

# SUMMER 1 - Wise Words, Smooth Words

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[ 0 : 00 ] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 29th of December 2002. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled Wise Words, Smooth Words. It is based on Proverbs 1.1-2.22.

Amen. Life is full of Proverbs.

Proverbs meant to give us advice. Proverbs meant to make us wise. Proverbs all over the place.

Often twisted in media headlines.

Lately, the Australian cricket team has got both war and love in it for this test for the first time ever.

So the media headlines have had a field day with all being fair or unfair in love and war and war giving way for love because Steve Waugh was out and then Martin Love came into bat and so on and so forth.

[ 1 : 32 ] Penny wise, pound foolish, good advice for spendthrifts. Look before you leap, good advice for those who are incautious.

One that seems to have done the rounds in the last decade or so ever since Dead Poets Society is *carpe diem* or seize the day as it's translated. That certainly seems to be a predominant sort of proverb or motto or slogan for our day and age.

Seize the day. Seize the opportunity. Live for today. Don't worry about tomorrow. One of the presents I got for Christmas was the book by Justin Langer, the cricketer, about or called *The Power of Passion*.

Now I had thought that maybe wrongly, I'm not sure, that Justin Langer was a Christian and I thought it would be an intriguing book to read. And in a sense you could sum up his book as something like seize the day or follow your instincts.

In fact his book was dotted with little proverbial sayings. I read recently a book on management and team leadership and so on. Same sort of thing. Really what controlled that book were all sorts of proverbs, sayings, mottos, slogans about seizing the day, following your instincts and so on.

[ 2 : 47 ] Sometimes of course proverbs are a little bit contradictory. Look before you leap. He who hesitates is lost. Hard to know how to balance those sometimes. What do we do when we end up with those sorts of proverbs that are a bit contradictory?

Sometimes the quest for wisdom takes us beyond little natty sayings that are a bit clever. Find a mentor. Find a mentor.

That's the trendy thing to do in Christian circles these days. Well it's not a new idea either. Because it was Odysseus' son in Greek mythology who was entrusted to mentor, a person called mentor that is, to be given guidance and advice.

And it's from that Greek fictional character, mentor, that the idea of a mentor to guide us, advise us, somebody with some wisdom, some experience, someone whom we can follow.

Mentors are very trendy, not only in Christian circles today, but also in modern management circles and leadership circles generally as well. Where do we find wisdom?

[ 3 : 56 ] Is it really just in little slogans and natty sayings? I mean what makes us wise when we ponder on he who hesitates is lost, for example, or look before we leap?

Does that really mean that we're wise because we look before we leap? Or perhaps wisdom is found from a mentor, a person, who's not just going to give us a list of slogans, but somebody who models and trains and guides us, somebody who's got more experience, usually more age, and in life as well.

What sort of person is a good mentor? A successful person? A rich person? A self-made person? They're the sort of people that Australian society looks up to. Or is the right sort of mentor somebody who comes out with great slogans and natty sayings?

What makes a person wise? A strung together proverb? Having a mentor? How can a person become wise? Well, one of the wisest people, par excellence really, in the scriptures, was King Solomon.

King of Israel, 960 to 920 BC, give or take a year or two. So a long time ago. Solomon asked God for wisdom, was granted wisdom from God, practiced that wisdom, at least in the initial stages of his time as King of Israel, and developed a reputation for being a wise king.

[ 5 : 19 ] And here in the book of Proverbs, we have at least in part, not all the book, but at least the bulk of the book and the early part of the book, are Proverbs of Solomon.

They may be Proverbs that Solomon wrote. They may be Proverbs that Solomon also or instead collected from other sources, perhaps. But certainly in part, the book of Proverbs is a collection of the Proverbs of the wise king, King Solomon, from give or take 3,000 years ago.

The purpose of the book of Proverbs is clearly stated in the opening paragraph. Verse 1 tells us that this is the book of, these are the Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel.

But then we go on to the purpose. Notice how verse 2 begins, for, that is, for the purpose of, this is why this is the book of Proverbs, for this purpose. And look at the description of the purpose in verses 2 to 6.

It's for learning about wisdom and instruction, for understanding words of insight, for gaining instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice and equity, to teach shrewdness to the simple, knowledge and prudence to the young.

