

Introduction:

- A. How do you decide what to do when you're stuck? How do you find guidance in life? Illus.: Last year I spotted this little column in the *Chicago Tribune* by Jenniffer Weigel entitled, "5 ways to stay spiritual." These are, apparently, ways that 'spiritual' people find guidance in life:
- **Treat yourself.** According to one of her gurus, "Like putting your oxygen mask on before helping a child on the plane. It's not selfish—it's self *first*."
 - **Talk to dead people.** Another guru says that our loved ones on the other side want to help us but they need to be asked.
 - **Look for signs.** My dad (she says) shows up as a cardinal whenever I need a little boost.
 - **Trust that you are where you're supposed to be at every moment.**
 - **Develop your intuition.** Trust what you feel. [*Chicago Tribune* 9/11/10]
- B. The Bible would say that every one of those ideas is poppycock! Foolishness. Outright dangerous. Quack medicine for sick souls. We're studying Proverbs, and in Proverbs God tells us, fatherlike, *If you want to find your way in this world safely, get wisdom*. Our passage today, Prov. 8, tells us why we'd be a fool to pass up wisdom. But before we look at it I want to take a few minutes to summarize the basic steps to pursuing wisdom. This is at least *part* of the Bible's answer to the drivel I read in the paper:
1. **Start with "the fear of the LORD"**—come before God in humility and reverence. Only the fool is glib or dismissive of God. But also come as to your Father with love and trust. *We know* God as our Father, we can come boldly into his presence, because of the salvation and new life Jesus Christ offers us when we trust him.
 2. **Learn and live out the commands, principles and promises of Scripture.** Wisdom often starts by doing what God tells us to do, and as we see how an obedient life takes shape, we grow wise. We see how God has fit life together. We also see that grace and love run like a great river through all the commands and promises of God, and they begin to irrigate our lives and then the lives of people around us.
 3. **Ask God for wisdom.** Pray in specific situations because James 1:5 invites us to: "*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt...*" But pray generally, too, as young Solomon did, that God would grant you wisdom.
 4. **Listen to God's wise people.** We gain wisdom from many counselors, but the best counselors are those who not only have advice about our problem, but who understand how our hearts work—who see what a situation is doing to our souls, and how God wants to realign us in this problem to be godly.
- C. Now, turn to **Prov. 8**. Last Sunday, Prov. 7 showed us how the seductress, whom I named Mrs. Folly I. (for Immoral) Madness, seduced young moral simpletons with her lies. Now today, in Prov. 8, the other woman in Proverbs—Lady Wisdom—shouts for the attention of those same simpletons—including us. It is important to emphasize that **in Proverbs, wisdom means God's wisdom**. Proverbs isn't encouraging us to build our lives on the adages and witticisms that we've picked up from our grandparents, from how-to books or from Benjamin Franklin. **Proverbs points us to the unique and infallible wisdom that comes from God.**
- D. Turn to **Prov 8:1-5... To save us from the seductive lies of moral madness, God's wisdom shouts for our attention.** God's wisdom does *not* play hard-to-get; God's wisdom is *not* elusive. Lady Wisdom is waiting to teach us now!

Much of the wisdom we learn outside of the Bible is amoral. "*The early bird gets the worm.*" Some of it is sly. "*Never let 'em see you sweat.*" Some of it is manipulative. "*Go along to get along.*" Some of it is just wrong. "*Never trust anyone who doesn't like garlic.*" But listen to what the Bible says about godly wisdom... **vv.6-9** [*"what is right... true...just...right...faultless..."*]

I. GOD'S WISDOM ALWAYS HONORS WHAT IS RIGHT (8:6-13)

- A. The wisdom of God, set forth in Scripture, will never steer us wrong. We will never do what God says, and then later find out it was a bad idea or that it was short-sighted. Because in maneuvering through life **God's wisdom always prioritizes righteousness and always pursues justice.** God gives all his wisdom a moral center. God's wisdom never forgets the weak or takes advantage of the powerless, but rather actually infuses grace—undeserved favor—into the ordinary ins and outs of life.
- B. Because God's wisdom always honors what is right it is invaluable. **Vv.10-11...** What a treasure it is not only to be able to think well about life's dilemmas and struggles, but to do it *righteously*, honorably, graciously!
- C. The corollary to this is in **vv.12-13...** We've heard a lot about "*the fear of the LORD*" in this book—this reverent love we bring to our heavenly Father. But here is a consequence we haven't talked about specifically: to fear the LORD is to hate evil. Humility before God is completely incompatible with pride and arrogance. The person who bows before a holy God will recoil at "evil behavior" and "perverse, twisted, double-dealing speech".

