

Proverbs 1:8-33

Everyday Wisdom: Two Paths

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Have you ever taken a **wrong turn**? In today's world if you have a **smart phone** wrong turns should be less and less common. If you have **Google** or **Apple Maps** or **Waze** you should never miss a turn, and yet sometimes we still do. When I get to the place my **GPS** says to turn it's not as clear as my phone says it should be. The **off-ramps merge** into **two lanes** going generally the same direction and you have to guess which one to take, the **left** or **right**. Once when Monica and I were driving on **I90** we missed an exit and the next **option** was **ten miles away**. A wrong turn can cost you **significant time** and **energy**.

Today I want to explain how not to take a **wrong turn** in your **walk with God**. I want to tell you about two paths, one that leads to **life** and the other **death**, and I'm hoping Lord willing by the end of today's message you will understand how to take the right turn. I'm hoping there won't be any confusion about the pathway. God offers each of us a **clear** way forward that leads to eternal life with him. Now the first **seven chapters** of the book of Proverbs are written to "**my son**." A **son figure** is being **presented with a choice**.

"My son" - Presented with a choice. (v8-9)

I've gone ahead and illustrated "my son" with a **small icon** in the shape of a man. This does not mean Proverbs is only written to **young men**. It's written to **whoever** wants to read and learn from it. Anyone can pick up and read a copy of the *Hunger Games*, but it's **young adult fiction**. Likewise Proverbs is written with **young men in mind**. It's written with an **ideal father** and **mother** giving advice to their son. **Usually** it's the **father** who speaks but here we see both father and mother offering **parental wisdom**.¹

Proverbs 1:8-9

8 Listen, my son, to your father's instruction
and do not forsake your mother's teaching.
9 They are a garland to grace your head
and a chain to adorn your neck. (NIV)

What does the father do? He presents his son with **two paths**, the **way of folly** and the **way of wisdom**. If you keep a **two-paths framework** in mind as we read the book of Proverbs it will make things **simpler** as we will often encounter a **contrast**, "choose this, not that."

Proverbs 28:10

Whoever leads the upright along an evil path
will fall into their own trap,
but the blameless will receive a good inheritance. (NIV)

Here we see that **contrast** between a **bad path** and **good path**. Together the father and mother urge their son to stay away from the evil path, the **way of the foolish**.

Path #1 - The way of the foolish (v10-19)

The way of the foolish is a **life lived against God** and **for oneself**. Proverbs **unashamedly calls** anyone who rejects God a "**fool**" because the **final consequence** is **death**. In today's Proverb the father **warns** the son of a **specific type** of fool—the type who is willing to **take advantage** of others for their **own gain**.

Proverbs 1:10-11, 15-16, 18-19

10 My son, if sinful men entice you,
do not give in to them.

11 If they say, “Come along with us;
let’s lie in wait for innocent blood,
let’s ambush some harmless soul; [...]

15 my son, do not go along with them,
do not set foot on their paths;

16 for their feet rush into evil,
they are swift to shed blood. [...]

18 These men lie in wait for their own blood;
they ambush only themselves!

19 Such are the paths of all who go after ill-gotten gain;
it takes away the life of those who get it.

So here’s the point our proverb is making. **Don’t take advantage of others and avoid those who do.** Those who do are sinful men, evil men, and even though in the **short-term** their decisions seem good in the **end** their actions will prove **harmful**, even **destructive**, to themselves and any who **join** them.

In Proverbs chapter one the father is essentially warning his son not to join a **gang**. Now the likelihood of most of us being **recruited** by the **Crips** or the **Bloods** or the **Jets** or the **Sharks** is **pretty low**. But we do regularly encounter a way of thinking that says to take care of “**me and my own first**” and that way of thinking comes at the **expense of others**.

