

October 4, 2009
Wisdom Cries Out ...
Proverbs 1:20-33

Proverbs is a textbook about the basics of life. It begins by considering the most important lesson we can ever learn - "*The fear (reverence, obedience) of the Lord is the beginning (source, controlling principle) of knowledge*" (1:7). Wisdom comes from God.

Proverbs speaks about the importance of our relationships with other people (1:8-19). We need godly advice from Christian role models - a parent, spiritual mentor, or prayer partner.

Proverbs 1 concludes by underlining, highlighting, writing-in-capitals, emphatically reemphasizing over and over again the danger of taking these basic principles lightly ... or worse yet, deliberately disobeying them! In life, it doesn't really matter which subjects we choose to study, or what kind of job we earn our living by. But what is important is that we understand how to distinguish good from evil, and that we know how to make wise decisions.

Wisdom Is Available

In this passage (1:20-21), Wisdom shouts to make herself heard above the clamour of life! She is portrayed as a courageous heroine "*calling out*" (with all her heart and soul, again and again and again), "*raising her voice*" (calling like a town crier, "*Hear ye!*" over and over). In past centuries, town criers were the means of communication since most people could not read or write. Proclamations, local bylaws, market days, advertisements, were all proclaimed by a bellman or crier (town criers were protected by the ruling monarch, as they sometimes brought bad news such as tax increases; to this day, any town crier in the British Commonwealth is protected under an old English law that they are not to be hindered or heckled while performing their duties; to harm a town crier was seen as an act of treason against the ruling monarchy). The town crier, having read his message to the people, would then "Post A Notice" would attach then it to the door of the local inn.

Wisdom is a town crier, standing amid the throngs of people, highly visible and prominent. She is proclaiming God's truth. She is posting a notice: God's wisdom is not hidden. It is not some secret treasure which we must seek in obscure nooks or dark crannies. It is very evident! She is calling for our attention! Where is wisdom?

1. Wisdom is found in God's Word: The Bible is God's inspired Word; it is His Wisdom. Most of us have at least one copy of it. But does it get read? And if it is read, do we take it seriously? Do we do what God says?

2. Wisdom is found in our consciences: God has given us a basic knowledge of right and wrong. We need to listen. And we need to actually do what is right ...

3. Wisdom comes from those who love us:

- A child: *"Dad, you're sure gone a lot."*
- A friend: *"As a friend I have to tell you that the way you are living is not consistent with God's principles." "I want to affirm that you are really using the gifts God has given you." "You know that idea you have to start a small group, I think you should go for it."*
- A spouse: *"We don't seem to talk anymore." Or, "You seem to enjoy being with your friends more than being with me."*

Don't you really appreciate those friends/family who love you enough and are honest enough to challenge you when you are doing something stupid?

4. Wisdom comes from creation: We can learn lessons from the world around us.

- we can explain many of its principles scientifically, but understanding the complexities of the universe only further emphasizes God's wisdom. German astronomer, Johannes Kepler, is credited with saying that through his study of the universe, he was *"thinking God's thoughts after him."*
- As we look at creation we see God - and we can learn from His creation how to live well. Robert the Bruce observed the continual try-try-again persistence of a spider building a web, and resolved to try-try-again to win Scottish independence; what can I learn from observing the way God's world works?
- The effects of climate change (retreating glaciers, rising sea levels, expanding deserts, increasing CO₂ in the atmosphere) are saying things to us - do we listen?

5. **Wisdom comes from history:** A popular proverb goes, *"Those who don't know their history are doomed to repeat it."* As we reflect on the past, we see time and again how God has saved His people. We can attribute medical breakthroughs, military victories, and other watershed moments to human genius and courage - or we can recognize that many of these heroic acts and great discoveries were done by people who loved God and were empowered and inspired by Him. Some are bona fide miracles; there is no other explanation. We can all look back and see times when God was at work in our lives and in the lives of people we know. God's hand is on my story, your story, and the lives of everyone we know - if we choose to see it and acknowledge it.

6. Wisdom comes from our bodies:

- The number of us with stress-related illnesses is now greater than the number of people with mood disorders - what is that saying to us about our culture? About our lives?
- When our bodies get weary after 6 days of work, what are they saying to us?

7. **Wisdom comes during our prayers and times of reflection:** God can and does speak directly to us as we pray and reflect on all we learn from Him. These nudges and insights will always in accordance with His Word and biblical principles.

We Can Choose Not To listen ...

