

What is Fitting for a Fool

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[0 : 00] All right. Well, as you all know, last week, BK began a two-part series on the book of James about trials, how we endure and face trials. And you probably came here expecting part two of that series. BK is actually over at Grace Church in 99. He is preaching there this morning.

But don't worry, he's not going to leave you hanging forever. Next week, he will be back, and he'll finish that second part series on the book of James on the trials we encounter in life. So I just advise you, for the time being, just try not to have any trials. Don't go through anything hard this week, you know, and you'll be okay. You'll make it through to next week when we can learn about how we endure trials and go through them. So let me open in prayer, and then we're going to dive into a particular trial, which is encountering someone who is foolish and working through that in our lives. Father, we thank you that your word contains so much wisdom. We confess, Lord God, we come to it. We take little bites, little pieces. We grab what's useful to us. But Lord, we have not taken the time to sit and to look at the world through your eyes and your ways and to understand you in all your fullness. And I pray this morning, as we examine just these practical problems of life, that we would do so not just merely for some nice tips and tricks for life, but that we would examine your heart, oh God, the way you look at the world, the way that you relate to us, the way that you perceive things. And we would come to know what kind of God you are, a God of wisdom. Lord, we tend to be blind, give us eyes to see. We are deaf, give us ears to hear. Our hearts are hardened, give us hearts that understand. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, do you know any fools? No, okay, don't be nudging the person next to you. But okay, let's just be frank. Do you know any fools? The answer is yes.

Yes, you do. And if you say, well, I don't, well, then you just don't really realize yet that some of the people in your life are what the book of Proverbs calls fools. And we're going to talk in a moment about what does that mean to be foolish or a fool. But the question we often face is, how do you respond to a fool? How do you respond to a fool? How do you relate to one? And maybe you're the kind of person, there are some of us this morning, who has nothing but contempt for a fool. You've got no difficulty, oh, that's a fool, write them off. Cut that fool out of your life. Walk away. If so, this sermon, it'll be of some help to you, but probably the sermon that'll be the most help is in a couple weeks, we're going to come back and we're going to talk about the sin of contempt. And so that's the one, if that's, if you tend towards being the person who's quick to identify and cut off a fool, that might be the one that really gets you. Now, let's say you've got fools in your life that are very complicated for you to live with and love well, and you're not the kind of person who just quickly writes off somebody, right? If you're having trouble thinking, how do I relate to this person? How do I love this person? How do I, if so, then this sermon is for you.

It is an introduction to, this is just an introduction because the book of Proverbs is the whole thing, but this is an introduction to the very complex subject of how we develop relational wisdom, relational wisdom in responding to a fool. And I hope as we go along that we will see that this is the same relational wisdom that God himself possesses. It comes from a God who knows how to relate to his children because it turns out that we as the children of God have often been fools ourselves, but our God is wise and he knows how to love us. And so we in turn can turn around to other people and learn from our God, how we love them, even in their folly. I'm going to start by reading a passage. This passage, at least one commentator has called a mirror for fools. And it's Proverbs chapter 26 verses one through 10. So Proverbs 26 verses one through 10, if you're using one of the blue Bibles that our ushers handed out, that's on page 547. Page 547. So this is sort of a collection of Proverbs about fools and our relationships with them.

like snow and summer or rain and harvest. So honor is not fitting for a fool. Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying, a curse that is causeless does not alight. A whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey and a rod for the back of fools. Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes. Whoever sends a message by the hand of a fool cuts off his own feet and drinks violence.

[5 : 31] Like a lame man's legs, which hang useless, is a proverb in the mouth of fools. Like one who binds the stone in the sling is one who gives honor to a fool. Like a thorn that goes up into the hand of a drunkard is a proverb in the mouth of fools. Like an archer who wounds everyone is one who hires a passing fool or drunkard. This is the word of the Lord. The Holy Spirit has given us these words through wise men of the past who brought them together in this collection and carefully arranged these proverbs into this book. And these wise men collected proverbs in this section that tell us what is fitting for a fool. Now, if we're going to understand how to apply these, how to put these into practice, we have to define our terms first. What exactly is a fool anyway? That's a word that sometimes gets thrown around, but we don't want to apply this label to just anybody. We don't want to throw it around as an insult or throw it around just to quickly dismiss and define and categorize people. We need to understand what exactly folly is. And one of the best ways to do that is to remember what the opposite of folly is. What exactly is meant by wisdom? Now, a few weeks ago, I preached a sermon on verses 11 through 16, a sermon on the sluggard. And in that sermon, at the beginning of January, I quoted

J.I. Packer's definition of wisdom that I found tremendously helpful. Packer says, wisdom in scripture means choosing the best and noblest end at which to aim, along with the most appropriate and effective means to it. Wisdom in scripture means choosing the best and noblest end at which to aim, along with the most appropriate and effective means to it. So wisdom is about means and it's about ends. Where you're going and how you get there. If you've read the book of Proverbs all the way through, I think you'll find this definition of wisdom corresponds very well with what you see in the book of Proverbs. Now, the book of Proverbs, the more that I ponder, the more I meditate on it, the more I think it's one of the books that challenges, stands in stark opposition to the ideas, the mentality that consume our culture in 21st century North America. There is actually a fundamental contradiction between the two. There's a famous line from the United States Supreme Court decision in 1992 and it makes this sweeping claim. At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.

