

CONTENTS

Introduction: On Wisdom's Threshold *11*

1. Who Is Wise? *14*
2. A House Is Not a Home *16*
3. The World Runs on Wisdom *18*
4. Christ Is Our Wisdom *20*
5. Wisdom's Stamp *22*
6. This New Thing Called Fear *24*
7. Lean on Me *26*
8. Wisdom Loves Life *28*
9. Wisdom's Call *30*
10. Lady Wisdom Speaks *32*
11. Unshakable Foundation *34*
12. Wisdom's Quickening *36*
13. Drink Deep *38*
14. Wisdom's Burden *40*
15. Wisdom's House *42*
16. The Leader Lays It Down *44*
17. The Who of Manifold Wisdom *46*
18. The Queen *48*
19. Solomon's Shifting Sand *50*
20. Consequence, the Professor *52*
21. The Library of Wisdom *54*
22. Stagnant Waters *56*

23. Evening to Morning 58
24. Tarnished Star 60
25. Wisdom's Ultimate Vow 62
26. When Creating Hands Redeem 64
27. The Value of Obedience 66
28. Precision, Preparation, Provision 68
29. Death Is Unnatural 70
30. Mirror Image 72
31. Gimme Girls of the Grave 74
32. A "Safe Space" 76
33. Righteous Oaks Don't Move 78
34. Celebrity Is Unnatural 80
35. Tiny Idols, Our Image 82
36. Ignorant, Loud, Dangerous 84
37. Moving Day 86
38. Follow Me 88
39. Groping for the Door 90
40. The Taipei 101 92
41. Cancer, Rust, and Gangrene 94
42. Sharpen That Ax, Son 96
43. Getting in Folly's Face 98
44. Folly Never Fulfills Her Promises 100
45. Downright Mean 102
46. Wisdom's Agonies, Our Crimes 104
47. Folly's Betrayal 106
48. When Wisdom Prayed 108
49. Our Wisest Prayer 110
50. Wisdom Unifies 112

51. Our Finest Hour? *114*
52. Rest Awhile *116*
53. Eloquent Silence *118*
54. Foolish Galatians *120*
55. The Weary Blues *122*
56. An Over-the-Shoulder Glance *124*
57. Saul on the Straight Street *126*
58. Wisdom's "Due Season" *128*
59. Bamboo Shoots *130*
60. The Household of Faith *132*
61. The Wiser Galatians *134*
62. Healed to the Bone *136*
63. Divinely Defined *138*
64. Deeds vs. Misdeeds: The Next Generation *140*
65. Rock in a Weary Land *142*
66. Wisdom at Watchnight *144*
67. Ultimate, Unshakable Wisdom *146*
68. Homecoming *148*
69. Reclining at Wisdom's Table *150*
70. The Fragrance of Wisdom *152*
71. Wisdom Speaks Truth *154*
72. Say Oughta Match Do *156*
73. Folly Loves Fear *158*
74. Folly in Disguise *160*
75. Partiality, or Getting That Good Seat *162*
76. Abraham's Sands *164*
77. The Haves, the Have Nots, and the Have Some Mores *166*
78. Folly Is Satan's Handmaiden *168*

79. Enduring Trials with Wisdom 170
 80. Perfecting the Imperfect 172
 81. Satan Isn't Creative, Just Great at Marketing 174
 82. Folly's Screech of Violence 176
 83. Confounding the Not-So-Wise 178
 84. Loss Is Gain, Death Is Life 180
 85. The Wisdom of Presence in Trials 182
 86. The Book That Matters 184
 87. Called Out, Set Apart, Safe 186
 88. The Wisdom of Persevering Faith 188
 89. The Costly Interruption of Disruptive Speech 190
 90. Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me 192
 91. Abiding in the Vine 194
 92. The Weight of Wisdom 196
 93. When the Ethiope Was Made a Man 198
 94. Fighting the Lord of the Flies 200
 95. Wisdom Breathes *Ex Nihilo* 202
 96. Uncommon Families, Untimely Born 204
 97. Wisdom Blesses Spiritual Motherhood 206
 98. Every Gift to the Wise 208
 99. Wisdom to Stand 210
 100. Wisdom and Hope Bound Together 212
- Epilogue 215
- Acknowledgments 217

WHO IS WISE?

