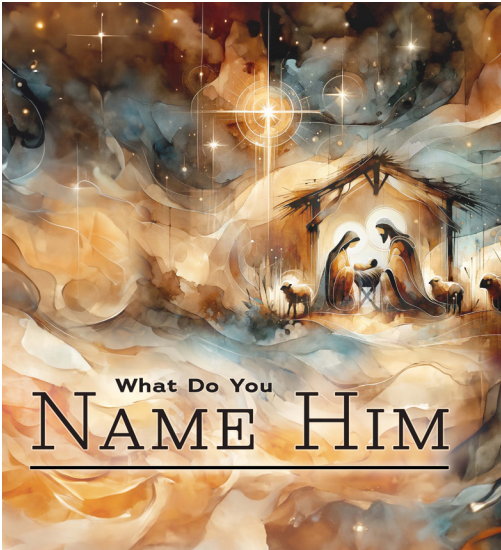


What Do You
NAME HIM

Sermon Growth Guide

December 1, 2024
Wonderful Counselor



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What Do You Name Him - Wonderful Counselor

Hebrews 4:13-16

Key Verse: Hebrews 4:15

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.”

Big Idea: Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor of Isaiah 9:6. Trust him to come into your life with your best interests at heart!

Foundations

In Isaiah 9:6, the prophet foretells of the coming messiah and gives him a series of names, “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”

Like a mirror exposing unseen flaws, Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor, reveals the hidden “bald spots” of sin, pride, and brokenness in our lives. Hebrews reminds us that nothing is hidden from God, who sees us fully. He knows us completely and is well aware of our triumphs, successes, sins, and failures, even more fully than we are.

The good news is that Jesus, our Great High Priest, empathizes with our weakness, having faced temptation yet remaining sinless (Hebrews 4:15). We see his empathy on display throughout the gospels. He is not distant but walks with us in our struggles, offering compassion, understanding, hope, and healing.

As the Wonderful Counselor, Jesus restores and heals us where we feel stuck, offering grace and mercy without condemnation (Romans 8:1).

This Advent, may you trust the Wonderful Counselor to come into your life to help with your best interests at heart. May you be awakened to more and more of Christ’s character. And may your faith be deepened as you are transformed by Him!

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Isaiah 9:6 and Hebrews 4:13-16.

What comes to mind when you think about Jesus being described as the “Wonderful Counselor?” Where in the Gospels do you see Jesus holding up a mirror to people’s lives? Where do you see Jesus’s empathy on display in the Gospels? What significance might we draw from the statement that Jesus was tempted in every way but did not sin? Where do you see Jesus offering healing and hope?

Applying God’s Word

John Calvin wrote, “Without knowledge of self there is no knowledge of God... Without knowledge of God, there is no knowledge of self.” What do you think about that statement? Can you describe a time when God revealed something about you that was hard to accept but led to transformation? How might the knowledge that Jesus empathizes with our weaknesses influence how you approach Him?

Witnessing God’s Word

How does Jesus’ example of empathy challenge how we interact with those who are lost in our world? In what ways might the church reflect Jesus’ qualities as a Wonderful Counselor to the community? How might you share the message of Jesus’ empathy and grace with someone who feels distant from God this Advent? of Christ.

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I want to start by showing you an image. This is me on this very chancel a few months ago. This is a bald spot. But that can't be right! I don't see that when I look in the mirror! I'm not even 40 yet! I'm too young for that! I've had the photo analyzed and have been assured that it has not been tampered with. It's authentic.

This is tough on 2-levels. For one, it's tough to look at. It makes me sad. Second. It's tough to look at! I can't see it! And it causes me to wonder if, on a deeper level, there aren't more bald spots in my life.

What about you? Are there bald spots in your life that you can't see? Often the mirrors we hold up, the mirrors we use to evaluate our lives... they're flawed or inadequate. We can't quite hold them at the right angle ourselves to see what we need to see. Maybe you're not aware that you're increasingly consumed by pride. Maybe you have hidden covetousness or lust? Maybe you lie so often you're having trouble really remembering what's true, what's not or don't even realize you're lying. Are there things you're avoiding? Are there things you simply can't see about yourself? Are there places where your conscience has been numbed?