- Has your **friend** ever told you to **steal** that **candy** or **toy** or **outfit** from the **store** because it’ll be **awesome**? *That’s the way of the fool.*
- Has your **classmate** ever told you to copy their **homework** or asked if they could copy yours even though that won’t help you **learn**? *That’s the way of the fool.*
- Has your **college buddy** ever encouraged you to take advantage of that **guy** or that **girl** that **likes you**. *That’s the way of the fool.*
- Have you ever been tempted to sell a **car** or **lawnmower** on **Craigslist** or **Facebook Marketplace** and not **inform** the **potential buyer** of some of its **problems**? *That’s the way of the fool.*
- (On your **frontline**)² Has your **supervisor** or **coworker** ever told you to **cover up** a **mistake** at the **expense** of your **company’s client**? *That’s the way of the fool.*

Proverbs is here to **guide** us like a **GPS** that never leads us wrong. We’re all presented with **choices** in this life. Don’t make the **wrong turn**. *Avoid path #1, the way of the foolish.* But is there any **alternative**? **Proverbs chapter 2** actually tells us about **another path**.

Proverbs 2:12-13

12 Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men,
from men whose words are perverse,

13 who have left the straight paths
to walk in dark ways,³ (NIV)

God **invites** us to walk in the way of wisdom, the second path.

Path #2 - The way of the wise (v20-33)

Last week I defined wisdom (“**hokmah**”) as “**the skill of living.**”⁴ But it’s not just living any way you want. It’s living “**for God.**” It’s living life in a way that **honors** God and is according to **his plan** and not our own. We live for God by **believing** in God, **respecting** him, **obeying** him, and having a **relationship with him**. Proverbs calls this “**the fear of the Lord.**”

Now if you were a **father** and wanted to have a **lengthy conversation** with your son **about wisdom** you might do some **creative things** to **hold your son’s attention** on the **topic of wisdom**. Maybe you would **personify wisdom**. Maybe you would describe wisdom as a **courageous, smart, and engaging woman**— just to help hold your **teenage boy’s interest**. “Son, have I got just the **girl for you**. Her **name** is wisdom and she is **hot!**” And that’s what we see in Proverbs.

Proverbs 1:20-21

20 Out in the open wisdom calls aloud,
she raises her voice in the public square;
21 on top of the wall she cries out,
at the city gate she makes her speech: (NIV)

This girl is completely different than the way of the wicked. She’s **not hiding** in ambush. She’s out in the open **bravely calling** out in the “**public square.**” The **ESV** translates “public square” as “**markets.**” This is the **marketplace**. This is the **broad open plaza** where **business** and **government** and **news** happen. Wisdom **offers her good path** to everyone in every part of life.

Remember how I said the foolish **take advantage of others** for their **own gain**. If that’s path number one, then you would **expect** that path number two, the way of wisdom, **offers a positive alternative**. I want to play a **2-minute clip** highlighting a **company** and one of its **employees** that has the opportunity to take advantage of others and is instead choosing **path #2 - the way of the wise** ([play video here](#)). From this video we see a company trying to **avoid** the way of the **foolish** and **walk** in the way of the **wise**.

What’s one way you can walk in the way of the wise **this week**? What’s one way you can **follow lady wisdom**? It might not look like the woman from the clip, but what does it look like in your **context**?

Lady wisdom does **not withdraw** out of **fear** for her own safety but **boldly enters into** the **public square** so that any can enter into a **relationship with her**. That’s just like **God**, isn’t it? **Through Jesus** God enters into our world full of **brokenness** and sin in order to bring us into **right relationship with himself**. I believe that **wisdom is a personification or metaphor for God**. A metaphor is **figure of speech**, a **word picture**. Wisdom is a picture of **God himself** entering into our world to bring us **closer to him**. Why else in the next **two verses** would we need to **repent** unless by **disobeying wisdom** we are **disobeying God**?

