

## A Bell Ringing

**Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice?** (Proverbs 8:1).

**Scripture:** Proverbs 8:1-12

**Song:** “As the Deer Pants for the Water”

Growing up in the 1970s on a cul-de-sac in Southern Virginia, my friends and I were pretty much allowed to run free. There was only one rule: be within earshot of our mothers’ voices calling us when it was time to go home. We could be in the woods behind our houses or a friend’s backyard, but when one of our moms called out, we’d better be able to hear her. My mom had a different way of calling me; she rang a bell. Thinking back, I’m not sure how the sound of that bell carried all around our neighborhood so well, but it did. I could always hear it, and I knew what that sound meant. It was time to go home.

The kingdom of God is marked by wisdom that calls to us. This wisdom tells us to desire it more than riches, more than worldly power or gain. Wisdom urges us to gain understanding and get wise instruction.

In these last days, there are many voices calling out, competing for our attention. How do we stay discerning and walk in wisdom? Verse 10 tells us to choose to hear the voice of God and choose to listen. Like a bell ringing out in a dry and weary land, wisdom beckons us home.

**Father,** help me to know and listen to Your voice calling out clearly. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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July 24–30. **Jane Keller** lives in Colorado with her family. Her passion is gathering people around the table.

## Finding Godly Wisdom

**Where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell? No mortal comprehends its worth; it cannot be found in the land of the living. . . . It cannot be bought with the finest gold, nor can its price be weighed out in silver (Job 28:12-13, 15).**

**Scripture:** Job 28:1-2, 12-19

**Song:** “Awesome God”

I was part of a conversation once about the validity of getting life advice from sources that were not overtly Christian. One person in our group insisted that listening to anyone who did not claim to be a follower of Christ was not only imprudent but could even be dangerous. Another person believed that God is the source of all truth, and so we can hear truth from lots of different people. In the end, we didn't change each other's minds, but we did agree that the litmus test for truth must be the Word of God.

Through God comes all understanding and knowledge, and His Word provides the wisdom we need for life. In the book of Job we read, “The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom” (28:28). To fear God leads us to exercise discernment regarding who and what we listen to.

God does speak to us through others—ministers, leaders, mentors, and friends. Our responsibility is to weigh what they say against the Word of God and listen to the Holy Spirit, who gives us discernment to know God's truth. If we do this, we can be confident that we have found wisdom.

**Father**, teach me to use godly discernment based on Your Word so that I'll recognize and embrace true wisdom from You. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Unconditional Surrender

**Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets” (Luke 5:5).**

**Scripture:** Luke 5:1-11

**Song:** “Have Thine Own Way, Lord!”

While growing up, I hated hearing my parents tell me, “Because I said so.” It was so frustrating. I felt like I deserved an explanation from them for their decisions. As a mom now, I have tried to explain myself to my kids when I can, but there have been plenty of times when “Because I said so” has had to suffice.

So much of Jesus’ teaching is about surrendering our will to His, the lifelong process of dying to self. To receive Him as our Savior means that we give Him a place in our lives that no one else has. “Because You say so” must become our quick response to the direction and instruction He gives us. Simon (Peter) understood this. Even though he was exhausted, he trusted Jesus enough to surrender to His directive with obedience.

In truth, this can be a difficult thing for us to walk out in our daily lives. We often have to fight against our own misgivings or willful independence. The process of coming to a place of complete surrender—trusting that it is the way to overflowing abundance—can be scary or just downright exhausting. But the Holy Spirit will provide the strength and courage we need to trust that on the other side of “Because You say so” lies an abundance of God’s blessings.

**Father,** strengthen my trust in You today as I surrender to Your will. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## A Mirror Full of Praises

**Let them praise the name of the LORD, for at his command they were created, and he established them** (Psalm 148:5-6).

**Scripture:** Psalm 148

**Song:** “Come, Let Us Worship and Bow Down”

My daughter is taking a metal-working class at our local community college. Last night she came home and showed us some of her work. She held up a small ornament that looked to me like a pineapple, so I said, “That’s so good! I love that pineapple.” Well, it wasn’t a pineapple, and she went on to tell me what she had made and what she was thinking when she made it.