The book of Proverbs would respond to that by saying that a wise person does not define these things for himself or for herself. Rather, there is already a sacred order to the world. There is a structure and purpose. There is a deep wisdom that has already been put in place by God himself.

If you want to read a book-length treatment of this, C.S. Lewis writes about this in his book, *The Abolition of Man*, the contrast between this idea that there is a deep order and structure to the world which we want to live in alignment with, that God made, versus our culture's idea that you just make reality for yourself and you carve out your own path and you find your own identity.

The wisdom, the order that we see in the world, yes, it's become corrupted. You see that in the books of Ecclesiastes and Job that wrestle with that. But there is an order behind it all that remains nonetheless.

[9 : 26] And it is our responsibility, as God's creatures, to align ourselves with God's great purpose for the world and with God's order and structure for the world.

When we fail to do that, when we fail to align ourselves with God's wisdom, then we do not become people of liberty. We instead become fools. It is the heart of folly to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.

Only the fool invents his own idea of the best and noblest end at which to aim. Only a fool devises his own means to it. Or as Ecclesiastes 12, verse 13 puts it, What is the end or purpose of humanity?

Fear God. You know and you live the truth that God is great, God is good, God is with us. You honor Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of the world.

What's the means to that end? Keep his commandments. You live in alignment with his character and his ways. It's the same idea as saying man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

[10 : 46] This is the end that we were made for. This is the purpose. And so the book of Proverbs asserts in chapter 1, verse 7, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.

And then in contrast, fools despise wisdom and instruction. They do not want God's end and they do not want the means to get there. So what does it look like?

Can we use an illustration to capture what it looks like to be a fool who rejects the best and noblest end at which to aim? A fool who despises the most appropriate and effective means to it.

Well, the book of Proverbs uses a variety of words to flesh out the different kinds of fool. As it turns out, there's all sorts of different categories. Not all fools are created equal. And it's helpful to think about it this way.

So I'll use this illustration. And I think maybe this will help us. We use a nice contextual Squamish illustration here. First, think of someone who's wise. This is someone who is well informed about his proper end and the means to get there.

[11 : 50] This is someone who knows what's true, remembers it, navigates his life well in light of this knowledge. So an illustration. Within a few weeks of moving to Squamish, I was invited to hike the Sea to Summit Trail.

Brent Smith invited me to join him on that hike. And we started out at the base of the gondola and hiked up to the Summit Lodge at the top. Now, that turned out to be a bit of a disaster because I came down with a stomach bug on the way up.

That was, oh man, that is quite a memory. I will never forget that experience. Thankfully, Brent was a wise guide. Because Brent knew the end at which to aim.

Brent knew exactly what the Summit Lodge looked like. He knew where it was. And not only that, Brent knew the most appropriate means to it. The most appropriate and effective means to get there.

He knew where the trail was and he knew how to follow the trail markers. If we were ever to go off course, obviously I was lost because I was just barely hanging in there.

[12 : 59] But Brent could quickly catch his mistake. There's no trail markers here. Wait a minute. Backtrack. Find the trail again. And he hiked in alignment with the way that things were. Brent didn't try to carve his own path up the mountain to God knows where.

You can imagine what that might have been like. It is good to have such a wise guide when you're hiking up a mountain as sick as a dog. That's my experience. Such are the benefits of wisdom.

What if Brent weren't a wise guide? Let's suppose Brent were the kind of man that the book of Proverbs, and you saw it when Chris read chapter one, a word that got thrown out there. Simple.

Maybe your translation might say something like naive. Our culture's view is that wisdom, the place, if you want to find wisdom, the place you look is in those who are young and untaught.

Youth culture. Because this person hasn't yet been repressed and restricted by all those oppressive rules of society. Right?

[14 : 00] That just teach you all this awful way to think. I mean, this is like how many Disney movies are about this, right? It's the young person who knows the right way. And all those old fools out there, you know, just need to listen.

Think of how many modern movies and TV shows portray. It's the adults who are the hapless fools. It's the children who speak the wisdom. And they always have this precocious, special wisdom to say to their parents.