SUMMARY: Chap. 7 said of the seductive Mrs. Folly I. Madness, "*With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk.*" Not so Lady Wisdom. God's wisdom is always true and right, just and faultless. How privileged we are to have godly wisdom calling for our attention! **God's wisdom always honors what is right. What's more...**

II. GOD'S WISDOM ALWAYS PRODUCES WHAT IS GOOD (8:14-21)

- A. I suspect that there's not a government on earth where people are not disgruntled with their leaders to some degree. So **vv.14-16** sound a little tinny at first... This is not justification for foolish government. This is the point, I think: Wisdom always makes good leadership possible. This is true whether we're speaking about a king or a congressman, a CEO or the leader of the band, a residence director or a parent. **Wisdom always makes good leadership possible.**

Look what wisdom brings to the table in **v.14:** *Counsel (i.e. sound advice), sound judgment (the ability to weigh and sort what matters most and what comes first), understanding (of base-line issues and of people), and power (wisdom is strong; it is compelling; it moves people toward truth and justice).* **Wisdom always makes good leadership possible.**

Notice **v.17...** God wants us to find wisdom. When we pray for wisdom, it is as though God says to wisdom, "*Go give him a hug!*" "*Run and see how you can help her.*"

- B. **Vv.18-21...** Wisdom enriches us far more than money in the bank. No one is ever so rich as the person who is wise, and no one is ever wise who does not love and serve the LORD. **God's wisdom does for us what money only pretends to do.** Wisdom opens doors, brings good and nourishing friends into our lives, makes us useful, guards us against the worst kinds of moral disasters and helps us keep our balance when the world trembles under our feet. *Can your money do that?* Wisdom delights a person's heart more than banquets, beaches or bargains. Wisdom gives us influence money could only dream of. Wisdom is recession-proof. And godly wisdom brings a contentment that money can't buy.

God's wisdom always honors what is right and produces what is good. Now we come to one of the most fascinating sections on wisdom.

III. GOD'S WISDOM ALWAYS DELIGHTS IN GOD'S PRESENCE AND CREATION (8:22-31)

- A. The next verses stir our imaginations: **vv.22-26...** This is a metaphor, not a literal scene. It is as though God decided to create and in that moment Lady Wisdom stepped to his side to confer. God, of course, is infinitely and eternally wise. No one helps the Triune God do anything. But this scene gives us eye-popping insight into the wisdom being offered to us. We stand there on the street, pulled between Mrs. Folly I. Madness and Lady Wisdom. Then Lady Wisdom tells us, "*I have been at God's side since time immemorial—before the oceans or mountains. God drew upon Wisdom when he wanted to make*

the wide world and every piece of dust upon it. I was born for creating this majestic, beautiful, intricate universe to delight God and people. It's what Wisdom does!"

- B. As Wisdom continues her story **notice the emphasis on boundaries** in these verses: **vv.27-29... God's wisdom set the boundaries that make everything in our world ordered and beautiful.** So when godly wisdom sets boundaries for us, they are good. When the world around us seems chaotic, when it seems that we're in some kind of mess where "darkness covers everything," godly wisdom stands at our side to bring order and goodness.
- C. In this picture of Lady Wisdom it is as if she throws her head back and her arms wide and laughs for joy. **Vv.30-31... The best part of being wise is rejoicing in God's presence and celebrating all he has made.** People who have learned God's wisdom are most at home delighting day after day in all that God does; most at home rejoicing always in his presence. Wise people love to worship "God only wise". Wise people, having seen what God's wisdom can do, sing for joy at all his works.
And nothing in all that God has made so displays his wisdom as mankind. "Rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind." What wisdom it took to create men and women in the image of God! What wisdom to entrust to us the stewardship of this great earth! David sang in **Ps. 8:4-9...**
And the wisdom God displayed in creating us pales in comparison to the wisdom it took to save us, and refit us for paradise. So Wisdom stands now by our side, as she does by God's, and bids us rejoice and sing, too. **No one in all the earth has so much reason to delight in God, or rejoice in his creation as those who have learned to be wise.**
- D. Feeling a little sheepish, we quietly ask, "Yes, but why are you telling us all this?" "Because," laughs Lady Wisdom, "I want to be at your side as surely as I was at God's. God's wisdom can be part of all you do, standing at your side as you maneuver through storms and opportunities, through relationships and sorrow. I can change everything for you! I can show you the joy of the wise!"

Conclusion

As that stupid little column showed, this world doesn't have a clue about how to live wisely, how to find guidance in this life. Such folly seduces people through her door and right down to the grave. But Lady Wisdom calls us to know the Lord and learn from him. **Vv.32-36... Love wisdom and our lives will be God-blessed.**

We will be blessed, first, because we "find life." Life, it turns out, is not what you get when you're in bed with foolishness. Life belongs to the wise.

We will be blessed, secondly, because we "receive favor from the LORD." God takes the side of those who love wisdom. He comes with his undeserved grace and help. He steps in even when we make foolish mistakes when he knows that we really do want to live in his wisdom. He tutors and gifts us. God loves to bless those who love his wisdom.

Illus.: Bonita Che, who works among Chinese students at Northwestern University, wrote recently about bringing Ting, a 25-year-old graduate student from Beijing, to visit Bonita's friend Stan at a retirement community in Evanston.

Bonita wrote that Ting "hopes to one day marry and become a housewife in China" because that is a symbol of wealth and status.

Stan is a 90-year-old retired pastor. "Though he has never owned a home nor attained great wealth, he enjoys good health and the company of family and friends in his old age."

Bonita writes, "Stan treated us to Philly cheese steaks and peach ice cream for lunch. While we were enjoying the great food, he shared with us how God had helped him overcome difficulties in life and had blessed him in his old age. He also took Ting's name and added her to his daily prayer list..."

"As we left, Ting turned to me and asked, 'What does success in life truly mean?'"

Bonita had titled her story, "Meeting the Wise Man."