[ 6 : 33 ] That the wise also hear and gain in learning and the discerning acquire skill to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles.

Notice the list of words that, at least at first sight, imply some intellectual or academic skill, knowledge, instruction, understanding, teaching, learning.

But when we realise what this book is for, it's not about an academic or intellectual pursuit learning, teaching, gaining instruction, as though somehow you're a very clever, bright-brained type person.

But rather it has a moral and behavioural component. You see, the wise person is not just a person with stacks of good head knowledge, full of instructions and understandings up here.

But it's about wisdom in living, wise living, knowing how to apply the sayings, the proverbs, the riddles. It's about dealing well in life, as verse 3 suggests.

[ 7 : 45 ] It's about righteousness and justice and equity, things that we are to practise with a moral, clearly a moral component to them. You see, the wise person is not a clever person, but a right living person.

That is, there is a combination here, an integration of what's in the head with what's in behaviour.

And the wise person is a person who's learned well, so that they behave well, and deal well in life, in particular in righteousness, equity and justice, as verse 3 in the centre of those verses tells us.

It's about the moral life, in effect. It's about action and behaviour, not just about intellectual capacity or academic rigour or cleverness.

Now that's consistent with what we find in the scriptures all over the place. God is always on about our head knowledge and our behavioural activity, cohering and being right.

Feeding our minds so that our lives practise what is right. In the book of Proverbs, the wisdom literature of the Bible itself is no different from the rest of scripture in that.

[ 8 : 58 ] Yes, it is about feeding our minds so that our lives behave appropriately and rightly. Well, who is this book for?

It's for the simple, firstly. I don't shut the book yet. You might think, oh, I'm not a simple person.

Verse 4 tells us this book is to teach shrewdness to the simple, knowledge and prudence to the young.

So those of you who are under the age of 41 are young. This is for you. Those two lines are actually in parallel. So if you're young, the implication is you're probably simple.

Now it doesn't mean simple as in the sense of being a stupid person or an imbecile. I remember when I was at primary school for a couple of years, I was at primary school in England. And we had a lovely guy in my class who was very much a simpleton.

Ernest was his name. Ernie, what's in your head? Rice pudding, he'd say. And I think he believed it. We used to taunt him. We actually cared for him. We didn't bully him.

[ 10 : 02 ] But I know that we taunted him and were fairly unloving in doing so. That's not the simpleton that is in mind here. To teach shrewdness to the simple is to teach shrewdness, wisdom,

prudence, whatever, to the young, to the inexperienced, to the ignorant.

It's all part of that one category. It's not dumb or stupid people. But it's more ignorant and experienced people. People who've yet to experience life in its fullness or life as adults, I guess. Life with independent responsibility and so on. So this book is for young believers in effect. Now don't shut the book if you're over the age of 41 or you're a mature believer.

Because verse 5 tells us that this book is also for the wise. Let the wise also hear and gain in learning and the discerning acquire skill.

So if you're already wise as a Christian, experienced and knowledgeable, with a head that understands the truths of God and lies that largely seek to conform to his laws and so on, this book is for you too.

[11:11] There's a warning there I think. Because very often we can get to the point of thinking, well I've heard all this before, I know all this before. I don't want to go back to all this stuff, back to basics.

I remember when I was at university, a girl in a year behind me at university became a Christian in the college where I lived. And I had a little group of new Christians that I was doing some basic Christianity with.

And after about a month to two months, my recollection is, she stopped coming along. And in the terms of us following her up, she said, well I've heard all this before.

And we were studying the letter to the Romans, which I don't think is particularly easy in the scriptures. But there was a sense in which she felt she knew it. She didn't really. And within a few months was no longer a Christian.

So there's a warning here I think. For those of us who are wise in the sense of already knowing truths of God and already experiencing Christian things, be careful that we don't fall into the trap of thinking, I know it, I've learnt it.

[12:21] The basics are not for me anymore. I've moved on to cleverer or trickier things. Not at all. The basics are always appropriate for Christian people.

The gospel is always our foundation, always the core of where we're always at. We cannot move on from it when we gain in experience and wisdom and become already discerning.

