

CORRECTING YOUR COURSE

A first-grade teacher collected old, well known proverbs. She gave each kid in her class the first half of a proverb and they had them come up with the rest. Here are a few of their responses;

Better to be safe than... punch a 5th grader.
Strike while the... bug is close.
It's always darkest before... Daylight Savings Time.
Don't bite the hand that... looks dirty.
You can't teach an old dog new... math.
The pen is mightier than the... pigs.
Where there is smoke, there is... pollution.
A penny saved is... not much.
Children should be seen and not... spanked and grounded.

Today we are continuing in our series on Proverbs called The Path. Last week we talked about the fact that your direction determines your destination. Your direction, not your intention or your hopes or your dreams. Your direction determines your destination. This is the hinge on which everything we are going to learn today swings.

This principle isn't rocket science. It just makes sense. We all know this when it comes to geography, but for some reason, when it comes to other areas of life like relationships or finances or morality or exercise we often walk one way and hope to wind up somewhere in the other direction.

Last week we talked about the fact that the beginning of the book of Proverbs lays out what the purpose of the book is. What is the book of Proverbs all about?

Proverbs 1:3-5 for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair; 4 for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young 5 let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance

If you like to underline things in your bible underline the word PRUDENT. The word in Hebrew means to get discretion or wisdom. In English the word prudent means "to know what to do, to exercise good judgment or to have common sense."

Someone once said "A proverb is a short sentence based on long experience. Proverbs are proven truths. They receive their value from the stamp and esteem of the ages through which they have passed." This is the meaning of prudence. It is common sense based on experience.

We do not use the word prudent very much anymore, but the book of Proverbs uses it a lot. In fact, Solomon often compares and contrasts prudent people with a second kind of people, simple people. A simple person is someone who is not prudent, someone who does not use good judgement.

Proverbs 27:12 The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.

So how do you become a wise person? What does it mean to be prudent? We see in this one verse three important truths about wisdom;

1. Wisdom Requires Attention (see danger)

Anyone here remember when they were learning to swim? When my kids were learning to swim they would put their heads in the water and just start kicking. They would occasionally come up for a quick breath, but mostly their head was down. Because of that they would go off course and eventually bump into the side of the pool. Watching where you are going is important.

This passage that we read this morning is only one of the times Solomon compares prudent people with simple people. In the book of Proverbs there are many others;

Proverbs 14:15 A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps.

Simple people get fooled easily because they have no discernment. It is easy to talk them into anything because they lack judgement. Prudent people use their brains. They understand the difference between truth and error.

Proverbs 12:16 A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.

Simple people let their emotions get the best of them because they lack self control. They get mad and go into a rage. Prudent people know how to control themselves and take things in stride.

Proverbs 19:25 Flog a mocker, and the simple will learn prudence; rebuke a discerning man, and he will gain knowledge.

Simple people do not learn a lesson by verbal instruction. They do not learn from the mistakes of others. Simple people have to get burned before they know not to touch the fire. They have to be beaten to learn a lesson. Prudent people learn through the mistakes of others.

The passage that we read this morning says;

Proverbs 27:12 The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.

What do prudent people do? They see when danger is approaching. They are able to distinguish what is right and what is wrong. They see the consequences of actions before it happens. Wisdom requires attention. It requires being aware of what is happening around you. It means you have to know the difference between what is harmless and what is dangerous. You have to see what is coming.

When I was a kid I went fishing in a pond in Florida. The sun was going down and I was sitting there on the bank. I saw a stick sitting beside me so I grabbed it to throw it into the water. It was not a stick, it was a deadly coral snake. I had no idea it was there. All I saw was a harmless stick.

This describes what happens so often in life. We do not see the danger around us because we have lost biblical truth. We look at something that God calls dangerous as something the world calls harmless. Last week I spoke about sex outside of marriage. I know that there were people who heard that message and thought "what is the big deal?" There is a reason God says not to do it. He created us in a way that sex is supposed to only be expressed in the context of a loving marriage between a man and a woman. When we take something that God has called wrong and disregard the warning, we are not prudent, we are simple. We ignore the danger.

