

# Finding Love

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[ 0 : 00 ]     The Bible reading today is from Proverbs 8. On the heights beside the way, at the crossroad she takes her stand. Beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud, To you, O men, I call, and my cry is to the children of man.

O simple ones, learn prudence. O fools, learn sense. 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 straight, they are all straight to him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge.

Take my instruction instead of silver, and my 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.

[ 1 : 22 ]     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. 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, at the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

[ 2 : 22 ]     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. 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.

[ 3 : 24 ]     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.

Good morning everyone. If you want to open to Proverbs 8, and then we'll pray. Please pray with me.

Our Father, we admit that our hearts chase after everything. We find everything else appealing, besides your ways often.

So I pray that this morning that you would speak to us, and that you would persuade each one of us that your ways are best.

[ 4 : 32 ] Your ways are good, and bring us life. That they are rich. So please be with each one of us. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, yesterday a friend said some harsh words to you, and you're now in the shower rehearsing those words that cut you deeply.

Lady Folly is shouting in one ear, How dare he? Does he even know me? I wish I pointed out how much of a hypocrite he is.

But woman wisdom is in the other ear, calling out, Is this really worth dwelling on? Now, Proverbs 19, 11, Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is to his glory to overlook an offence.

Can I just overlook this? Lady Folly butts in. Your pride is at stake. Are you just going to let them walk all over you? Are you going to take this lying down?

Defend yourself. Woman wisdom calls you again. Did he really intend to harm me? Is there truth to his words? Proverbs 27, 6.

[ 5 : 45 ] Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. Lady Folly yells again. Yes, he meant every word.

I don't know why he said it, and I don't know how our relationship is going to get past this. Here's a few things you can say to defend yourself next time. You can get one up on him. If the friendship blows up, well, there obviously wasn't much of a friendship to begin with.

Woman wisdom offers a different way. Okay. Even if the words are untrue, even inconsiderate, remember Proverbs 15, 1.

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. And then you have breakfast, and then you confront the next dilemma you've got to face in life.

Life is complicated, isn't it? I find it is. We have to make choices all day, every day. Some are small. Some have big consequences, like the impact on our friendships, our relationships.

[ 6 : 54 ] The good news in Proverbs is we're not left to ourselves to navigate the complexities of life. The book of Proverbs gives down-to-earth advice, divine advice, to help us live well.

So I've just tried to illustrate the theme of friendship, but there's loads of Proverbs on our speech. How many times have your words got you into trouble and caused damage?

Words on speech, Proverbs on work and laziness and alcohol and sexuality and parenting and children relating to parents and justice and relating to those in authority.

So we've got help. We've got help to navigate the complexities of life. The bad news is, at every turn, we're confronted with competing voices, both wanting us to give ourselves to them, both presenting as the best way to live.

There's two fundamental paths we can take in every decision, two women we can embrace. Whether we're male or female, reading Proverbs, we take the position of a young man trying to work out their way in life.

[ 8 : 12 ] We've got two women we can listen to and embrace. Both want our heart's affections. Both want to be our intimate companion through life.

As Marty helpfully explained to the kids, it's lady folly and woman wisdom. At every turn, we can choose whether to fear the Lord or to be a fool and turn away from him.

Now, I think sometimes I'm a bit dull. When we use the term foolishness and wisdom, they just seem like abstract terms in my mind.

What's actually, what's the choice? How would the original hearers in Israel from Solomon's day onwards, how would they have heard this choice?

I think it'll help if we just pause and consider that so that we understand what choice we're making. I think a clue here is that both ladies are crying out from the high places where God's temple or idols were worshipped.

[ 9 : 19 ] And more broadly than that, one results in destruction, the other results in life and blessing. To a Jewish person, they would be thinking of Deuteronomy, whether they are in covenant faithfulness with Yahweh or choosing to worship idols.

In their case, Baal, who offered fertility and life and blessing. So the personification of these two women really means the choice isn't an abstract one.

It's not just an ethical one. It's a relationship. Who are we going to give ourselves to? Yahweh or Baal? For the original audience. Who do we think is going to give us life?

Whose love is best? Who's going to enrich our life? Are we going to be faithful to Yahweh or are we going to commit spiritual adultery with idols?

Now, I've never been tempted to worship Baal. I doubt any of you have. But idols just have different faces today, don't they?