There was a t-shirt I almost bought once in Oxford in England when I was doing my PhD. It said something like, the more I learn, the more I know. The more I know, the more I know I don't know. That is the more you know, the more you realise there are so many other things you need to know. And for Christians I think it ought to be a bit like that. The wiser we become, the more we realise that we need to become wiser yet.

So this book is to make the simple wise and to make the wise wiser. And therefore it's for all of you. I don't see that anyone is outside of either of those two categories, myself included.

[13:28] We can never have sufficient wisdom from God. This book is for us all. Well where do you begin? When you build a building like this one, the first thing to be built were not the lights, they were about the last thing.

The first thing were the foundations on which the rest of the building is built. What's the foundation of wisdom? But God, in particular, the fear of God, in particular the fear of the Lord God.

Verse 7 tells us the beginning of it all. The foundation on which this book is built. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Not the fear of God, some remote sovereign creator being, unknown or unknowable.

But the fear of the Lord, Yahweh is the name. That is the fear of the God who is in a relationship with Israel. At the time when Solomon compiled this book.

That is, it's the fear of a God who is known and knowable. The fear of the Lord who is in a covenant relationship with you. For us, nearly 3000 years after Solomon, the same basis applies, though we know much more of God than Solomon did.

[14:40] The fear of the triune God, Father, Son and Spirit revealed to us preeminently in the coming of Jesus to be born and to die and to rise again from the dead and so on.

It's the fear of Father, Son and Spirit God that is the basis of our wisdom. The beginning point, the foundation, if you like. And fear here is not terror.

Like, you know, an arachnophobe like me. Terror at seeing a huntsman's spider. That's not the fear of the Lord. It's not terror from Him as though we run a mile when there's somehow a dazzling display of God's glory.

But rather, it's the fear that is a reverent awe. But not again, impersonal. Whenever the fear of the Lord is used in the scriptures, especially the Old Testament, it is a relational term. That is, it's not again the fear of the Lord that is unknown or unknowable. It's talking about a person in a relationship with God that knows that God is God and they are not God. It is not an equal relationship.

[ 15 : 43 ] It's not a buddy-chump-pal relationship. It is fear of the sovereign God who, yes, in mercy has established a relationship, but nonetheless remains holy, sovereign and judge of all.

It is a positive term. It is a positive relationship between the people of God and God. But a relationship of fear, knowing that in the end God is God, holy, sovereign, majestic and judge. And wisdom begins here. And all that follows in this book presupposes this beginning point. It doesn't come out in every second verse throughout the book of Proverbs, fear of the Lord, fear of the Lord.

But it's stated very clearly here in verse 7, the foundation of the rest of this book. So everything else depends upon it. Don't exclude it in your consideration of the verses and chapters that follow. Otherwise, you've got wisdom wrong. This is no different from what Jesus, of course, taught. The wise person builds his house not on sand, but on the rock, on God.

[ 16 : 49 ] And that, in effect, is what the fear of the Lord is saying. If you want to be a wise person, the foundation for your wisdom is fear of the Lord. That's the rock on which to build. And that's the rock on which this book is built.

Now, that's where so many wise people in our society get it wrong. They often have useful sayings. The experts that write in the papers, they often have nice proverbs, neat advice. Sometimes it makes sense and sometimes it's worth following. But all too often their starting point is wrong. Their foundation is wrong. And so the building of their wisdom is in the end inherently unstable.

But that's the wisdom of our age. The media pundits who espouse their wisdom on everything from Iraq to Steve Waugh's captaincy. The academics of our world.

The columnists of the papers and magazines. The people who are looked up to as the wise of our age. The experienced elder statesmen of our society. But without a foundation that begins with the fear of the Lord.

[ 18 : 00 ] In the end all they're spouting forth is perhaps little more than nonsense. And in the end, without the right foundation, even if there are some good things built in there.

In the end they're fools. Paul made the claim about his society. Ours is little different. In Romans chapter 1 he talks of pagan people in general. And he says of them.

That they did not honour God as God or give thanks to him. But they became futile in their thinking. Their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise they became fools.

And they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images. That's the wisdom of our age. It looks wise. It claims to be wise. But in the end of course it's foolish. Because it's abandoned the living God.

