

Woman Wisdom (Evening Service)

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[0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening. In Christ's name. Amen. Please, yes, grab a seat. Nice to see you all. Happy Thanksgiving. We are preaching a series at the moment. I'm Aaron, by the way, if you're just visiting with us.

You're on holiday this weekend. I'm the minister of the service. I'd love to meet you afterwards. Come and say hi. Just to give you a catch up. So we're preaching a series in Proverbs. And the major concern of Proverbs is wisdom. It's the art of living in God's world. Wisdom is the skill of making the best decision you can in the majority of situations you'll face in life. And we're looking at chapter 9 tonight. It's a really important chapter. It's really important because of this. When you think Proverbs, you probably think lots of random sort of little pithy little sayings, right? And that is most of the book of Proverbs, except for the first nine chapters. The first nine chapters are a series of speeches which provide us a framework for understanding all these pithy little sayings. So the first nine chapters are an introduction to the whole book. And we're looking at the final chapter of that introduction to the rest of Proverbs so we understand the rest of it. And what it does in this chapter is it sort of catalyzes all the things it sort of said just before. It asks us a very good question though. And the question that comes out of chapter 9, this final chapter of the introduction, it says, how are you going to live? It's a basic question. How are you going to live?

Before you, you have these two paths. You have the path of wisdom and you have the path of folly. And chapter 9 says you must choose. You've got to choose one of these paths. There's no middle ground here. You can't not make a decision. If you don't make a decision, you're choosing folly.

You must actually choose. And how does it get this idea of a cross that you must choose? That there are these two paths? What it does is you heard the passage read, it personifies wisdom and it personifies foolishness, each as a woman.

So the first third of this chapter 9 is all about this woman called wisdom. And the last third is all about this woman called folly. And they're both inviting you over to their house. So that's the picture. You're basically being pursued by two women. And as we get into it, you'll see one wants your love and one wants your body. That's the situation. Let's look at it. Let's compare these two women that have things in common and they have things that are very different. So what do they have in common? What do these two women have in common? Woman wisdom and woman folly. What do they have in common? Well, they're both pursuing us. They're both after us. And you'll see the invitation is actually exactly the same. Verses 4 for wisdom, verse 16 for folly. They both say, whoever is simple, let him turn in here. Now who are the simple? We talked about these guys before, but as a reminder, the simple are not like stupid people. They're not dumb people. They're just people that are sort of inexperienced. They're easily influenced. I like politics, so I will call them, they're like the swing voters, okay? They could really go, they're walking down the road, they could go either way.

[3 : 27] They could go folly. They could go wisdom. So both women are after these swing voters. Now what else do these guys have in common? Well, they're both calling out from high places, it says. What is that mean? Because it's interesting, that kind of detail, right? They're both in high places calling out to you. I think this is what I think it means. It's not like wisdom calls out from this really, really nice place and folly is screaming at you from the gutter, you know, because then it would be pretty obvious kind of who you'd want to listen to. Or a more vivid example, you're walking down the street and a friend of yours says, listen, you know, I just don't think that boyfriend is good for you. I don't think you're being wise right now. That's good advice. At exactly the same time, some strangers lying in the ground drunk, screaming at you, telling you to smoke crack and worship Satan or something, right? Now in that situation, you kind of know who has got fairly decent advice for you, right? Like who's got some integrity in that situation. But in this situation here, the foolish voice is not like some crazy person. Folly is also on a hill. She assumes this place of authority.

So woman folly could be like your favorite professor, this winsome, wonderful professor at university who's slowly convincing you that faith is a delusion that intelligent people leave behind. Folly could be your best friend. It could be your favorite auntie. See, both folly and wisdom speak from these high places. Now those two things I've mentioned, the invitation and high places, those are the only two things woman folly and woman wisdom have in common. They're both after you.

They both speak from high places. What's different about these women? Well, look at woman wisdom there in the first third of the chapter. Woman is, this wisdom woman, she's industrious. She's built a house.

