


The Art of Wise Living
Part 3
The Path of the Fool

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

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Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

Note: For each of the following questions, refer to the **Sermon Summary** inside.

Observation—*What do I see?*

- Pastor Doug noted that Proverbs presents us with only two possible paths. What are they?
- What role do warnings (by friends, consequences and by the Holy Spirit) play?
- What three categories of people are identified in Proverbs 1:22 and how is their progression in foolishness described?
- Proverbs 1:20–22 personifies “Lady Wisdom”, crying out publicly—in streets, squares, and city gates—making her message visible and accessible. What solution does she present (v. 23)?

Interpretation—*What does it mean?*

- How does the distinction between naïve, fool, and scoffer deepen the understanding of sin?
- What underlies the fact that scoffing is a “volitional” rather than “intellectual” problem?
- What is the significance of the fact that Lady Wisdom calls out publicly, and what hope does she give?
- How does Pastor Doug connect consequences with the “path” metaphor?

Application—*What do I do with this?*

- What warning signs in your life might indicate you are on the path foolishness?
- Is there something you are “loving” that you should be rejecting, or rejecting that you should be loving? Are you making any decisions despite knowing they are wrong? If so, what does that reveal?
- Foolishness—even if they are “personal choices”—creates a ripple effect, bringing harm to others. What indications are there that your actions are impacting others negatively? Would you tell us about it?
- What concrete step should you take today to “turn” even more toward wisdom?

Sermon Summary Proverbs 1:19-22

According to the Book of Proverbs there are really only two paths in life: the path of wisdom and the path of folly. If you step away from wisdom, you don't find yourself on morally neutral ground, but rather on the path of the fool. In Proverbs, Solomon asks 70 times: "Are you going to go the way of the wise or the way of the fool?" They are two different paths with two different destinations. In Proverbs 1:20-22, Solomon warns us to avoid the path of the fool. I want to talk with you about the staircase of the fool. Solomon uses these words like the different categories of a hurricane: category 1, category 2, category 3. The further down the staircase you go, the more destruction they bring.

Solomon says that one of the reasons people go down the path of the fool is because they are naïve. They just don't understand. Middle and high school-age kids, for instance, are naïve not because they lack intelligence, but because they lack experience. They are naïve about the law of sowing and reaping, cause and effect. All of us go through the naïve stage. The best thing you can do if you're young, is to look down the road 10 or 15 years, and think about where you want to be educationally, vocationally, and in terms of relationships. And then you need take steps and make decisions that will make those hopes, dreams, and desires a reality.

There is a second reason why many people make foolish decisions. According to Solomon, it's because "You are a fool!" Here is the life motto of a fool: "I am old enough to know better, but I'm too young to care." In other words, I'm not naïve. I know what's at stake. I just don't care! I know what I ought to do. I just don't want to do it. That is the profile of a fool. The fool says, "I'm not hurting anybody. This is my deal. I wish people would just leave me alone." Foolish decisions aren't self-contained. There is always a ripple effect. People who are close to a fool always end up getting hurt. But the fool doesn't care. He just wants to continue living life on his terms. And if you enable them to continue doing that... you will invite even more pain into your life and theirs (Proverbs 13:20). Oftentimes, the only thing that will wake up a fool is when they realize the negative impact their actions are having on those who love them. A rebuke usually falls on deaf ears (Proverbs 17:10). If you fit the description of a fool, cry out to Wisdom. Because you are on a dangerous path. And things are not going to go well for you. You can still veer off this path, but if you choose to remain on it, just know that things are going to get much worse, and you are going to inflict a lot pain on those who care about you.

There is a "category three" kind of fool. He is called a scoffer (Proverbs 1:22). The scoffer is the kind of person who has closed their mind to the possibility of their being a God. He won't even consider the evidence. He doesn't want to be accountable to anyone—much less God. For that reason, he is completely closed off to the possibility that there is a God. The possibility that there's a God is so threatening to him that he refuses to even entertain it. Because he knows if there is a God, he is accountable to Him. And that is something he simply cannot abide. He thinks, "If I can remove God from the equation, I can remove consequences. That way, I can do what I want to do." But it doesn't stop there. Not only does he refuse to have anything to do with God, he doesn't want you too, either. Scoffers are often evangelistic atheists. They want to convince you that there is no God. They mock our faith and they mock our values.

