

GOD'S WISDOM FOR LIFE - PART 11:
"WISDOM OR FOLLY?"
PROVERBS 9:1-18

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone. I'm Jeff - one of the pastors at HMCC of Jakarta. And it's my privilege to preach the Word of God for us.

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Sermon Series Introduction

Today, we'll finally be concluding our sermon series on Proverbs 1-9!

We've taken a bit of a break to go through the book of Ruth and for an Advent sermon series. So today, we'll finally be finishing the sermon series on Proverbs, called "God's Wisdom for Life."

The title of today's sermon is "Wisdom or Folly?"

Before we begin, let me pray for us.

<prayer>

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Sermon Introduction & Scripture Introduction

Did you know that since waking up this morning, we already made thousands of decisions...

- What time should I get up?
- What should I wear?
- Should I go to church today?

Various sources say that we make about 33,000 to 35,000 decisions per day.

Most of them are subconscious and instant; made within seconds. But others are more complex, and they require more thought - "How should I manage my finances? Which job should I take? Which church should I be a part of?"

In fact, some choices are so complex - and potentially life-changing - that we're thinking about it for days, even losing sleep over it, and even then... It's still unclear to us which decision to make.

This is the situation that King Solomon's son is facing in this passage - After everything that Solomon has taught him about wisdom, his son now needs to make a choice. After 8 chapters, Solomon is basically asking his son, "Will you now choose wisdom or folly?"

And to help his son with his choice, Solomon paints a picture (using figurative language) to describe what these two choices look like... (And I hope that this would also be helpful for us today).

If you have your Bibles with you, please turn to Proverbs 9:1-18...

This is Solomon's teaching to his son... I'll read it for us...

Proverbs 9:1-18 (ESV)

Wisdom has built her house;

she has hewn her seven pillars.

2 She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine;

she has also set her table.

3 She has sent out her young women to call

from the highest places in the town,

4 "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!"

To him who lacks sense she says,

5 "Come, eat of my bread

and drink of the wine I have mixed.

6 Leave your simple ways, and live,

and walk in the way of insight."

7 Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse,

and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.

8 Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you;

reprove a wise man, and he will love you.

9 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser;

teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.

10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,

and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

11 For by me your days will be multiplied,

and years will be added to your life.

12 If you are wise, you are wise for yourself;

if you scoff, you alone will bear it.

13 The woman Folly is loud;

she is seductive and knows nothing.

14 She sits at the door of her house;
she takes a seat on the highest places of the town,
15 calling to those who pass by,
who are going straight on their way,
16 "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!"
And to him who lacks sense she says,
17 "Stolen water is sweet,
and bread eaten in secret is pleasant."
18 But he does not know that the dead are there,
that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

This is God's Word.

The One Thing

Choosing the way of wisdom means humbly receiving correction that's centered on God's wisdom.

Overview

We'll take a look at this passage in 3 parts, and we'll see what the journey of growing in wisdom looks like:

- I. Intentionally choose the way of Wisdom (vv. 1-6, 13-18)
- II. Humbly receive correction along the way (vv. 7-9, 11-12)
- III. Continuously pursue God and His wisdom (v. 10)

If we think of this passage as an onion, we'll be taking a look at the outer layer first (vv. 1-6 & 13-18), and then we'll be unpeeling this passage as we go... and we'll go deeper and take a look at the middle layer (vv. 7-9 & 11-12), and then we'll unpeel it some more and finally take a look at the center (v. 10).

I. Intentionally choose the way of wisdom (vv. 1-6, 13-18)

Let's begin by looking at verses 1-6 & 13-18...

So to help his son choose between wisdom and folly, Solomon paints a picture (using figurative language) to describe what Wisdom and Folly look like...

Notice that Wisdom and Folly are personified here as 2 women. And the picture that's described is that these 2 women are both hosting a banquet in their homes.

And notice who's invited to this banquet - look at verse 4 and 16 - The wording is basically identical: "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" Both Wisdom and Folly are inviting the same group of people.

The invited guests are those who are simple and lack sense - those who have not yet made up their minds and can still go either way... That's who Wisdom and Folly are trying to persuade... Those who are still in the process of making a decision.

<pause>

So imagine with me... a simple man just going about his way... not sure of where he's going... when he suddenly hears a call from a young woman...