I have told the story before of my first summer missions trip to Bolivia.

I was in the city of Cochabamba and one day I walked to the main city square to enjoy some ice cream. I was sitting there on a park bench when a parade approached. I thought to myself how lucky I was to have picked that day to sit there and sat back to enjoy the parade. They had banners and as they got close I could read them. It said ‘Matar los Gringos.’ I knew what the word Gringo meant – a foreigner. Just then a man from the Bible Society shop that was across the street ran over to me and said “You have to leave now or you are going to die.” Matar means KILL. Kill the Gringos. This was not a parade, it was a demonstration against America burning the cocaine fields. My life was in danger, but all I saw was a parade.

Prudence means choosing the right path. Part of choosing the right path is getting off the wrong path. Saying, “This behavior, this habit, this relationship, this... you name it, is leading me somewhere that is going to hurt me or draw me away from Christ, so I’m going to get off of this path and get on a better one.”

Wisdom is seeing the danger. It requires attention.

2. Wisdom Requires Action (take refuge)

The primary difference between the prudent and the simple is not only what they see but how they respond to what they see. The prudent not only see the danger, they take refuge. The simple see danger and just keep right on going. Both of them see danger. One responds by changing course, the other keeps going and hopes that the danger will never arrive. It’s like the ostrich who buries his head in the sand: “If I can’t see it, it can’t see me. If I ignore what I know is out there, it can’t hurt me.”

Matthew 7:24-27 Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

Prudent people see danger and plan for it. They adjust their behavior based on it. A person that builds a house when it is sunny out does not build believing that it will always be sunny. You plan for the storms. You know that the rains will eventually come so you build accordingly. A wise man knows that sand is a bad foundation for building on if floods are likely. Building on rock is much harder to do in the short term. It requires much more effort, but is better in the long term.

When a prudent person senses that a relationship is moving in an unhealthy direction, they do something. The simple keep going. When a prudent person sees trouble on their financial horizon, they do something. The simple keep spending. When a prudent person realizes that God is the most important person in the universe, and their relationship with Him isn’t growing, they do something about it. The simple keep doing whatever they were doing that took their time away from God.

There is an old urban legend that back in the 70s a man purchased a brand new 32-foot Winnebago motor home. On his first trip home, having driven onto the freeway, he set the cruise control at 70 mph and calmly left the drivers seat to go into the back and make himself a cup of coffee. Not surprisingly, the RV left the freeway, crashed and overturned. While this did not actually happen, so many people today live like this. They live their lives on cruise control thinking that they do not need to plan for the road ahead, that somehow things will just magically sort themselves out.

Wisdom requires attention and action.

3. Wisdom Results in Avoidance (suffer for it)

The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and *suffer for it*. For refusing to act on what they see. They pay the penalty because they see no connection between the choices of today and the consequences of tomorrow. They overlook the fact that every path has a destination.

The prudent see danger, take refuge and AVOID it. They do not suffer the consequences of bad choices. The simple keep going and suffer the consequences of their actions.

Did you ever hear the story of The Three Little Pigs? One builds his house out of straw; one builds his house out of sticks. When the big bad wolf comes along, he huffs, and he puffs, and he blows their houses down. Solomon would call those two “simple pigs.” The third little pig was a prudent pig. He built a house out of bricks. Why? Because he saw danger coming and built a refuge!

We all know that life is going to bring us challenges. Only foolish people do not prepare for the challenges that they know will eventually come. Prudent people plan for it.

If you’re married, at some point your relationship will be tested. Prudent people know that, so they don’t take their marriages for granted. They work on them in the good times so they have a foundation and strength to weather the bad times. Prudent people understand that what it means at the beginning of the book of Proverbs when it says;

Pro 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge...

