

Chasing Wisdom: The Turn to Wisdom

Proverbs 1:20-33

You can't live in southeast Michigan for very long without having to make a decision while driving. Do I stop and wait for this train to pass or do I attempt to find another route around it? Which will be quicker? Will the train slow down? Will it stop and sit on the tracks for long periods of time?

This was a new decision-making process for us when we moved here. We had trains in Virginia, but they didn't cross our roads like they do here and they certainly didn't slow down and stop like they do here.

If you make the decision to try and find another route, you have to slow down, turn your car around and begin going in the opposite direction. It's that turning motion that I want you to get into your mind today because that's the subject matter of our passage. It's a call to turn but not simply to turn onto a side street. It's a call to go in the opposite direction.

So now, instead of picturing a train in the middle of the road blocking your path, picture the road dropping off into nothing for several hundred feet down. You are driving toward this cliff and you have two options. You can either keep driving, or you can turn around and go the opposite way. And picture a woman standing along the roadside shouting instructions to each car as it passes and telling you to turn around because there's incredible joy, satisfaction, and eternal life found that way. But if you keep going you will drive off that cliff into difficulty and ultimately judgment. What will you do?

We would all like to think that the choice would be easy, but it's not because we aren't rational people. We are sinful people with twisted desires and prideful hearts, and we think things will be different for us. But as we ponder this decision, let's at least pull over for a second this morning and listen to this woman and what she's saying. We may benefit from it. So, make sure you are in Proverbs 1:20-33 this morning and we will see **3 Qualities Necessary for the Turn to Wisdom.**

1. Willingness to Listen to Correction (vv. 20-23)

We are studying Proverbs 1-9, and this portion of Proverbs is made up of a series of lectures from a father to a son along with a couple of speeches made by lady wisdom. The father has personified wisdom as a woman and puts words in her mouth to call out to the son to pursue her. This is the first of these speeches and notice in verses 20-21 what she is doing.

She is pictured as going to four different locations within the city and crying out, raising her voice, and speaking to those who pass by. Notice the language there of crying out. She's not dispassionate. She's intense and loud, which is not what would have been expected of women during this time. She's also at the busiest and most important places in the city. Everyone had to go to the market. She's at the noisiest intersections and she's even at the gates of the city, which is where much business and commerce took place.

This tells us that wisdom touches every area of life and that it's extremely accessible. Wisdom is available and wants to be received and listened to. Whose attention is she trying to get? Look at verse 22.

She calls out to three types of people and none of them have wisdom, but they aren't all the same. First, you have the simple. This is who she's really pursuing. This word means young or naïve. This would be every single young person. The simple are gullible, easily seduced and uncommitted to the truth. They are keeping their options open, and they tend to go with the flow. This is the type of person who gets sucked into some strange issue or belief. They are always on the "latest and greatest" bandwagon. You can probably think of all sorts of these trends that come and go that for a moment seem to be the answer to all of life's problems.

They don't have discernment and so they get carried along into foolishness. Lady Wisdom calls out to the simple because they aren't yet hardened in their ways and could possibly listen to her. But she also mentions the scoffers, who love mocking and jeering and treating others with contempt. The scoffers are the more hardened type of fool. They are past the gullible into the "I'm too cool" phase and so they tend to make fun of and deride others. Lastly, she mentions the "fool" who hates knowledge. They don't want to hear it from you because they know

better anyway. This is the overconfident man who gets it and knows how smart he is. Except he isn't. Proverbs 28:26.

Notice that each of these categories of fools are driven by their desires. The simple love being simple and the scoffers delight in their scoffing. They need a change of heart, and this will take a willingness to listen to correction. Look at the first phrase of verse 23.

Turning from the path of the fool requires hearing that I am foolish and I need instruction and wisdom. It requires a posture that listens. When was the last time someone told you that you were wrong? That you were unhelpful or that you were part of the problem? How did you respond? Did you dismiss it outright?

Now I get it. Criticism and correction aren't always accurate, and people can just be jerks and mean spirited. However, the value of correction and reproof can't be denied. To turn around you have to know you are on the wrong path and that requires someone pointing it out to you. And it requires you listening. Look at the rest of verse 23. But the foolish refused to listen. They've got it and don't need the help. And this brings us to our second quality.

2. Wariness of Overconfidence (vv. 24-27)

Lady Wisdom is denouncing the foolish as they continue on their path by her. Why do they continue and why does she denounce them? Look at verses 24-25. They refuse to listen and don't heed her help. They ignore her counsel and don't want to hear her correction. Notice in verse 25 that same word is used as we saw in verse 23, reproof.

Wisdom gives the foolish the opportunity to see what path they are on and turn from it, but they won't listen. Over the years Bethany and I have been involved in pre-marital counseling with engaged couples. There have been times where we've seen something in the relationship or one individual in the relationship where we've thought, "They are going to struggle." We would try to gently point that out, but often those couples are so ready to get married and so convinced they will be fine that they brush it off. Interestingly enough, the couples that were headed toward difficulty that we could see would never ask for insight because

they just really didn't want to hear it. They thought they had it together and couldn't see the problem. On the other hand, the couples who were handling things well and had a great relationship would be the ones to ask for help and correction. There's probably a connection there. A willingness to ask for and receive correction sometimes goes with not really needing it in the first place. But the person who needs it won't ask for it and certainly won't listen if it's given.

