

## THE WAY OF THE PRODIGAL | THE WAY OF FOLLY

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### **The Way of the Prodigal...**

Few things bring sorrow and break hearts like dealing with wayward people—people who have determined they will pursue their sin, that they will reject their roles, forsake their promises, ignore their counselors. When dealing with such people we need to ask, what is the mindset, the worldview, the value system of a wayward man or woman? Dave Harvey and Paul Gilbert look deep into the wayward heart in their book *Letting Go*. They offer three answers for what the wayward wants and these answers tell why it is so difficult to reason with them, why it requires such grace for them to return from their sin.

***The wayward wants choices without consequence.*** *The wayward is the fool who is* so aptly and repeatedly described in the book of Proverbs—the fool who is convinced he can make bad choices without bad consequence. “Foolish people living in rebellion roll through life like they have a free pass, a ‘Get Out of Jail Free’ card that springs them from consequences. They are constantly dodging natural repercussions of poor decisions. They follow a risky path, expecting to be bailed out by someone, no matter what black hole they are being sucked into.” They want freedom, but a particular, ridiculous kind of freedom—the freedom to choose whatever they want but without the negative consequences that ought to accompany such a poor choice.

***The wayward wants autonomy without accountability.*** *Wayward people want* autonomy without the rule of love. They want to live in an irrational immaturity that allows them to indulge in sin without any responsibility. “For prodigals, maturity means indulging in freedoms, not accepting responsibility. The freedom they want is entirely on their terms. They expect money, liberty, rights, and privileges without standing accountable for what they do with these blessings. They want their dream without any reality crowding in.” Not surprisingly, this results in nothing short of devastation and disaster.

***The wayward wants leaving without loss.*** *Wayward people want to stray from* God-given roles and responsibilities or solemn promises while expecting that everything else in their lives will remain the same. They want to change toward other people even while other people remain unchanged toward them. “When prodigals perceive that they can wander without the threat of loss, their hunger for sin is fed. This may sound crazy, but in their world, it all makes complete sense. They will do whatever they must to get what they want. That’s the nature of our sin—it is irrational, out of touch with reality.” They want to leave but without the uncomfortable feeling of loss. Why is it important to know what the wayward wants? Because “to reach the prodigal, you must first crawl into the story of the prodigal.” It is an ugly story, but one God so often delights in ending with the prodigal returning to all that was once his. (Author – Unknown)

“Folly” addresses behavior. “Fool” addresses the person.

“**Folly** is a more dangerous enemy to the good than evil. One can protest against evil; it can be unmasked and if need be, prevented by force. Evil always carries the seeds of its own destruction as it makes people at the least uncomfortable. Against **folly** we have no defense. Neither protests

nor force can touch it; reasoning is no use; facts that contradict personal prejudices can simply be disbelieved – indeed, the **fool** can counter by criticizing them, and if they are undeniable, they can just be pushed aside as trivial exceptions. So the **fool**, as distinct from the scoundrel, is completely self-satisfied; in fact he can easily become dangerous, as it does not take much to make him aggressive. A **fool** must therefore be treated more cautiously than a scoundrel; we shall never again try to convince a **fool** by reason, for it is both useless and dangerous. If we are to deal adequately with **folly**, we must try to understand its nature. This much is certain it is a moral rather than an intellectual defect...The fact that a **fool** is often stubborn must not mislead us into thinking that he is independent. One feels in fact when talking to him, that one is dealing, not with the man himself, but with slogans, catchwords, and the like, which have taken hold of him. He is under a spell, he is blinded, his very nature is being misused and exploited. Having thus become a passive instrument, the **fool** will be capable of any evil and at the same time incapable of seeing that it is evil. Here lies the danger of a diabolical exploitation that can do irreparable damage to human beings. But at this point it is quite clear, too, that **folly** can be overcome, not by instruction, but only by an act of liberation... The Bible's Words that '*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*' (Psalm 111:10) tell us that a person's inward liberation to live a responsible life before God is the only real cure for **folly**."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (Nazi Prison in Berlin 1943-45)

