

Meet Sophie Your IEC
Proverbs 8 1-4 22-31
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Getting into the college of our choice can be quite an arduous venture. At the most academically competitive schools, thousands of students apply, and only a handful are accepted. If our first choice school is Stanford, for example, it's going to be very tough. They accept only 5.1 percent of their applicants. That's one acceptance for every 20 applications! Or, said a different way, 19 disappointments out of every 20 applicants. Harvard and Yale are a little easier, accepting 6 percent of their applicants.

Gaining acceptance to prestigious technical schools is also difficult. Massachusetts Institute of Technology accepts only 8 percent of applicants, and California Institute of Technology, only 9 percent.

Notre Dame's acceptance rate is more than double those at 21 percent, but that still means that 4 out of 5 applicants do not receive a letter of acceptance.

For a growing number of occupations, a college education is vitally important, and a degree from a prestigious university can open doors to employment upon graduation, and networking advantages for advancement all the way to retirement. At least, this is the perception of many parents who want their child to have the best opportunity to succeed. They believe, in other words, that getting into the "right" college can be an important first step toward a successful lifelong journey.

That's why, to improve their child's chances of acceptance from the institution of their choice, some parents are employing the services of an independent educational consultant (IEC). These IECs offer a variety of services for high school students.

Many assist with the application process by offering coaching in the writing of the dreaded application essay, preparing for the anxiety-ridden admissions interview, and helping students assemble a complete and thorough application packet. Some offer their expert opinions of which

colleges will be the best fit and most likely to accept their clients, decreasing the number of expensive application fees that need to be paid.

Others, hired before the student's junior year of high school, can provide tutoring for the SAT and ACT tests. Still others help students select high school courses and extra-curricular activities, clubs and other associations that may help bolster a college application.

These services, as one might expect, can be pricey. Fees for independent educational consultants can range from about \$1,000 to tens of thousands of dollars, depending upon their experience and services offered. Some parents find the fees worth paying to help their child receive the advantage of the "right" degree from the "right" college to help them succeed for the rest of their lives.

Wouldn't it be great to have our own personal IEC?

Wouldn't it be nice to have an independent educational consultant for other moments in life? In our professional lives, we could use someone coaching us prior to a job interview. Or they might remind us what not to say at the company picnic.

In our personal lives, an IEC offering tips to deepen our relationships with our spouse, our children and even our parents would be deeply helpful. In our decision making, having someone give us perspective and a sense of right and wrong would bring us a level of peace.

The good news is that we already have an IEC. Her name is Sophie, and she's our personal IEC for life. She will be our guide for whatever challenges life brings. Let's take a look at Sophie's resume.

Sophie's availability

Unlike other educational consultants, Sophie is always available, answering whenever we call.

When we contact our doctors to get some answers, we may be given an appointment for which we will have to wait weeks. Call for tech support for our new computer or software, and we're likely to be put on hold to wait for the next available representative. Contact our stockbrokers, and we may

be forwarded to voicemail and our calls may not be returned for hours or days.

Sophie is different. Rather than waiting for us to call her, she comes to us whenever and wherever we are along life's journey. Still, the Bible invites us to ask for help: "If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you" (James 1:5).

When things are going well, and we are comfortably walking the heights of life, she is there. When we find ourselves at a crossroads, she is there. When we are standing at the threshold of something new, Sophie is there to guide and direct us. There's no application process or prerequisites that need to be met.

Because some IECs specialize in helping high school students get into the most prestigious and competitive schools, they will not help just anyone. Their services are only available to the best students in the class.

Some of us, during periods of unemployment, have experienced something similar. We seek out a particular career consultant or recruiter, only to find she caters to a specific segment of the job market for which we are not qualified.

This will never happen with Sophie. She is ready to consult for us, no matter who we are, where we come from, or what we believe. Sophie calls out to all people, all who will listen and follow, and is already at work in our lives before we are even aware of it.

Sophie's experience

When looking for an IEC, experience matters. We want someone with a rich background who will not be surprised by our circumstances. We want someone who has seen it all before.

No one has been doing it longer than Sophie ... literally. Before the first day of creation, God made Sophie and appointed her a consultant to humanity. She was in on the ground floor. She has seen it all.

This wealth of experience means her advice is different. She does not offer empty platitudes that sound good but provide no real help. Nor does she endorse principles or theories meant to be studied and debated by great minds.

Instead, Sophie's assistance is "rubber-meets-the-road" practical. Sophie knows how the "real world" works.

She was there as the world was created, watching the Master Builder every step of the way. Sophie knows and understands what truly makes up a meaningful life. She can be trusted.

There are so many other would-be consultants available with far less experience and less knowledge of the workings of the world. Despite their agreements, making up what we might call the conventional wisdom of the day, they don't know what they're talking about compared to Sophie.

