

Chasing Wisdom: Resist the Foolish Crowd

Proverbs 1:8-19

Most people understand the basic fact that human beings are social creatures and that we are heavily influenced by other people, especially when we are part of a crowd. Even at a basic level, being a part of a crowd causes you to lose individuality and become more anonymous. This can cause you to do or say things you wouldn't typically do or say. There's an entire area of study called Crowd Psychology where large groups are studied, and people's behavior and responses are analyzed in order to be better understood.

This area of study has been utilized by companies to make some serious money. Did you know that there is a company called Crowds on Demand with a website crowdsondemand.com. Here's what the top of the front page of their website says, "**Crowds on Demand** is your home for impactful advocacy campaigns, demonstrations, PR stunts, crowds for hire and corporate events. Services available nationwide."

Need a crowd to help push people politically in your direction? Hire one. Need a crowd for a PR stunt to sell a new product? Hire one and get people excited.

Even if you aren't in the habit of joining a large crowd physically at an event, you and I are shaped by other people. This is a major theme in Proverbs, and we'll see it through Proverbs 1-9. Wisdom is not something obtained through isolated effort. It's always mediated to us through others and so is foolishness. Who is influencing you? We talked about "authorized" guides to wisdom. Who are yours? It's not always foolish to follow the crowd, but it certainly can be and that's where the first lecture from a father to a son goes. So, make sure you are in Proverbs 1:8-19 and here's what we will see today as Solomon lays out his first wisdom lecture to his son and to us by extension. **3 Ways to Resist the Allure of the Foolish Crowd.**

1. **Regard Trusted Sources of Wisdom (vv. 8-9)**

The best news about wisdom in this book is that gaining it is not something that completely depends on you from start to finish. In many ways, it's simply a matter of trusting the right sources.

The idea of good sources and bad sources gets a little obscured today because of the internet, but it's still true and something important to consider. There are certain books, websites, journals, and people that are reliable sources of information and others that just aren't. The internet makes finding good sources more difficult because everything gets treated as a reliable source, but this isn't the case.

Wisdom requires you to identify the right sources and this is where Solomon starts. Look at verse 8. The commands are to hear or pay attention to the teaching and to not forsake the instruction. Don't leave it behind as if it doesn't matter. Who are the sources that Solomon wants? In this case, parents and this is the situation for most children. Start here. However, God has designed the church to function in this role for all of us. This means the teaching of the church but also the relationships. In fact, I would say that it's good to identify multiple sources of wisdom in your life. Who is this in your life?

Notice the result of listening to the right sources for wisdom. Verse 9. You might be thinking, I don't really want a garland on my head or a pendant for my neck. Fair enough. But a garland was given to a victor, and a pendant was a sign of honor and prestige. Listen to Proverbs 4:9. The point is that if you listen to wisdom from the right sources and grow wise, you will become an honored and attractive individual. People will be delighted to be around you, and your influence will spread and your success will increase. This is because this is how the world works. Remember, God's wisdom is not theoretical, it's functional. It goes with the grain of the universe.

So, this is a picture meant to motivate you to look for wisdom in the right places. But that's only half the pursuit of wisdom. You can't be shaped and formed by the wrong sources of wisdom.

2. Refuse to be Deceived (vv. 10-16)

Look at verse 10 as the father addresses the son again clearly. Don't be enticed by sinners. To be enticed is to be seduced, tricked or persuaded toward the crowd with the goal of you joining their sinful pursuits. Solomon understands that we are often not persuaded or seduced by strong reasoning and weighty arguments. Instead, we are enticed through our desires. There's a reason that Proverbs 4:23 says this. To grow in wisdom, we can't let our desires be shaped and formed in the wrong direction and then give in to follow our hearts toward foolishness.

So what direction is the crowd trying to take the son here? As you look at verses 11-14 you've got words placed in the mouth of the sinners by Solomon. These words aren't an actual speech by the sinners to entice the son, but they are placed in their mouth by Solomon to help his son learn what is behind their enticement of him. Let's read them.

Notice in the speech how often they ask the son to join them in their plans. They are trying to create a sense of community here and using his very natural desire to belong to get him to join them. It's a twisted sense of community aimed at personal gain at the expense of others. They lie in wait for blood; they ambush the innocent and swallow them alive. And notice the personal gain part of this in verses 13-14.

Now, it's clear that this little speech is filled with threats of violence and most of you in this room aren't going to be tempted anytime soon to go join a gang and start stealing cars. But lying in wait for blood may not mean sneaking around at night with a gang looking to rob someone. It may mean that over coffee with a friend you verbally shred that other mom who you both struggle with. Verse 19 gives us more insight. Unjust gain. Again, this may mean financial resources, but it may mean personal prestige and promotion. Ambushing the innocent could mean stabbing that co-worker in the back. Undercutting that boss or manipulating a fellow church member to get what you want. The thread that ties all of this together is that the sinners entice you to use people for selfish goals. They don't have any regard for others. And there's a certain thrill that comes from doing this with other people who have the same dark intentions.

Wisdom does not jump in with this crowd. Look at verse 15. Throughout wisdom literature, life is pictured as having two options and only two options. You can either walk down the path of wisdom or the path of foolishness. Listen to Proverbs 4:14 and Psalm 1:1.

Here we are warned not to start down this path with sinners. Do not even get on it with them. Why? Look at verse 16. You know where they are headed. They are making a beeline straight for evil. This is moral evil or sin and they are quick to go that direction.