Perhaps the most famous of the wisdom books in the Bible is Proverbs. It tells us at its outset why it exists:

For learning wisdom and discipline;
for understanding insightful sayings;
for receiving prudent instruction
in righteousness, justice, and integrity;
for teaching shrewdness to the inexperienced,
knowledge and discretion to a young man—
let a wise person listen and increase learning,
and let a discerning person obtain guidance—
for understanding a proverb or a parable,
the words of the wise, and their riddles.
(Prov. 1:2–7)

Life is confusing and at times, profoundly disappointing. If God hadn't provided His Word and the Holy Spirit to guide us into all wisdom and joy, we would most certainly be people of absolute despair, with the pain of the world obscuring its joys and triumphs.

Once we gather some years and a bit of grey hair at the temple, we realize that some of life's difficulties were the result of suffering the consequence of our own choices. At times those choices were made from ignorance, at other times selfishly motivated, and still at other times completely against the counsel of those who already knew the briar-covered path and had the scars to prove it.

Yet there are some who have come through this pilgrim's journey as if it were a nomadic adventure—hard-won wisdom that produces joy in knowing what is the right thing in the worst situations. Imagine a nomadic people group who have always lived off the land. Their children are told as they walk along where the hazards are. In the savanna, death

lurks in the tall grass where the lions hide; in the tundra, the danger lies in crossing the thin ice. In each case, those who are journeying pass on vital, life-saving information.

We call these people wise.

Some who have not traveled the path reject their wisdom and grow more foolish with each passing year, only wishing to satisfy themselves. The old people used to say there's no fool like an old fool, battle-scarred and never learning. Old on the outside, but children within. We all know people who've grown old yet never learned that the low grass provides clearer vision, that a whole community can cross on thicker ice. Moreover, the foolish do not only hurt themselves, since we never sin in a vacuum; our foolish choices always affect others because we are a connected, communal people made to either bless or curse after the fashion of our triune, promise-keeping Creator.

These people, we call fools.

It's at the humble threshold of wisdom and life that we leave folly behind, where we move from haphazard to disciplined and from ignorant to understanding, able to receive from those who are elder-wise, trading shrewdness for inexperience, and pursue righteous, just, and holy living that respects our own dignity and the dignity of others.

And be prepared for the words of the wise in riddles: they are vexing and fun, much better lived than told.

A HOUSE IS NOT A HOME

What transforms a house into a home? Any structure can be a house, but it's the elements within—especially the people—and what qualities they bring that make it a home. I've noticed that even the most beautifully appointed home can feel terribly hollow if the occupants I love are not there. Of course, in a busy home I enjoy the stillness and the quiet, but also because of the lingering memories of the occupants who have filled the rooms and my heart with their peace.

Some of our spiritual ancestors sang from the depths of their souls, toil, and harsh labor: "I've got a home in glory land that outshines the sun."¹ They sang of the Home that Christ Himself has prepared—for the construction is already done, and the keys secured the moment He emerged from the grave to lead us captives to the door. He tells us that His Home has many rooms, space for all He has gathered in. In His Home, there is pleasant work. The fragrances of perfect peace and purpose rise from every corner to bless our glorified senses. The fragrance of life reigns because He is there—the chief architect of the structure that was set stone upon stone, filling it with the safety and fulfillment of His people in mind.

Look around. The architect has set glimpses of this glorious Home all around for us to discover, for our delight. The psalmist saw these homes of peace and order all around him, parting tree limbs and peering into the homes of God's tiniest creatures nestled between branches. God fashions homes for even the sparrow and the swallow, "a nest for herself where she places her young . . . near your altars" (Ps. 84:3). So safe are these little ones that they trust their young—that is, their future and their hope—to Him.

1. "I've Got a Home in Glory Land," https://hymnary.org/text/ive_got_a_home_in_glory_land.

A HOUSE IS NOT A HOME

How content are the psalmist's swallow and sparrow, more secure than in the palm of any human hand. Safe. Nestled. Protected and watched over by the Creator Himself, who reminds us today that we have a home in glory land that outshines the sun.

And as the psalmist meditates on his promised place of shalom, like Adam he names it aptly . . . he calls it *lovely*.

So it is with Wisdom's house.

How lovely is your dwelling place,
LORD of Armies.
I long and yearn
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and flesh cry out for the living God.

Even a sparrow finds a home,
and a swallow, a nest for herself
where she places her young—
near your altars, LORD of Armies
my King and my God.

How happy are those who reside in your house,
who praise you continually.

(Ps. 84:1-4)

THE WORLD RUNS ON WISDOM

The LORD founded the earth by wisdom
and established the heavens by understanding.
By his knowledge the watery depths broke open,
and the clouds dripped with dew.

