

Woman Folly

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Our Father, we ask now that you would help us to hear your word and that our hearts would love what we hear so that our feet would follow in the way of life.

We ask this in your Son's name. Amen. Please sit down. I think you will find it helpful today if you turn to that reading that Deidre just read for us, Proverbs chapter 7.

I have it on page 531. And as you're turning to it, this is just a small advisory warning on the sermon. And it's this, that the Bible is completely candid and unafraid of talking about sex.

Sex as God intended it and sex which has been distorted and deformed. And I give you an instance of this. In chapter 5, which is really part of our section today, there is frank marriage encouragement.

So look at chapter 5, verse 18. Let your fountain, speaking to the man, let your fountain be blessed and rejoice in the wife of her youth, a lovely dear, a graceful doe.

[1 : 20] Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight. Be intoxicated, always in her love. Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman? And embrace the bosom of an adulteress.

For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths. Now, that has been translated into very polite English. The Hebrew is not so polite.

And what it does is it puts sex in its place and puts it under the care and the watchful loving eye of God himself. So whether you are married or whether you are single, it doesn't really matter.

The point is that our sexuality and our spirituality can't be separated. Now, we're in our fourth week in Proverbs, and we haven't even managed to get to the Proverbs yet.

They start in chapter 10. In fact, we're not going to get there next week either. I'll tell you why. The first nine chapters are swimming lessons before we dive in.

[2 : 21] They're how to read the book. And of the first nine chapters, a whole five chapters, from five to nine, are given to a conflict and a contrast between two women.

Woman folly, woman foolishness, and woman wisdom. And this week, we look at woman folly, the forbidden woman, chapter 5, 6, and 7.

And next week, which will be much happier, we're going to look at chapters 8 and 9. So it really is a two-part sermon, this one and next week, together.

So you'll all have to come back next week. Here is the thing to know, that these two women, the forbidden woman or the foolish woman and the woman wisdom, they're not individual women.

They stand for two ways, two paths of life, the way of foolishness and the way of wisdom. Because there are two paths, the Proverbs says, there are two paths in life, two roads, two trails, two routes, which covers everything that we do.

[3 : 32] There is the way of wisdom and the way of foolishness, the way of righteousness, the way of evil, the way of life, and the way of death. And despite our desperate attempts, there's no third way.

And this is one of the deepest and most important pictures of the life of faith in the Bible. It's so frequently used, it becomes almost invisible. It's Jesus' favourite way of speaking about the life of faith.

Let me give you, for instance, we'll go out of our section into chapter 4. Let me read a couple of verses from chapter 4. I just want you to pick up how deeply ingrained, how deeply important this concept is.

So chapter 4, verse 11, I'll read a couple of verses here. I have taught you the way of wisdom.

I have led you in the paths of uprightness. When you walk, your step won't be hampered. And if you run, you will not stumble.

[4 : 33] Keep hold of instruction. Do not let her go. Guard her, for she is your life. Do not enter the path of the wicked. That's the other way. Do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it.

Don't go on it. Turn away from it and pass on. Or down in verse 18 in chapter 4. But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.

The way of the wicked is like deep darkness. They do not know over what they stumble. Verse 25. Let your eyes look directly forward and your gaze be straight before you.

Ponder the path of your feet, then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left. Turn your foot away from evil. You see, Proverbs is giving us a picture of the good life from God's point of view.

And it's different than every other picture of the good life that we're immersed in. But you can't instill in someone a love for the good life by facts or commands or rules.

[5 : 36] It comes about as we calibrate the compass of our heart and desire to trust God. By pondering the path of our feet and seeing and walking in the way of wisdom.

And there are two very important and wonderful reasons why the way as a picture of our lives is so important. The first is this. It's a feet on the ground picture.

David Foster Wallace told a story about two young fish swimming along one morning. And coming the other way was an older fish.

