

# The Peril of Ignoring the Obvious

## A Study of Daniel 5

Characteristic of Completeness: World

Big Idea: We are responsible for what we know.

Related Scriptures: Psalm 19:1-6; 86:8-10; Proverbs 29:1; Isaiah 47:1-5; Luke 12:47-48; John 15:22; Acts 17:24-31; Romans 1:18-32; James 4:17

Introduction:

- A. We humans have a remarkable capacity for ignoring the obvious. We can overlook stuff that's right under our noses.  
  
And disregarding the obvious can be perilous. When we choose to ignore clear and present realities, it can be dangerous.
- B. This morning I want to first review the peril of ignoring the obvious in history, using Daniel 5 as our text. Then I want to relate that to the peril of ignoring the obvious today for us.
- I. First, let's consider the peril of ignoring the obvious in history. Daniel, Chapter 5, ► Verse 1 introduces us to a new king in Babylon. It says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 5:1** Belshazzar the king held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand.

Our text does not explain how Belshazzar fits into the succession of kings in Babylonia, but some ancient historical sources help us fill in the blanks.<sup>1</sup>

You may recall that ► Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylonia back in Daniel 4. Here is Nebuchadnezzar's family tree as near as we can tell.<sup>2</sup> Nebuchadnezzar had ► a son named Evil-Merodach (also known as Amel-Marduk). He also had ► a daughter whose name we don't know, but she was married to ► a guy named Neriglissar (also known as Nergal-Sharezer), and they had ► a son named Labashi-Marduk (also known as Laborosoarchod). Nebuchadnezzar also had ► another daughter named Nitocris, who married ► a guy named Nabonidus (also known as Nabu-naid), and they had ► a son named Belshazzar (also known as Bel-shar-usur).

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<sup>1</sup> A primary source is Berosus, quoted by Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1:146-153.

<sup>2</sup> Gleason L. Archer, Jr., "Daniel," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1985), 68-69; J. Dwight Pentecost, "Daniel," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1326, 1344.

Now here's the succession of ► kings.<sup>3</sup> Nebuchadnezzar died in 563 or 562 A.D. and was ► succeeded on the throne by his son Evil-Merodach, who ruled for a couple of years. In 560, king Evil-Merodach was assassinated by his brother-in-law ► Neriglissar, who then became king. Neriglissar ruled for about four years; then he died, ► leaving the throne to his son, Labashi-Marduk in 556. Labashi-Marduk ruled for less than a year and was murdered by his brother-in-law, ► Nabonidus who became king in 556.

And you thought your family was dysfunctional!

Several years later, Nabonidus named his ► son Belshazzar as co-regent or co-ruler of Babylonia.<sup>4</sup> It seems that Belshazzar stayed in capital city of Babylon, while Nabonidus spent a lot of time in other parts of Babylonia.<sup>5</sup>

At least 23 years had passed since the events of Daniel, Chapter 4, and Daniel was now over 80 years old.<sup>6</sup>

A. Verse ► 1 tells us that Belshazzar “held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles.” It was party time. This is our first hint that Belshazzar had a propensity for ignoring the obvious. He was ignoring obvious danger.

You see, Belshazzar was partying while Babylon was surrounded and under siege by enemy forces. Extra-biblical sources tell us that Medo-Persian forces had conquered all of Babylonia except Babylon, the last city to be conquered.<sup>7</sup> And now, these enemy forces had surrounded Babylon and cut off all outside sources of supply.

1. Why was Belshazzar partying at a time like this?
  - a. Perhaps it was a move to boost morale in the midst of adversity.<sup>8</sup>
  - b. Perhaps he wanted to reassure everyone that he was in control.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Archer, 68-69; Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Resolute: Determining to Go God's Direction*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2000), 61-62; John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 116; Leon J. Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1973), 129.

<sup>4</sup> Gene A. Getz, *Daniel: Standing Firm for God, Men of Character Series*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 87; Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel, The New American Commentary*, E. Ray Clendenen, ed., vol. 18, (Memphis, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 147; Pentecost, 1344; Walvoord, 115; Wood, 130.

<sup>5</sup> Archer, 69; Getz, 87; Ernest C. Lucas, *Daniel, Apollos Old Testament Commentary*, David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham, eds., vol. 20, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press and Leicester, England: Apollos, 2002), 126.