Paul makes the point again in his next letter. As they're written in the order of the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians chapter 1. Where is the one who's wise? Where's the scribe?

[ 18 : 56 ] Where's the debater of this age? Has God not made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom. God decided through the foolishness of our proclamation.

To save those who believe. That is it's the cross of Christ you're saying there. That exposes the folly of our world's wisdom. Now that's jumping ahead a little bit from the book of Proverbs.

But showing the consistency of the ideas. Those who spout forth so-called wisdom. Without the foundation of the fear of the Lord. Or in New Testament terms without the foundation of God revealed as Father, Son and Spirit.

And without the foundation of the cross of Christ. Are in the end fools alone. So in your pursuit of wisdom. Which is an essential pursuit for Christian people.

It's not an optional extra. If you're a Christian you ought to be pursuing wisdom as we'll see in a minute. Then never depart from the foundation of the fear of the Lord. Don't think wisdom can be found on any other foundation.

[ 19 : 57 ] It may look appealing and attractive as we'll see in a minute. But ultimately it's destructive. Well the book in effect begins having had this prologue or introduction and statement of

the foundation.

In chapter 1 verse 8. And the words of wisdom that come here come in the form of parental advice. Something that the young are not usually good at following. Hear my child your father's instruction and do not reject your mother's teaching.

Goes on to describe such wisdom as being beautiful. It's not here saying that everything a father and mother says is good and wise and ought to be followed. Let me say. But in the context of this book it is wisdom from God that is being voiced as parental instruction.

It's beautiful. For they are a fair garland for your head and pendants for your neck. Verse 9 says. Now the essence of this advice that comes in this form as parental instruction.

Is to avoid the smooth words of sinners. Smooth words because they attempt to entice. Persuade. Seduce.

[ 21 : 03 ] Attract. Entice. Entice. And so on. They have some appeal about them. That is they are not words that are unattractive. Their subtle and evil power is because they actually look attractive and look appealing.

It's about peer pressure. It's about hanging out with the gang. Verse 11 and 14 says. It promises power over other people in verse 12 and 11 and 12.

It promises wealth and treasure. It's a get rich quick attraction in verse 13. It promises a community. Something that so much of our society craves in verse 14.

See what these seducers, these smooth words are saying then. Verse 10. If sinners entice you. Do not consent. If they say. Come with us.

Let us lie in wait for blood. Let us wantonly ambush the innocent like she or let us swallow them alive and whole like those who go down to the pit. That's the power over other people it is appealing to. We shall find all kinds of costly things.

[ 22 : 08 ] We shall fill our houses with booty. That's the get rich philosophy. Throw in your lot among us. We'll all have one purse. There's the community philosophy and attraction. So if they're the smooth words that the young person hears.

The fool hears or the simple person hears. My child, the parents advice is. Verse 10. Do not consent. Verse 15. Do not walk in their way. Keep your foot from their paths.

Strong advice. Clear advice. Don't go their way. Don't flirt with their temptations.

Don't sort of try and have a bit each way. Don't sort of meander down the path thinking that you haven't gone there. Don't start thinking that you haven't gone too far. A step down the path is down dangerous territory.

Because though these smooth words seem to offer power and wealth and community and a great life. The reality is far from that. As the wise parents say and warn in verse 16 onwards.

[ 23 : 14 ] For their feet run to evil and they hurry to shed blood. For in vain is the net baited while the bird is looking on. Yet they lie in wait and ironically to kill themselves.

They think they're going to capture other things and accumulate power and wealth and community for themselves. But no in the end they only kill themselves and they set an ambush for their own lives. Such is the end of all who are greedy for gain.

It takes away the life of its possessors. Do you see the sort of attraction there to go down the path of power and wealth. And to go down the path of community even.

But abandon the truths of God. A step down the path you're on dangerous territory. It's offering all sorts of beautiful things like a glossy holiday brochure.

But the reality is probably a flea infested bed in what's supposed to be a four star hotel. That is it doesn't deliver what it promises. And the path that is tempting you down is a path that leads to destruction in the end.

[ 24 : 18 ] Don't go that way. Avoid the destruction by avoiding the company that entices you down that path. Now let us be clear here that this sinful way is appealing.