From a young handmaiden who invites him to a banquet. She shares how she's sent by Lady Wisdom. And she shares how Lady Wisdom has set up her house for a grand banquet - She slaughtered her beasts and prepared various meats to eat, she mixed and prepared her own wine to drink, and she's set her table. Everything is ready.

Lady Wisdom says, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight."

What Wisdom offers is good - it's a full meal. And she invites her guests to live in the way of wisdom & insight.

But notice how Wisdom's offer is gonna cost something - It's gonna require work. Because to head to the way of Wisdom, you'll need to leave your simple ways (that's the cost)... You need to acknowledge that a change of direction is needed in your life (that's not easy).

So choosing Wisdom looks more like a journey (You need to turn away from your old ways and head to a new direction).

But... it's a journey that would lead to life, not death. A journey that leads to insight and clarity, not confusion... Because here we're told that the way of Wisdom is the way of insight.

- What Solomon is helping his son see... is that the way of God's wisdom will help you have insight - it's going to take work, but you will see clearly what is wise and what is foolish (without mixing the two).
- That's what it means to have godly wisdom and insight. Think of the word "insight" as "in" and "sight" - Inward sight... Being able to discern and judge the difference between two things for what they truly are (not just based on outer appearance but seeing what's truly inside). That's what it means to have insight and godly wisdom... you'd be able to tell the difference between what's truly wise and foolish.

Pursuing godly wisdom & insight will be a journey and will require effort, but is definitely something that's worthy to be pursued.

And it's something that we all actually need...

We all need insight. We all actually already have some sort of sight - some worldview from which we see the world and see our lives through. And it's affected by various factors: who we grew up with, our life experiences, the culture and society that we find ourselves in. They affect what we view as wise and what we view as foolish.

Something as simple as... How does your family view money and how do your friends view success? That can impact how you view life... and what's wise and foolish when you make decisions.

But another huge factor that affects our worldview is our sinful nature. Because of the sin in our hearts, we're more bent to think about ourselves - and what we often think is "wise" is merely just what we think would be good for us and what gives us pleasure (and whatever does not fit our worldview is what's foolish).

So the first step toward godly wisdom is to acknowledge that our worldview is not perfect; it's actually impaired... It's not always right.

- Sometimes we see wisdom as folly and folly as wisdom. It's difficult for us to tell the difference sometimes.

<pause>

And to make things more difficult, as this man is considering Wisdom's call, he receives another invite.

This time, from a woman called Folly, who's just sitting there at the front of her house. Notice (in v. 15) how he just stumbles upon her. It doesn't seem like Folly needs to do much work to invite her guests - the simple will pass by her place anyways as they naturally go about their ways. So it seems like the ways of the simple are already very close to the way of Folly.

- What do people need to do to choose Folly? Not much, no change needed. Just go about your ways and you'll come across Folly sooner or later.

Folly calls out to this simple man, "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" And to him who lacks sense she says, "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant."

So what's Folly offering in her banquet? Stolen food and water.

She says that it's gonna taste sweet and pleasant - because even though it's wrongfully gained... if it's done in secret then no one's gonna find out and you can enjoy what you desire

right now at no cost. You're already near the front door, just take a few more steps in and you'll experience pleasure.

What's actually being offered here is instant gratification of what your flesh desires - whatever it is that it's already hungry for...

- And if you just ignore your conscience for a second, you can feed that hunger...
- Some commentators believe that what this symbolizes is lust for sexual pleasure, but I think it can also represent any worldly desire that you have a strong desire for, something that you'd do anything for so that you can experience it immediately, even if it means doing what you know is questionable and not right.

Some of you are probably already familiar with the temptations that you're struggling with right now...

- What do you desire the most?
- How are you being tempted to do what's easiest and fastest to try and satisfy your flesh's desire?

But look at verse 18 - This simple man doesn't know that Folly's offer would lead to death. What was promised was sweetness and pleasure and for some time maybe there is sweetness and pleasure, but in the end... it ultimately leads to death. Her food is like poison that would destroy your life, and disrupt your sense of what's right and wrong, leading you to be lost and confused (maybe thinking what you're doing is wise when it's actually foolish because it will harm you - and possibly others - in the long-term).

This is what choosing Folly looks like - No change needed, just continue to go about your ways, follow your heart's natural desires, and just feed it with whatever is easiest and closest and fastest (even if you consciously know it's questionable or wrong).

