

Our next Scripture is going to be from the 8th chapter of the book of Proverbs. This chapter contains a description of something which Christians have struggled to understand. This chapter gives a description of what the Bible calls wisdom.

In this chapter we are about to read, the word we translate “wisdom” is from the feminine Greek translation of the Hebrew word “Sophia.” I recently read where “Sophia” is one of the most popular names to name girls in the US. I wonder, though, how many parents who name their child “Sophia” are aware of its biblical roots?

This feminine character “Sophia” is really hard to comprehend. Some have said she is an Old Testament interpretation of the Holy Spirit. Sophia is sometimes called “Lady Wisdom” and that she contrasts with “Lady Folly” who is described earlier in Proverbs as a prostitute. As I read this passage, I ask you to listen to what you think this character of “Sophia” or “wisdom” is.

Read Proverbs 8: 1-4, 22-36

Sophia is not a passive character. She stands at the gate of the town and calls out. Sophia is also described as the first of God’s creation. She is described as being created before God created the earth where we live. Before the waters and before the mountains, there was “Sophia” or “wisdom.” Sophia is described as being with God as God created the earth.

The image is almost like a little girl who dances and plays around the feet of God as God creates the world where we live. Almost like a preschool child running around her mother as her mother struggles to buy groceries in the store. Every time we see this scene of a little girl with her mother or father we can imagine “Sophia” playing around God as God creates the world.

I say that “Sophia” is like that joy filled preschool girl because that sense of playful dance and joy is how she is described. Sophia is described as the free spirit that surrounded God as God made the world. Sophia is that joyful free spirit as God created you.

One of the things I was struck by as I read these words about Sophia or Wisdom from Proverbs is that Sophia is always very positive in her outlook. Sophia does not say a discouraging word. Sophia has nothing but good to say about God. Sophia has nothing but good to say about what God creates. Sophia, the voice of wisdom, is the voice that says that God is good and that what God creates is good.

Now contrast Sophia with the voices that many of us hear in our world. Whereas Sophia shares positive words about God’s creation including you, we live in a world where we hear lots of negative voices and opinions about us. We live in a world where maybe we constantly see the negative in others.

In a book I have been reading by author Jan Cinsero, she describes a recent experience that I think speaks a lot about what Sophia may be saying to us. The author tells a story about a bird that came into her house. She says, she was “hanging out in her sunny California home one morning, reading the newspaper with the doors flung open and the stereo blasting, when all of a sudden a bird came tearing into her living room. He was flapping around like a maniac, flying into lamps and plants, spreading leaves, feathers, poop, and panic all over the place.

In an attempt to escape, the bird kept slamming himself into the window while she feebly chased him around with a flip flop, trying to guide him back toward the open door. It was awful to watch, she says, the poor bird was all panting and wild-eyed, his little birdy heart no doubt about to explode with fear while he threw himself over and over again into the glass window at full speed.

Cincero continues by saying she finally managed to escort the bird outside to freedom, and then spent a very bothered few minutes calming her own little birdy heart while she revisited the scene of the accident. She imagined his confusion and frustration: “I can see the sky! It’s right there!! If I fly hard and fast enough I know I can reach it!”

In reflecting on what she had seen, the author noted, “It made me think of the way so many of us live our lives. We can see what we want, and nearly kill ourselves trying to get it in a way that’s not working. Meanwhile, if we just stopped, got quiet for a minute or two, and looked at things a little differently, we’d notice the door to what we want being held open for us by the nice lady in the bathrobe across the room. Then all we’d have to do is fly through it.”

This author then invites the reader to try a little exercise which I am going to invite you to do. Take a few seconds and look around this sanctuary and notice everything that is blue. Have you finished? Now how many things in this room are red? You don’t know because you were so focused on only looking for blue.

You may be living in a world where you hear a lot of negativity thrown your way. And you may only see the world through the negativity of others. Or you may see the world by only looking for what is wrong with others. How many times do you begin a sentence with a phrase like, “I always or you always.” “I never or you never.” “I can’t or you can’t.” “I’m not good at or you are no good at.” “I wish or I wish you.”

Many of us live in a world where all we can see is what is not there. Many of us live in a world where the negative overtakes the positive in the way we see the world.

But Sophia or Wisdom does not see the world through what is not there. Sophia does not see the world through negative thoughts and ideas. Sophia is not interested in describing what God cannot do. Sophia is not interested in describing what you cannot do.

Seeing the negative in yourself and in others is one story. But it does not have to be your story. You can write a different story for yourself. Looking to Sophia as a guide, you can begin to write a story that looks to the possibilities.

Many of us get comfortable with our negative stories. We say we can't do something so that we can play the victim. It is easier to play the victim than to write a different story. But if we seek to gain understanding from God's wisdom, we come to realize that we don't have to keep slamming ourselves into the window like that bird in my earlier example. There is a doorway to freedom. There is a different story we are invited to hear. A different story we are invited to write.

Sophia is calling to you. Do you respond to her invitation? If you respond to God's wisdom, then the future is a place of possibility. AMEN.

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-Sincero, Jan, *You Are a Badass: How to Stop Doubting Your Greatness and Start Living an Awesome Life*, Running Press, Philadelphia, 2013

-Given: May 26, 2013 in Allison Creek (York, SC) and the Presbyterian Home (Lexington, SC)

Unison Prayer of Confession

God of glory, grace and Wisdom, you call to us, but we do not listen. We trust in the emptiness of the world, but are reluctant to hope in your Word. We boast in our successes, but ignore the sufferings of others. We listen to the voices that try to tear us down rather than your wisdom that builds us up. Holy God, three in one, have mercy on us.

PRAYER FOR GRADUATES

Holy God of all wisdom, we pray for the generation of which these graduates are members. Give them purpose and a sense of direction. Make them peacemakers in a world that yearns for peace. Give them a passion for the protection of the world itself. Make them sensitive to the worth and dignity of every other person. Help them to be radical where radical solutions are needed and conservative where old ways and values are still useful. Guide each of them as they pursue the goals and ambitions and dreams that are the prerogative of youth. Guide them as they seek and find places of importance and fulfillment in your world. Remind them that you are their creator and you made each of them very good and in your image. Let them see that in themselves and others. Guided by your wisdom we pray in the name of the one who showed us how to live, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of heaven and earth, before the foundation of the universe and the beginning of time you are the triune God: the Author of creation, the eternal Word of salvation, and the life-giving Spirit of wisdom. Guide us to all truth by your Spirit, that we may proclaim all that Christ revealed and rejoice in the glory he shared with us. Glory and praise to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever.