

Wisdom famine (Proverbs 9:1-6; Ephesians 5:15-20)

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by [Heidi Husted](#) in the [August 2, 2000](#) issue

In this information age, a steady stream of input is bombarding us. Like water from a fire hose, information overwhelms and numbs us. But are we any wiser? Are we any closer to God, or to God's design or intentions for life? Are we humbler? Are we learning anything about the way life really works? I fear the subtitle of a book by C. John Sommerville sums up our situation: *The Dearth of Wisdom in an Information Society*. As one observer notes, we are in a "wisdom famine."

Who wants to be wise anymore? People want to be right, rich, popular and in control. But wise?

In sharp contrast, the Proverbs passage pictures a wisdom feast. In this allegory full of poetic images, wisdom is personified as a woman—a kind of hostess with the mostest. She's prepared a lavish feast and sent out formal invitations. "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed." All that you need to do is RSVP. Just show up! Come on in, sit down and feast on wisdom!

Later in chapter nine we meet another woman, "a foolish woman" who lives down the road. She wants our company too. But her place is not a mansion but a dive, and the sustenance she offers is meager, even deadly. We need to be careful, because she represents foolishness, and foolishness is dangerous.

Proverbs 9 seems to suggest that someone might be tempted to bypass wisdom's feast and try to survive on the thin gruel of folly (or information). Why would anyone want to do that? Clearly, wisdom has more to offer: she's the better person, offering the better feast. But we are to choose.

Ephesians 5 is a call to wisdom too, although it comes across less as an invitation and more as a kick in the backside: “Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise . . . do not be foolish.” And the text even gives some specific ideas of what wisdom looks like, examples of what a wise person does, things like “make the most of the time” or “understand what the will of the Lord is” or “don’t get drunk” and “be filled with the Spirit.”

Of course, the Book of Proverbs gets down to specifics too. The first nine chapters describe how wisdom works in general, but the proverbs in chapter ten concern the nuts and bolts of godly living. As someone has pointed out, a proverb is “a short sentence based on long experience.” Some proverbs are real zingers. They’re plain truth, brought home with the gentleness of a sledgehammer.

Maybe that’s why I’ve never been overly fond of the genre. When was the last time you recommended “wisdom literature” as a must read? Much of it seems like a cross between reading a Chinese fortune cookie and an Ann Landers column. It’s advice I didn’t ask for and don’t need. I need good news. I don’t need to try harder to conform; I need to be transformed.

Fortunately, Proverbs knows this. Fourteen times we’re reminded that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Wisdom and godly living begins with letting God be God. In that sense, Proverbs is not for the general public. Proverbs is for God’s people, calling them beyond the theoretical to the practical, beyond the intellectual to the actual, beyond abstractions to application, and beyond beliefs to behavior. In contrast to Greek wisdom—which is about philosophy and ideas and intellectual thought—biblical wisdom is about what to do day by day.

In 1989 the U.S. hosted Lech Walesa, leader of the former Solidarity labor movement and the newly elected president of Poland. During his visit, Walesa spoke candidly to the U.S. Congress. Speculating about how Americans might respond to the astounding events taking place in Eastern Europe, he said that we must remember that “there is a declining world market for words.” In an information age, there is a declining market for words. While what we say is important, words are not enough. Spoken words, even a mouthed confession of faith, mean nothing without the behavior to back it up. “Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight”—of understanding, of wisdom. Ephesians 5:15 (in some versions) cautions us, “Be careful then how you walk.”

Information is fast, loud, superficial, numbing. We can't get away from it. Wisdom is slower, deeper, lasting, more elusive. We can begin to make our way toward wisdom by clearing out the data smog—by fasting from TV, computer, cell phone and pocket planner long enough to talk with a friend face-to-face, read a book or simply sit still and listen for the way of wisdom.