

Courting Woman Wisdom

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[0 : 00] Proverbs chapter 8 Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right.

For my mouth will utter truth. Wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are righteous. There is nothing twisted or crooked in them.

They are all straight to Him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge. Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold.

For wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her. I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion.

The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil, pride and arrogance, and the way of evil, and perverted speech I hate. I have counsel and sound wisdom. I have insight. I have strength.

[1 : 25] By me, kings reign, and rulers decree what is just. By me, princes rule, and nobles, all who govern justly. I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.

Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver.

I walk in the way of righteousness, in the paths of justice, granting an inheritance to those who love me, and filling their treasuries. The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His work, the first of His acts of old.

Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths, I was brought forth. When there were no springs abounding with water.

Before the mountains had been shaped. Before the hills, I was brought forth. Before He had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world.

[2 : 28] When He established the heavens, I was there. When He drew a circle on the face of the deep. When He made firm the skies above. When He established the fountains of the deep.

When He assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress His command. When He marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was beside Him, like a master workman.

And I was daily His delight, rejoicing before Him always. Rejoicing in His inhabited world, and delighting in the children of man. And now, O sons, listen to me.

Blessed are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and do not neglect it. Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.

For whoever finds me, finds life, and obtains favor from the Lord. But he who fails to find me, injures himself. All who hate me, love death.

[3 : 32] This is God's holy and authoritative word. In last week's passage, chapter 7, verses 4 to 5.

The father exhorted his son this way. Say to wisdom, you are my sister, and call inside your intimate friend. To keep you from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words.

So the forbidden woman, which means literally strange woman. It's a reference to a woman that doesn't belong to your family. Someone that is not your wife, but your neighbor's wife. If you want to be protected from the seduction of the strange woman, he told us that we ought to make wisdom familiar to us.

Wisdom, our family. And if you want to remain estranged from the adulteress, you have to make yourself familiar with the wisdom of God. And that's where Proverbs 8 picks up.

It gives us a portrait of personified woman wisdom. As a contrast from the portrait of the forbidden woman from chapter 7.

[4 : 39] And the main exhortation of this passage is that we should court woman wisdom in order to find divine favor and eternal life. So in verses 1 to 11, we see the instruction of wisdom.

She instructs her hearers to learn from her. And then in verses 12 to 31, we see the introduction of wisdom. She introduces herself and explains her value. And then finally in verses 32 to 36, we see the invitation of wisdom.

Where we are exhorted to seek her diligently. So the instruction, the introduction, and the invitation. So let's look at the instruction of wisdom in verses 1 to 11. It says in verses 1 to 3, So on the one hand, we were told already in Proverbs chapter 2, that we should call out for insight and raise our voice for understanding.

And that we were told to seek wisdom. So on the one hand, we are to call out for wisdom and raise our voice. But on the other hand, it's also true that wisdom herself calls out to us and raises her voice for us.

So it depicts wisdom as using these elevated platforms beside the way as our podium from which to teach us. She stands at the crossroads, it says, where there is most foot traffic.

[6 : 13] Where people are deciding which way to go. And you can hear her, it says, beside the gates in front of the town at the entrance of the portals. In contrast with the forbidden woman, the forbidden woman was a lurker.

If you remember from chapter 7, verse 12, she was lying in wait in every street corner, as if to pounce on unwitting, I guess, unwitting bystanders, people that would come by.

And she also worked with traps and ambushes in the darkness of night, in the cover of night.

Woman wisdom, however, has nothing to hide. So she walks out in the open, speaks forthrightly.

She's at the city gates, the center of public commerce and politics, offering her insight to all who would listen. And her audience, it says in verses 4 to 5, is all of humanity.

To you, O men, I call, and my cry is to the children of men. O simple ones, learn prudence, O fools, learn sense. This is an instance of the grammatical convention that I mentioned a few sermons ago, called the collective masculine.

[7 : 21] Old Testament Hebrew, New Testament Greek, just like English and many other modern languages, use the masculine noun and pronoun when it's referring to a group of both men and women. And as we have seen, the book of Proverbs often employs the male perspective because men were representative leaders in society and it's addressed to them.

And this is why, for example, you find warnings about the adulterous woman in chapters 5 to 7, but no parallel warnings about the predatory man. But this does not mean that Proverbs is only applicable to men or that it has an implicit bias against women.

Just as it warns specifically against the adulterous with her smooth words, it also warns specifically against men of perverted speech in Proverbs 2, verse 12.

It personifies folly as a woman in chapter 9, but it also personifies wisdom as a woman throughout the book. It has an entire section dedicated to praising a woman who fears the Lord in chapter 31, who also appears to be schooled in wisdom.