The turn to wisdom requires a wariness of your own insight, wisdom, and ability. It requires receiving instruction and listening to correction. But the foolish refuse to do that here in verses 24-25 and notice the result in verses 26-27. This sounds awful at first, but this is not a giddy sort of laughter. It's a shocking laughter at the insanity of continuing in foolishness and expecting different results.

Keep in mind the purpose of this language here. Lady Wisdom is trying to convince the simple young man to turn from his foolish ways and embrace her wisdom. This is her way of saying that you deserve to be mocked and laughed at if you continue in this foolish way of life and refuse to listen.

Did you all hear the story about the guy who put up a bunch of videos online presenting himself as an NFL player and then got women to "invest" in his schemes while promising amazing returns? It's a wild story. It's terrible that those women lost that money to him, but also the foolishness of believing him and sending him money has a certain amount of humor to it. The idea here is more of a "What were you thinking?!" Notice the results. Calamity. Terror. Whirlwind. Distress and anguish. All from an overconfidence in oneself that refuses to listen to correction and wisdom.

Now, up through verse 27 we've seen the pronoun "you" and "your" used as Lady wisdom speaks directly to the simple and foolish as they continue on their path. But now in verse 28 things switch, and the word "they" is used to describe the foolish and the results. Lady Wisdom has turned from calling out to the foolish and is now talking to us about the results.

How many of you have older siblings? Bethany is the third born in her family and she distinctly remembers watching her older siblings get in trouble and thinking,

“I’m not going to do that.” Verses 28-33 are us watching the results of foolishness in real life and learning from it in order to grow in wisdom.

3. Watchful for Real Life Results (vv. 28-33)

Look at verses 28-29. The root issue with the foolish is not just that they refuse instruction on practical matters. The real issue is that they ultimately reject the reality of God and His work in the world. They won’t fear Him and they won’t acknowledge Him. Remember Proverbs 1:7. The Fear of the Lord is the starting point for wisdom. Wisdom means seeing everything, including self, as it relates to God. The foolish continue on their self-centered path and refuse to acknowledge who God is. This is exactly how Paul describes all of us in Romans 3:9-18, 23. We need to understand our own sinfulness so that we listen to wisdom’s correction.

Look at verse 30.

Notice the word reproof again. Wisdom’s counsel isn’t just on day-to-day issues of life. Wisdom’s counsel ultimately deals with eternal truths and our life before God. And what happens if a person continues to reject that counsel? Look at verses 31-32.

We see the same principle at work that we saw last week. Foolishness ultimately comes back to bite you. Remember 1:18-19. But notice the word used in verse 32, complacency. Last week we saw the sinful crowd call out to the young man to join them and go along with them. That at least takes some get up and go and effort. But I think this word speaks to the dominant cultural feeling right now. It’s so easy to just sort of chill regarding the pursuit of wisdom. I don’t want to do anything extra or push too much. The desire here is a life of fun and rest without too much struggle. There’s no passion and no pursuit.

But the pathway to a life of rest is not found in complacency. Look at verse 33. The life of joy, rest, comfort, and satisfaction is found in wisdom. We’ve been talking all morning about wisdom’s reproof and rebuke of us in our foolishness and sin. We looked at Romans 3 and saw the same issue as Paul describes our commitment to sin. But wisdom’s rebuke isn’t all negative. Wisdom, as we see in verse 33, holds out the promise of rest and true life. But this only comes from

trusting in the remedy for our sin and complacency, Jesus Christ. Listen to what He say in Matthew 11:28-30.

So, Lady Wisdom is standing along the road shouting out to you, “How Long will you love being simple?” How long will you reject the fear of God? But she’s also saying, “Come to me, all you who are weary of your sin and heavy laden and I will give you true rest and security.” Let’s respond to this by making this a practice every day to turn from trust in self to trust in Christ. Let’s pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 10/4/26

- What's a moment in your life where you turned and went in the opposite direction and it later proved to be a really good choice?
- The sermon described repentance as a turning motion, away from one direction, toward another. What are we turning from, and what are we turning to? Is repentance a one-time event or ongoing?"
- The sermon described three kinds of fools in verse 22: the simple, the scoffer, and the overconfident. What's the progression? What hardens a person from simple naivety into active scoffing?
- The "fool" mentioned at the end of verse 22 is an overconfident individual. How do you recognize overconfidence in yourself? What does it tend to look like?
- Think of a time you received correction. How did you respond, and what made it easy or hard to receive?
- Is it appropriate for us to laugh at those who are suffering for their foolishness as wisdom does in verses 26-27? How can we avoid this turning into self-righteousness?
- Proverbs suggests we can learn from the failures of people around us. What's one lesson you've picked up that way, without having to learn it the hard way yourself?

- Where are you most tempted toward complacency: in your faith, your relationships, your work?