She's prepared this amazing meal. She's slaughtered, I love this line, she's slaughtered a beast. And I like it, this is the reason I like it so much because in New Zealand, in the old country, the most hospitable thing you could do for somebody is you could kill one of your sheep, because we all have sheep. You could kill one of your sheep, one of the young ones, and you roast it on a big spit outside for about eight hours and have a big party. That's the most hospitable thing you could do. So woman wisdom does that. She invites everyone over to her house for a meal. And in those days, in the ancient areas, inviting somebody to home, this wasn't just like a casual act. This wasn't inviting somebody into an ongoing friendship. It was an invitation to intimacy. It's saying, let's do life together. What does wisdom do? Wisdom invites you into a friendship with her. But there's a catch. Look at verse five. Come, eat of my bread, drink of my wine, which I've mixed. Verse six, leave your simple ways. So there's an invitation into friendship, but there's a demand.

Wisdom says to you, leave your simple ways. To walk in wisdom means as you live thoughtfully, you live intentionally, not wantonly. Wisdom calls you to repent.

[6 : 46] Friendship with wisdom makes demands on you. Have a look at wisdom folly. I'll remind you of these verses. She's loud, seductive, knows nothing. She just sits in the door of her house. She's calling out to all who pass by. Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.

So she's not industrious like wisdom. Folly doesn't make food. She doesn't prepare a house. She lacks discipline. She's unprepared, but she's loud. She's got that going for her. She's really, really loud.

She captures your attention. She's seductive. This phrase, stolen water and bread, scholars say that this is sort of like code for sex. So she kind of just sits by her door and yells at whoever's passing by. My wife is from the States, and I love the houses in the southern states. They're big and tend to be single story, and they're kind of squat. But the thing I love about them is they have these massive sort of porches that go all the way around them. I love that. And I have this picture of wisdom. Folly sitting in one of these houses on the porch, drinking iced tea, calling out to the young men that walk past. Hey, honey, why don't you come and sit with me? Keep me company for a while.

It's very seductive, isn't it? It's very tempting. So what else do you notice about wisdom? Folly? How is she different from woman wisdom? It's very significant, I think, that she makes no demands, does she? Did you see that? I don't know if you noticed that. Wisdom says, leave your simple ways.

Folly just says, just come on over. Just grab a seat. Make yourself comfortable. We'll have some fun. See, folly doesn't call you to change, does it? Because I've thought about this.

[8 : 37] Sometimes people will leave the faith, right? They leave their Christian faith. And they leave a church community and they find a new group of friends. And here is something you will hear from people who have left faith. Often they'll say something like this. They'll say, my new friends, they're so great. They don't judge me. They accept me for who I am. They don't pester me about my decisions. They just accept me. Which sounds really lovely, doesn't it? When they just sort of accept me. But real friendship, real friends do ask questions of you. Real friends should keep you accountable. Real friends ask you tough questions. They call you to account. Real friends call you out when you're being foolish. Real friends don't just accept you and just leave you to your own devices.

Leave your foolish ways. That's what wisdom says. It makes demands of you. But folly doesn't make these kind of demands. Folly doesn't question you with asking you hard things.

Folly will never tell you you're foolish, of course. Folly is actually a lot easier to get along with. Wisdom folly is a lot easier to get along with. But there is a great cost to that easy relationship.

And we'll talk about that in a moment. So let's move on. So we're talking about the differences between wisdom folly and woman wisdom. Sorry, we're talking about the differences between woman folly and woman wisdom. So if there's two women, they call out to you. One wants your heart. It seems like one just wants your body. But you must choose. And what are the consequences? Here's the next thing.

What are the big consequences in choosing either way? Well, there's a huge difference. You choose wisdom, what happens? Verse 6. Leave your simple ways and live. Choose wisdom. Live.

[10 : 32] That's where there's life. Now what awaits you at the house of woman folly? It's a very dark sort of description here. Verse 18. What awaits you at her house? The dead are there.

The dead are there. Her guests are in the depths of Sheol. Now the dead, from what I read, in its original language, it's equivalent to something like what we would call ghosts.

It's like, it's saying that her house is filled with these kind of shadowy people. It's a very vivid picture. Her house is full of people that live these very sort of thin lives whose how do I say this?