[ 10 : 29 ] If you take any created thing and you make it an ultimate thing, you must have this thing to live. You've made an idol. I'm not sure who said it, but someone described killing idols as like whack-a-mole.

You hit one and like two others pop up and we're just idol factories. I can't remember who described it though. Calvin maybe. I don't know.

Marty, you could tell me. Yeah, Calvin. Okay. Our hearts are idol factories, taking a created thing and making it, I must have this to have life.

So whether that's food or power, success, marriage, money, popularity, anything really.

At every turn, we're going to choose between embracing the Lord and his ways and what idols offer us. We're on the search for love. Whose love is best?

[ 11 : 30 ] The Lord's or idols? Who's going to love us? Who do we think is going to give us the best life? Who's going to enrich our life?

Whoever we think is, we're going to embrace them. And we're making that choice all the time. So in chapter 7, we've been warned of the deceptive, seductive dangers of idols.

Now in chapter 8, we've got the positive side of the argument. We've got this grand display of all the reasons why we should choose God's voice, his wisdom, his ways. Just before we get into it, it struck me like, why do we need nine chapters to convince us to choose wisdom?

Like, why don't we just jump into chapter 10 and get all the wisdom about life? Surely I want to be wise. Am I ignorant?

Am I slow to learn? Am I forgetful? Or worse still, am I already convinced that foolishness is better, that idols are better?

[ 12 : 43 ] I reckon it's all the above in my case. We need to be convinced that God's word is best. And the paradox is, you're only on the path to God's wisdom when you first admit that you're a fool, that we're already in love with idols.

We need to be convinced. And that's what chapter 8 is about. It's showing us, look how beautiful wisdom is. Look how much God's ways enrich your life. So let's jump into it.

Here's why we should embrace woman wisdom. Here's what she offers you. Do you want to be a good person? I don't think I've met anyone who doesn't want to be a good person. Do you want to be a good person?

Do you want to live a successful life? Do you want to be rich? Do you want to live in harmony with how the world works, in tune with the meaning of life?

Do you want a long and satisfying life? Do you want to live in harmony with the truth? That's what she offers us. So let's take a look at these things. Verses 1 to 5, if you have a look there.

[ 13 : 59 ] The first great truth about God's wisdom is that even though I'm a fool, the gracious news is that woman wisdom is pursuing me.

it's it doesn't start with me pursuing God it starts with God pursuing me if you look at those verses she is everywhere you go in your daily life in Newcastle she is everywhere at every turn even in the shower along the roads on your way to work on the way home common places public places she's not silent foolishness is loud but she is calling out she's crying out at every turn and she's crying out to every person verse 4 to you oh men I call and my cry is to the children of man even gullible and simple-minded ignorant wayward people verse 5 she's calling out to us she's calling out she wants us no one needs to remain a fool she's there with us all the time so both in ancient times with ancient philosophy and I think in modern day too with intellectuals of the world like Stephen Hawking sometimes they can claim like they've got the monopoly on what life is about but wisdom is available to all God is saying in these verses whether educated or not whether you're a brain on legs or not like God's wisdom wants to be found God wisdom is available to all of us in fact consider who the Lord reveals the way of eternal life to in Matthew 11 25 Jesus prays this I thank you father Lord of heaven and earth that you've hidden these things so eternal life from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children yes father for such was your gracious will wisdom is pursuing you she's available everywhere you go all day you don't have to be wise and learn it you have to be a child and listen that's how you become wise it's by a personal relationship with the Lord not by intellect that you find her and because wisdom is pursuing you here's the guarantee in verse 17 those who seek me diligently find me if you want her you will find her you won't miss out she wants to be found and if you want the company of truth in your life if you want the company of what is good and right if you want to be prudent if you want discretion in making your choices if you want to stay away from pride and arrogance twisted speech all that's evil then one wisdom can introduce you to these things she is the way to be a good person now I don't know about you but sometimes the righteous thing to do is just not obvious I find some things are obvious other times it's really hard to work it out there seems to be an emphasis in these verses on words and just reflecting on my own words like knowing my own motives is really tricky like am I saying this thing to be honest or to gossip to provide relevant information or to try and defend myself am I saying this to give helpful advice or because I just need to be needed wisdom helps us navigate these motives in our hearts helps us be wise in understanding them

we need her to do that we need to listen to her to do that and we've got we've got to decide where the character and virtue is more valuable than what money can offer she claims in verse 11 all that you may desire cannot compare with her we can become virtuous by her we just need to listen to her so she is the way to be a good person and the flip side is even though she's better than all that you can desire including riches she then is the key to success in riches verse 14 to 21 wisdom isn't just head knowledge it's it's really practical it's how to live well we need her counsel to make the right plan we need sound judgment to be resourceful we need her power her boldness to actually carry out the plan for it to be successful if you don't have those things your plans will just flop let me give you an example of a plan flopping the other day when leaving the house very simple activity I thought I'm going to leave the house

