

Dumb Things Smart People Believe

Week 1

Day 1

Read: Hebrews 11:1-10, Proverbs 21:16

This week we are beginning a brand new series called “Dumb Things Smart People Believe.” We can sometimes get the impression that intelligence and education is more important than anything else in life. And they are very important. But having an unbelievable intellect and a high IQ doesn’t guarantee that we’ll put our faith in the right stuff. The truth is that there are people who are very smart but who believe some really wacky things. Over the next several weeks we’ll be looking at some of the dumb things that some very smart people believe.

One of the first questions to answer is: why it is so important to have the right beliefs in our lives? After all, does it really make any difference? One thing that the Bible affirms over and over again is that what we believe matters. The Bible places a great deal of weight on where we put our beliefs and our faith.

There is something very interesting about the way humans are built. We don’t always think about our lives this way, but the stuff we believe on the inside will always manifest itself on the outside. I once saw a sign in front of a church in Tennessee that read, “Live what you believe.” Undoubtedly this church was trying to compel people to live out the things they *confess* to believe, but the truth is that all of us, everyone, lives out what they *really* believe. When we believe something, it effects the way we act, think, and view the world.

There's no point in telling someone you believe in loving everyone, because if you are not loving toward people, they already know that you don't believe it. If you tell people you believe that your family is the most important part of your life, but the majority of your time and energy is spent elsewhere, people know what you really believe. The things that we believe change how we act and who we are.

This is why it's so important that we get our beliefs straight, no matter how smart we are.

Why is being smart not always enough? Why do you think it's important to have our faith and beliefs in the right things?

Dumb Things Smart People Believe
Week 1
Day 2

Read: Psalm 50:10-12, Mark 10:27, 2 Peter 3:8-9

During this first week of the series "Dumb Things Smart People Believe" we'll be looking at the belief that "everything happens for a reason." At first glance, there doesn't seem to be anything particularly shocking or disturbing about this belief. After all, who hasn't heard this expression used at one point or another.

Yet, as innocuous as it seems, this statement (and the belief behind this statement) imply several very important things worth investigating more deeply.

One of the first things the statement “everything happens for a reason” affirms is the power and sovereignty of God. The Bible teaches and we believe that God is powerful enough to do anything. He is powerful enough to make anything happen or to prevent anything from happening. It stands to reason, then, that anything that happens does so because God wants it to happen or God allows it to happen.

I think that the belief that everything happens for a reason is born out of the belief in the power of God, which is a good belief and one that is supported by the Bible. Yet, when we look around our world and at our own lives, we are confronted with the fact that there are many things that are dark, evil, and broken. So, how do we reconcile an all powerful God with a world that contains so much pain?

Part of what this comes down to is God’s desire that we have the ability to love, to love him and each other. In order for us to have the ability to love, God had to give us free will, free choice, because it is only in the ability to choose love openly that love can exist.

God doesn’t want a collection of mindless robots, but people who can willingly choose to love. But in order for us to have the capacity to choose love, we must also have the ability to *not* choose love. If God is going to give us the freedom to choose, then he has to give us the ability to misuse that freedom.

To be free is to be morally responsible, and to be morally responsible is to be responsible to (and for) each other. What is the freedom to love or not love except to ability to enrich or harm others, the ability to do good or evil? When we look at the evil and pain that fills our world, it's often evil and pain born from someone's free choice.

So why doesn't God simply intervene every time someone is about to make a choice that will cause pain? The answer is because if God removes the ability to choose either good or evil, then he has removed our freewill. Let's say you picked up a stone. You might be able to use that stone to build a wall or to carve a statue. Or you could use the stone as a weapon to hurt or kill someone. And let's say that at the second you began to use it as a weapon, God turned it into a sponge. What God has done is remove the ability to choose, since you can only choose to do good with the stone. This is, after all, no choice since there is only one option.

The bottom line is we cannot choose love without freedom. It's impossible. But with freedom, the possibility exists for us to choose to *not* love, to do evil, and cause pain. This is not God's doing but our own.

The belief that everything happens for a reason does not take into account the freedom God endows to us to choose either love or hate, to build or destroy, to cause good or pain. Yet, God is willing to endure the evil of the world for now so that we might choose to love him and that we might all draw near to him.

How are freewill and love tied together? Does this change your understanding of love and hate, good and evil? What does this

have to do with the expression “everything happens for a reason?”