And so Proverbs is written for a general audience. It's written for the children of man that includes both men and women. But here, there is a more particular audience than just all of humanity.

[8 : 39] It says in verses 5 to 6, Proverbs employs a variety of terms to characterize the fool.

Of those terms, the simple one is the mildest term. It refers to those who are naive or gullible, people who are easily duped.

They are duped by evildoers in particular. And so they're still responsible for their naivete, but their gullibility is not morally neutral.

They're still morally culpable. But of the range of words that are used to describe the fool, this one is the mildest. It's the least problematic. They're not settled in their foolish ways yet.

You can still speak to them and exhort them. Hopefully, they will listen and gain prudence. That's what they need to learn, prudence or shrewdness. The term fool used here is the one that's most commonly used to refer to the fool in the book of Proverbs.

[9 : 45] It occurs 70 times in the entire Old Testament, and 67 of those times is in the Proverbs. It can have several nuances, but its basic root meaning is to be thick or fat.

So it refers to someone who is thick-headed or obtuse, and for that reason, short-sighted and foolhardy. So then wisdom is particularly concerned with instructing the simple-minded and the thick-headed.

If only they would learn prudence, if only they would learn sense, there is still hope for them. And so a woman calls out to them in verses 6 to 9, All of this is also a contrast with the smooth and wily

nature of the forbidden woman.

The words of the woman's wisdom are all noble, right, true, righteous, straight. There is no wickedness, nothing twisted or crooked.

In contrast to the words of the forbidden woman, which were slippery, twisted, deceptive. Wisdom is a straight shooter. However, there is an important caveat.

[11:16] Her words are all straight, only to him who understands. Her words are right, only to those who find knowledge.

To those who do not understand, to those who have not found knowledge, even wisdom's unvarnished truth appears false.

Nowadays, a lot of people talk about cognitive biases. And there's one of the popular ones, the confirmation bias, right, the tendency to interpret new evidence as a confirmation of one's existing beliefs and theories.

And as much as people like to think that they are cruelly rational and objective, humans often take new data and finagle it to fit their existing prejudices and preconceptions. And such is the case with the fool.

The fool is immune to learning. He is impervious to instruction. He never comes to understand. He never learns. Look again at verse 5 and the repetition of the word learn.

[12:24] O simple words, learn prudence. O fools, learn sense. The Hebrew word that is translated as learn here is the same word that is translated as understand in verse 9.

And notably, in the book of Proverbs, this word is used only to refer to those who acquire wisdom.

The moment you learn, you cease to be a fool because only the wise learn in Proverbs.

The fool has no use for learning. Proverbs 12, 15 says, The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice. Learning wisdom requires patience, self-discipline, humility.

It demands change, a reformation. In contrast, folly comes easily because it requires no self-discipline, only self-indulgence.

It demands no change. It preserves the status quo. And this is why wisdom is a hard sell. This is why woman wisdom needs to make this compelling sales pitch.

[13:31] She says in verses 10 to 11, Take my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.

Wisdom has incomparable value. Think for a moment about the things that you desire in life, things you wish you had or hope to attain, perhaps traveling the world, maybe fame or fortune, a dream job, a spouse or a family or a car, a jewel or a laptop, whatever it might be, it does not compare with wisdom.

So you must choose wisdom over all else. That's the exhortation of this passage because in her we find divine favor and eternal life. That's a nice transition to the second part of the passage, verses 12 to 31, which is the introduction of wisdom.

She introduces herself to us and explains our true value. And usually when people are trying to sell you on the value of something, they often mention that the thing is, one, proven, and two, that it is time-tested, right?

So we know that, have that phrase, proven and time-tested. First, they mention that it has proven benefits. This is the page with all the raving reviews and endorsements. And then second, they mention that it's time-tested, meaning it has been around for a while, it has outlasted its competition, it has demonstrated staying power, it's been around longer than its rivals, which means it has experienced a thing or two more, which makes it more reliable or trustworthy.

[15:08] And this is why people often prefer well-established brands, right, that have been around for a while. And that's why they say, well, we've been around since 1928 or established in 1942 and so on.

And similarly, in her self-introduction, woman wisdom tells us of her proven benefits in verses 12 to 21, and then about her ancient origin in verses 22 to 31.

First, she tells us of her proven benefits. The second person pronouns of verses 4 to 11 give way to the first person pronouns here, because wisdom is not talking for herself.

She says in verse 12, I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion. Her name is wisdom. Wisdom, this word is used in other parts of Scripture to refer to an expertise or a skill in something, such as arts, war, judgship, or governance.