PROVERBS 3:19–20

The psalmist marvels aloud at creation around him: Christ has created everything seen and unseen. We live in an ordered, intricately interdependent yet harmonious universe.

Even though our age is one of cynicism, even pessimism, every one of us still feels our breath catch at the sight of a shooting star, or when the curtain of the northern lights descends and dances, or as we survey the wonder of tiny nails, eyebrows, and toes of a fresh, newborn babe.

The foundation of this ordered world stands so firm with the imprint of its Creator's wisdom that even though the destructive folly of Satan would mar its beauty and introduce decay, the principles of physics still define and drive it.

We see numerous affirmations scattered throughout Scripture that Christ is the wisdom on which our world rests. These assurances exist as our treasure, like iridescent pearls scattered across the page. The letter to the Colossians declares that Christ is the Creator of all things in the universe (Col. 1:16), and the Corinthian epistle likewise draws on Solomon's treasury with this truth: Christ Himself is our wisdom, and our way of understanding the world (1 Cor. 1:16–31).

Even though it is a fallen beauty, it is a majestic beauty still, with human beings as creation's pinnacle: a marvel of divine engineering, living, sentient machines that run independently and are capable of worship,

living beings with souls, each possessing a curious battery called a heart that runs without a plug, and cease at the Creator's determining.

We run alive, with the breath of our Creator in our lungs.

And yet there are terrible things marring the beauty of all that is made—people, flora, fauna alike. Nothing has escaped the effects of the fall.

Scripture tells us that if we get wisdom, understanding follows. Apart from Christ, our wisdom—what we are able to know and do, anything that builds life—is an act of His grace. Proverbs tells us more about wisdom. The book tells us that the Lord, who is Wisdom Himself, used the innate qualities of wisdom to lay the earth's foundation. In truth, the Creator is why the world, for all its brokenness and destruction, still makes sense and hangs together as a whole, since wisdom was the foundation of the cosmos design. Seasons still color our landscapes; spring still predictably follows winter in the places where it should.

Day follows night, and the sun hangs in the sky and marks our time. Animals, fish, and fowl remain fed and true to their nature. Kingdoms still rise and fall, and here is humanity in the middle of it all, despite the fallen nature of the world as we know it . . . His world crafted by wisdom, founded on wisdom, still sings.

CHRIST IS OUR WISDOM

Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. . . . It is from [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom from God for us—our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:24, 30

Paul teaches in his letter to Corinth that the uncreated Christ Himself is our wisdom.

Yes, Wisdom is a person—the person of Christ, the Creator of all things. His wise fingerprints are upon us, His breath of life is inside us, and His image covers us inside and out. Wisdom’s imprint on us is a part of God’s garden package. By dwelling with wisdom in the person of Christ, by whom, in whom, and through whom all things were made, our first parents relied on Him to explain their world. Having unhindered communion with the triune God in some form while they lived in the garden, they were to pattern themselves after His image by understanding the world through His eyes.

While the Bible speaks of Wisdom as a person, it also speaks of wisdom as a benefit to life, created by Christ at the foundation of the world. Proverbs 8 tells us that the Lord brought wisdom forth as the first of His works, before His deeds of old, appointed before eternity, before the world began (see vv. 22–23). Before the “Let us makes” of Genesis 1, even before the “Let there bes,” Wisdom was.

Let’s continue to think of Wisdom both as a person (Christ), and as an asset created by that person . . . a byproduct of the source of all wisdom, if you will.

Wisdom and truth are part of the testament to the richness of that image of God bestowed on humankind that separates us from

the animals. (I hesitate to say it's the whole, because no library could exhaust the contents of the image of God.) But we cannot deny that *wisdom the life-force* was imparted to man by *Wisdom the Person*, when Christ breathed life into mankind and he became a living, breathing soul contained in a body.

Imagine that first intaking of breath . . . the first breath of life, how thrilling it must have been for Creator and creature, the tender exchange of life-giving, life-making air, billowing into the lungs from Life Himself.

We sing then with wisdom and amazement of the psalmist:

When I observe your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you set in place,
what is a human being that you remember him,
a son of man that you look after him?
You made him little less than God
and crowned him with glory and honor.
You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet.
(Ps. 8:3–7)

WISDOM'S STAMP

The exact substance of wisdom is difficult to grasp hold of, because that substance is God Himself. Yet we can understand wisdom's substance by its expressions and also by its effects, which God has given us as visual aids.

