

Wisdom's Feast

Bible Background • PROVERBS 9

Printed Text • PROVERBS 9:1–6, 8–10, 13–18 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 119:97–104

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: COMPARE and contrast the call and promise of wisdom with that of folly, DESIRE to walk the path of wisdom and receive its benefits, avoiding the peril of foolishness, and GROW in the fear and knowledge of the Lord as the first step in walking the way of wisdom.

In Focus

James' wife died from complications of Parkinson's disease. He was feeling lonely and having a hard time adjusting to living alone, and his son Greg started to worry about him. Greg asked his daughter Carol if she would stay with her Grandpa for a few weeks in the summer, since she would be between semesters. Carol would often find James dabbing his eyes, then pretending it was just allergies. "Grandpa, it will take time to recover from Grandma's death. I'm glad I'm here." "Oh, you're sweet. I hope you'll get to go enjoy yourself some this summer too, instead of just hanging around with a sad old man," James said. "Now, tell me about this move I heard about from your father." "OK! I met my new boyfriend Quinton online. He lives in LA and has come to visit me three times. He wants me to come live with him after I finish college. Grandpa, I think he might be the one!" Carol said, getting more and more excited. "Carol, I love you. That's why I want you to listen to me. I do not think this is a wise decision. You do not know him. He could be trying to take advantage of you. Please, don't give your heart away just yet. Pray and ask God for wisdom about your relationship with this man."

Why should we take into consideration the godly counsel of older adults?

Keep in Mind

"Leave your simple ways behind, and begin to live; learn to use good judgment" (Proverbs 9:6, NLT).

Words You Should Know

A. Foolish (v. 13) kesilot (Heb.)—Silly, stupid, pursuing folly.

B. Simple (v. 16) peti (Heb.)—Those who lack judgment, maturity, and experience; foolish.

Say It Correctly

Sheol. SHEE-ol.

KJV

Proverbs 9:1 Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars:
2 She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table.
3 She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city,
4 Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him,
5 Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.
6 Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding.
8 Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.
9 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.
10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.
13 A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and knoweth nothing.
14 For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city,
15 To call passengers who go right on their ways:
16 Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him,
17 Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.
18 But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell.

NLT

Proverbs 9:1 Wisdom has built her house; she has carved its seven columns.
2 She has prepared a great banquet, mixed the wines, and set the table.
3 She has sent her servants to invite everyone to come. She calls out from the heights overlooking the city.
4 “Come in with me,” she urges the simple. To those who lack good judgment, she says,
5 “Come, eat my food, and drink the wine I have mixed.
6 Leave your simple ways behind, and begin to live; learn to use good judgment.”
8 So don’t bother correcting mockers; they will only hate you. But correct the wise, and they will love you.
9 Instruct the wise, and they will be even wiser. Teach the righteous, and they will learn even more.
10 Fear of the LORD is the foundation of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy One results in good judgment.
13 The woman named Folly is brash. She is ignorant and doesn’t know it.
14 She sits in her doorway on the heights overlooking the city.
15 She calls out to men going by who are minding their own business.
16 “Come in with me,” she urges the simple. To those who lack good judgment, she says,
17 “Stolen water is refreshing; food eaten in secret tastes the best!”
18 But little do they know that the dead are there. Her guests are in the depths of the grave.

The People, Places, and Times

Lady Folly. In opposition to Lady Wisdom, Lady Folly also calls for followers throughout the city, but she is heavily associated with adultery, her loudness, and her offerings of stolen water and bread. Lady Folly promises all manner of earthly pleasures, but these are all fleeting. Associating with her leads to death, just as surely as associating with Lady Wisdom brings life.

Background

The book of Proverbs reveals two major themes: wisdom and folly. Wisdom is knowledge, understanding, discretion, obedience, and instruction based on God’s Word and reverence of God. Folly is everything that contradicts wisdom. The Old Testament provides God’s truth through the Law, which was given by the priest; the wise men or sages gave the Word, which was given by God and wise counsel. Solomon is the sage that provided insight on the perplexities of life (Proverbs 1:1, 6).

This lesson’s focus on chapter 9 concludes the entire collection of instructions and admonitions contained in Proverbs 1–9. Here, the writer makes explicit something only hinted at before: Lady Wisdom has an evil

opponent in Lady Folly, and brings the two of them to a side-by-side showdown. Both women host lavish banquets, but the outcomes for the invitees are different. This portrait of the two women, each eager to attract her guests, reaffirms the benefits and gains to be won from paying attention to wisdom's teaching. Together, they show the vital importance of the choices that have to be made and the ultimate consequences that they carry.