Dumb Things Smart People Believe

Week 1

Day 3

Read: Romans 8:18-28

The belief that everything happens for a reason can, to some degree, taint our view of God. As discussed in yesterday’s reading, everything that happens does so because God wants it to happen or allows it to happen. The belief that everything happens for a reason tends to shift our thoughts toward believing that everything that happens is within the will of God, since it happened for a reason.

One of the wonderful things about God is that he is in the business of redemption. Over and over again in the Bible we encounter stories about God redeeming people, nations, and even specific events. Yet, the fact that God is able (and willing) to redeem broken lives and evil events does not mean that he is glad that those people and events needed redemption in the first place.

The ability of God to redeem and use everything that happens is not the same thing as God approving of everything that happens.

We read in the Bible that the world and all of creation “groans as if in childbirth” in anticipation of redemption and renewal. Pain during

childbirth might seem like a very natural thing. I mean, it doesn't surprise anyone when there is pain associated with having a baby. Yet, pain during childbirth was not part of the original plan. It is only after sin enters the world that there is pain during childbirth (Genesis 3:16). While we might think it's normal, pain during childbirth is not God's desire or plan. Neither is the groaning of all creation part of God's plan.

But God will use it and work it for the good of those who love him. God has the ability to redeem even the worst things we can imagine. But that does not mean that God approves of those things in the first place. This is an essential distinction to make with regard to the belief that everything happens for a reason.

What is the difference between allowing something to happen and approving of it (or being glad that it happened)? Do you think God's willingness to redeem and restore evil is the same thing as condoning evil? Why or why not?

Dumb Things Smart People Believe

Week 1

Day 4

Read: Matthew 25:31-46, James 2:14-16

I think we can sometimes use this statement, "everything happens for a reason," as a copout. I hate to be so blunt (well, I don't exactly hate it, but it doesn't normally win me any friends), but sometimes people throw this statement out instead of doing the hard work of reasoning through life and hardships with good biblical and theological thinking.

The problem of reconciling pain and evil with an all powerful God is a classic question of faith that has been wrestled with for generations. Yet, when we try to avoid the question by saying that everything happens for a reason, we are basically waving a white flag and submitting the conversation before it even begins. This might sound like I'm taking a pretty hard tact on a fairly minor issue, but being able to engage with these sorts of difficult questions is essential to someone who wants to follow Jesus.

I want to encourage you to avoid taking the easy road out by offering simply platitudes. The truth is that when someone is going through a tragedy in their lives, when someone is struggling with pain or hardships, it is not helpful to tell them "everything happens for a reason." That statement, and the belief behind it, is not encouraging or life giving or inspiring. I have had conversations with people who lamented how well-intentioned Christians treated them during a tragedy by addressing their pain with the simple answer, "everything happens for a reason."

Simple answers imply that the question was simple too. Yet, pain and suffering are not simple. Life is not simple. I hope we do more for people in pain than give them statement like this one. Instead, I hope we help in ways much more tangible and that we journey with the person in pain, not try to excuse it away with simple clichés.

Why do people avoid hard conversations? Do you think the belief "everything happens for a reason" can be used to avoid hard conversations or hard question? Why or why not?

Dumb Things Smart People Believe

Week 1

Day 5

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:10, James 3:13, Romans 12:15

The belief “everything happens for a reason” can be used in a really destructive way is when we use it as a cheap excuse for our actions. Instead of taking personal responsibility for our actions, we sometimes just throw our hands up and say, “everything happens for a reason.”

The implication is that the things that happen in our lives are completely out of our control and that we are simply at the whims of fate or chance or God and that everything that happens is the way it was suppose to happen. What this neglects to take into effect is the role we play in our own lives.

A car gets into an accident. Everything happens for a reason. Never mind that the driver was going too fast and not paying attention. A marriage ends in divorce. Everything happens for a reason. Never mind that the couple never learned to love and serve each other. We fail a test, we get fired, our finances are a mess; everything happens for a reason.

This casual phrase can be used as a way of shrugging our shoulders and ignoring the responsibility we play in our lives. Because if everything happens for a reason, then everything that happens should happen.

Let me say that again because I think it's the crux of what makes this thinking faulty. If everything happens for a reason, then everything that happens should happen. The simple truth is that we live in a busted world where many of the things that happen are not what God wills to happen. It breaks God's heart when people hate each other, when from our own neglect and selfishness relationships are broken, when people live loveless lives. This is not the way things are supposed to be. These things are against the will of God.

If you are ever tempted to say, "everything happens for a reason" I hope you'll pause for just a second to consider why your saying it and what that statement really means in your life.

