

Wisdom vs. Foolishness

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 July 2026

Preacher: Jesse Kincer

[0:00] Cool. So, as I said, we're continuing our Proverbs series. And I just want to acknowledge Kirk and the job he did last week in introducing us to this amazing book.

And it's historical context and just his insights that he brought on wisdom literature and that genre and specifically how it's helpful for what it's for in God's great scheme and plan of bringing us his truth to bear in our lives.

And so, Kirk, well done, man. Today, we're going to dive into the main theme of Proverbs, kind of the overarching theme. And what it is, it's wisdom and foolishness.

And that's what Proverbs does. It presents us with those two options. You could either be wise or you could be foolish. There's the pathway of wisdom. There's the pathway of foolishness.

And Proverbs also kind of presents these two options as two different women that we have to choose between. You know, you can't marry them both. Sorry. There's no polygamy.

[0:57] Wisdom ain't into polygamy. You got to choose one or the other. And so, that's what we're going to be speaking of today. Now, one of the things that I really love about this series and Proverbs and wisdom particularly are that it is so accessible to everyone.

There's these principles that so many of them, they are things that anybody could observe in any place at any time. You can look at life.

You can look at how life works well and how it doesn't work well. And you can say like, gosh, that's wise and that is foolish. It references natural laws that govern life, right? So, it says, hey, what you sow, you are going to reap.

And that natural law plays out, right? If you sow wheat, don't expect barley. And so, this natural thing, we look at it, but we learn from the natural.

We can learn the spiritual things from the natural. And they help us understand that there's not only natural laws that govern life, but there are moral laws that govern life as well. Like those who sow in violence, they're going to most likely receive violence back on themselves.

[2:04] Those who sow in peace, they make room for peace to blossom. The sluggard sows in idleness and he reaps poverty. And so, you have these kind of natural things that work out in the moral law as well.

And Proverbs and wisdom, they're not these hidden truths that like only the enlightened, the spiritually enlightened suddenly know it is, right? They're these plain truths that guide us into understanding God's creation, how he designed things into his creation, how it works.

And from that, how we ought to conduct ourselves. It's his common grace to us, right? And how he made his created things to work in goodness and in order. And wisdom is, if you want to kind of like sum up wisdom and foolishness, wisdom is God's good design written into his creation for the benefit and blessing of his creatures.

And foolishness, on the other hand, is the creature's choice to kind of ignore that and go his own way, which brings about destruction. Live according to wisdom and you will reap its rewards.

Or don't, and you will reap the consequences. But here's the problem. As good as that sounds, we know from living life long enough, that doesn't always play out clean.

[3:17] It's why we have sayings like, only the good die young. And nice guys finish last. It's why we're frustrated at times when the rich and the powerful are able to use their position to skirt around consequences of their bad behavior.

As they continue to kind of flourish and live their best life. And then we can't help but notice that sometimes investments go bad, markets plummet, recessions hit, and famines hit, and people lose their retirement savings and livelihood.

Despite their wise living and wise choices, those things do tend to happen. And in this world, such setbacks help us to understand that Proverbs, what it does, it's offering us principles, not promises. Okay? Proverbs never guarantees the outcomes. It says proportionally, if you live this way, proportionally it's probably going to end up good for you.

And if you choose to live foolishly, proportionally, most likely it's not going to end up good for you. It's going to lead to destruction. And ultimately, those two things will bear out and be true. The wisdom of Proverbs, it offers to the prudent, the discerning, the diligent, the disciplined.

[4:24] It offers her rewards of wealth and favor and protection against calamity. But in the end, what it calls us to is to consider that wisdom itself is the reward.

Proverbs 3.13 to 15 says, Wisdom is the reward far and above the rewards it may bring.

Even the foolish look at wisdom's reward and desire them and say, hey, I could live for that. They desire wisdom's outcomes. They just don't desire to walk in the path of wisdom.

Now, if you notice, there is a lot in Proverbs of referring to wisdom as a her. And Proverbs depicts wisdom in the first nine chapters as a woman that is adorned with beauty and value and insight. She is stable. She is faithful. She makes good things. And she has them on offer to you. It wants you, Proverbs wants you to think of her, lady wisdom, as the ultimate prize.

[5:43] To bind yourself to her in covenant faithfulness like a marriage. That's kind of what Proverbs has in mind. That you can say, I belong to her and she belongs to me.

