

HE WHO FINDS ME FINDS LIFE

by Steve Zeisler

When I was in the fifth grade, my parents sent me to YMCA summer camp, basically to get me out of their hair. I was supposed to canoe, run around in the woods, and make crafts out of leather, but the main thing was to burn off some energy, be with my friends, and get away for a couple of weeks in the summer.

We have gone beyond that in the modern world. Many parents today send their kids to camp in the summer, but the expectation is that the camp should teach the child a skill. They can go to computer camp, for instance, and become more adept at using computers. And there's soccer camp, equestrian camp, mountaineering camp, and so forth.

The book of Proverbs is about gaining skills as well. It is the account, especially in the early chapters, of a father teaching his son, which we've expanded in our thinking to include mothers and daughters. It is about one generation passing on the skills of living life to the next generation. Up to this point we have primarily considered dangers that must be avoided. Many of the passages that we've talked about dwell on some concern the father has that he wants to warn his son about. In chapter 1 he warns against youthful gangs and violence; in chapter 2, verse 12, against the man who speaks perverse things. The last two weeks we've talked about the adulterous seducer in chapters 5 and 7.

But in chapter 8 we have come to a section in which a woman we've encountered before, Lady Wisdom, is going to have her ministry described. This section isn't so much warning against particular dangers as offering of opportunity. As Wisdom speaks, young people who listen will find themselves encouraged to live life to its full potential, in all its joy. We might imagine her here as a camp counselor running one of these skill-oriented camps, inviting young people to come with her to be given the benefit of her training there. Proverbs 8:1-5:

Does not wisdom call,
And understanding lift up her voice?
On top of the heights beside the way,
Where the paths meet, she takes her stand;
Beside the gates, at the opening to the city,
At the entrance of the doors, she cries out:
"To you, O men, I call,
And my voice is to the sons of men.
"O naive ones, discern prudence;
And, O fools, discern wisdom.

Camp Conscience

The cry goes out to all people, but specifically even to those who are naive and foolish, who aren't inclined to listen. Everyone should pay attention to this call. She's in the streets as we've noted more than once in the past, not confined in some cloistered environment, but out where real life is lived. She's inviting young people to camp. Maybe she has shorts and running shoes on, a whistle around her neck, a clipboard, and forms for the parents to fill out. She's saying, "Come join me! Take this opportunity to learn these things, because the advantages are tremendous, and the skills to be gained are worth having."

Our attention is focused first on the skills to be gained at Camp Conscience: how to have your conscience informed so that the messages you get from your heart, instead of accusing you or misleading you in arrogance, can be a source of blessing. How can your conscience become your ally? How can your insides be

cleansed so that there is nobility, beauty, and hope when you look in and consider yourself? That's a skill that she's going to make available to those who will listen. In verses 6-13 we find the invitation to Camp Conscience:

"Listen, for I shall speak noble things;
And the opening of my lips will produce right things.
"For my mouth will utter truth;
And wickedness is an abomination to my lips.
"All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness;
There is nothing crooked or perverted in them.
"They are all straightforward to him who understands,
And right to those who find knowledge.
"Take my instruction, and not silver,
And knowledge rather than choicest gold.
"For wisdom is better than jewels;
And all desirable things can not compare with her.
"I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,
And I find knowledge and discretion.
"The fear of the Lord is to hate evil;
Pride and arrogance and the evil way,
And the perverted mouth, I hate.

**It's a glorious thing to see God at work inside,
to see renewal and change,
to see beauty where once
there was no beauty**

The speech of the woman is emphasized: "My lips will speak noble, truthful, righteous, worthy things. These are what will proceed from my mouth." If we want to think biblically with wider range, we need to add the New Testament perspective as well, Jesus' words: "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil." (Matthew 12:34.) So if the mouth can speak noble things, it's because there's nobility of heart. If the mouth can say truthful things and rejoice in righteous things, the clear implication is that something on the inside has been made well. Our counselor or camp director is inviting us to become skilled as she is skilled so that what we are able to say to others is increasingly right and worthy.

