

## Introduction

Congregation. You may have heard of the Proverbs 31 woman. She's pretty famous. It's a poem in Proverbs about a woman. I don't know a lot about her, but I know she's not real live woman. I know that when women read about this, they tend to think that it's some sort of standard for us to live up to. And I know if that is true, if anyone has set their standard to this mythical Proverbs 31 woman, they will always be disappointed. But this sermon is not about the Proverbs 31 woman.

I want to introduce you to a woman this morning that you have likely heard, but maybe not heard of. You must have heard her though. *She. Is. Loud.* She calls out. She cries out. She summons us. *She. Is. In. Plain sight.* She is at the highest place at the tallest tip above your journey – at the crossroads. *She. Speaks. To Everyone.* There are NO limits to her audience. Her voice goes out to ALL. If you are simple, foolish, smart, silly, young, old, male, female - she is talking TO YOU! The only reason you have not heard her is if you have not been listening. This morning, I would like to introduce you to this woman you have heard, but maybe not heard of. She has been formally and informally dubbed: Lady Wisdom.

### Page 1:

Lady Wisdom is not a physical woman. Lady wisdom is a personification of wisdom. In other words, if wisdom was a person – then it would be Lady Wisdom. The first time we hear her speak is in Proverbs 1. Listen to this:

But since you refuse to listen when I call  
 and no one pays attention when I stretch out my hand,  
<sup>25</sup> since you disregard all my advice  
 and do not accept my rebuke,

...

<sup>28</sup> “Then they will call to me, but I will not answer;  
 they will look for me but will not find me,

If we wanted to sum up her straightforward and clear speech in chapter 1, we could say: If you reject wisdom, she’s not going to be there for you when you need her. If you reject wisdom, your life will be a disaster full of distress and trouble.

A few chapters later, in chapter 8, we hear more from Lady Wisdom. Still important though, is to mention what happens in chapter 7. For here, we meet Lady Wisdom’s nemesis. Her name is Lady Folly. Lady Folly also cries out. She is beautiful and persuasive. One of the ways she gets you is through her flattering tongue. Listen to this:

With persuasive words she led him astray;  
 she seduced him with her smooth talk.

<sup>22</sup> All at once he followed her  
 like an ox going to the slaughter,

...

little knowing it will cost him his life.

Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death.

First, we meet Lady Wisdom. Speaking clearly and warning us. Then we meet Lady Folly. Speaking seductively and leading us to death. And then we hear Lady Wisdom again in chapter 8. This time we hear her speak of her assurances and her promises – contrasting herself with Lady Folly. Rather than tell us what happens when we don’t listen to her, we hear more about who she is and what happens when we do.

Let us listen. She speaks to everyone. But like Lady Folly, there are certain people that she targets. The simple and the foolish.

To the simple, wisdom says, “Gain prudence. Discern trickery.”

The simple can mean someone who is inexperienced or hasn't learned something yet. Because of this, they can be easily persuaded and lack judgement. Another word for simple would be naïve. Usually when one is simple, it's because they lack instruction or information, not because they are dumb. It's not necessarily their fault. They believe everything they see or hear. But if you stay simple, you can be taken advantage of. The simple are easily deceived.

Lady Wisdom also pinpoints the foolish. To the fool, wisdom says, “Gain understanding. Discern the heart.”

A fool is different. A fool can be very educated, experienced, and intelligent. One can have great intellect and still be foolish. There is an exhaustive list in Proverbs alone of the qualities of a fool. I will not go through that with you, but I will list a few:

- A fool is someone who hates rebuke.
- A fool will refuse advice.
- A fool is someone who deceives... but they also deceive themselves.

When I was doing research on the difference between one who is simple and foolish, I found a bit of cross over. When I thought of examples of people who were foolish, I am tempted to put those examples in the “simple” category because I think to myself, “well, they just need some education” or “after that experience, maybe they got wiser.”

I would say this is the main difference between one who is simple and foolish: The fool does NOT listen. Not to rebuke, not to advice, not to truth, not even their own life experience. Therefore, a fool is to be blamed for their own ignorance.

## **Page 2:**

I think we can understand why Lady Wisdom is so loud. This reminds me of a story I heard.

A mother was preparing dinner once and walked to the living room to where her 2 kids were. She asked one to set the table and the other to chop the lettuce.” They said would be there in a minute. She went back in the kitchen. A few minutes past and she called out to them from the kitchen, “Children – come to the kitchen.” They called back, “yup, just one second.” She waited. She called again, “Kids! Come to the kitchen!” She heard nothing. Finally, with water boiling over the pot, she went to the living room and yelled, “Go to the kitchen.” And the kids got up and said, “Sheesh mom. Why do you have to be so loud?”

It’s not a perfect analogy. Here’s another one, very short:

You’re in school. You’re listening to the teacher. When suddenly everyone in the class hears something very loud. It’s so loud that you stop listening to the teacher and do something else. Because it’s the fire alarm. It drowns out everything out and forces you to make a change.