One tangible expression of wisdom is the ordered universe in which we live. Though we know it now as a fallen world with brokenness shot through it, it remains beautiful and ordered and held together by His will and power. Matthew Henry, still highly regarded after three centuries for his biblical commentary, taught us that divine revelation is the word and wisdom of God, that the Redeemer is the eternal Word, and wisdom the Logos. So wisdom contains the power, understanding, and knowledge of the Trinity.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth."

So God created man
in his own image;
he created him in the image of God;
he created them male and female.
(Gen. 1:26–27)

Adam first out of the dust, and Eve next out of his side. Ironically, among all the non-human creatures from which God made many couples, man is the only one where He fashioned two out of one. The man *and* the woman seem to be a physical extension of the relational intimacy of the Trinity's creative force. By the handiwork of the interconnected yet distinct Three come an interconnected but distinct One.

Wisdom's imprint on the first people is also a trinity of sorts: (1) *in knowledge*, their ability to see divine things clearly and truly, and there were no errors or mistakes in their knowledge; (2) *in righteousness*, in that the first couple's will complied readily and universally with the will of God without reluctance or resistance; and (3) *in true holiness* (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; Eccl. 7:29).

This imprint of wisdom defines the byproduct we call shalom. The first people of God enjoyed complex, interwoven relationships and affection among all the involved parties. They knew harmony with the rest of creation, as well as trust, communion, identity, security, and a lack of want.

This shalom was marked by three distinct blessings: presence, where God dwelt with man; property in a newly fashioned heaven and earth; and peace, as they lived in harmony with each other and the world around them. The garden, under Christ-directed shalom, was created to be a sanctuary and protected place.

Wisdom is then, at the very least, a window into the image of God. It is a part of the "very good" of garden life, a part of the situation that was most conducive to human flourishing. Throughout Proverbs and the rest of Scripture, Christ's breath of life, of wisdom, of presence-dwelling and shalom, continues to be a life-giving force wherever it is found.

This picture gives us a scriptural definition for flourishing: the shalom of dwelling with the Creator, with no hindrances or obstacles to understanding His world, His intentions, and His purposes through His eyes. Shalom—or flourishing—is dwelling with Wisdom Himself, and it is directly tied to obedience to the source of wisdom. Shalom was never intended as a goal to be obtained; it's not something humans can strive for or can even create. Though we create in God's image by His mercy, our Creator stands as the only One who can wisely shape a world perfectly suited to our hopes, needs, and even our godly desires.

THIS NEW THING CALLED FEAR

Satan, the author of folly and destruction, ruined himself by attempting to be like the Most High: “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High’” (Isa. 14:12–14 ESV). This was ambition at its loftiest and its most foolish, to attempt an act that could never be attained.

The one who could not bear to dwell with the Prince of Peace coozied up to the woman and persuaded her that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which had been forbidden by God, “was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, *and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise*, [so] she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate” (Gen. 3:6 ESV).

He called her to Folly’s side, and how ironic that wisdom is included in the deception! The first people were already wise, since they walked and dwelt with Wisdom Himself. Wisdom was the first and natural orientation of our parents in the garden. But they chose instead to dwell with foolishness, and we as their children dwell with foolishness. Wisdom and Truth are two sides of the same coin, while Foolishness and Lies are also two sides of the same coin.

The result of the abandonment of wisdom, obedience, and shalom is reported in Romans 1:

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking,

and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (vv. 21–23 ESV)

The depth of grief the first couple likely felt when peace with God was shattered can't be understated. They experienced an instantaneous transition from peace to chaos, knowing abject fear and shame, hiding because "I was afraid . . . I was naked."

What is this new thing I feel, called fear? What this new thing I sense, called nakedness? Imagine, these never-before-known emotions cascading down on their heads and into their hearts, after knowing only shalom.

LEAN ON ME

Our first parents knew wisdom through intimacy with Christ. When temptation and sin slithered into the garden, so came Folly—Wisdom’s envious and unfortunate partner throughout Scripture.

They chose instead to dwell with folly and foolishness, and we as their children dwell with the foolishness of our own understanding of the world, apart from the One who created the world. Folly was not a part of the “very good” created order. It was forced upon the man and the woman by a hostile and deceitful enemy, hell-bent on frustrating the first couple’s God-given shalom.

Wisdom’s world of obedience was disfigured. Everything that made her a haven of rest and safety contorted into something grotesque, the product of fearsome rebellion.

In an instant, the lights dimmed a bit, the trees drooped, and creation uttered her first weighted groan. Relationship became brokenness, affection became resentment, trust turned to suspicion, unity morphed into discord, security decayed into danger, balance yielded to oppression, abundance evaporated into paucity. To echo Ophelia in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the sweet bells of harmony with creation became “jangled, out of tune and harsh.”