Whose horizons don't often rise above meeting their own needs. Which is a very thin life, isn't it? It's a very narrow life. It's a shadowy life.

So folks, there are consequences to listening to lady wisdom or lady folly. And those consequences are life or death. So it's, you know, it's not messing around, this proverb.

[11 : 44] Now here's a good question. How do we know whose call we're listening to? So we have these two women both pursuing us. How do we know which one we're listening to?

How do we know what path that we're on? Well, the passage gives us some tests and now we're into the middle of the texts. We've talked about the first third. We've talked about the bottom third. We're going to talk about this middle third right now.

Verses 7 to 12. Well, one test is, are we growing? Look at verse 9 there. Give instruction to a wise man and he will be wiser still. Teach a righteous man.

He will increase in learning. My father-in-law is moving to Vancouver very soon to be part of a housing project. It's an apartment building especially built by a church in East Van, especially built for people who are hard or difficult to house.

My father-in-law is not difficult to house, but he's moving in there to be like a pastoral staff in this house to be like an advocate for these folks who perhaps can't advocate for themselves, for these other tenants.

[12 : 50] So he's been praying about this and discerning and speaking to lots of people about what he should do next with his life. And he's 67. 67 years old. And he's still asking the question, Father, and he's still talking to people, what should I do?

How can I serve you? I just think that is just remarkable. See, it doesn't matter how old you are. The test as to whether you're on the path of folly or whether you're on the path of wisdom is that you are still growing and you're still leaning into God.

So are you growing? That's one test. Another test to see what path you're on is do you fear the Lord? Now, it's a big idea in Proverbs and we've talked about that before.

The passage mentions it, but we'll move on because we have talked about it. I want to get to verses 7 and 8 here. Listen to this. It's very interesting kind of. It's not immediately obvious what it's saying here. Verse 7.

So what's that about?

[14 : 00] This is what it's about. Are you listening to Woman Wisdom or Wisdom Folly? A really big indicator is how you respond to reproof. How you respond to being corrected.

You might think that's kind of a minor issue. I mean, that feels like a minor thing in the Bible. Actually, you read Proverbs and we're going to get stuck into Proverbs over these next two months.

It is a significant theme in this book is how people respond to being called out. So our passage, it talks about a specific type of fool here.

One who is particularly lost and that person is called, we just read him, a scoffer. And how does a scoffer respond to correction? How do they respond to a pastor or a spouse or a friend or a relative calling them out on something?

They respond violently. See, the simple person in Proverbs might not like the correction, the fool might ignore it, but the scoffer takes it to a whole new level. You correct a scoffer, you get abused.

[15 : 08] They start yelling at you or thinking these awful things about you. You know, like for example here. So a good friend says to you, like the example I used before. So a good friend says to you, your boyfriends, I think he's no good for you.

Oh, I'm your friend. I just want to tell you this. I don't think he's good for you. I have a funny feeling about him. I don't think he's good for you. Or another friend says to you, listen, the way you handle your business, it feels a bit dodgy to me.

It doesn't feel like you're being a witness for Christ in there. So what's the scoffer's immediate response to that? Well, it's not acceptance. It's not like, tell me more, I want to hear this. You know, it's, well, I don't know what they think, but they might think something like this.

Ah, that person, they've never liked me. They have always had it in for me. Or, well, that person, they're just jealous of me. Or they've got an agenda. They're so judgmental.

They're always judging me. Judge not. They might even throw scripture at you, right? They might even quote scripture to you. See, these guys are the worst kind of fools in Proverbs.

[16 : 18] They're the worst kind because they have cut themselves off from any kind of help. They just won't listen. They refuse to be corrected. I've been studying this passage this week.

I keep asking myself, God, is this me? You know, is this me? It's a good question to ask yourself as I'm speaking. Is this me? So what about the wise? How do they respond to correction? Verse 8, Reprove a wise man, and he will love you.

Now, we've said this before, but it's very sort of gender, sort of exclusive here, but it's inclusive. I think we've said that before. I'm assuming you guys will know this.