It's the idea, someone younger has been, they haven't been damaged by their parents' teaching and the teaching of their culture. They're free to be their true and authentic self. That is not the way the book of Proverbs portrays youth.

A person like that is, as we saw in chapter one, they're not wise, but simple. I know that, I'm sorry if you're a young person, but that's, it's true.

And me thinking back, and lest you, you're like, no, that's not me. Okay, just give yourself 10 years and then look back to where you're at now. In fact, start writing, start keeping a journal.

[15 : 01] Write all your thoughts in your journal and then go back and read it in 10 years. I did that. I cringed 10 years later when I read my thoughts. I was like, oh my goodness, I can't believe I thought like that. Oh man, I had no idea what I was doing.

This is the kind of person who is easily led, gullible, silly. He's rather thoughtless, yet he just bounds on ahead, following his desires and passions into all sorts of scrapes and messes.

That's how the book of Proverbs portrays the simple one. When he falls in with the wrong crowd, he is led into ruin. The simple one, the prescription is he ought to listen to the instruction of his father and mother.

He needs the wisdom, the Proverbs. So if we call the wise person well-informed, then we call the simple person uninformed. So if Brent had been a simple guide, he would have taken me on a hike up to the Summit Lodge, and he would have no idea what the Summit Lodge looked like.

He wouldn't know what it was like even if he found it. And then, he wouldn't even know where the trail was. He would just start out and be like, I don't know, let's just go.

[16 : 13] Let's just see what happens here. He would have been a simple guide, and there's a lot of potential for that sort of hike to go terribly wrong. Now let's go a step further. Let's suppose Brent were the kind of man that the Proverbs calls a fool.

If the wise person is well-informed and the simple person is uninformed, the fool we might call misinformed. They've got the wrong ideas in their head. Has anyone here worked a customer service job before?

You ever worked in customer service, retail, at a restaurant, on the phone? Ever encountered a misinformed customer who knew that they were right?

Then you've encountered a classic fool. The fool is convinced he knows what the Summit Lodge looks like, because after all, he did a Google image search, typed in Summit Lodge, first photo came up with some shack somewhere, he's like, that's what it looks like.

I know now, I've got it in my head, and it gets stuck in his head. That's the end of the hike. And the fool knows, oh man, well, when you go to a hike, you just look for brightly colored flags.

[17 : 20] And so they just follow whatever flags that there are in the forest, and they just wander off all over the place, going up and down the mountain. A tour guide like that can get you into all sorts of scrapes.

That tour guide will tell you, no, we don't need to call search and rescue. We're on the right trail. Besides, I didn't bring my phone anyway, you know? Finally, the book of Proverbs speaks of two specific categories of fool.

One we encountered the other week, back in January, the sluggard. And that's what this passage on the fool in chapter 26 sort of then proceeds to talk about, is the sluggard.

If the fool is misinformed, then the sluggard is uninformable. Cannot be informed. You cannot challenge the sluggard, you cannot correct him. If you question his idea of like, hey, wait a minute, does Summit Lodge really look like that little shack?

He's like, well, I've been to that shack. I've been there many times. I know what it looks like, okay? If you question the random path the sluggard is carving his way through the forest, he shoots back, I know where I'm going.

[18 : 22] This is the way I always go. Don't try to change me. And then, in addition to the sluggard, another type of fool is the scoffer. If the wise person is well-informed and the fool is misinformed, the scoffer is straight up anti-information.

Anti-information. If you try to question him, like, is that what the Summit Lodge really looks like? He'll say, are you stupid? Are you ignorant?

He'll mock you. If you suggest, hey, maybe we should try a different trail, maybe we follow the green diamond markings there. He's like, what are you, a coward? We're going the right way.

Oh, okay, yeah, you want to go back to your mommy. You know, you just want to give up. The scoffer doesn't care to learn. Anyone who teaches the scoffer is going to get a healthy dose of scorn right back at them.

So are we getting an idea? There's these different varieties of folly that we might encounter among the people we know. Are there fools in your family?

[19 : 28] Are there fools at your school? Are there fools at your workplace? Are there fools that you have to interact with on a daily basis? Are there fools at your church?

The reason I present all these to you is because I want you to imagine that you're on a hike with a guide who is a fool. And some of you may have been a bit too compliant with the fools in your life.

You're so used to going along with the fool. Letting the fool take the lead. Accommodating the fool. I try not to rock the boat. Maybe if I give him what he wants, he'll be nicer.

Maybe if I let her have her way, she'll be happy. Maybe if I give him a promotion, he'll start living up to his potential. If that's you, if you have a tendency to yield to a fool, these verses are for you.

They tell us what is fitting for a fool. Let's work our way backward. We're going to start at verses 6 through 10. Here's the central message of these verses.

[20 : 36] Proverbs 26, verses 6 through 10. A fool should be given wariness, not responsibility. A fool should be given wariness, not responsibility. You need to be wary around a fool.

