

“Your Life: A Work in Progress”

Proverbs 8 (selected verses)

- 1 Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice?
- 2 At the highest point along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand;
- 3 beside the gate leading into the city, at the entrance, she cries aloud:
- 4 “To you, O people, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind.
- 5 You who are simple, gain prudence; you who are foolish, set your hearts on it.
- 6 Listen, for I have trustworthy things to say; I open my lips to speak what is right.
- 7 My mouth speaks what is true, for my lips detest wickedness.
- 8 All the words of my mouth are just; none of them is crooked or perverse.
- 9 To the discerning all of them are right; they are upright to those who have found knowledge.
- 10 Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold,
- 11 for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.
- 17 I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me.
- 20 I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice,
- 21 bestowing a rich inheritance on those who love me and making their treasuries full.
- 22 “The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old;
- 23 I was formed long ages ago, at the very beginning, when the world came to be.
- 27 I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep,
- 28 when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep,
- 30 Then I was constantly at his side. I was filled with delight day after day,
rejoicing always in his presence,
- 31 rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind.
- 32 “Now then, my children, listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways.
- 33 Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not disregard it.
- 34 Blessed are those who listen to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway.
- 35 For those who find me find life and receive favor from the LORD.
- 36 But those who fail to find me harm themselves; all who hate me love death.”

Introduction

Pastor John Ortberg imagined picking his car from a tune-up, and the technician says, “Your car is in great shape.” Later that day the brakes didn’t work. He found out that it was out of brake fluid. “Are you kidding me?”

He went back to the shop and asked, “Why didn't you tell me?” The technician said, “Well, I didn't want you to feel bad. Plus, to be honest, I was afraid you might get upset with me. I want this to be a safe place where you feel loved and accepted.” John was furious. “I didn't come here for a little fantasy-based ego boost. When it comes to my car I want the truth.”

Or, going to the doctor's office for a check-up my doctor tells me, “You are a magnificent physical specimen, you have the body of an Olympian.” Later that day while climbing the stairs my heart gives out. My arteries were so clogged I was like one jelly donut away from the grim reaper. So, I go back and say,

“Why didn't you tell me?” “Well, if I tell people stuff like that they get kind of offended. They might not come back. I want this to be a safe place where you feel loved and accepted.” “When it comes to my health I want the truth.” Anybody have any idea where this is headed? (from “Using your introduction to gain your listener's interest” by John Ortberg).

I. Two Dinner Invitations

In the Book of Proverbs, King Solomon personifies “wisdom” in two people, Lady Wisdom and Lady Foolishness. Both are women, both invite guests for dinner at her house, both promise benefits to those who accept her invitation. One will tell you the truth, the other what will make you feel good.

Here in Proverbs 8, Lady Wisdom is highlighted. “Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice? ‘To you, O people, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind... Listen, for I have trustworthy things to say; My mouth speaks what is true. All the words of my mouth are just; none of them is crooked or perverse. To the discerning all of them are right; to those who have found knowledge.’”

We live in a world of competing invitations. Will you listen and respond to Wisdom? Or the World? The Lord calls us to fill our minds with his wisdom to help us make daily decisions. The Bible contrasts wisdom with what it calls foolishness. Not merely a silliness of joking, frivolous ways, foolishness is wickedly stupid, mindlessly egotistical, a rash, vile way of life.

As with many sermons, I can identify other people I know like that. Not me! But, I must admit that I have my aftertastes of the Lady Foolishness dinner. I suppose you do as well.

Lady Wisdom wants us to know and practice wisdom: living with patience and love, listening with grace, adoration, beauty, and respect. The answer to the rhetorical question, “Does not wisdom call out?” is a certain “Yes.” God’s Word of law and grace, judgment and mercy, conviction and forgiveness gives us all we need to know for life as the Lord intends for it to be. Wisdom’s call is certain.

Wisdom is also a public declaration “where the paths meet, beside the city gate entrance.” As the secular culture around us tries to limit or even eliminate biblical wisdom in business and politics, public education and community relations, our faith in Christ should inform our behavior in all these areas of life. Lady Wisdom “takes her stand at the highest point along the way.”

Wisdom’s call is personal, addressed to everyone. “Yes, I mean you!” because each one of us has a great capacity for foolishness. All of us can be nagged by a sense of empty places in our lives. Wisdom fills those places with what the Bible calls “the fear of God” and “the knowledge of God.”