God's promise is that if we listen we will receive God's blessing (1:23). But many of us choose to ignore the wisdom around us? Why? We know what is right yet we choose what is wrong. It's

not so much that we are ignorant, as that we are disobedient. This is nothing new - I specialized in that sort of thing as a child. But I never grew out of it. It's just the ways in which my "contrariness" is expressed that has changed. Now, instead of trying to sneak a cookie from the cookie jar, I may try and sneak up to 20 or 30 km/h over the speed limit if I figure there's no RCMP around ... Now, instead of trying to trick a friend to give me a hockey card, I may try to fudge my income tax ... *"How long will you simple ones¹ love your simple ways?"* asks the Lord, *"How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge?"* (1:22) ...

These things are SO stressful! Even if I don't get caught, I worry I might. And if I do get caught, there are consequences with trying to go my own way. It's a struggle we all have ...

Proverbs suggests we look inside ourselves for some of these issues ...

1. **Stubbornness** - God's Wisdom says, *"you rejected me when I called ..."* (1:24). The word *"rejected"* means *"to directly refuse"* to do something. Pharaoh rejected God's clear direction and refused to let the Israelites go - he paid a price. Solomon talks about a lazy man who refuses to get a job - he will pay a price. A stubborn person refuses to believe that God might have something to say about his behaviour. He could not possibly need correction. He could not possibly be wrong. He is not willing to change. He will pay a price.
2. **Insensitivity** - *"No one gave heed when I stretched out my hand ..."* (1:24). Have you ever been in a situation where you tried to talk with someone standing right in front of you, but she paid no attention and passed right by. That is what Solomon is talking about here. God's wisdom is all around us. Her warnings are evident. Her truth is clear. But we choose to take no notice ...
3. **Indifference** - *"You ignored all my advice ..."* (1:25). Some people know better - it's NOT that they don't know God's truth. But they choose to let good advice go. In effect they say, *"I couldn't care less!"* *"God is just not that important."*
4. **Defensiveness** - *"You would not accept my rebuke"* (1:25). In Hebrew this means the advice was not just ignored, but actively thrown back in the wise-person's face. Advice is resisted. Solomon, wise man that he is, recognizes that those who often think they know better are really struggling with low self-esteem - Proverbs 15:31-32: *"He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise. He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding."* People who are teachable have a humility that allows them to recognize that they don't know it all - they need wise counsel.

The Decisions We Make Have Consequences

In this life or the next, we will all face the consequences of our decisions. *"The waywardness of*

¹ *"Simple ones"* in Proverbs refers to people who choose to ignore God's ethics, choosing the "simple" - that is, the easy - way of living: doing whatever you feel like, whenever you feel like it, without thinking through the consequences, without reflecting on bigger issues of morality and ethics.

the simple (those who insist on doing what they like, when they like, how they like - with no respect for God or other people) *will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them ...*" (Proverbs 1:32). At the end of the day there's a cost.

- If you mismanage your money - spending more than you have - at the end of the day, there's a cost.
- If you are not loyal to your spouse - at the end of the day, there's a cost.
- If you routinely break the traffic laws - at the end of the day, there's a cost.
- If you eat poorly, don't exercise, or have other bad habits - at the end of the day, there's a cost.
- If you don't pay your taxes - at the end of the day, there's a cost.
- If you gossip - at the end of the day, there's a cost.
- If we as a culture don't take responsibility for the health of our waterways, the quality of the atmosphere and other environmental issues - at the end of the day, there's a cost.
- If I ignore God, don't follow His commands, refuse to live by His ethics - at the end of the day, there's a cost.

"But whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm" (Proverbs 1:33). In general, life goes well when we listen to God's Wisdom and choose to live by His ways.

Stepping back - trying to be objective - it just makes sense to follow God's ways. In practice - in day to day life - it is often so difficult. Temptation is so subtle. Compromise is so appealing. Much of the time we don't even realize we've crossed the line and are doing stupid things ...

Wisdom Cries Out ...

Wisdom, the town crier, warns us to have our ears open, our eyes peeled, and our wits about us. Be very aware of the temptations to compromise. They are far more subtle than most of us realize. Wisdom says, *"Listen. Look. Learn. Be Wise. Do what is right - in every circumstance."*

God is always prodding us, if we take notice. He gives us unmistakable nudges (sometimes He even gives us shoves!). They are warning signs: from friends, our consciences, His Word ... Proverbs 3:11-12, says, *"My son, do not despise the LORD'S discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in."* *"These commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life,"* writes Solomon (Proverbs 6:23).

Are you teachable? We all have qualities of character that need attention. Will you allow God's Spirit to address those issues in your life that need attention? That takes humility. It takes integrity. It takes honesty. It takes courage. It takes faith. It may hurt. But it gives life ...