

GOD'S CALL TO WISDOM Proverbs 1:5, 20-23

(ESV): "Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance.

²⁰Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; ²¹at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: ²²'How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?' ²³If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you."

INTRODUCTION

A certain riding stable posted this sign to help them identify the riding skill of its patrons: "We have fast horses for folks who like to ride fast. We have slow horses for folks who ride slow. We have big horses for big folks, and we have little horses for little folks. And for those who have never ridden horses before, we have horses that have never been ridden."

Socrates, one of history's foremost philosophers, died about 400 years before Christ's birth in Athens, Greece. His teaching style—the celebrated Socratic Method—involved not directly conveying knowledge but rather asking question after clarifying question until his students arrived at their own understanding of what is wise and true. A proud young man walked up to the muscular philosopher one day saying, "O great Socrates, I come to you for knowledge." Socrates recognized him as a pompous numbskull. What he truly wanted from Socrates was a few tidbits to toss around to impress others with his own wisdom. Socrates led the young man through the streets, to the sea, and chest deep into water. Then he asked, "What do you want?" "Knowledge, O wise Socrates," said the young man with a smile. Socrates put his strong hands on the man's shoulders and pushed him under. Thirty seconds later Socrates let him up. "What do you want?" "Wisdom," the young man sputtered, "O great and wise Socrates." Socrates crunched him under again. Thirty seconds passed; thirty-five; forty. Again, Socrates let up this now gasping man. "What do you want, young man?" Between heaving breaths he wheezed, "Knowledge, O wise and wonderful..." Before he could finish his sentence, Socrates jammed him under again. Forty seconds passed; then fifty. "What do you want?" "Air!" the young man screeched. "I need air!" Socrates replied, "When you crave knowledge as desperately as you have just wanted air, then you will gain knowledge."

Today's text identifies four classes of people: the "simple" or "naïve" (who are too ignorant of life to know how little they know and are easily misled), "fools" (who are their own worst enemy by resenting moral restraints God places on those "created . . . in His own image" (**Genesis 1:27**), preferring to gratify their immediate cravings like animals), "scoffers" (cynics who delight in finding fault with everyone's actions and truth claims but their own), and the "wise" led by God's wisdom. Biblical wisdom is best understood as "the expertise needed to navigate successfully the moral complexities of life." It's the ability to view life through God's eyes and to evaluate every action and every choice by whether this will distance us from the LORD or draw us closer to Him. It's the conviction that what God believes is best for us truly is the best choice we can make for ourselves.

How do we gain such "wisdom"? What is needed before our Creator can align us with His moral blueprints of right living by which He designed us to thrive? **Jesus** gives us a clue in **Matthew 5:6** (NKJV): "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." A family often treated their children to ice cream after the church service. One Sunday, the father decided to break what he feared had become a habit. The children were not happy and started whining. The father tried to point his kids to less selfish, spiritual values by asking them, "Where in the Bible does it say we should eat immediately after the service?" The children tried to outsmart him by replying, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after all the Righteousness, for they will be filled." Nice try. **Jesus'** words are better echoed by the passion with which the writer of **Psalms 119** (NASB) thirsted for a deeper experience of God's presence. You are

probably familiar with **Psalm 119:11**, "Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You." **Psalm 119:105** is also a favorite verse to many believers, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." But listen now to the hungering for an intimate closeness to the LORD based upon rightly embracing His moral training: **vs. 18**, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law"; **vs. 20**, "My soul is crushed with longing after Your ordinances at all times"; **vss. 34-35**, "Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law and keep it with all *my* heart."³⁵ Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it"; **vs. 62**, "At midnight I shall rise to give thanks to You because of Your righteous ordinances"; and **vss. 129-32**, "Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul observes them."¹³⁰ The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.¹³¹ I opened my mouth wide and panted, for I longed for Your commandments,¹³² Turn to me and be gracious to me, after Your manner with those who love Your name."

Solomon later seriously strayed from wisdom's path he described in **Proverbs**. He became painfully aware of the extent to which sin can pressure, pester, and provocatively allure us to stray from the moral guidelines that offer us the most intimacy with God and our best opportunity for a happy and successful life. Solomon personified Wisdom into a Divine Being to emphasize the extent to which God seeks us out individually to call us to Himself. Today we will explore Ways God Calls to Us and Why God Calls to Us.

