

“Wisdom on the Street”
Proverbs 1:20-33
Andrew Foster Connors
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The way Proverbs tells it, you can't miss Woman Wisdom. Every time you go outside to walk the dog, or chat with the neighbors, she's yelling in the streets. She's down at the city gates where the politicians do their business, advising them to keep their policies in line with God's vision. She's down in the financial district shouting to the banks to keep their rates reasonable unless they want more credit to bubble and then burst. She's down at the Harbor trying to get a hearing with our real estate barons making sure they don't forget the rest of the city. She's in your neighborhood warning us not to forget people who don't live there.

The way Proverbs tells it, you can't miss Woman Wisdom. It should be too difficult to turn her away. She's too visible, too loud, and too persistent. She's too strong. She's too in your face. She's an elder stateswoman, the matriarch of the city, and your second grade teacher all rolled into one. When Woman Wisdom walks into the room, the antics should stop, games cease, misbehavior cut out and everybody should fall into the line.

The way Proverbs tells it, you can't miss Woman Wisdom. It should be too difficult to get away from her even if you wanted to.

Yet *not being heard is her primary complaint*. Listen! Give heed! Don't ignore me. Don't cross to the other side of the street. Don't ignore the words that I am speaking to you. They are for your own good. They are for your own benefit. They are for your safety and your security. Even though she's screaming in the streets--even though she's positioning herself in the public space--even though she's standing at the busiest places where the most people come and go, still she's frustrated that most people are not listening. “I have called you and you refused;” “I have stretched out my hand and no one heeded;” “you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof;”

With all of that speaking, all of that shouting, all of that pleading, it's hard to understand how anyone could ignore her. It's hard to understand how anyone could shut her out. It's hard to understand how anyone could avoid her counsel. Yet, a year out from our financial collapse, it's clear that ignoring Woman Wisdom happens all the time.

You *can* get away from Woman Wisdom. You *can* claim that she does not speak. You can *argue* that you do not hear her voice. I've heard plenty of mortgage brokers say the only voices they heard were shouting, “sell more and more and more.” I've heard more than one mortgage trader on the news say the only voices they heard were screaming, “buy more and more and more.” I've heard plenty of homeowners say, the only voices we heard were saying, “everybody else seems to be able to afford it.” I've heard plenty of politicians say, we didn't hear a single voice warning us about anything.

We didn't hear anyone say treasures gained by wickedness do not profit (10:2). We didn't hear anyone say, wisdom's income is better than silver. (3:14) We didn't hear anyone say, her revenue is better than gold. We didn't hear anyone say, nothing you desire can compare with her. (3:15)

All we heard was money makes the world go round. More is better. Stuff makes you happy. If it's legal, it must be right. We can choose our own destiny. Security and financial are two words that always go together. It's too big to fail.

Apparently, you can escape from Woman Wisdom. You can claim she does not speak. You can argue that you do not hear her voice. Your world can crumble beneath your feet before you've ever noticed her in the street, before you've ever heard her voice, before you've ever listened to her claims.

It makes me wonder if woman wisdom can't be heard because she's not the only one shouting in the streets. Maybe there are other voices, shouting other things that are easier to hear. Shouting "diamonds are forever;" or you can buy "the real thing" or you ought to "just do it." Maybe there are other voices broadcasting "freedom must be defended" or "what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" or "you deserve a break today" – one that you can purchase at the next exit. Maybe that's why woman wisdom is so worried about being heard. She's got to compete with other voices - thousands of them, with purses bigger than she'll ever carry spreading their so-called wisdom on more street corners than she'll ever reach, purchasing TV time that she'll never be able to afford.

She can't compete with the thousands of discrete advertisements that we see each day. Rarely will you see "choose the respect of the Lord" next to, "we bring good things to life." Rarely will you hear "choose knowledge" before or after "double your pleasure, double your fun." Though she's quite clear about what happens when we don't listen. Though she gives us every warning that all the things that we put our faith in – money, success, image, entertainment – they all flee from us quicker than they come. Though she cautions us that distress and anguish will always follow when we refuse to hear her voice, still she can't compete.

If you're going to listen to woman wisdom in the streets today, if you're going to hear her voice, you're going to have to turn down the rest of the noise to hear her. You're going to have to choose to ignore all the other voices that are shouting her down. You're going to have to seek her out while too many of your neighbors or your family or your colleagues or friends are running away with the other voices, convinced that they really can buy themselves a break today, they really can buy a relationship that will last forever, they really can fill in every void just by doing it.

I saw her this summer – up on the side of a mountain, in Montreat, NC. I was there with Kate and our youth group. It was late – way past my bedtime. The official devotions were over for the night, the official programming of the week had come to a close. And there we were - nine of us. And our youth said you know what we really need to do – what we really want to do is go around the room, one by one and spend time sharing our gratitude for each person – say

what gifts they have, why they are special, why they mean something to each of us. And so we did.

And I didn't hear a single person say, "I like you because you're successful." or "I respect you because you're not afraid to push people around" or "you've got a cool house, or a nice car, or great clothes." No I heard things like, "your family is really important to you," "you stick up for kids even when it costs you something." "you always look out for younger kids – you've made me want to do the same" "I'm an introvert but when you share your feelings I feel invited to do the same." "You have a strong sense of who you are and you're not afraid to go against the grain." "Your heart is so full of compassion for people who are suffering."

Maybe I was delirious from too many icy pops at 3 in the morning – but I'm certain I caught a glimpse of Wisdom, a rare, satisfied look on her face as if she had finally found a place where she didn't have to yell or scream. She had finally found some people – some of your children - who had shut the door, if only for a little while, to all those voices that we're used to hearing. The ones that yell from billboards, scream from television, or whisper lies inside our heads – you know the ones - telling us we would be happy if we were thinner, we would be filled if we were richer, we would be cool if we were smarter, we would find meaning if we would lose ourselves to the world. They had shut the door to all those voices.

And Wisdom found her way in. She's funny like that. The more you turn down the volume, the louder she seems to speak. The more you shut the door to the noise, the easier time she has getting in. When you turn off the flow of other voices, she'll pour out her thoughts to you. She'll make her words known to you.

I wish I could say that I always remember just how valuable are her words. I wish I could say that her voice is the only one I ever hear. I wish I could remember how right it feels when the way of the Lord is the path I choose to follow. The truth is that those other voices always feed the nagging doubt inside my head. They always leave me wishing I was a little more of this, a little less of that, wishing I had a little more of this, and a little more of that. Fantasizing how much more powerful, or confident, or lovable I would feel if only I could purchase myself some more of the real things. I wish I could say that I always listen to wisdom. I wish I would not forget all the lives that have been heartbroken, or the economies that have been brought to their knees when her counsel is ignored.

But since I don't always remember and I don't always listen, I'm grateful that Wisdom cries out in the streets. In the squares - at the busiest corner. The way Proverbs tells it you can't miss her. Every time you go outside to walk the dog, or chat with the neighbors, she's yelling in the streets. Everytime you open your eyes and greet a new day, she's there to point you in the right way. She's there to tell you again of your giftedness and steer you to the place where you are needed and you are loved. To lead you to the places where you'll really be filled, where you'll really find meaning, where you'll really find what matters. She's there. She's here. If you turn down the volume, you can hear her speaking.