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## FINDING WORDS THAT MATTER (PROVERBS 1:20-21; 4:10-13)

Harvard Stevens Jr.

Are we merchants of wisdom? I know well that we want to be mentors, teachers, and advocates, but the word *MERCHANTS* is helpful because it reminds us of the marketplace of values and ideas. The Book of Proverbs says: "*Wisdom cries out in the street... at the busiest corners... at the city gates.*" And yes, we have our own booths, well-manned and well-womanned, and from them we cry out: *Lutheran Higher Education, right here!*

We know that the wisdom tradition of Hebrew scripture was always very cross-cultural, reflecting a wide range of authorities, voices, and traditions. This is even truer of some wisdom sources today. Can you say *internet*? Can you say *cable TV*? Can you say *urban rap music*?

Biblical wisdom has always offered us skills for living, but today's wisdom market almost frightens us, because it offers its own versions of independent studies, seminars, and work study experiences—and some of the topics may as well be: *Hedonism 101*, *Advanced Voyeurism*, *Neo-Racism*, *Applied Sexism*, and *Pure Escapism*.

Often our students are the ones who help us face our fears. Last October, I was invited to a meeting of a student poetry club at Carthage. Young poets, rappers, and philosophers with dreadlocks, curls, and shaved heads gathered in a small classroom. They were a diverse multicultural group, from cities, suburbs, and farms. All of them were navigating together through the

marketplace of wisdom, and I am proud to say, all of them were doing well in school. They were magnificent representatives of a generation that actively seeks wisdom in profound ways and who hunger and thirst for a way to live a good life.

That night we were given an assignment to take fifteen minutes and write a poem in a style that was different for us. We all wrote, and then shared the results of our creative process. That night, this is what wisdom whispered into my ear.

Being close like this—to you and you—  
gives me more than words can say.  
Yet it was words that made me pass this way.  
Words: invitation—collaboration—inspiration—  
new creation—the next generation—  
right here before my eyes.  
What a surprise.  
No need for disguise.  
Just realize—this is the prize.  
Being close like this,  
making words that matter...  
A higher cause than chatter, chatter, chatter.

For the high calling to teach the fruits of wisdom, for words that matter, and for the promise that our students bring before us each day, let us give thanks to God Almighty, the source of all wisdom and truth! Amen.

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*Harvard Stevens Jr. is the dean of Siebert Chapel at Carthage College in Kenosha, Wisconsin.*