Lady wisdom. We are one together. That's what Proverbs is saying. Hey, if you want to think of wisdom, that's a really good way to understand and to think of wisdom.

And then, then if wisdom is the ultimate prize, then you will enjoy her whether or not it comes with rewards of prosperity or peace or a long life.

But here's the thing. Right? If wisdom is meant to be seen as like entering into a covenant relationship in marriage, we have to see that, okay, every covenant relationship comes with expectations, rewards, and also consequences.

So it is with wisdom. You and I can't just know about wisdom. Wisdom is more than just knowing things. Right? That knowing things doesn't make you wise. You can be a 10 times Jeopardy champion and still be a total fool in life.

[6:48] The question is, the question that wisdom is asking, are you living the way that wisdom demands? Proverbs makes it clear from the beginning that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord and that alone is a truth that has its own sermon next week.

Okay? But for our purposes today, to answer the question, are you living the way wisdom demands? We're going to look at what Proverbs gives us in describing aspects of the wise and the foolish.

And little side, like I just want to shout out to Derek Kidner. He's a guy who wrote a great commentary on Proverbs who really helped me to unearth this. If wisdom calls us into a relationship with her and puts demands on us, then we can be sure that the wise reveal the nature of wisdom. We can look at the wise and see, and see from the way that they are living, it's pointing back to its origin, which is wisdom. Think of wisdom as a pure light that is being pushed through a prism. Right? Right? Like when light goes through a prism, I think it refracts. Is that the right term? Help me, science people. Thank you. Woo! I got lucky there. Let me just say, sometimes it's better to be lucky than smart.

[8:02] So it goes through a prism, it refracts, and you see all those colors. Right? Now we know that inside that pure light exists all those colors that make up that pure light.

So it is with wisdom. We can learn the various aspects that make up wisdom. And what she demands of the wise, what we can see in the way of the wise, we can see all these different ways and see like, oh, in totality, these make up what wisdom is.

And so first we learn from Proverbs, wisdom is a guide. Those verses we read, wisdom is a guide that demands we remain diligent and teachable. Like I said, the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

And if that is true, if that's the beginning, the next step is knowing that you haven't arrived. Proverbs 1.5 says, let the wise hear and increase in learning.

And let the one who understands obtain guidance. Well, gosh, if you have the wise and the understanding, it seems like you wouldn't need those things. Now counter that to how the foolish are described.

[9:10] And you get a clear picture. Proverbs 1.20-23 says, wisdom cries aloud in the street. In the market, she raises her voice. At the head of the noisy street, she cries out.

At the entrance of the city gate, she speaks. And here is what she is saying. How long, oh simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?

If you turn to my reproof, my correction, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you. I will make my words known to you.

So we see the juxtaposition of the wise and the foolish here. We see the wise are ready and willing to learn and to be guided. And now that word, we have this aspect of wisdom that gets into learning and instruction.

And that comes in two forms throughout the Proverbs, right? There's these two words that are closely related. And one is the Hebrew word *musar* and the other is the Hebrew word *tokeka*.

[10:19] All right? And together, they teach us that wisdom is more than just academic pursuit. It is not like, it is not an intramural study.

It's not a mural study, extramural study. It's not like, okay, it's an elective that we go out and we find some things and then we're helped out in life. No. What it is trying to get you to see that to obtain wisdom, the way of wisdom, the way that you get there, wisdom demands the discipline of a disciple that desires to become like their teacher in every way.

That's what it means. And such is the way that wisdom demands of us. The two aspects of her discipline are found in those two words, *musar* and *tokeka*.

That first word, *musar*, brings together these ideas of discipline and correction and chastening and rebuke and formative instruction. And in the context of Proverbs, what it does, it has, it's wisdom, yes, but it's wisdom is rooted in connection with the relationship to God.

It's implicit goal here is to shape character toward covenant fidelity and reverent wisdom rather than just mere punishment. So that's a part of wisdom, that wisdom is calling us in that second word, *tokeka*, means to verbally confront, right, in a way that both exposes wrong but also appeals for change.

[11:47] And it ranges from, throughout the Proverbs, it ranges from orderly legal argument to sharp prophetic rebuke. Because that verbal confrontation, its aim is restoration.

It desires for peace and relationship to be restored. And so scripture always puts it as a gracious gift rather than censure.

