



SUNDAY SCHOOL JUNE 15, 2025

Prayer:

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Old Testament

Scripture: Proverbs 8:1-2, 22-31

WISDOM REJOICES IN THE CREATION

Does not wisdom call and understanding raise her voice?

On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out:

“To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all who live.

“The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.

“Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths, I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water.

“Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, when he had not yet made earth and fields or the world's first bits of soil.

“When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker, and I was daily his delight, playing before him always, playing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.”

OVERVIEW

Proverbs 8 presents a poetic and theological portrait of *Wisdom* as a woman calling out to humanity—pleading to be heard. Verses 1–4 describe her public cry to all people, offering instruction and understanding. Verses 22–31 shift into a stunning cosmic reflection where Wisdom speaks of being present with God before and during the creation of the world.

These verses elevate Wisdom not merely as an attribute but as a near-personified presence, fundamental to creation and moral order.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Proverbs is part of the *Wisdom Literature* of the Old Testament (along with Job, Ecclesiastes, Psalms, and Song of Songs). It's often attributed to Solomon but likely compiled over centuries. Chapter 8 stands in contrast to the seductive voice of *Folly* (Proverbs 7), emphasizing that true life and understanding come from listening to Wisdom's voice.

Chapter 8 isn't just practical advice—it's theological. It presents Wisdom as divine, preexistent, and active in creation—echoing themes that later influence Christian theology, especially ideas about the Logos (John 1).

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

Wisdom was a celebrated concept across many ancient Near Eastern cultures. In Egypt and Mesopotamia, divine wisdom was thought to guide rulers and ensure cosmic and social order. Proverbs 8 places Israel's view of Wisdom in line with these traditions, but with a crucial difference: *Wisdom is rooted in the fear of the Lord* (Proverbs 1:7).



Politically, these texts were used to shape ethical governance. Ancient Israel wasn't just offering advice to individuals; it was forming a moral and theological framework for society. Listening to Wisdom meant shaping just courts, honest trade, and compassionate care for the poor.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **Approximate Date of Composition:** Between the 10th century BCE (Solomonic era) and the post-exilic period (5th century BCE).
- **Cultural Layering:** Some sayings may come from early monarchic times, but the poetic, theological development of *Lady Wisdom* likely matured during the later stages of Jewish wisdom tradition—possibly during or after the Babylonian exile, when reflection on creation and divine order deepened.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

Metaphorical Lens

Lady Wisdom represents the voice of order, justice, and moral clarity that predates all existence. Her voice calls “to all,” symbolizing the universal reach of divine truth—not locked away in temples or among the elite but available in the public square.

She is present “before the beginning” not to boast, but to ground human morality in the very structure of creation. Her joy, especially in humanity (v. 31), signals God’s delight in the human vocation to seek, create, and live rightly.

Modern-Day Relevance

In a world overwhelmed by noise, misinformation, and divisive voices, Proverbs 8 reminds us that the call of Wisdom is still available—*if we’re willing to listen*. She’s not hiding; she’s at the crossroads, the city gate, the main street. That’s as true for the internet as it is for Main Street in Marion, Indiana, or S 600 W in Herbst.

Grant County, Indiana Context

In a rural, tight-knit place like Grant County, where faith and tradition still shape much of life, this passage can be a gentle but powerful reminder:

- **Public Witness:** Wisdom speaks *publicly*. How do we as a church speak wisdom not only inside our buildings but in our town meetings, school boards, and community centers?
- **Creation and Stewardship:** Lady Wisdom rejoices in the created world. Can this shape how we steward our farmland, rivers, and small-town ecosystems?
- **Vocational Joy:** “Rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in mankind” (v. 31) affirms that human life and work matter. It dignifies factory workers, teachers, farmers, and caregivers—not just pastors or scholars or Sunday school teachers. ;-)
- **Discernment in Polarized Times:** In an area where political and social divisions can run deep, this passage invites all to pause and ask—*whose voice am I listening to?* Is it grounded in ancient, life-giving Wisdom—or in modern folly dressed up as truth?

SUMMARY

Proverbs 8:1–4, 22–31 presents Lady Wisdom as a divine voice calling out for all to follow her ways. She is not hidden but cries out in the public square, inviting humanity to live rightly. She existed before creation, participating in God’s creative work and rejoicing in the world and humanity.



For today—and for a community like Grant County—this passage affirms that wisdom is accessible, foundational, and joyful. It urges us to seek not just knowledge, but divine understanding, and to live in harmony with the moral and created order God has embedded in the world.