When we're getting conflicting messages, we trust Sophie, even when her advice is vastly different from what may seem right to us and others. No one has more intimate knowledge of the world than she does. She will always steer us in the right direction.

Sophie's love and commitment

Another reason to trust Sophie is her pure motives. All she does, she does with our best interests in mind.

Some of those who readily seek to give us advice have ulterior motives. Mortgage companies sometimes push the loans that make them the most money, rather than the one that will be best for us. Pharmaceutical companies sometimes offer incentives to have their medication prescribed over one manufactured by a competitor.

This is never true of Sophie. She always shares what is best for us. As Sophie watched the Master Artist create our world, she appreciated this amazing creation, and especially delights in us who are created in the image of God -- the one whom she worships.

Sophie has worshiped God from the beginning of time, and her greatest delight is to deepen our relationship with God. She longs to help us live into the goodness for which we are created.

Where other consultants may have their judgment clouded by other interests, Sophie can be trusted. She is God's delight, and loves her work for us. She seeks what is best for us.

Sophie's results

Delving a bit deeper into Sophie's resume (the verses not included in the lectionary reading), we find that she gets great results. She has been a consultant to kings, princes and other rulers. Those who have listened and followed her in the past give high recommendations, calling her direction more valuable than gold or jewels.

Maybe the most convincing testimonial is that her previous clients are happy. Those who have listened and followed experience a deep sense of joy and peace.

Sophie: The wisdom of God

Sophie is the dream consultant because she is so much more than all others. Her proper name is Sophia, the Greek word for wisdom.

In this chapter of Proverbs, the author introduces us to sophia, the wisdom of God, as if she is a human being. These verses are a resume intended to convince us to follow her as our IEC, rather than trusting our own intuition or the conventional wisdom of the day.

How can we hire Sophie?

How do we hire Sophie? The Bible says we don't need to. She's already calling to us. We simply need to get quiet enough to hear her speak.

When we gather as the people of God for worship, we are afforded the opportunity to open our ears and hearts to the wisdom of God. She may speak through the words of a sermon, a Scripture reading, a prayer or the lyrics of a hymn or song.

We meet God's wisdom in our reading of the Bible. Whenever we take the time to read and listen to what the Spirit of God is speaking to us in the words of Scripture, we hear her speak.

We meet Sophie in prayer and silence. When we quiet our minds and spirits enough, we make room for her speak to the deepest parts of ourselves.

While these may be some of the more easily recognized places, we can actually meet Sophie anywhere. The Bible tells us she has been with us from the first day of creation, knows every inch of it. Some of those places may be different from our preconceived notions of where God speaks, but still wisdom is there. Then, when we hear, we need to follow.

Hiring an IEC is no guarantee of getting into the college of your choice. Our IEC cannot write our admission essays for us, nor can he take the SAT or ACT in our stead. She cannot make us do our homework to keep our grades up, or force us to take that summer internship that will look great on our college applications. He or she can coach and advise, but it is up to us to put the advice into practice.

The same is true of what Sophie offers each of us. The wisdom of God is not available simply to make us smarter, to give us inside information or to give advice to others on how they are to live their lives. If we want the peace and happiness only available through a life lived for God, we must practice what she tells us.

IECs help high school students receive a letter of acceptance into the college of their choice -- the one they believe will start them on a journey that leads to a successful career.

Get to know God's wisdom, Sophie, your IEC for life. Follow her toward a closer relationship with God, and a life of happiness and peace.

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The character of personified Wisdom is one of the most fascinating in biblical literature. Although Wisdom is portrayed as if it is an actual divine entity that lives apart from God —the more correct way of describing the character of Wisdom is as a personification of a quality that is actually an internal part of God's person.

Proverbs 8:1-4 and 22-31

New Century Version:

Wisdom calls to you like someone shouting;
understanding raises her voice.
On the hilltops along the road

and at the crossroads, she stands calling.
Beside the city gates,
at the entrances into the city, she calls out:
“Listen, everyone, I’m calling out to you;
I am shouting to all people.
“I, wisdom, was with the Lord when he began his work,
long before he made anything else.
I was created in the very beginning,
even before the world began.
I was born before there were oceans,
or springs overflowing with water,
before the hills were there,
before the mountains were put in place.
God had not made the earth or fields,
not even the first dust of the earth.
I was there when God put the skies in place,
when he stretched the horizon over the oceans,
when he made the clouds above
and put the deep underground springs in place.
I was there when he ordered the sea
not to go beyond the borders he had set.
I was there when he laid the earth’s foundation.
I was like a child by his side.
I was delighted every day,
enjoying his presence all the time,
enjoying the whole world,
and delighted with all its people.

May God add a blessing to the reading, hearing and understanding of this holy Word.