

Born to Win

A Flash of Wisdom

by Ronald L. Dart

Insight comes in small packets. There's no landslide of wisdom. You can't go to school and take a course in Wisdom 101. But she is everywhere, every day. She's *always* around. Solomon said:

Proverbs 1

NIV '84

²⁰ Wisdom calls aloud in the street,
she raises her voice in the public squares;
²¹ at the head of the noisy streets she cries out,
in the gateways of the city she makes her speech[.]

Wisdom is just *everywhere*. Now, it follows naturally from that that the message, of necessity, is broken up into packets that come to you at odd moments and odd places. One moment you don't see something, and the next moment you do. And she demands your *participation* in the shaping of wisdom. She demands that you be attentive. She demands that you think about it and that you work your way through it. Now, you notice I speak of wisdom as "she"? I do it because Solomon did in the Book of Proverbs—I think with a reason in mind. You'll find all this in Proverbs, the very first chapter. I'm now in verse 22. She asks:

Proverbs 1

NIV '84

²² How long will you simple ones love your simple ways?
How long will mockers delight in mockery
and fools hate knowledge?
²³ If you had responded to my rebuke,
I would have poured out my heart to you
and made my thoughts known to you.

Now, mind you, it's Wisdom that's speaking here. I find myself wanting to attribute the words to God, but that's not the way Solomon's doing this. He's basically saying that Wisdom is everywhere around you, and if you'll just *respond* to her, she will pour out her heart to you. That means something in terms of how you've got to be and how you've got to think. She then goes on to say:

Proverbs 1

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²⁴ But since you rejected me when I called
and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand,
²⁵ since you ignored all my advice
and would not accept my rebuke,
²⁶ I in turn will laugh at your disaster;

I will mock when calamity overtakes you—
27 when calamity overtakes you like a storm,
when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind,
when distress and trouble overwhelm you.
28 Then they will call to me but I will not answer;
they will look for me but will not find me.

Now, this is really classic when you're thinking of wisdom as a woman. Any married man knows exactly what this sounds like, because your wife tries to tell you something, and she'll tell you, and she'll try again, and then there will come a time when you're looking for advice and she'll say, "Ha! You didn't want to hear me then, no point in me telling you now."

Now, this is poetry. It uses imagery to say what wants to be said. The point is this: Wisdom, habitually ignored, *won't be there* when you need her most. And it's a law. It's not something that God makes happen; it's something that's built into the nature of things and the nature of man. That if you just don't pay attention to the lessons of life, you'll get blind-sided somewhere down the road. It makes perfect sense. If you get in the habit of ignoring wisdom, it won't cross your mind when you're in trouble. You'll have no wisdom in store to use. The woman continues to say:

Proverbs 1

NIV '84

29 Since they hated knowledge
and did not choose to fear the LORD,
30 since they would not accept my advice
and spurned my rebuke,
31 they will eat the fruit of their ways
and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.
32 For the waywardness of the simple will kill them,
and the complacency of fools will destroy them;
33 but whoever listens to me will live in safety
and be at ease, without fear of harm.

Now, this is *really* classic. It's classic, also, as an example of personification. Personification is a literary technique. It means to represent something that's abstract (in this case, wisdom) in the form of a person—to present something that is not a person as though it were. Now, it does seem significant, doesn't it, that the choice is made here to present wisdom as a woman? I think there is a reason for that, and I'll come to it. What got me thinking about this was an article titled *God in the Shower* by Andrée Seu, who is a senior editor for *World* magazine. She encountered a new friend who was a "charismatic" Christian. And this charismatic Christian friend claimed that God spoke to her in the shower.

Now, I was amused by that and I commented on it with some friends. While they didn't claim that God spoke to them in the shower, though, they admitted that some of their best insights came to them *in the shower*. And that's rather interesting because the same thing happens to me. It was so much so that one friend remarked she had actually considered putting a waterproof tablet of some sort in the shower so those insights would not get away from her. I made a joke; I commented, "Well, I had considered that if there were some way to install a computer in the shower, I probably would do it. In fact, I might never get out." But we all agreed in the end that taking writing materials into the shower would probably put *an end* to the insights we gained there. For the wisdom comes to us for us to think it through, for us to file it away, for us to "hide it in our heart" (to use a biblical term [**Psalm 119:11**]) for use later on. But the insight that comes to me from all of this is that it is in the rare, quiet moments that flashes of insight and wisdom come our way.