Wisdom leads to life and prosperity. Why do you think her way is usually unpopular?

At-A-Glance

1. Wisdom's Invitation to the Banquet (Proverbs 9:1–6)
2. The Fear of the Lord Is the Beginning of Wisdom (vv. 8–10)
3. Folly's Invitation to the Banquet
(vv. 13–18)

In Depth

1. Wisdom's Invitation to the Banquet (Proverbs 9:1–6)

Wisdom and foolishness are personified as rival young women who give out invitations for banquets at their houses. Lady Wisdom builds a house. It is supported by the seven stone pillars. The number seven in the Bible often represents completeness and perfection. Wisdom's house is also elegant and spacious.

Wisdom has prepared a feast with “slaughtered animals and mixed wine” as well as set her table for the guests (v. 2). The wine was mixed with water to decrease the likelihood of drunkenness (and to make the wine last longer). After this, she sends out her maidens to bid “the simple” to come to the banquet. “The simple” refers to those who lack judgment, maturity, and experience. They are subject to seduction by the foolish woman. When we do not know right from wrong, we can be easily fooled. So it is important to accept the invitation of wisdom to come to the feast she prepares which leads to maturity, insight, and life (vv.5–6). Wisdom has done her work, and now she cries out from the place in the city; it is the people's response that makes the party possible. She is calling out for the simple who lack understanding. She is looking for those who are hungry for wisdom (those who know their hunger and are humble enough to seek wisdom). She is calling out for them so she can feed them. Her food and wine will give them wisdom. It is for their good that she invites them—but again, this invitation benefits those who know their need and are willing to do whatever it takes to meet it.

How will you stay hungry for wisdom and humbly seek it out even when you look successful?

2. The Fear of the Lord Is the Beginning of Wisdom (vv. 8–10)

Wisdom reflects on the behavior of a scoffer versus the wise. A scoffer is very arrogant and self-centered. They do not like for anyone to criticize them, so they only respond with hate towards others (v. 8). However, a wise person will appreciate the reprimand given and love the giver. The wise enjoy instruction because they want to become wiser and learn more (v. 9).

Of course, wisdom begins with “fear of the Lord” and “knowledge of the Holy One is insight.” This is where life begins—the fear of the Lord. Back then and even today, wisdom begins when we choose to live our lives with an awareness that God sees how we treat one another and the earth that He gave us to steward. Wisdom happens when we realize that the way we deal with life, in general, reveals whether we revere God or not. And, of course, reverence is worship that enables us to hear wise sayings of the spirit. Submission to God is the first step toward a wise life.

How do you react toward someone who gets angry after you try to give them constructive criticism?

3. Folly's Invitation to the Banquet (vv.13-18)

The foolish woman's invitation to her banquet is in direct contrast to the wise woman's invitation. The woman's "loudness" is symbolic of an adulterous person (cf. Proverbs 7:11). She lacks good judgment and is ignorant. The foolish woman does not even try to hide what her intentions are. She "sits right at the door of her house" to call people in who are passing by.

She intends to grab the attention of those who are gullible and convince them to come to her banquet. Lady Folly does not even work. Instead, she steals whatever she gives to her guests. In contrast to the wise woman's feast, the foolish woman offers "stolen water" and "bread eaten in secret." These are references to illicit sex (see Proverbs 5:15). She claims that "stolen water is sweet" and that "bread eaten in secret is pleasant," and entices young men to her secret rendezvous. However, after momentary joys, she lets them realize that there is no life where they are. The people who come to her banquet do not realize enjoying her feast will lead to them to the place of the dead (v.18).

It is very important to stop and think about the consequences of sin before yielding to temptation. We often make our decisions based on what looks great to us today, even though it may lead us to destruction. That is what folly does: it wants to deceive us to do what feels good today at the expense of what will be helpful in the future.

How do you think you would recognize if folly tried to entice you into doing something that may lead you down the path to destruction?