When it says man, it's talking about woman. When it says son, it's talking about daughter as well. So reprove a wise man, reprove a wise woman, and they will love you. Notice it doesn't say they'll begrudgingly accept it.

They'll kind of hate it, but process it, and kind of like maybe do something about it. No, they'll love it. Folks, the wisest people, the wise people, the people on the path of wisdom who are listening to the voice of woman wisdom, what do they do?

[17 : 17] They actually seek out advice. They gather it. They love it. They welcome input into their decisions. They pursue correction. It's the married couple meeting another married couple because their marriage is in a tough time, and they're saying, would you help us?

We don't know what to do. We feel so stuck here. Tell us what to do. Help us. It's the friend getting together with another friend because they think they're a slack friend, and they go, would you just help me?

I feel like I'm really negative. I'm not supportive. Would you help me? Am I there? Do I talk too much? Do you think I'm trustworthy? Help me out here. I want to know. I want to be better at this stuff.

Folks, correction and instruction. This is the food and drink of lady wisdom. And if you're not being told how to improve, how do you grow? This is true in any area of our life, law, medicine, welding, art, just name a subject.

You don't get better without people speaking into your life. So we go to woman wisdom's house and we drink the cup of correction. We seek it out. That's the wise life.

[18 : 23] How are you doing on that? How are you doing on this? So I've been asking myself, how am I doing on this? Are you creating space in your life for this to happen? Are you in the type of intentional Christian group or small group or prayer group or Bible study or trio, whatever, where this kind of thing can happen?

If you're not, and you've never been, you run the risk of dying a fool. Lastly, before we finish, where's the gospel in all this, right?

Just sounds a bit kind of full on really, doesn't it? Where's the gospel here? Where's Jesus in all of this? Folks, what we've been talking about, it's at the heart of the gospel.

When we come to the cross, think about this. This is not me trying to force this into the sort of Christian salvation narrative here. Just think about this.

When you come to the cross, the very existence of the cross, what does that say to you? What is the truth that that expresses to you?

[19 : 31] It says this to you. It says, It's the great correction.

It's the great rebuke. And the wonderful news is, is that God forgives us and loves us and wants to live in peace with us, with him.

But we don't get that good news without accepting the correction, without being humbled by that correction and going, Yes, that is true.

Help me. Repentance. It's just, it's agreeing with God's assessment of us, isn't it? It's agreeing with God's great correction.

It's receiving that. It's the great reproof. It's the sweetest correction, isn't it? Because it's the path to life. It's the path to life with God. Now, this is where I'd normally finish the sermon, okay?

[20 : 32] But we're not. Because I think this is the kind of passage that requires a bit of space to think about. See, most of the time at this point, our service would sort of keep rolling on in this wonderful way.

But I want us to stop for just two or three minutes and sit, and I want us to ask the Holy Spirit to speak to us. So here's what's going to happen.

Before the intercessory prayer comes up, somebody from the band's going to come up and they're going to play for a couple of minutes, just something instrumental. During that time, I want us to use that time and I want us to ask some tough questions of ourselves.

I want us to ask questions like this. I want us to ask ourselves what path we're on. Are we listening to the call of woman folly?

Or are we listening to the call of woman wisdom? Whose call am I attending to? I want to ask how we respond to critique.

[21 : 32] How do we respond when somebody lovingly corrects us? Now, if you need to in this time, feel free to ask somebody to pray for you around you. But perhaps you're here and you're not a Christian at all, but you feel like God has been speaking to you here for the first time tonight or over a series of weeks.

And if you feel like God is speaking to you and you want to follow Jesus during this time in your heart, you can pray to him. You know that. I want you to know that. You can pray to him and you can ask him to forgive you and you can commit your life to him and you can use whatever words you want to convey that to God.

And he will forgive you and he will love you and he will adopt you into his family. And at the end of the service, if you feel like you're able to do this, it would be great if you told someone that you've done that. So that's what's going to happen now for the next couple of minutes.

He's going to pray for us and then Sean's going to come and pray. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[23 : 26] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.