I'm going to lock the door when I return I'll open the door and enter that did not happen I looked at the bunch of keys it had my car key had a bunch of keys okay I've got the house key I'll leave I come back home and my purple house key isn't on the ring I couldn't get in I've forgotten and I've given that purple key to a visitor the previous week now that is a very simple situation in life but I need wisdom for my plans to be successful we need wisdom every step of the way success depends entirely on her any success in our life is due to her so the connection to riches becomes obvious then if she's the key to success then that's gonna result give results in financial terms that's gonna bring wealth so I think you see it in the salvation army movement um in England when it started up they just focused on serving the poor and giving them the gospel here's the thing though the gospel turn these people into like reliable hard-working diligent people who then became middle class it actually resulted in well-being she is the key to success and and riches and the same applies to leadership kings and princes whether they recognize it as god's wisdom or not if they have any success it's because of her it's because of her but even for them it's not the main goal isn't the wealth we need to get our head around this the main goal isn't the wealth kings and princes don't need wisdom for their own personal advantage they need it to execute justice to bring out peace in society that's the real riches they need it for the key here is verse 19 my fruit is better than gold so the results I give you is better than money better than fine gold my yield than choice silver so Tim Keller to kind of help help me understand this hopefully the way I say it can help you success although wisdom brings about success success isn't what a wise person is aiming for primarily they hope to get success but it's not the primary goal so success whether relationally or financially is just a byproduct a wise person seeks something more than riches this better fruit so what is that I think verse 35 clarifies it for us life and favor from the lord so a wise person doesn't do something because it will succeed but because it's right and loving towards god so think of it relationally confessing your sin in in a broken relationship is the good way to restore a relationship and you desire for that to happen but you can't success isn't the primary motivation you hope success happens that the relationship is restored but that's not the primary motive the primary motive in confessing your sin is it's right and it pleases the lord trying to gauge if that makes sense or not if I've muddied the waters I'm not sure god's ways usually produce results but the results isn't what we're aiming for we're doing it because it's right and it pleases the lord we receive favor from the lord and there's a very good reason why doing what is right and loving towards god works in life and that

and that brings us to verses 22 to 31 it's because woman wisdom is the architect of all that exists she made it all she designed it as we read these verses it is really critical to remember we're reading poetry here it's not saying that there's this personal entity outside of god that that's existed before the world that god consulted to make the world this is poetry it's this woman wisdom is god's mind intrinsic to his eternal being so woman wisdom made the world before we read these verses do you know what one of the key features is that makes a person's face beautiful now I learned this on four corners I'm not just making this up one of the key features I was surprised to learn this it's symmetry it's not like big eyes or whatever it's symmetry the left and right being in order sorry if you've got a bent nose probably don't play rugby it's when things are in order that things are beautiful that we delight in them so a stone wall is more beautiful than just a pile of those same stones or a garden looks beautiful when the weeds are gone and it's trimmed not when it's wild when things are in order that's when we delight in it that's when that's what we call beauty order makes something beautiful something to delight in

[ 25 : 40 ] I think that'll help us understand these verses the picture in these verses recalls Genesis 1 when God created order out of chaos creating the world let me read some of the verses  
ages ago I was set up at the first before the beginning of the earth when there was no depths I was brought forth before the mountains had been shaped when he established the heavens I was there 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 wisdom wasn't just there observing she was the agency through which everything came about including you and me wisdom was God's architect God looked at wisdom and said you are absolutely necessary indispensable for ordering all things making things beautiful to delight in there's no speck of our life no aspect of our life that wasn't made by God's wisdom now here's the implication for us to live in harmony with the way the world works we need to listen to the architect who made it how do we listen to the architect?

