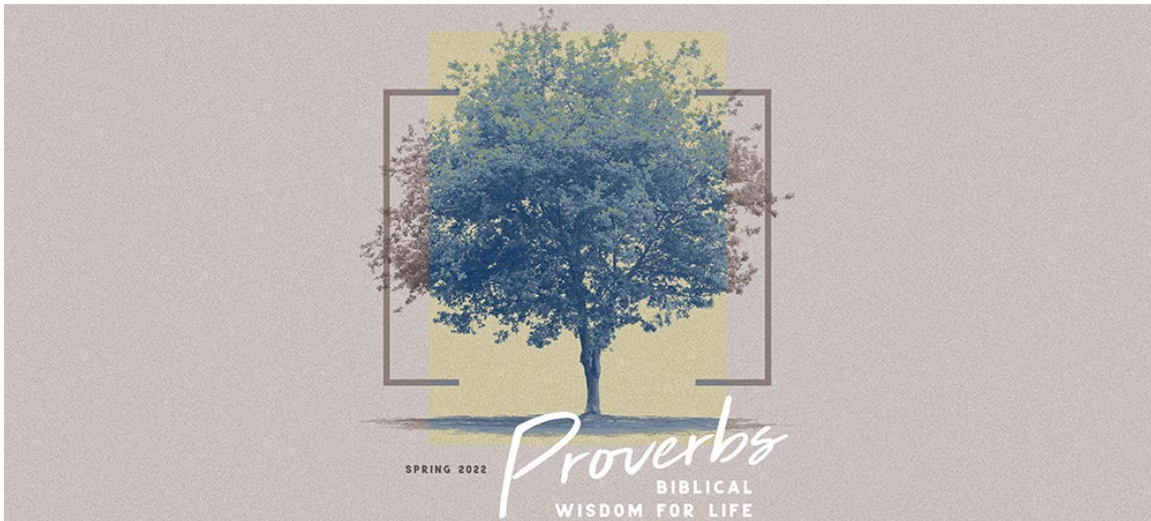


## **Week 16: Proverbs: Naiveté and Impulsiveness**

### **Hook**



**Main Point: Wisdom requires thinking things through and living intentionally.**

The Brooklyn Bridge has a history of being “sold” by con artists. George C. Parker sold the bridge several times in the early 1900s, luring in potential buyers with seemingly official documentation. Parker would promise that the buyers would make a fortune by controlling the traffic on the bridge. Police had to remove new “owners” when they attempted to erect toll booths.<sup>1</sup>

**Q: What kind of person might be fooled into “purchasing” the Brooklyn Bridge?**

**Q: What contributes to someone’s being naïve?**

**Q: How does someone become less naïve?**

## **Week 16: Proverbs: Naiveté and Impulsiveness**

### **Book**

**Main Point:** Wisdom requires thinking things through and living intentionally.

**Proverbs 1:29–33; 8:1–5; 14:15–18; 15:2, 21 [Read]**

**Talking Point 1:** Being wise takes intentionality and discernment.

**Q: Based on these passages, what does it mean to be “simple,” and how can we avoid it?**

**Q: What is the opposite of acting foolishly, or as the simple, according to Proverbs?**

These passages all talk about the behavior and mindset of “the simple.” This phrase has a specific definition in Proverbs. It doesn’t mean people who choose to live a simple life, such as a farmer or a minimalist, but those who are naïve and foolish, even gullible.<sup>2</sup> “The simple believe everything” while the prudent have discernment (14:15). Have you ever met someone who believed everything he or she heard? Or read on the Internet? The simple don’t have sense or prudence (8:5). They jump right into things without thinking. They “inherit folly” (14:18). Because they are naïve and don’t think things through, folly comes naturally to them as a result. Because they don’t think before they speak, folly “pours out” of their mouths (15:2). They even enjoy folly because they don’t know any better (15:21).

We often think of people who are naïve as innocent, but there comes a point when they should know better. For Solomon, not knowing better is not an excuse. Those who are simple have *chosen* foolishness over wisdom. They *do* know better; they have chosen not to listen. Wisdom has been calling them, begging them to learn prudence and sense (8:1–5), but they have turned away (1:32).

