

Bull Riding & The New Year

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[0 : 00] Well, today, as we mentioned earlier, marks the first Sunday of a new year. 2020 is over, and 2021 has now begun.

And I don't know about you, but in some ways, 2020 felt a little bit like this for me. Can anyone relate to that? As I got thinking about it, last year was kind of like riding a bull.

In bull riding, you don't get to practice on the bull. Before it all begins. There's no chance to try and bond with your bull or tame your bull before you come to sit on it.

What you experience in that brief moment of time after the gate is opened is brand new, both to you and to the beast that you are riding. And just like with last year, you just don't know which way it's going to twist and turn.

And there's a pretty good chance that something is going to happen that will catch you by surprise. Something that you weren't quite ready for. For some of us, 2020 was a bull that we made our best efforts to ride, only to be bucked off near the end.

[1 : 14] Others of us were maybe bucked off three or four times. 2020 was a difficult bull to ride. And while we might be thankful that we are now done with 2020, the reality is that we now have a different bull to ride.

His name is 2021. And as of right now, most of us are probably just sitting on him in anticipation, waiting for the gate to be opened.

And we might assume that after 2020, this ride ahead is just going to be so much better. But the truth is, we don't know.

We've never ridden 2021 before. Just like with 2020, there will likely be some unexpected twists and turns. Perhaps even some that will send us flying through the air and landing on our heads. So how do we get better at bull riding? What can we do to prepare ourselves for the unknown ride of 2021?

[2 : 21] Apparently, bull riders put a lot of time into training. They study the sport. They learn as much as they can about the animal. They watch video clips of other riders riding different bulls.

And they try to learn from those riders' mistakes and try to add to their own understanding and their own intuition. They do exercises and stretches to build their muscles and to increase their flexibility. And they ride practice bulls in between competitions. None of these things can perfectly ready a person for the unknown bull that they will ride on the day of competition.

But having some kind of understanding and some kind of built-up intuition will make a huge difference with whatever happens when the gate is opened up.

The same principle applies to riding this new year of 2021. Having a strong understanding, a built-up intuition, a growing wisdom will make a huge difference with whatever happens in the weeks and months ahead.

[3 : 35] Let me be honest. I don't want to get bucked off of 2021 again and again and again. I want this year to be different for me.

Even if it turns out that it's more challenging than last year. What will make that difference? We all have some experience now with all this COVID stuff.

And that may help us some. But I need more. I need a deeper wisdom for life. And not just for a few specific things in life, but for everything in life.

I know I'm tempted to think that I might only need wisdom for a few specific things in 2021. But the truth is, just like with 2020, this year may go totally different than I expect.

I need more wisdom in all areas of my life. I need more wisdom to be a better father to my dear children.

[4 : 42] I need more wisdom to be a better husband to my precious wife. I need more wisdom to grow in skill in my work as a pastor. I need more wisdom for how to handle those tricky conversations and situations that are likely to come up in this new year.

I need more wisdom for how to balance the many responsibilities of my life. I need more wisdom to keep from getting distracted by less important things.

And to keep those most important things as my priorities. I need more wisdom to know how to sift through the news and understand something of what's really going on in the world around me.

I need more wisdom to fight and win against temptation. Against discouragement. Against frustration and sometimes even anger.

And the list can go on to touch every area of my life. Finances. Friendship. Decisions. Planning. Habits.

[5 : 52] When to speak up. When to be silent. And on and on. I need more wisdom in all areas of my life. And I believe that putting my time and intention into growing in wisdom will make a huge difference in the year ahead.

Not just for me. But for anyone. So how do we do it? Where does wisdom come from? A long time ago a man named Job asked this very question.

Where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell? No mortal comprehends its worth. It cannot be found in the land of the living. The deep says it is not in me. The sea says it is not with me. It cannot be bought with the finest gold.

Nor can its price be weighed out in silver. That's Job 28 verse 12 to 15. Job tells his friends that wisdom is not something easily found.

[7 : 06] It doesn't come from among us. He says. But it is exceedingly valuable. So where can wisdom be found?

Where does understanding come from? Well before we get to the answer. Let's think about how so many in our world would answer this question. Imagine you just go to some random person on the street.

Or at the post office. And just ask them. Where can wisdom be found? Where do you get your wisdom? Your understanding? A few people might say experience.

A few others might say from books. Some might say from other wise people. Though that kind of begs the question. Where did that wise person get their wisdom from?

