

Proverbs 9:1-18

Everyday Wisdom: The Wise Choice

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Sometimes it all comes down to a **single choice**. You ever watch that old gameshow *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* It finally got cancelled this summer but the concept was pretty simple. The original gameshow host **Regis Philbin** would ask a contestant trivia questions. The questions were pretty easy at first but they got progressively harder and harder. But that also meant that each question was worth more and more, ranging from **\$100** to **\$1,000,000**. If you answered all **fifteen questions** right you won a million dollars, but if you missed a single question you lost most of your money.

Now I didn't watch this show very often but I recently watched a clip of a contestant, a guy named **John Carpenter**, who made it all the way to the **million dollar question**. He still had **all three** of his **lifelines**. He could **ask the audience**, take a **50:50** (reduce the answers down from **4 to 2**), and he could **phone a friend**. So he got all the way to the end and he got this question (and if you know the answer don't shout it out):

Which of these U.S. Presidents appeared on the television series "Laugh-In"?

A) Lyndon Johnson; B) Richard Nixon; C) Jimmy Carter; D) Gerald Ford.¹

By **show of hands** who here thinks it was Johnson? Nixon? Carter? or Ford? Or who is wondering "what's Laugh-In?" This is a million dollar question. And the **answer is...** we'll be right back! We're going to **come back** to the answer because today I want to ask you a question that has even **higher stakes** than a million dollars. What's at stake is **heaven** and **hell**. What's at stake is your and my **eternal destination**.

Which path will you take?

A) The way of wisdom; B) The way of folly.

Today we're coming to the end of the first **nine-chapters** of the book of Proverbs. It's a **natural close** to the first part of the book. Next week we're going to pick up in **Proverbs 30** as we look the end of the book, and then after that we'll jump into some of the **center**, more **topical** passages. Throughout the first nine chapters we've been given a choice again and again between **two paths**, **the wise path** and **the foolish path**. Today I want to expand on each of those choices a bit more. The first option is...

A) The way of wisdom (Proverbs 9:1-12)

By way or path I mean **not one singular choice** but a **lifetime** of **decisions** and **choices**. Are you heading down one path or the other? The way of wisdom...

It begins with a relationship with God.

Let's look more closely at the first four verses.

Proverbs 9:1-4a

- 1 Wisdom has built her house;
she has set up its seven pillars.
- 2 She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine;
she has also set her table.

- 3 She has sent out her servants, and she calls
from the highest point of the city,
4 “Let all who are simple come to my house!” (NIV)

Here we find **lady wisdom**, a **metaphor** for **God**, calling out for anyone who is simple to come and **eat** with her. In this culture for a **woman** to invite a man to dinner was not like grabbing a **bite to eat** at **Panera**. No this is more like a **candlelight dinner** with **steak**. **Meat** was rare because meat was **expensive** and hard to store (**no refrigeration**). Wisdom is inviting him to enter into an **intimate relationship** with her.

Her house may also be built on the **high point of the city** (v1,3). If you think back to the **author Solomon** you realize he was **writing from Jerusalem** and the high point in Jerusalem is the **temple mount** where **God’s presence dwells**. God is inviting simple people to come to his temple and enter into relationship with him and let him grow them and give them his wisdom. God invites us to seek him (Prov 8:17; Rom 3:11; James 1:5).² Just like **Proverbs 1:7** opened by calling us to “fear the Lord” chapter **9** **closes the same way**.

Proverbs 9:10

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. (NIV)

Remember last week how **Christ Jesus embodies wisdom** and actual **identifies himself** with **lady wisdom** (Prov 8:22-31; Mat 11:19; Col 1:15-17)? So often when we think about wisdom we think of it as a **set of facts or knowledge** we can **acquire** to **improve our lives**. That’s **part** of what wisdom is. It’s the **skill of living**.³ But that’s not all it is. Wisdom is not just a **what** but also a **who**. Wisdom is not a **thing** but a **person**. **Jesus is wisdom**. Jesus is wisdom in the **flesh**. If you want to get wise, get to know Jesus. If you want to get wise, get **real with God**. Go deep in your relationship with him. God wants us to **seek him**.

