

PROVERBS



Dale Carnegie was a budding salesman and aspiring actor. Noticing that certain people were able to have more pull than others, Carnegie began studying what made certain people more influential. He began teaching communication courses at the YMCA in NYC in 1912, and out of that grew the Carnegie course.

Over time, the course developed into a full-length book, and in 1936 it was published as *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. And what began was the emergence of what we know today as the Self-Help or Inspirational section of literature.

Carnegie wanted people to be better communicators, and so he encouraged people to become friendlier – don't complain, be honest, be genuinely interested in others, listen, and avoid arguments. By learning these skills, Carnegie attempted to persuade people that you could win people and influence them by getting them to say YES! And bring people around by seeing people's point of view and appeal to higher motives.

While published almost 90 years ago, Carnegie's model still influences much of leadership studies today. But Carnegie's strategies aren't unique. In fact, the father in Proverbs wants his son to become influential as well. So how do we grow in becoming a person of influence? Proverbs 8 offers 4 reflections that help us to see the wisdom of Christ.

Hear Wisdom's Call And Take Her Offer (8:1-11)

In these first 11 verses, what we have is wisdom personified, and in her longest speech, she calls out at the high places of the path, at the crossroads, at the gates, and at the entrance of the city. She is calling out at those key places of life: where you will worship (the high places), at those moments of decision (crossroads), where you will do business and justice (the gates), and where you will live (the entrance of the city).

Most of the influential decisions we make for life will be made by the time we are 30 – what we will study, who we will have a relationship with, what kind of friends we will have, what vocation we will embrace, and so on. For this reason, the father wants his son to choose wisely and not listen to the foolish woman who says, "You can have whatever you want; it's easy – follow me!"

So wisdom calls out and invites you to take her. Why should you take her? Because she is excellent, noble, and right. God is not using wisdom to get you. God will tell us the hard things, and if we would take wisdom, we will find the noble way, the way to judge rightly in those situations where it isn't clear what we should do. Because she is better than silver, fine gold, and jewels.

This is wisdom – it enables you to make right, noble, excellent, and righteous decisions that are for your good and the good of others. So wisdom cries out – take her!

Receive Wisdom's Power (8:12-21)

What makes wisdom so powerful is that she doesn't live alone – she has house-mates. Prudence, knowledge, and discretion come with her. Prudence is thoughtful, knowledge is having information, and discretion knows when to use that knowledge and apply it well. Together, wisdom, counsel, sound

counsel, and righteous speech are contrasted with arrogance, pride, evil, and perverted speech. Like we saw with Solomon in 1 Kings 3, she enables kings to rule well and justly.

But she also enables there to be justice. When God gave Solomon wisdom in 1 Kings 3, we are told he was immediately faced with a trying situation. Two women came to him; one woman's baby was dead, the other woman's baby was alive. During the night, one had smothered her child, causing the child to die. In an act of desperation, switched the children. In the morning, confusion abounded, so the two women brought their children to Solomon. As he considered the situation and could not discern whose baby belonged to who, he told the women to cut the child in half and give each woman half of the child. The mother who had swapped the children so she could have the living child was fine with the decision; the mother of the baby willingly would forgo being a mother to allow the child to live. And in that moment, Solomon knew who the living baby belonged to – the one who would forgo motherhood for the sake of her child's life.

And at times, wisdom will forgo the quick benefit because it sees that there is something better than getting rich quick. Wisdom brings about a profitability that comes for the common good. There is more than just riches of silver and gold, we are told in vv. 17-21. It offers a life well lived, a life where you learn the good life in all of life and a life that benefits others.

Possess Ancient Wisdom (8:22-31) – Colossians 1;15-20

In these verses, we have the motivation for why we should take and possess wisdom. First, God possessed wisdom from the very beginning. You will notice in the footnotes of your Bible that other translations have this as God creating wisdom, and these verses became critical in debates in the 3rd and 4th centuries to understanding the Triune God, and we will come back to these verses shortly. But the point is that God had wisdom before he began to create.

Wisdom, you see, isn't found by looking deep inside of yourself. Wisdom is found by looking outside of yourself because wisdom isn't inherent in us, it is ancient – older than the hills – and this wisdom can guide us.

