

## WISDOM THEN, WISDOM NOW

BIBLE READING: Proverbs 1:1-7

The class on nutrition was in progress when Sandra raised the question, "But didn't you give us just the opposite information last week? I'm afraid I'm confused."

Haven't we all felt like that at times? We've just become used to a new product, or a new approach or procedure, when along comes an expert telling us we need to change whatever we're doing or buying.

It's hard to know what *is* right with all the voices bombarding us. And some authorities have changed their own minds. Dr. Benjamin Spock, for example, admits that his earlier counsel to parents should be scrapped in favor of his newer theories.

Likewise, if we listen to certain people we will be told that the Bible is outdated, that it's old-fashioned to believe God's Word in the way our parents and grandparents did.

Are we to believe, then, that God is learning new things He didn't know before today's world? Is the Almighty just catching up with us in our expanding knowledge?

The Bible *lives and abides* forever (present tense), Peter tells us (1 Peter 1:23). We will never be disillusioned by learning that after living by God's Word, we find it to be outdated, not effective to meet our needs today.

True, we are learning new things—some good, some not so good. It's said that the majority of scientists who ever lived are alive and functioning today. One "wonder invention" is quickly superseded by a new one, as modern knowledge increases.

There's nothing wrong with learning new things. In fact we will never grow mentally, emotionally, or spiritually, if

we keep a closed mind toward everything new. The problem arises when we do not question whether the new is better than the old. Nor should we discard our values in the interest of something new. We are told to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Nowhere is that more true than in spiritual things. God’s wisdom, like His Word, is unchanging. It was wisdom when it was given; it is the same wisdom now.

**TODAY’S THOUGHT:** God’s wisdom is not, like today’s knowledge, doubling every ten years.

## PERFECTIONISM—GOOD OR BAD?

BIBLE READING: Philippians 1:1-6

Sue and Miriam, neighbors, were discussing something they had read on perfectionism.

"Maybe I'll have to change my mind," Sue admitted, "for I've always thought that perfectionism was a good thing to strive for. But now—"

"That piece made me think, too," said Miriam, shaking her head.

Like those women, I had to change my mind on that subject. I can recall when I would have felt highly complimented if anyone had called me a perfectionist. But I've learned since then something of what the trait can do both to the perfectionist and those around her.

The woman who prides herself on being a perfectionist is usually a driven person. She works early and late, yet can rarely enjoy the good inner feeling of having done something well. Always, in her mind, she should have done "better." Unhappily, she tends to find fault with everyone else's achievements, having set for them the same impossible standards she has for herself. All too often that results in her having few friends, for continual criticism is hard on friendship. Another disastrous result is that her witness as a Christian is far from attractive to her unsaved friends and neighbors. They don't wish to be like her, and may attribute her fault finding to what she believes as a professed Christian.

How can we overcome the drive for perfectionism? We don't want to recommend a "don't care" attitude. As God's people, we should have no less than the pursuit of excellence

as our goal. But there is sometimes a fine line between that pursuit and negative perfectionism.

Paul offers a solution that provides balance, in Philipians 3:12-14: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect . . . I press toward the mark." The apostle was aware that although we are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works," we are nevertheless imperfect people living in an imperfect world. Only Jesus our Lord ever walked perfectly before God.

There is a beautiful thought being expressed in one of today's gospel songs: "He looked beyond my faults and saw my need." God will enable us—if *we want to* and if we ask Him—to overlook the faults of others. He will help us even to tolerate our own weaknesses rather than being driven by "should's."

We can rest our expectations on Psalm 138:8, "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me."

**TODAY'S THOUGHT:** How much better to be imperfect and loving, than to be "perfect" and cold.

## WHAT DOES NICE MEAN?

BIBLE READING: Matthew 7:7-12

My granddaughter was in third grade when she wrote me something of her fears about her teacher for the coming school year. "She's new in our school so none of my older friends have had her," Ellyn explained, "and I don't know if she is nice or not."

I found myself wondering what "nice" means to a little school girl. Obviously it was a very real factor in her expectation of her own well-being in the classroom. But what images did "nice" evoke in her mind?

A few days later I had the opportunity to explore that with a child the same age as my Ellyn. We were talking about school, teachers, and so on, and I asked, "If you were to tell me your teacher is nice, what would you mean by that?" She wasn't a quick-answer kid. She screwed up her face, half closed her eyes in thought, and kept me waiting a few seconds before replying. "Nice. Nice." She repeated the word, then said, "Well—I think I would mean that my teacher is comfortable to be with. That's what nice means." She sounded satisfied with her explanation.

I thought, *Yes. "Nice" is comfortable to be with, whatever the age or the relationship.*

How do we help people to be comfortable with us?

It's a big topic. I'm inclined to think that we do that best by just being ourselves and letting the other person be himself or herself. Accepting a person for what he is contributes largely to a feeling of comfortableness. Conversely, when we do not accept people as we find them but rather attempt to change them all the time, it comes across to them as "She

doesn't like me the way I am." It's difficult to feel comfortable in such a situation.