According to these proverbs, the simple are those who have not made the time and effort to become wise. They don’t give thought to their steps (14:15) or take time to be cautious (14:16), and they reject reproof and correction (1:30). They’re quick tempered instead of taking time to cool down and think (14:17), are complacent, and don’t make any effort to make things better (1:32). Prudence and sense are things that we have to learn (8:5); they don’t just come naturally. The truth is that it takes time and effort to become wise. It’s not easy. It takes studying God’s Word, listening for His voice, and seeking godly counsel within your church community. Becoming wise also takes learning

discernment, self-control and intentionality. If you want to be wise, you can't just let life happen to you; you need to choose to follow God's wisdom.<sup>3</sup>

Discipleship doesn't happen by accident. Jesus said that if we want to be His disciple, we must take up our cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24–26). We must turn away from the world to follow Him. You don't "stumble upon" the path to discipleship. And it doesn't happen just by attending church or praying the prayer of salvation. It's an intentional decision to go against the flow.

The "simple" aren't following Jesus; they're just going along with whatever feels good in the moment or whatever everyone else is doing. They aren't "counting the cost" (Luke 14:25–33) and making the hard decision to trade the things of this world for the kingdom of God (Matthew 13:44–46). Gaining true wisdom requires making the intentional choice to follow God's wisdom rather than the wisdom of the world (1 Corinthians 1:18–25). Going with the flow or following the crowd will only lead to folly.

**Q: How can we develop discernment, or learn to think critically, so we don't just believe everything we hear?**

**Q: What is the cost of becoming wise?**

**Q: Why is it hard to go against the flow? How can we help each other do it?**

**Proverbs 7:5–10, 21–23 and 9:3–6, 13–18 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** The simple are easily enticed by the temptations of the world.

**Q: Why is the simple man easily persuaded by smooth talk?**

**Q: What are the differences between the two women depicted in Proverbs 9?**

Both of these proverbs personify wisdom and folly as women calling out to the simple on the streets, trying to persuade them to come into her home. Of course, this is a metaphor for wisdom and folly, not literally talking about adulterous women (though adultery is certainly addressed in other proverbs). The image is of the enticement of folly versus wisdom. Folly often seems enticing. Folly uses "smooth talk" and "seductive speech" (7:5, 21). It is "wily" or "cunning" (NASB) or "crafty" (NIV) and dressed to entice (7:10). Think about when you were young, and friends tried to pressure you into things you knew you shouldn't do. They would say things such as "Come on, it'll be fun!" or "Your parents will never find out" or "Everybody's doing it." They "dressed up" the sin to make it look good, not telling you that it may cost you your life (7:23). These

enticements don't change much as we get older. "If it feels good, do it!" or "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas." A fool is easily drawn in by this smooth talk and fooled by the "dressing up" of the sin. The wise know how to resist or say no. They know to think about the consequences versus the fleeting pleasure of sin.

Solomon gave us some vivid imagery to describe what happens to those who are fooled by these enticements. The young man follows her "as an ox goes to the slaughter" (7:22) or as a stag or a bird are caught in traps (7:22–23). These last two are images of being hunted, which is exactly what happens when it comes to enticement to sin. Peter said that Satan "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). We are his prey. He is always trying to trap us in sin through his "schemes" (Ephesians 6:11). The animal that gets caught in a trap is the one that is not looking for traps. That's how these proverbs describe the "simple" or the fool.<sup>4</sup> It's not necessarily that they aren't smart; it's that they aren't wise. Because they don't know the Lord and His wisdom, they don't know to look out for the traps of the Devil, or even how to.

Speaking of being caught unaware, Jesus spoke about the days of Noah and the days before His Second Coming. People were just eating and drinking and living their lives; they had no idea what was coming (Matthew 24:37–39). But Noah, who walked with God and heard His voice and believed it, built an escape. Noah wasn't caught unaware, but only because he knew God and listened to His voice. The way to keep ourselves from being trapped by sin is to listen to God's voice, follow His ways, and to always keep our eyes open looking for Satan's traps. Peter said to "be sober-minded, be watchful" (1 Peter 5:8). The world is a spiritual battlefield; we have to look out for traps and landmines (Ephesians 6:10–18).

Proverbs 9 tells us that both wisdom and folly cry out to the simple with the same phrase, "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here" (9:4, 16). There is a stark contrast between the kind of women they are. Wisdom's house is strong and offers a great feast she has worked hard to make herself (9:1–2). Folly offers stolen water and bread eaten in secret (9:17). She says it's sweet and pleasant, but it really leads to death (9:18). This image of sin is used over and over in Scripture, from the very beginning with Adam and Eve. Sin looks good but leads to death (Genesis 3:6). The key to wisdom is to know whom you are listening to. Are you listening to the voice of wisdom (God) or the voice of folly (Satan's enticing schemes)? Those who fear the Lord, the wise, trust in His voice and are not easily enticed by the schemes of the Devil.

