

January 27, 2013. Proverbs – The Path of Wisdom. Walking Wisely with Our Desires. Tim Flora

Welcome to the worship of the Lord Jesus Christ and thank you for your patience. I'm mindful as I take the platform that our service started just a little bit after it normally does, but I also know that God's word is important for us and I trust that you know that as well.

It was a 2009 movie entitled *Crazy Heart* that tells a story of a broken down country music singer, Bad Blake. That's quite a name, Bad Blake, and according to one reviewer, Bad Blake had "way too many marriages, far too many years on the road, and one too many drinks, way too many times." But one of the songs featured on the soundtrack for *Crazy Heart* was a song called "Falling and Flying." I'm going to quote the first verse and chorus, and I think it sets the stage for where my heart is, and I trust maybe what you can appreciate as well.

I was going where I shouldn't go
seeing who I shouldn't see
doing what I shouldn't do
being who I shouldn't be
A little voice told me it's all wrong
Another voice told me it's all right
I used to think that I was strong,
but lately I just lost the fight
It's funny how falling feels like flying for a little while
It's funny how falling feels like flying for a little while

I so appreciate the truth in that chorus. Sadly, I've experienced the truth of that chorus and I daresay that so have you. Anybody in this room who has ever been confronted in their sin and repented has experienced what is going on with that brief glimpse of truth. We experience the euphoria, the pleasure, even, the excitement, the exhilaration of whatever we're into until we hit that brick wall or we fall or God brings attention to our hearts and we get that challenge, that confrontation that, either through his word, through his people, or both, and we know what it is to be corrected.

We return to our study in the book of Proverbs today. We're looking specifically at what it means to be men and women. Men and women, men and women, young and old who are walking wisely with our desires--walking wisely with our desires. And specifically I'd like to give us a definition to work with. When I say, 'desires' I believe that what we're saying is that God has given to each of us various drives—drives that he has placed within us. They're part of our human experience. The things that we know to be us, physical, emotional, spiritual. Things that drive us. We're comprised of a complex mix of drives and passions. Simple observation of our fellow human beings reveals that we have a lot in common as Adam's children. The desire for food and drink, the desired to eat and be satisfied. The desire to be loved, to be affirmed, even to be accepted. Everything from a desire to know what our purpose in life is, what our significance in life is, to a desire for physical pleasure, even if that simply is defined as the avoidance of pain and the pursuit of comfort. We know those drives. But when left to our own devices, trusting in our own pathetic version of wisdom, our own hearts, not leaning on him, we are hopelessly doomed to follow after the whims of darkened hearts. Darkened hearts that apart from the gracious intervention of the rescue that the power of Jesus Christ alone provides--those hearts that stand condemned already. So the answer is not to ask to have our desires removed. Don't pray that prayer. If you ever have you know that futility of a prayer like that. Please take this desire from me. No, that would be to live a passionless life. It would be to stay in the borderlands like Mike just referred us to in the men's retreat. Rather, quite the opposite. When we trust in the Lord with all our hearts, when we lean not on our own understanding, when we, as Jesus said, deny ourselves, then we have the opportunity to marvel at how he redeems and redirects and reaffirms the desires that he's given to us--that we can live those out according to the wisdom of his word for his glory and for our good. To be a people with purposeful passion. Amen?

The book of Proverbs is a reflection of that journey that each of us is on. It's a pilgrimage; we've talked about, from foolishness to wisdom, from walking in the way of folly to walking in the way of the wise. It's written by a wise, elder person to a foolish, younger person. It's written from a concerned father to a simpleton son. One of the desires that the wise father is diligent to instruct his son on is concerning the way of wisdom as it relates to our sexuality. Now this is a tricky one, I know. I don't enter into this lightly. I know that there are world wise individuals in the room, and I also know