Imagine you’re on *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* and you decide to use a **lifeline**. **Regis** calls your best friend who is waiting for your phone call and you read the question and your friend pauses and says, “That’s a great question! I have no idea. Good luck!” Or what if they just **don’t pick up**? Our **lifeline to God**, our Heavenly Father, isn’t like that. We can call on him **day** or **night**, when times are **good** or when times are **hard**, and no matter what **he’ll pick up**. We can call on **Jesus** through **prayer** at any time. Whenever we need to **make a decision** we can ask him for his **wisdom** and **guidance**. God always answers. He speaks to us through his **Word**, the **Bible**, as we **read** it and **hear it preached** and he speaks to us through his **Holy Spirit applying** God’s Word to our lives. He often doesn’t give us the **answer we want to be true**, sometimes he says **yes**, other times **no**, sometimes **maybe**, and other times **wait**. But he always gives us the **right answer**. *The way of wisdom begins with a relationship with God and...*

It displays the character of God.

Wisdom is one of **God’s character qualities**. *To be wise then is to reflect God’s character*. How does developing wisdom help us reflect the character of our God?

- a. Wisdom is **creative** and **works hard**. (v1 She built a large house.) God is creative/works hard.
- b. Wisdom is **generous**. (v2-6 She offers food and wine.) God is generous.
- c. Wisdom is **teachable**. (v7-9 The wise learn from her.) Jesus grew in wisdom.

As we become wise through a **relationship with God** we too will display his **creativity**, his **work ethic**, his **generosity**, his **wisdom**, and a relationship with him **leads to eternal life** (v10-12 Your days will be many). To be a Christian is not just to have **good character** or to **hold Christian values**. You can be someone who is creative, or generous, or teachable, but not have eternal life. This is why wisdom **begins** and **ends** with a

relationship with God (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). It's a genuine relationship with God that will then **bear the fruit** of a character that **displays God's character**. *The way of wisdom begins with a relationship with God and displays the character of God.*

If lady wisdom is **option A** there's still another option. You can choose **option B**, the way of folly, the foolish woman, but she is a **tricky lady**.

B) The way of folly (Proverbs 9:13-18)

Proverbs 9:13

Folly is an unruly woman;
she is simple and knows nothing.

Tremper Longman III **translates** this, "Woman Folly is boisterous; **she is simpleminded but does not even know it.**"⁴ The **problem with foolish men and women, boys and girls**, is that they often don't know they're foolish and aren't **humble enough to take correction**. Lady folly is the **complete opposite of lady wisdom**.

- a. Folly is naive. (v13 She knows nothing.)⁵
- b. Folly is lazy. (v14 She sits at the door of her house.)
- c. Folly is greedy and deceptive. (v17 Stolen water is sweet.)

Do you know **where folly leads? The pits of hell** (v18 her guests are deep in the **realm of the dead**). If you choose a life of foolishness and live to **satisfy yourself**, as Bernie Michaud says, it's like going to **dine in a morgue**. You're **surrounded by the dead**.⁶ *The way of folly leads to death.*

So maybe you're someone who doesn't want to choose the way of folly, but neither do you want to choose the way of wisdom. You don't want to be in a relationship with God but you're **no fool**. Well...

You have to choose one way or the other.

*You have to choose the way of wisdom through a **relationship with God** if you want **eternal life**. To **not choose is to choose** the way of folly that leads to death. There is **no middle ground**. There are **not four** choices like our **gameshow** but only **two** and **only one is right**. There is no **border zone** or **neutral Switzerland** or "**kinda Christianity**". *There's only the way of wisdom and the way of folly.**

I've been thinking about how the Bible itself **presents** these **two paths** throughout the **big story of the Bible**. It doesn't always appear in the **same language** as wisdom and folly but it's still there, presenting each of us with a choice. Which will you choose?