<pause>

This may be why we don't always choose what's wise... Because what's foolish is usually easier and it can scratch your itch immediately.

- But in the long-term, it can be damaging...

So Solomon is trying to persuade his son to choose the way of God's wisdom. And the first step is to choose to leave your simple ways. Choose to turn around from Folly, and head towards God's wisdom.

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II. Humbly receive correction along the way (vv. 7-9, 11-12)

Now, let's take a look at verses 7-9 & 11-12...

Let's say that the simple man has chosen to leave his simple ways, and he decided to head to Wisdom's house. Now how would he know that he's heading toward the right direction? Because along the way, there may be twists and turns (That's just how life is like). How can he make sure that he's on the right path to Wisdom?

And this applies to us too - for those of us who are striving to grow in godly wisdom, how can we know if we're heading in the right direction or not?

Because many of us here - by the grace of God - have already made the choice to turn back from our past life of sinfulness. We've repented to God, confessed our sins, placed our faith in Jesus Christ, and now we desire to live a life of faithfulness that's in accordance with God's Wisdom.

So as we live our lives, how can we know if we're heading in the right direction? That we're actually growing in godly wisdom, and not being foolish?

Thank goodness, God did not leave us without guidance. He gave us things that we can look for in our lives so that we can check that we're headed in the right way (Like signs along a path that points to the right direction).

A sign of someone growing in godly wisdom is... humility and teachability (Growing in these characteristics are signs that you're heading in the right way)

- This is the character of a wise man that we see in verses 7-9.
- "Reprove a wise man, and he will love you"
- A wise man is humble - He knows that his view is limited and he has blind spots. He doesn't know everything, so he's open to receiving corrections from others.
 - He knows that rejecting correction would be foolish: it would harm himself (Like a car that gets into an accident because the driver couldn't see his blind spot).
- So he listens and carefully considers when others tell him that he's heading the wrong way.
- And he's teachable, he loves the ones who correct him because their guidance helps him go back to the right track, and helps him to grow as a person.
- That's why it says in verse 9, "Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning."
- Look at v. 12 - He loves correction because he understands that it'll ultimately benefit himself - Correction helps him grow wiser, and helps him get closer and closer to Wisdom's house.

But there's another kind of person being described here in verses 7-9 - a scoffer (or a mocker).

- Someone who hates correction and hates those who try to correct him.
- Now this is a sign of someone who's not growing in wisdom... It's pride and ignorance.
- A scoffer is prideful - they think that they're basically always right. And so they ignore (or even scoff at) the correction that others give him (thinking that others are usually wrong).
- In the end, they're just hurting themselves and not growing as a person.

<pause>

Which one of these two individuals describe what you are like?

Let's reflect on ourselves for a moment...

- When was the last time you received feedback from someone? And how did you take it?
- Were you defensive, and quick to justify your actions?
- Did you truly listen, or did you only pretend to listen, but deep inside you knew that you're not gonna make any changes?

I invite you to reflect on this further either tonight or this upcoming week. Because maybe we're not as open to receiving corrections as we think.

So this also made me think: I think I'm quite open to receiving feedback. But I'm not sure if I would say that I love it. There's something uncomfortable about receiving feedback. Why is that? Why is my initial reaction this uneasy feeling?

I thought about this... And I think my initial reaction is to take others' feedback personally. Because the fact that I need some sort of correction in order to improve implies that I'm not great at something. And that kinda hurts. If I look deeper into my heart, this is because - in my sinfulness and self-centeredness - I have a strong desire for others to think of me as a good and capable person who's great at what he does. So if I take it personally, I can hear others' feedback as, "you suck." So I kinda brace myself when I'm about to receive feedback (and so that can lead to stress and anxiety).

That may be the same for you. No one wants to be seen by others as being bad or simple-minded.

But then what if we change our mindset? What if we don't pretend like we know everything and we don't pretend like we have everything put together? But what if we acknowledge that we're works in progress...

That we're not perfect (only God is). And there's always room for us to learn and grow. That's the kind of humble and teachable mindset that's described here in verses 7-9.

If you think you're already great and don't think there's any aspects of your life that you can grow in... ask your spouse... or a close friend. They may have something to say about that...