The second thing about this wisdom is that it is present all around us. When God created, it was with wisdom. This means that the world has an inner logic to it. There is no randomness to the world; God has designed everything with specificity and complexity. Consider the human eye – the ability to take light, transfer what is seen outwardly and put it into the brain so that you can process what is happening around you – this is an incredibly complicated part of the body. Or look at the way that pine cones and sunflower heads have a pattern of a spiral, known as the Fibonacci sequence.

For this reason, many of the scientists of generations ago were also theologians. Isaac Newton would develop theories around motion, light, gravity, and much of the thought around calculus, yet was profoundly influenced by his faith. Or William Carey, a pioneer missionary to India, was enamoured with language study and was a botanist. Why is this? Because they saw that there was an inner logic to the universe, knowing that faith and science worked together. Faith causes me to look at the world with curiosity.

Because God set limits to the waters and founded the world with wisdom, God's wisdom is discoverable all around us. And this creates a pleasure that is described in vv. 30-31. When God saw all that he made,

he said it was good (Gen. 1) and rested to enjoy his work. For this reason, we are designed to enjoy what God has made so that we would rejoice.

But we live in a world where not everything is perfect. Things break. Relationships have pain. But if God is the craftsman and designed this world with pleasure out of chaos, can't he take your life and form it too?

We know that God made all things good and for our enjoyment. Gardening is good, fallen, and enjoyable. Baseball is good, fallen, and enjoyable. Your job is good, fallen, and enjoyable. Everything God has made is good; we have caused it to be broken, but that does not mean that we cannot enjoy what he has given. It means that we need God to redeem it.

Find the Blessing of Wisdom (8:32-36)

And in this is the blessing of God. When you hear wisdom, take it in, you can discover what truly satisfies in this life. God's ways lead to life. God's ways lead to blessing. God has designed us to discover wisdom all around us, and he has designed that we look outside of ourselves to find what is good and right so that we would discover wisdom comes from heaven. Heaven's ways lead to the blessed life. Heaven's ways lead to joy. But despising God's ways will not produce greater joy, but greater anxiety, despair, and death.

You see, the wisdom of heaven has come so that we would...

See the Wisdom of Christ

The logic of heaven has come down to us, and John tells us in his gospel that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory. John uses this word *logos* – it is the idea of an inner logic that exists, and he claims that the inner logic of everything that was made finds its origins in God.

So Jesus comes to us and he says, hear and take! "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart (Matt. 11:28-29). He calls to us to take his way, and as we take his way, we find that his wisdom helps us to live wisely. This is why Paul would tell the Corinthians that Christ is their wisdom (1 Cor. 1:30) and that he should be the one who brings them together to live well, not to live wild and reckless lives.

But some in the church, specifically a man named Arius, read Proverbs 8:22 and thought that Christ was created like wisdom was. He used Proverbs 8:22 and saw that like Paul would say in Colossians 1:15-20, Christ is the firstborn of all creation, and that like wisdom created all things (8:24-29; Col. 1:16), Christ created all things and came before all things (8:22-23; Col. 1:17).

So Arius assumed that Jesus was created and became God. He believed that this was the logic of the universe. His teaching was so popular that by 325 AD his views had been popularized and were in hymn form and were being sung across the Roman world.

But there were those who opposed Arius' teaching, and a council was called by the emperor in Nicea where the Church hammered out this basic belief:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
Eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,
Begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven:
By the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.

This is the logic of heaven. Wisdom came down. Wisdom was not created; wisdom fulfilled, wisdom is the exact representation of God rules over all creation, is superior to creation, and is the end for which God created the world. He is the logic that holds all things together.

But the implication of this is that in a world where there is brokenness, suffering, pain, wisdom calls out to us – you need to be recreated!

Because Jesus is the wisdom of God (Col. 2:3), wisdom has come down from heaven to rescue you. You want to enjoy the world more fully? You want to make a difference? God sent his Son into this world, and by the blood of his cross, Paul says in Col. 1, he is making peace.

So you want to be a person of influence? Stop looking inside of yourself to figure out how to be influential. Look to Christ. Look to the logic of heaven that came down. Look all around you and see that God has ordered the world and that you need his wisdom to live and enjoy all that he has made as we wait for the renewal of all things, when wisdom will come again and destroy all evil and make all things right once and for all.

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