

June 15, Trinity C (Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31)

## **Wisdom is frisky and frolicking. She reminds us that God created our impulse to learn and to grow.**

by [Martha Spong](#) in the [June 2025](#) issue

Published on June 9, 2025

In February, I had a chance to visit with my grandchildren, two of whom are toddlers. The 11-month-old vocalized and used some ASL signs to tell us what they wanted. Eleven seemed delighted when their communications connected with parents and grandparents and cried sadly when not understood. Mobile on all fours but not yet walking alone, Eleven relied on adult assistance a lot more than their cousin. The 16-month-old had reached a different level of development, largely free-range physically but expressing frustration when communications did not connect. Sixteen seemed aware that power and control rely not only on size and coordination but also on being understood. All of the joys and frustrations of both cousins are developmentally appropriate; they are also phases that will have passed and transitioned into something else by the next time we are together in person. They will grow wiser about their worlds.

They will learn most of what they need to know by simply playing and being.

The New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition invites such an interpretation in its choice to describe Wisdom as “playing,” a change from the previous translation, “rejoicing.” The Hebrew word means something like “gamboling,” a word that suggests the awkward and joyful romping of lambs in a field or the levitating abandon my chocolate lab exhibits when chasing a toy I’ve thrown. “Playing” feels lighthearted; it’s a counterintuitive way to think of the personification of wisdom if we consider the wise to be learned, aged, or gravely authoritative.

Proverbs draws a picture of Woman Wisdom, created by God before the beginning, “set up from everlasting” in the King James Version. Frisky and frolicking, she calls

out to us, a reminder that God created our impulse to learn and to grow, placing wisdom at the crossroads and entry points all along the way of our lives.

Some expect the development of wisdom to be linear until we reach a point where we feel satisfied with what we know or believe. My wife, a Presbyterian pastor, received an invitation to share her spiritual journey with a meeting of interfaith prison chaplains, as part of a panel chosen to encourage the chaplains in their ministry to LGBTQ people who are incarcerated. As I sat in the front row listening to the panel discussion, I felt the tension in the room behind me rising. When the time came for questions, the more conservative chaplains on the panel pushed back. The journey metaphor rankled. Didn't a journey imply arriving at a new place or way of thinking? It struck some as condescending. Why should they have to travel from where they stood to a place where ideas they found incompatible with their theological understanding might be acceptable?

What if seeking eternal wisdom requires acknowledging there are things we don't know?

Contemplating this understanding of wisdom humbles and challenges me. What certainties do I hold? What delight and depth of spirit do those certainties prevent me from exploring? What would it shift in me to imagine myself not only working alongside God but also playing before God always?

What if wisdom is not about being book-smart or learning-complete? What if it is about being creation-delighting? God-partnering? Play-responding?

Playfulness requires openness. Improv comedy teaches us to be open to anything, and even actors working with a script often begin by exploring different possibilities for bringing that script to life.

We learn this when observing children; they do not limit their playthings to toys or limit their toys to particular purposes. When they were little, Eleven's father converted the Ninja Turtles' enemies "to the good," and Sixteen's father made musical instruments from pots and pans and storage containers.

What gifts or resources from God am I using only in the ways they are defined by earthly kingdom values or expectations? Or, worse, which am I using only in the ways I have always used them before?

Scripture offers these questions in the person of Woman Wisdom. Her voice tells us that God's setting of creation's parameters was more than merely practical or logistical. A word from the wise invites us not only to apprehend and appreciate what we have been given but to go farther: to play with the infinite possibilities inherent in all that God has made and to rejoice in them. Wherever we go, she calls out to us, in hope that we will respond with delight. Frolic with wisdom, she cries; come and play until you know something you never considered before.