Don't be quick to give them responsibility. If you look at these verses for a while, you'll notice a pattern. These five verses begin with verse 6, end with verse 10, and they sort of, there's a symmetry to them.

Verses 6 and 10 are symmetrical. They focus on what happens when you hire a fool to do an important job. And then we move inward. Verses 7 and 9 are symmetrical too. These verses focus on what happens when a fool quotes a proverb.

Then finally, the center is verse 8. This verse speaks of what happens when a fool is elevated to a position of honor. So all five of these verses focus in on what happens when a fool is entrusted with important things.

With honor, with words of wisdom, or with important tasks. What happens is, at best, failure. And at worst, disaster.

[21 : 44] That spills not only onto the fool, but on everyone around the fool. Now these words of wisdom are nothing if not colorful. Notice verse 6. Whoever sends a message by the hand of a fool, cuts off his own feet and drinks violence.

Well, that's a little blunt. In a time when long distance communication had to be done with the help of a messenger. You know, there was no instant messaging.

There was no WhatsApp. Nothing like that. Not even a telegraph. Information could travel only as fast as a horse. This proverb suggests you are better off using your own feet than the feet of a fool.

The fool will probably screw up the message. That will lead to terrible consequences. Maybe the person you're communicating with will respond with violence because of a miscommunication.

Be wary when a fool comes to you with a report about a conversation that you weren't a part of. They're going to tell you how the conversation went and reenact it.

[22 : 52] And if you trust their report, bad things could happen. Don't be quick to believe it. Take it with a grain of salt. Don't be surprised when a fool then turns around and twists your own words as well.

A fool can do a lot of damage to you when you entrust the fool with something important. And not just to you, but to others as well. Consider verse 10. Like an archer who wounds everyone is one who hires a passing fool or drunkard.

Different translations handle this verse in different ways. I think our modern translations, they seem to get it right. If you hire a fool and the fool causes a lot of damage, guess who's to blame according to this verse?

If you hire the fool, the fool causes damage. Whose fault is it? Yours. Yours. You're the archer in this proverb. You're the one who hired the fool.

The fool is a fool. They're just going to cause damage. Don't put them into your bow and let it go. This ought to be a warning to those of us who just want to give a fool a third chance and a fourth and a fifth and a sixth and a seventh and an eighth.

[24 : 05] I know your heart is good. You're wanting to help the fool. You have compassion. And that's good that you have compassion. But consider that you may end up hurting a lot of other people when you do.

Not just yourself, as verse 6 says. You might hurt a lot of other people too. When you entrust a fool with an important task. Move toward the center now.

Verse 7. Like a lame man's legs which hang useless is a proverb in the mouth of fools. But we all know that, hey, some of us, maybe we suffer from paralysis.

Maybe you've just got a gimpy knee or a gimpy hip. Points that our legs, whose purpose is to move us around, aren't having any effect at all. We're not doing what legs are supposed to do.

And so it is with a proverb or a Bible verse. I know people who can quote, who've memorized all sorts of Bible verses, can quote them left and right.

[25 : 06] And they have no clue what any of them mean. They have no clue how to use them. They have no clue how the Bible fits together. It's just a jumble of magic spells the way they talk about it.

Just quote a verse, quote a verse, quote a verse. As though it's like some sort of magic spell that solves the problem in this situation. That's the best case scenario when you hand the Bible to a fool or when you hand a proverb to a fool.

The worst case scenario is verse 9. Like a thorn that goes up into the hand of a drunkard is a proverb in the mouth of fools. Here's the picture.

Imagine a guy who's drunk. He's flailing around and unsteady and he grabs a branch covered in thorns. Grips it.

Starts swinging it wildly around. He doesn't feel all the thorns digging into his own hand. The blood coming down. He doesn't see the damage that he's doing to other people who are running away from his branch.

[26 : 11] There's a real danger of spiritual abuse when we take God's words and we brandish them when we have not learned his ways.

I have seen people quote Bible verses and use the Bible in ways that just honestly make me cringe.

Because they offer counsel that actually does damage to other people. Because they don't even understand the text. They misunderstand the whole scope of scriptures. And not only that, they misunderstand the person they're using the scriptures on.

They don't understand the situation they're speaking to. BK has mentioned in the past that there is actually a danger when someone who is a new Christian, there's a danger of sometimes that person wants to take a shortcut to maturity.

They start accumulating vast amounts of biblical and theological knowledge. They're just on YouTube all the time, watching whatever. They're reading book after book after book after book. And gaining that knowledge is good.

[27 : 19] But they are gaining the knowledge, but they're not living in community. They're not learning how to put it into practice in the church community. In the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul says of such people, Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

What happens is you end up puffed up, your head big and puffed up with pride. You start bashing people over the head with your knowledge of Christian doctrine. Often this is called the cage stage of learning.

