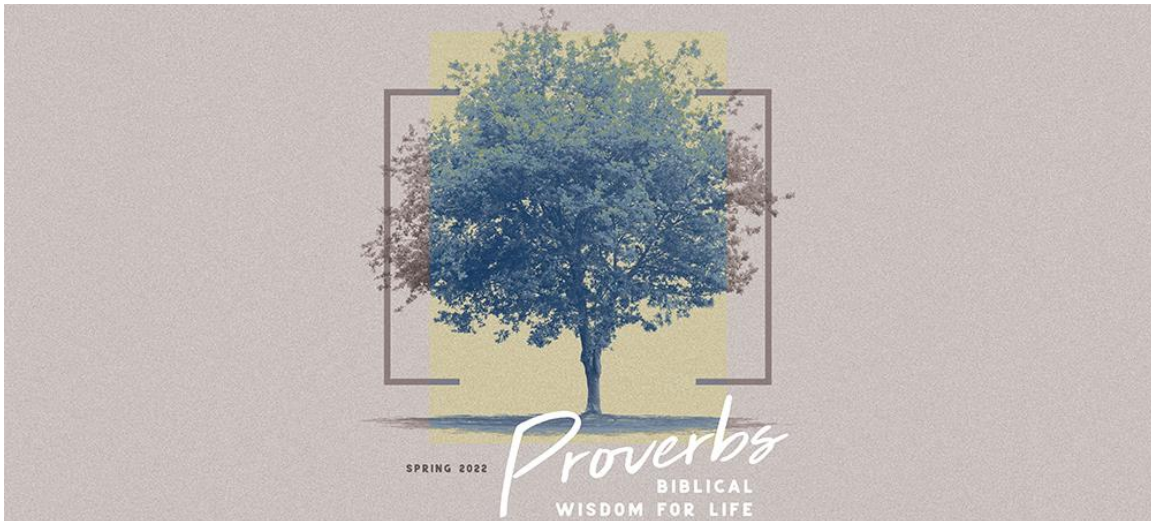


Week 2: Proverbs 9: Wisdom vs. Folly

Hook



Main Point: Folly may sound good, but it leads to death. Wisdom leads to life.

McDonald's introduced the Happy Meal in 1979 – a boxed meal that featured a hamburger or cheeseburger, French fries, cookies, a soft drink and a toy.¹ It was a simple concept, a meal specifically for children, that became a massive success; in 2010, Happy Meal sales in the United States were around 220 million units.² To put that in perspective, the population of those under the age of 18 in the United States in 2010 was about 74 million.³ In 2004, McDonald's updated the Happy Meal options to include apple slices instead of fries. By 2006, 88 percent of McDonald's customers were aware that apple slices were available but only 11 percent ordered them instead of French fries.⁴

Q: Were you/are you a Happy Meal fan? Why?

Q: Have you ordered apple slices instead of French fries in Happy Meals for yourself or your children?

Q: Why might encouraging customers to order fruit instead of French fries be a difficult task for McDonald's?

Transition: Today's lesson highlights the two options that we are daily presented with: wisdom and folly. While folly might be appealing in the moment, wisdom is clearly the better choice.

Week 2: Proverbs 9

Book

Main Point: Folly may sound good, but it leads to death. Wisdom leads to life.

Proverbs 9:1–6 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Wisdom is personified as a strong, capable woman.

Q: Why might Solomon portray wisdom and folly as two opposite women?

Q: What does this description of wisdom show us about walking in the way of insight?

Proverbs 9 is the last chapter of the introduction of the book of Proverbs. Chapters 1 and 9 “act as bookends to unify the entire section in its call to recognize, internalize, and walk in the way of wisdom.”⁵ Wisdom literature often draws contrasts between wisdom and folly. We see it in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Psalms. It is the main theme of this chapter, but it’s also a theme scattered throughout the book. A few examples (all in NLT):

- “Wise people think before they act; fools don’t – and even brag about their foolishness” (13:16).
- “The wise inherit honor, but fools are put to shame!” (3:35).
- “Fools think their own way is right, but the wise listen to others” (12:15).
- “Fools vent their anger, but the wise quietly hold it back” (29:11).
- “Fools have no interest in understanding; they only want to air their own opinions” (18:2).

We could go on and on. The consistent theme is the same as in lesson 1 – the wise trust in what God says rather than in their own understanding. They are humble enough to listen, learn, and grow. Fools think they already know everything.