In what ways can the belief "everything happens for a reason" neglect our personal responsibility?

Small Group Guide

1. Who is the smartest person you know? Who are some of the smartest people in history?
2. Why is being smart not always enough?
3. Why do you think it's important to have the right beliefs or to put our faith in the right things?
4. Have you ever used the expression "everything happens for a reason?" When do you find yourself using it?

Read: **Psalm 50:10-12, Mark 10:27, 2 Peter 3:8-9, Romans 8:18-28**

5. What is the difference between allowing something to happen and approving (or causing) it to happen?
6. Do you think God's willingness to redeem evil is the same things as condoning evil? Why or why not?
7. How can the expression "everything happens for a reason" imply that God desires or causes everything to happen?
8. How can this expression be used as an easy answer or an excuse for our own action?



Dumb Things Smart People Believe

Week 2

Day 1

Read: Colossians 3:13, Matthew 18:21-35, Matthew 6:14-16

We are in the second week of the series “Dumb Things Smart People Believe.” The truth of life is that there are some highly intelligent people who believe things that are just odd. In case any of us are eager to point the finger at someone else, we should remember that it could just as easily be us that believes a “dumb thing.” Last week we looked at the belief that “everything happens for a reason.” This week we are going to deal with beliefs and myths surrounding forgiveness, focusing on the belief “forgiving means forgetting.”

There’s just no getting around the fact that people who follow God and who are trying to honor Jesus with their lives are called to forgive. We are told, very clearly, to forgive each other. We are told to “*Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*” (Colossians 3:13)

During the time of Jesus, Jewish custom required that you forgive someone three times and then you were able to wash your hands of them and hold whatever grudges you liked. Jesus’ followers wanted some clarification on this common Jewish teaching and so they asked Jesus how many times they should forgive someone who has wronged them. “Seven times?” they asked, probably feeling pretty generous since this was twice the normal amount plus one. Jesus replied, “*not seven times, but seventy-seven times.*” (Matthew 18:22) Some translations of this text say seven times seventy times. The point is,

we are called to forgive so much that we lose count. Not three times, not seven times, but over and over again, as often as it is needed.

What is the consequence of not forgiving people? Jesus has some sobering words about that as well when he said, “*For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*” (Matthew 6:14-16) Yikes! The stakes are high, we better try to get this right.

Just in case I’m not making myself clear, forgiveness is vitally important to the life of someone who wants to follow Jesus. Forgiveness is not an optional accessory that we can take or leave at our discretion, like leather seats and a sunroof. It’s something we are commanded to do.

Yet, what happens when well meaning, intelligent people have some misguided ideas about forgiveness, about what it is and what it isn’t? People who want to follow God can get sidetracked and frustrated because we’ve bought into some myths about forgiveness. This week we are going to take a closer look at some of these myths. Forgiveness is just too important to get wrong.

How would you define forgiveness? What importance do you think forgiveness should have in the life of someone who is following Jesus? Why?

Dumb Things Smart People Believe

Week 2

Day 2

Read: Psalm 51:6, Luke 17:3-5

Perhaps one of the most common beliefs about forgiveness that can cause us to stumble is the concept that forgiving means forgetting. The impression exists that if we truly forgive someone of a wrong they have committed against us, then we must scrub our minds clean of any memory of it happening. It's an odd belief, but one that is fairly prevalent in our world. Perhaps you've heard or bought into this belief yourself. Today we are going to take a closer look at this idea and what it means for our lives.

One of the first ways this belief is destructive is that it's just not possible to control our memories. We, as humans, are constructed in a particular way. One thing that every human has in common is that we are not able to pick and choose what we forget. We just can't force ourselves to forget something, the way we can force ourselves to eat broccoli or watch a Yankee game. It's like me telling you to try not to think about Mickey Mouse. You immediately think of those round black ears and red shorts. It's just how we're built.

When we buy deeply into the belief that forgiving means forgetting we are setting ourselves up for either disappointment or frustration, because we are not likely to forget an incident when something painful happened in our lives.

Notice that the Bible very clearly commands us to forgive, but it never tells us to forget.

There are good, well-intentioned people who never truly seek to forgive someone because they have misunderstood forgiveness. People can be plagued by feelings of guilt because they can't seem to forget something they've forgiven. Our hope is that this week will unhinge what forgiveness really is so we can all make it a part of our lives.

To what degree do you think you have bought into the belief that forgiving is forgetting?

