

Life in a Nutshell

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 March 2026

Preacher: Rev Calum M Smith

[0:00] We can turn back to our reading in the book of Proverbs, chapter 9. We're looking at this whole chapter together this morning, but we read again at verse 10.

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

Well, as I was saying with the young ones, we're looking at this passage today in the light of the choices that are put before us in the Word of God.

And we look at life and what it means to us. We ask the question, what is life? That's a big question for us to think about, but I'm sure it's something we consider from time to time, although most of the time we maybe just live our lives, just keep going, trying to get used to things, trying to understand different things in life and maybe not finding answers.

Or maybe we look at life about just getting through and pushing on, keeping going. There's so many different experiences that we have to go through in life. But is there a purpose in it all, and what is the purpose in it all?

[1:13] Well, as we're looking for answers to these big questions, God's Word reminds us where these answers are found. That there's more to life than just pushing on.

There's more to life than just trying to find our way through it. But the answers are found in the fact if we are listening to what the Word of God says or not.

And that's what's quite clear to us in this chapter that we are looking at together, chapter 9. But the book of Proverbs as a whole, it covers many aspects of life.

It's Proverbs, it's wise sayings about how we are to live, and it speaks to us about many different aspects of life. But so often it comes down, boils down to two matters, being wise or being foolish. And again, that's what we see in this chapter, the way of wisdom or the way of folly. And as we read in chapter 4, the summary of the book of Proverbs is get wisdom.

[2:19] Get wisdom because this is what you need. This is what's the most important thing that you can find in your life, to get wisdom. Because life as we so often see it, we see it often as a journey that we're on.

Where we live our life day by day, week by week, month by month, even year by year. And we look back over our years and we see the journey that we've been on.

And we look ahead, maybe thinking we know the journey that we are to go on as well. Where we are going, what's ahead of us, what we're going to do. And so as we reflect on our lives, we see the different twists and turns there's been along the way.

The different joys and sorrows that we've experienced. The different turning points maybe in our life where things have come our way. That we've changed things in our life.

But there's often times in our lives when we come to a point and it's just like a T-junction. Just as you have when you're maybe out driving, you come to the end of one road and you come to a T-junction and there's a choice.

[3:25] Do you go to the left or do you go to the right? How do you decide which way you go when you've got these two choices before you? Well, you have to have some kind of understanding of the way that you are going, the direction you want to go in.

And that's what we have this morning as we look at this passage. We've all come to this point in our life today. We can all look back in our lives to this point and see the different way our lives have gone.

We can look back and reflect on it in many different ways. Whether it's just personally, as families, as a congregation, communities. Whatever way we're looking at, we can look upon our lives in the different ways, different turnings that we've come along.

But we come to a point every time we're under the Word of God where the Word of God asks us, which direction will you go? Who will you listen to?

These are the key questions that we have put before us. And we have it put before us here today. It's like we're coming to a T-junction. And this chapter is putting the choice before us.

[4:38] Two different directions are there for us. The way of wisdom or the way of folly. Which way will you go? There are those who say the Bible is not relevant today.

But have they read it? Or if you're saying the Bible is not important to me today, have you read it? Have you taken up your Bible recently and started to read it in a meaningful way?

In a way that you're seeking understanding? Many people have taken up the Bible in their lives, seeking a way to find fault with it, to criticize it, to dismiss it.

But as they've read it, they've found there's understanding, there's wisdom, there's truth. And so when was the last time you lifted your Bible up and looked into it in that way of maybe prayerfully just saying, Lord, show me the way to go.

Teach me your wisdom. Help me to understand the way my life should go. Because God speaks through his word. And that's through whether you're seeking today or whether you're a believer over many years today.

[5:47] We're constantly looking at the word of God. And we need to come to it with that idea of get wisdom. Give me wisdom to live my life for you in this world.

And Proverbs 9 breaks this down for us. And somebody described it as life in a nutshell. Looking at these two ways, the way of wisdom and the way of folly.

Life in a nutshell. Because here we are presented with many contrasts. The way that we are living. We are living one way or we are living another.

And it's asking ourselves, am I listening to God or am I listening to the world? Am I coming to God? Am I on the right path? Have I made the right choice?