How did they become wise? But I suspect that a lot of people. Whether they will admit it or not. Are getting their wisdom.

[8 : 08] Their wisdom. From Google. YouTube. Online sources. Blog posts. Wikipedia.

Things that trusted friends or family members share through Facebook. Or email. This is the kind of world that we live in. The digital age.

Where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding come from? Job may be asking the question. But in reality he's already given the answer.

Earlier on. In chapter 12. Verse 13. This is what Job says. To God. Belong.

Wisdom. And power. Counsel. And understanding. Are his. True wisdom.

[9 : 08] Is not just something that we can go to the local bookstore and buy. It's not something that you can gain by scrolling for hours through your Facebook or Twitter feeds.

Google may put a wealth of information at your fingertips. But Google can't give you discernment. It can't give you the ability to correctly sort through all that information.

And know what's true and right. And what actually applies to your situation. Or to your relationship. And what doesn't. So where does true wisdom and understanding come from?

Job's answer. Is from God. True wisdom comes. From the one who possesses it. To God belongs. Wisdom. Understanding. Is his. His. Listen to the words of Isaiah. Long ago. This is from Isaiah chapter 40 verse 13.

[10 : 14] Who can fathom the spirit of the Lord? Or instruct the Lord as his counselor? Answer. Implied.

No one. Answer. No one. Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him? And who taught him the right way? Answer. No one.

Who was it that taught him knowledge? Or showed him the path of understanding? Answer. No one. Ponder this with me for a minute.

Can you fathom? Can you understand. Just what goes on in the mind. The spirit. Of God. He's shown us time and time again.

In his word. Through prophecy. Even through the words and behavior of Jesus himself. When he was here on earth. That he knows all things.

[11:16] Can you imagine what goes on in the mind. Of the one. Who knows all things. Not only does he know all things.

He sees all things. He is continuously aware. Of all things. Proverbs 5 verse 21. Says this. For your ways.

Are in full. View. Of the Lord. God. And he examines all your paths. Everything.

That everyone does. God sees. In fact. God sees even more. Than we can see. Jesus said.

You might remember. Even the very hairs of your head. Are numbered. God knows the count on every head. God. In the world. All at the same time.

[12:14] He sees that. He knows that. And it's not just physical things. That God sees and knows. Even the non-physical things. King David said this.

To his son Solomon. For the Lord. Searches. Every heart. And understands.

Every desire. And every thought. Think about that for a moment. The Lord searches.

Every heart. And understands. Every desire. And every thought. Can you imagine.

What goes on in the mind. Of God. As he sees. And searches. Every heart. Of every person. Every desire.

[13:12] Every thought. As he witnesses. Every action. And interaction. In the universe. All at the same time. Truly.

God's understanding. Is mind-blowing. And what's truly amazing. Is that. He's not just a passive observer. Of all this. He's not just someone.

Who sees and knows all. But has no idea. How to interact. Meaningfully. With the universe. That he's made. It's not as though. He has.

All knowledge. But doesn't know. What to do with it. He has all knowledge. But he also has all wisdom. He knows exactly.

How to act. And interact. Within this complex universe. With other beings. To bring about. What he has planned. And promised.

[14:06] To bring about. What is good. And right. In the midst of the chaos. Of our world. And so back to our question.

Where does. Wisdom come from. It comes. From the one. Who possesses it. And here's something wonderful.

And amazing. The one. Who possesses. All wisdom. Offers. To share his wisdom. With you. And with me.

Proverbs 2. Verse 6. For the Lord. Gives. Wisdom. From his mouth. Come knowledge.

And understanding. Isn't that amazing? The one who alone. Possesses all wisdom. Gives his wisdom. To people. How?

[15:08] From his mouth. He speaks. His words. His words. Of wisdom. Google. May have a lot. To offer us.

But God. Has so much more. And better. Good books. May have some great insights. And some great nuggets. But none of those books.

Compares. To the one. That God. Has written. For us. What is this book. We call the Bible. Unlike everything.

That you will find on Google. Or in other books. Or in the news. Or on Facebook. What's in this book. Comes from God. Himself. And not just from mere men.

Think back over the story. It's God. Who spoke to. And through Moses. To give us the story. Of how our world began. And how things went. Up until the time.

[16:07] The Israelites entered Canaan. It's God. Who spoke to. And through David. As he penned. The Psalms. It's God. Who put his spirit.