Search the Scriptures

1. What does the wise woman offer to those who come to partake of the feast (Proverbs 9:6)?
2. Compare and contrast the reaction of the scoffer and the wise when rebuked (v. 8).
3. What happens to the people who enjoy the feast offered by the foolish woman (v. 18)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Explore what the fear of the Lord means. What does it look like in our day-to-day life to live in the fear of the Lord? How does one grow in the fear and knowledge of God to gain more wisdom?
2. The wise woman's banquet seems similar to the banquet Jesus described in a parable. Read Luke 14:15–24 and then compare it to the wise woman's banquet. What similarities and differences can you identify?

Liberating Lesson

In today's society, it seems as though there are more foolish people than wise. Just listen to the news, and we can identify people who are not making good choices. Moreover, they frequently commit hateful acts toward others. Why do people behave this way?

The fear and knowledge of the Lord guide us down the path of wise living. We must seek after godly wisdom that will bring life-giving results. As we grow in wisdom, share with others what you have learned. We lose much as a society by not passing down the wisdom we have learned and by not taking the time to value our elders enough to listen to their wisdom. If you are tempted and make the wrong choice, repent and learn from it. But do not go back to living foolishly because that life will only lead to destruction. Wisdom is calling; will you answer?

Application for Activation

Whether you have the wisdom to share with others or are in need of wisdom yourself, a meal is a perfect setting to engage others in the wise discussion. Prepare a special meal and invite those whose wisdom you desire or those who you think need to hear your words.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Proverbs 9:1–6, 8–10, 13–18

Proverbs 9 is a fitting conclusion to the introductory section of the book (Proverbs 1–8) where wisdom has taken the center stage. There are several lessons in the passage. First, it makes clear that wisdom and folly continually vie for human allegiance. Second, the ultimate choice lies with us and which call we answer, to whose invitation we respond, and with whom we choose to eat. Third, scoffers can be so hardened in their ways and choice that they do harm to teachers who challenge them (cf. 2 Timothy 4:3–4). Fourth, the wise are so open to wisdom’s message that even her rebuke will spark their affection (cf. Psalm 141:5). Fifth, behind wisdom’s invitation is God. To say yes to wisdom is to respond in reverent obedience to God. Last, to heed the call of folly is to forsake the land of the living and join the company of the dead.

1 Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: 2 She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. 3 She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city.

Wisdom is a woman of generous hospitality who invites all to a lavish banquet that she hosts. The house described here is one Wisdom herself has built. It represents an image of luxury and is a complete, ideal, or perfect building— understood from the use of seven as a perfect, complete number. It is certainly large enough to entertain everyone. In verses 1–2 Wisdom is pictured as an industrious, active woman (vv. 1–2), in contrast to the foolish woman (vv. 13–14). Wisdom has built a comfortable and permanent place for herself to live, in contrast to Folly’s house, which is associated with the dead and Sheol in verse 18.

Wisdom sends forth her maidens (servants) to call people to the feast. In keeping with the dignity ascribed to her, Wisdom has “maidservants” to convey her invitations. Thus, she is a woman of wealth and influence. As in 8:2 (cf. 1:21) the summons is issued from on high, presumably at the city gates (cf. 8:3), so as to reach the invited. It is important to note that no qualifications are required for the invitees. They do not have to attain a certain level of knowledge to attend the banquet.who listen to Wisdom, to live in her house or to partake of her food and wine are different ways of envisioning a lifetime of learning.

There is a deliberate use of the imperative in this verse, which is echoed in the less coercive but subtle invitation issued in practically the same words by Lady Folly in verse 16 and Proverbs 4:17. The bread and wine are the counterparts to the stolen water and bread of verse 17.

8 Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. 9 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. 10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

These verses enjoin us to choose our pupils wisely. Later, Jesus would teach in His Sermon on the Mount that we must not give “that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you” (Matthew 7:6). Rebuking scoffers is a waste of time and energy; they will only hate you and your advice. The scoffer is proud and hardened beyond reproof. They mock Wisdom. A fool hears reproof and only hardens in exasperation. If one is to teach, it is better to teach the wise who will love the truth and wisdom you give them. Thus, one should not waste time and energy with scoffers or the wicked, but rather, with the wise and the righteous. The wise person is characterized by a willingness to endure rebuke. One who seeks wisdom is very receptive to any kind of instruction. Whenever such a person is rebuked, the response is very different from a scoffer’s. That student loves rather than hates the teacher. A person who wants to be wise and is aware of the benefits of instruction is very open to any kind of guidance that increases learning.

