

## **Choosing Wisdom**

### *Proverbs 9*

I have a new hobby: making fermented foods (I had lots of time on my hands this summer) - yogurt (fermented milk), sauerkraut (fermented cabbage), kombucha (fermented sweet tea), and most recently sourdough bread (fermented awesomeness). I can't remember why I started making yogurt, but my brother Jeffy got me interested in the other three. Let me tell you about kombucha. . . My three brothers and I do a Zoom every Monday evening with our mom. One night Jeffy, who lived in Vietnam at the time, was drinking a glass of peach kombucha. I had barely even heard of kombucha, so I started asking him questions. Eventually I got interested in making kombucha myself. Jeff agreed to teach me how to make it.

He sent me an online course, Kombucha U. I watched about 40 short videos (some of them several times), got some gear, and started making kombucha. In the process Jeff and I messaged back and forth dozens and dozens of times. To make a long story short, I went from zero to 90 in about two months. I now know about stuff I didn't even know existed, like a SCOBY (symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast). And I know about first fermentation, second fermentation, carbonation, flavors, SCOBY hotel, etc.

I'm not bragging; I'm just saying that metaphorically speaking old dogs **can** learn new tricks. Human beings can learn things. You can probably think of something you've learned or even "mastered" related to your career or a hobby.

Generally speaking, whether or not you really learn something is dependent on two main things: your teacher and you. **Your teacher needs to be knowledgeable and competent** in explaining and modeling and coaching you. And **you need to be teachable and willing to invest** the time and resources necessary for learning.

We are in the midst of a series entitled *Becoming Wise, a matter of life and death*. Today as we consider Proverbs 9, I hope you become convinced that YOU can become wise in specific areas of your life. I have noticed that people who actively pursue knowledge and skills in every other area of their lives become strangely passive when it comes to pursuing spiritual maturity.

Whatever your age, whatever your history, you **can** become wise. Unless you are what Proverbs calls a scoffer, you can become wise. Why do I say that? Because Proverbs 9 personifies Wisdom as a woman who is incredibly knowledgeable and competent when it comes to teaching wisdom. And she is offering to teach YOU wisdom when it comes to speech, money and generosity, friendships, sex, wealth and poverty, and many other topics. As well Proverbs 9 will describe what is required of you in terms of being teachable and willing to invest yourself in the process of becoming wise.

I hope you leave here today convinced that you can become wise. And I hope you will actually accept Wisdom's invitation and let her teach you wisdom through Proverbs. With that in mind, listen as I read Proverbs 9.

## READ Proverbs 9.

You may have noticed that the 18 verses of Proverbs 9 have a very simple structure. The first six verses describe Wisdom's invitation to the simple. The last six verses describe Folly's invitation to the simple. The middle six verses make a compelling case for accepting Wisdom's invitation. First we'll look at the bookends of the chapter - the invitations of Wisdom and Folly. Then we'll look at the case for accepting Wisdom's invitation.

***Rival Invitations to the Uncommitted.*** (9:1-6, 13-18) In these two passages we find rival invitations to the "simple" (i.e., the uncommitted). One is an invitation to fine dining and the other is more like gas station food.

***Wisdom's Invitation.*** (Proverbs 9:1-6) In verses 1-6 we see Wisdom's invitation. The first thing we notice is Wisdom's meticulous preparation. She has built/crafted a house.

1 Wisdom has built her house;  
she has hewn her seven pillars.

In Scripture, the number seven often denotes completeness and fulness. By saying that she has crafted a house and hewn seven pillars, Solomon is saying that Wisdom's house is complete; it lacks nothing. [See 14:1 - wisdom and folly approach home ownership very differently.]

2 She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine;  
she has also set her table.

Wisdom has carefully thought through the menu, prepared the food and drink, and has the whole spread waiting for the guests to arrive. It's much like the wedding reception I attended last Sunday; it was obvious that a great deal of thought and work had gone into the food and drink and the table settings. That made the whole experience a delight.

Remember that chapters 1 through 9 are an extended introduction to the entire book of Proverbs. This chapter is the final appeal to the simple to learn the wisdom found in the rest of Proverbs (chapter 10-31). Verse 2 is saying that ***Proverbs is a lavish, well-prepared feast.*** There is *nothing second-class or careless* about Proverbs. Wisdom is ready and eager for us to come and learn wisdom from the proverbs in the rest of the book.

And so she sends out her servants to extend an invitation.