Dumb Things Smart People Believe

Week 2

Day 3

Read: Ephesians 4:31-32

Part of what makes this belief that forgiving means forgetting so damaging is how it affects the way we view forgiveness. When we buy into this thought, we also buy into several very ill conceived notions of what forgiveness is and isn't.

Sometimes people will act as if forgiveness is simply waving your hand and saying "it doesn't really matter." This posture is tantamount to pretending that it really wasn't that big of a deal in the first place or that it didn't bother me that much.

This is not forgiveness. Forgiveness is not condoning or overlooking what happened. Forgiveness is not disregarding or minimizing the pain that was caused.

In fact, forgiveness implies the very opposite. If something didn't really bug you or if there really wasn't any offense that took place, then forgiveness wouldn't be needed. The fact that forgiveness is needed states very clearly that something fractured our relationship with another person. Forgiveness isn't a process of minimizing our pain by shrugging it off. Instead, it's acknowledging that what happened mattered and needed to be forgiven.

The action was hurtful, painful, neglectful, insensitive, wrong; otherwise it wouldn't need forgiveness in the first place.

Forgiveness is not forgetting our pain or the offense done to us. It is not waving away what happened. Forgiveness is an intentional decision that, in the face of pain and in the face of being wronged, we will no longer hold that offense against them.

What is the difference between forgiveness and disregarding or minimizing what happened? Why is it important to make this distinction?

Dumb Things Smart People Believe
Week 2
Day 4

Read: Romans 3:19, Matthew 25: 14-30, 1 Corinthians 5:10

Another aspect of forgiveness that can be misunderstood because of the belief that forgiving means forgetting is that it seems like we no longer hold the other person accountable for their actions. After all, if we forget anything we've forgiven then what accountability can there be? Does forgiveness mean that we are just letting the person off the hook?

First of all, we need to make some distinctions. First of all, forgiveness and being held accountable are different things. In the Bible, we are assured that we will be held accountable to how we have lived our lives. Forgiving someone does not mean that they have somehow found a loophole and will not have to own up to what they have done. They will. We all will. The Bible teaches that the whole world will be held accountable to God (Romans 3:19). Jesus tells a whole parable that teaches about present day responsibility and future accountability to God (Matthew 25: 14-30).

Our forgiveness of someone does not let him or her off the hook; it is simply an acknowledgement that we are no longer holding their offense against them. Forgiveness does not negate accountability.

Forgiveness also doesn't mean that we don't have to suffer any earthly consequence. Read the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19). He was forgiven by God and yet he didn't just keep all of his ill-gotten gains. He paid people back what he stole four times what he owed them.

People can be forgiven and go to jail. People can be forgiven and be sued. People can be forgiven and held accountable.

Sin always has a consequence. And while God longs to forgive our sins, this doesn't take away the worldly price we often reap for the sins that we sow. Yet, remember that none of this is a reason or excuse not to forgive someone. We are called to forgive.

To what degree do you feel like forgiveness is just letting someone off the hook for what they've done? Explain the relationship between personal accountability and forgiveness?

Dumb Things Smart People Believe
Week 2
Day 5

Read: Hebrews 8:12, Jeremiah 31:34, Isaiah 43:25

The argument is often made that forgiving means forgetting by using God as the example of a perfect forgiver. The Bible speaks often about God's forgiveness of us and how God, through his son Jesus, has made a way for us to be in a right relationship with him.

Maybe you've read in the Bible where God says (speaking of us), "I will remember their sins no more" (Hebrews 8:12, also reference Jeremiah 31:34 and Isaiah 43:25). These verses have been used to argue that if you haven't forgotten the sin committed against you, then you haven't really forgiven the person at all.

What we must remember is that language can mean different things in different contexts. The word used for remember in this text is the Greek word $\mu\lambda\eta\sigma\tau\alpha\iota$ (which we would spell mnaomai: pronounced mna-o-my). This word does not mean remember in the way we normally think about remember, like remembering an answer on an exam. Instead, it means that God will not bring it back to his attention, that he will not dwell on it. Think of it less like something that is intentionally forgotten so that it no longer exists, but more like a bill that has been paid. This in no way implies that the price of the bill didn't matter or that it doesn't exist any longer. God simple does not turn his attention toward it any more. When the Bible says that

God remembers our sins no more it means that when God looks at us he doesn't see a list of sins, but he see us instead.

If anyone has told you that forgiveness is easy, they were lying to you. It's not. Forgiveness is hard and it always costs something. Always. For God, it cost his son Jesus. It will cost us something too.

Yet, no matter what it costs, we are called to forgive. And at the end of the day, forgiveness is just as much about the condition of our own hearts as it is about anyone else.

C.S. Lewis sums it up well when he wrote: "To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you."

We hope and pray that Community Christian Church can be a place marked by forgiveness. If you have someone you need to forgive in your life, pray to God for the grace to help you forgive. If you need someone to forgive you, pray to God for the courage to ask forgiveness. Let's live in such a way that forgiveness is a part of us.

What difference does it make to understand what it means that God remembers our sin no more? Is there anyone you need to forgive? That you need to ask forgiveness from?

**Dumb Things Smart People Believe
Week 2
Small Group Guide**

1. Tell of a time when you were a child when you had to ask for forgiveness.

2. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word “forgiveness?”
3. How would you define forgiveness?

Read: Hebrews 8:12, Matthew 25:14-30, Colossians 3:13

4. Have you ever heard of used the phrase “forgive and forget?”
5. In what ways do you think the concept that forgiving means forgetting might lead people to define forgiveness in damaging terms? (Refer to Days 2-4 of this booklet for food for thought.)
6. Do you ever feel like forgiveness is like letting someone off the hook or that you need to minimize your pain in order to forgive? Why are these damaging thoughts?
7. How does understanding that God doesn’t “forget” our sin but that God intentionally doesn’t bring it back into his attention change your understanding of forgiveness?
8. Is there anyone you need to forgive? Is there anyone you need to ask forgiveness from?

Dumb Things Smart People Believe
Week 3
Day 1

Read: Proverbs 22:6

We are in the third week of our series called “Dumb Things Smart People Believe.” No matter how smart you are, there is no guarantee that our beliefs will coincide with the wisdom of God as it’s taught in the Bible.

This is especially true when it comes to our families, where many of us often wear blinders. Yet, it is worth learning how to be the best family members we can be.

There is a common belief when it comes to parenting that we will spend some time looking at this week. It is build around a single verse from Proverbs in the Bible, and it can cause a tremendous amount of pain and heartache if it is not understood properly. It’s the belief that a godly household and godly parents ensure godly children.

In Proverbs 22:6 we comes across this:

“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”

This single verse has created a significant amount of confusion. There are many well meaning and faithful Christians who have been derailed in their faith when a child makes choices that take them away from God and the church. Many intelligent and dedicated people have had their hearts crushed because they have pinned their hopes on this verse, only to find that their child continues in a life that is filled with sin and far from God.

We will spend some time this week taking a closer look at the truth behind this belief.

Have you ever heard or read Proverb 22:6 before? Have you or someone you know ever believed the idea that “a godly home guarantees godly children?”

Dumb Things Smart People Believe
Week 3
Day 2

Read: Proverbs 10:4, Proverbs 15:22

One thing we need to understand before we go much further is the different ways that God teaches us through the Bible. What we encounter on the pages of the Bible is an eclectic mixture of writing styles and literary genres, as well as writing that is intended to serve different purposes. Some writing in the Bible is a retelling of history. Other writings are letters written to specific people or churches that give clear instruction and guidance. Still other writings are collections of poetry or song.

One form of writing we find in the Bible are proverbial statements. Proverbs are statements of wisdom that carry with it a general truth. Proverbs are short and memorable, because they are intended to be used as a teaching tool to help people understand how to live lives

marked with wisdom. Proverbs are not promises. Let me repeat that: proverbs are not promises. Proverbs are statements that are generally true, but to which there are exceptions.

Let me give a couple of examples to help clarify what I mean.

In Proverbs 10:4 we read: "Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth." Have you ever met someone who was diligent and hardworking, but also poor? I have. Have you ever met someone who was rich, but also lazy? So have I.

Or in Proverbs 15:22 we read: "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." Again, I have met people who have succeeded without anyone's advice and I have met people who have surrounded themselves with good counsel, but still failed.

What's the point? More often than not, these statements are true. More often than not, when someone is lazy, they suffer because of it. And it is generally true that when someone makes choices in isolation without seeking any advice, those plans often fail.

But not always. These are not promises, but statements of how things generally work.

The same is true of Proverbs 22:6. Though it is often true, it is not a promise.

What difference does it make to understand that the things we read in Proverbs are not promises but statements that are generally true?