Wisdom instructs, wisdom corrects, and it does that because its desire is to keep us on her path. The wise, they don't passively receive wisdom's instruction.

They actively seek it. They don't begrudge wisdom's corrections. They embrace them and learn from them. And perhaps that's the demand of wisdom. That very effort and humility demands of us why very few are wise.

Because we don't want to change and we don't like change. It's hard and it's painful at times. You know, as verse 22 and 23 points out of what we just read, we love being simple, right?

[12:57] Wisdom's crying out, oh, simple ones, how long will you stay simple? We delight in being the scoffer. How long, why are you delighting in being the scoffer? So we have these two people presented to us, the simple and the scoffer.

And we're going to look at those two types. Because they bring contrast. And when you look and you think about contrast, when it comes to color, contrast brings clarity.

I'm like one of those guys, when I look at a dark navy blue, I'm like, that's black. And someone's like, that's not black. And I'm like, yeah, that's black. And then they slap a black color next to it and they said, no, that's black. And I'm like, oh, you're right, yeah, that's navy blue.

Contrast brings clarity. And understanding foolishness actually helps us to better understand wisdom. It brings further clarity of what wisdom is and what wisdom isn't.

And so Proverbs identifies this person called simple. They are like the fool's younger brother. Hasn't quite fully matured into full-blown foolishness yet. They're on their way if nothing changes.

[14:00] But they have a lot in common with the fool. And the fool and the simple are the same in many ways. They both love, as the Proverbs points out in many ways, they both love a good conspiracy theory, the latest fine-sounding philosophy.

They gather up many thoughts and opinions. They just lap them up without thinking them through very much. And they are more than ready to share them, regurgitate them on anybody who's willing

to listen.

The simple rarely see the inconsistencies and contradictions among their many positions. In a word, they are pliable. The simple would say, the truth that I know now is absolute, until I hear the counter-argument.

Then that is now my new absolute truth. That is the simple. They are what James likens the book, the letter of James, which is like the wisdom literature of the New Testament.

And James likens these guys to a ship being tossed around in stormy seas. They have no anchor and are carried away by every new wind of thought. Easily deceived.

[15 : 07] Easily brought into something that is actually not good for them at all. In the simple, they prefer the path of those things that are easily attained rather than those things that are hard fought.

They are those who tend to go after quick gain, the promise of quick gain and easy money. They are those who give in to the allure of the adulteress, for hers is an offer of immediate pleasure without the responsibility and commitments of covenant relationship.

The simple or the sluggard, he doesn't like to begin things nor finish things nor face difficult things. And at the point of resistance and difficulty, they tend to shrink back or change their minds.

These are the ways of the simple that are contrary to the way of wisdom. Now, wisdom does not abide idleness like the simple does, nor shifting convictions, nor shrinking back when the road gets hard.

The wise are those who are diligent to learn. If they are to change their minds, it's because they have wrestled deeply in the matter, but have come to a resolute conviction that their way wasn't necessarily the right way and they need to change.

[16 : 29] The wise do not melt when truth calls them to a difficult path. Rather, they are those who are willing to suffer for righteousness' sake.

Unlike the simple, the wise are faithful. They are hardworking. They don't change their convictions easily, but they are teachable, unlike the scoffer.

While the simple, despise effort scoffers scorn humility. The scoffer can never learn because they are convinced they know better. They are convinced they got it right, or they convince like, hey, I can poke holes in your argument.

This points to the fact that as far as wisdom is concerned, it is an internal moral attitude, not mental capacity that identifies the wise and the foolish. The scoffer doesn't necessarily have a superior position on which he stands.

In fact, they prefer to cast doubt rather than to take a stand on anything. It is the difference in the shrewdness of the scoffer to the shrewdness of the wise. The wise navigate complexities and traps that happen throughout life.

[17 : 39] They face things that are just like, gosh, it is really hard to discern what is the better way here, but they do that with integrity, and when things seem to be a bit confusing or a bit difficult, they look for common ground without compromising righteousness.

But the shrewdness of the scoffer draws them to navigate such things very differently. The scoffer has many opinions and few convictions because convictions cost.

Trying to get a scoffer to say what they believe in is like trying to nail jello to the wall. They love to argue many matters, and flirt with taking a position, but in the end, they avoid pinning their colors to the mast.