And as he came by them, the older fish said to the two younger fish, Good morning, boys. How's the water? They swam on a little further until one young fish turned to the other and said, What the heck is water?

And sometimes as Christians we talk about worldview as though somehow we can lift ourselves out of the culture that we swim in and look down as neutral observers unaffected by the temperature of the water.

[6 : 41] And it's true that the word of God does stand over every human word because it ultimately comes from the mouth of God. But the picture of Christian life as the way is a recognition that we're already on the road, that we're already moving in one direction or another, and that we cannot see the whole picture.

But God can. And that the only way for us to move on the path of life is by trusting him with all our hearts and not necessarily by having all the answers. It's a great picture on the ground because things are messy.

They're often unclear. They're often ambiguous. What matters is that we're walking with Christ in his direction, not that we're getting everything right. The way of wisdom is not explaining all of reality, but it's helping us to live one step at a time.

It's a feet-on-the-ground picture. And secondly, it's also a destination picture because the reason our choices each day are important is not because I choose, therefore I am, as we looked at last week, but because every choice has consequences, that there is an unbreakable link between the steps I take today and where I am heading ultimately.

Every philosophy, every religion has a picture of the good life. You know, who I am, what I'm here for, what's the purpose? From Plato to paganism, from Marxism to capitalism.

[8 : 13] What's so very strange about our moment in history is that for the first time in history, we seem to be incapable of thinking about the future, the long term.

And I don't know whether it's we're over-busy or over-stretched or over-entertained, or thinking about the future is going to make me too anxious because I'm so comfortable right now.

But we are like people who are driving in the most luxurious electronic car, passing wonderful scenery with the latest automatic navigation, congratulating ourselves on how we're going, and not thinking about where we're going, and we drive over a cliff.

And the idea of the way means that our choices have profound consequences, that each of our lives are heading in a particular direction, either toward God or away from God.

And one path ends with life with God and the other ends with life without God, and the stakes couldn't be higher. And this is very important as we come to the forbidden woman, chapters 5, 6, and 7, because the forbidden woman is the embodiment of the way of foolishness and death.

[9 : 35] Not because foolishness is feminine. There's nothing necessarily feminine. Likewise, there's nothing feminine about wisdom necessarily. At 5 to 7, the forbidden woman is not just a picture of sexual temptation.

She stands for every way in which we're seduced off the path of life. You know, it could be just the load of cares of this life that distract us, or it could be holding areas away from God. Every rival picture of the good life that we've bought into, everything that makes us lean on our own understanding and not trust in God, everything that makes us think that God's not really interested in our best.

And so we come to chapter 7. And chapter 7 is a narrative. It's a story of the forbidden woman, and it's a first-hand account of how our hearts are drawn away from the path of life.

That's why you need to have... You've got to come back next week. All right? I feel like pausing for questions because now we come to chapter 7, but I'm not allowed to do that.

[10:44] So verse 5, you can see we meet the forbidden woman, the adulteress, with smooth words. And this chapter gives us the longest story, the longest narrative in Proverbs, and it's about how we're drawn out of the way of life.

And it's a first-hand view, you see verse 6, from the father. There's a distance between the father and the story. He is on the second floor, looking down on the street through his window.

And what he sees in verse 7 is a young man who is simple, lacking sense. Now, that has nothing to do with intellect or learning.

This young man is not actively evil or violent. The word behind lacking sense simply means that he has refused to make a strong commitment to wisdom.

He's convinced himself that he's unbiased, that he's open, he's a good listener, he's spiritually neutral. He is the West Coast man. He is the West Coast woman.

[11:56] He leans on his own understanding, unaware of the deceitfulness of his own heart. He's much more vulnerable to the deception of others. And so we see in verse 8, he's just strolling along aimlessly, wandering near the house of the forbidden woman, completely unaware that he is walking into her path.

And in verse 9, before the woman steps onto the stage, the lights go down. You notice in verse 9, there are four references to darkness. It's as though as she approaches, darkness falls.