They know that following God and obeying His commands ultimately makes us the very best version of our self, so they invest in getting to know God and spending time with Him and reading His word.

You may not be able to monitor every aspect of my life, but the top five areas to monitor are:

1. Spiritual
2. Moral
3. Relational
4. Physical
5. Financial

I think they are in that order of importance. The most important thing is our relationship with God. It is the one thing that not only affects what we do in this life but it determines where we will go to in the next. Along with that is our morality. You cannot have peace with others until you first find peace with God and then with yourself. Next is relationships. Nobody gets to their deathbed wishing they had more money. They might wish they had a better body so they could live longer but everyone on their deathbed wishes they had more time with family and friends, and EVERYONE on their deathbed wants to be right with God and know they have lived a good life.

Imagine if all of us in this room loved God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, like the Bible says God wants us to? Imagine a world in which people were becoming more and more like Jesus in their character. Imagine a place where our love for Jesus spilled over into how we treated one another and how we saw one another.

I once heard someone say, “My goal in life is to become the man my dog thinks I am.”

Why waste another minute of life on a path that leads somewhere you don’t want to go. I challenge you this week, as I have personally done in the last few weeks, to reflect and redirect. To make some course corrections. It is our direction, not our intentions that will determine our destination.

The problem for most people is that, to change course in life you almost always have to give up something. Changing direction almost always requires sacrifice, which is why we don’t do it. It is ironic that often when prudent people act, they often look foolish. They do things that others aren’t doing so they look different. They stand out. They go against the flow. They act as if then is now and change course before they ever hit the wall.

Years ago there was a cross-country championship race held in Riverside, California. 123 of the 128 runners missed a turn. Mike Delcavo was the 1st runner who stayed on the 10,000 meter course. He began waving for fellow runners to follow him, but only 4 other runners came with him. After an interviewer asked him how the other runners responded when he stopped following the crowd. Delcavo responded, "They thought it was funny when I went the right way."

The prudent see danger and take refuge. They get off the wrong path and get on the right path. They make course corrections. They don’t just think about it or worry about it—they do it. Because they do it, their lives are different.

At Delphi, in ancient Greece, there was a temple dedicated to Apollo. Carved over the entrance to this temple were two great principles of life: “Know thyself” and “Nothing in excess.” Let me close today by asking you the first of these principles. How well do you know yourself? What the Greeks learned by experience, the Bible teaches by revelation: An individual cannot successfully deal with life and its problems if he does not first understand himself.

Where are you at with your relationship with Jesus today. Would Solomon refer to you as a prudent or a simple person? Do you understand truth? Do you see danger and then avoid it and in so doing find your life blessed?

A few years ago, Decision magazine told the story of a Winnipeg couple named Rick and Shawna Pilat. Shawna got up one Sunday morning in January of 2000 and realized that her husband Rick had not yet come home from his all-night partying. As she angrily washed dishes in the kitchen, she noticed a man speaking on the television. She was quickly drawn to his message. She said “I felt something come over me that I can’t explain.” She started crying. At the end of the program it said, ‘Join us today’ and it gave the name of a church in Winnipeg. She got dressed and headed out the door. On the way to the church she had one purpose in mind. She wanted to get emotionally strong enough to kick Rick out. She had tried using drugs and alcohol and ruining her life to get Rick to leave her, but now she thought she had found the answer. God had other plans. At the end of the service she gave her life to Jesus, and He changed her. Just three weeks later, her husband Rick saw such a change in her life that he asked if he could come to church with her. After a few weeks he also came to Christ.

The following months were not easy, but soon both of them were different. After one service Rick told Shawna “I can be the husband you need me to be now.” They became active in their church, and now they share the hope of God’s restoration and forgiveness with struggling couples as volunteers. The article end with Rick saying, “When I think how Jesus can change people – no matter how deep in sin they are – that overwhelms me. If he did it for us, he can do it for anybody.”