Why is anything loud? Because it is hard to get a person’s attention. Maybe because they are listening to someone else. Or they don’t want to listen, so they blatantly ignore. Maybe we don’t think the voice is for us.

Is her voice for you?

When I said earlier that Lady Wisdom calls out to everyone, but especially the simple and the foolish, did you wonder if you were simple? Did you wonder if you were foolish? What was your conclusion? Here is my guess. No one wants to think of themselves as foolish. So, my guess is most of us wanted to come up with examples of why we are not in that category. But here's the thing... if we do not think that we are, then we will not hear the voice. Ironically, it is the mark of the wise to hear and love a rebuke.

Let's expand a bit on the simple and the foolish. I do this to help us see the need to listen to Lady Wisdom.

Perhaps the best example of one who is simple are children. They haven't lived that long, and they need to learn and experience life. The hope as parents educate their children and give opportunities for life experience, their children will grow in wisdom so they make wise decisions, have a good degree of cautiousness, and good judgements.

It's not just children who are simple. We all have things to learn, therefore there are areas of our life that we may be naïve. I will give you an example of a situation when I was naïve. I won't tell the whole story, but essentially, I got scammed. I was living in Prague at the time and there was a man on the side of the road in some distress. I, of course, want to help him. He tells me a story. I believe him. I end up giving him the equivalent of around \$50 or \$60. It came to the light shortly after that it was all a scam. I felt so dumb. How could I have fallen for that?

I've thought a lot about that story since then. I had to think about how to move forward. I needed to learn. How can I help people who are in distress without getting scammed? I know from other experiences that there are people who genuinely need help. How can I know the difference? I need Wisdom.

Besides being simple, we all act foolishly sometimes. I'm going to expand on what I said earlier now.

- A fool is someone who hates rebuke. You cannot tell a fool if they have made a mistake or how they can improve. It won't do any good for they will not hear you and they will rage against you. For a fool is quick tempered. They are quick to react if they are insulted. How do we react when people call us out? Are we approachable in times of conflict or do people avoid us? Do we make the conflict worse and escalate the situation?
- A fool will refuse advice. Because they think they are always right. They often think they know everything about everything and continually say their own opinions as if they are true. Are we always the advice giver? Do we listen when people try to help? How do we feel when we don't have all the information?
- A fool is someone who deceives... but they also deceive themselves. It's difficult for a fool to believe that they are a fool, for they think very highly of themselves. It is often pride and arrogance that steps in between us and Wisdom.

Congregation, if you heard some of those marks of being foolish and you thought...ugh, I act that way sometimes...Be glad! Let us be glad! For that means we have heard Lady Wisdom! It is the mark of one who is wise to hear a rebuke, and even though it is painful, the holy conviction feels good. If you recognized yourself in there – be glad! Let us turn to Lady Wisdom.

Keep listening!

### **Page 3:**

I hope she has your attention. She wants it. And she doesn't want to lose you, so in this part of our text, Lady Wisdom tells you a little bit about herself. It's almost like a resume:

\*I hate pride, arrogance, evil behavior, and preserve speech. I can't stand them. They make me sick, actually. Because those qualities are so far away from who I am.

\*I love knowledge and insight.

\*I am very supportive and offer strength and power to those around me.

\*References? Just look at all the wise kings and princes who are governing. It is by me that they are in charge. Every just law they make – it's because of me. They couldn't have done it without me. With me comes wealth, honor, fullness of life. Call any of them and they will rave about me.

\* I am worth more than rubies, gold, and I surpass choice silver. What would you rather have? A vault full of gold or a full and fulfilling life?

Maybe at this point in her speech, you are sold. But maybe we are a little confused. Lady Wisdom got our attention, she totally sold us, and we are in. Great. But how do we get it? And also...what exactly is wisdom? Because after this whole thing, it seems like we should be receiving some specific instruction. Like, a travelling saleswoman trying to sell us herself. We hear the spiel and say "Sounds great! So, how much? Where do I sign on the dotted line?" As if there is some sort of transaction.

But Lady Wisdom doesn't do that. Her call does not involve a list of things we need to do to acquire wisdom. If we were to summarize her call, it would be something like this:

Hey. Pay attention. This is important. Trust me. For I am trustworthy. I know things that I say can seem counter intuitive, but just trust me. Be my disciple. I am everything that is good. Knowing me and my ways are what will give you the good life. I am not doing this because I need something from you. I am doing this because I LOVE you.

In more succinct words, Lady Wisdom says: Follow me. I will be your lifelong companion.

I'd like to tell you a story about a wise woman in the Bible. Her story is found in 1 Samuel. Her name is Abigail. Scripture says she was a wise and beautiful woman. However, her husband, Nabal, was the opposite. He was harsh and badly behaved in his business. King David was in the area. He sent greetings and a request for food to Nabal. 10 of David's servants arrived and gave David's message. Nabal reacted harshly. "Why should I take my bread and water and meat and give it to men coming from who knows where?" The servants reported back to David and told him what he said. David instructed all his men, hundreds of them, to get their swords ready.