Or do I need to reflect and turn back in a different direction? And so the way of wisdom and the way of folly is put before us here.

[6:49] But we're going to look at it under four different contrasts that we see. We see here, first of all, two calls that go out.

Then we see two choices. Then we see two contrasts. And then we see two consequences. And they're all related to the way of wisdom and the way of folly.

So the first thing we see here is that there are two calls in life. Life is full of things that call for our attention. Things that are clamoring for our attention.

They're there all the time before us. How often does your phone ping in a day and you find yourself, you've got to lift it up and look at it. It's claiming your attention.

It's calling to you. How often do you check your emails? Because again, there's someone who wants your attention, who wants you to hear something.

[7:50] How often do you hear or read some piece of advice? Again, there's just so many things clamoring for our attention, calling for our attention.

But the most important calls that we are hearing in life are the calls that we find in the Word of God and God speaking to us.

And here we find these two calls before us, the call of wisdom and the call of folly. And they're presented to us here.

In verse 1, we find the call of wisdom. Wisdom has built her house. She has hewn seven pillars. She has slaughtered her beast. She has mixed her wine.

She has set her table. And she has sent out her young woman to call from the highest places in the town. So wisdom is calling. But you find also that the way of folly is calling.

[8:48] The woman, folly in verse 13, is loud. She is seductive. She knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house. She takes her seat in the highest places of the town, calling to those who pass by.

So there's these two calls going on in life, the call of wisdom and the call of folly. But you notice the difference with them.

Wisdom has built her house. Seven pillars. She has made a feast. She has mixed wine. She has set her table. She has sent her young woman out to call from the highest places of the town. It's like wisdom is calling from above. But if you look at folly, she is calling, as it were, on the streets. In verse 15, calling those who pass by who are going straight on their way.

Those who are just living day by day where life is just this motion of just ongoing sameness in each day. We're just living, trying to find our way, pressing on.

[9:57] But wisdom is, as it were, calling for a different direction. Calling us to lift us out of that just normal day-by-day routine, to lift our eyes higher, to lift our eyes up, the highest places in the town.

Wisdom is calling and folly is calling. And it's like wisdom takes effort. Because we can easily just stay in the way of folly.

Just keep listening to the words of this world. Just keep going as you are. Just do your own thing. Just be yourself. Just keep going on as you are. But wisdom calls us away from that.

Apart from that. Wisdom, as we see in verse 10, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. So it speaks of a change.

And when we realize the fear of the Lord, that's a right reverence towards God, a right worship towards God. When instead of just worshiping the things of this world, we see they're empty.

[11:08] But the call of wisdom is different. It calls us in a different direction. And you notice these calls go out to all.

The call of foolishness goes out where we are. Those who are on the straight way. Those who are just keeping going. But the call of wisdom is also going out.

She has sent her young woman to call from the highest places in the town. So there's this call that goes out to all as well. But it boils down to who are we listening to?

Who is catching our attention? And Jesus taught us about wisdom. In the parable of the wise man who built his house upon the rock and the fool who built his house upon the sand.

These ways, the way of folly and the way of wisdom are very similar to us. They're asking us, are you building on the rock or are you building on the sand?

[12:14] There's two calls that go out to you today. As you're living your life, there's the call to just carry on as you are. No thought of God. Or the call to lift your eyes up and listen to God who is speaking.

So there's these two calls. But because of these two calls, we see secondly then, there are two choices. Two choices.

Eating is a big part of our day-to-day lives. We do it every day. Whether it's eating in or dining out, we need to eat.

But we've become used to having a selection of meals. Whether it's a selection of starters, mains or puddings. Whether if you're going out, you're looking at a menu, trying to decide what you'll have. But that's not the kind of choices that we have here. It's not a menu where you look and say, well, I'll have this and I'll have that, but I'll leave that and I'll leave this. It's not a huge choice.

[13:18] Because the choices we have here are more like the old-fashioned choice when it came to dinner. Eat what's on your plate or you don't eat at all. It's simple.

Eat what you have in front of you or don't eat at all. And that's the kind of choice that we have here. It's not a choice from a large menu. It's a choice between the two ways.

And again, Jesus taught this in his Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 7, verse 13, he spoke about two ways. And so we have that very choice put before us here, the way of wisdom and the way of folly.