that there are not. I know that there are some of us who are over the age of twenty-one--well over--and others who are not. I know our covenant children are present. I'm aware of this, but what better place--few better, I think--than the worship of the living God, surrounded by the people of God, to discuss what God calls us to with regard to our maleness in our femaleness. So I want us to see that. It seems to me that too few of us know the dangers inherent, and sadly too many of us know the devastating consequences, that result from letting the world, a system of thought that is diametrically opposed to the purity of God, letting that system of thought be our majority voice in our heads. The warning and the way of rescue that the father offers to his son is the warning and the way of rescue for each one of us. He is writing to us. He is calling us to hear and to heed, to pay attention, to learn from the way of the wise. And it's my prayer today (I've been praying ever since we identified we would talk about this subject) that God would take this lesson and the general applications that come forth from this preacher and that he would be pleased to particularly apply them to each one of us where we need him to do that the most. I know he can do that, and because I know he can do that, that's why we proceed. I want to look at three Proverbs passages, actually four. We're going to look at Proverbs two, Proverbs five, Proverbs six, and Proverbs seven, but we'll end up eventually camping out in Proverbs seven for a while. I believe that the wise father in the book of Proverbs wants us to be aware of the decision to not decide. If that's confusing, good, just stay right there. The wise father wants us to be aware of the deceit of smooth words. He wants us to be aware of the gradual descent into darkness. The devastating destruction that awaits us if we don't turn, and that deliverance is through and by and for wisdom. Our deliverance is through and by and for Jesus Christ, and hopefully we will see that.

There is no shortage of pleading with the son to heed wise instruction. But we're the apathetic ones. Proverbs 2:1-5. The father--listen to his pleading: "My son, if you receive my words, if you treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom, inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight, if you raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver, if you search for it like hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and you will find the knowledge of God." The father pleading with his son. Proverbs 5:1&2: "My son, be attentive to my wisdom, incline your ear to my understanding, that you may keep discretion, that your lips may guard knowledge." Proverbs 7:1-3. "My son, keep my words, treasure up my commandments within you, keep my commandments and live, keep my teaching as the apple of your eye [that precious treasure] and bind them on your fingers, write them on the tablet of your heart." We know when someone's pleading like this to hear instruction, that it's a matter of life and death. In the Flora household we believe we've trained successfully, praise be to God, two motor vehicle drivers. We've got one more right now in the pipeline. And I don't know if you've ever instructed or trained someone how to operate a motor vehicle or not, but it's a panicky thing because the instructions we give actually do have life or death consequence. Red means stop, green means go, yellow means go faster. Right? Yellow means prepare to stop. The instructions that we give and we plead with them--cover your break here, watch out for this--is because we know the inherent dangers that exist. How much more, how much more the dangers inherent in being a male or female in this present age. And God is so gracious. Isn't he so very gracious? He doesn't give those instructions and leave us. He actually gives those instructions and produces with those instructions the warning why it is imperative for us to pay attention. For example in Proverbs 2:16-19 after the father cries out to the son to hear and heed, he says, "So that you will be delivered from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words, who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God; for her house sinks down to death, her paths to the departed, none who go to her come back nor do they ever regain the pathway of life." Now those are some sobering warnings. Sometimes the instructions are very clear. God's word is very clear, black-and-white, even: do not lie, do not steal, do not murder, do not commit adultery. It's very clear. But sometimes God's word instructs us in more general ways. We are simply called to walk on the way of wisdom. Paul tells the Corinthians, "Therefore, whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do all to the glory of God." In Micah six and verse eight he has told you, O man, what is good in a very general way, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to walk justly, to love kindness and mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. There is a very general sense that we are called to live our lives as God's creatures instructed by our holy Creator. Sometimes, however, we make a decision to not decide because we're apathetic. The words 'whatever' and 'tomorrow' are perfectly good words. We use them in sentences every day of the week. But when we put our hearts' apathy toward those words they become perilously dangerous in our walk with Christ. "Whatever. Whatever. I don't care. I'll work on that. Yeah, I'll work on that tomorrow. Tomorrow." See in our hearts we hear the instruction. We hear the pleading of the father, and we must be aware that we sometimes make the decision to not decide. Some of the most sobering words in print, I believe, in the Bible, related to the greatest king in Israel, King David, are found in 2 Samuel 11, verse one. It says, in the spring of the year when kings go off to battle, and then there's