well graciously the architect has spoken to us the rest of the book of Proverbs all of God's words to us and most fully that word comes to us in the word of the gospel when Jesus the embodiment of wisdom arrives Tim Keller therefore calls the Bible since it's the word of our creator our soul's owner's manual I really like that the problem is none of us read manuals anymore our soul's owner's manual so I'm going to tweak it a bit and call it our soul's YouTube tutorials I did watch one the other day to tie a Windsor knot that's where I go to to work out life I'm not sure if I should be suggesting that or not so the question is do you treat the architect's words as the place you go to to work out how to live well or do you listen to Jordan Peterson now I want to make a nuance point here you can listen to Jordan Peterson if a non-Christian looks at the world and studies it and knows how it works they've discovered God's wisdom they just don't acknowledge that so you can listen to non-Christians my point is where is your primary primary source of authority in life do you treat God's words as a place you go to to work out how to live why wouldn't we we'd be a fool not to wouldn't we this is the architect telling us this is what life this is how it works this will make it ordered and beautiful you'll delight in it to listen to woman wisdom is to live in harmony with how the world was designed that raised a question in my mind maybe it has for you as well if that's the case why doesn't it feel like

God's ways are best so often it just doesn't feel like it's the best way like acquiring possessions feels more valuable than giving or leisure is more enjoyable than serving or retaliation feels more satisfying than turning the other cheek or demanding our rights feels more just than laying them down and letting them go or gossip is more exciting than self-control why is that the case without going into each of these things and looking at the real cost of choosing these options I think the opening chapters of Proverbs gives us a few answers first foolishness doesn't come to us saying hey I'm foolishness choose me it comes to us saying here's a better wisdom here's the best way to live it's a counterfeit it's a false way to live it pretends to be wisdom in a sense that's why we need to be warned don't be seduced by her don't choose her path it just leads to destruction so we need discernment to listen and work out which is really wise and I think the second reason is since Adam believes Satan's deception in the garden by nature we're prone to believing that same lie we already are in love with Lady Folly so if we can't even recognise foolishness when we see it and we actually desire it more than true wisdom a lot of the time what hope have we got it would be a bad place to end the sermon the hope is woman wisdom is pursuing us she's calling out to us and she's offering us something better we need to see that she she offers us something better doing something just out of duty will work for a moment but really if you want to live in God's ways we need to be convinced that God's ways are good in the last few verses summarise what she's offering us ultimately let's hear her words oh my sons my sons she's not some stranger she's no adulteress like Lady Folly who offers us excitement in the moment but who really is just wanting us to die oh my sons she can call us that because she's the architect who made us the love she offers isn't just the thrill of a one night stand the love she offers us is the steadfast care and affection of a mother who only wants our good all the time she offers us love but I think it's a different kind here's what she says verse 35 whoever finds me finds life and obtains favour from the Lord but he who fails to find me injures himself all who hate me love death to be in relationship with woman wisdom results in favour from the Lord it's to receive the love of God it's to be in relationship with God it's to be in harmony not just with how the world works but to be in harmony with our maker knowing his love for us his approval of us his delight in us so what does it look like

to respond to woman wisdom what does it what does it actually look like we need to find her searching diligently diligently for her with a guarantee remember that if we do we will find her she wants to be found she's available she's everywhere we turn and this looks like listening daily watching at her house always waiting beside her doors constantly diligently looking for her but what does that mean practically it really will be seen in how we treat God's words do we look at the rest of the book of Proverbs the rest of God's words to us our maker's words to us and treat them as the guide to life the way to live best do we listen to Proverbs when it tells us how to use our words how to work faithfully how to treat those in authority over you how to treat your parents and your spouse and children and so on are we listening as a church are we listening to God's words individually in our families and not just Proverbs the book of Proverbs we're going to read the whole manual we're going to watch all the YouTube tutorials and these tutorials point to one direction not the band in one solution the one example to follow and not just the example otherwise it's down to our own effort but the one saviour the one solution who is our wisdom who gives us his wisdom who lives that perfect life of wisdom on our behalf so that we have the favour of God

Colossians 2-3 says in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge he is our wisdom life is complicated but Christ is pursuing us through his word if only we would listen to how he says life is best lived because he is the embodiment of God's wisdom his word woman wisdom's words become Christ's words to us whoever finds me finds life and obtains favour from the Lord but he who fails to find me injures himself all who hate me love death will you pray with me Lord Jesus I just pray for us as a church and individually that you would continue to reveal to us as we take on the posture of little children may you continually reveal to us that you are good that your ways bring life in Jesus name

[ 36 : 44 ] Amen