It is a period of time which the puffed up person ought to be locked in a cage for a few years until he learns to express his knowledge with humility. Until that doctrine that has puffed up his head starts to go down and sink into his heart.

Someone who cannot just quote a proverb willy-nilly, but has actually let it sink in. Applied it to their own life.

Learn to walk in the law of the Lord. There's another danger that can come from giving a fool a proverb or a rule. A fool wants to run his life his way.

[28 : 27] And often a fool just wants a few rules, a few pro tips to fix the problems he's running into in life. Just give me a few tips. Give me a few rules. Sometimes when I'm counseling people just want, okay, just tell me what to do.

Give me a few rules. He doesn't understand the way of wisdom that lies underneath the Bible verses you give him. He just wants a checklist to follow. He wants hoops to jump through. A fool says, just tell me what to do, man.

Okay, and I'll just do it. And then that'll fix my problems. You know what that's like? That is like somebody, it's like having a friend of yours who has lived 20 years in Squamish and has never learned the layout of the town.

He's been driving around town for 20 years and every single time he has to pull out his phone and take his GPS and get turn-by-turn directions to get anywhere because he has no idea where everything is.

He's just constantly just, I just tell me what to do. Tell me where to go. And he's never learned the map. So it is with a fool and his craving for the turn-by-turn directions of rules and Proverbs and proof texts.

[29 : 28] He wishes the Bible were a gigantic encyclopedia that told him what to do in every situation. He hasn't learned the art of wisdom. He hasn't learned and looked at God's world as a place of wisdom and order and wondered, how can I walk in his ways?

To him, the church is a place that is merely useful. Jesus Christ is useful as a mascot for the causes he already has.

Jesus is useful for his therapeutic benefits to prop up the person's life. Jesus is useful as a delivery vehicle for the stuff he wants. A fool shows up at church and doesn't understand.

We're not here because it's useful. We're here to exalt Jesus as king. Because God has so ordered the world to honor and lift up his son, to elevate his son.

And so it is that a fool ought not to be entrusted with important knowledge. Because he's just going to put it to terrible use.

[30 : 37] And finally, at the center, we read in verse 8. Like one who binds the stone in the sling is one who gives honor to a fool. So imagine, the sling was a weapon in the ancient world.

And could be quite a surprisingly powerful one. Imagine you take a long strap made out of cloth. And you put a stone in the center of the strap. And then you grab both ends of the cloth.

And then you start swinging. There's circles overhead. And you swing and you swing and swing. That stone reaches incredible speeds. And then you let go one end. You watch it fly.

That stone is a serious weapon. That stone can strike a killer blow. A stone like that brought down Goliath. Now, what would have happened if you tied the stone into the sling before you started swinging it around?

You tied it in place. Maybe put a little super glue there just to make sure it stays still. Well, one thing that wouldn't happen is you certainly wouldn't bring down Goliath with that. What you might end up doing is cracking yourself in the skull with your own sling.

[31 : 43] And so it is when you entrust a fool with important knowledge and important tasks. At best, the stone flies away uselessly, missing its target. At worst, you crack yourself in the head.

Or maybe knock down a bystander. You do not honor, you do not elevate a fool. I say this particularly in light. Within the church, within local churches, we want to make sure, and we have made this mistake before, even in our own church, of putting in a position of leadership someone who is a fool.

Someone as pastor or elder or ministry leader. Someone who has the education or the charismatic personality or tremendous talent or a brilliant ability to teach.

But whose patterns of behavior betray the folly underneath. That is why the qualifications of a Christian leader are that they be above reproach in their character.

Do not elevate a fool to a position of honor. It is not fitting to trust a fool with important things. This is the way the Lord operates too.

[33 : 06] Go and read the parable of the talents when you have time. It's Matthew chapter 25 verses 14 to 30. Matthew 25, 14 to 30. And what you're going to find there is the way that God relates to us is the same way.

We, in this world, in this life, we are entrusted with good things, in particular the gospel. And that entrusting is a test.

How do you put into practice these things? And what happens in the parable is those who have acquitted themselves well in this life are entrusted with important things in the next.

Those who do not acquit themselves well but squander their opportunities in this life, they are not entrusted with important things in the next. If that is the way that the Lord relates to fools, ought we not do the same?

Ought we not walk according to his wisdom? A fool should be given wariness, not responsibility. Take caution. Take prudence.

[34 : 07] Let's continue moving backward to a pair of verses that is really interesting. Here we find, in verses 4 and 5, that a fool should be given careful correction, not natural conversation.

Careful correction, not natural conversation. Let me read these verses and then I'll explain what I mean by that. Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.

Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes. Take a look at that. Look carefully. Notice any problems here.

What do you think those two verses are doing together? Oh no, we've found a contradiction, haven't we? Do you answer a fool or don't you? Here's the thing. When you see a fool making a mess of things, hurting themselves, hurting all the people around them, maybe even hurting you, you have to make a decision.

Do I say something or do I go on saying nothing? If you say nothing, then the fool becomes wise in his own eyes. They think there's no problem.

[35 : 20] He keeps thinking he's doing just fine. He's handling life well. If you say something, then you get dragged into some sort of awful argument.

You get all defensive, you know, when they come back at you. Maybe a yelling match starts. You just start doing, you fall into those same old patterns of conflict that you just always keep falling into. You start saying and doing foolish things yourself.

There's an old folk saying, what's the sense of wrestling with a pig? You get all over muddy and the pig likes it. All right? Oh, boy.

Answer a fool, don't answer a fool. If this feels like a no-win situation, then welcome to life with a fool. I've been in situations where someone is, and this is something that's hard, someone's lashing out at me with all sorts of wild, impulsive demands and accusations, and I have to sit there and I have to restrain myself and my words because I can't respond in kind.

That's especially hard when you're a pastor. You can't just, yeah, right back at you. No. You have to sit, you have to think, you have to pray, you have to get wisdom, you send a reply, five seconds later, boom!

[36 : 32] It feels like fighting with one arm tied behind your back. Right? It's really hard. Some people, I say this in counseling, okay? Some people are just really complicated to love.

Just really complicated to love. How do you help them? The answer is very carefully. So often, we make the mistake of treating a fool like they're not a fool.

We make the mistake of just trying to answer a fool with an unplanned, natural conversation. I just want a natural conversation with this person. I want to just sit down with them and just start talking, like I do with so-and-so.

We blurt out a bunch of unexamined, unprepared thoughts. Unprocessed. That is a huge mistake to make when you're talking with a fool. Do not do that.

Think about it like you're feeding someone a carrot. If I'm going to feed an adult a carrot, so let's say, hmm, say if I'm going to feed Janet a carrot, okay?

[37 : 33] I can just hand her a carrot. She can cut it up herself and eat it. She can chew it on her own. Am I right? Okay. You don't have to do any processing when you're feeding Janet a carrot.

That is not the case with an infant. You can't just hand a baby a carrot. You've got to take that carrot. You've got to cut it up into little pieces. You've got to blend it down to mush.

You've got to put it in a bowl. You've got to spoon feed the baby the mushy carrot. And even then, there's a chance that baby may scream and throw a fit and make a mess, and there's carrot mush everywhere, okay?

But, you know, you try. And often it works. Not that any of us ever did that as a child, okay? You know, I'm not making any accusations. I'm sure you were all perfect babies. But that is how it is with the fool.

You have to prepare the carrot for them to eat. You have to be the one to sit down ahead of time, take a lot of time to pray first. Then, you have to plan out the conversation.

[38 : 39] What's the goal of this conversation? Remember, what's the best and noblest end of that conversation? What do I need to say? And then, what's the most effective and appropriate means to it?

How do I make my points really clear and simple? How do I hold this conversation God's way? What reactions might I anticipate from the other person? How do I respond to those?

How do I prepare for those? You are almost certainly going to need some help. Especially if it's someone very close to you that you tend to get really emotionally reactive towards when you get into a conversation.

You need help to plan it. You might even need to document the conversation. Write it out. Script it ahead of time. Make an outline.

Afterwards, take notes. Make sure you've got receipts about what was said. You have to answer a fool's folly. But you do not answer it in a way that gets you sucked into the folly.

[39 : 36] If all that prayer and all that preparation sounds exhausting, maybe it is. Maybe it sounds like so much work.

But believe me, do the hard work up front. Because if you just go into a difficult conversation with a fool and you do not have a plan, guess what you will be doing afterward?

A lot more hard work. A lot more cleanup than you ever imagined. Trust me, you save time and energy if you plan ahead.

Be thoughtful in your correction. After all, has not the Lord done the same for you? God's words in Scripture are not these impulsive, unplanned utterances the way we so often communicate.

They are wise words. He has crafted them well to address our own folly, to address our own condition.

[40 : 40] And he has sometimes we take his carefully processed words and we throw them everywhere and misuse them. But that's not on the Lord. He has done it well.

A fool should be given careful correction, not a natural conversation. And so now we've worked our way backwards to the very first set of verses. And those are the ones where we're going to end with.

Verses 1 to 3. We find that a fool should be given a penalty, not prominence. A penalty, not prominence. Verse 1 reads, Like snow in summer or rain in harvest, so honor is not fitting for a fool.

Snow is out of place in the summer. Rain during harvest isn't just out of place. It can ruin the crop. These things do not belong together.

