

# Proverbs 8

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[ 0 : 00 ] And do turn to Proverbs 8 on page 532. Would you say that you are a good listener?

! Even sat here together this morning, we might wish that the sermon would be a bit shorter, so that we can stop listening and we can get talking.

Maybe that feels easier. The book of Proverbs in chapter 3, it has that famous verse, Trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

Because listening is not easy. We naturally want to trust our own understanding, to listen to our own gut, to understand the circumstances of life, rather than someone else, rather than God.

But Solomon in this passage this morning wants us to see that all of life itself is received and founded upon and enjoyed by listening.

[ 1 : 28 ] To God. In our passage we read in verse 33 there, Hear instruction and be wise and don't neglect it. Blessed is the one who listens to me.

Verse 35, Whoever finds me finds life. Solomon tells us that living, life itself, is listening.

The leading faculty of the wise person's life is not his speech, what he or she says, sharing their opinions on Twitter all of the time, or their sight.

But the wise person lives by hearing. His or her ears are the executive function of his life.

But listening to the right things is pretty hard to get hold of, isn't it? What are we to listen to? In all of the noise, where is the right voice?

[ 2 : 31 ] Well, we're told to tune into one lone speaker in this passage today. To listen to God's wisdom. Living is listening to him.

And God says to us, as I show you why that is, I am not going to give you my IQ as a wise God. I'm not going to quantify it in statistics.

I'm not going to define it in a neat theological statement. That is often our way of trying to understand the abstract. We kind of scientificise it, don't we, if that's a word.

But God says, no, to show you wisdom, my wisdom, I am going to write you a poem. And it's a biographical poem.

Presenting my wisdom to you, God says, as a person, as a woman. What is this wisdom? God says, let me picture it for you.

[ 3 : 32 ] Let me put flesh on the bone for you. It is someone that you should get to know. And there she is, verse 1. Lady wisdom does not wisdom call.

Does not understanding raise her voice. Living is listening to her. And there are three things that we see about her in this chapter.

First of all, she is the riches of the people. She is the riches of the people. It's great when you find unexpected wealth, isn't it?

Imagine a cash machine that gives out free money. If you were on Tooting High Street a couple of years ago, that did not have to be left to the imagination.

When an ATM machine malfunctioned. And people were putting their cards in without putting any pin numbers in. And getting free cash up to £500 a time.

[ 4 : 26 ] Ordinary people walking down the street, getting more than they thought they were going to get. But imagine that.

Finding free money. And that's the picture here. Here on the street, for ordinary people just going about their business. They don't suspect it's going to happen.

But suddenly they hear this voice. They hear Lady Wisdom. And it makes them rich. She's on the public high street.

She's on the pavement. She calls for passers-by. Look at verse 10. Take my instruction instead of silver. And knowledge rather than choice gold.

Verse 19. My fruit is better than gold. Even fine gold. And my yield than choice silver. Great riches can be found.

[ 5 : 23 ] But where can they be found? Well, where she can be heard. Life's riches come from listening to her. It's like finding a surprise fiver down the back of the sofa, isn't it?

But finding her is even better than that. Of more lasting value. And these words are rich because they are good.

In a moral sense. Do you see what kinds of words she speaks? Verse 6. I will speak noble things. From my lips comes what is right.

My mouth will utter truth. The words of my mouth are righteous. Sounds that go into our ears affect us, don't they?

They affect our thinking, our lives. Our perspective on life. Listening to the rippling of a gentle stream.

[ 6 : 24 ] Kind of makes you a bit more gentle, doesn't it? Listening to heavy metal music makes you a bit more angry. Sounds that go into our ears affect our thinking and our living.

And her words are like that. She says they are straight, not crooked. They make the person level. They are righteous.

They tune the listener into God's wavelength. They are true words. Changing the listener's perspective. Finally, the truth about the world.

About the big questions of life. About meaning and purpose. Are in these words. These are the riches that she offers.

Jim Carrey, the comedian, said, I think everyone should get rich. And do everything that they ever dreamed of. So that they can see that it's not the answer. Some people are so poor that all they have is money.