Of wisdom. Upon Solomon. So that he could. Write. The Proverbs. It is God. Himself. Who spoke to. And through.

Isaiah. And Jeremiah. And so many of the prophets. Of long ago. Much later. The apostle Peter. Was eager.

To remind Christians. About this. This is what Peter said. He said. Above all. You must understand. That no prophecy.

Of scripture. Came about. By the prophets. Own interpretation. Of things. For prophecy. Never had its origin. In the human will.

[16:59] But prophets. Though human. Spoke from God. As they were carried along. By the Holy Spirit.

In a similar way. The apostles also. Spoke from God. From the Lord Jesus himself. They recognized. One another's letters. As being.

On the same level. As the scriptures. That were written long ago. He spoke to. And through. The apostles. As well. In fact. Even Jesus.

The son of God. Made it clear. Just where his many words. Of wisdom. Came from. John. Chapter 12. Verse 49. For I did not speak.

On my own. Says Jesus. But the father. Who sent me. Commanded me. To say. All that I have spoken. So whatever I say. Is just what the father.

[17:54] Has told me. To say. So from cover to cover. This book. That we all have a copy of. Is the collection.

Of what God himself. Has spoken. It's his. Collection. Of wisdom. That he has decided. To share with us. And preserve for us.

Through the centuries. Think about that. The one. Who possesses. All wisdom. Has chosen. To put some. Of his wisdom.

Into human language. At different points. Along the way. In history. So that we could come. To understand. Some really important things. About him.

About this world. That we live in. About relationships. About all the important things. In life. It's all. Right here. And in many places.

[18:51] It's so plainly stated. I think of the way. Solomon introduces. His book of. Proverbs. The Proverbs of Solomon. Son of David. King of Israel. For gaining.

Wisdom. You want to gain the wisdom. That the Lord gives. Read what I'm about to write. Says Solomon. Or in the words of David.

Solomon's dad. David wrote this. The law of the Lord. Is perfect. Refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord.

Are trustworthy. Making wise. The simple. You want to. Be made wise. David says. Read the law of the Lord.

The first five books. Of the Bible. Or in the words of Paul. To Timothy. He says. From infancy. You have known.

[19:47] The holy scriptures. Which are able to make you. Wise. For salvation. Through faith in. Christ Jesus. But not just for salvation.

He goes on. He says. All scripture. All of it. Is God breathed. And is useful. For teaching. Rebuking. Correcting. And training. In righteousness. So that the servant of God. May be thoroughly equipped. For every good work.

Every good work. For all you need to do in life. You want wisdom for all of life.

It's right here. All the wisdom that we need. To face the unknown ride. Of 2021.

[20:47] And ride it as well as possible. Is right here. In the pages. Of our Bibles. From the one.

Who possesses. All wisdom. And so. How do we get God's wisdom. From here. Into us. That's the final step. I think we kind of all know the answer.

We know some answers. Let's talk about it for a minute. One of the things I love about. God and his word. Is that he tells us. Right inside of it.

What we should do with it. He doesn't just leave us on our own to guess. He actually tells us. In many different places. That we should read it. He tells us.

That we should. Meditate on these words. Day and night. In Psalm 1. He tells us. That we should. Hide these words. In our hearts. In Psalm 119.

[21:44] Verse 11. Which at the very least. Includes memorizing. Some of them. He tells us. That we should live. Off these words. Just like we live.

Off food. Man shall not live. By bread alone. But by every word. That proceeds. From the mouth of God. Not only that.

But God knows. That we have a tendency. To get into his word. For a little while. And then to get away from it. For a little while. And so Jesus tells us. To have his words.

Stay in us. Remain. Abide. In us. For the long term. John 15. 7.

One of the questions. That often comes up. Is. How often. Do we need to read the Bible. To be a faithful follower. Of Jesus. It's kind of a weird question.

[22 : 42] I don't think. It's a question. That we ask. By the spirit. In faith. I think. That's a question. That we ask. Out of our.

Sinful nature. Out of our flesh. Let me phrase it. Another way. God. What's the bare minimum. Of your priceless wisdom. That I can take in. And still be on good terms.

With you. Try asking. Something like that. To your wife. If you're married. Honey. What's the bare minimum. Amount of time.

I can spend. Listening to your words. This year. And you still think. That I'm. A faithful husband. It's our sinful nature. That asks that question. A question like that.