They can be a disaster. And so it is, as we saw before, when you take a fool and you put him in a position of honor. When you promote a fool at work because he is well liked.

[41 : 51] When you try to win the approval of a fool in your class at school. I just want them to like me. When you keep giving money to a fool who squanders it all and asks again for more.

When you let a fool control the conversation while you lie down like a doormat. When you let a fool live rent free inside your head. When you appoint a fool as deacon or elder at a church.

A fool should not be elevated to these positions of prominence and power. It is not fitting. In his commentary on this verse, Matthew Henry observes.

Princes, instead of giving honor to a fool, must put disgrace upon him. Instead of putting power into his hand, must exercise power over him. His point is that fools need someone from the outside to step in and exercise control when the fool cannot do so.

Or is not willing to do so. And that's hard. Because if you are a person who is wise, it is not your desire and it is not your heart to control people. Like look, if you're the kind of person who does like controlling people, then I wouldn't, don't put yourself in the wise category, okay?

[43 : 13] You belong in the fool category. But if you are a wise person, your heart is not to control people. Your heart is you want to see people mature and making their own decisions and you cheering them on and saying, yeah, great job.

Let me encourage you. Let me help you. You know, that's your heart. That's what you love. Some people actually need you to step in and to be the adult in the room.

You might not feel like it's not your place, but God might be calling you to step up in this situation. And I would urge you very strongly, because that is such a dangerous thing to do and because our pride can so quickly come in, seek counsel before you do that.

Okay, let's talk with someone who's wise, help them process. Okay, what do we do? How do I respond? Is it right for me to step in here? Because what you might have to do is described in verse three, a whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools.

Now, if you are a warrior riding a chariot into battle, drawn by horses, your life and death depends on having a whip to control your horse.

[44 : 30] Okay, like we don't like to just whip horses, but believe me, if you're going into battle, you know, all those concerns are out the window, right? Life and death are on the line. Words of encouragement to your horse are not enough.

If a donkey is pulling a load, you need a bridle to keep it on track, not words of coaxing. Oh, come on, come on back to the bow. Come on back to the path, please.

And so it is with fools. Words are not enough. A fool needs to feel the consequences. This is sometimes really hard for us. If you're a person of compassion, this is going to be very hard.

And to be frank, we all ought to be persons of compassion like Jesus Christ. This ought to feel hard for all of us to hear this. If this doesn't feel hard for you, again, come back in two weeks.

There's a sermon on contempt, okay? When I'm counseling people on these sorts of relationships, I talk about setting boundaries. Now, maybe you've heard about this idea of setting boundaries.

[45 : 30] A boundary is a set of rules or expectations that you communicate to a fool about how the fool ought to behave towards you. If you do this, here's something that's very important about boundaries.

A lot of times people set boundaries out of self-preservation. I just want to protect myself. Stay away. Keep away. Don't cross the line. You don't do it out of self-preservation.

Jesus set boundaries, and he never did it out of self-preservation. He did it out of love. You can do it out of love for the fool. What you do is you set expectations.

You establish consequences. You do it all in advance and communicate it in advance. And then when the fool just keeps doing what they've always done, you follow through with what you said you would do.

That's very important. Because if you set a boundary, and then they just ignore it, and then you're like, oh, no. Then they're just going to keep being a fool. And now they know that you can't be trusted to keep your word.

[46 : 36] You need to do this because if you want to love a fool, you've got to know this. Fools need a rod for their backs. It is the only way they learn through the hard school of consequences.

If the police never handed out speeding tickets, what would our roads be like? Okay? You know what a speeding ticket is?

A rod for the back of fools. I say this as somebody who got just such a rod a couple years ago. Okay? I got a rod in my back, and I got the lesson. Listen. If you're the kind of person who tends to yield to a fool, who tends to just keep bailing a fool out, who keeps saving a fool from the consequences of his or her actions, it is time to stop.

The fool needs to feel the pain. It is the only teacher a fool will listen to. The best way to love a fool, and remember, you want to do this out of love, not out of contempt.

The best way to love a fool is to let the fool face the penalty. Let them experience the consequences. Think of the parable of the prodigal son.

[47 : 51] Again, that's Luke chapter 15, verses 11 to 32. You can read it later if you'd like. The wandering son who left his father squandered his inheritance. He did, you know when he came to his senses?

Not until he was starving as a hired hand in a field, and he was staring longingly at the food the pigs were eating, and then he woke up. It took the rod of starvation to bring him back to his father, humble and contrite.

And his father held no contempt for him. He let him endure all that. So that he would come back humble and contrite to open arms.

There are two reasons you might not be letting a fool feel the rod. One, is that, you know, you do just feel bad about seeing someone hurting. If you've got a lot of empathy that we ought to have for other people, there's just no getting around this.