Our Creator made us and knows us through and through. He made us in His image and knows the purpose for which we were brought forth. In Psalm 139:14, the psalmist looked in the mirror, saw what God had made, and rejoiced: “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well” (v. 14). The incredible handiwork of God brought forth a shout of praise.

Only our Creator can tell us who He made us to be. When we know who we are in Him, our identity can be so secure that our hearts overflow with praise. Let God, the one who fashioned your being, speak to you about who He created you to be. See His handiwork all around you, and trust that your Creator knows you and cares for you.

**Father**, thank You for Your creation. Thank You that I can see your glory in everything You’ve made. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Treasure Hunters

**[Jesus said,] “Seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”** (Matthew 6:33).

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:19-33

**Song:** “Knowing You”

Several years ago there was a news story about a man who was moving to an assisted-living home and needed to raise some money. He thought he had some sports memorabilia that might be worth something, so he had an appraiser come out to his home. The sports memorabilia was worth a bit, but the true treasure turned out to be an original Jackson Pollock painting he wasn’t even aware he owned. It was worth \$15 million.

The kingdom of God is counterintuitive. Seek not for what we need, but seek after God and His kingdom. Then everything we need will be given to us—and not just what we need, but more than we could ever imagine. But what is this overflowing abundance? It is God’s goodness and grace in our lives.

Paul tells us not to worry about anything but instead to pray about everything, and as we do, God will give us surpassing peace (Philippians 4:6-7). Chasing after what we believe we need or what the world has to offer will only drive us to places of anxiety and fear. The true treasure of seeking after God’s kingdom is that He gives us everything we need for life, as well as peace in Christ.

**Father,** help me to seek after You first, to trust that You will supply all my needs according to Your riches in glory (Philippians 4:19). In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Leaping over the Hurdles

**Great peace have those who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble** (Psalm 119:165).

**Scripture:** Psalm 119:161-176

**Song:** “A Shield about Me”

My cousin ran track in high school, and her event was the 100-meter hurdles. She had a very long driveway at home on which she would set up hurdles so she could practice. I was in middle school, and I remember watching her run and jump, run and jump. I was mesmerized by how she could run so fast and not kick over a hurdle. She once told me that the secret was to not look at the hurdles but to look ahead to the finish line.

To love something means to feel toward it deep affection, devotion, adoration, or even worship. But to these “feeling words,” we must add “action words” when it comes to loving God’s Word. Love for God’s law means walking in the light of it and obeying it. We cannot love the law of God and be passive toward it. James 1:22-25 explains to us that merely listening to the Word and not obeying it is like looking in a mirror and immediately forgetting what we look like.

Applying God’s Word to our lives leads to peace because it protects us from hurdles that could become stumbling blocks, such as rage, bitterness, pride, and fear. As we keep our eyes and hearts fixed on loving and obeying God’s laws, life’s hurdles won’t trip us up.

**Father,** I want to truly love Your law, not just with my words but with my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Our Priceless Treasure

**[Jesus said,] “The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it” (Matthew 13:45-46).**

**Scripture:** Matthew 13:44-52

**Song:** “More Precious than Silver”

Years ago my husband and I were in a thrift store in a remote part of Canada. As we were leafing through some artwork, we came across a reproduction of a Renaissance-era painting that depicted dancers at a wedding. We immediately fell in love with it. Back then we were barely making ends meet. We knew it wasn't wise to buy this “luxury item,” but with what little spending money we had, we made the purchase. After bringing the piece home and hanging it in our den, our five-year-old daughter spent what seemed like hours staring at it. Today, she is getting her master's degree in Northern Renaissance art history. We had no idea our “treasure” would play a role in shaping her interests and future.

The kingdom of Heaven is worth every sacrifice we could make. The apostle Paul wrote, “I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:8).

What we spend of our lives for the sake of God's kingdom may feel like a sacrifice today. But when time is done, we'll discover that what we gave up is nothing compared to the unforeseen joys of eternity.

**Father,** I want to spend my life pursuing Your kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.