**King Saul Plays the Fool:** "A man plays the fool when he neglects his godly friends, as Saul neglected Samuel. A man plays the fool when he goes on enterprises for God before God has sent him, as Saul did. A man plays the fool when he disobeys God even in seemingly small matters, as Saul first did; for such disobedience nearly always leads to worse default. A man plays the fool when he tries to cover up his disobedience to God by religious excuses, as Saul did. 'To obey is better than sacrifice.' A man plays the fool when he tries to persuade himself that he is doing the will of God, as Saul tried to persuade himself, when all the time, deep in his heart, he knows otherwise. A man plays the fool when he allows some jealousy or hatred to master and enslave and deprave him, as Saul did, toward David. A man plays the fool when he knowingly fights against God, as Saul did in hunting David, to save his own face. A man plays the fool when he turns from God, from the God he has grieved, and seeks an alternative in spiritism, in traffic with spirits in the beyond. The end of all these ways of sin and folly is moral and spiritual suicide. We can only finish such a downgrade course with the pathetic groan of Saul, '*I have played the fool.*' "

Chuck Swindoll

## 25 Characteristics of a Fool

Lou Priolo: *Getting A Grip - The Heart of Anger Handbook for Teens*

(1) despises wisdom and knowledge **1:7** (2) hates knowledge **1:22** (3) grieves his mother **10:1** (4) enjoys devising mischief **10:23** (5) right in his own eyes **12:15** (6) quick to anger **12:16** (7) hates to depart from evil **13:19** (8) is deceitful **14:8** (9) arrogant and careless **14:16** (10) rejects his father's instruction **15:5**  
 (11) despises his mother **15:20** (12) does not respond well to discipline **17:10** (13) does not understand wisdom **17:16** (14) has a worldly (carnal) focus (value system) **17:24** (15) grieves his father **17:25** (16) hurts his mother **17:25** (17) does not consider discussing any other viewpoint

but his own **18:2** (18) provokes others to strife and anger by what he says **18:6** (19) has a smart mouth that usually gets him into trouble **18:7** (20) is quarrelsome, contentious **20:3** (21) is a spendthrift **21:20** (22) he repeats his folly (foolishness) **26:11** (23) trusts in his own heart **28:26** (24) cannot resolve conflict **29:9** (25) gives full vent to his anger **29:11**

### 1. A fool in regards to Truth

- A. A fool hates truth. **Proverbs 1:7, 1:22, 18:2**
- B. A fool lies against the truth and spreads slander. **Proverbs 10:18**
- C. A fool abuses truth when he receives it. **Proverbs 15:2, 19:1b, 26:6-7**
- D. A fool has convinced himself he is right. **Proverbs 12:15**
- E. A fool has an appetite for error. **Proverbs 15:14**

### 2. A fool in regards to Sin

- A. It is fun. (A 'sport to do mischief' KJV - harm, damage) **Proverbs 10:23**
- B. It is a "sin" for a fool not to "sin". **Proverbs 13:19b**
- C. Fools laugh at their sin. **Proverbs 14:9a**
- D. A fool is confident in his sinful behavior. **Proverbs 14:16**
- E. A fool repeats sin, just as a dog returns to eat his own vomit. **Proverbs 26:11**

### What Does It Look Like to Have Godly Wisdom?

1. Wisdom creates a desire to listen and learn and to know more about God.  
**Proverbs 1:5** A wise *man* will hear, and will increase learning
2. Wisdom's companions are knowledge, discretion, and understanding.  
**Proverbs 2:10-11** When wisdom enters into your heart, And knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul;  
<sup>11</sup> Discretion (discernment) shall preserve thee, Understanding shall keep thee:
3. Wisdom recognizes and rejects the human source of wisdom.  
**Proverbs 3:7** Be not wise in your own eyes: Fear the LORD, and depart from evil.
4. Wisdom provides direction for doing life on this side of Heaven.  
**Proverbs 4:10-13** ...I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths.  
<sup>12</sup> When thou go, thy steps shall not be straitened; (hindered) And when thou run, thou shalt not stumble...
5. Wisdom reveals the deception and danger of sexual sins. **Proverbs 5-7**
6. Wisdom is the path to a fear of the Lord.  
**Proverbs 9:10** The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom
7. Wisdom in a child brings pleasure and joy to the parents.  
**Proverbs 10:1** A wise son makes a glad father: But a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.  
**Ephesians 6:1**

