



FOUR APPROACHES TO WISDOM

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“Fearing the LORD is the beginning of moral knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:7)

God wants to turn us from victims into victors, from people who abdicate responsibility into men and women who pursue character, integrity, and trustworthiness and press into difficult situations. It’s this character that God is forming in us that will allow us to fulfill who we are intended to be. It’s this character that will provide influence and allow us to teach truth and love others in a world that does neither. It’s through our new heart, new nature, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and our cooperation with Him that our character will take shape.

In Proverbs, Solomon ties our character and our subsequent influence to this term *hokma*, wisdom. *Hokma* is the skillful execution of life. It’s the intellectual, emotional and spiritual capacity to walk through the challenges and adversity of life fearing the Lord over everything else.

Solomon describes the progression of life when you reject God’s *hokma* and the progression of life when you embrace and pursue it. He describes four main characters in Proverbs.

THE SIMPLE (*pethi*)

In Proverbs, there is a fork in the road and the starting point is this “simple” stage. The simple are empty vessels ready to be filled. They are easily influenced and manipulated and often their actions are directed by others. The simple have a difficult time discerning and problem solving and are often gullible because they haven’t lived much life. Solomon says in Proverbs 7:7, “And I saw among the simple, I perceived among the youths, a young man devoid of understanding.” Proverbs 14:15, “The simple believes every word, but the prudent considers well his steps.”

In so many ways, Proverbs is written to the “simple” and is a passionate plea for their understanding. Solomon says in the first chapter, “How long will you simple ones, love simplicity?” (vs. 22). There is a sense of urgency for the simple and because of the great cost and consequences of their decisions, they live vulnerable. Proverbs 1:32, “For the waywardness of the simpletons will kill them, and the careless ease of fools will destroy them.” In chapter 9, Solomon develops a contrast between Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly and each of them is calling out to the simple—“Come to me, let him turn in here” (9:4, 16). Until the simple make a decisive decision for wisdom, they suffer the fate of fools (1:22-33).

THE FOOL (*kesil, ewil, nabal*)

The Fool says, “Left to myself I can be successful on my own.” He or she chooses against God and His character, is hard-headed and hates knowledge. The fool is a simpleton who has not learned the way of wisdom, but has come to spurn it. Proverbs 12:15, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise.” Proverbs 14:3, “In the mouth of a fool is a rod of pride, but the lips of the wise will preserve them” Proverbs 14:16, “A wise man fears and departs from evil, But a fool rages and is self-confident.” Proverbs 28:26, “The one who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but the one who walks in wisdom will escape.”

Proverbs says that we are born with a predisposition towards folly. Proverbs 22:15, “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.” Foolishness is rooted in a deep-seated hostility toward God and those in authority. Proverbs 19:3, “A person’s folly subverts his way, and his heart rages against the Lord.” Proverbs 1:7, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Proverbs 14:9, “Fools mock at sin, but among the upright there is favor.” Proverbs 10:23, “To do evil is like sport to a fool, but a man of understanding has wisdom.” Proverbs 21:10, “The soul of the wicked desires evil.”

The fool loses his temper (14:17; 29:11) and quarrels (20:3). The fool is deeply entrenched in his sin and won’t change (15:5; 17:10, 12; 23:9; 26:11; 27:22). When confronted, the fool will react rather than repent. Confronting a fool

is therefore useless and sometimes painful (29:9). The fool is wasteful and self-indulgent (21:20). The fool is unprofitable to others (10:1; 12:1, 7; 14:1, 7; 17:21, 25; 19:13; 26:6, 10).

The life of a fool will come to ruin. Proverbs 10:8, "The wise person accepts instructions, but the one who speaks foolishness will come to ruin." Proverbs 3:35, "The wise shall inherit glory, But shame shall be the legacy of fools." Proverbs 10:1, "A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother." Proverbs 13:20, "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed."

THE SCOFFER (*lesim*)

The villain of the Proverbs is what Solomon calls the "scoffer" or "mocker." Scoffers have been hardened by sin and their foolishness. Not only do they not learn from their mistakes, but they defend their mistakes and are committed to their lifestyle. They are arrogant and oppose God and wisdom to an even greater degree than the fool. The best practice with scoffers is to keep them away from you. Proverbs 22:10, "Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave; yes, strife and reproach will cease." Proverbs 19:29, "Judgments are prepared for scoffers, and beatings for the backs of fools."

Solomon says in 21:24, "A proud and arrogant person, whose name is 'Scoffer,' acts with overbearing pride." Proverbs 9:7-8, "He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes a wicked man only harms himself. Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you." Proverbs 24:9, "The devising of foolishness is sin, and the scoffer is an abomination to men." Proverbs 29:8, "Scoffers set a city aflame, but wise men turn away wrath." Proverbs 17:21, "He who begets a scoffer does so to his sorrow, and the father of a fool has no joy."

THE WISE (*hokma*)

Wisdom isn't something you purchase: it's not something that comes from your gene pool or the color of your skin. Rich people don't have greater access to it and it doesn't come from a bachelor or master's degree. Wisdom starts and finishes with one thing. In the thesis statement of Proverbs, Solomon says, "Fearing the LORD is the beginning of moral knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction." (1:7) Happiness, peace and wholeness come to those who fear the Lord (repeated 45 times). When we humbly trust the character and plan of our Creator, men and women, boys and girls are able to flourish. A wise person begins with the recognition that there is a God who made the universe and made us, and His truth and His love are absolute. Rest and peace are only found in Him.

The characteristic that goes hand in hand with the fear of the Lord is humility. "The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom, before honor comes humility" (15:33). "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom" (11:2). The fear of the Lord and humility are soil in which all character and virtue grow.



Proverbs is a passionate plea from the wisest man ever to pursue *hokma*. It's terrifying to face life outside of God and His loving and absolute commands. The lives of the simple, fool and scoffer prove there is great risk if we do not pursue wisdom.

Where do you feel at risk? What area of your/your family's lives do you feel you have abdicated and allowed foolishness to creep in?

Wise men and women abandon the outcomes of their lives to the faithful Creator who is to be revered over everything else.