So it's not merely bookish, kind of theoretical knowledge, it's applied knowledge. That's what wisdom is in Scripture. And wisdom, as it is used here in the book of Proverbs, is about life. [16:20] So it's expertise in life. It's skill for living in proper relationship with God and with the world. It's expertise that enables one to navigate the complexities and difficulties and the realities of life.

And woman wisdom discloses her close consorts. She says she dwells with, is accompanied by prudence, knowledge and discretion. Prudence is shrewdness, which is the corrective to naivete. Knowledge is the building block of wisdom. It's you apply the knowledge in order to have wisdom. It's the corrective to ignorance. Discretion is the quality of being careful or considerate. It's the corrective to carelessness or impulsiveness. And so she continues her introduction in verse 13 this way, The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil and pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.

This echoes the thesis statement of the book of Proverbs found in chapter 1, verse 7, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. And the fear of the Lord is another name for wisdom.

[17:30] Notice the structure of verse 13. It tells us about two things that are hated. Evil and then pride and arrogance. Wisdom tells us that she herself hates pride and arrogance in the way of evil and perverted speech.

And she tells us that the fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. So structurally, wisdom and fear of the Lord are parallel, which suggests that to have wisdom is to fear the Lord.

So that means you can't have wisdom apart from relating to God in a proper way. To fear the Lord is to relate to Him and respond to Him with reverent obedience and humble submission.

Proverbs chapter 15, verse 33 confirms this. It says, The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom and humility comes before honor. This is why wisdom militates against pride.

A human being cannot simultaneously have a high view of God and a high view of himself. Just as one can only take in the soaring height and the grandeur of a mountain by looking up, we cannot rightly appreciate God and relate to God unless we assume a position of lowliness, a posture of humility, and look up to Him in submission.

[18:57] To be wise is to fear the Lord. And woman wisdom continues to demonstrate our value by telling us about our proven benefits in verses 14 to 16.

I have counsel and sound wisdom. I have insight. I have strength. By me, kings reign and rulers decree what is just. By me, princes rule and nobles all who govern justly.

It's by woman wisdom that kings, rulers, princes and nobles govern. During this pandemic, I have developed a newfound respect for our governing authorities because even as a pastor of a small local church, I've had to wrestle with both the spiritual and physical consequences of every decision that I, along with the eldership, have to make to consider how certain words and phrases are going to land on some people differently, to anticipate cheers, both cheers and jeers from different sectors of people with various views and opinions, different political, theological, and spiritual sides of the spectrum.

I've had to make many decisions on the fly from a place of uncertainty but nevertheless have to live with the certain consequences of those decisions. And that's the case for me who's just a small local church pastor.

I can't imagine being a mega church pastor with thousands of people in their church. I can't imagine being a president with billions of people under his authority.

[20:33] I'm sure the complexities and weight of things that they deal with are orders of magnitude greater than what I face. And that requires great wisdom.

And so woman wisdom tells us, you know how these rulers do what they do. Not the ones that do it badly but ones that who do it with justice. Do you know what enables them to govern justly?

She says, by me. All those who rule and govern justly, they govern by me, says Lady Wisdom. And woman wisdom's words become increasingly personally and intimate in verse 17.

Personally and intimate in verse 17. I love those who love me and those who seek me diligently find me. This is the language of courtship and covenant. Woman wisdom is inviting her suitors to come. Because already in Proverbs chapter 4 we were told, do not forsake her and she will keep you.

Love her and she will guard you. We are to set our love, our loyal affections on the wisdom of God.

[21:43] And verses 18 to 21 give us the reason why we should do this. It says, Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my

yield than choice silver.

I walk in the way of righteousness in the paths of justice, granting an inheritance to those who love me and filling their treasuries. Earlier in verse 10, woman wisdom said, take my instruction instead of silver in knowledge rather than choice gold.

But then here she promises riches and wealth to those who choose her. Paradoxically, it is by pursuing wisdom instead of riches that one acquires riches as the reward of wisdom.

If you make wisdom your highest aim, it enriches you. But if you make wealth your highest aim, it corrupts you. This is because God has so ordered the world that wise living and honest hard work ordinarily, generally speaking, produces prosperity.

So even in English, we have proverbial sayings like honesty pays or cheats never prosper. Of course, these sayings admit exceptions, but these exceptions prove the general applicability of the rule.

[23 : 03] But woman wisdom isn't merely promising material wealth since she says in verses 19 to 20, my fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver.

I walk in the way of righteousness in the path of justice. Ultimately, she promises something far better, righteousness. And in verse 35, she says, for whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord.