a description and then at the end of that passage it says, David remained behind in Jerusalem. "In the spring of the year when the kings go out to battle...David remained behind in Jerusalem." And thus begins the sad drama of unbridled lust, devious scheming, adultery, murder, a web of deceit to cover the scandalous sin between David and Bathsheba, eventually the death of her husband, Uriah. I don't have the ability to read David's thought processes. The Scriptures are not very clear what David was thinking when Samuel records that when kings go off to battle, David remained behind. But I would hazard that it was safe to say that David didn't wake up on that morning and say, you know what, I think I'll shirk my responsibility as King, I'll not lead my men into battle, I'll spy on the married woman bathing next door, I'll bring her to my house, I'll take her as my own, then I'll plot the death of her husband--one of my generals, by the way--then I'll get him out of the way. I don't think that was the first thought on David's mind. But he did make the decision to not decide. He had a call on his life, he was the King, he had responsibilities, and he said, you know what... tomorrow... whatever... tomorrow. And I'm pretty sure that he also didn't process through his mind the devastating consequence that his action--that first action--would bring. Unless we're vigilant, the twisted way that the world thinks about our desires will become our way of thinking about our desires. And the world is fairly adept with its words.

The deceit of words. Our minds are watchmen, they're placed at the forefront so that we can incorporate what is being said, and we can discern between truth and error. Leading us astray or leading us to life, the subtly deceitful, smooth words of the adulteress. Proverbs 5:3. "For the lips of the forbidden woman drip honey and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she's bitter as gall." There's a comparison for you, between the sweetness of honey and the bitterness of wormwood. "Sharp as a double-edged sword." A contrast to the way of wisdom again, the contrast of the way of wisdom and the wily seductress's words. Using the language reminiscent of Deuteronomy six, language reminiscent of Psalm 119, listen to these passages from Proverbs 6:20-24, Proverbs 7:1-5. "My son, keep your father's commandment, forsake not your mother's teaching, bind them on your heart always, tie them around your neck. When you walk they will lead you, and when you lie down they will watch over you, when you awake they will talk with you. For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life, to preserve you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress. God's word. "I have hidden your word in my heart, O Lord, that I might not sin against you." Protect me, Lord. "Let the word of Christ," Paul tells the Colossians, "let the word of Christ dwell within you richly" Protect me in that. Proverbs 7. "My son, keep my words, treasure up my commandments..., keep my commandments and live, keep my teaching...bind them on your fingers, write them on the tablet of your heart, say to wisdom, 'You are my sister,' you are my kinsman, you're with me. I walk with wisdom. I'm going to guard you, I'm going to protect you. My intimate friend, call for insight for my "intimate friend, to keep you from the forbidden woman, the adulteress with her smooth words." And then again in Proverbs 7:21, "With much seductive speech she persuades him, with her smooth talk she compels him." The smooth, honey dripping, subtle tongue of the evil woman comes in various shapes and sizes. You've heard them this week. I've heard them this week. Some of us have succumbed to her seductive, smooth talk this week. You hear her words altering God's design for our sexuality in so many of the situation comedies on TV. You don't even have to watch the shows, just watch the thirty second ad. And you know how twisted that view of God's role for men and role for women is out there. Advertisements, billboards, radio spots. Her smooth words show up in the form of conversation with friends, neighbors, co-workers debating the current politic of the day, and they argue for tolerance for a "If it isn't hurting anyone, why should you worry about it" group think, and you're pushed back into the corner. You're the minority. Don't think like that. What do you do, and that's not loving. We're loving. We're tolerant. The adulterous woman's words show up in the gender-bending pop culture that redefines what it means to be male, what it means to be female. We have this stuff on in our house: Disney Channel, Pixar, MTV (I don't think we have that one, I don't know, I think Mom's probably blocked that one.) Pop stars, teen idols. So eventually, being immersed in this, what happens to us is we think that's the way to walk. That's not God's way for us. It's not God's way for us. And if we're not mindful of examining her subtle words in the light of truth, we will be further swept away, further down into the descent of darkness. The father instructs his son, steer clear of the danger zones before you get dragged deeper into the darkness.