John Calvin, in his opening section of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* wrote:

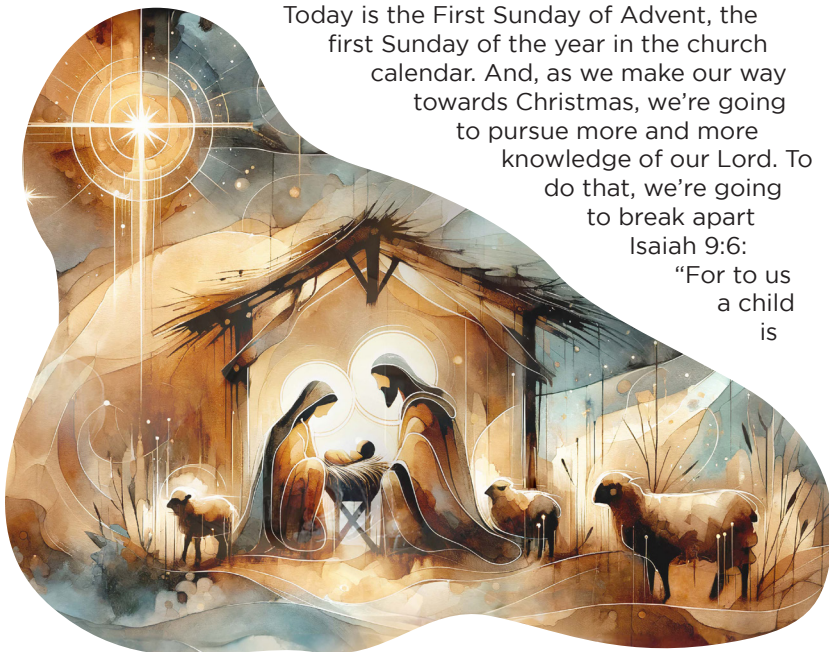
"Without knowledge of self there is no knowledge of God... Without knowledge of God, there is no knowledge of self." He expands on this idea noting, "From the feeling of our own ignorance, vanity, poverty, infirmity, depravity, and corruption, we recognize that the true light of wisdom, sound virtue, full abundance of every good, and purity of righteousness rest in the Lord alone... Knowledge of ourselves not only arouses us to seek God, but also, as it were, leads us by the hand to find him."

See, when we contemplate our own humanness, we are inspired to turn our attention to the divine. When we acknowledge our own brokenness, we are moved to turn towards a Savior.

This is what we acknowledge in our practice of corporate confession in worship. "Who can save us!?" There is ONE.

Today is the First Sunday of Advent, the first Sunday of the year in the church calendar. And, as we make our way towards Christmas, we're going to pursue more and more knowledge of our Lord. To do that, we're going to break apart
Isaiah 9:6:

"For to us
a child
is



born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Each week, we want to introduce you to another facet of who Jesus is. We want to get MORE of Jesus in front of you so that you might begin to see MORE of yourself... because growing in the knowledge of God will enrich your life and make for a great Advent! We begin our journey together thinking about the Wonderful Counselor as we look to Hebrews 4:13-16.

From our passage, we know three things about what a Wonderful Counselor is:

First, a wonderful counselor can see things about you that you yourself cannot see.

In verse 13, the author of Hebrews tells us "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:13) We are exposed completely before God, and that is... scary. Not only are our bald spots are not hidden from God. But our flaws, our brokenness, self-centeredness, despising of others, self-glorification, our sin... They're all laid bare before the judge. The one to whom we must give account.

Maybe you've had someone video tape a golf swing for you. When you watch the video, you can see your posture, where your head looks up, if you bend your elbow. You don't get that without the outside/objective perspective of the video. You see every flaw and failing. And in some ways, that's what we have in the Word, in Christ. When the mirror of the Sermon on the Mount or the mirror of the 10 Commandments is lifted up to our lives; when we meet with Jesus in daily prayer and meditation, it's kind of like watching a video of our pathetic golf swing. We begin to see ourselves for who we are: we see rebellion and anarchy dressed up in skin. The good news is that a Wonderful Counselor won't leave you in ignorance. They help you understand your strengths/weaknesses, your potential/growth areas. This is critical for us!

This is certainly true in the workplace. Emotional Intelligence, EQ, Soft Skills, these have become HUGE topics over the last few decades. Researchers have identified that those with high EQ consistently receive higher salaries, advance through promotions more quickly, and become a significant factor in reducing turnover on staff teams.³ One Harvard Business School article concluded: "emotional intelligence (EQ)... is the

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strongest predictor of performance... Employees with high emotional intelligence are more likely to stay calm under pressure, resolve conflict effectively, and respond to co-workers with empathy." In the workplace, when you're self-aware and can identify how your own bald spots and weaknesses influence your interactions with others, people want to work with you and for you!

This is why companies pay big bucks to run their executive teams through assessments, coaching, and work with consultants! High self-awareness consistently produces positive results that impact the entire organization.

So, if self-awareness is of such great value in the workplace, how much more important could it be for our personal lives... our spiritual lives?