It's exciting to discover in the Bible (Ephesians 1:6) that *God accepted us* because of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. And God accepted us just as we were. He didn't go about to change us first. I love the verse in Revelation 1:5 that says He loved us and washed us from our sins. In that order. Not washed and loved. He loved us first. He accepts us as we are. That just has to be "nice"; it certainly made me feel comfortable!

Perhaps a good way to sum up for us what "nice" entails would be to study the Golden Rule: *Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.*

**TODAY'S THOUGHT:** I can cause someone to feel comfortable with me today.

## HOW TO HAVE A BEST DAY

BIBLE READING: Psalm 118:23-29

"Have a good day," the store clerk said in a mechanical manner, as she bagged the groceries and handed them to Frances.

Gritting her teeth, Fran turned to a fellow customer and said, "I get *so* tired having just about everybody I meet tell me to have a good day."

Maybe you agree with disgruntled Fran.

So how about aiming for a best day, instead?

"How can I have a best when I never have a good day?" some will complain.

Personally, I've found a simple, workable formula. It's this: First thing in the morning, honestly turn your day over to God. I don't mean in a pious "leave it to the Lord" sense, a withdrawal from personal responsibility. I have in mind squarely facing up to the known realities as well as the unpredictables the day can bring, then talking it over with our loving Father, asking Him to supply each hour's needs. Another thing, *thanking the Lord ahead of time for what He is going to do*, then stepping out the door expecting Him to be all that He has promised to be, makes for the best kind of day. I like to add, "And Lord, because you are so good to me, will you please give me the privilege of being a special help to someone else today?"

That offering of yourself makes for an especially good day. When Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive, He was not just framing a noble sentence. The statement is loaded with implications that we have probably not even begun to fathom. But we can try. We can practice giving, and the finest gift is ourselves, our time given to help someone.

Maybe we have things all turned around, tending to think of a good day as one in which everything comes our way; few or no frustrations; much success—and of course those make for good feelings throughout the day. However, for the inner joy that makes the day stand out as “best,” we need the fulfillment of our desire to give, to meet someone else’s need.

Some of the emptiest people I know, Christians who have little joy in their faces and not much excitement in their daily lives, are occupied solely in meeting their own needs. And at the end of the day many of them are sighing, “Another day—and what has it brought me?”

It need not be so, for each day is “the day which the Lord hath made.” By an act of the will, we can rejoice in it, whatever its hours bring; it can be a best day.

**TODAY’S THOUGHT:** Rejoicing by the minute makes possible rejoicing by the day.

## WHAT CAN A MOTHER DO?

BIBLE READING: Genesis 6:17—7:1

What can a mother do?

The question is as old as motherhood itself. It may be that we can find some answers if we will look back over the centuries.

Mother Noah, perplexed by the problems of an age whose morals so closely paralleled the standards of our own era, must have asked herself, "What can a mother do?" Undoubtedly she had to listen often to the pre-Flood equivalent of, "What's the matter with you folk? Are you crazy or something? Old Noah trying to *save* everybody. Him and his ark and his gloomy predictions!" And what about the times when her boys would come home upset over all the scoffing? When they said, "Mom, can't you *do* something?"

Mrs. Noah might have rationalized like this: "Husband, we have to think of our sons. A boy shouldn't have to go around apologizing for his father's queer behavior and talk—even in the name of religion."

But she didn't. And when the promised judgment fell, her sons were safe in the shelter ordained by God for those who believed Noah's message.

The New Testament has its sampling of mothers who must likewise have questioned at times. The mother of James and John, for instance. Perhaps she had lived with the fond hope of seeing "Zebedee and Sons" on her husband's business establishment, instead of which her sons took themselves off to be disciples of an almost unknown—though coming—prophet, spelling death to their financial future and the family's expectations. She might have chided

them thus, "Think of the business your father has built up. And he did it all for you—"

The glimpse we are given of that mother would indicate the opposite. "Then came the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him" (Matthew 20:20).

Some have criticized her for that request. But she asked nothing but the best for her two sons, and what mother doesn't want that! And we should note that she came with them (she didn't send them); second, she had her priorities straight: she came *worshipping* Jesus, first, before making her request. And what a request! That her sons might be close to Him in His glory. What more can a mother ask?

We might look, too, at Timothy's mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois. Their place in history was procured through their insistence on teaching a young lad the Scriptures which were able to make him "wise unto salvation" (2 Timothy 3:15). There must have been times when Timothy's Greek father opposed such teaching of his son.

There will always be conflict in raising a child for God in a God-dishonoring society. Situation ethics would require that we accommodate to the times in which we live. Nevertheless, when we sincerely ask of God, What can a mother do? the Lord will honor that request. He will help, and guide, and bless such a mother.

**TODAY'S THOUGHT:** There is always at least *one godly thing* a Christian mother can do.