Proverbs personifies wisdom and folly as two different women. This isn’t meant to be literal father-son advice for how to choose a wise wife instead of a foolish one. It’s a metaphor, a literary tool. Living a life of wisdom *is like* settling down with a godly, loving spouse, while living a life of folly *is like* chasing after a seductive temptress who will cheat on you and treat you poorly (2:16–19). It makes no logical sense to chase after a temptress when you are married to a loving woman, yet many people do it anyway. In the same way, godly wisdom is clearly the better choice for living a happy life, yet many people are wooed away by the empty promises of foolishness, which never turn out well. If you want to live a happy life, ignore the wooing cries of foolishness and pursue

true godly wisdom with all your heart, soul and strength. A person should pursue wisdom as passionately as they would pursue a wonderful wife.

Proverbs 9 describes wisdom as a woman who has built a large, beautiful house. There have been many theories about what the seven pillars might represent; a simple answer is that they represent grandeur, beauty and strength. The number seven in Hebrew is also the number of completeness and perfection.⁶ This house is safe, strong and solid. It's complete and perfect.

This woman has done everything herself. Whoever responded to her invitation would have to do nothing but come and enjoy the feast. This doesn't mean that walking in God's wisdom leads to a life of ease and feasting. But wisdom is strong, and her house is a safe and good place to be. Not necessarily physically safe, but spiritually. Dr. Kent Brantley, a missionary doctor with Samaritan's Purse, almost died of Ebola in 2014. He said, "Faith doesn't make you safe. It was my faith that put me on the front lines. It was faith that put me in the Ebola Treatment Unit."⁷ But if you're in the will of God, there is no better place to be. This attitude is contrary to man's wisdom but consistent with the wisdom of God.

Q: How does a fool's belief that he already knows everything impact his ability to live well?

Q: Describe a person who is fully committed to pursuing godly wisdom.

Q: Describe a time in your life when you pursued God's wisdom even though the world's wisdom would tell you to do otherwise. How did it prove to be the better choice?

Proverbs 9:7–12 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Wisdom comes from knowing God.

Q: Why do wise people appreciate reproof and correction?

The phrase "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" is here at the end of the introduction so we won't forget that this is the thesis statement of the whole book.⁸ Wisdom comes from a right relationship with God, admitting that He is God and we are not. And living that way.

This section focuses on what we see about wisdom vs. folly in so many of the individual Proverbs we listed above – that fools hate correction, but the wise welcome it. Wise

people realize that they don't know everything. They appreciate someone showing them the error of their ways because they know it will help them grow, just as an athlete appreciates a coach correcting his/her swing or stance or strategy. Just as Paul told Timothy that Scripture is useful for "teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Correction isn't a bad thing; it trains us for a life of righteousness. With each correction, we learn more about what it means to live as Jesus did, and we grow to be more like Him. This is the process of sanctification.

This attitude – recognizing that you need correction because He is God and you are not – is part of "the fear of the Lord." Understanding that you need to grow in wisdom is one of the things that makes you wise (v. 9). Paul described this when he said that everyone who is "mature" should think "this way" – that they have not already arrived at perfection, but that they have to continue to press on toward the finish line of the upward call of God in Christ (Philippians 3:12–16). Only fools think they've "already arrived." Those who are truly spiritually mature know that they need to keep growing.

In the New Testament, we see that Peter received correction from Paul, which may have been difficult for Peter because he was one of Jesus' inner circle of disciples and one of the earliest leaders of the church. And he was not a meek person. But he had the humility to recognize when Paul was right about his not eating with the Gentiles out of fear of Judaizers (Galatians 2:11–14). Peter allowed himself to be corrected and was a stronger leader for it (Acts 15:6–11).

None of us will ever be finished growing in wisdom in this life. Only the fool thinks he already knows everything. This is why the book of Proverbs is necessary for our daily lives, today and every day, for the rest of our lives. We will keep reading it and keep learning and keep growing. We will never be done.

Q: Describe a time that someone's correction really helped you grow, either in a physical thing such as sports, work or school, or in a spiritual situation.

Q: What barriers prevent people from receiving and growing from healthy correction?

Q: How can we change our attitude about correction?

Proverbs 9:13–18 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Folly is personified as an unruly woman.

Q: How is the foolish woman different from the wise woman?

Q: What does this description tell us about the ways of the foolish?