New Testament

Scripture: Romans 5:1-5

GOD'S LOVE POURED INTO OUR HEARTS

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

OVERVIEW

Romans 5:1–5 is a powerful, tightly packed passage that transitions from the theological foundations of justification by faith to its practical, *lived implications*. Paul explains how faith leads to peace with God, and how the grace in which believers now “stand” equips them not only to hope in glory but also to rejoice in suffering, as suffering leads to a virtuous cycle culminating in hope—a hope grounded in the indwelling Holy Spirit.

“Lived implications” are the **real-world, practical effects** of a belief or teaching—**how it actually shows up in daily life** rather than just staying in the realm of theology or ideas.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

- **Placement in Romans:** This passage follows Paul’s theological argument in Romans 1–4, where he argues that **righteousness comes not through the Law but through faith**. Chapter 5 begins a new section where Paul explores the **results** of that justification.
- **Justification by Faith:** Paul’s use of “we have peace with God” indicates not just tranquility but a reconciliation—a right relationship restored by grace.
- **Suffering and Hope:** Paul’s “chain” (*see metaphor below*) from suffering to hope emphasizes spiritual growth through hardship—an idea deeply rooted in Jewish wisdom literature and early Christian experience.

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

- **1st Century Roman World:** Early Christians, especially Gentile believers in Rome, lived under imperial rule and constant cultural tension. The Roman Empire valued status, strength, and honor—ideas at odds with Paul’s message of suffering producing character.
- **Paul’s Audience:** Likely included both Jewish and Gentile Christians navigating friction not only between each other but also with the Roman world. Persecution, marginalization, and uncertainty were real daily experiences.
- **Political Layer:** Paul’s emphasis on hope and inner transformation through suffering stands in contrast to Roman imperial propaganda, which claimed *peace* and *order* through military conquest and Caesar’s rule. Paul boldly claims that peace comes through Christ, not Caesar.



HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **Date Written:** Likely around **57 CE**.
- **Paul's Location:** Written from Corinth, while preparing for his trip to Jerusalem and hoping eventually to visit Rome.
- **Roman Church's State:** A mix of house churches, composed of a growing number of Gentiles and a returning population of Jews who had been expelled from Rome under Claudius (49 CE) and were now returning under Nero (after 54 CE).

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

Metaphor of a “Spiritual Chain Reaction”: Paul sets up a cause-and-effect progression—*suffering* → *endurance* → *character* → *hope*—like a spiritual growth engine. This metaphor works today as a way to frame hardship not as a dead-end but as a transformation process.

- Paul's message in Romans 5:1–5 is not just about the *theology* of justification; it's about how faith reshapes the way we respond to conflict, hardship, and even our own anger. In a world that often tells us to “take matters into our own hands,” Paul urges us to **stand in grace, have peace with God**, and let that peace inform how we treat others—even those who wrong us.
- I've had conversations with people who wanted to “pray against” another person. It's tempting to act as God's enforcer, to seek justice on our terms. But my response is **“Let God do His job, and not try to do it for Him.”** Would this be both the **wisdom and understanding** that Paul's letter points us toward?
- Paul doesn't deny that people suffer or get wronged. But he says that in suffering (whether it's injustice or disappointment), we are called **not to retaliate** but to let the experience shape us—to produce endurance, character, and finally, **hope**. That hope comes *not* from “getting our way,” but from trusting that God is at work—even when we're hurting, even when others fail us.

Modern Application in Grant County:

- In rural communities like Grant County, where relationships are tight and people often wear multiple hats (friend, coworker, neighbor, church member), tensions can feel personal and lasting. Romans 5 reminds us that part of standing in grace means **giving others the same space and time we've needed to grow**—and resisting the urge to “do God's job” in judging or punishing.
- Paul is not glorifying suffering, but **redeeming it**—transforming the narrative from “why is this happening?” to “what is God forming in me through this?”
- Whether it's a factory closure, health battles, or a dwindling local paper, Romans 5 reminds believers that *hope is not naive*—it's grounded in experience and God's love.

Hope as Community Glue:

- In smaller towns, where people see each other in the grocery store, churches serve as places of both spiritual and social sustenance. Romans 5 speaks not just individually but communally: your suffering is not invisible, and your endurance feeds the collective witness of faith.

SUMMARY

Romans 5:1–5 teaches that faith in Christ brings peace with God and opens the door to a grace-filled life, even when things are hard. Rather than rushing to judgment or trying to “fix” everything ourselves, we are called to live in grace, grow through endurance, and cling to hope. This passage is both a



theological foundation and a personal invitation—to stop trying to do God’s job, and to trust in the process of spiritual growth through suffering, led by the Holy Spirit.