She brings the darkness with her. She works best out of the limelight. And then in verse 10, suddenly we are taken down into the street and she appears.

And verse 10 gives us the idea she comes right up into his face. And she is dressed as a prostitute. Now it's important, she is not a prostitute.

She is the wife of a wealthy businessman who is now out of town. She lives in a big mansion of a house that's been featured in Vancouver magazine.

[13:11] She's put on a seductive outfit because she wants to catch the young man off guard and she wants to play a role. Interestingly, just a side note, if you read chapters 5 and 6, there's much less condemnation of the prostitute than there is of the married woman and the married man who commit adultery.

This woman has not been sold into sex slavery. She's not been forced to do anything. She has another motivation entirely. She's got another reason and that is she is hunting to take a life.

She's not in it for the sex. She wants to take power over someone else's life even if it means destroying it. She is wily of heart, says verse 10.

There are great ironies in this. You know, the fact that she is so uncovered and showing all her skin actually camouflages her real intention. Outwardly, she's promising her body but she's hungry for something else entirely.

She wants a conquest. She wants to take his soul away. She is hunting down his life and we know this because at the end of chapter 6, verse 26, for the price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread but a married woman hunts down a precious life.

[14:38] So in chapter 7, verse 12, the last little phrase, she lies in wait. She's laying a trap. She wants to find the uncommitted to bring...

And I just remind you, this is about every temptation to go off the path of life. She wants to bring the uncommitted into her house because it's a transfer station on the way to death. She's predator and terminator in one.

Here's the prey. And so in verse 13, there's violence in her actions. She grabs him. She makes her face hard, literally kisses him and begins the conquest.

But of all her weapons, the most powerful is not her looks or her state of undress. It is her words, her smooth and deceptive words.

Because Proverbs keeps saying to us, be careful who you listen to. Be careful what you say. It could be the difference of life and death. And so all the way from verses 14 to verse 20 is her speech.

[15:43] We listen to her. And it's fascinating where she begins. Verse 14, she pretends she's religious. I've just come back from a sacrifice, she says.

It's okay. I'm a Christian. Then she goes after his ego, verse 15. Now she says, I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly.

I have found you. It's you I've been looking for. I finally, you're the only one who can understand me. You're the only one who can give me what I want.

She wants him to think that what's going on is about him, but it's not. And most of the people who I know, who are Christian, who've committed adultery, believe that they, in the time, in the moment, believe that their situation was unique, exceptional, and special.

And it's not. She works hard on his imagination. She describes her bedroom prepared and the various aphrodisiacs she has.

[16:55] But there's one more thing she needs to get over before he puts his head in the noose. And in the last section of her speech, you can hear the voice of Satan from the Garden of Eden saying, you will not die. She says, there will be no consequences.

Don't be a silly Billy. There's nothing to be afraid of. She says, my husband is away and he's taken his big wallet and he's not going to be back for at least two weeks. There's no commitment here.

Nobody will see us. She doesn't argue that adultery is right. She just skillfully cuts the tie between choice and consequence and says, we'll get away with it.

Verse 21, with much seductive speech, she persuades him. Verse 22 brings the moment of action. He moves his feet.

The thing is, he's been entertaining her ideas and now his feet follow. Because you can't stop temptation from coming into your heart, but you can stop yourself from entertaining it.

[17:59] And he acts without thinking. He follows her path, her way, her trail into her house. And the camera screens back a little bit and the father describes the young man in three pictures in verses 22 to 23 of three animals.

An ox going into a slaughterhouse. Physically impressive, full of life and usefulness. He thinks the house is a house of pleasure. It's a slaughterhouse.

Or a stag, a graceful and noble creature, completely unaware that he's stepping his foot into a noose. Or a bird which rushes into a trap. You know how birds fly into the window without even seeing the glass.