The descent into darkness. I want to characterize it by four things we find in chapter seven of Proverbs: a lack of judgment, an overindulgence of the senses, and a self-centered pride coupled with a sense of entitlement, and the fourth one is that we search for life where no life can be found. The narrator of chapter seven reveals the way of the simpleton. I love that word. Because it's me if I'm not walking in the way of wisdom. It says, my son, I peered through my lattice, I looked out my window as the sun was setting and I saw the simpleton. I saw him, what was he doing... He was venturing close to the wayward woman's house as the sun was setting and the night was closing in. The woman in

chapter seven has earned a reputation for taking on many men under the cover of darkness. And this simpleton probably knows the reputation and he's curious. He's not going to do anything, he just wants to go a little bit closer to check it out. He's probably not going to do anything, that's probably not his first thought. And then all of a sudden, in verse ten to twelve, she's out of the house. She sees him. That's who she's been waiting for, and she is loud and bodacious. She makes sure that everything about her draws his attention. Everything. And he's drawn in. He's drawn in by the fact that she speaks his language. She's got meat prepared for the sacrifice, she's done her religious vows. She's dressed in such a way that it draws his attention. She's dressed as a prostitute. She's wily of heart, the father says. There's something about the visual there that the writer of Proverbs is saying, listen, you have to guard your eyes. Like Job said, I've made a covenant with my eyes that I might not look on a woman in that wrong way. We have to be careful. And she's there. She talks about religion, I'm on the same page as you. Look, I'll even personalize it. See there in verse fourteen, "I had to offer sacrifices, and today I pay my vows, so now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, I've found you." That sense of pride and entitlement. And it's about him, it's a flattering tongue, it's going to serve me, this is good for me. And with her smooth word she continues, I prepared my bed just for you. It's just for you. There is none other. So indulge and indulge and do so with reckless abandon, come on, let's---she says it---let's love each other till morning. Let us delight ourselves with love. How dare she use that term. How dare she use the term, 'love.' It's got nothing to do with love. Love is other-centered, love gives, love is concerned for sacrifice. This is lust. Lust takes, lust tears down. Young people, listen to me, never forget those two truths: love is concerned for your well-being, love protects, love is other-centered; lust takes without regard, but it always appears like it's on your side. And she further pushes the agenda. She even provides the illusion of secrecy. My husband is gone, you see that in verse nineteen to twenty? My husband is not even at home. He's taken his purse, he's going into the market, he is gone for a long time, it's safe. No one sees. Enjoy. But somebody sees. Remember the story starts with someone peering through the lattice observing the simpleton. Somebody sees. Somebody sees and they know and they know where this is headed. She says, nobody sees, you're safe, enjoy it, you deserve it. You deserve it. And then apparently he's hooked. Verse twenty-one, "With much seductive speech she persuades him, and with her smooth talk she compels him." The Latin term, 'duco' means, 'I lead.' It refers to the role, what this man is supposed to be. He's supposed to be in a leadership role. He's supposed to self-govern himself, he's supposed to have self-control, he's he supposed to make wise choices. But what's happened here is, 'se-duction.' He's been led aside, he's been led astray, he's allowed someone else to lead him. He's fallen for it. The persuasive words have caused him to descend into darkness. He didn't see the destruction that awaits.

Sadly, none of us, few of us, rarely see the destruction that awaits. And all of a sudden, verse 22 and 23, BAM! "As an ox goes to the slaughter..."---I'm not even going to describe what that practice was, but it was brutal---"as a deer, as a stag is ensnared in the trap, as a bird rushes into the snare," and the piercing of the liver with the arrow---that's the pangs of guilt deep within. That's what's happening. He's gone, he has been persuaded. He never saw that those smooth words words contained destruction. "He does not know," verse 23, that in the end "it will cost him his life." I don't know if anybody has ever seen the movie *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. I don't know why they let kids watch that. When I was a child, it scared the daylights out of me. The Children's Catcher, that's a character's name. "Ice cream, lollipops, children." There's two children hiding out in the basement of the toymaker's shop, but the Children's Catcher is about to get them. He's luring them with the thought of candy. And there's this wagon set up, it's got candy on the side and lollipops and all the stuff, and they are drawn. But as soon as they walk up the ramp and they're inside that cart the false walls fall away, the gate is slammed shut, and you see iron bars that are holding them prisoner, and just as suddenly as that, it occurs. "Sometimes falling feels like flying, but only for a little while" and we know this but why, why do we run toward it. I just want to make a point here that sexual sin is not about our sexual orientation, it's not about our sexual perversions in and of themselves. That's a manifestation. But primarily our sexual sins are rather about the fact that our sexuality is not being Christ-controlled. It's not under the lordship of Christ. We are not walking in the way of the wise. Our lives are not ordered by God's word. Our pride-filled hearts are being revealed with every exhibition of our unrestrained desires. We are unwilling to submit to God, and if we are unwilling to submit to God he says that there's a price to pay. And the price, very plainly put by the Scriptures, is that the wages or the just desserts of our sin is death. What we deserve for our sin is death.