I. WAYS GOD CALLS TO US

Proverbs 1:20-23 describes God's efforts to call us to Himself as those of a sidewalk preacher. Those hawking sinful lures and promoting foolish rejection of God's will are everywhere, so God does not wait for us to seek Him out in churches or synagogues but takes to "the street" to reach out to us in a variety of ways. **Vs. 20** declares Wisdom "cries aloud" or "shouts" "in the street," translating *taronna!* This is a Hebrew onomatopoeic word (that seeks to describe a sound, as "kaboom") used by public speakers to gain a hearing. Our Creator always takes the initiative in calling out to us to embrace His redemptive love. Wisdom's exasperated question in **vs. 22**, beginning with, "How long," reveals the danger we're in if we've repeatedly spurned God's corrective guidance in the past. In the context of **Proverbs 1:20-33**, God is screaming out to us: "Stop! You are about to drive off a cliff on the road you're on! Follow My directions to get back on the right road!" Two ministers were en route to a convention. Dressed in clerical shirts and collars, they were taking a shortcut on a seldom used, winding country road, shortly after a massive rain-storm. A farmer was amused when he saw them driving back in the opposite direction. He was puzzled when they stopped, took items from their trunk, and were soon seen pounding a sign into the ground that read: "The End is Near! Turn Yourself Around Now Before It's Too Late!" A few minutes later, another car drove past them. The driver yelled, "Leave us alone, you Religious nuts!" After the car disappeared around the curve, they all heard screeching tires followed by a big splash. One minister turned to the other and asked, "Do you think the sign should just say, 'Bridge Out'?"

God warns us and pleads with us to respond to His "reproof" by turning back to the solid road built upon His wisdom while there is still time. The Ways God Calls to Us to turn us back to Him include:

A. Creation

Romans 1:18-20 (NLT) tells us, "God shows His anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.¹⁹ They know the truth about God because He has made it obvious to them.²⁰ For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see His invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God."

The King who ruled Peru's sun-worshipping Incas from A.D. 1438-71, Pachacuti, began questioning if the sun could truly be the Supreme God. It appeared too regulated in its movements, suggesting another greater Power had created it. Guided by wisdom gained from observations of Creation, he discovered the

almost extinct memory of Viracocha—the Lord, the Omnipotent Creator of all things—whom the Incas had formerly worshiped. One shrine to Him remained. Pachacuti's father once claimed Viracocha reminded him in a dream that He was truly the Creator of all things. Pachacuti composed hymns to Viracocha to restore His worship among the Incas. The King described Him saying: "He is ancient, remote, supreme, and uncreated. He manifests Himself as a trinity when He wishes. He created all things by His 'word,'" including "all spirits. He is in His own being blessed and has pity on men's wretchedness. He alone judges and absolves them and enables them to combat their evil tendencies." Isn't it astounding to hear someone in the Americas describing God in this way prior to the coming of Bible-carrying missionaries! Pachacuti's conclusions about the Lord based upon wisdom learned through the general revelation of Creation were not isolated, however. Viracocha-like figures have been found to hold a prominent position in Indian cultures from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego! As Paul reminds us, even prior to the coming of the Gospel, God "did not leave Himself without a witness" (**Acts 14:17**)!

B. Conscience

Another vehicle of general revelation through which God calls to all people is our conscience. **Romans 2:14-15**: "[W]hen Gentiles, who do not have the law, instinctively do what the law demands, . . . They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts. Their consciences testify in support of this, and their competing thoughts either accuse or excuse them." Major principles of morality are in everyone's soul, and the ethics of the Bible are but the transcript of them. People who've never even seen a Bible reveal they are responding to God's call when they establish laws or rules to live by built upon His wisdom.

Hammurabi, 5th King of Babylon, reigned 1810 to 1750 B.C. He formulated an elaborate legal code 300 years before Moses recorded God's Laws of our Bible. A few examples demonstrate the clear sense of absolute right and wrong by which these Babylonians were governed. *Item #3*: "If any one bring an accusation of any crime before the elders, and does not prove what he has charged, he shall, if it be a capital offense charged, be put to death" (for wrongly accusing someone of a crime that could have cost this person's life). *Item #25*: "If fire break out in a house, and some one who comes to put it out cast his eye upon the property of the owner of the house, and takes the property of the master of the house, he shall be thrown into that self-same fire." *Item #229*: "If a builder build a house for some one, and does not construct it properly, and the house which he built fall in and kill its owner, then that builder shall be put to death."