If we really believe. That this is God's word. And. As he said in here. That he speaks. Through it. To us. How can we ask. What's the bare minimum. In the book of Proverbs.

[23 : 40] Solomon. As he speaks. From the spirit of God. Words that will help us. Gain wisdom. He does something. Rather clever. He personifies.

Wisdom. He writes a bit. As if he were. Wisdom itself. Proverbs 8. Verse 1. I'll just read. A little bit here. Does not wisdom.

Call out. Does not understanding. Raise her voice. At the highest point. Along the way. Where the paths meet. She takes her stand. Beside the gate.

Leading into the city. At the entrance. She cries aloud. And this is what wisdom says. To you. Oh people. I call out. I raise my voice. To all mankind.

You who are simple. Gain prudence. You who are foolish. Set your hearts on it. Listen. For I have trustworthy things to say.

[24 : 38] I open my lips to speak what is right. And Solomon goes on like this. For some time. Until he finally comes to these words. In verse 32. This is still wisdom talking.

Now then. My children. Listen to me. Blessed are those who keep my ways. Listen to my instruction. And be wise.

Do not disregard it. Here it is. Blessed are those who listen to me. Watching. Daily. At my doors.

Waiting. At my doorway. For those who find me. Find life. And receive favor. From the Lord.

Lord. What do you think it means. To watch daily. At the doors of wisdom. The picture we get here.

[25 : 37] Is of a person who's waiting at the door. For wisdom to come out and speak. To him. And let's not miss that word daily.

Not just once in a while. But daily. Every day. Not just going on our way in life. And waiting for wisdom to come to us somehow.

But going to wisdom's very house. The place where she lives. Searching her out. Waiting at the door. And doing it every single day.

To listen. To what. She has to say. So if you're looking for an answer to that question. Of how often you should read your Bible. I think this is. This is a good one right here.

This character that Solomon describes. Is wisdom itself. But we've already talked about where wisdom comes from. And where wisdom lives.

[26 : 33] This is not just Solomon telling us to listen to some fictional character. Named wisdom. And watch daily at her doors. This is God. Telling us.

Through Solomon. To seek for his wisdom. Daily. To come to him. The one who gives wisdom.

And listen. God wants to speak many words of wisdom. To you. In this year ahead.

Words which will keep you. On the right path. Words which will help you stay on the bull. Of 2021.

And ride it well. Words which may keep you from doing or saying things that you'll later regret.

Words which may give you just the right thing to say.

[27 : 27] In that very significant moment. Words which will help you keep the main thing. The main thing. In 2021. And so much more.

And so I want to encourage all of us here. Now is the time. At the start of this new year. To make it our daily habit. To be in God's word.

To take time. To listen. To his wisdom. And we need it. We need it. For every area of our lives.

If you're not sure what to do. I'd be happy to have a conversation with you after the service. Come and talk to me. I'd love to listen to what you've tried. What you've done before.

Maybe I could suggest to you. Something you can try that's new in the year ahead. Or a Bible reading plan that you've never done before. And one final word.

[28 : 29] I know many of you like to listen to preaching and teaching. Whether it's online or DVD or on the radio. And that's a good thing. There's so many benefits to listening to good preaching and teaching.

But there's no substitute. For having your own personal time. And attention. In the word of God. What you get from me on Sunday morning.

Or from Charles Stanley on the radio. Or from whoever else online. It's all second hand. It's like the food that's been pre-chewed. And then given to someone else to eat.

I hope it feeds your soul. I hope that it applies well to you. As you hear what I say on Sunday mornings. But there's no substitute for you having time directly with God.

Right here. Every day. Don't just seek wisdom from preachers and teachers. Be like the Bereans. In the book of Acts.

[29 : 31] And go directly to the source. And let him speak to you. To your own spirit. Every day. If I have only half an hour that I could spend each day.

I would rather spend it discovering the riches and wisdom. Of God's word for myself. Than merely listening to what someone else has discovered.

In their reading of the Bible. So don't allow other people to be the only ones who open your Bible. I want to encourage you. Open it for yourself.

And feast. And find strength. And wisdom. For this new year ahead. Let's pray. Father in heaven.

We thank you so much for this incredible gift. That you have given us. Help us to see it for what it is. Help us to.

[30 : 32] Find the discipline. The self-control. Whatever it is that we need. To make this. Have the place it should. In this year ahead.

We want the benefits. Of what you have said. To ripple through every area of our lives. And so come.

And work in us. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. For that.

Amen. Amen.