Dumb Things Smart People Believe

Week 3

Day 3

The problem with confusing a teaching on wisdom that is meant to convey a general truth with a promise made by God is that we can become disillusioned with God when things don't go the way we assume they will. We can sometimes put God on the hook for things that he never promised.

I have known wonderful people who have rested all their hopes and faith in Proverbs 22:6 as a promise when it came to a wayward child, only to have their heart broken again and again when that child did not return to the path that God wants them to follow.

Those who believe in Proverbs 22:6 as a promise are, in essence, putting their faith in the idea that a child can be programmed to follow a certain course whether it is against their will or not.

God has given people freewill, which means he has given us the ability to choose which road we will follow.

After all, didn't Adam and Eve have a perfect relationship with God the Father? Didn't God teach them the way they should follow and

tell them the course they should stick to in their lives? Did God make any “parenting” mistakes?

Yet, Adam and Eve had free will and they left the path that God set out for them.

Adam and Eve, who were raised in a perfect environment, free from the pressures that we face, turned from the path, they walk away from what they were taught.

Ultimately, like any children, Adam and Eve had to make their own choices. And they decided to walk away from God.

What is your reaction to the fact that Adam and Eve, even with perfect “fathering,” turned away from God? If you are a parent, what does this mean for you?

Dumb Things Smart People Believe

Week 3

Day 4

The Old Testament portion of the Bible was written in Hebrew. The Hebrew language is fairly complex. Its sentence structure is different from what we are used to in the English-speaking world, which can lead to confusion when Hebrew is translated to English. So it's worth taking a moment to look more closely at what is going

on in this passage of Proverbs 22:6, because I think there several possible explanations that might shed more light on our discussion.

There are two alternate translations of this passage, which might be helpful. The first difference focuses on an alternate understanding of the Hebrew word דֶּרֶךְ (pronounced “Derek”), which is often translated “way” or “path.” While this is a reasonable translation, there is a note of nuance I’d like to add.

This word “derek” is related back to the child. It is not a general way, but “his way.” The verse holds the nuance of “train a child in his way,” that is, understanding his natural bent and his natural inclinations.

This might change how we think about this passage. If we help to cultivate the very best things that are naturally occurring in our children, then he will follow this path all his days, because it is his most natural route. If a child is artistic, then train a child in that way. If a child is analytical, then train a child in that way. If a child is athletic, or academic, or sensitive, or outgoing, train him or her with regard to their natural bent.

Again, this isn’t a promise, but a general truth that the things we learn in a way most natural to us are the things that are likely to remain with us for a long time.

What this really means for parents is there is a need to have a deep understanding of who their children are and help them learn in the ways that work best for them. This passage, which is sometimes misunderstood as a promise, becomes a beautiful reminder of the need for a deep, intimate relationship between parent and child.

How does a new understanding of the word “way” (derek) change the meaning of Proverbs 22:6 for you?

Dumb Things Smart People Believe

Week 3

Day 5

There is a second word in Proverbs 22:6 that can cause some trouble when it is translated over from Hebrew to English. It is the word סוֹר (pronounced “Soor”), which means “to turn away from” or “to leave.” The traditional translation uses this word to state that the child will not leave or depart from the right path if they are taught it early on in their life.

Yet, this word is a little less clear because it is not entirely clear what subject it is being tied to. The normal translation is completely correct, but a second translation is also possible within Hebrew grammar.

“Soor” could also be used to refer to, not only the child, but to the path.

This would alter our understanding of the passage. Instead of the general truth being that the child will not depart from the proper path, it becomes that the proper path does not depart from the child.

When you train a child in the way he should go, when you give them the guidance and love they need to know right from wrong and when you spend the time and energy helping them learn what it means to walk on the right path, that teaching never leaves them.

The right path, which you have helped them learn to identify, will never leave them.

All the days of their life, even into their old age, they will remember and know what it means to walk on the right path, because the path is always with them.

How does a new understanding of the word “to turn away” (“Soor”) change the meaning of Proverbs 22:6 for you?

Dumb Things Smart People Believe
Week 3
Small Group Guide

1. What are some of your favorite family memories?
2. How would you describe the family you grew up with? How does that effect you now?

Read: Proverbs 22:6

3. Have you ever heard or read Proverb 22:6 before? Have you or someone you know ever believed the idea that “a godly home guarantees godly children?”
4. What difference does it make to understand that the things we read in Proverbs are not promises but statements that are generally true?
5. What is your reaction to the fact that Adam and Eve, even with perfect “fathering,” turned away from God? If you are a parent, what does this mean for you?
6. How does changing your understanding of the word “way” and “to turn away” in Proverbs 22:6 alter your understanding of this passage?