**Q: What lies does our culture tell us about sin? How can sin be enticing?**

**Q: Describe how you could be caught unaware by sin and suddenly find yourself in a trap. How can you prevent being caught in that trap?**

**Q: Why is it sometimes difficult to hear the voice of God over all the competing voices in the world that cry out to us to “turn in here”?**

**Proverbs 14:29; 18:13; 19:2; 21:5; 28:20; and 29:20 [Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** Impulsiveness leads to folly.

**Q: What warnings do these verses provide about doing things hastily?**

You may wonder what impulsiveness has to do with naiveté. It may feel like an abrupt shift in topic. But remember what Proverbs said about the “simple” – they don’t take the time to think things through. They just let life happen to them instead of being intentional about their choices and learning discernment. Impulsiveness goes hand in hand with that description. Each of these proverbs addresses different ways in which people might act hastily or impulsively:

- A hasty temper, reacting in anger (14:29; 29:11)
- A hasty answer, without really listening to the question (18:13)
- Walking or moving hastily so you get lost easily (19:2)
- Hastily working rather than being diligent (21:5)
- Hastening to become rich; get-rich-quick schemes (28:20)
- Being hasty with your words, not thinking through how to say things (29:20)

**Q: What consequences accompany the behaviors listed in the verses above?**

Impulsiveness is acting or reacting without any thought to the consequences. Psychological research tells us that people are typically more impulsive when they’re young and grow more discerning as they mature.<sup>5</sup> But Scripture tells us that wisdom is related not to age but to the fear of the Lord (1:7). Young people who know God’s Word have more wisdom and insight than their elders who don’t (Psalm 119:99). Plenty of older people are quick to anger, hasty with their words, or gullible about get-rich-quick schemes. It’s not about age, it’s about spiritual maturity (Jeremiah 1:7; 1 Timothy 4:12). It’s about having the discernment to know what God would want you to do and the self-control to do it.

When we take time to think through our decisions instead of acting hastily based on our desires or feelings in the moment, we avoid making a mess of things. We think through

a healthy way to work through conflict instead of exploding in anger, which only makes more conflict. We work diligently for our money instead of losing everything in get-rich-quick schemes. We think through how to say things to people so our words don't hurt others, even by accident. These are all signs of wisdom and maturity, thinking through our words and actions. In everything, asking ourselves what Jesus would do.

**Q: How have you seen others' impulsive behavior/words hurt themselves or others?**

**Q: What are some practical steps to not being impulsive or acting hastily?**

## **Week 16: Proverbs: Naiveté and Impulsiveness**

### **Took**

**Main Point: Wisdom requires thinking things through and living intentionally.**

If you've ever stood in line to check out at a grocery store, you've been targeted for impulse buys. Delicious chocolates and candies surround you as you patiently wait to make your sensible purchases. If you get tired of perusing the delicacies, you may find entertainment by reading the shocking (and often far-fetched) claims on the covers of tabloids. Sales of these items depend on the naiveté and impulsivity of consumers.

Some of us have a tendency to live our lives that way; we make decisions on momentary feelings and motivations, we consume sensational information as truth and don't do the work of taking the time to discern. Wisdom requires that we slow down, think things through, and make choices that reflect our purpose.

### **CHALLENGES**

**THINK:** What kinds of things entice you personally, things you know aren't wise choices that follow what God wants for you? Be honest with yourself about your temptations. Think through specific times you have been enticed by sin and how you could have responded differently. Come up with a game plan of your own so that you will know how to respond next time.

**PRAY:** Pray for God to reveal to you any way you are being impulsive or naïve, any way you aren't thinking things through or letting life happen to you or responding to situations without thinking. Think specifically about your relationships. Pray for the Lord to give you wisdom to know how to live with intentionality and discernment.

**ACT:** Memorize Scripture. The way to combat naiveté and impulsiveness is to stop and think about what God would have you do or say in each situation. This takes knowing God's Word. Choose a topic that tends to be a source of temptation for you. Then, using a concordance (there are plenty online if you don't own one), look up a few verses related to that topic. Then spend this week memorizing them so that when you are faced with that temptation, you can respond with wisdom instead of acting hastily or without thinking.

Editing by Shelley Reeves

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/27/nyregion/thecity/for-you-half-price.html>

<sup>2</sup> F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Allen P. Ross, "Proverbs," Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Proverbs–Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1–15, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Ann Pietrangelo, "Is Impulsive Behavior a Disorder?" *Healthline* - <https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/impulsive-behavior#is-it-a-disorder>