Don't ever fool yourself that sin is unappealing. If sin was always unattractive and unappealing no one would ever sin. The reason we sin is because it seems to offer us things that we desire.

Power, wealth, excitement, thrills, community, whatever it is. But it never delivers on the goods.

Because the pleasure of sin is oh so fleeting in the end.

And so destructive of course as well. You see wisdom here is saying flee sin. Flee the temptation. Don't listen to the temptation.

Because you're vulnerable. We are weak. That's the point of view of humanity that is thoroughly scriptural. We're not strong enough to walk down that path without falling into destruction. [ 25 : 20 ] So don't go down that path. Don't even flirt with the words of enticement and temptation. Now in contrast to these words that are almost whispered in enticement in verse 10.

If sinners entice you come along, come along in. By those people who stand outside shops and promise you that you'll save thousands of dollars. I can never work out how. Now comes another voice to attract us.

Verse 20. Wisdom. A woman called wisdom it is. Cries out in the street. In the squares she raises her voice. Not hear the sort of seductive whisper perhaps.

But now the beacon, the cry, the newspaper herald who shouts out a warning from the newspaper headlines or something like that. In the public places, in the squares, at the busiest corner, at Flinders and Swanson Street perhaps.

The entrance to the city gates she shouts out. In contrast to the sinners who are enticing down their little dark alleyways. Promising so much but delivering nothing in the end. And what is this wisdom woman saying?

[ 26 : 22 ] How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? Give heed to my reproof.

I will pour out my thoughts to you. I'll make my words known to you. Because I have called and you refused, have stretched out my hand and no one heeded.

The words of this book of Proverbs you see are not just addressed to the wise, to those who are following God's way. They are addressed to the simple who are not.

To entice them back, to draw them back, to warn them from keeping going down the path of sinners that they have begun to walk. Not an easy job to call back sinners to repentance.

It is not easy for a sinner to repent. There is urgency here in wisdom's shout. Verse 25, because you've ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity.

[ 27 : 23 ] I will mock when panic strikes you. When panic strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind. When distress and anguish come upon you, then they will call upon me, but I will not answer.

They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me, because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof.

That is a time is coming when it will be too late to repent, is what wisdom is crying out here. Turn now from your ways of going down the dark sinful alleys. Come out to these city streets and follow the path of wisdom she's crying out.

You've refused me so far, but refuse me no more. Because calamity comes on all who go down the path of sin. And when it strikes you, it will be too late to turn and come back.

Go no further, turn around and come back to the way of wisdom, to the way of God. Fools often think that their paths are safe and sure.

[ 28 : 27 ] But they are blind to their destination and they are deaf to the warning signs. And calamity will come for them too late to bring them back.

We are to heed the warnings of the book of Proverbs. For this book is warning us in its own way and language that judgment is sure and coming from God.

There is no fear of God now for these people, but there will be terror on judgment day. And the path that they are following is a path of folly that leads to self-destruction.

It is true that God will judge, but indeed the path they are going down of sin, following the snares and enticements, is actually a path of self-destruction as much as anything.

Indeed, the two paths are summed up at the end of the chapter, verses 32 and 33. Waywardness kills the simple and the complacency of fools destroys them.

[ 29 : 24 ] But on the other hand, those who listen to me, this call of wisdom, will be secure, will live at ease without dread of disaster. Chapter 1 is the negative spin, if you like.

Chapter 1 is the warning not to heed the snares and enticements and the smooth words of sinners. Now comes the positive spin in chapter 2. The warning is there in chapter 1, don't go that way, it leads to destruction.

But now comes the positive spin of what will benefit you by walking down the way pointed out by Lady Wisdom. And our responsibility is seen in the opening verses of chapter 2.

Notice the verbs that are there at the beginning of chapter 2. The answer is, 1-8. 2-8. 2-8. 3-9. Attentive to them.

Incline your heart to understanding. Cry out for insight. Raise your voice for understanding. Seek it like silver. Search for it as for treasure.

[ 30 : 30 ] That's our job. That's our responsibility. We are to do those things. We are to search. We are to be attentive. We are to heed, hear, incline our hearts. That's what we've got to do.