The broad way or the narrow way. One is grounded on human understanding. We're just told to carry on on our way.

In verse 16, the way of folly, whoever is simple, let him turn in here. And to him who lacks sense, she says, stolen water is sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.

[14:41] The broad way is just to keep going as you are. But the narrow way is so different. It's grounded in a heavenly understanding.

As she has sent out her young woman to call in verse 3, from the highest places, it says in verse 4, whoever is simple, let him turn in here. To him who lacks sense, she says, come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.

So it's the same call to all but very different outcomes. The choice is bread, stolen water is sweet, or to turn to wisdom and come, eat of my bread and drink of my wine.

It's like we go back to the Garden of Eden. And there Satan gave that temptation to Eve. What did God say? Not to touch, not to eat that fruit.

Well, it's that same kind of idea. Stolen water is sweet. The devil said that fruit is sweet. It's good for you. You will have the knowledge that you are seeking after.

[15:51] But it was just a temptation that was put in, that was brought death into this world. But there's the way of life, the choice of life, to turn to the way of wisdom and to come to that understanding of the life that God gives through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The wise person comes to understand that at the end of our days, God will judge. It's not about nothing at the end of it, but a day of judgment at the end of it.

And our eternal destiny rests upon the choice we make in this life, whether it's the broad road that we keep going on or the narrow way that leads to life, the life that is found in Jesus Christ.

So which way are you on today? Are you on the broad road? Are you at that T-junction where there's that choice, which way to go? Or are you on the narrow way that leads to life?

The choice is put before us. You stand at this junction. Will you carry on and turn in the way of foolishness or turn to the way of wisdom and there find life?

[17:10] Where will you spend eternity? That's always the challenging question. And it comes down to the choice that we make. Will we go away from Christ or will we turn to him?

Then the third thing that we see here is that in light of these two choices, there are two contrasts there are those who are teachable and those who are unteachable.

We see this in verse 7. Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.

Do not reprove a scoffer or he will hate you. Reprove a wise man and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser. Teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning.

You see there there's the contrasts. As we hear the word of God, what effect does it have on you? Are you scoffing at it?

[18:18] Are you abused towards the person who is giving to you? I want nothing to do with that. Or are you seeing that it speaks of wisdom? Are you seeing that it speaks to us of a way to life?

There are contrasts. Are you stubborn when it comes to these things? How often have you heard it? How often has someone spoken to you about it and you've just turned them away, pushed them away?

Or perhaps maybe today you're finding your heart just starting to melt that little bit. The word of God is starting to speak to you. Maybe it's making you afraid.

Maybe you're afraid of that today. You don't know just what it will entail, what it will mean for you. But when you see the two contrasts here, those who are unteachable, they just push it away.

They just give abuse. They do not want to hear. But those who God starts speaking to you, you become teachable. The word of God starts to melt your heart.

[19:32] And you start to get wisdom. You find righteousness. You will increase in learning all of these things. That are outlined here. And they come from the fear of the Lord.

But is your heart today teachable or unteachable? Again, you stand at that junction and you say, well, which voice am I going to listen to? Which way am I going to turn?

Am I going to listen to my own wisdom? My own understanding? Or am I going to listen to what God is saying? We are surrounded by people like this.

We are all people like this. We are either teachable or unteachable. We all go through life with that sense of learning.

But perhaps from a very young age, within us is a sense of making excuses. Making excuses so that as we are hearing all of these things, we will make our excuses as we are going on.

[20:38] We have our common excuses when we forget to do things, when we did not do what we were meant to. We can just say, well, I forgot. We can say, well, no one told me to do it.

We could say, I didn't think it was that important. I didn't know there was a hurry for it. Or even just fob it off to somebody else. It's not my job. And that's the kind of excuses that we can make when it comes to the things of God as well.

I forgot. In other words, I wasn't paying attention. I didn't listen. No one told me. Well, if you're sitting under the word of God, you cannot use that excuse because you are being told every time you are under it.

I didn't think it was important. Well, of course it's important. It's the way of life or the way of death that we're speaking about here. It's important. I didn't know there was a hurry for it.

Well, of course there's an urgency about it because we do not know what a day or an hour will bring. Or maybe you could say, well, that's for somebody else. It's not my job.