Wisdom is out there in the public square. She speaks to you *everywhere*. And I once heard a psychologist make the point in a lecture he gave that everything that enters your mind—everything you feel, everything you touch, every sensation—it all goes into your mind and it stays there forever. He said it’s like a closet you can never clean out. So what happens is, in the public square, in the top of every street, wisdom is coming at you from every side. You just don’t *recognize* it as wisdom. It is in the *quiet* moments, when the busy parts of the brain are nailed down, that the quiet parts of our mind can make sense of the world and send those flashes of insight. It comes to us in places like the shower. It may come to us behind the wheel of a car if we don’t have the radio on, bombarding us with noise. And so it is that these things are sent our way. Solomon continued, in chapter 2, to say:

Proverbs 2

NIV '84

¹ My son, if you accept my words
and store up my commands within you,
² turning your ear to wisdom
and applying your heart to understanding,
³ and if you call out for insight
and cry aloud for understanding,
⁴ and if you look for it as for silver
and search for it as for hidden treasure,
⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom,
and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

And the thing that comes to me as I read this is the realization that you have got to, at some time in your busy week and your busy day, you need to kick back, put your feet up, stare off into space, have a cup of coffee, get away from noise and so forth, and just *think* for a while. You’ll notice I didn’t say “think about God”? I didn’t say what to think about. What I said was, “just think”. Allow the quiet side of your mind to work its way through the things that you’re doing. See, what happens in the shower you’re busy...not really busy...you’re soaping yourself down, you’re showering, you’re feeling the hot water running down your body. And sometimes you just stand there doing nothing but enjoying the sense of the shower, and an idea will come to mind unbidden. You can do the same thing if you will just slow down, get comfortable, and stare into space for a while.

I remember one person who was discussing some of this talked about how the way to solve a problem is to *do your research*. Cram in all the information that you possibly can cram into your mind...and then stop. Get into your comfort zone, because the insights usually (in fact, almost always) come when you are in your comfort zone.

Now, I don’t know what your comfort zone is. For an awful lot of people it’s a shower, or it’s a bathtub. For some people it’s their recliner. But in order for the recliner to work, you’ve got to have the television off. Follow me? You need those quiet moments to apply your heart to wisdom. And there’s no really deep technique involved in this. Sometimes you just need to let your mind idle for a while so it can, below the surface, unconsciously to you, sort all this stuff out.

A lot of that goes on while you’re asleep. All the stuff that’s gone into your mind throughout the day gets filed in little cupboards throughout your brain, oftentimes with no relationship to one another. What happens while you are asleep is the brain does something like a computer disk cleanup. It goes chasing around, finding things that relate to one another, tying them together, making relationships, and you experience all this stuff as dreams. And they say that if you can deprive a man of that kind of sleep long enough, he will get a little bit crazy.

So here we are, looking at a question of wisdom. Solomon is speaking, to be sure, but Wisdom speaks to a young man as though he were her son or her brother. Now, I asked earlier, why is wisdom personified as a woman?

Well, the Book of Proverbs opens up, not with one woman, but with *two*. You have a good woman and a—what shall I say—not-so-good woman. The other woman shows up in verse 16 of chapter 2. The first half has all kinds of good things that can come to you from wisdom. The last half, beginning in 16, is another matter. Wisdom will:

Proverbs 2

NKJV

¹⁶ To deliver you from the immoral woman,
From the seductress *who* flatters with her words,
¹⁷ Who forsakes the companion of her youth,
And forgets the covenant of her God.
¹⁸ For her house leads down to death,
And her paths to the dead;
¹⁹ None who go to her return,
Nor do they regain the paths of life—
²⁰ So you may walk in the way of goodness,
And keep *to* the paths of righteousness. [*You're just not going to come back to it from there.*]
²¹ For the upright will dwell in the land,
And the blameless will remain in it;
²² But the wicked will be cut off from the earth,
And the unfaithful will be uprooted from it.

So, if Wisdom in Proverbs is the good woman, who is the seductress? Well, in this context, she is the opposite of all the things Wisdom tells us are good in the first half of the chapter. Now, this is not to lay aside the warning against sexual immorality, but Solomon is speaking of something much bigger than that. He says:

Proverbs 2

NIV '84

¹ My son, if you accept my words
and store up my commands within you,

The first layer of wisdom is *commands*. They are clear, they are simple, they are firm, they are unambiguous.