That's our responsibility to become wise and to heed the words of Lady Wisdom. As Jesus said, search and you'll find. Seek and you'll find. Incline your ear and heart implies obedience. Crying out and raising your voice implies a real desire and repentance. If that is what we do, then we will become wise. Not because wisdom is our achievement.

It is the gift of God. So verse 5 tells us that if we do all those things of verses 1 to 4, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God for the Lord gives wisdom.

We don't make ourselves wise. Wisdom is not our achievement. Wisdom is a gift of God. But it is our responsibility to search for it, to seek it, to cry out for it, to be attentive to it and to obey it, as those verbs imply.

[ 31 : 41 ] And if we do, then we will become wise. For God promises wisdom to those who seek it. Not only will we be wise, but we will be protected.

For just as the path following the smooth words leads to calamity and destruction, the path that follows the wise words of lady wisdom leads to security and protection from God.

Not because we become strong enough to deal with any foe or enemy or calamity, not because we gain the power to overcome, but because God protects and God keeps his people secure.

So see what verse 7 says, that God stores up sound wisdom for the upright. He is a shield to those who walk blamelessly. God is the protection. And then again in verse 8, guarding the paths of justice and preserving the way of his faithful ones.

God keeps us. It's not us keeping ourselves. Move down to verse 11, the same sort of idea.

Prudence will watch over you and understanding will guard you. That is, wisdom itself personified is the one who guards and protects us along the path of wisdom.

[ 32 : 51 ] Verse 12, wisdom will save you from the way of evil. That is, wisdom is powerful, you see. God gives wisdom, a wisdom which is powerful to save us.

And it is to save us on the path to God's blessing. It will save us from temptation, as verse 16 suggests. You will be saved from the loose woman, from the adulteress, with her smooth words, who forsakes the partner of her youth, the one who seduces and tempts and entices.

That is, the power to resist temptation is from God and from God's gift of wisdom to us. Therefore, the end of chapter 2 says, walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the just.

For the upright will abide in the land and the innocent will remain in it. But the wicked will be cut off from the land and the treacherous will be rooted out of it. There again are the two options.

There's no third option. There's no middle road. The path of the fool, the non-wise person, is the path of the wicked. Here again we see how wisdom and morality go together.

[ 34 : 03 ] The fool is the wicked person, the evil person, and that is a path of calamity, destruction, being rooted out of the land. But the path of the wise person is an upright path, a righteous path, a moral path, not just an intellectually clever path.

And that is the path of obedience of God's law, walking in God's ways. Indeed, the whole notion of the verb to walk in the way, in verse 20, is about our behaviour and our life pattern.

They're the two options. A way that leads to destruction, a way that leads to the blessing and protection and security that God gives in wisdom. This is a message for young Christians and for old Christians.

This is a message for the simple and for the wise. When I lived in England doing my PhD a few years ago, John Major was then the Prime Minister and he had a campaign called Back to Basics. And in many respects, the opening chapters of the book of Proverbs are Back to Basics. For those of you who are mature, wise Christians, this is a call back to basics. There are two paths to take. Which path are you on?

[ 35 : 08 ] Very basic question, but very important one. Because no matter how wise we are, experienced we are as Christians, there are still only two paths and we must ensure that we're still on the right path.

And for those of us who are young Christians, somewhat simple in the faith, the same choice was before us. Which path are we on?

Do we heed the smooth words, the promise so much gold, but lead in the end to destruction? Or do we follow the path, the beckoning of Lady Wisdom, a path that promises real protection from God? The choice is ours. It is our responsibility. We are to choose the fear of the Lord, as was made clear in chapter 2 and chapter 1.

That's our responsibility. But God is the one who gives us wisdom. God is the one who protects us. And God is the one who guards those who walk in his path. Let's pray.

[ 36 : 08 ] God, we thank you for making so clear to us the paths, the path down which we ought to walk, the paths down which we are so often tempted to walk and do so.

Father, we pray that in your sovereign power you'll turn us around from following the enticements and seductions that promise us so much but lead us only to evil and destruction.

Help us to repent so that we may follow the path called out by Lady Wisdom, a path of obedience in you and understanding, a path that finds protection from you and ultimately eternal blessing in you. Amen.