Dumb Things Smart People Believe
Week 4
Day 1

Read: Proverbs 2:2-6, 9-11

We are in the last week of our series “Dumb Things Smart People Believe,” where we’ve been looking at some beliefs that even the most

intelligent person can buy into that just aren't true. We get the impression sometimes that Christians are immune to this sort of false belief, but no one is.

It's worth reminding ourselves why taking a closer look at what we believe really matters. In Proverbs 2 we are told that if we want wisdom and understanding we need to cry out to God for it and then seek it out like we were seeking out silver or hidden treasure. If we do, God will give us wisdom and knowledge and understanding. Then we will know right from wrong, just from unjust, fair from unfair, and we will see what the good path for our life will be. In the end, when we have the wisdom and understanding of God in our lives, knowledge will guard us and discretion will protect us.

What this passage tells us is something that many people overlook when it comes to gaining more understanding or wisdom for our lives. First, we need to cry out to God. We need to ask God to give us the wisdom and understanding and knowledge we are looking for. Second, we need to search for it like we were searching for a buried treasure. There is an aspect that depends on God, but that doesn't mean we get to just sit on our hands and wait on him. We are called to seek and search as well.

When we look at our lives, don't we all want understanding and wisdom? Don't we all want knowledge? Don't we all want to know the paths to follow so that we will know what is right and just and fair? Don't we all want to live in such a way that understanding and discretion will guard and protect us?

I want that for my life. I'd wager you want it for yours as well. That is why this series is so important, because we are calling out to God to

help us have a deeper understanding and then searching out for places where we might believe things that aren't true.

The reason we are spending time talking about these topics is that if we have the wrong beliefs, it can lead us down some very unhealthy paths. So we want to turn to the wisdom of God found in the Bible and put our faith and beliefs in the right things.

What role does God have in helping us have a better, deeper understanding? What role do we have?

Dumb Things Smart People Believe
Week 4
Day 2

Read: John 16:33, Mark 8:34

This week's "dumb thing" is actually written into the very fabric of our nation. When the United States was still just a collection of colonies at war with the British Empire, a document was penned that has changed the way we've thought and acted ever since.

It was, of course, the Declaration of Independence. Written in 1776, the Declaration of Independence was the formal statement telling the British Empire, and the rest of the world, that the United States was now independent and no longer colonies of the British Empire.

And maybe the most famous lines out of the Declaration of Independence are these:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

I bet most of us have heard that before. What has happened is that we often build our lives on this principal, whether we realize it or not, that we have a right to pursue happiness.

Sometimes it's easy for American Christians to get our wires crossed as to what America says and what God says. Which leads to our dumb thing for today:

God wants me to be happy.

In a nation where we have been told that we have been given by our creator the right to pursue happiness, the next logical step is to conclude that God wants us to be happy.

You hear it all the time from people on TV and from self help books, that God's main purpose and goal for our lives is for us to be happy.

The only problem is, this isn't something you find in the Bible. Don't get me wrong, God doesn't want us to be unhappy either.

The reality we see from the Bible is that God is much less concerned with our happiness and unhappiness than we are. God has bigger goals and plans in mind.

What is your reaction to the statement, “God wants me to be happy”? To what degree have you bought into this belief?

Dumb Things Smart People Believe

Week 4

Day 3

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:15-16, John 15:10-11, Hebrews 12:2, James 1:2

Part of the confusion that arises is when we confuse happiness and joy. The Bible makes it very clear that God calls us to live joy-filled existences. Just reading the handful of verses for today’s reading will show us that joy is a common topic talked about in the Bible.

Yet, joy and happiness are not the same.

There’s nothing wrong with happiness, but as we all know, happiness is fleeting and very fickle. As the word itself implies, happiness relates to what is happening. If circumstances are favorable, then I’m happy. If the circumstances aren’t favorable, I’m not happy. I think we all know what its like when we were little to really want a specific gift for Christmas. And when Christmas morning rolls around and we get that one special thing we hoped for, our happiness is

overwhelming. But how long does that last? Parents know the frustration of a child who plays with a toy for a couple minutes, maybe an hour, only to grow bored and begin looking for the next thing that will make them happy.

Because that's the thing with happiness. Happiness is tied to our circumstances.

I think this is really the reason why buying into the idea that God wants me to be happy is so dangerous, because what it really means is that God wants all my circumstances to be pleasant and all of my moments to be never-ending happy bliss.