So I encourage us to invite feedback and correction into our lives:

- Think of the people who can give you wise, godly counsel; think of the people who can point you back to Christ whenever you're straying away...
- And ask them if they see anything about your life or your character that you could work on; That'd be so helpful for your growth as a Christian.

<pause>

Now, take a look at vv.7-9 again, and notice how the point of view is from someone who's actually giving the correction. So this is a separate skill that we can develop (that complements the skill of receiving correction. And it's giving correction).

- This is when we help others grow in wisdom by pointing them back to Jesus and the Gospel.
- It may be uncomfortable to bring this up with a close friend.
- But to correct someone is actually a loving thing to do.
 - Imagine you're heading toward Wisdom's house and you see someone who took a wrong turn, and is getting lost. Wouldn't the loving thing be to call out to them, and to correct them, so that they may start heading in the right direction again?
 - That's the loving thing to do.

So I encourage us to also ask ourselves: whose lives can you speak into? Perhaps there's a family member, friend, co-worker, or church member who needs your guidance at this time.

<pause>

Again, these are not the most comfortable things to do, but very beneficial ones. And when you have others speaking into your life and you're speaking into others' lives. Then that's a good sign that you're heading in the right direction.

A yellow flag is actually if everyone around you does not correct you. And keep telling you that everything is right, and sweet, and pleasing. And no change is needed. That's a yellow flag because that sounds closer to Folly than Wisdom.

So first, make the choice to head to wisdom, then be willing to receive corrections along the way to help make sure that you stay on the right path...

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III. Continuously pursue God and His wisdom (v. 10)

Finally, let's take a look at the center of this passage, verse 10:

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight."

This verse is so good - Because at the core of this passage, we're directed to God. And it's so important for us to see here how God is at the core of this message.

Notice the word "fear" that's used here in verse 10... In the original Hebrew, that word "fear" also means "to respect" or "to revere." So to "fear the Lord" means to "respect the Lord" or to "revere the Lord."

- So another way of saying this is that “the respect and the reverence of the Lord” is the beginning of wisdom.

So at the core of this passage, we’re pointed to an important truth that God Himself is the beginning of wisdom; we cannot truly know wisdom if we don’t truly respect and know God first. And that makes sense because wisdom begins with God (He’s the one who’s all-knowing and who created everything - including all of the universe and all of life). And so we cannot begin to know what true wisdom is if we do not first know who our wise God is...

That’s why it also says that...

“The knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”

- To know God is to know wisdom.
- And it’s only when we know our wise creator that we can truly know how to live wisely in the world that he’s created.

<pause>

Speaking of creating something... In high school, I took an “introduction to art” class. And I learned that there’s a lot of details that you can look for in a painting, but if you truly want to know the real meaning of a painting... you need to know the painter. Who is the painter? Why did they create this painting? What did they say about what their painting means?

- Without knowing who the painter is, we cannot truly know the full meaning of a painting.
- Without knowing the creator, we cannot truly know the full meaning of His creation.

Yet oftentimes, when we look at something, we just make our own interpretation of what we think it means. We look at the world and our lives, and we try to interpret how the world works, and how we should live our lives... based on our own wisdom and understanding. But what does God - the author & creator - have to say about it?

So we want to know how to live wisely in this world? Well, what does God have to say about it? Because He’s the one who created the world and all of our lives.

We want to know how to manage our finances wisely? What does God say about money and financial stewardship?

We want to be wise in our dating, marriage, friendship, and work?

- Well, what does God have to say about those things?

Because what God says about those things would be what’s truly wise - And that would be valuable insight directly from the creator Himself.

<pause>

“The knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”

So the big question is: How can we know God?

Well, the good news is that God wants to be known; He wants His people to personally know Him more and more...

And that's why God revealed Himself to us through His Word.

And ultimately, God revealed Himself through His one and only Son, Jesus Christ - the Word of God made flesh; the wisdom of God personified.

- Remember... Lady Wisdom was just a figurative personification of the wisdom of God.
- But Jesus Christ is the true and physical personification of the Wisdom of God.

And so by knowing Jesus, we may know God and His wisdom.

- And that's because Jesus Christ is fully man and fully God.
- And that means that God Himself came into the world that He created, so that His creation may truly know Him.

This is what we as Christians celebrated this past Christmas - the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And by knowing who Jesus is, we may know the wisdom of God.

<pause>

So how should this impact our lives? Well, I'll share two things on how this affects us...