[ 7 : 28 ] But these are the true riches of listening to her. Living with the ears. Taking in her words. It is to have the big questions of life answered.

To find truth. To find a clear way through the maze of life. And notice that her wisdom is not just for the elite, is it?

Not exclusive for intellectuals or philosophers or scholars. No. She says to simple ones, verse 5. Learn prudence. Fools. Learn sense.

It's not a private thing. It's not something done in a corner. Or in a professor's ivory tower. There is no file on life that says top secret.

No secret hidden knowledge. We should avoid things like that, shouldn't we? We should avoid people who say they've got some special insight into life.

[ 8 : 29 ] Some special hidden knowledge of what the Bible says. She raises her voice on the street. The word is out. And it's plain to hear.

For every person of every nationality. Of every social status. Of any intelligence. And there are those of us who can vouch for her.

You weren't expecting it. But one day you heard the gospel. You came within earshot of her wisdom. And it changed your life.

It made you rich. These riches of God's wisdom are available to all those who will listen. But are you a good listener?

That's the question. It's been said that a wise person is someone who wants to hear what they don't want to hear. Listening to God.

[ 9 : 28 ] Listening to this wisdom is not always easy. And actually as we sit and we listen to God's words. Especially on a Sunday together.

I wonder whether you think it's easier for the preacher to speak. Or for the congregation to listen. In every age we've always thought of ourselves as better than the last.

As more intelligent. As knowing more. Of thinking we don't have to listen to God. We can work out the truth for ourselves now. But actually I think I'm afraid we've been told that we're cleverer than we are.

And it's good. It's really good to listen to God's wisdom. Because living is listening. To her. The riches of the people.

Then secondly she is the power of kings. See she's there for the common man. Isn't she on the street? She's welcoming enough for commoners. Open enough.

[10:30] For every man, woman, boy and girl. But wise enough for kings. Look at verse 15. By me kings reign and rulers decree what is just.

This wisdom is wide enough for all. And it's deep enough for the challenges of good government. She belongs in palaces as well as pavements.

So picture the scene here. It's abstract isn't it? But let's try and put it into concrete terms. Imagine a royal courtroom. And there is a king there. And wherever he goes, she goes as well.

This is a wise king. Ruling and listening to her. And she's there. The king's advisor. The king's tactician. The king's benchmark for justice.

Her qualities are the qualities that he needs to rule well. So she is the foundation not just of a happy individual heart.

[11:30] But of the whole of society. Because we love it, don't we, when rulers deal wisely. When they do well. Watching the FA Cup final a couple of weeks ago.

Did you see that fake dive in the penalty box? And the referee called it, didn't he? The referee got it. We love it when the referee does his job.

And injustice is called. We love it when justice is administered. We love it when you cannot pull the wool over the ruler's eyes. When fair is fair.

We love it when the king has God's wisdom as his companion. They loved it, didn't they, when Solomon ruled. You see an example of this.

In Solomon's kingdom. Who asked God for wisdom. She was with him in the height of his power. Remember the Queen of Sheba came, didn't she, to visit.

[12:29] And she said, your wisdom and prosperity surpass all of the reports. Happy are your men. Happy are your servants. Who stand before you and hear your wisdom.

This is God's wisdom filling the whole of society through the king. And into each individual heart. See her bring life and happiness to humanity.

To those who hear her. Living and ruling is listening to her. Riches to men and to kings. But thirdly, then, she is the fountainhead of creation.

She is the fountainhead of creation. From verse 22 to about verse 31. It is probably one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible, isn't it?

It's one of the most celebrated and contested passages in the Old Testament. It's been used to argue the deity of Christ. And to argue against the deity of Christ.

[13:36] It's been used to discuss the origins of the universe. It's full, actually, of some quite difficult imagery. Some difficult words.

But remember, God writes to us here a poem. And poems don't always have to be tied down, do they? To definitions for us to understand them properly.

And the biography continues here. Or rather, it rewinds to the beginning of everything. Verse 22. The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work. Before the beginning of the earth, she has engraved on the foundations of the earth, wisdom, I was here.

We're taken back in time before time itself. Before the mountains had been shaped. Before God had made the earth.