The animals don't see the connection between the bait and death. The ox steps over the doorstep thinking he's going to get a feed. The stag steps into the noose thinking he's safe.

The bird flies into the trap thinking he'll get some seed. But the father says, verse 23, he does not know it will cost him his life. Because despite her denials, our actions have consequences.

[19:11] We have to choose our path. We have to either choose the path of trusting God that leads to life because all other paths go to death. And in the end, in verse 24, the father turns to all of us and makes his application and his application is put in terms of the path we walk.

In verse 25, let not your heart turn aside to her ways. Do not stray into her paths.

For many victims she's laid low. All her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is the way to Sheol, the underworld, going down to the chambers of death.

And finally, she is unmasked. She's offering one thing but giving another. She, this picture of the foolish life, has conquered a congregation of strong men and her way is the path to the underground, to Sheol.

Her body is a grave. Her house is the front door to death and hell and the last word in the chapter is death, which is why you have to come back next week.

[20:26] And you might be thinking, well, it's a very unhappy passage. Where is God in this passage? And there are a number of ways of answering that but I think it's God who makes our choices meaningful.

God takes our decisions and our steps very seriously. God invests our lives with consequence and meaning. And the place that God desires for us throughout Proverbs is life.

He is the giver and lover of life. Back in chapter 5 we were warned that the forbidden woman, the woman fool, does not ponder the path of life.

Her ways wander and she doesn't even know it. And there are only two mentions of life in chapter 7. One is right at the end, near the end, verse 23.

He doesn't know it will cost him his life. But we know that wisdom is the tree of life. And when we come to the passage next week we will find that woman wisdom is more than a match for death.

[21 : 36] Far more than a match for death. And she is able to give the simple and the foolish life. She says in chapter 8 whoever finds me finds life and obtains favour of the Lord.

And of course standing a bit further back we know that wisdom is able to give us life because the Son of God came into the world. And when he came he said he was the way and the truth and the life and that for us to walk the way of wisdom now is to walk in fellowship with Christ to trust him and walk with him.

And of course he went into the place of death he went into Sheol dying in our place rising to life offering all of those whose feet have slipped off the path new life and new hope.

And the most obvious application even on the surface of this passage of course is that if you are involved in adultery now your feet are on the path to death.

You are devouring your own life and the life of at least two other people. There's only one thing you can do you have to turn out of that path you have to step out of that path and move your feet onto the path of life.

[22 : 51] But at a broader level the forbidden woman is a picture of every siren called to us saying it's not worth walking on the path of life come over to this path and every single one of us faces different temptations around this and you find them in your imagination you dwell on them and you know if you're trusting the Lord or if you're walking with him or if you're not and if you're not you're the young guy on the street and you may be even listening to the voice of the forbidden woman but there is a second reference to life in this passage and this is where I want to finish it's back in verse 5 no it's not it's in verse 2 sorry it's in the first five verses see by the time the young man wanders off the path it's too late her words of imagination have got him his heart has strayed long before his feet because the path we walk has to do with what we love and if there's no commitment or love for the path of wisdom our imaginations become easy prey

I mean the life of the imagination all sorts of things promise pleasure and success and we dwell on them and our affections grow and you find ourselves in the shoes of this young man and that's why in the first five verses of chapter 7 they open with a small marriage scene see the word life is in verse 2 and in verse 4 the father says say to wisdom you are my sister and call insight your intimate friend to keep you from the forbidden woman from the adulteress with her smooth words I point out verse 1 keep my words verse 2 keep my commandments keep my teaching as the apple of the eye because if you're on the path of wisdom it will keep you and the little speech there you are my sister the commentators take as a marriage declaration I take this person and sister and intimate friend is the same language used of husband and wife intimacy in a song of songs it's making wisdom my closest kin it's loving her it's leaving father and mother and for this one it's saying your family now so that as we keep

God's words in our hearts the words of wisdom and we keep his teaching we will live because if we keep to his way the way will keep us to the end amen