Righteous Within

Now, there is a requirement that we value and long for what is righteous. She says that it is more valuable than silver or gold. We need to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Correspondingly, we are required to hate what is evil. Verse 7 says, "Wickedness is an abomination to my lips." And verse 13: "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way, and the perverted mouth, I hate." We have to learn to stop winking at and enjoying what is unrighteous, to stop having pockets of wickedness that we are at home with. We learn to hate what is wrong and to love what is truthful and right, to hunger and thirst for it. We let God make the changes that only he can make from the inside, and increasingly we become the sort of person who finds his heart cleansed so we are not filled with either self-accusation or secret sin.

It's interesting to note in verse 13 that the evil way and the perverted mouth are most clearly associated with arrogance. It is pride and self-love primarily that incline us toward wickedness. If we do not fear the Lord, bow our knee before him, and admit our poverty and our need, if we are god in our own lives, worshiping our own capabilities, then we will never hunger and thirst for righteousness, nor will we hate what's wrong. It is pride that is at the heart of wickedness, and the counselor is teaching us to reject that so we can become people who have been cleansed within.

It's a glorious thing to see God at work inside, to see renewal and change, to see beauty where once there was no beauty. It's a glorious thing to go to Camp Conscience and to be able to see yourself as a new creature; a skill that is clearly worth learning.

Royalty Ranch

Now, there's another skill, another condition that our counselor or our camp director wants to pass on to us. We might leave Camp Conscience, get on the bus again, and move on to a second destination, Royalty Ranch. Verses 14-21 suggest some further help that we can receive:

"Counsel is mine and sound wisdom;
I am understanding, power is mine.
"By me kings reign,
And rulers decree justice.
"By me princes rule, and nobles,
All who judge rightly.
"I love those who love me;
And those who diligently seek me will find me.
"Riches and honor are with me,
Enduring wealth and righteousness.
"My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold,
And my yield than choicest silver.
"I walk in the way of righteousness,
In the midst of the paths of justice,
To endow those who love me with wealth,
That I may fill their treasuries.

Wisdom, again describing life from her perspective, speaks about those who rule in this life, who are noble. If you reign in life, you are in a position of being unthreatened by the world you live in. You have power over your environment. You tell people what to do rather than being threatened by them. You're protected by armies. You're the owner of treasuries. You have everything that you need to protect yourself in life. Nothing external to you is going to attack you, overpower you, push you where you don't want to go, or force you into some activity that you know is wrong for you. That's what it means to be a king, to reign in life.

Whereas the first place we went on our journey, Camp Conscience, had to do with the work of God to meet our needs within, the suggestion here is that we need to be able to make our way in an external environment, to deal with pressures, problems, and threats from without. What wisdom is saying is that power, riches, acceptance, and authority are hers, everything you need in life to succeed in living as the child of the King. That's the lesson that can be learned at Royalty Ranch, as we'll see.

Consider some of the issues that she raises. In verse 14, she says, "Counsel is mine and sound wisdom." You are vulnerable, aren't you, in a setting where you feel you have no expertise, where you don't know what you're doing. Have you ever been in a situation where somebody has advanced degrees, expresses themselves powerfully, talks loudly and insistently, and claims to know what they're doing, when you don't? You sort of feel swept away by what's going on around you, by their proclamation of expertise. But the promise of wisdom here is that in the essential things of life you never need to feel foolish because if you learn these lessons you have centered on that which is really worth knowing. No matter how loud or impressive the other pronouncements, we have found true knowledge, genuine wisdom. We have centered ourselves on that which is worthwhile, and we can stand up to such proclamations, however they come to us.

I was sitting with a group of pastors at a pastors conference Friday and Saturday. The man giving the lecture was learned and impressive; he's written a number of books. And yet he made a comment as he discussed the parable of the Good Samaritan that surprised me. There was a seminary professor present who has recently

written a definitive commentary on Luke. The lecturer said, "I'm somewhat hesitant to do this because I realize that we have a greater expert among us". But I've felt that way many times myself.

From a distance Jim Freeman of our body looks a lot like Chuck Swindoll to me. I remember once preaching here, and Jim Freeman was sitting at the back of the church. For a moment I had a sinking feeling as I thought, "Oh, Lord, if that's Chuck Swindoll sitting back there, what in the world am I doing up here?" Of course it was only Jim Freeman, so it wasn't a big deal! But that sense of being vulnerable if somebody of superior expertise is present is removed if wisdom is our accomplice, if wisdom has informed us. We've been told what's worth knowing, and it doesn't really matter how we sound or whether we have the credentials that others have.

