disastrous for David's cause and would most likely have cost him the throne. Abigail, Nabal's wife, hears about this and immediately takes action. She gathered 200 loaves of bread, wine, 5 sheep for a meal, roasted grain, raisins, and cakes. She meets David and his men, presents him with all the food, And says, "Don't pay attention to my husband, Nabal...he is a fool just as his name suggests!"

- (v.28) *"You are fighting the Lord's battles. You have not done wrong throughout your entire life."*
- What is Abigail doing? She is CONFRONTING David...she is seeking to CORRECT David...she is speaking WISE COUNSEL to David...to save him from disaster (and her household from slaughter).

What does David do? Let's pick up the story in 1 Samuel 25:30-35

1 Samuel 25:30-35 (NLT)

(Abigail speaking) ³⁰ *When the Lord has done all he promised and has made you leader of Israel, ³¹ don't let this be a blemish on your record. Then your conscience won't have to bear the staggering burden of needless bloodshed and vengeance. And when the Lord has done these great things for you, please remember me, your servant!"*

³² *David replied to Abigail, "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you to meet me today! ³³ Thank God for your good sense! Bless you for keeping me from murder and from carrying out vengeance with my own hands. ³⁴ For I swear by the Lord, the God of Israel, who has kept me from hurting you, that if you had not hurried out to meet me, not one of Nabal's men would still be alive tomorrow morning."* ³⁵ *Then David accepted her present and told her, "Return home in peace. I have heard what you said. We will not kill your husband."*

- (v. 35) NKJV: *"I have heeded your voice."*
- David LISTENED to Abigail.
- He recognizes the hand of God working in his life THROUGH the wisdom of Abigail.
- David "unclenched his fists" and "opened his hands to receive" the correction and counsel Abigail had to give.
- In doing so, David is admitting his poor decision...that he, too, (as a man after God's own heart) still needs the wisdom of others in his life.

Of the many admirable stories of David...THIS ONE is a favorite of mine.

- An example of a man who humbles himself to admit when he is wrong.
- A man who acknowledges that he is still a work in progress...
- that God is still growing him.

I believe it is the trait of TEACHABILITY which shows David to be more qualified than Saul to be King of Israel.

QUESTION:

Is every piece of counsel and correction we receive good and true?

- No...of course not!
- Some things people say to us are WRONG...out of line and worthless.
- “Chew the meat and spit out the bones.”

Having a posture of teachability means we LISTEN and we CONSIDER what is said...

- We take all of this to God in prayer. Is this Your wisdom, God?
- We bring it to friends whom we respect...friends who know God and love us...
- they help us in discerning whether the advice is good or not.

** This highlights the importance of immersing ourselves into Christian fellowship. We seek friends who love God AND are “for” us...they want God’s best for us. My wife and I are in a Life Group here at Neighborhood Church.

- We love each other. We pray for each other.
- We study God’s Word together.
- We are “for” each other and God’s work of growing each of us.

CONCLUSION:

There is great freedom for us in admitting that “we don’t know it all.”

- That we don’t have to have it all together.
- That God is still growing us, each and every day, to be more and more like Jesus.

- May God release you from the chains of AVOIDANCE, which cause you to deny the areas of your life that need attention.
- May God release you from the chains of PRIDE that make you think you have to have it all together and prevent you from listening to counsel and correction.
- May God strengthen you to “uncleth your fists” and “open your hands” that you might receive His good gifts of wisdom and learning He brings you through other people.

PRAYER:

Clenched Fists: represents a posture that is closed to anything others might have to say to us, closed to correction or instruction...

Open Hands: signifies a posture that welcomes God’s freedom to GROW, to listen, to change, and to consider the areas in our lives that need attention. The open hand is willing to learn from the wisdom and counsel of others.

Lord, release us from the chains of Avoidance and Pride.

Give us freedom from being “stuck” and “stagnant.”

May we live each day as humble learners, and may You continue the good work you have begun in us until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.