This is a very clear image contrasting wisdom and folly. The way of wisdom leads to a feast, while folly leads to death. Folly tries to trick you, while wisdom offers you what is real, true and good. The woman of folly is loud; the NLT even says “brash” (v. 13). The Hebrew is “growl/roar” or “cause an uproar.”⁹ She knows nothing (v. 13). She did not do anything to build her house or make a feast; she’s offering “stolen water.” Instead of sending out proper invitations, she sits in the doorway and yells out to passers-by in an uproar (v. 15). She tempts them with lies – that stolen water is sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant (v. 17). But accepting her invitation leads to death (v. 18).

Both women call out to “whoever is simple,” but wisdom asks them to “leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight” (v. 6). Wisdom asks us to turn from human wisdom and follow God’s wisdom. Human wisdom may *seem* good, like stolen water, but it only leads to death. Godly wisdom leads to life and goodness.

We see this principle played out throughout the Bible, from the very beginning. Adam and Eve chose not to listen to God’s voice in the garden because the fruit “was a delight to the eyes” and “was to be desired to make one wise” (Genesis 3:6). It *seemed* wise to them to eat the fruit, despite what God had said. And we all suffered the consequences. Abraham used human wisdom to try to conceive an heir instead of trusting in God’s promises, which led to a lot of mess with Hagar and Sarah and Ishmael (Genesis 16). In Judges, “everyone did what was right in his own eyes,” and they were oppressed until God sent a judge to deliver them – a cycle that was repeated over and over (Judges 21:25).

In story after story, we see what happens to those who trust in the Lord’s wisdom vs. those who trust in human wisdom. Ten of the spies believed human wisdom that they could not defeat the Canaanites, but Caleb and Joshua trusted God’s promise that He could (Numbers 13). Saul followed his own wisdom instead of God’s in battle, but David trusted that the Lord could defeat Goliath through him (1 Samuel 17). In the end, Paul said, “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise ... so that no one may boast before Him” but only boast in the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:27–29).

This chapter ends the introduction to the book of Proverbs (chapters 1–9). From this point, Solomon will share hundreds of specific proverbs about all aspects of life – family, work, neighbors, friendship, sex, marriage, money, anger, forgiveness, alcohol, debt – everything. He has spent these first nine chapters contrasting wisdom and folly, showing us why it is so much better to choose wisdom. He wants us to listen to his instruction, to

trust in the Lord over the tempting calls of the wisdom of the world. Don't listen to the empty lies of the world that may look good and sound good but only lead to death. Trust in the perfect wisdom of God that leads to an abundant life.

Q: What lies does the world try to tell us about how much easier or better life could be if we followed its ways instead of God's?

Q: Describe a time you made a foolish choice. What were the consequences?

Q: In what ways have you been tempted by folly in your life? How do you find the strength to ignore the calls of folly and follow God's wisdom?

Week 2: Proverbs 9

Took

Main Point: Folly may sound good, but it leads to death. Wisdom leads to life.

Prestonwood offers a number of tools to help you pursue wisdom. Perhaps the greatest of these is a mentoring relationship: these occur in Life Recovery ministry, marriage ministry, LifeGroup Bible Studies, and Prestonwood's discipleship curriculum, *Starting Point*. Please contact your divisional minister if you are interested in entering into a discipleship relationship.

CHALLENGES

THINK: In what ways have you been listening to the seductive temptations of the world, the lies that say the ways of the world are better than the ways of God? In what specific areas, situations and issues are you tempted to listen to the wisdom of man over the wisdom of God? What about it sounds good, and why? Can you see how those promises are empty and false? Why is God's way really better?

PRAY: For God to give you a stronger passion to pursue His wisdom. To give you a desire to learn from His Word, listen to His Holy Spirit, and grow in His ways.

ACT: If you don't already have an accountability partner, ask someone you really trust as a godly friend to meet with you to pray together and share accountability and loving correction with one another, "as iron sharpens iron" (Proverbs 27:17).

¹ <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1986073,00.html>

² <https://www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/commentary/ct-perspec-mcdonalds-happy-meals-addictive-20180227-story.html>

³ <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED527048.pdf>

⁴ https://www.pennlive.com/midstate/2011/07/mcdonalds_apple_slices_in_ever_1.html

⁵ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

⁶ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000).

⁷ Kathy Larson, "Franklin Graham: We Wanted to Produce This Film to Show People What God Can Do in the Middle of a Storm" *The Layman*, Mar 7, 2017 - <https://layman.org/franklin-graham-wanted-produce-film-show-people-god-can-middle-storm/>

⁸ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

⁹ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994).