Power and Riches

The second thing that's in focus here at the end of verse 14 is the phrase, "Power is mine." The power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ lives within us if we are informed by wisdom, if we have captured her insight into life. Instead of feeling overwhelmed by events, we can draw on power that is beyond anything in this world for protection, health, security, and balance.

In verse 17, she says, "I love those who love me; and those who diligently seek me will find me." If you're loved truly without reservation, just for who you are, even though your shortcomings are acknowledged, then you gain security. To know that you're cared about and that that will not be taken from you is a great source of protection. It makes your life a royal one.

Lastly she speaks of riches. Now, the promise of riches may occasionally result in actual material riches for those who follow wisdom, but that is not the main point she's making. In verse 19 she says, "My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold." In verse 10 we saw the same point made. Better than any material thing is the richness promised here. Remember the words of Paul in Romans 11:33: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" We are extraordinarily rich people if we are the friends of God. If we are in a living relationship with the God who cares for us, who has poured out his life for us, who will never leave nor forsake us, then we have riches beyond anything we can ever measure. Now, if these things are true, then we are in a position to live a life of stability. We can avoid threat, we can make our way in life without always having to be frightened and insecure. That's the life of a king or queen, a royal life.

So we've been to Camp Conscience and Royalty Ranch, and we're learning the skills of being people who can stand on their own feet, approve of themselves within, and be protected from without. Life becomes increasingly delightful to live; it's an adventure. We don't know where it's going to go, or what will happen next, but we're looking forward to finding out. Now we might do well to start examining more closely who this woman is, this camp director who has been so helpful. And if we'd ask, she'd tell us. Verses 22-31:

"The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way,
Before His works of old.
"From everlasting I was established,
From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth.
"When there were no depths I was brought forth,
When there were no springs abounding with water.
"Before the mountains were settled,
Before the hills I was brought forth;
While He had not yet made the earth and the fields,
Nor the first dust of the world.

"When He established the heavens, I was there,
When He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep,
When He made firm the skies above,
When the springs of the deep became fixed,

When He set for the sea its boundary,
So that the water should not transgress His command.
When He marked out the foundations of the earth;

Then I was beside Him, as a master workman;
And I was daily His delight,
Rejoicing always before Him,
Rejoicing in the world, His earth,
And having my delight in the sons of men.

The Companion of God and Man

Who is this woman? She's in the streets of the city, standing with those who will listen. Her voice is calling out and talking about real life and ordinary things. She is a companion for people like us, concerned about the lives we live and the hearts beating within us that sometimes accuse and mislead us. She's concerned to help us deal with our vulnerabilities to lovelessness, powerlessness, and lack of expertise. She wants to strengthen us in those things. She's nearby and yet---extraordinary truth!---she was there before the foundations of the world. She was there at the creative beginning with the Lord God himself, setting all the boundaries for the sea and the hills, the individual pieces of dust on the earth, the fields that would be cultivated. She was present at the establishing the heavens themselves.

Who is this person? How can someone of that breadth and immensity, of that glory and workmanship, be our companion, our counselor at camp? Those who read this in Old Testament times must have wondered about what was being described here. How can a characteristic like wisdom, which is impersonal really, a condition and not a person, be met as such a woman, as if she could be known or spoken to? Who is this companion of God in creation? But eventually we find that the answers come to us at Bethlehem, don't they?

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Who is the companion of God who is also the intimate of people like us? Who is the guide for life, who understands real life on the streets, having been here, and yet was present at the creation and established everything that is? The answer is the incarnation of God, Jesus Christ. The New Testament is very clear. He is the wisdom of God, we are told in 1 Corinthians 1:30. Colossians 1:16-17 says, "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities---all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." The writer of Hebrews reminds us, "In the past God spoke to our fathers through the prophets in many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe." God the Son chose humility, humanity, and ultimately sacrifice for us. It is a magnificent truth. The one who is directing us in how to live life is really our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who is trying to help us with our insides and help us find our way through the real world, the one who wants us to be whole people, is the one who was there at the beginning.

Look at the closing comments in Proverbs 30:22-31. They are filled with rejoicing, aren't they? There is delight as God created the world---it was beautiful, good, holy, exciting, and wonderful to behold. And there is particular joy in humanity, delight in the sons of men. That's what the companionship of Christ is going to lead us to: a life that is joyful. He takes joy in us; he approves of us. Then as we go out into a world that is not easy, not what it once was nor what it ought to be, by his companionship, and as we learn the skills he's teaching us, we will find that life is a joy to experience.