Here is the good news. Solomon says, "If you find yourself somewhere along this staircase...Repent! Do a 180. You are headed in this direction. Turn around and head the other way. And do it today. Don't wait another moment! (see Proverbs 1:23). You only get one life! And what a shame it would be, to waste it on the fool's staircase. To get to the end of life, only to ask yourself. "How could I have been such a fool? Ask yourself some questions. "Am I a candidate to get off the fool staircase?" Is there something that you are currently loving that you should be rejecting? Is there something in life that you keep returning to, you keep holding onto as somehow being precious to life? Are you rejecting something that you should be loving? A relationship with God? A relationship with kids? A relationship with a spouse? If so, you might be a candidate to get off the fool's staircase and get on the path of wisdom. My prayer for all of us is that we would choose not to take the fool's staircase, but to be people who run in the direction of the voice of wisdom.

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

1. The naive/simple is the kind of person who is easily led, gullible, silly.

- **Mentally**, he is naïve:
The naïve believes everything, but the sensible man considers his steps. (14:15)
- **Morally**, he is willful and irresponsible:
The waywardness of the naïve will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them. (1:32)
- Because of his lazy thoughtlessness, he may need a visual aid to bring him to repentance:
Strike a scoffer and the naïve may learn sense... (19:25)
- If he refuses it, he will graduate to a more serious condition, for one does not stay still.
A man who is empty-headed will end up wrong-headed:
The naïve acquire foolishness, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge (14:18)

The key passage on the naïve/simple is Proverbs 7. He is aimless, inexperienced, drifting into temptation—indeed **almost seeking it**. A person in such a state will not go far before he meets a temptress, or (as in 1:10ff.) tempters. The naïve/simple (and his elder brother, the fool) is no half-wit; he is a person whose instability **could be** fixed, but who **prefers** not to accept discipline in the school of wisdom (1:22–32).

2. The fool In Proverbs, three words are translated as “fool”.

2a. The most common of the three terms (Hebrew: *kesîl*) occurring nearly 50 times, means one who is dull and obstinate.

- The fool is **not** mentally deficient—he has **chosen** this outlook.
He has no idea of a patient search for wisdom; he hasn’t the concentration for it:
a fool’s eyes are in the ends of the earth (17:24)
- He imagines wisdom will be handed to him on a platter:
Why does a fool offer the sage a fee, when he has no mind to learn? (17:16)
- Instead, he “grazes on” his own opinions unreflectingly...
The mind of the intelligent seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on folly. (15:14)
...and pours out his own opinions freely...
The mouth of fools spouts folly. (15:2)
...unaware that he is only displaying his foolishness for all to see:
A fool displays folly. (13:16)

§ Unless other wise noted, all passages are from the Book of Proverbs.

He does not see his own foolishness because he cannot imagine himself mistaken:
A rebuke enters deeper into a discerning man than a hundred stripes into a fool. (17:10)

- The root of his trouble is spiritual, not mental. He **likes** his foolishness, going back to it...
like a dog that returns to his vomit (26:11)

He has no reverence for truth, preferring his comfortable illusions:
The wisdom of the sensible is to understand his way, but the foolishness of fools is deceit. (14:8)

Bottom Line: He rejects the fear of the Lord. This is what makes him a fool!
They hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD (1:29)

His complacency is tragic; it will destroy him:
the careless ease of fools shall destroy them (1:32)

- The fool is a menace to others, not just to himself.
At best, he wastes your time:
you will not find a word of sense in him (14:7)

...and he may cause you more serious trouble:
Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs, rather than a fool in his folly. (17:12)

His foolishness may be some prank that is beyond a joke...
Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool, and so is wisdom to a man of understanding. (10:23)