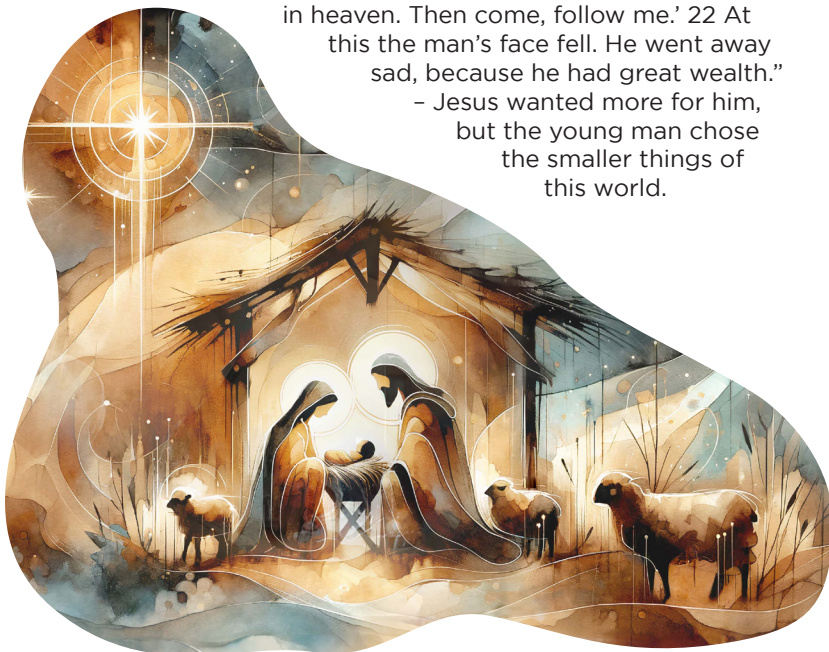
Again, as Calvin said, "Without knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of God."

It's shocking to be confronted with our shame, pride, self-centeredness - But if we don't address it, if we don't become aware of it, we will remain stunted. We won't grow into God's vision of who he designed us to be. We see Jesus fulfill the role of a "Wonderful Counselor" holding up a mirror over and over in the Gospels.

Think of Nicodemus (John 3) - Jesus tells him, "You must be Born Again." Nicodemus replies: "How can this be?" Jesus holds up the mirror: "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things!?" - Nicodemus believed himself to be wise, educated, an expert in the ways of God. But Jesus saw more for him.

Think of the Woman at the well (John 4) - In their conversation, Jesus finally holds up a mirror saying, "...you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband." He wants more for her.

Think of the Rich Young Ruler (Mark 10) - The verse says, "21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. 'One thing you lack,' he said. 'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' 22 At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth."
- Jesus wanted more for him, but the young man chose the smaller things of this world.



Over and over Jesus presents people with the reality of their lives, holding up a mirror that they might see their frailty while calling them into something greater.

Again, Hebrews says our sin is laid bare before God the judge... but we're not to wallow in sin and self-pity. Hebrews tells us that Jesus is our Great High Priest. And that means that Jesus, who knows us, who understands us, who sees our sin and brokenness, whom we have rebelled against, JESUS represents us to God. He atones/purifies us in the eyes of God.

To live into this purified/atoned-for version of ourselves is a process that takes time. We are on a path of Progressive Sanctification. We spend our lives growing more and more aware of the goodness and beauty of the Savior as he holds up a mirror over and over again, helping us see the places we need His hand in our lives.

As part of submitting ourselves to this process, Hebrews calls us to Hold Firmly to the Confession of Faith before us. This is in line with First Pres's Value #2 "Hold Fast" - We as First Pres challenge one another to stay founded on Scripture and centered on Christ, who holds us steady. We're challenged to ask one another, "Are your priorities consistent with Scripture?"

Maybe another way of asking that is, "Have you looked in the mirror lately?" The Wonderful Counselor sees things about us that we cannot see and holds up a mirror awakening us to our bald spots. Have you looked in the mirror lately? The next thing to highlight in our passage is that a Wonderful Counselor listens and empathizes with us, even when we think no one else can ever understand our situation. We see in verse 15 that "we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet he did not sin."

It's been said that "Empathy is your pain in my heart." And over and over again we see Jesus move towards the hurting in empathy. Jesus knew human pain and grief. Jesus moved towards people in their suffering. Jesus's heart was, at times, broken. But Hebrews is telling us more than that. It's not just that Jesus had empathy or compassion in general, it's that he empathizes with our weaknesses. The Greek word for Weakness is "Asthenia." It can mean different things. It can refer to illness, sickness, disease, vulnerability, helplessness, or (more in line with Hebrews 4) poor judgement, lack of spiritual insight, moral deficiency. We humans are weak-minded, prone to evil. We constantly give in to the temptations of

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this world. It's as Paul wrote in Romans 7, "19 ... I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing." But Incarnate Jesus walked this world fully-man. Jesus faced the trials of sin himself as a human and did not sin. AND He walks with us as we face temptation.