Put another way, wisdom and truth brought them peace and harmony; folly and lies brought chaos and disorder.

As a result, the tuition for biblical wisdom ever since is now become astronomically high; we can take fire in our laps and experience the pain on our own flesh, or we can trace inquisitive fingers along the burn scars of others and ask, “What hurt you—was it your folly, or someone else’s foolish flame that jumped on you?”

And then we listen for the wisdom. But however the knowledge of consequence comes, someone has paid the price to know what is good and what is not.

LEAN ON ME

Imagine if our first parents had followed the old proverb, stitched and hung on many a wall for generations:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise on your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones. (Prov. 3:5–8 ESV)

Imagine if we better followed these wise words today!

WISDOM LOVES LIFE

Who pays the price for becoming wise? If Folly had its own banking system, humanity would write checks on the overdrawn account of human wisdom.

Scripture tells us that wisdom is a high commodity in the open market of life, and often it comes at the expense of bills that our own folly racks up; we learn the cost of both by experience. Sometimes the education comes by ignorance, e.g., “I didn’t know the stove was hot, but my blistering finger tells me it was so!” At other times, our curiosity drives our willingness to pay the price: “This stove has burned me before, so I know I can withstand the searing pain.”

Proverbs 3 reminds us that to grasp wisdom is to take hold of one of the most valuable, even powerful, weapons in life. And of course, it is—for to grasp wisdom is to invite the mind of Christ Himself, the One who ordered the world and keeps it hanging together. To grasp Christ’s mind for His creation is much more than understanding what is right and wrong; it is a return to the peace, knowledge, and shalom of the One who created the whole system of life. He has paid the tuition on our behalf and left us the record of His world in natural and special revelation. He has left His Spirit to guide us into all knowledge and wisdom to the place that our spiritual parents forsook:

Happy is a man who finds wisdom
and who acquires understanding,
for she is more profitable than silver,
and her revenue is better than gold.
She is more precious than jewels;
nothing you desire can equal her.

Long life is in her right hand;
in her left, riches and honor.
Her ways are pleasant,
and all her paths, peaceful.
She is a tree of life to those who embrace her,
and those who hold on to her are happy. (Prov. 3:13–18)

Wisdom beckons us with a full scholarship to her academy, bought and paid for by the Creator and the return to wisdom made possible through the blood-bought redemption of Christ. Christ, in the wisdom of the kind Creator, has given us His wisdom in the form of written Word, explaining the ordered workings of His universe.

Happiness and peace are the lifelong possession of the one who garners wisdom. Does this mean that unfortunate things, even destructive things, will never happen to the wise? Certainly not. No comfortable life is promised to the Christian, but rather trouble is promised; yet we are instructed to take heart in the midst of trouble because Wisdom Himself has overcome the world. He will hold the Christian together in peace, even when the world is falling apart.

WISDOM'S CALL

Many voices call out to us in the brief hours of a day. We receive phone calls from familiar voices, emails, texts, calls from our own hallways and from up the stairs of our homes. We are bombarded with ads that entice us to momentary pleasure at the expense of our pain, that one last meeting with the wrong person, or whichever drug of choice we find irresistible. These voices crowd in and echo with insistent and increasing volume, attempting to obscure Wisdom's voice if we do not take care. They know what we like, they know what we want.

Both modern and developing worlds provide an abundance of distractions calling for our time and attention, but it seems like more than ever before. Neurobiologists who specialize in the brain's functions and how it adapts to the world around us teach us that while our bodies experience both pain and pleasure in similar ways, our bodies are exhausted by balancing the dissonance between the two. Perhaps this is our Creator calling from inside His creation to discern between the fruit of wisdom and folly, and that our understanding the difference extends into, even begins in, our brains.

It's no wonder then, that Scripture instructs us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). Detaching from the distractions and calls of other voices intent on harm is a weighty task when they are everywhere, targeting us from a distance us like a hustler seeking a mark.

There are many human voices woven into the stories of the Bible; the voices of husbands directing wives and wives directing husbands, of rulers directing their people, of prophets speaking the words and will of God, of those treated unjustly crying out in the desert for recompense; voices persuading, condemning, upbraiding, and even encouraging us

to draw near to the ultimate voice, such as that of John the Baptist crying in the wilderness to “make straight the way of the Lord.”