Proverbs 2

NIV '84

² turning your ear to wisdom
and applying your heart to understanding,
³ and if you call out for insight
and cry aloud for understanding,

You see, what he's talking about here is that you make the desire to be wise a *cardinal virtue* in your life. It is something you think about every day. There is a right way to do things and a wrong way to do things. There's a right way to live, a wrong way to live. There's a way that makes your life better and there's a way that destroys your life. You want to *know* the things that will make the right path yours.

Understanding and insight are two more layers of wisdom. They require thought. They require consideration. And Solomon says:

Proverbs 2

NIV '84

⁴ and if you look for it as for silver
and search for it as for hidden treasure,
⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.

The fear of the Lord, the knowledge of God—two more layers. Respect for God is fundamental, and that's what is meant by the "fear of the LORD". Knowledge is something you have to get out the shovel and dig for. It comes from study, from systematic learning. And all these things have to work together to somehow bring wisdom into the picture. In verse 6, he says this:

Proverbs 2

NIV '84

⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom,
and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.
⁷ He holds victory in store for the upright,
he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless,
⁸ for he guards the course of the just
and protects the way of his faithful ones.

So, where does wisdom come from? Well, according to this, it comes from the mouth of God. Who are his "faithful ones"? Well, they're the ones who keep faith with him. "Do this", he said:

Proverbs 2

NIV '84

⁹ Then you will understand what is right and just
and fair—every good path.
¹⁰ For wisdom will enter your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.
¹¹ Discretion will protect you,
and understanding will guard you.

Now we're going to add discretion to the layers of wisdom. Discretion is the ability to separate things—to make distinctions between ambiguous things. And the assumption all the way through here is that the good ways, the wise ways, the faithful ways, are ways that make your life better. And the absence of it makes your life worse. And what man is so *stupid* that he doesn't want a better life? Solomon said:

Proverbs 2

NIV '84

¹² Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men,
from men whose words are perverse,
¹³ who leave the straight paths
to walk in dark ways,
¹⁴ who delight in doing wrong
and rejoice in the perverseness of evil,

¹⁵ whose paths are crooked
and who are devious in their ways.

It's kind of hard to imagine there are people like that, but we all know there are. Now, I've walked back through all that to set the other woman opposite Wisdom—the good mother. And that brings me back to the article, *God in the Shower*, by Andrée Seu. She said:

[...] God brought me into the company of believers called “charismatics” who listen for God’s voice like you listen for the cellphone ring. My friend would hear from God in the shower.

Andrée Seu - God in the Shower

Ms. Seu described this as a new world for her: the land of what her friends now called “the living God”.

[...] God drawn closer by the elimination of distancing and interposing layers of what I used to call “wisdom.” God without committee chatter.

Andrée Seu - God in the Shower

Now, not to put too fine a point on it, but the seductress doesn't want you listening to the interposing layers of wisdom. You follow me? They don't want you to stop and think, “Wait a minute, wait a minute, is this idea godly or not? What kind of a standard can I apply to this? Is this right according to God's Word—according to what I know to be true?” In fact, in many cases, that's not the question. The question is *how it feels*. Most of us who have lived very long at all know precisely what it means to silence one's conscience—to silence that little nagging idea that keeps trying to struggle forward into your consciousness. Ms. Seu did not suppress that. She went on to think this through. She says:

But I dropped the book of Proverbs from my diet somehow. It didn't fit my new spirituality. It insists on bringing up cautions, things that might break the confident stride of a budding charismatic. It keeps saying look around, cultivate “judgment” (1:3, NKJV), get “discretion” (1:4), “hear instruction” (1:8), “pay attention” to what goes on “in the open squares” (1:20, NKJV), don't be “simple” (1:22). It conceives of wisdom more as a persistent search than a Gideon fleece (2:1-8). It invokes the hard evidence of experience, track records, patterns of behavior, outcomes of life choices. It says look at how the ruler acts (chapter 23), how the harlot acts (chapter 7), how the lazy man turns out (10:4).

Andrée Seu - God in the Shower

Now, she's looking at this pretty boldly. She says Solomon had probably seen enough whores in his time to know how they would respond to his solution of cutting the baby in two. He knew. But then she said she saw what she called the “dark side” of this new teaching she had encountered. The person, who had told you last month that God revealed to him that you two are to be best friends, *now* tells you that God has revealed to him that you are *not* to be best friends. She pondered:

Perhaps the will of God was confused with desire.

Andrée Seu - God in the Shower

And there is the rub.