And the reason being is that when you take a firm position on something, what you do is you open yourself up to the possibility of being wrong. To have to be corrected, and scoffers do not like correction.

Because any correction that comes, any rebuke that may come means that, oops, I'm wrong. And for the scoffer to be shown wrong is the most terrible fate, even over above the possibility of ever being right.

[18 : 51] And because of this, the scoffer is one, as we see in the Proverbs, is one who rarely, if ever, repents. They will not take correction, they will not heed it, they will not receive it, and they will not turn.

But they are ready to point out the many problems out there. And the reason they like to keep pointing the problems out there is because it avoids the potential scrutiny and the spotlight facing themselves, what's going on in here.

But the wise are those who in earnest can hold a conviction, while at the same time remain open to correction. Here's how it can work out.

I was listening to a pastor that I highly respect. And he's in his 50s now, and he's reflecting on his earlier years of ministry. His first pastorate was in his late 20s.

And he is just recalling with great joy and delight how he was so confident and highly opinionated about the right doctrine that he held, and the right way you're supposed to run a church, and the right way to be a pastor.

[19 : 55] But now, in these days, in his present day, in his older age, he's had his clock cleaned a few times. And he laughs at that overconfidence of his youth.

But also, he's thankful that he didn't stay there. And he would say, you know, my doctrine hasn't changed, but my dogmatism has. That attitude of dogmatism has changed.

And over the years, he's received wisdom's instructions and corrections. He's more kind. He's more charitable. And has learned that God had to work on what he would call some misguided emphases of those earlier years of ministry.

God's had to come and has had to correct some things. That's his testimony. And if you're a Christian, if you're walking the way of wisdom, that's got to be our testimony. Have convictions, friends.

Like, we are people that believe in things. Right? We go to our Bible, and the Bible has truths, and there are some very clear truths, and we hold on to those things. But as we walk with those convictions, we also are open to the fact that, like, you know what?

[21 : 07] We might not have everything right. We gotta remain open to correction as well. We need to have that same testimony because we need to have that attitude and posture because we never grow out of needing wisdom.

You and I will never arrive at knowing wisdom completely. We will never know her completely. And I'm saying, what I'm saying is the wise will never be perfectly wise. And you know what?

Wisdom knows that. So then how is wisdom satisfied? How can she be satisfied if we are never fully getting to that perfect place of wisdom?

Proverbs 4, 6 to 9. Do not forsake her, and she will keep you. Love her, and she will guard you. The beginning of wisdom is this.

Get wisdom. And whatever you get, get insight. Prize her highly, and she will exalt you. She will honor you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a graceful garland.

[22 : 15] She will bestow on you a beautiful crown. And here's the hope for you and me that these verses give. As you and I pursue and grow in wisdom and continue to see foolishness leak out of us at times, wisdom demands our affection, not our perfection.

Look at what it's saying to us about wisdom. Do not forsake her. Love her. Prize her. Embrace her. I mean, that could be lifted out of a Barry White song.

But it's Proverbs talking about lady wisdom. Now, you can look at that and just see, oh, that's poetic license.

Using some poetry to personify wisdom, to help us understand some things, to really, but, you know, we may look at that and just think like, eh, that's not really true.

It's just a literary device. Wisdom isn't really personified. But what if that is true? What if wisdom is more than reason and logic and principles?

[23 : 27] The wisdom literature of the Bible, Proverbs or Sera, it never separates itself from the covenant God of the Bible because that covenant God is the creator of all things.

Everything that we live in, he has made. His natural laws and moral laws, he wrote into his creation for our good and for beauty to flourish.

And when we look at those things, when we look at wisdom, when we look how things are meant to work out and the beauty and the logic and the goodness of those things, we're meant to look at them and we're meant to see that they point back to something greater.

And they point back to him. They have a fountainhead. James 1.17 says, Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

You and I, we can only get so far in wisdom apart from knowing the God who is wisdom. Wisdom can't just be principles. Principles don't love you back when you're faithful to them.

[24:36] They don't get angry and bring judgment when you forsake them. But the person of perfect wisdom is also the person of perfect love. He is jealous for your affection.

And that is what satisfies the person of wisdom. And here's the thing. He knows how things work. He knows that affection is the main thing. Because you will not obey nor submit to that which holds little to no affection in your heart.

God knows us. He's made us that way. But here's the thing. Affection reaps faithfulness. It yields within us a heart of obedience and submission.