<sup>6</sup> Getz, 87; Miller, 151; Wiersbe, 66; Walvoord, 116, 124; Wood, 131.

<sup>7</sup> Getz, 87.

<sup>8</sup> Miller, 151; Wood, 132.

<sup>9</sup> Getz, 88.

- c. Perhaps he felt that Babylon was impregnable. Indeed, Babylon was remarkably fortified. One ancient historian describes the city as surrounded by a large moat, and defended by a perimeter wall that was so large that it could not be knocked down or run over by an enemy.<sup>10</sup>

In anticipation of the siege, Babylon had stored up provisions sufficient for about twenty years.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the Euphrates River ran under the wall and right through the city, providing plenty of water to its inhabitants.<sup>12</sup>

For all these reasons, no enemy had even tried to storm Babylon in over a thousand years.<sup>13</sup> And so, Belshazzar ignored the obvious threat.

2. So oblivious and complacent was Belshazzar that apparently no one noticed that the Medo-Persian forces outside the city walls were working to temporarily divert the Euphrates River, dropping the water flow into the city sufficiently to gain access.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the security of Babylon may have been first breached during Belshazzar's party. Historians tell us that the Medo-Persian army would not have been unable to get inside had the Babylonians been paying attention.<sup>15</sup> But Belshazzar ignored the obvious.

- B. Belshazzar also ignored something else that was obvious. It is likely that ► Belshazzar, as the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, would have seen first hand the last years of his grandfather's reign and not just heard about it.<sup>16</sup> That means he would have seen his grandfather humbled by the God of Israel. Afterward, he would have heard his grandfather speak of the greatness of this God of Israel. He would have read his grandfather's public decree extolling the power of this God. But Belshazzar ignored the obvious. Listen to how Belshazzar blasphemes God at his party, beginning in ► Verse 2. It says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 5:2** When Belshazzar tasted the wine . . .

The phrase, "tasted the wine" is a figure of speech that indicates Belshazzar was under the influence.<sup>17</sup> He had a buzz going from the wine.

Verse ► 2 continues,

<sup>10</sup> Archer, 69; Walvoord, 119.

<sup>11</sup> Archer, 69; Getz, 87; Pentecost, 1344, 1346; Wiersbe, 61.

<sup>12</sup> Archer, 70; Getz, 87.

<sup>13</sup> Archer, 70.

<sup>14</sup> Archer, 70, 75; Getz, 95; Pentecost, 1347; Herodotus 1:190-191, quoted by Walvoord, 129-130.

<sup>15</sup> Herodotus, quoted by Archer, 75.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, 163.

<sup>17</sup> Miller, 152-153; Walvoord, 117; Wood, 132.

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 5:2** . . . he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which *was* in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them.

You may recall that these were the gold and silver ► vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem many years before.<sup>18</sup>

Some of you may be thinking, “I thought you said Nebuchadnezzar was Belshazzar’s grandfather and now this says Nebuchadnezzar was ► his father. What gives?” Well, in neither the Hebrew nor the Chaldean language is there any word for “grandfather” or “grandson.”<sup>19</sup> As such, the term “father” is used to describe any ancestor, including grandfathers.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, the term, “son” is used to describe any descendant. In this case, the term “father” is used to describe Belshazzar’s grandfather.<sup>21</sup>

Let’s pick it up in ► Verse 3:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 5:3** Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God which *was* in Jerusalem; and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. <sup>4</sup> They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

This was sacrilege for two reasons. First, it was a profane use of sacred vessels, and second, the vessels were used to worship false gods.<sup>22</sup> This was probably a deliberate attempt by Belshazzar to demonstrate the superiority of Babylonian gods over the God of Israel.<sup>23</sup>

And so, God delivered a message that would get the attention of even the bone-headed Belshazzar with a buzz on. Verses ► 5 and 6 say,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 5:5** Suddenly the fingers of a man’s hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace, and the king saw the back of the hand that did the writing. <sup>6</sup> Then the king’s face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together.

<sup>18</sup> There would have been plenty of gold and silver vessels to go around. Ezra 1:11 tells us there were at least 5,400 such vessels.

<sup>19</sup> Walvoord, 118.

<sup>20</sup> e.g. John 8:39.