This wisdom from the Lady Wisdom is reliable and purposeful. Airwaves and internet are filled with crooked, perverse, foolish speech, unreliable opinions and advice. “Listen,” Wisdom raises her voice, “for I have trustworthy things to say; My mouth speaks what is true; All the words of my mouth are just.”

It reminds me of Paul in Philippians 4, “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

II. The Way of Wisdom

Proverbs 8 can be seen as directed toward Jesus. First Corinthians 1 proclaims, “To those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Many of the phrases in Proverbs 8 can certainly look forward to Jesus: “All the words of my mouth are just... I walk in the way of righteousness... I was there when he set the heavens in place... I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind... For those who find me find life and receive favor from the LORD.”

There’s opposition between secular wisdom and Godly wisdom. Again, Paul writes “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” However, to those who are on the path to salvation Christ is the wisdom of God. “You are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (I Corinthians 1:30).

I came recently across this amazing story in Billy Graham’s *Decision* magazine. Nard Pugyao has been a missionary pilot for Wycliffe Bible Translators for 41 years now. It all began in March 1956, when he was about 6. A tall, pale white man stumbled into his home village on the Philippine island of Luzon. “I’ve come to learn your language,” he said. “I’d like to write it down and then give you God’s Word in your language.” The elders asked him, “Who is your God?” “He’s the God of heaven and earth,” the man answered. “And he created you.” They started teaching this man, Dick Roe, their language. They thought that maybe his God could free them from the spirits.

Nard talked to Dick often. He tried to explain the concept of God’s grace, but their lives revolved around the revenge killings of their headhunter ancestors. Grace didn’t make sense. When Nard was about 13, Dick had to return to the United States to raise support for his ministry. But before he went back, he finished translating the Gospel of Mark and gave Nard a copy. That was 7 years in the making.

Nard tells more of the story. “Sitting on top of a rock, I read the Gospel of Mark in my heart language. It felt like I was actually there. But the further I read, the more distressed I felt. A mob of people came to get Jesus out of the Garden. What did He do wrong? I read as fast as I could. They accused Him of all kinds of false things. It was excruciating to read that they forced Him to carry a wooden cross and then nailed Him to it.

A hatred of God swelled up deep in my heart. I shook my fist and shouted, ‘Why should I believe in a powerless God like You?’ I couldn’t understand why God wouldn’t protect His own Son. I wanted a god who would protect me from the spirits that demanded that we sacrifice our cows, chickens, pigs and dogs. This God didn’t even save His own Son.

Suddenly God reached down into my heart. I heard Him say. ‘That’s how much I love you. I gave my Son for you.’ I went back and picked up my Gospel, brushed it off and sat back on that rock to see what happened next. It was an incredible moment as I read that Jesus rose from the grave on the third day. Nobody from among the Isnag people, had ever risen from the grave. The resurrection story changed my life.”

Dick came back to the Philippines in 1964, and Nard told him he had met Jesus. He was overjoyed. “How would you like to go with me and help me finish translating the Bible into Isnag?” So at about age 14, he left Dibagat. It was his first flight. “I clutched Dick’s leg and screamed as we took off. Terror filled me for the next 55 minutes. I decided that flying was meant only for birds. But God didn’t agree.”

After high school, Nard went to several aviation-training programs in the United States. He met and married Sandy, a missionary’s daughter, and they joined Wycliffe Bible Translators in 1977. In 1979, Wycliffe assigned them to the Philippines, where he served as pilot with some of the same missionaries who had an impact on him as a young man.

On June 24, 1982, they experienced the greatest moment of their ministry. “Sandy and I, along with our eldest son, Steve, packed 500 copies of the newly completed Isnag New Testament into a plane and flew to Dibagat to deliver them to my people. As I loaded the plane, I wondered what would have become of me, and so many others in our village, if Dick Roe had ignored God’s call to bring the Bible to the Isnag people. My heart was about to burst as I realized again the penetrating power of the Bible and what it means to read God’s Word in your heart language.”

Conclusion

Speaking for God and for the Lord Jesus Christ, Lady Wisdom finishes Proverbs 8 saying, “Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not disregard it. 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.”

Let us pray together.

I Corinthians 1:18-30

- 18** For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,
but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
- 19** For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”
- 20** Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age?
Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?
- 21** For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him,
God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.
- 22** Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom,
23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,
24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks,
Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.
- 25** For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom,
and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.
- 26** Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called.
Not many of you were wise by human standards;
not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.
- 27** But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise;
God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.
- 28** God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—
to nullify the things that are,
29 so that no one may boast before him.
- 30** It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—
that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.