The voice of Wisdom that commands and beckons us to come apart from those is distinct from all others; it beckons us to come, be refreshed, renewed, made alive, and live. This is the voice of the Shepherd, by whom His sheep are known. And so as all others fall away in this moment, we tune our voice to His:

Doesn't wisdom call out?
 Doesn't understanding make her voice heard?
 At the heights overlooking the road,
 at the crossroads, she takes her stand.
 Beside the gates leading into the city,
 at the main entrance, she cries out:
 “People, I call out to you;
 my cry is to the children of Adam.
 Learn to be shrewd, you who are inexperienced;
 develop common sense, you who are foolish.” (Prov. 8:1–5)

There is no shame in Wisdom's call. Wisdom wants not only to be heard, she wants to be seen. Wisdom calls to us as high and grand as a living statue, raised on the highest places, high atop a hill so that all may see who it is that is calling, and see who is flocking toward this voice of life.

Note here that the invitation is to everyone. All people are welcome at Wisdom's door, and that includes you and me. Shakespeare's sprite Puck famously said, “Lord, what fools these mortals be!” And this is us as well, for we are all under the foolishness of Adam after the fall.

The school of wisdom is the most inclusive and comprehensive educational plan known to mankind . . . it is also the most essential.

LADY WISDOM SPEAKS

Proverbs 8 is a gift to all women who belong to the people of God. Because it is a gift to women of God, it is a gift to all the people of God, for in God's life-giving economy, what is good for one is good for all.

God presents Wisdom, and her opposing force Folly, in the feminine. The two women are the star players in this analogy of the grand choice of life.

In fact, God paints for us a picture of two women, living in two houses, serving two meals, with two communities, and based on two separate lives. Casting the two women feels like a literary absolution of the first woman's disobedience in the garden, where her mind, heart, body, and soul stood at the crossroads of life and death.

In painting the picture, He asks us to stand before the final word picture and bids us to ask questions: Which of these two houses is the dwelling that will lead to the shalom intended in that first garden shelter? Which one is the home that resulted in the first tempting bite that threw the world off-kilter?

As the Bible speaks of Lady Wisdom, our ears open to recognize the distinctive voice of personal Wisdom that's found as an abundant fountain in the second person of the Godhead. We hear that voice as the very voice of God cascading through His Word and works:

Listen, for I speak of noble things, and what my lips say is right.

For my mouth tells the truth, and wickedness is detestable to my lips.

All the words from my mouth are righteous; none of them are deceptive or perverse.

All of them are clear to the perceptive, and right to those who discover knowledge.

Accept my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than pure gold.

For wisdom is better than jewels, and nothing desirable can equal it. (Prov. 8:6–11)

In this we find the echoes of Paul, and what we should all listen for and heed from our Shepherd's voice: "Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things" (Phil. 4:8). The things that are the opposite of a righteous, noble nature and of truth are named—deceitfulness, wickedness, perversion of the created order—these do not belong in Wisdom's house and therefore we can neither dwell on them nor dwell with them. Nothing impure comes from the lips of the Shepherd, and nothing against His character will enter Wisdom's house. Not only will His distinctive voice be clear to those who seek Him, so will their understanding of His precepts.

Debates will continue throughout human history about the ownership and value of the world's finest and largest jewels worn in the crowns of earthly kings and queens. Yet even the commodities of the ages that have withstood the tests of war, tech, and time cannot eclipse the value of knowing this voice.

The world lusts after silver, gold, and precious diamonds and rubies, but they all pale in comparison to knowing and hungering after Wisdom's voice.

UNSHAKABLE FOUNDATION

The house of Wisdom is unshakable because its foundation,
the King of kings, cannot be shaken.

I exalt you, my God the King,
and bless your name forever and ever.

PSALM 145:1

David **must have loved** singing this song. That it was David's song of praise intimates that not only did he write it, but that he took particular pleasure in it; it was his companion and comfort wherever he went, perhaps even long before he was a king.

And this is so good to David's heart and ear—such a rich declaration—that David repeats and doubles down . . .

I will bless you every day;
I will praise your name forever and ever.
(Ps. 145:2)

There is no succession plan in this kingdom. This is a forever rule, and it is not only David's duty to praise and extol the King's virtue as a subject in the kingdom, it is his delight. Our praise shall have no end, because this kingdom shall have no end. If David can praise the name of his King forever and ever, it is because the King will reign forever and ever. Not even death can shake the house of Wisdom that King Jesus rules!