<sup>21</sup> Archer, 72; James A. Borland, Daniel, *Liberty Bible Commentary, Old Testament*, Jerry Falwell, ed., (Lynchburg, VA: The Old-Time Gospel Hour, 1982), 1641; Getz, 88.

<sup>22</sup> Lucas, 129.

<sup>23</sup> Miller, 154; Pentecost, 1345; Wood, 133.

From these two verses emerge two figures of speech that we still use today. We say, “the handwriting on the wall” to describe an ominous sign. And we say, “knees knocking” to describe someone’s fear.

By the way, archaeologists have uncovered in the ruins of ancient Babylon a large hall sufficiently large to accommodate Belshazzar’s banquet; it had plastered walls.<sup>24</sup>

- C. The handwriting on the wall definitely got Belshazzar’s attention, but he went on to ignore the obvious in yet another way, beginning in ► Verse 7:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 5:7** The king called aloud to bring in the conjurers, the Chaldeans and the diviners. The king spoke and said to the wise men of Babylon, “Any man who can read this inscription and explain its interpretation to me shall be clothed with purple and *have* a necklace of gold around his neck, and have authority as third *ruler* in the kingdom.”

Third ► ruler may mean a co-equal ruler with Nabonidus and Belshazzar,<sup>25</sup> or it may mean the third in line.<sup>26</sup> In any case, Verse ► 8 continues,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 5:8** Then all the king’s wise men came in, but they could not read the inscription or make known its interpretation to the king.<sup>9</sup> Then King Belshazzar was greatly alarmed, his face grew *even* paler, and his nobles were perplexed.

The obvious thing that Belshazzar was missing was Daniel. Where was Daniel? Had Daniel not repeatedly proven himself as an exceptionally wise and skilled interpreter of mysterious things? Perhaps Daniel was retired.<sup>27</sup> After all, he was over 80 years old. Or perhaps he had been reassigned under the new king.<sup>28</sup> In any case, you would think that Belshazzar would have sought Daniel out at that point as an obvious source of wisdom.

Instead, someone else had to point out the obvious for Belshazzar. Verse ► 10 says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 5:10** The queen entered the banquet hall because of the words of the king and his nobles . . .

The queen was either Belshazzar’s grandmother, or more likely, his mother.<sup>29</sup> Verse ► 10 continues,

<sup>24</sup> Pentecost, 1344; Walvoord, 120; Wood, 136.

<sup>25</sup> Getz, 90; Wood, 138.

<sup>26</sup> Miller, 157-158; Walvoord, 121.

<sup>27</sup> Archer, 73; Lucas, 130; Wiersbe, 66.

<sup>28</sup> C.F. Keil, *Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, vol. 9, three volumes in one, translated by M.G. Easton, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, reprinted 1975), 186.

<sup>29</sup> Archer, 72; Borland, 1641; Getz, 91; Lucas, 130; Miller, 160; Pentecost, 1345; Walvoord, 116, 123; Wood, 133.

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 5:10** . . . the queen spoke and said, “O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts alarm you or your face be pale. ►<sup>11</sup> There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father, illumination, insight and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans *and* diviners. ►<sup>12</sup> *This was* because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned and he will declare the interpretation.”

- D. It is obvious that the queen had respect for Daniel. But once again, Belshazzar ignored the obvious. He did not grant the respect that was obviously due to Daniel. Verse ► 13 says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 5:13** Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke and said to Daniel, “Are you that Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah?”

This was a needless and belittling remark, associating Daniel with the God of Israel whom Belshazzar was intentionally blaspheming in his banquet.<sup>30</sup> We have no evidence that the queen spoke of Daniel being one of the exiles from Judah, and yet, by what he says, the king certainly knew this. I suspect he knew of Daniel all along and chose to ignore the obvious.

In Verse ► 14, the king continued to address Daniel,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 5:14** “Now I have heard about you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that illumination, insight and extraordinary wisdom have been found in you. ►<sup>15</sup> Just now the wise men *and* the conjurers were brought in before me that they might read this inscription and make its interpretation known to me, but they could not declare the interpretation of the message. ►<sup>16</sup> But I personally have heard about you, that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. Now if you are able to read the inscription and make its interpretation known to me, you will be clothed with purple and *wear* a necklace of gold around your neck, and you will have authority as the third *ruler* in the kingdom.”