...or some quarrel he feels compelled pick and not put down:
A fool's lips bring strife, and his mouth calls for blows.
A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back. (18:6 & 29:11)

- Don't associate with a fool, because...
the companion of fools suffers harm (13:20)

Unfortunately, his family doesn't have the luxury of not associating with him:
A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother.
It is painful to be the parent of a fool; there is no joy for the father of a rebel.
A foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him.
A foolish son is destruction to his father... (10:1; 17:21 & 25; 19:13)

It is the price his family pays for loving him. But it causes him no qualms—he despises them:
A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish man despises his mother. (15:20)

2b. The second Hebrew word translated “fool” suggests stupidity and stubbornness—virtually the same as the previous word—but just a bit darker:

- He is just as quarrelsome; he knows no restraint:
*When a wise man has a controversy with a foolish man,
the foolish man either rages or laughs, and there is no rest.* (29:9)

- Especially prominent is his **moral insolence**.
The fool is impatient of all advice:
*Fools despise wisdom and instruction.
The wise of heart will receive commands,
but babbling fools don't, and are ruined.
The way of a fool is right in his own eyes.* (1:7; 10:8; 12:15)

The fool is unconcerned about the damage he does:
Fools mock at sin... (14:9)
and unless it is knocked out of him early, his foolishness is virtually impossible to eradicate:
*Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child,
but the rod of discipline will remove it far from him.
Though you pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain,
yet his foolishness will not depart from him.* (22:15; 27:22)

2c. The third Hebrew word rendered as “fool” is *nabal*. (See 1 Samuel 25:25 for his name-sake.)
This term adds little to the picture, except an extra weight of boorishness:
Eloquent words are not fitting for a fool... (17:7)

Summary: The fool, by whatever name he goes, is by definition one whose mind is closed
(*at least for the present*), to...

- God:
*The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.”
They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds;
There is no one who does good.* (Psalm 14:1)

- and to reason:
...he is such a worthless man that no one can speak to him. (1 Samuel 25:17)

...since he has rejected the first principle of wisdom, namely the fear of the Lord.
*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.* (1:7)

3. The scoffer or scorner makes about seventeen appearances in Proverbs, and is contrasted with the wise, or coupled with the foolish, often enough to earn a place of his own in the fools' gallery. It is his **mental attitude, not mental limitation**, makes him what he is.

- Like the naïve/simple and the fool, he has a strong dislike of correction:
*He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself,
and he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself.
Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you,
reprove a wise man and he will love you.
A wise son accepts his father's discipline,
but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.
A scoffer does not love one who reproves him,
he will not go to the wise.* (9:7-8; 13:1; 15:12)
 - The mischief he does is not the random mischief of the ordinary fool, but the deeper damage of the “debunker” and deliberate trouble-maker:
*“Proud,” “Haughty,” “Scoffer,” are his names,
who acts with insolent pride.
Drive out the scoffer, and contention will go out,
even strife and dishonor will cease.
Scorners set a city aflame,
but wise men turn away anger.* (21:24; 22:10; 29:8)
 - His bad character is invisible to himself, but plain to most others:
The scoffer is detestable to men. (24:9)
 - Punishment awaits scoffers:
Judgments are prepared for scoffers, and blows for the back of fools. (19:29)
- The final and most withering punishment is a dose of their own medicine from the Lord:
The Lord scoffs at the scoffers... (3:34)

So, is there hope for a fool? Yes—but it comes neither automatically nor easily:

*Do you see a man wise in his own eyes?
There is **more hope for a fool** than for him.
Do you see a man who is hasty in his words?
There is **more hope for a fool** than for him.* (26:12; 29:20)

The path is one of repentance and reverence—“the fear of the Lord”:

*Serve the LORD with **reverent fear**, and rejoice with **trembling**. **Submit** to God's Son, or he will become angry, and you will be destroyed in the midst of all your activities—for his anger flares up in an instant. But what joy for all who **take refuge in him!*** (Psalm 2:10-12)