One of the servants went to find Abigail. He told her everything that happened. Abigail lost no time. She took 2 hundred loaves of bread, 5 hundred sheep, a hundred cakes of raisins, 2 hundred cakes of pressed figs, flour, wine, and loaded them on donkeys. She came to David with everything. When she saw him, she bowed down and spoke. When she was done, David praised God for her and said, "may you be blessed for your sound judgement."

How did Abigail know what to do? There is no book with specific directions for what to do in every scenario. Abigail didn't go to a thick book on the shelf and look up Point 1388b: What do I do when my husband acts like a fool and is about to get himself killed. Ahha! I see here I am to go to the king and bring him the following food and say this.

She didn't do that. There was no clear "right" answer. Abigail had wisdom. We can assume that she listened to wisdom, esteemed wisdom, and sought after wisdom. And when Abigail needed her, Wisdom was right there for her. And in this case, saved the lives of many. This is what wisdom does and why it is important. Wisdom gives life. Folly takes it away.

**Page 4:**

Congregation. Do you want to live a good life? What a silly question, eh? Of course you do. I do! I don't want to waste my life. I want to live a life that is full and meaningful and healthy.

This is what I love about Lady Wisdom. She speaks to everyone. The wise can always be wiser. And there is still hope for the simple and the fool. There is no one out of her reach. Have you chosen Lady Folly your whole life? Are you headed for destruction? There is still hope for you. There is no one so far gone who cannot hear the message. That doesn't mean that if you ignore Lady Wisdom your whole life and then the day you need help you'll get it from her. She is very clear that that will not happen. No, it means you begin your journey of wisdom. She is your companion. You begin to grow with her. The more you ask for wisdom, esteem wisdom, and seek after wisdom, the wiser you will get.

Seeking wisdom has always been valued. There are different answers on where to get it and how to get it. Christians have our own answer. We see more of this fleshed out in the last part of Lady Wisdom's presentation. She describes her special relationship with Yahweh. Before the universe came into being, wisdom was there. While the universe was being created, wisdom was with YHWH. What is the Christian's answer for finding wisdom? In Jesus. Jesus IS the wisdom of God.

Do you hear him? He calls out: Hey. Pay attention. This is important. Trust me. For I am trustworthy. I know things that I say can seem counter intuitive, but just trust me. Be my disciple. I am everything that is good. Knowing me and my ways are what will give you the good life. I am not doing this because I need something from you. I am doing this because I LOVE you.

In more succinct words, Jesus says: Follow me. I will be your lifelong companion.

And when we hear that following Christ means living the good life, that sounds counter intuitive. Because we know where Jesus went. He went to the cross. Maybe counter intuitive is too mild a phrase. It screams at us that that is the wrong direction. That's not a good life. That's death. Let us hear Jesus speaking to us again: Trust me. Have faith in me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

This is the Christian's rhythm. Dying and rising with Christ. So, it is not us who live, but Christ who lives in us. This is one of the symbols of baptism. Buried with him in death and raised to new life – producing a union with God that only lead to joy.

I'd like to give you an example. A mother.

While we all confess that we are not our own but belong body and soul to Jesus Christ, I think we can all imagine that no one knows that better than a mother. As soon as a woman is expecting to be a mother, her life is no longer own. Whether she is giving up alcohol and experiencing morning sickness OR using all her spare time to fill out paperwork and have interviews for adoption – her life is not her own.

I'm not a mother, but I know a lot of mothers, and what I know and what I see that for every mother to be a mother, she must die to her old way of life. Every mother that I know, that I see right now, when they have their children, they have a new life when their child comes home. And I feel very confident that, although that life is hard, every mother here believes it is worth it and it produces great joy.

One of the reasons why being a mother or father is hard, is that children do not come with an instruction manual. How do you know what to do? What if your child gets into fights at school? What if they don't eat their broccoli? What if they hate taking showers? There is not a book to go to tell you exactly what a parent should do in each situation.

What do you do? We can expand this, of course, to all of life. We don't have an instruction manual with exact details for our life. What if someone offends us...how do we proceed? What medical treatment do we seek when we get a diagnosis? What house should we buy? Should we accept that job? Should we marry that person? Do we smoke marijuana? Is it good for our minds to watch that movie?

In many of those cases, there is not necessarily a right and wrong answer. Maybe in one scenario in your life, either decision is good. Or in another, either decision isn't great. Maybe it's good for one person, but for another it isn't.

And for Christians, our answer is not finding it in a book, but it's a person. Following Jesus. Trusting him. He is with us and we glorify him when we share in his story This is where it starts. We cannot gain knowledge without God. With Christ we grow in knowledge from science, history, experiences, each other, parents, teachers, etc. We grow to know more about God and know more about ourselves. It is a process. Let us be encouraged when we need wisdom, he or she will be there and hear the call to keep going.

I'll end this sermon with the words when Paul writes to the Colossians:

My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,<sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Amen