As I was considering the incarnation, I had a friend tell me about being in the Price Club in Redwood City. He was walking down the aisles and glanced across to the center section. There was a tall blond couple walking over there, pushing their cart. He didn't pay them any more attention until people around him were whispering, pointing, and calling attention to the couple. He listened to what they were saying and heard the

whisperers say, "That's Joe and Jennifer Montana!" Sure enough, it turned out to be Joe and Jennifer Montana pushing their cart around the Price Club just like human beings. Now, you expect to see celebrities on television---throwing touchdown passes or selling some product. They ride around in limousines; they descend from Olympian heights. They seem to live in some other universe. They don't go shopping with people like us at the Price Club, pushing their own cart around. But sure enough, they were, wearing ordinary clothes in a place where ordinary people went. This most remarkable message of the Bible is the intimacy of God with people like us, joining us on the streets, teaching us about life where we live it.

You may have been interested in the conjunction of planets that's taken place in the last couple of weeks. I remember taking my kids out at one point and pointing out that we probably won't see for a hundred years again--Jupiter and Mars and Venus in a close triangle as we've seen them lately. That's fascinating for all kinds of people. An astrologer from Palo Alto noted, "Venus is the planet that rules love, affection and pleasure. Mars rules aggression, passion, and sexual energy. And Jupiter rules optimism, buoyancy and opportunity. You put these three together in the sign of Leo, and you get a combination that makes people want to put a lot of energy into relationships, particularly romantic relationships." I remember back to the musical of the '70s, Hair, and the song about the dawning of the age of Aquarius: "When the moon is in the seventh house and Jupiter aligns with Mars, then peace will rule the planets and love will steer the stars."

It's easy to be flippant about astrology. But there is something marvelous, in contrast, about the announcement of wisdom, as we come to see the person of Christ, who established the heavens, who built the earth, who gave the sea its boundaries. The creation is filled with the wise counsel of God. Creation is inherently moral. It has meaning. Your Lord who cares deeply for you is the one who made these things. He is the one to whom we can go for help and strength, direction, and understanding. He is the one who established the world that we see.

Our Response

Chapter 8 comes to a conclusion that calls for response. Verses 32-36:

"Now therefore, O sons, listen to me,
For blessed are they who keep my ways.
"Heed instruction and be wise,
And do not neglect it.

"Blessed is the man who listens to me,
Watching daily at my gates,
Waiting at my doorposts.
"For he who finds me finds life,
And obtains favor from the LORD.
"But he who sins against me injures himself;
All those who hate me love death."

This chapter began with wisdom's wearing a whistle around her neck, holding her clipboard, and urging any who would join her in the gaining of skills to learn lessons that are valuable and worth learning, to go to the camp that would enhance their lives. But having these things made known to us, the point we must come to is one where we are the seeker; we respond from the heart, we wait anxiously for word of her, and we have become her intimate and follower. Instead of her calling on the street corners in hopes that we might occasionally attend, we are there anxiously waiting. "Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at my doorposts." Daily is an important modifier here. It is a relationship that is important all the time, and our prayers become, "Lord, guide me, lead me, help me. Lord, speak." We come to love the word of God. We love the people of God. We seek him and care for him. Our response is to receive the invitation and to act on it, to care about it.

The succinct final summation of these things is in verse 35: "For he who finds me finds life, and obtains favor

from the LORD." How can there be a better offer than that? It echoes Jesus' words in John 10:10: "I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly." Life itself--vitality, joy, adventure, wonder, learning, experiencing this world as a place you want to be because it is filled with the glory of God and the opportunity of God. The dangers are real, but the Savior is magnificent: Life is worth living. We are protected on the inside, protected on the outside, rejoicing at the created world, doing the bidding of God, finding life.

And, as if that weren't enough, we have favor with God. Everywhere we go we live with his approval, his companionship, his commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant." The invitation has been extended. How will we respond? Will we learn the lessons and be changed? Will the skills become ours?

Think through the invitation to have Christ be the one who can make your life everything you long for it to be. He desires to do that, whether you're a Christian now and need to be grown up in your faith, or you're not even a Christian yet. You can begin the process of having life and favor with God. You must decide how you will respond to the truth that's before us in Proverbs.

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