The foolish crowd believes that they can use other people for personal gain, whether that's financial gain, popularity, prestige or position. They are quick to shed blood in this way, but they don't realize that their own paths of sin will return to them and cause destruction and difficulty for them. Their foolishness will come back to bite them.

And this is the main point that Solomon wants to get across to his son and it's what you and I need to understand. It's insane to follow along with the foolish crowd because it's a crowd unknowingly pursuing it's own demise. One author put it like this: *Not only is the way of sinners wrong; it is stupid.* – Bruce Waltke

Let's see the stupidity of it and let this recognition lead you to wisdom.

3. Recognize the Self-Destructiveness of the Foolish (vv. 17-19)

Verse 17 gives us a little proverb and it's a very vivid picture for us to ponder. Here's what's going on. If you were to get out a net and attempt to capture a bird in it by throwing the net into the air and over the bird, what do you think would happen? Well, the bird would instantly fly away. The net spreading here is speaking of the tossing of the net as a trap. It's not easy to catch a bird because they know enough to avoid traps that may ultimately result in their own destruction.

But even though that sort of knowledge is clear enough to your average bluejay, it's apparently too much for the foolish crowd. Look at verse 18. Remember the language we saw in verse 11? "Let us ambush the innocent without reason". But when they use other people for their own selfish gain, they actually end up setting

a trap for their own lives. They don't realize that their foolishness will result in their undoing, not in their power, prestige, and personal gain. Look at verse 19.

Sin is not neutral and is not benign. God has designed the world to work in certain ways, wisdom lives with those ways, sin and foolishness live against those ways and you cannot live against the grain without difficulty and harm.

The real human predicament, as Scripture reveals, is that inexplicably, irrationally, we all keep living our lives against what's good for us. In what can only be called the mystery of iniquity, human beings from nearly the beginning have so often chosen to live against God, against each other, and against God's world. We live even against ourselves. An addict, for example, partakes of a substance or practice that he knows might kill him. For a time he does so freely. He has a choice. He freely starts a "conversion unto death," and for reasons he can't fully explain, he doesn't stop until he crashes. He starts out with a choice. He ends up with a habit. And the habit slowly converts to a kind of slavery that can be broken only by God.

– Cornelius Plantinga

I'm going to mention one area I am particularly concerned about where I think you see this play itself out in our day. I hesitate to mention this because I don't want it to become the only focus of the message, but I am so concerned about it, I will risk it. I don't think there's a clearer example of following the foolish crowd in pursuit of unjust gain that ends up creating a habit and causes ruin than sports betting and other types of betting.

We watch sports in our house, and I think the only commercials they are allowed to have anymore are prescription drugs and sports betting. At this point I'm convinced that a same game parlay is a symptom that you might get from taking skyrizzy.

Seriously though, sports betting is something that entices with all the desires mentioned in this text and ultimately causes ruin for so many people. The promise of easy money catches the foolish because everyone is doing it. It seizes your heart and raises the excitement level of watching a game and hooks you and it

won't let you go until it cashes you out. Many of the people participating can't really afford to either.

Indulging the ways of the foolish in pursuit of gain will ultimately take your life away from you. You will be enslaved to your desires, and the desires of the foolish crowd. You will walk down a road to destruction that will steal the joy and delight from life over time.

But Jesus promises freedom from destruction and life abundantly through Him. Listen to John 10:10. This is why He came and it's why He died.

Abundant life requires that we trust the shepherd and the direction He leads. It requires that we pay attention to trusted sources of wisdom and not the foolish crowd. In Christ we have been rescued from sinful desires and the foolish crowd. We have new life because of Jesus, and we can now walk with the grain of the universe and with Him. Listen to Romans 6:12-14 and 20-23. The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Trust the one who died for you, not the foolishness of the crowd and let that trust lead you to wisdom in and through Him. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 9/27/26

- Have you ever been a part of a crowd that led you to respond differently than you would as an individual?
- The sermon mentioned that it's getting harder today to know which sources to rely on for information. Do you find this to be true in your experience? What do you do to identify worthwhile sources?
- The sermon said it's wise to identify multiple sources of wisdom in your life. Who are yours, and is there a gap you're aware of?
- The key idea in Proverbs 1:9 is that we should pursue wisdom because it makes us compelling and attractive to others. Think of a specific person in your life who strikes you as genuinely wise. What is it about them that makes wisdom visible? What draws you to them?
- Give an example of what it might look like to “lie in wait for blood” without actually intending to do any physical violence.
- Bruce Waltke writes that the way of sinners is not only wrong, it's stupid. Has that been true in your own life? Can you share a time when following the foolish crowd turned out to be stupid in hindsight?
- The sermon used sports betting as the clearest modern example of following the foolish crowd toward unjust gain and self-destruction. Do you agree or does that feel like too strong a take? And honestly: do you think placing a sports bet is sinful? What about on the Lions?

- The sermon ended with Romans 6, the idea that in Christ we've been freed from slavery to sin and the foolish crowd. Where in your life do you most need that freedom right now? Is there a crowd, literal or figurative, you need to walk away from?
- The Plantinga quote in the sermon describes how foolishness works: a choice becomes a habit, a habit becomes slavery. Where have you seen that progression in yourself or in someone close to you? What does it tell you about why Solomon is so urgent about not even getting on the path with the foolish crowd?