It calls us to seek and pursue the desire of our heart. And the rewards of wisdom for our affections and faithfulness are not riches nor her prosperity. It's found there in chapter 4 verse 6.

[25:36] Do not forsake her and she will keep you. Keep you. That Hebrew word there keep first appears in Exodus 34 7 and is repeated in Deuteronomy as God talks about his covenant grace of keeping his steadfast love unto a thousand generations.

Your affection isn't set toward a cold set of unfeeling principles. It is set upon a covenant keeping God who won't forsake his covenant promises. Not only is this relationship built on his steadfast love to us it is guarded by his ongoing grace that is at work in us.

Verse 6 goes on to say love her and she will guard you. And that word translated guard implies two things. God guards us by counseling our interior faithfulness.

He goes into our hearts and he counsels us and he guides us in the way of what faithfulness to him looks like. Like he sets up the covenant and he says this is what this is my fidelity to you this is my faithfulness to you and now what I'm going to do because you are not capable in and of yourselves to do this I'm going to come into your heart and enable your covenant faithfulness back to me.

He guards us in that way. He works in our hearts to stoke those affections and that longing for wisdom. And then the other part of that guarding is that he covers and protects us so that we don't fall away.

[27:02] We see God's grace that creates our relationship to him and sustains our relationship to him but notice in both of those verses that we were looking at it puts our action first right?

It says that we must not forsake and we must love and then it seems like there's a reciprocation from wisdom back to us which sounds like if God is wisdom and that's what's going on here it sounds like God is responding to us which he isn't because when we start with we must not forsake and we must love that is our response to him when we have to see and understand that is it's God who initiates think of it like think of it like a slinky right?

Like a coil you stretch out a slinky and a coil right? And it has a starting point and then it kind of spirals around this way but God initiates he starts he brings us into this relationship and we know his love and we know his goodness and then we respond to him with love and with faithfulness and then we learn more about his love and his faithfulness and we respond to it and then it's this cycle and it's a circle and it's this dance that we're in a relationship with this amazing heavenly father and Jesus Christ our savior and the holy spirit and it goes on and on and on to eternity without end that is the beauty of what we're talking about here but we don't jump into that coil it's God who draws us and pulls us in and here is the part where we must understand that in Jesus the wisdom of God put on flesh and came to us wisdom loved us wisdom loved you before you ever loved it before you ever loved him so friends our love and our faithfulness is in response to Jesus love and faithfulness the wisdom that seems to require so much of us so much sacrifice so much cost it first came to be the sacrifice that was required as the band comes up and we look to respond in a moment we're gonna take communion and I wanna say to you if you're not yet a follower of Jesus don't come to the communion table come to Jesus just as you are he is more than wisdom that's gonna make your life a little bit better than it is now he is the wisdom that makes life possible that's real life the life of being with God the life lived with God in relationship to him the hope of joy of everlasting life that is on offer to us after this one for those who believe and put their faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior and you can come to him right now come to him just as you are put your trust and your faith and your hope in him there's gonna be a prayer on the screen for you to pray and if you're here and already a follower of Jesus we're going to take communion we're gonna prepare ourselves and I want us to come humbly

Alright? Wisdom demands humility so let's come humbly let's come humbly to the table to receive the signs of Jesus most wonderful grace to us that he initiated Jesus has sacrificed atoned for our sin so that we can be in relationship with the father who is perfect wisdom but he is a father that demands our affections and so in response before we come to the table I want you to consider

for yourself where have your affections been focused?

Have we forsaken? Have we neglected? Or have we embraced and have we loved? Have we pursued? Have we sought out? Is God more precious to you than silver and gold?

[30:53] Does he have higher value? Come to Jesus right now his grace forgives and heals and restores and his grace strengthens us his grace pours into us these wonderful affections for him that we so desperately need in order to walk in wisdom let's pray together Jesus we are about to come to your table we just confess that we fall short the love that you deserve the praise that you deserve the attention that you deserve the desire of our hearts they are not as pure as they should be and yet we know that you are a God of great grace Lord and Sue we desire to be a people who loves lady wisdom who will not forsake her but will embrace her and love her we want to be those that do that we pray

Lord we are so weak help us Lord stir our affections where they are dulled work that in us Lord meet us where we're at restore us we pray this in your name Amen