First, this truth should transform how we view wisdom.

- Because up to this point in our lives, when we think of growing in wisdom and becoming wiser... maybe we think of knowing more and learning more things, or maybe we think about doing more and learning how to do things better. That's what we think wisdom is.
- But what this verse means for us is that growing in wisdom actually looks more like a relationship: it's about knowing someone more (that's not usually what we think about wisdom). Not just learning more things and doing more things, but it's about knowing Jesus more. That's what true wisdom is - to know Jesus more and more...

So for those of us who have been losing sleep over a decision that we need to make... what some of you need to do tonight... is maybe not to think about it some more (to be honest, you've probably done enough thinking of the pros and cons). But maybe what you actually need to do tonight is go to Jesus. Because true wisdom is only found in him.

- You especially need to do that if you've been too caught up in your own thoughts that you haven't even considered what God's Word says about it (and you haven't been spending time in the Word and prayer). Then the wisest thing you can do right now is to go back to the source of all wisdom.

- That's the most important thing. The more you forget that, the more Wisdom and Folly will look blurry to you. But the more time you spend with Jesus, the clearer Wisdom and Folly will look to you, as you're more aligned with his views.
- So let's ask ourselves:
 - Have our decisions been made in accordance with our own wisdom or Jesus' wisdom?
 - In our dating, marriage, relationships, and work - have our choices been based on our own wisdom or Jesus' wisdom?
 - Have we even considered Jesus' wisdom?
 - And have we invited other godly men and women to speak Jesus' wisdom into our lives? That's important.

The second way this affects us is... knowing Jesus transforms how we view our world and our lives, and knowing Jesus more transforms what we view as wise and foolish.

- Because when Jesus was on Earth, Jesus spent time with his disciples and taught them that there's more to life than this world that we see. That what would be wise is to not store up treasures on Earth, but to store up treasures in Heaven where moth and rust cannot destroy.
- Jesus taught his disciples to look at the world and to look at life in light of eternity, not just what's right in front of them.
- Jesus taught his disciples to humble themselves and to learn from him because he is the promised Messiah that they've been waiting for.
 - What's wise is for us to humble ourselves before God, and to learn from Jesus and to be corrected by him.
 - If that's what you're doing, I want to encourage you to keep going (even if the world thinks that you're being foolish... Keep going).

Because other people thought that Jesus and his disciples were also crazy and foolish. And they crucified Jesus on the cross for blasphemy.

- They didn't realize that it was actually them who were being foolish by rejecting Jesus, and it's actually them who had a limited worldview. And by crucifying Jesus, they actually fulfilled God's redemptive plan - Because Jesus actually willingly died on the cross for the sins of His people, so that those who believe in him may be forgiven of their sins, and so they may enter the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Through him, Jesus made it possible for sinners to go to God's house, so that one day... we'll enjoy fellowship with God in Heaven, and enjoy the marriage supper of the lamb.
 - A banquet that's like nothing before it.

Until that day, we have the Word of God in the Bible to guide us in making daily decisions that are aligned with God's wisdom. So may we see the Bible (including the rest of Proverbs) with humility and with the fear of the Lord, and may we see the world more and more through the lens of God's Wisdom.

Conclusion

As we conclude, I just want to remind us that - each day, you and I make about 33,000 to 35,000 decisions per day.

If you haven't put your faith in Christ, the most important decision out of the 35,000 decisions is to carefully consider Jesus Christ, who died for the sins of his people. Because this decision not only affects your life now but your eternity.

And for those of us who've already put our faith in Christ, then I just want to remind us that even though we should strive to grow in godly wisdom, we should also keep reminding each other that our salvation does not depend on our own personal wisdom and our personal decision-making. Our salvation is already secured in Jesus Christ.

But by God's grace - we have His Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts; shaping us to be more and more like Christ in wisdom and character - Helping us to see the world more and more through His perspective.

So out of the countless decisions that we need to make in the new year, my prayer is that we'd continue to choose to pursue godly wisdom by pursuing a relationship with God Himself, and that our relationship with Christ will grow richer.

Church, this is a worthy aim for us - let's not think of ourselves as perfect, but as a work-in-progress. I hope that in 2025, we'd continue to learn and grow as a church.

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The One Thing

Choosing the way of wisdom means humbly receiving correction that's centered on God's wisdom.