Wisdom promises divine favor and life itself. And these are the proven benefits of wisdom. And in verses 22 to 31, then woman wisdom further communicates her worth by speaking of her ancient and divine origin.

She says in verses 22 to 23, the Lord possessed me at the beginning of His work, the first of His acts of old. Ages ago, I was set up at the first before the beginning of the earth.

If you're using the English standard version, there's a footnote next to the word possessed, which says that the word possessed can be rendered fathered or begot.

[24 : 18] So that's because the Hebrew word behind the translation can mean a wide range of things, just like many English words have a wide range of meanings. And this means that we need to rely on the context to determine its meaning.

And in certain specific contexts, like Genesis 4, verse 1, Deuteronomy 32, verse 6, Psalm 139, verse 13, this word that's used here clearly refers to conceiving or begetting a child.

And I think that's what it means here. It's confirmed by verses 24 to 25, which say, When there were no depths, I was brought forth. Before the hills, I was brought forth.

The word brought forth repeated twice. There literally means birthed. So it's continuing that metaphor of begetting, fathering. So verse 23, again, says, Ages ago I was set up.

That literally means woven. And these verses then have a close parallel in Psalm 139, verse 13.

For you formed my inward parts, you wove me in my mother's womb.

[25 : 24] This is all referring to the same idea. The Bible has no hint whatsoever of the pagan ideas of gods procreating with one another and with other humans to bring about other gods and demigods.

It has no hint of that at all. However, it uses the language of begetting here to convey the fact that wisdom has a divine origin. She was birthed from God.

And this makes her qualitatively different from the created world. The world, the earth was made, it says in verse 26, but wisdom was begotten.

When we make something, whether it's a meal or furniture or webpage or even a sculpture that resembles us, we make something that is fundamentally different from us.

We make things that do not share our nature. But when you beget something, you beget something that fundamentally shares your nature. Dogs beget dogs, right?

[26 : 22] Cats beget cats. and humans beget humans. And so it's significant that wisdom is begotten, not created. And as such, she predates all love creation.

The Lord fathered her at the beginning of His work, the first of His acts of old. Ages ago, she was woven at the first before the beginning of the earth. And she continues in verses 24 to 26, when there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water, before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills I was brought forth, before He had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world.

Before the sea depths below were made, before the mountains up above were made, before anything on earth between the two were made, before even the first of the dust of the world from

which human beings were made, wisdom was there.

So when we look at the earth, it looks as though the seas and the mountains had been there forever. And yet, even before they were made, wisdom was already begotten by God.

And she not only predates all of creation, she was present for all of God's work in creation and even participated in it. She says in verses 27 to 31, When He established the heavens, I was there.

[27 : 45] When He drew a circle on the face of the deep, making the horizon. When He made firm the skies above. When He established the fountains of the deep. When He assigned to the sea its limits so that the waters might not transgress His command.

When He marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was beside Him like a master workman and I was daily His delight, rejoicing before Him always, rejoicing in His inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.

When God established and separated and filled and ordered the cosmos, wisdom was right there beside Him. She emphasizes her participation in it by saying, I was there, I was beside Him.

And this is confirmed by Proverbs 3, 19 to 20, which says that Lord, by wisdom, founded the earth. And, this too, highlights wisdom's value.

that's the point of this section. Because in the book of Proverbs, the elder is described as being superior to youth. And the reason why Proverbs describes the elders that way is because a longer life usually confers broader experiences and deeper understanding and learning.

[29 : 01] And that's why Proverbs 16, verse 31 says, gray hair is a crown of glory. Following that logic, woman wisdom should be heeded because she has been there from before the beginning of creation.

She was there as a witness of, even participant of God's work in creation. She has seen all of human history unfold. So she has something that Job didn't have.

If you remember in Job's encounter with God, in the book of Job, Job is complaining to God and accusing God of injustice because he, for as far as he can tell, was obedient, he was righteous, he was blameless and yet God allows him to undergo experience unimaginable suffering and he loses all of his prosperity, his crops and all of his progeny, his children as well.

And so he accuses God, points his finger at God and Job thinks he is in the right when he does this but God finally answers him in Job chapter 38, verses 2-4 with a simple question.

Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

[30 : 29] Tell me if you have understanding. And once God recounts all his work of creation, Job backtracks and forfeits entirely his claim to answer back to God at all in Job chapter 42, verse 3, I have uttered, he says, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know.

I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear but now my eyes see you, therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. Job realizes at that moment, he understands that he has an infinitesimally small part of the created world.

He understands so little and that his life is an infinitesimally small piece of the whole puzzle. And so he concedes that he was presumptuous to try to counsel God.