3 She has sent out her young women to call  
from the highest places in the town,

They call out from the highest places in the town so that everybody can hear. Here's the invitation:

4 “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!”  
To him who lacks sense she says,

As we’ve mentioned a couple weeks ago, if you are simple you are young and inexperienced and undecided about how you will live your life. You are uncommitted. You haven’t decided whether or not you will follow God and learn wisdom. Wisdom calls the simple to “**turn** in here.” Turn is the common Hebrew word for repent. To repent means to change directions. Instead of continuing on the path of undecidedness, Wisdom wants them to “turn in” and decisively choose the path of wisdom.

The second line of verse 4 restates this point by referring to the simple as “him who lacks sense.” When was the last time you admitted that you “lack sense” in some area of your life? Admitting that you lack sense in some area of your life is a sign of being teachable.

Here’s what they will experience if they accept Wisdom’s invitation (verse 5):

5 “Come, eat of my bread  
and drink of the wine I have mixed.

Wisdom invites people to come into her well-crafted, fully-furnished house and eat her food and drink her wine free of charge. Verse 6 explains in plain terms what this metaphor means:

6 Leave your simple ways, and live,  
and walk in the way of insight.”

People give all sorts of reasons for remaining uncommitted to wisdom: “I want to keep my options open for a while. . . you know, maybe ‘sow some wild oats’ while I’m young. . . I want to figure things out on my own for a while.” But Wisdom pleads and says, “Leave your simple ways” - decisively commit yourself to wisdom. “And live” - experience life as it was intended to be lived. “And walk in the way of insight” - start living out the insights that you will get from the proverbs. That is the invitation from Wisdom.

All of this means that you will not find a more knowledgeable and competent teacher than Wisdom. If you read chapter 8, you might remember that Wisdom was present with God at Creation. Therefore, her wisdom has stood the test of time; she alone can teach you the ancient paths that lead to rest and peace and life (see Jeremiah 6:16). In a few weeks we’ll see that *everything Wisdom promises, Jesus himself delivers*.

*Folly’s Invitation.* (Proverbs 9:13-18) If you have read chapters 1 through 8 carefully, you will notice that the description of “the woman Folly” sounds a lot like the description of the “adulterous woman” in previous chapters.

13 The woman Folly is loud;

she is seductive and knows nothing.

Like the adulterous woman in Proverbs 7:11, she is loud or boisterous. Unlike Wisdom, Folly isn't trying to convince you through reason to enter her house; she is trying to seduce you, just like the woman in Proverbs 7 (see 7:21). Instead of being full of insight like Wisdom, Folly knows nothing.

In contrast to Wisdom who had built her house and prepared her feast, Folly is just sitting on the front porch.

14 She sits at the door of her house;  
she takes a seat on the highest places of the town,

Remember how Wisdom sent out her servants throughout the town to call out to the simple? By contrast, Folly is sitting and waiting for people to walk by.

15 calling to those who pass by,  
who are going straight on their way,

In the Old Testament, the "straight path" is one of honesty and righteousness; a crooked path is one of deceit and unrighteousness. Folly appeals to the simple who are on the straight path in some sense, but they weren't fully committed to that path. This would be like the kid that grew up in church and followed the rules, and when he got out on his own he continued to live like he did at home; but he's open to another way of living his life. Folly understands that the simple are vulnerable to her seduction. And so she calls out:

16 "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!"  
And to him who lacks sense she says,

So far this appeal is identical to the appeal of Wisdom in verse 4. But what Folly says next is very different:

17 "Stolen water is sweet,  
and bread eaten in secret is pleasant."

"Stolen water" and "bread eaten in secret" are basically euphemisms for illicit sex. Back in chapter 5 adultery is described as "drinking water." When the father encouraged his son to be satisfied with the wife of his youth, he said, "Drink water from your cistern, flowing water from your own well." Here in 9:17, "stolen water" refers to stealing another man's wife sexually. In chapter 30, the act of adultery is described as eating. We read that the adulterous woman "eats and wipes her mouth and says, 'I have done no wrong.'" Here in 9:17 "bread eaten in secret" refers to a secret adulterous relationship. The promise is that illicit sex is "sweet" and "pleasant." That's not completely wrong; Hebrews 11:25 speaks of "the passing pleasures of sin." But Solomon tells the rest of the story in verse 18:

18 But he does not know that the dead are there,  
that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

Instead of experiencing the life that Wisdom offers, all who enter the house of Folly eventually experience death.

There are the two hosts, two invitations, two meals. And I would guess that the vast majority of us here today would say, "I choose the invitation of Wisdom. I want life, not death." But the reality is that Wisdom can sound better on Sunday morning but Folly can sound better on Friday night.

What is the deciding factor for the uncommitted? What determines whether or not we will accept Wisdom's invitation in a permanent, ongoing way and become wise?