A person’s character is revealed by his or her response to correction and teaching. Scoffers will despise rebuke while wise people will welcome correction. The reader is, thus, invited into the story, not as one who teaches wisdom, but as one who could potentially be taught. Would the reader be a scoffer or a wise student? It is impossible to teach wisdom to the unreceptive, and therefore, wise students are warned against indifference and inattention.

Fear—or reverential awe as it implies in this verse—is the proper human response to Yahweh, the Holy One. “Fear” (Heb. *yir’ah*, year-RAW) is to realize you are under another’s power. If you have a positive relationship with that authority figure, recognition of power becomes awe; if not, it becomes terror. Rather than a slavish tormenting fear that causes a person to cower and hide, the fear of God inspires one to grow in wisdom and reach out to others. The fear of God overcomes the twin evils of pride and cynicism, core traits of a foolish person. This is because God, rather than the self, is at the focus of a person’s identity. Devotion to God lifts a person’s life above the mundane, unsettled character of all things earthly. Yahweh is identified as the Holy One. Holiness is God’s very essence. In other words, holiness is Yahweh’s defining quality. All others described as holy have that quality solely because they are either in God’s presence or are dedicated to God. No person or object ever becomes intrinsically holy. God’s holy presence in a person’s life empowers a person to live righteously.

13 A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and knoweth nothing.

Here, we get to learn more about the other woman, Lady Folly. She calls the vulnerable to her own feast of stolen water and hidden bread, but her feast precedes the fool’s descent into the place of the dead (v. 18). Folly is probably copying the acts of Wisdom (as Wisdom warns

With shameless boldness, she cries to all that pass by; she addresses her solicitations to people who are going straight on their way, thinking nothing of her, having no idea of deviating from their pursued object. As they walk in the path of right and duty, she tries to turn them aside.

16 Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, 17 Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.

The foolish woman, the personification of folly, uses the very same words that Wisdom utters (v. 4). Wisdom addressed the simple because they were inexperienced and undecided, and might be guided rightly; Folly now speaks to them because they have not yet made their final choice, can still be swayed by lower considerations, and may be led astray. Such people find it hard to distinguish between the good and the evil, the false and the true, especially when their sensual appetite is aroused and sides with the temptress. Such fools are easily deceived. This is the other class addressed by wisdom, and which Folly now solicits, urging them to follow her on the path of pleasure, promising sensual enjoyment and security. She brags about sin, for it is because a relationship with her is secretive that makes it so appealing.

Unstable and senseless, she furnishes her guests with stolen bread and water—to their detriment. Stolen water, she suggests, is sweeter than “drinking from your own well” (cf. 5:15). The metaphor of “stolen waters” refers primarily to adulterous intercourse, as to “drink waters out of one’s own cistern” (Proverbs 5:15) signifies the chaste connection of lawful wedlock. Wisdom offers meat and wine to her guests; Folly offers bread and water. Wisdom invites openly to a well-furnished table; Folly calls to a secret meal of simple food. What the former offers are rich, satisfying, and comforting; what folly gives is poor, mean, and insipid. Yet this latter has the charm of being forbidden; it is attractive because it is unlawful. Things easily attained, the possession of which is gotten without effort or danger or breach of restraint, soon cease to charm. To some minds, the cleverness and secrecy required for success have an irresistible attraction.

Young men enter into Folly’s house not knowing that the dead are there; there are none in the house that can be considered to be living. Wisdom’s banquet leads to life, while Folly’s banquet leads to death. The wise hear what the spirit is saying.

18 But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell.

The deluded youth is persuaded by the seductions of Folly and enters her house. The writer, then, in a few weighty words, shows the terrible result of this evil compliance. Once entangled in the toils of the tempter or temptress, the victim may pass through many stages, but he or she ends finally in the lowest depth—the destruction of body and soul. The terrible warning may be profitably repeated more than once.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Law Provides the Edge
(Psalm 119:97–104)

TUESDAY

Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids
(Matthew 25:1–13)

WEDNESDAY

Church Proclaims the Wisdom of God
(Ephesians 3:7–13)

THURSDAY

No Wise Person Among You?
(1 Corinthians 6:1–6)

FRIDAY

Wise and Foolish Builders
(Matthew 7:24–27)

SATURDAY

Benefits of Making the Wise Choice
(Psalm 1)

SUNDAY

Wisdom Delivers Many Benefits
(Proverbs 9:1–6, 8–10, 13–18)