[14:40] It's the value of longevity, isn't it? She has been there throughout the whole process. It's like that Thorntons ad, Chocolate Heavens since 1911.

I have stood the test of time. I have been with kings and with people. But before it all, I was with God.

As his master workman, verse 13. So listening to me is good, it is beneficial, but not just because I'm a clever idea for you and for your society and your king.

But because I am fundamentally ingrained in the makeup of the world that you live in. As God made the foundations of the deep, before he made the heavens, I was there like an advisor, like a partner in his creative project.

Drawing and planning and making. I am the wisdom that marks out everything God has ever said and ever done. And when you look at creation, you can see that, can't you?

[15:51] When you look at the world, when you watch David Attenborough TV shows, the world is staggering. Just the depths of the sea are beyond our understanding, aren't they?

Verse 28, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limits. And those David Attenborough programs are amazing.

Do you remember there was one, the Blue Planet, I think it is, isn't it? Going around the sea, they were following one episode, a group of blue whales. And they kind of follow the story, don't they? And they were looking at these blue whales, the largest creature on earth. They can grow up to 100 foot long, weigh 200 tonnes. The heart of a blue whale is about the size of a mini.

But at one point, the film crew struggled to get the footage because they'd lost the blue whale that they were following. I'm sorry, but how do you lose a blue whale?

[16:55] But apparently, if you put Everest underwater, the sea in places would cover it with a mile of depth to spare. When he set the boundaries and the depths of the sea, you can lose a blue whale in it.

And wisdom says, I was there, weaving all of this creation together from the skies to the sea. As Isaac Watts said, in every star, thy wisdom shines.

Wisdom says to us this morning, I am not just a clever part of the creation that would be beneficial to you if you listened to me.

But I am the linchpin of everything. This world and everything in it is a world made of words of God's wisdom.

So when the people listen to me, when kings listen to me, they slot themselves into the very grain of creation. Into the grooves of reality.

[18:04] With my wisdom, this world fits like a glove and you fit with it. Living in this world is listening to me because I was there.

When we want to lean on our own understanding, we close our ears to life in this world as it's truly meant to be lived. To the enjoyment and play of creation.

Just look at verse 30. I was beside him like a master workman. I was daily his delight. Rejoicing before him always. Rejoicing in his inhabited world.

And delighting in the children of man. It's a really difficult word. A verse to translate into English. This. Apparently.

It might be better to think of wisdom here describing herself as a child playing in the world. It could read something like, like a nursed child, I was filled with delight in the children of man.

[19:12] Either way, the scene is of wisdom frolicking and playing in the creation that God has made with him. Enjoying it. Loving the work of human beings.

God's images in the world. Delighting in this wonderful world. And so she is not an austere, insular, stilted intellectualism.

She is not going to make you retreat from the world into a library to study, although that's a good thing to do. But this is the way to enjoyment and fulfilment in the world.

This is laughing, leaping, living, loving, learning, listening to her. This is the biography of wisdom.

Through the book of Proverbs, we might come back to it later in the summer, this thing, wisdom, is not an easy thing to grasp. And I think that's probably the point. But God personifies it for us here in this poem.

[20:19] What he wants to do here is to elevate listening to him. It is more than just data download. of life tips.

It is more than just getting information from God. Einstein was an atheist, perhaps the greatest scientist the world has ever known, and he sensed something of this.

Let me read to you an extract of his writings. If we look at this tree outside, whose roots search beneath the pavement for water, or a flower which sends its sweet smell to the pollinating bees, or even our own selves and the inner forces that drive us to act, we can see that we all dance to a mysterious tune, and the piper who plays this melody from an inscrutable distance, whatever name we give him, creative force or God, escapes all book knowledge, says Einstein.

A man who loved books, who loved reading and learning, saw something in creation, that God's wisdom isn't just something you can learn facts coldly about, it is a person you have to know, it is the piper who plays her melody.

It shows us a whole approach to listening to God's words, doesn't it? Verse 35, whoever finds me, finds life, she says.

[21:58] God's wisdom is a relational matter, not just an informational matter. It was something that formed actually the way of life for God's ancient people.