***The Deciding Factor for the Uncommitted: the fear of the Lord.*** (Proverbs 9:7-12)  
That's what Solomon discusses in the middle six verses. In these verses Solomon doesn't mention the simple at all. Rather, he makes observations about those on either end of the wisdom spectrum: the wise and scoffers. The simple person is halfway between the wise (who have accepted Wisdom's invitation and are eager to become more wise) and the scoffer (who hates Wisdom and everything she says; Proverbs 1:22). Since a person cannot remain undecided forever, Solomon wants to make clear the blessings of dining with Wisdom and the consequences of dining with Folly.

7 Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse,  
and he who reproveth a wicked man incurs injury.

Jesus said (Matthew 7:6) not to throw pearls before swine because they will just trample them under foot and then turn and attack you. In the same way, if you try to correct a scoffer (a wicked man), he will punish you. Scoffers, by definition, use their words to injure other people and what they stand for. Look at the contrast in verse 8.

8 Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you;  
reprove a wise man, and he will love you.

Note that the wise person is neither perfect nor infallible; there are times when the wise need to be reprov'd/corrected. If you correct a scoffer will hate you, but if you correct a wise man, he will love you! Why? Because his deepest desire is to increase in wisdom. Wise people value those who speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

9 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser;  
teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.

Verse 10 tells us why the wise are so teachable and humble and willing to be corrected: they fear the Lord. This verse at the very end of the extended introduction to Proverbs (chapters 1-9) points back to a verse at the very beginning of the introduction in 1:7 which says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, fools despise wisdom and instruction."

10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,  
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

As we discussed a few weeks ago, when you fear the Lord you relate to him as he really is. That means two foundational things. First, you relate to him as One who is *infinitely perfect in every way*. You relate to him mindful that he is more powerful than you, more insightful than you, more consistent than you, more everything (that's good) than you. He is the Creator who designed you and who sustains you. Relating to him as infinitely perfect in his attributes makes you humble and teachable.

Second, if you fear the Lord, you relate to him as One who is *radically for you*. He proved that on the cross. When, because of your sin, you had a debt that you could not pay, he sent his Son to pay for that debt on the cross. If you fear the Lord, you relate to him as One who is radically for you. In other words, you believe along with Paul in Romans 8:32 that "He who did not spare his own Son. . . will also with him freely give us all things." We relate to him as One who freely supplies us everything we need for life and godliness. James explicitly applied the generosity of God to wisdom in James 1 when he said that "if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives generously and without reproach." If you fear God, you believe that he is neither reluctant nor stingy when it comes to supplying wisdom.

And that is, I think, the core reason why "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." You are relating to God as one who can give you wisdom and who longs to give you wisdom. If you fear the Lord you are poised to become wise.

Notice that in verses 11 and 12 Wisdom is now speaking directly to the reader:

11 For by me your days will be multiplied,  
and years will be added to your life.  
12 If you are wise, you are wise for yourself;  
if you scoff, you alone will bear it.

The point there is that the wise will experience the blessings of their wisdom; and the scoffers will bear the consequences of their folly. Again, the point of this section is to make sure we understand that the fear of the Lord is the decisive factor in whether or not we will accept Wisdom's offer.

In light of everything we've seen, let's loop back to the two issues I flagged at the beginning of this message: First, are you now convinced that you can become wise? Second, will you do what is required to become wise? Let's consider each of those briefly.

Answer this question as honestly as you possibly can:

*Do you believe that you can become wise in specific areas of your life?*

If you don't believe that you can attain something, you won't pursue it, at least not wholeheartedly. If I came and asked me, "Do you think I can become wise?" I would say, "If you believe the gospel, you can become wise. Preach the gospel to yourself. Remind yourself that 'he who did not spare his own Son will freely give you everything you need for life and godliness. That surely includes wisdom.'"

If you are a believer in Jesus, don't give yourself a pass in terms of becoming wise in any area of your life. As believers we are living in the age of fulfillment in which God is committed to giving us wisdom. And he is an infinitely knowledgeable and competent teacher. That being the case, the next question is:

*Do you resolve to fear the Lord, turn from your own ways, submit to God, and feast on the wisdom found in Proverbs (and the rest of Scripture)?*

Instead of being passive and hoping that you become wise someday, do you resolve to respond to Wisdom's invitation in the ways described in Proverbs 9? I put it that way because in Proverbs 1:29 Wisdom said that fools are those who "did not choose the fear of the Lord." With God's help, you can choose the fear of the Lord. Nobody can do it for you. If you relate to God as he really is, you will repent (turn from everything that is at odds with his revealed will), you will submit to him, and you will feast on the wisdom found in Proverbs (and the rest of Scripture).

I'm pleading with you to make that resolve this week. Next week we're going to talk about **how** to feast on the wisdom found in Proverbs. In some ways the proverbs are unique. So we'll need to think carefully about how to understand and live out what we find there.