Years ago, when I was dean of students in a small college in England, one of the students, a girl, came in for counseling. It seems a fellow she hardly knew had taken her out to dinner and, in the course of the evening, had told her that God had revealed to him that she was to marry him. I told her, tongue in cheek, that God had just revealed to me that she was to do no such thing. How did God reveal that to me? Well, he didn't speak in my ear. He did it through wisdom. I had been around the block enough times to recognize flim-flam when I saw it. My advice to the young lady was wisdom: Just tell the young man that when God reveals it to *you*, you'll give him a call.

This is *really* important. There are loads of preachers out there who will tell you what God has revealed to them. It may be that God has revealed to him that you should give a large sum of money to his ministry. Your reply should be similar to the young lady's to her suitor. That when God reveals it to *you*, you will consider it.

A lot of things could be confused with divine revelation: desire, hope, lust, covetousness, and even wisdom. A flash of insight may be wisdom knocking on the door. It also, though, may be the leading of the Holy Spirit. But here's the thing: You are expected to treat that in the same way—even if it is the Holy Spirit—as you would a flash of insight. How is that? You hold it in your mind. You think it through. You internalize it. You *don't* go babbling to your friends about it. You *do not* attempt to use it to influence the behavior of others, who have *no way in the world* of confirming your experience with God. In the Bible, this is called “trying the spirits” [1 John 4]. You don't necessarily give divine authority to everything that pops into your brain in the shower. It may just be a flash of insight. And it's wise for you to hold on to it, to think about it, to worry the thought like a dog would chew on a bone. In the process, you may learn some things.

Now, seriously, how do you know if it is God speaking to you in the shower or merely one of your own desires? You've got to check it out. One of the toughest novels I ever read was titled *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco. It was made into a movie with Sean Connery. And the movie was okay, but it was *nowhere near* the experience of reading that novel. It's one of the rare novels I've ever read, that I read twice. I have a good vocabulary, but I needed a dictionary close at hand while I was reading that. It's one of the few novels, as I said, that I have ever read more than once. There was an interesting dialogue in the book between two monks about the perverse desire people have to experience something supernatural, *even if it is the devil*. When God has been silent for too long, our faith can begin to waver, and we look for something supernatural—*anything*—to keep us aware that there is a spirit world. And so we go looking. In that situation, we might even be glad to see the devil, because his existence would somehow prove God's existence. Now, you talk about a perverse idea: that, in the process of seeing an occult manifestation—even the devil himself—we *think* it would help us to believe in God.

I think Ms. Seu was driving at something like this when she wrote her piece. Charismatics are not content to know God in faith, they must experience him somehow, someway. They like manifestations like speaking in tongues and being slain in the spirit. And there is a danger that they will confuse the two women of Proverbs. Solomon wrote in the fifth chapter:

Proverbs 5

AKJV

¹ My son, attend to my wisdom, and bow your ear to my understanding:

² That you may regard discretion [*That you can know the difference between these two manifestations.*], and that your lips may keep knowledge.

³ For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil:

⁴ But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.

⁵ Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell.

⁶ Lest you should ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, that you can not know them.

She doesn't want you to *think*. She only wants you to *feel*. There is no solid ground with her. She is here today; she's gone tomorrow. She is *feeling*, not knowing. She is *touching*, not thinking. Smooth and sweet—these are her watch words. She is all dessert. Wisdom is meat and requires chewing. She wants you to swallow without chewing. Solomon says in chapter 7:

Proverbs 7

AKJV

¹ My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with you.

² Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of your eye.

He has here three solid, un-moveable things: my words, my commandments, my laws.

Proverbs 7

AKJV

³ Bind them on your fingers, write them on the table of your heart.

⁴ Say to wisdom, You are my sister; and call understanding your kinswoman:

⁵ That they may keep you from the strange woman, from the stranger which flatters with her words.

You know, a sister who is close *will not like it* if you are involved with the wrong kind of woman. And, strange as it may seem, you can often get more help and more wisdom from your sister, your aunt...you might get more from them you would from a brother or an uncle.

The early chapters of Proverbs are a tale of two women. I have never seen God, or the devil, but I know they are there. I have a lamp for my feet and a light for my path. Why should I wander off into the dark? How, then, can I know that this brilliant idea that came to me in the shower is from God or from some other source? It's easy. I can test the idea against the Bible. I can remember that God speaks to us in *words*, and asks only that we believe the words.

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