C. Circumstances

God calls to us through a variety of circumstances. One day, while at work on a road, a man took shelter from the sun in the shade of a large, overhanging rock near the roadside while he ate lunch. Strangely, a pigeon lighted upon his shoulder and then flew away some yards and lit in the road. Soon it came and repeated this odd action. The third time it did this, the man arose and went to where the pigeon was to see if he could discover anything. The pigeon flew away and he never saw it again, but a few seconds later he heard a terrible crash! He looked back and saw that a chunk of the great rock had fallen just where he'd been sitting. Had he remained there, it would have crushed him to death. The man wept and said, "If God is that anxious to save me I had better surrender to Him," which he did then and there!

D. Canon of Scripture

"Canon," Latin for "measuring rod," refers to writings God's Church has tested and received as being genuinely inspired by God's Spirit, unlike other supposedly inspired books that are the Devil's handiwork to deceive us from following God's wisdom that leads us to safety and happiness. A Christian from China, when giving his testimony, said, "I had slipped into a great ditch and the ditch was sin. Buddha came along and said, 'Come up half way and I will lift you up.' Muhammad came along and said, 'Here are five pillars that will get you out.' But I couldn't get up those five pillars. Confucius came along and said, 'You're not really in that ditch; you just think you're in that hole.' But I was still there in the ditch of sin. Then Jesus came by, saw my predicament, laid aside His regal robes, and got down in the ditch along with the sin and

the mire. He lifted me out of it by His grace. He who was God was willing to come down to my level in order to lift me out of sin."

II. WHY GOD CALLS TO US

God has one objective in mind when He calls to us: To free us from everything that would enslave us and keep us from experiencing the abundant blessings of a relationship with Him and the quality of life He created us to enjoy! **Proverbs 1:23** (NRSV) radiates His warmth to us. If we'll repent for ignoring God's calls to live by the wise principles He gave us for our safety and good, He declares, "I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you." "Pour out," in Hebrew, describes an uncontrollable gushing forth, as when one of our dry desert washes is filled with monsoonal rains. God is promising that He'll be so excited whenever we are willing to turn from sin's foolishness that He will gush all over us with expressions of His love and will want to hold us all the more closely to Him!

CONCLUSION

Danny had been a tough street-fighter all his life, until he wound up in prison for murdering a man. Someone gave him a Bible. From a mixture of boredom and curiosity, he began to read it. He found himself being attracted to **Jesus**. He was used to comparing himself to the guy on the next bar stool. That way, he usually didn't look too bad. But when he compared himself to **Jesus**, he started to feel afraid. This man who never raised His fists scared him as nobody else ever had. He also read about people being "'cast into outer darkness,'" where there was "'weeping' and gnashing of teeth'" (**Matthew 8:12**, KJV). Danny knew something about darkness. Lying on his bunk at night, he began to review his whole life; horrified by the person he had become. He saw himself living for his next drink, his next coke (cocaine) party. He saw himself using women. His last girlfriend had been good to him, but he would have thrown her away for the next quarter ounce of coke. In fact, he probably had.

That next Sunday, when the guard called, "Who wants to be let out to attend chapel," Danny shouted, "Cell 16." But he sat like a stone through the service; hearing little. He came to ask a question. Afterward, he approached Chaplain Bob Hansen to ask if the passages he'd read about "outer darkness" were really about Hell. "Yes," said the chaplain. "Then I'm in big trouble," Danny replied. Chaplain Bob advised him, "When you get back to your cell, get on your knees by your bunk. Confess your sins to God, and pray for Jesus Christ to come into your heart." Danny did just that. He knelt in his cell, confessed he was a sinner, and asked Christ to be his Lord. As he did so, he kept remembering horrible things he'd done. These memories triggered both pain and an eagerness to be forgiven. Danny marveled that talking to God seemed like carrying on a conversation with someone he had missed all along without knowing it. He could almost hear God replying through a silence that echoed Danny's sorrow and embraced it. Danny not only felt heard, he also felt understood, accepted, and forgiven. He then enjoyed his first peaceful night's sleep in years!

Years later, Danny was released from prison, met a godly woman, and experienced genuine love for the first time. They married and were blessed with five children. He then graduated from Wheaton College, was ordained to the Christian ministry, and went on to work with troubled kids in Boston whose lives were being ruined by the godless choices of their parents or themselves. Later, he became a prison chaplain. He is no longer naïve about the consequences of his moral choices, enslaved by destructive habits, or hardened into a cynic who scoffs at ideas of a personal Creator or of absolute principles of right and wrong. Danny now models the quality of life that can begin for anyone who cries out for the forgiveness **Jesus Christ** alone can offer us and that God's wise moral guidelines alone can guarantee to us!