- E. At this point, God used Daniel to communicate a sobering truth: Belshazzar was responsible for ignoring the obvious. Verse ► 17 says,

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<sup>30</sup> Pentecost, 1345.

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 5:17** Then Daniel answered and said before the king, “Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him.”

Daniel may not have been interested in the gifts and rewards because he didn’t want people to think that he was being bought.<sup>31</sup> Or perhaps he simply knew that the gifts and rewards were likely to be worthless in light of the imminent demise of Belshazzar.<sup>32</sup>

In any case, Daniel continues in ► Verse 18:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 5:18** “O king, the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father. ►<sup>19</sup> Because of the grandeur which He bestowed on him, all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language feared and trembled before him; whomever he wished he killed and whomever he wished he spared alive; and whomever he wished he elevated and whomever he wished he humbled. ►<sup>20</sup> But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne and *his* glory was taken away from him. ►<sup>21</sup> He was also driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like *that of* beasts, and his dwelling place *was* with the wild donkeys. He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and *that* He sets over it whomever He wishes. ►<sup>22</sup> Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this . . .

There’s the rub. Belshazzar ► “knew all this.” It was obvious what God had done. But Belshazzar ignored the obvious. And now Daniel prophesied his resulting doom, beginning in ► Verse 23:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 5:23** but you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them; ► and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which do not see, hear or understand. But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and your ways, you have not glorified. ►<sup>24</sup> Then the hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out.<sup>25</sup> “Now this is the inscription that was written out: ‘MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.’ ►<sup>26</sup> This is the interpretation of the message: ‘MENE’—God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it.<sup>27</sup> ‘TEKEL’—you have been weighed on the

<sup>31</sup> Getz, 92; Lucas, 131-132; Miller, 162; Walvoord, 125; Wood, 144.

<sup>32</sup> Borland, 1643.

scales and found deficient. <sup>28</sup> ‘PERES’—your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians. <sup>33</sup>

The interpretation of the message was that God would soon put an end to Belshazzar and his kingdom. Despite this bad news, ► Verse 29 shows that Belshazzar followed through on his promise:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 5:29** Then Belshazzar gave orders, and they clothed Daniel with purple and *put* a necklace of gold around his neck, and issued a proclamation concerning him that he *now* had authority as the third *ruler* in the kingdom.

But it didn’t mean much, and the king probably knew it didn’t mean much. By this time, Medo-Persian forces had infiltrated Babylon and were about to overthrow it. Verses ► 30 and 31 say,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 5:30** That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. <sup>31</sup> So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two.

By repeatedly ignoring the obvious, Belshazzar met his demise.

II. What can ► we learn from the example of Belshazzar?

- A. First, I believe the example of Belshazzar has something to say about the world. In fact, ► the world is our Characteristic of Completeness for the week. In particular, Belshazzar shows us that we humans of the world have a remarkable capacity for ignoring the obvious, for suppressing the truth. There’s a bit of Belshazzar in all of us.<sup>34</sup>
- B. Second, I believe the example of Belshazzar shows us that we are responsible for what God has revealed to us. We humans are responsible for what we know before God. In fact, that is ► the big idea of this message: We are responsible for what we know.

III. Well, how are we to apply all this? It seems to me that, in order to make personal application, two questions must be answered.

First, ► what do you know about God? What has God revealed to you? What is obvious?

Second, ► what is your responsibility? What is God calling you to do about what you know?

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<sup>33</sup> “UPHARSIN” in Verse 25 is the same word as “PERES” in Verse 28 with a prefixed conjunction, “U” and a plural ending. See Wood, 149.

<sup>34</sup> Walvoord (131) says, “The downfall of Babylon is in type the downfall of the unbelieving world. In many respects, modern civilization is much like ancient Babylon, resplendent with its monuments of architectural triumph, as secure as human hands and ingenuity could make it, and yet defenseless against the judgment of God at the proper hour.”

A. Let me first address these questions to unbelievers—those who have not yet believed in Jesus Christ for eternal life.

1. What ► do you know about God? What has God revealed? What is obvious? You may think, “Well that’s just it. I’m not sure about anything. Nothing is obvious.” Far be it from *me* to tell you what you know, but *God* in His Word says everybody knows something about God.

a. For example, whether or not it is acknowledged, the Bible says we all know that there is one true God who is manifest in His creation and our conscience. Romans ► 1:18-20 says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Romans 1:18** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ►<sup>19</sup> because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. ►<sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Psalm 19 corroborates that God has revealed Himself through what He has created. It ► says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Psalm 19:1** The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. <sup>2</sup> Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. . . <sup>4</sup> Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world. . . .