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things

were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1:1–5)

Christ has laid the kingdom to run on the foundation of His wisdom. He built the pillars that uphold the structure, and everything in His world runs on His power and knowledge; how He has set it to work for our good and His ultimate glory. Since He laid out its workings, He was the only one who could upset the natural physics of death. He is the only one who held the keys to upending and redeeming all of His creation for its intended purpose—to be the dwelling place for a King and His people.

When earthly kings and queens die, they stay dead. The whole world is a mausoleum of archeological digs and graves, memorials, tombs, cathedral sepulchres, and cemeteries full of kings and queens who died and did not resurrect. Their tombs are still full.

But we have a greater King whose tomb is empty! No succession plan is needed for a King who reigns from beginning to end. He will, forever, receive praise every eternal day for this marvelous, miraculous work of defying natural laws He Himself set in place.

This ruler of wisdom is impervious to destruction; so are His kingdom and we, His people. If we put ourselves in the psalmist's shoes, we should give glory to God every day and everywhere: in our solemn devotions, in our art, in our common conversation. If our hearts are full of God, then out of the abundance of our mouths will speak with reverence—with praise—on all occasions.

WISDOM'S QUICKENING

Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. “Remove the stone,” Jesus said.

Martha, the dead man’s sister, told him, “Lord, there is already a stench because he has been dead four days.”

Jesus said to her, “Didn’t I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”

So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you heard me. I know that you always hear me, but because of the crowd standing here I said this, so that they may believe you sent me.” After he said this, he shouted with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips and with his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unwrap him and let him go.”

(John 11:38–44)

Lies we’ve believed about ourselves wrap around us like grave clothes. They swaddle us in a death grip, telling us we must live this false identity in a house of death and decay. Yet once we hear even the faintest echo of Wisdom’s call, our eyes, once closed in death, pop open and interrogate our surroundings, and suddenly we want to live!

We look down at our grave clothes and smell their stench. All at once, we see what we once were and what we actually are. Wisdom’s call has snatched our blinders and shown us the reality of the house of the dead.

But as it is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man,

WISDOM'S QUICKENING

the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Cor. 15:20–22)

Once we come alive in the grave we've dug for ourselves, we cry to be lifted out. And when the Spirit opens our eyes, our grave will be empty, just like His.

No longer dead in Adam, we are now alive in Christ. He unbinds the grave clothes that hold us, and we come Home.

This is what it is to approach the threshold of Wisdom's house.

DRINK DEEP

You made him little less than God and
crowned him with glory and honor.
You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
all the sheep and oxen as well as the animals in the wild,
the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea that pass
through the currents of the seas.
LORD, our Lord, how magnificent is your name
throughout the earth!

PSALM 8:5-9

Our distinct way of knowing—of being able to not merely know but to grow wise—is a part of the Creator’s wisdom. The animals may bring us their vivid personalities, express their intelligence and reasoning, and even show affection toward us, but we are still different from them. Some can be trained, others can be domesticated and tamed. All creation hunts, gathers, multiplies, chirps, whistles, swims, moves via wings or on two feet or four. All creation worships the Creator, simply by doing what they were created to do. Though by man’s hand creation has been broken, all creation still worships obediently by submitting to the ordered world established for them. Creatures are even able to learn; but they cannot grow wise and apply their wisdom in the way that human beings can. Despite their varied abilities, they still live in the confined circle of their God-given instincts and drives. We are different from them; Genesis tells us that we have God’s image, and they do not.

Man, in God’s likeness, looks for meanings so that he can control and direct his instinctive desires. It might be easier and more satisfying

to become animalistic and satisfy all our primal urges, but even as we do so we cannot escape God's imprint on us. Our consciences eventually will prick us, simply because we are human and possess consciences to be pricked with regret. Yes, we experience regret, and ponder the deeper things that are especially human, such as why, how, and for what purpose?

Though we are distinct from the animals, we are also distinct from God. We are fallen human beings who need wisdom; we need life and the illumination that come from the worship of God. One brother in Christ captures the differences this way:

Even Christians, with a fuller revelation than Solomon had still cannot see the whole plan, though faith enables them to see that in everything God works for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose. There is much we cannot understand, but our efforts at aiming for unsubstantial and ungodly ideals, and our efforts to straighten things out and supply what seems to be lacking will always lead to disappointment. We simply cannot break through our barriers between our wisdom and God's. If we could, he wouldn't be God. We are wholly dependent on God's great wisdom, and His increased knowledge.¹

We will never cross over to own the fountain and source of wisdom; however, we are privileged to drink deeply from it.

And because we are human, drink deeply we must.