But praise be to God. The Scriptures say, however, the gift, a free gift, the free gift of Christ is eternal life. He knows our condition. He knows your particular bent. He knows it fully. Listen to me. He knew it when he went to the cross to pay for your sins and to pay for my sins. He knows, he sees, and he knows, and he loves, and he calls. The gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. Deliverance, then, is through and by and for wisdom. It's through and by and

for Jesus Christ. It's for his glory. It's accomplished by him, and we receive it by faith. In 1 Corinthians 2 Paul speaks of declaring the wisdom of God, the mystery of the gospel--that which was hidden but God destined for our glory has now been revealed, Paul says. It's simply this, that the Son of God came to seek and save lost things, lost things like us, lost things like you and like me. All of us who realize that he's the Creator God, that he fully deserves our praise and our worship, our life's devotion, and then to hear those sweet words--this is amazing grace, how sweet the sound of truth, the consistent fruit of the gospel laid out and given freely. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, I couldn't see him. I couldn't walk in his way. I wasn't equipped, I wasn't enabled. But he took a lost thing and found it, he took a blind thing and gave it sight. Ephesians 3, Paul says that the church proclaims the manifold wisdom of God. It's the same concept there, as we're proclaiming the wisdom of God, we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified for sinners. God making all things new again. God making things right. God transforming our hearts. God renewing our minds. Praise God. His word is for all of us. It's for all of us, wherever you are in your walk. You know the church in Corinth was immersed in a sex-saturated society. There were temple sacrifice and all kinds of things that had to do with the reading that Jeff read earlier from Galatians. Those deeds of the flesh were prominent, evident. The same kind of city that we live in. Same kind of--if they had them--TV, cable, radio, music that we have, just different versions. Different versions of the same heart, different versions of the same twisted view of God's purpose for our maleness and our femaleness.

But Paul said this to the Corinthians: Therefore, listen, the warning comes, "Let anyone who thinks he is standing, take heed, lest you fall." I don't know where you were when you came in to this setting today, but that's a warning for each of us. If you think you don't need the way of wisdom, take heed lest you fall. And then Paul continues, he says, listen, "No temptation has overtaken you except that which is common to man." We each have our particular versions of it, but the commonality of the temptation of the flesh to live in a prideful way and to not regard God--that's the commonness of our temptations. "And God is faithful in this: he will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able to bear. But with that temptation he will also provide the way of escape..."--listen--"so that you may be able to endure it." However he either pulls you from that situation or walks you through as he removes his restraining grace and allows you to sin and to see the consequence of your sin, however God does it, he is the one who is in it with you. God provides a way of escape. Sometimes it's by the ordinary means of his word and the sacrament. He reminds us of his sacrifice, he reminds us of the gospel, it comes to our mind, it comes to our heart, and he arrests our heart and he prevents us. Sometimes he brings that by way of correction: a loving friend, the faithful brother or sister who presents to us the word, hey, you're on the precipice. If you take another step, it's dangerous. Don't. Sometimes he intervenes in other ways, powerful ways, bone-chilling ways. I know of a man who, when he was in seminary, he was on the trajectory to be a missionary, but he was about to commit fornication with a woman who was not his wife and he was praying this verse. God, where is the way out that you promised. And at that moment the woman that he was with said, some missionary you're going to be. And that was all he needed, that was all he needed to see what he was about to commit. And he cut that liaison off and he repented. Since I've been here I've encountered many stories, but one of a husband who had just spoken with his wife and was going to see a girl that he had planned to have a tryst with in the afternoon. And as he came to her front entrance way her rather large dog jumped up on his front and one of the paws of the dog actually redialed his wife's cell phone and she heard the first six minutes of their liaison. Enough, enough to be able to challenge and confront him and bring what he thought was in the secret into the light. God is in the business of seeing us, but not leaving us. Seeing us and pursuing us is God's business. Whatever form our encounter with God's wisdom takes, our role in that meeting is one of humility. It's one of submission. It's one of "I surrender all."