I'm sorry it is going to hurt. It's going to hurt you to see them hurting. If you love a fool, it hurts to see them experience the consequences of their folly. You cannot save them just to make yourself feel better.

[49 : 07] That's not love. That's just making yourself feel better. You must be willing to bear this burden out of love. Another reason that you might not be willing to let a fool feel the rod is you're afraid of how the fool is going to respond when you stop saving them again and again.

How they'll respond when you stop bailing them out, when you stop giving them money, when you stop cleaning up their messes after them, when you stop smoothing over all the relationships they keep breaking, when you stop doing all the work that they ought to be doing themselves.

What's the fool going to do when you tell them you're not going to save them anymore, when you set that boundary out of love for them? Matthew Henry tells us, when you put a fool in a position of prominence, here's what he does.

Give honor to a fool, and he thunders out his anathemas against all that he is disgusted with, right or wrong. He voices and gives vent to all his anger and all the things he's frustrated with and all the people who have harmed him and all his grievances.

And if that's true when a fool is elevated, how much more when you remove the elevation, when a fool's support is taken away.

[50 : 26] It is very possible that the fool will thunder out his anathemas all the louder and now against you. The fool will accuse you of being a horrible person, a bad Christian.

I remember once trying to sell my car and the person who, there were a competition between a couple people to get it, and the loser let me know that I was a very bad person.

How can you call yourself a pastor? How can you call yourself a Christian? They used that against me because they didn't get the car they wanted.

You may come away and, you may come away feeling absolutely rotten. I've been there. Wondering, hey, maybe, maybe the fool's right after all. Maybe I'm a garbage person who just won't help somebody.

Verse 2 offers you a reassurance from the Lord if you are enduring the wrath of a fool. Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying, a curse that is causeless does not alight.

[51 : 35] The accusing words of the fool mean nothing to God. He pays them no regard.

He does not listen. I know their words hurt. They do. And so what I want to say in the middle of that hurt is to assure you of this. Those words the fool speaks to you, they have no divine warrant.

They have no divine approval to them. They have no divine power. The fool has no real power over you. When you are walking with the Lord in the way of wisdom, getting counsel, getting help.

Matthew Henry, again, he speaks about the person who suffers the verbal assault of a fool. The curse shall do him no more harm than the bird that flies over his head than Goliath's curses did to David.

It will fly away like the sparrow or the wild dove, which go nobody knows where, till they return to their proper place. As the curse will at length return upon the head of him that uttered it.

[52 : 47] Understand that when your aim, again, is to love a fool and you want to do it with gracious, gentle wisdom, you do it God's way.

Your Father in heaven is not on the side of the fool who responds with rage. He is not on their side. Your Father in heaven is with you. Remember what we said about wisdom?

It begins with the fear of the Lord. It means that you know this, God is great. His words have absolute eternal power. The fool's words flit away like a sparrow.

God is good. His words cover you with honor and glory. They cover over all of those shameful and accusing words from a fool.

God is with you. He will never leave you nor forsake you. Remember these words from Psalm 118. The Lord is on my side.

[53 : 58] I will not fear. What can man do to me? The Lord is on my side as my helper. I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.

Those are the words that Jesus Christ was able to take and appropriate for himself. They are his words that belong to him. And those words belong to you as well.

If you have been rescued from your own folly by Jesus Christ and put your faith in him, Jesus alone is the embodiment of wisdom.

He is full of the wisdom of God. By the wisdom of God, Jesus was sent as a perfect sacrifice. He has saved sinners from their sin. He has saved fools from their folly.

Jesus suffered the rod that was fitting for a fool. He took your place so that you would put your faith in him and gain his wisdom.

[54 : 59] So what is most fitting for a fool? To turn to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Father, our Father, we come to you not from a place of pride because you oppose the proud, but you give grace to the humble.

Let us not be fools ourselves, strut around thinking we are the ones with great, tremendous wisdom. Lord, you know how often we fall back into our own folly, how often we fall into our own strategies to save ourselves and make ourselves okay and make life okay, how often we come to you just looking for useful tips and tricks to get through life, how often we lose sight of your right agenda.

We have been fools. And I thank you that you have been patient, patient, patient, patient with us, slow to anger, abounding with steadfast love.

So let us be that way for the people in our lives who do fall under the category of the heading of fool. Let us know how to love them too, how to be firm, how not to entrust them with things that they ought not to be entrusted with, how to speak to them in a careful and prepared manner, how to let them endure consequences so that they may turn to you, so that they may turn from their folly.

And Lord, for every fool that turns from his folly and turns from her folly and turns back to you, let us celebrate. Throw a party because the one who is lost has been found.

[56 : 44] Lord God, make us people who know how to relate to others the way that you have done for us. Amen.