O what a magnificent Creator, to make from wisdom a gift of such distinctions!

1. Frank E. Gaebelien, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Vol. 5): Psalms–Song of Songs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, 1991), 943–50.

WISDOM'S BURDEN

I, the Teacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. I applied my mind to examine and explore through wisdom all that is done under heaven. God has given people this miserable task to keep them occupied. I have seen all the things that are done under the sun and have found everything to be futile, a pursuit of the wind.

What is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.

I said to myself, “See, I have amassed wisdom far beyond all those who were over Jerusalem before me, and my mind has thoroughly grasped wisdom and knowledge.”

I applied my mind to know wisdom and knowledge, madness and folly;

I learned that this too is a pursuit of the wind.

For with much wisdom is much sorrow; as knowledge increases, grief increases. (Eccl. 1:12–18)

King Solomon—teacher, preacher, king—wrote a good amount of what we find in the wisdom books of our Scriptures. In truth, as we know, he is regarded by Scripture itself as the wisest among rulers in his day. He captures the modern idea that the more we know and the more we understand, the harder it is to pretend we don’t know. Wisdom—the act of knowing what is right, fair, just, and orderly—will also bring grief as it brings peace.

Why, then, should anyone desire Wisdom’s house if it brings grief or pain? Isn’t that the domain of Folly’s house?

It seems that from one hand wisdom restores a measure of peace to the soul, but the other hand brings the burden of seeing injustice

more clearly. The hands combine so that the mind may connect foolish actions with inevitable destructive results.

The more we distance ourselves from our own folly and the hurt we have caused while indulging our own folly, the more our hearts likewise ache to watch the foolish destroy themselves, burn down their relationships, and betray the people around them. We hurt for them because we know the emptiness that awaits them at the end of their temporary pleasure. It's the same emptiness that we found at the end of ourselves that caused us to cry out for wisdom and life.

Solomon determines what is wise, possibly from his own experience with folly, his own folly and that of the people he ruled. Domestic issues, marital betrayals, crooked lawyers defrauding clients of their meager finances, thefts, murders, adulteries and other betrayals—too many grave injustices to name—were seen up close and personal by Solomon himself. Yet nothing is wasted in God's economy. As the king aged and as he pulled away from his own folly, God used his adjudicating of these situations to make him more wise.

His writing drips with the regret of a refugee who has visited the House of Folly more than once:

“Absolute futility,” says the Teacher.
 “Absolute futility. Everything is futile.”
 What does a person gain for all his efforts
 that he labors at under the sun?
 (Eccl. 1:2–3)

Better then to labor not under the sun, but under the Son. Christ is the source of all wisdom, and the only antidote to folly and destruction.

WISDOM'S HOUSE

Get Wisdom, get understanding.” Over at the House of Life, Wisdom is not looking for just a temporary visit from those she has called. She wants all who come through the door to take up permanent residence.

Once we set foot onto Wisdom's threshold, a whole new world lies before us. Like Dorothy opening the door from Kansas to Oz, the world we are about to enter will be drastically different from the one we knew as fools. We raise a hesitant fist; when she called aloud from the high points of the cities, did Wisdom really mean me? Her call was irresistible, but was it really for foolish little me?

Even before our fist raps the door, it opens. She has been waiting for us. Her hand reaches out to welcome us in like the father who ran to the prodigal, so glad is she to see us turn her way. The warm hand of help, truth, sincerity, and security takes us by the arm and guides us in.

Stepping through her door may feel like walking into a foreign land, stepping from the chaotic and clanging streets of folly to a wonderland of peace, justice, and order.

What is this place? So different from the one we tolerate across the street!

Is this the transition from the old man to the new? Is the threshold the margin between death and life?

At the same time, the new and unfamiliar world feels like coming Home: the capital *H* Home; Home to the conditions for which we were made.

Once inside, her door closes with a rich, velvet, and satisfying click of the latch. Security at last.

She offers us a tour. She introduces us to her maids, symbolizing

worshipful service, cooperation, and simultaneous unity and diversity we see in the character of the Trinity. The way that the body of Christ should operate on earth, unified in mission and purpose, and in the object of their adoration.

Our brother Paul distinguishes what we should be from what we too often are:

Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be united with the same understanding and the same conviction. For it has been reported to me . . . that there is rivalry among you. What I am saying is this: One of you says, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?

(1 Cor. 1:10–17)

We know that we are welcome, because this is where we were always supposed to be: near to the heart of Wisdom, close to the members of her household, and safely unified in Christ.