That's just not what the Bible teaches about God or our lives.

If we read the verses for today than what we see is that joy is tied to some very odd things, such as suffering, trials, pain, obedience, and even the cross that Jesus died on. None of these sound overly happy or joyful. But joy, properly understood, is not dependant on our circumstances, but on God.

Joy is firm confidence that, because of God, all is well.

Even when things don't go our way. Even when we are called to obey in an area we might rather not. Even when we have pains and trials in our life. Even then we have confidence in God that all is well. No matter what our circumstances, we know that all is well because of God, and when we have that confidence in God, we have joy.

How would you define happiness? How would you define joy?
How do these things differ? Why is it easy to get happiness and
joy confused?

Dumb Things Smart People Believe

Week 4

Day 4

Read: Psalm 10: 4-6, Romans 5:3-5

One of the first things that the belief that God wants me to be happy leads to is a false sense of knowing the will of God. If I believe that God wants me to be happy, than it often leads us to see what we want to see, to hear what we want to hear, to believe what we want to believe, and do what we want to do, because if God wants me to be happy and I want me to be happy, then God essentially wants what I want, namely for me to be happy. And we come to the conclusion that anything that makes me happy is God's will for my life.

This belief leads us to make some very self-centered decisions.

And since happiness is tied to our circumstances, if our situations are not what we want them to be, we seek to change our circumstances, thinking all the while that we are simply doing what God wants us to do by making myself happy.

If we've really bought into this belief, when we come to a difficult decision for our lives, instead of carefully examining which road God wants us to take, we simply take the road that we think will make us happiest and assume that God agrees that this is where we should go. When things get difficult in a marriage, or a job, or with our finances,

then we simply take the path of least resistance and make choices that we hope will make us happy.

What we need to realize is that God uses the pains and the valleys of our lives to build in us things like character, perseverance, and hope. In fact, the only time the Bible speaks about being happy all the time is in a very negative light, where this belief is held by someone who is so prideful and arrogant that they have no room in their life for God.

When we seek our own happiness, we can sometimes miss out on the lessons and growth that God has in store for us.

What are ways that you think suffering and trial can develop us more fully into the people God wants us to be? Why doesn't pursuing things that we think will make us happy develop us in the same way?

Dumb Things Smart People Believe

Week 4

Day 5

Read: James 1:2-4, Hebrews 5:8

When we convince ourselves that the greatest goal that God has for our lives is for us to be happy, then we are in a position to miss out on what God really has planned for us.

As we can see from this passage in James, God longs to use hardships and pains to form us into people who are full and whole and lacking nothing. If we allow it, God will take even some of the worst things we can face and use them to make us into the people we were meant to be.

The reality that we see when we look at the Bible is that God is much more concerned with us being *holy* than happy.

Holiness, properly understood, means being set apart for God. And what is one tool that God uses to make us holy? Valleys and trials and suffering.

There is not a person from the Bible that we would call a “hero of the faith” that didn’t have suffering and valleys in their life. Even Jesus, the Son of God, had to walk through some dark valleys. We are all going to walk through valleys as well.

Whether they’re valleys of our own making, valleys that we walk into because we are being obedient to God, or valleys that we just can’t understand, God wants us to learn and grow from these experiences. The Bible tells us that even Jesus learned from his suffering, do we expect that we’ll be any different?

In our lives, we need to seek our how to be more fully set apart from this world for God, not for what we think will make us happy. The irony is that when we fully devote ourselves to seeking God and being holy, we find a deeper joy and fulfillment than we will ever experience anywhere, overshadowing even our greatest vision of happiness. The dream of God is to have children that love him and who are set apart for him.

What is the difference between seeking to be holy and seeking to be happy? What is your reaction to knowing that even Jesus had to learn from suffering?

**Dumb Things Smart People Believe
Week 4
Small Group Guide**

1. What is one of your happiest childhood memories?
2. How would you define happiness?
3. What are ways that people pursue happiness?

Read: Psalm 10: 4-6, Romans 5:3-5, James 1:2-4, Hebrews 5:8

4. How would you define happiness? How would you define joy? How do these things differ? Why is it easy to get happiness and joy confused?
5. What are ways that you think suffering and trial can develop us more fully into the people God wants us to be? Why doesn't

pursuing things that we think will make us happy develop us in the same way?

6. What is the difference between seeking to be holy and seeking to be happy? What is your reaction to knowing that even Jesus had to learn from suffering?