Addendum

Relating to today’s sermon “Seek First to Understand”

ROMANS 5:1–5

This week’s sermon theme, “*Seek First to Understand*,” fits seamlessly with Paul’s message in Romans 5. Too often, when we feel wronged or uncomfortable, our instinct is to react—defend ourselves, push back, or even pray *against* someone else. But Paul invites us to something deeper: **stand in grace, grow through hardship**, and let that experience produce **character and hope**, not retaliation or judgment.

When we seek to understand—whether someone’s pain, perspective, or even their mistakes—we are actually participating in that process Paul describes: **endurance shaping character**. We let go of the need to be right or to win, and instead grow in the ability to see others through the lens of grace.

And maybe that’s part of what it means to “let God do His job.” Seeking first to understand means we don’t rush to do God’s judging—we **listen**, we **endure**, and we **hope** that grace will do its work in both us and the other person.

Especially here in Grant County, where small-town relationships run deep—and sometimes run into conflict—this is the kind of wisdom that builds not just character, but **community**.

PROVERBS 8:1-4, 22-31

Proverbs 8 models exactly what it means to *seek first to understand*. Lady Wisdom doesn’t shout to overpower or manipulate—she calls out to *all people* with clarity and invitation (vv. 1–4). Her voice is not hidden in mystery but made available at the crossroads, city gates, and marketplaces—places where people live, work, and make decisions.

She isn’t demanding allegiance without understanding. Instead, she invites people into deep awareness—**an understanding of how the world was made, how it works best, and how we can live well within it**.

Verse 22–31 shows that Wisdom was with God *before* creation—meaning that to understand our world, our neighbors, and even ourselves, we must begin with that ancient, divine wisdom. It’s not reactionary. It’s not driven by fear. It’s rooted in joy, delight, and creative order.

In a Grant County context—especially in a time of social or political tension—the call is this: **Before we jump to judgment or defensiveness, seek Wisdom’s way. Slow down. Ask questions to understand, not to elicit a response we’re looking for, or want to defend. Listen first. Understand before being understood**. That is what Lady Wisdom offers: a way to live that begins not with control or pride, but with humility and discernment.



Suffering Alignment

Christians aren't the only ones who wrestle with the meaning of suffering. In Buddhism, one of the first things taught is that life involves suffering—because of things like desire, loss, and disappointment.

But here's where the message of Romans 5 stands apart: Paul doesn't just accept suffering—he believes God can use it. Through Christ, suffering isn't just something to survive or escape; it's something that can lead us toward endurance, deeper character, and real hope.

And unlike some paths that say we must overcome suffering alone, Paul reminds us: **God's love has already been poured into our hearts. We are not alone.**

- Recognizes other traditions wrestle with suffering.
- Highlights the *distinctive Christian view* of redemptive suffering.
- Emphasizes **God's presence** and the **Holy Spirit**, which are absent in Buddhist philosophy.

Paul treats suffering as something that:

- Has meaning and purpose within a relationship with God.
- Is not a good thing in itself, but a process God uses to *form character* and *produce hope*.
- Is endured with the help of **God's love** and the **Holy Spirit**.
- Is framed within **redemptive history**—it connects to Jesus' suffering and resurrection, with an eye on future glory.

It's not suffering for suffering's sake. It's suffering with a trajectory—leading to transformation.

Buddhist View of Suffering (Dukkha):

- Suffering is central to the **Four Noble Truths**:
 1. **Life is suffering.**
 2. **Suffering is caused by desire and attachment.**
 3. **There is a way to end suffering.**
 4. That way is the Eightfold Path.
 1. Right View
 2. Right Intention
 3. Right Speech
 4. Right Action
 5. Right Livelihood
 6. Right Effort
 7. Right Mindfulness
 8. Right Concentration
- Suffering is seen as something to **understand deeply and detach from**, not as something redemptive or character-building.
- The goal is **liberation** (nirvana)—the cessation of suffering through enlightenment, not endurance.

Where They Overlap:

- **Both take suffering seriously**—not as something to ignore, but something to engage with.
- **Both frame suffering as a teacher**—Buddhism through insight and detachment, Paul through spiritual formation and dependence on God.



- **Both speak to a hope beyond suffering**—Buddhism through the end of desire, Paul through the hope of glory and resurrection.

Where They Differ:

Topic	Paul (Romans 5)	Buddhism (Four Noble Truths)
Origin of Suffering	Can include persecution, testing, or the general brokenness of the world	All life involves suffering due to craving/attachment
Meaning of Suffering	Can be a pathway to hope, shaped by God's love and Spirit	Something to observe, understand, and let go of
Goal	Endurance, character, hope, ultimately unity with God	Enlightenment and release from the cycle of rebirth (samsara)
Role of the Divine	God is <i>with you in suffering</i> , shaping you	No central God—focus is on personal awareness and practice