[21:48] Well, we all have a personal responsibility in this to listen to the word of God. Because have you listened to these two contrasts, teachable or unteachable?

Have you listened to the two choices or the two calls, the way of folly or the way of wisdom?

Because one day you have to give an account.

And you have to give an account before the Lord. And what excuse will work for you then? Do you have your excuse prepared?

I forgot. I didn't think it was important. All of these excuses will be meaningless. It's about hearing the choices put before you today and choosing the way of wisdom.

Get wisdom. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of that wisdom. A right reverence. A right worship of him.

[22:51] Because the final thing you see here is there are two consequences in life. The way that you listen, the choice that you make, all of these things have consequences.

And the consequences are outlined for us here in the way of folly and the way of wisdom. Because with one, you attend a funeral.

But with the other, you attend a feast. And when you look at the way of folly and the way it ends, it ends in a funeral.

He does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Shoal. The way of folly is the way of death, eternal death.

That's what's made clear for us there. There is consequences to going on the broad road. It leads to destruction. And that's what's highlighted for us here.

[23:58] Stolen water is sweet and bread eaten and secret is pleasant. But he does not know that the dead are there and that her guests are in the depths of Shoal.

Similar to the parable of the rich fool in Luke's Gospel, chapter 12. I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years.

Relax, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, Fool, this night your soul is required of you and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?

The way of folly has consequences, clear consequences. And so come back to the choice. Do you choose that way?

Or will you choose the way of wisdom? And when you choose the way of wisdom, you find that there's a very different end. It's a feast.

[24:58] When you look at it there in verse 2, it's a feast prepared.

She has slaughtered her beasts. She has mixed her wine. And she has also set her table. And then in verse 5, Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.

Leave your simple ways and live and walk in the way of insight. That is the way of life.

And it's a feast that is prepared for those who will go in that way. The way of wisdom. Find this way and live.

And we cannot even imagine what the Lord has prepared for us. In 1 Corinthians 2 verse 9 says, What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.

[26:04] And so, there is a way prepared for his people. A way where we find ourselves partaking in a feast. A way that Jesus said, even as he was going to the cross in John 14 verse 1 to 3, Let not your hearts be troubled.

Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you I go to prepare a place for you. And he will come again.

He will come again to take us to that place. To all who believe in him, that is the way of life, the way to a feast. And so that is the choice that we have put before us today.

The way of wisdom or the way of folly. The two calls go out. The two choices are put before us.

The two contrasts are there for us and the two consequences. What we do with the call leads to what we find are the consequences for us.

[27:14] And so may we hear the call of wisdom. May we find wisdom. May we fear the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom.

And that is to give reverence and honour and glory to him. And find life in him through his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The consequences are serious.

And so heed the call, the call to wisdom. Let us pray. Lord, our gracious God, we thank you that your word is truth, that your word reminds us of the two ways before us, the way of folly and the way of wisdom.

The broad road that leads to destruction or the narrow path that leads to eternal life. And as these choices, as these calls and the consequences are before us this day, Lord, may your spirit help us to call to you to find wisdom, to find that way, to find the way that leads to life and life eternal for how we need it, O Lord.

And help us to turn away from the foolishness of this world and to look to our saviour, our redeemer, who is the Lord Jesus Christ. As we ask it for his sake.

[28:40] Amen. We're going to conclude by singing to God's praise in Psalm 19, the Scottish Psalter version.

Psalm 19, page 223. We're going to sing from verse 7 to 9, the tune is Moravia.

God's law is perfect and converts the soul in sin that lies. God's testimony is most sure and makes the simple wise. We'll sing from verse 7 to 9 to God's praise.

God's law is perfect and comfort the soul in sin that lies.

God's testimony is most sure and makes the simple wise.

[29:53] God's law is perfect and the statutes of the Lord our right and who rejoiced the heart.

The Lord's home and risk you and that right to me I'd sing and heart and for it is well ye of God and not end you forever the church next of the Lord are true and righteous all together after the benediction I'll go to the main door we'll close with the benediction.

Now may grace, mercy and peace from God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with you all now and forevermore. Amen. of God.

of God. of God. of God. of God. of God. of God. of God. of God. of God. of God. of God. of God. of God. of God. of God. of God. Thank you.