Way of Wisdom	Way of Folly
Tree of life	Tree of the knowledge of good and evil
Abel (Seth)	Cain
Abraham/Isaac/Jacob	Lot/Ishmael/Esau
Israel	Egypt, Canaan, Babylon
King David	Saul, Absalom
Jesus Christ	Self/world

Narrow gate	Wide gate
The lamb	The dragon
God	Satan
New heavens and new earth	Hell

When we choose the way of self or foolishness we're not just making a bad decision. We're choosing the way of **Satan** over the way of **God**. All of the **proverbs** in the **center of our book**, which seem so **topical** and **disorganized**, are **all unified by this one idea**. You can either choose God and his ways or you can choose Satan and his.⁷ Most proverbs will show this contrast and **encourage** us to **choose God's ways**.

So what's my **big idea**? *Choose the way of wisdom. Choose Christ.* Choose to be in **relationship with God**. Choose **him today, tomorrow, and the next day** and the next.

But here's the **real kicker**. Over and over again when God's people Israel can choose the way of wisdom or the way of folly they choose the way of folly. They **choose to wander**. **Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and King David** all represent the way of wisdom and their lives were **messed up**. **Why** is that? We actually read the reason why all the way back in Proverbs 4.

Proverbs 4:23

Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it. (NIV)

See **what we do shows what's in our heart**. Our **behavior displays what's really true** on the **inside**. What's really true is that all human beings, even the best humans, are **bent towards sin**. We're professionals at sin. We **love** it. We **like** it. It's **fun**. And that's why **God himself** had to **walk the way of wisdom for us**. God entered into this world **through Christ Jesus**, through **wisdom embodied**, and walked down that path of wisdom, **never swerving** to the **right** or to the **left**. When we place our **faith** in him through **repentance** and **belief** he grants us **his track record**. He gives us his **wisdom** and takes the **consequence** of our **folly**.

Through the **cross** Jesus **paid the penalty** for our sin. It cost Jesus his life to rescue us from the way of folly. But he **rose** from the **grave** and now he **rescues** us any who believe. Although at **times** we will **stumble back towards** the way of folly we are **forever forgiven** and forever **secure** in Christ. Through Christ we can **begin to walk the right way**. We can now begin to show the **fruit** of a **holy** and **wise** life.

Choose the way of wisdom. Choose Christ.

Maybe you want to know what happened with the million dollar question? When **Regis** read the question to **John Carpenter** he said he'd like to call his **parents**. He asked to use his lifeline to call his **father**. **Regis** gets his dad on the line and says, "We got your son John with us right now. He's doing pretty well. He's won a half million dollars and he's going for a million dollars." John's dad **laughs**. He must have been pretty **pleased**. Regis adds, "And he needs your help to get there. So he's going to come on the line, read four possible answers, and one of them is the right answer, and the next voice you hear will be John's. You've got thirty seconds. Starts right now."

The **30-seconds countdown clock** begins and John says, "**Hi dad**, I don't really need your help. I just wanted to let you know that I'm gonna win the million dollars." The **audience goes wild**. **Regis smiles** and John says, "Because the U.S. President who appeared on "Laugh In" is **Richard Nixon**. That's my **final answer**." He was the **first player** to ever **win** the million and he used only one lifeline to **tell his father** he had **won**. He made the **right choice** and I **hope you will too**.

Every time we choose the path of wisdom we are choosing a prize much more **valuable** than a million dollars. We're choosing **God himself** and **eternal life** with him through his son, Christ Jesus. I think that **pleases our father**. If you haven't called your **Heavenly Father** up recently **call him up today** and tell him **you choose him** and his ways. He'd love to **hear from you**. *Choose the way of wisdom. Choose Christ.*

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](#).

¹ Wikipedia contributors, "John Carpenter (game show contestant)," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=John_Carpenter_\(game_show_contestant\)&oldid=903605093](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=John_Carpenter_(game_show_contestant)&oldid=903605093) (accessed August 22, 2019).

² God calls us to his temple, which we know to be Christ Jesus, who the very presence of God fills. Jesus is God's tabernacle. See John 1:14.

³ Tremper Longman III. *How To Read Proverbs*.

⁴ Tremper Longman, III, *Proverbs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2015). 215.

⁵ See NASB translation.

⁶ Bernie Michaud talked about dining in a nursing home surrounded by people who have died and you don't even know it in one of his sermon manuscripts.

⁷ Tremper Longman III uses Proverbs 10:1 to make this point.