

WISE LIVING FROM PROVERBS: Avoid Being a Fool at all Costs

Proverbs 17

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Wisdom is the knowledge and understanding of life's usual patterns with the skillful application of that recognition to one's life situation. It's a skill for recognizing life's regular patterns. Wisdom understands what is usually going to happen most of the time. Solomon wanted this insight developed in the life of his family and extended family. So he explains the content of wisdom in Proverbs, comparing and contrasting this with folly.

Here Solomon concentrates on those who violate the knowledge and understanding of life's usual patterns—this is a fool. Foolishness is playing the percentages. Folly is attempting to risk the usual patterns of life without losing. Fools believe they can act against what usually happens and still come out ahead. Fools ignore the usual patterns of life bypassing how things usually work out hoping to gain the advantage. Fools invite disaster and create chaotic scenarios that require damage control. Wisdom promotes order in life. Order is foundational for the development of maturity. Fools never gain wisdom because they constantly risk order rather than embrace it. As a result, the foundation for maturity is never laid, making maturity out of reach for a fool.

Theme: FOOLS BYPASS WISDOM BY VIOLATING THE USUAL PATTERNS OF LIFE

Fools boast about themselves v 7

Here is a description of lofty speech that does not suit the fool. A fool makes great claims about himself that are untrue. Drawing attention to himself his speech swells into empty claims full of hot air. The fool wants to seem bigger, better, and badder than his or her life actually is. In contrast is a ruler with a code of honor to whom truthfulness is almost second nature. A fool wants to seem 'larger than life' to others without the substance of character and wisdom that supports and warrants the respect he desires.

Fools are not teachable v 10

Discipline will benefit the wise but not the foolish. Those who are wise will learn from it. However, not even a hundred lashes will make such a lasting impression on the fool. This hyperbole emphasizes the point that while the wise are sensitive and learn readily the thickheaded fool is unresponsive even after the most extreme measures of correction are taken. What the fool does not have is understanding, so disciplining him for correction is ineffective since he has no category for that.

Fools cause collateral damage v 12

Which is worse meeting a mother bear with her cubs or meeting a fool engaged in his folly? Consider meeting a fool wielding a gun or knife, or driving behind the wheel—how often has the mother bear been less dangerous! A fool's foolishness causes collateral damage. Others get hit with a fool's foolishness even if one is not directly in its line of fire. Avoid fools. Don't marry a fool.

Don't hire a fool. Don't form a partnership with a fool. Don't hang around with a fool. Even if they are not evil, those without wisdom cause collateral damage. There should be zero tolerance of fools.

Fools have no desire to obtain wisdom v 16

What good is the offer of money since what is needed cannot be bought? Some consequences have apparently caught up to him so he desires to buy some of wisdom in hopes that it may get him out of his trouble. It won't work. One cannot buy wisdom when he needs it. Wisdom is only assimilated by knowledge and understanding over time. The fool has no interest in securing wisdom by knowledge and understanding of the usual patterns of life and orienting his life according to these. One does not gain wisdom 'on the fly'.

Fools cause bitter grief to parents and family v 21, 25

Parents who hoped their child would be a credit to the family and the faith are bitterly disappointed. Here Solomon describes the foolish son or daughter as both thickheaded and lacking spiritual perception. The child has neither the knowledge of how life works nor the understanding to put that knowledge to use. A wise household is not based on luck, or chance, or religious mysticism. It is based on real things, which usually happen, most of the time, in the real physical world, taught and instilled at home. It's painful and grievous to watch the chaotic life of a foolish child.

Fools are preoccupied with their foolishness v 24

When Solomon speaks of *the ends of the earth* he may be referring to some type of personal scenario that ignores the present moment. A fool is always looking beyond the moment to some hoped for future that never arrives. A fool might buy lottery tickets because he thinks that he might get lucky. Some day he will get rich by chance. Some day his ship will come in all by itself. So his eyes are on some unrealistic *ends of the earth* scenario, not his present reality. He lacks any serious concentration, unable to fix his attention on wisdom, wandering from one potential quick scheme to another. It's like having one year of experience 25 times over.

APPLICATION

1. Avoid foolishness like the plague today, tomorrow, next week, and next year. Do that as a young adult, married, single, or older. Foolishness is too costly. The price too high.
2. Develop wisdom to counter the tendency to be foolish. Do that by understanding how life usually works. Then order your life that way. That's wisdom.
3. Quit trying to play the percentages. Discipline yourself. Study hard. Be responsible. Keep away from evil. Do your homework. Have the right friends. Pay your bills. Don't spend more than you earn. Don't lie, cheat, or steal. Establish order in your life based on the knowledge and understanding of life's usual patterns.