See the relational way wisdom is shared, verse 32, now, oh sons, listen to me. It's a family thing, isn't it?

It's a relational thing, an understanding of God's wisdom shared between parents and children. This wisdom cannot be grasped in a library alone, but through the people that God has placed and given.

It was then in the Old Testament, listening to parents, to priests, to the prophets, to the people in the community that God had given to teach God's words.

And those things are the same, aren't they, today, in different ways. Children and teenagers, living is listening for you when you listen to your parents, isn't it?

[ 23 : 07 ] Knowing facts, some of you are cramming your heads full of facts for exams, and you should keep doing that. But knowing facts does not make a person wise.

And this is something that we massively struggle with in our culture, actually, in this information age. You know, at the click of a button, you can find out anything instantly.

You could Google the sermon points this morning, couldn't you? You could Google the thing about the blue whale and see if it's true. you could test everything that I'm saying right now by Googling it, but the problem is that we assume that wisdom is easy because information is easy.

Someone said that the saddest aspect of life right now is that science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers wisdom. So true. You don't get to know wisdom just by Googling it.

It's not informational, but relational. And you don't get to know a person, lady wisdom, by knowing facts. We try and conduct our relationships like that sometimes, don't we?

[ 24 : 25 ] Facebook and social media, good things, I guess. But as we hope to know one another, we think that we only need to exchange facts about one another. that God has personified his wisdom to say to us that this is relational, this living listening thing.

There is some wisdom to be had just by getting facts from the world, by seeing how the world is made, but you can't just kind of run the app, just download the data without having the operating system, without having the person, without coming to the person that God has personified here in wisdom.

So Christianity is not just about accepting ideas, but about accepting and trusting a person. It is about listening with the ears and with the heart.

This is living listening. The whole idea of putting flesh on the subject of abstract wisdom is how God deals with it for us, isn't it?

To help us understand. Turning abstract wisdom into a person that we can relate to. And God has done that, not just in a poem, but actually, really.

[ 25 : 53 ] John's gospel begins with those famous verses, in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

He was in the beginning with God, and all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. And the word became flesh, and dwelt among us.

Where can these riches be found? Only where he can be heard. let me put flesh on the bone for you, says God.

My wisdom, my word, personified. Paul says to the Corinthians, because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us the wisdom of God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Riches for the people. people. And the one who is ushering in a kingdom where we love him as the wise king. Where we love him as the just king.

[ 27 : 03 ] And we see and taste that kingdom now don't we in church. So if you want this rich wisdom you are in the right place.

In Jesus' presence with his people listening to him. Where Jesus is present through his holy spirit. But when you come to hear God's wisdom every Sunday which is easier, the preacher's job or your job?

Listening is not easy. Listening is not passive. Listening actually what you are doing for the majority of this service and every time we meet it might feel like you're not doing anything but listening is worship.

It is to align yourself with reality with a person who has stood outside of time. It is to step into the realms of eternity to see things beyond the horizon.

When you listen to him it's as if your ears are like slot machines isn't it? With value going in all of the time like a piggy bank. the fibre down the back of the sofa.

[ 28 : 21 ] So are you a good listener? Listening with the heart. Because Solomon elevates listening here where it's not just informational it's relational.

It is to take hold of Jesus Christ with the heart relationally by faith as you hear sermons. It's often true isn't it that the easier you make things the harder it is to learn.

The easier it is to listen the less likely it is that you are going to take things in. And we are used to easy listening aren't we? In spiritual matters as well.

We soak up so much stuff. We soak up purely emotionally driven preaching over the internet. We soak up trashy Christian novels we soak up any voice that is easy to hear.

It's been our problem since the beginning isn't it? Saying did God really say? And sometimes the easier things that we take into our minds are just the things that seem right to me.

[ 29 : 31 ] Leaning on our own understanding but a wise person is a person who wants to hear what they don't want to hear. The riches of men and kings.

the foundation of creation. Whoever finds Jesus Christ finds life. Blessed is the one who listens to him.

So listen and listen well. Listen with the heart. Let's pray.