Woman wisdom, however, is far superior to Job. She can answer that question and say, I was there when God laid the foundation of the earth.

And for that reason, we ought to value and cherish her counsel because she has been through it all. She's been around the block. This is who she is and why we should cherish her, the introduction of wisdom.

[31 : 58] And after this, we see in verses 32 to 36, the invitation of wisdom. And like a nurturing mother, she addresses us as sons and encourages us to seek her favor and learn from her.

And she goes back and forth between telling us to listen and the promising blessing in verses 32 to 34. Now, O sons, listen to me. Blessed are those who keep my ways.

Hear instruction and be wise and do not neglect it. Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.

Watching and waiting convey just eager anticipation. We are to be vigilant and diligent in our pursuit of wisdom, biding our time, waiting with bated breath, watching for her door to open in order to seize any and every opportunity to learn from wisdom.

And in the same way, verses 30 to 31, wisdom was beside God constantly and was filled with delight daily, rejoicing before Him always.

[33 : 04] We are now told to emulate her example by watching daily at wisdom's gates, waiting beside her doors. And verses 35 to 36 provide the reason why we should do this.

For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord, but he who fails to find me injures himself, all who hate me love death. Finding wisdom leads to life because it comes with favor from the Lord.

In contrast, the failure to find wisdom leads to injury and death. This is an incredible promise and a striking portrait of woman wisdom who represents the wisdom of God's Word.

If we heed the wisdom of God revealed to us in the book of Proverbs, it's saying that it will impart life to us. But this promise and portrait of woman wisdom goes beyond this book and points to a person.

Wisdom described herself this way in verse 14. I have counsel and sound wisdom. I have insight. I have strength. These four exact attributes are attributed to God Himself in Job chapter 12 verse 13.

[34 : 19] It says, Not only this, wisdom describes herself as fathered by God, begotten by Him verses 22 to 25, existing from before the creation of the cosmos.

And so, this depiction of woman wisdom in Proverbs points to and is ultimately fulfilled by the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ, who is described in 1 Corinthians 1.24 as the wisdom of God, who is described in Hebrews 1.5 Hebrews 5.5 and 1 John 5 as the begotten one.

It says of Jesus in John 1.1-4, In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God and all things were made through Him and without Him was not anything made that was made.

In Him was life and the life was the light of man. Eternal pre-existence, instrument of creation, giver of life.

We can superimpose Christ on all the characteristics of woman wisdom described in Proverbs 8. And this really is given climactic expression in Colossians 1.15-20 which we read for the assurance of pardon.

[35 : 42] There it described Jesus as the firstborn of all creation. Meaning, not that Jesus is the first thing that God created because He's uncreated.

He's begotten. However, the verse itself, Colossians 1.15 explains it. For by Him all things were created. The reason why Jesus is called the firstborn of all creation is because He is the one through whom all of creation was brought forth, was created.

And likewise, that same passage described Jesus as the firstborn from the dead for the same reason because it is through Jesus that all of God's people are brought forth from death and are born again into eternal life.

And that happens because Jesus died on the cross for the sins of His people and He was raised from the dead promising new life and that's why He can promise in 2 Corinthians 5.17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, He is a new creation.

The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. That's why He promises in Revelation 21.5 that He's making all things new.

[36 : 57] And so, this is the promise that is in Jesus Christ. If some of you, maybe you are not yet a follower of Jesus, maybe you feel dead inside, maybe you know what it means when Scripture speaks of being dead in our sins and trespasses.

You are living without the abundant life that God has given. But Christ came to restore all of that. He came to bring new life.

I found a compelling description of what Jesus, how Jesus lived and what He did from a writing by a German theologian, Jürgen Moltmann.

Because we often think of when Jesus is coming, He's performing miracles and signs and wonders, things that defy nature. But He puts it this way instead, that when Jesus expels demons and heals the sick, He's driving out of creation the powers of destruction and is healing and restoring created beings who are hurt and sick.

The Lordship of God to which the healing's witness restores creation to health. Jesus' healings are not supernatural miracles in a natural world.

[38 : 11] They are the only truly natural thing in a world that is unnatural, demonized, and wounded. Jesus comes to restore the natural order, the goodness of creation that was there when

God first created by wisdom, through the Word, through Jesus Christ.

And ultimately, death itself is unnatural. It was not meant to be. We were created to live forever with God. And so God sends Jesus, His Son, to die for our sins, to pay the penalty of death, to absorb our penalty, and to be raised from the dead in resurrection power so that that life and that power may rest with us, all of those who put their trust in Him, and that may be restored, that may be restored to new life, that we may be new creations, as this passage speaks of.