Proverbs 1:22-23

22 “How long will you who are simple love your simple ways?
How long will mockers delight in mockery
and fools hate knowledge?
23 Repent at my rebuke!
Then I will pour out my thoughts to you,
I will make known to you my teachings. (NIV)

Wisdom is the **ideal girl** any **parent** would want their **son** to **marry**. But wisdom is also a **picture of God**. Wisdom can be **two things at once** because this is **poetry**. It **doesn’t fit perfectly** into a **neat diagram**. But that **doesn’t mean** there’s **no limits**. Just because wisdom is a **metaphor** for God **doesn’t mean that**

wisdom is God. Wisdom is a **characteristic** or **attribute** of God. Some people have taken the **Greek word** for wisdom, “**sophia**” and said “**Sophia is God,**” so we can **worship** and **pray** and **sing** to the **goddess Sophia**, the **fourth person** of the **Trinity**. That’s **heresy**. That’s a **lie** and that’s **not** what I am saying. God is **not female**, but neither is he **male**. The Bible does use both **feminine** and **masculine imagery** to describe God. Wisdom is a **symbolic image** of God through which we are called to be in **relationship with him**.

This is **serious stuff** because there are **consequences** if we choose to **reject wisdom**. If we reject wisdom, if we choose not to live the way God **designed** us to live, we **reject God himself** and God promises that one day there will come a **judgment**.

Proverbs 1:24-26

24 But since you refuse to listen when I call
and no one pays attention when I stretch out my hand,
25 since you disregard all my advice
and do not accept my rebuke,
26 I in turn will laugh when disaster strikes you;
I will mock when calamity overtakes you— (NIV)

This **isn’t** a **cruel laugh**, but a laugh of **goodness defeating evil**. It’s the laughter of a **child** finding a **safe** and **loving forever home**. It’s the laughter of an **office Christmas party celebrating a record year** because they **did it right**—they **served** their **customers** and **employees** and **community** well. It’s the laughter of the **innocent person** declared **not guilty** at their trial. It’s the laughter of **Allied soldiers defeating Hitler** and coming home to be with their **families**. **Wisdom** and **goodness** will **overthrow sin** and it will be good.

Jesus taught there were **two paths**, one leading to life and the other death.

Matthew 7:13-14 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. (NIV)

If you want to walk the road to life, you need to enter into a **relationship with wisdom** by entering into a **relationship with God**. We can **only** do this **through Jesus Christ**. None of us can walk the **wisdom highway perfectly**. We all **stumble** and **fall into the way of the foolish**. That’s why we **need a Savior**. That’s why we need someone who our **Heavenly Father** calls, “**my Son!**” Jesus is the Son who **actually did** all the things Proverbs calls us to do. He was perfectly **wise**. Perfectly **obedient**. He was the **perfect embodiment** of **God’s wisdom** (Proverbs 8:22-31; Colossians 1:15-17). If you **repent** of your sins and **believe** in him, the **perfect Son**, God will grant you **eternal life**. When God **counts up** your life he’ll count Christ’s **wise record** instead of our **foolish records**. **Listen** to how the **last verse ends**.

Proverbs 1:33

but whoever listens to me will live in safety
and be at ease, without fear of harm.”

God offers **refuge in himself**. There is **safety in wisdom** because there is **safety in God**. No one can **steal** you from him, **not even yourself**. So **which path will you choose? Path #1** - The way of the **foolish**, which leads to **death**? Or **Path #2** - The way of the **wise**, which leads to **eternal life**? **Which way** have you been **living**? If you’ve been living the way of the fool, **Christ** invites you to **repent** and he will forgive you. God invites you into a **relationship with him** through his **Son Jesus Christ**. *I hope you’ll choose the **right path**. I hope you’ll choose **Jesus**.*

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon, which includes endnotes and references. Read our story here.⁵

¹ The mother also offers wisdom. See Proverbs 6:20; 10:1; 15:20; 29:15; 31:1

² “Your Frontline is the place where you spend the majority of your time outside the church, where you are in contact with non-Christians.” – Life on the Frontline (licc.org.uk)

³ See also the next two verses:

14 who delight in doing wrong

and rejoice in the perverseness of evil,

15 whose paths are crooked

and who are devious in their ways. (NIV)

⁴ *How to Read Proverbs* by Tremper Longman III. Page 14.

⁵ All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.