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Jesus knows the temptations of this life. He came to this earth, got down in the pit with us, and provided a way out. He lifts us up out of the pit. He sets our feet on solid ground and gives us a new song to sing. Jesus can appreciate both the prodigal son who is consumed by temptation to reckless living, as well as the temptation of the older brother to be self-righteous and self-centered. And he knows what it is to avoid both these ditches on the side of the road. We are weak, but he is strong. Do you believe Jesus cares about you? Do you believe he understands you? Let him walk with you.

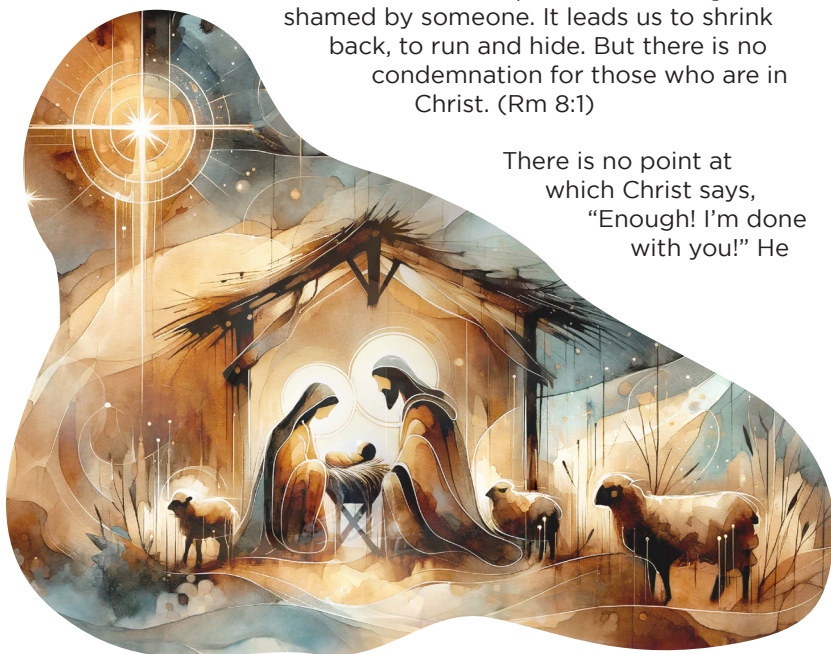
Finally friends, the Wonderful Counselor offers hope and healing when you are stuck. There's a scene in John 5 - Jesus comes across a paralyzed man lying next to a community pool. He asks, "Do you want to get well?" The man has been unable to get up and walk for 38 years, and Jesus tells him, "Get up and walk." And he does.

Luke 19 - A despised tax collector, who has no hope of being loved or accepted by his people, no hope for a life with the People of God climbs a tree to get a better glimpse of Jesus, and Jesus says, "Come down so I may stay at your house."

John 8 - Woman caught in adultery and is set to be executed. In Jesus's presence, the angry mob disperses. Jesus asks the woman, "Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir." "Then neither do I condemn you."

Most of us know the experience of being shamed by someone. It leads us to shrink back, to run and hide. But there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. (Rm 8:1)

There is no point at which Christ says, "Enough! I'm done with you!" He



understands our "Weakness" and offers hope and healing. And so, then, we can, "...approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Heb 4:16)

The story is told of a young Union soldier during the American Civil War. The soldier reportedly lost both his brothers and his father in the Battle of Gettysburg and was granted leave to travel to Washington to request exemption from military service so he might go back to the family farm to care for his mother and sister.

When he arrived at the White House, he asked to see the president, and the guards told him, "You can't see the president! He is a very busy man! Go away! Get back out to the battle lines where you belong!"

Dejected, the man walked away and sat on a bench where he began to weep. Soon after, a boy came up and asked the soldier what was wrong. The soldier shared a bit of his story and the boy said, "Come with me." The boy took the soldier by the hand and headed back to the White House. The boy ran the soldier right past the guards and in through the front door. Once inside, they rushed past high-ranking officials and military leaders, but no one said a word.

The soldier was baffled! Why wasn't anyone stopping them!? Finally, they reached the office of the President. The boy didn't even knock, he just walked right in with the soldier stumbling behind him. Standing on the other side of the room, looking over maps and battle plans, were Abraham Lincoln and some of his staff. Lincoln looked at the boy with a smile and said, "Good afternoon, Tad, what can I do for you?" The boy, Tad Lincoln responded, "Daddy, this soldier needs to talk to you..."

We have a Great High Priest a Wonderful Counselor who takes us by the hand, and brings us before the Father, so we might have strength for today, and bright hope for tomorrow. We can be confident in receiving mercy and help from God, for he knows us, has experienced what we have experienced, and longs to restore us and give us hope.

Dear ones, this Advent, would you like to be embraced by the Wonderful Counselor? His name is Jesus. Let him come close.