

PROVERBS 9: 1-11

- Wisdom has built her house,
she has hewn her seven pillars.
- ² She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine,
she has also set her table.
- ³ She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls
from the highest places in the town,
⁴ 'You that are simple, turn in here!'
To those without sense she says,
⁵ 'Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.
- ⁶ Lay aside immaturity, and live,
and walk in the way of insight.'
- ⁷ Whoever corrects a scoffer wins abuse;
whoever rebukes the wicked gets hurt.
- ⁸ A scoffer who is rebuked will only hate you;
the wise, when rebuked, will love you.
- ⁹ Give instruction to the wise, and they will become wiser still;
teach the righteous and they will gain in learning.
- ¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.
- ¹¹ For by me your days will be multiplied,
and years will be added to your life.

Most of us would say we want to learn. Learning is essential to growing up, to becoming more mature, to gaining not only information, but wisdom about life. But learning can also be hard, especially if the learning has to come out of our mistakes and failures. Who wants to be called out for doing something poorly or even wrong? Who wants to be found out and rebuked for an injustice? Who wants to feel guilt and shame because something hidden is now in the open and must be faced? Who wants to be told that they could have done something another way and saved themselves and others a lot of trouble if they had listened or been less know-it-all about it? Who wants to be told any of this? Not you and not me either.

And yet, some of the greatest learning in our lives and some of the richest wisdom we carry about life has come and will come as we work through our mistakes and our failures - moral, relational and otherwise. Think about it... How have we failed another person badly or dealt with a situation poorly? How could we have done better if we had known better, been more humble, open, curious and had paid more attention perhaps? How would we have done better if we listened better or had been more patient rather than hurried, anxious or afraid?

This passage from Proverbs has two parts to it: 1-6 and 7-11.

1-6 - is an invitation. Lady wisdom is inviting you and me to a feast she has prepared. Her house is on seven pillars. Seven is the number of completion and perfection. It is the height we must ascend and the summit we must aim to reach. But are we prepared to set aside our “simplicity” and our “senselessness”? Are we prepared to rid ourselves of immaturity and grow up? Life is complicated and the wisdom of compassionate discernment takes time and consultation to grow. The right decisions and the wiser paths are rarely black or white. All of us need truth but speaking truth is not always straightforward. We are not only responsible for speaking it but listening for it. Good judgement isn't something we're born with and justice must be tempered with care for the one being judged so that trust is established and listening can happen. Are you ready to grow in wisdom? Unless we begin to dig deep into ourselves we will have little wisdom to offer others. How have you learned from your mistakes as much as from your successes?

7-11- seems simple in what it says, but be careful. It distinguishes those who are wicked and scoff at any advice or correction from those who are righteous and wise and seek to learn what is good and right even when that includes rebuke and correction. But too often, when reading a passage like this, we're thinking of the other person we're engaging as the one who is wicked or righteous, a scoffer or wise depending on whether they listen to our advice or correction. But this passage is also about us and whether we are prepared to be wise and righteous ourselves. If we want true knowledge and insight into wisdom, we must stand before God who sees and knows all in fear (that is: humble reverence) ready to grow more wise by cleansing ourselves of the scoffer in us.

Maybe we think the source of advice is not worthy or the means of correction is more of a put down. Maybe we have a hard time not getting defensive with certain kinds of people as we perceive them always seeking their own advantage in what they say to us. Our advantage is always in taking the good, the true and the right from wherever it comes. How others must be judged is not up to us to determine in the end. We must all stand before our maker and we must all make our own journey to spiritual maturity. Each of us must build our own relationship with Lady Wisdom and decide through each moment of our lives whether we will accept her invitation to enter her house and sup with her.

What do you think about any of this?

PRAYER: Thank you, O God, for wisdom and for your wisdom. Grant us greater humility, openness and a capacity to listen without resistance or defensiveness. Help us discern where to be careful and cautious, and where to step into growth through change that must begin with us. Show us the way. Shine the light of your wisdom upon us, O God, and grant us greater courage, heart and a will to follow the path illumined... Amen.