I want to close with an illustration from C.S. Lewis. In C.S. Lewis's book *The Great Divorce* it's a picture, each chapter is a vignette of people who are traveling from what is in Lewis's depiction, Hell, to the more substantial Heaven. And these are referred to as ghosts, and they're on this journey. And this one chapter we see a man who is walking and as he walked you notice as he gets closer a small red lizard representing his lust affixed to his shoulder. And the lizard whispers in his ear and this little tail flicks back and forth and you can tell that the man is agitated by this. You can tell that there is a love/hate relationship between the man and the lust lizard. And the angel, The Burning One, C.S. Lewis refers to him, the angel approaches and he says, do you want me to silence that lizard, and the man says yes, please, silence Him. So the angel comes closely, and realizing that the angel is going to kill the lizard, the man backs off. You said silence him, and the angel continues, in order for me to silence that lizard, I must kill the lizard. The man didn't think that he had intended something so drastic. The angel says it must be done in a definitive way. The man argues for a more gradual approach. He argues for time to prepare for such an operation. The angel tells him that the angel will do

most of the work and he moves closer to the lizard again. The man realizes that the burning that he is experiencing and he cries out in pain, I thought you were going to kill the lizard, now you're hurting me! The angel responds, I never said it wouldn't hurt you. I said it wouldn't kill you. And after another exchange of excuses in response the angel finally asks the man, have I your permission now, and the man says I know it will kill me. The angel responds, it won't, but supposing it did. The man concludes, you're right. It would be better to be dead than to live with this creature. And so in one final cry of pain the man yells out loudly and then whimpers softly, God help me, God help me. The angel locks his vise death grip on the lizard. The lizard twists and bites and writhes, because the lizard is not going to give up easy. But the angel throws a broken-back lizard to the ground. And then Lewis presents for us this picture that from the place where the body of the lizard lay there begins to be movement and the lizard's body changes and it grows and becomes this massively muscular stallion, glistening silver with golden mane and golden tail. And the man, now transformed, approaches the stallion and the two of them connect in a way that the narrator can only imagine the connection and the man grabs the mane of the stallion and throws himself up on the back and horse and rider together in synch, in unison, ride off and get faster and more strong as they gallop into the rising red sky. The narrator in Lewis's book comments at the close of the chapter, What is a lizard compared to a stallion? Lust is a poor and weak and whimpering, whispering thing compared with that richness and energy of desire which will arise when lust has been killed. What God is capable of doing in each of us is to take the desires that we simply twist and use them for his glory. He takes those things that we twist, that were never intended to be used in the way that we used them, and he redeems them, he renews them, he brings them under his lordship. He does that work and then we serve through those desires the glory of God. So I don't know where you were, but I would dare say that for some of us today this is your encounter with God's wisdom. This is your encounter with God's wisdom. And it's your opportunity to turn from and to run to. It's your opportunity now to turn from trusting in your own heart, in your own way, doing your own thing, and to run to the finished work of Jesus Christ. Run to him for forgiveness, run to him for cleansing, run to him for a renewed passion for his glory and allow him to do the work that makes us into sons and daughters of the living King.

Let's pray. God, please help us. Please cause us to desire you above all things, that you would be our joy forever like we've already sung today, and that you, Lord Jesus, would be pleased then to be the conquering King of our hearts. We surrender all to you in the name of Christ, we pray, Amen.