God has revealed Himself. And we all know it.

b. And ► there is something else we all know. We all have a sense of what is morally right and morally wrong, even if it’s distorted, even if we don’t all agree on what is right and wrong. All humans make moral judgments. And we all stand guilty before God on the basis of our own moral judgments. We need a Savior, and, whether or not we have chosen to suppress this truth, in our heart of hearts, we know it.

The late theologian, ► Francis Schaeffer, drawing from principles found in Romans, Chapter 2, illustrates it this way:

*Let us suppose for a moment that as each baby is born, a tape recorder is placed about its neck. ► Let us further*

*suppose that this tape recorder works only when moral judgments are being made. ► Aesthetic judgments, etc., are not recorded, but every moral judgment is. ► Throughout one's whole life, every real moral motion is recorded upon the tape recorder. ► Finally, when each person dies and stands before God in judgment, God pushes a button and each person hears with his own ears his own moral judgments as they rolled out over the years: ► "You were wrong in doing this. You were wrong in doing that." ► Thousands of moral judgments pour forth, and God simply turns and says, "On the basis of your own words, have you kept these moral standards?" ► And each man is silent. No person in all the world has kept the moral standards with which he has tried to bind others. ► Consequently, God says, "I will judge you upon your own moral statements . . . even if they are lower than moral statements should be. Are you guilty or not guilty?" ► No one will be able to raise his voice. ► The whole world will stand totally condemned before God in utter justice, because they will be judged not upon what they have not known, but upon what they have known and have not kept."<sup>35</sup>*

We are responsible for what we know. We know that there is a God and that we stand guilty before Him. We know that we need a Savior.

2. Well then, what ► is your responsibility? We can learn from a Philippian jailer who asks a crucial question of the Apostle Paul and Silas in ► Acts 16:30:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Acts 16:30** . . . "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

The response of Paul and Silas reaches down through the centuries. Their response is based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our sins. Their response points the way to forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God and the receiving of eternal life. Their response spells out quite clearly the responsibility of ► all people before God:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Acts 16:31** . . . "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved . . ."

Now you know. And you are responsible to believe. Don't ignore the obvious.

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<sup>35</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *Death in the City*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1969), 112-113. He cites Romans 2:15-16 as support for his statement.

- B. And ► now I want to address those who have already believed in Jesus for eternal life. What do you know about God? And what is your responsibility? James ► 4:17 tells us plainly,

<sup>NAU</sup> **James 4:17** Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

Are there some “right things” you know to do that you just aren’t doing? Is there an obvious thing that, for whatever reason, you are simply ignoring? To coin a phrase, are you “going Belshazzar”?

This week, I challenge you as I challenge myself to get alone with God and ask Him, “Am I going Belshazzar? Help me see the obvious thing that I might be overlooking.” That’s basically the prayer David prays in ► Psalm 139:23-24:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Psalm 139:23** Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; <sup>24</sup> And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.

That’s David’s way of praying, “Show me how I’m going Belshazzar.”

Sometimes I think we overcomplicate our problems in life. A Christian psychiatrist who has practiced for nearly 40 years has learned to first ask one simple question of every patient suffering from an emotional problem: Are there any unconfessed sins in your life?<sup>36</sup>

“I need wisdom for living and I can’t find it.” Are you looking in the right place?

“I feel estranged from God.” Are you pursuing Him?

“I wish the physical intimacy part of my marriage was better.” Are you loving your wife as Christ loved the Church?

“I wish God would show me what He wants me to do.” Why aren’t you doing what He has already made clear?

“My life seems directionless.” God has directed us to make disciples; are you doing that?

“My kids are a mess.” How’s your parenting?

“I wish my problems would go away.” What is your contribution to the problems?

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted by Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1999), 108.

The idea is pretty simple: Start with what you know and respond to that. I'm not saying that all problems are simple. Life can be very messy and complex, and sometimes we need help—even professional help—sorting it out. But start with what you know. Don't ignore the obvious. Because we are responsible for what we know.