8. Wisdom reveals that sin is not harmless or victimless.

**Proverbs 10:23** *It is as sport to a fool to do mischief: But a man of understanding hath wisdom.*

9. Wisdom helps us see the value in taking heed to godly advice.

**Proverbs 12:15, 13:10** *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: But he that hearkens unto counsel is wise. <sup>10</sup> Only by pride cometh contention: But with the well advised is wisdom.*

**“Considerable weight** is to be given to the judgment (counsel) of men and women who live near to God, and in most instances their verdict will not be a mistaken one. Yet this appeal is neither final nor infallible, and is only to be estimated in proportion to the intelligence and piety of those consulted.” C.H. Spurgeon

10. Wisdom protects us in finding the right type of friends.

**Proverbs 13:20** *He that walks with wise men shall be wise: But a companion of fools shall be destroyed.*

11. Wisdom stresses the need to care for one’s soul.

**Proverbs 19:8** *He that gets wisdom loves his own soul: He that keeps understanding shall find good.*

12. Wisdom leads us to learn from the mistakes of others.

**Proverbs 21:11** *When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise: And when the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge.*

13. Wisdom detects the presence and danger of sin before it is obvious.

**Proverbs 22:3** *A prudent (wise) man foresee the evil, and hides himself: But the simple pass on, and are punished.*

14. Wisdom uncovers the wrong view of money.

**Proverbs 23:4-5** *Will you set your eyes upon that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; They fly away as an eagle toward heaven.*

*“No matter what a person may claim to know, if they do not understand the **truth of God**, they lack the most foundational of all knowledge.” John MacArthur*

#### **Four Facts Concerning Wisdom | Proverbs 1:20-33**

1. Wisdom is available.
2. Wisdom can be rejected.
3. Rejecting wisdom bears serious and bitter consequences.
4. Accepting wisdom brings blessings and benefits.

#### **Four Reasons Wisdom is Rejected** *(Outline adapted from Chuck Swindoll)*

1. Rebellion      **v24** *I (wisdom) have called, and ye (plural) refused*
2. Insensitivity   **v24b** *...I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded.*

- 3. **Indifference** v25 But ye have set at nought (ignored) all my counsel.
- 4. **Defensiveness** v25b And would none of my reproof (2Timothy 3:16)

**Reproof** means to convict or convince. It is God's loving criticism that points out our character flaws in order to bring us to confession and repentance. **Proverbs 28:13**

**Fear of the Lord** is an understanding that God sees and knows everything and one day we will give an account of ourselves to Him. This knowledge creates a reverence within the believer that motivates him to worship and serve God.

- **The need for Wisdom**
  - The temptation of something that appears better than God, is always with us.
  - The temptation to "go for sin's offer" is always stronger than the reality of the consequences.
  - If you "go for sin" it will not satisfy if you are a genuine believer.
- **Wisdom** is a gift, graciously imparted to those who seek it for the right reasons, from the right source, and in the right way. **Proverbs 2:1-8**
- **Wisdom** in the Hebrew language means "skilled". God wants us to have the proper life skills needed on this side of Heaven.
- **Wisdom** is to see life from God's perspective; it is to have an eternal worldview.

*James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*

Prayer: Dear gracious Father, I confess that I have often trusted by heart and my reasoning instead of trusting completely in you. Forgive me and place within my heart a desire to seek you for wisdom. Help me be disciplined in Bible Study and prayer always resting in and relying upon your immeasurable grace. Open my eyes that I may see far beyond what is perceived with just physical sight. I need your wisdom dear God and I ask for it with no merit of my own, but in the name and for the glory of Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior! Amen.