

Wisdom for teenagers (and their parents!)

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Date: 20 May 2018

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[0 : 00] So, what would you say is the biggest issue facing society today, if I asked you? What do you think it is? Drugs? Crime? Racism? Is that the biggest issue? Corruption? Is that the biggest issue we're facing in society today?

Well, in fact, it's none of those. No, you want to know what the biggest issue facing our society today is? It's bad parenting. Bad parenting. Because all the other issues, if you think about it, are actually linked to that one.

When a child grows up in this world without effective guidance to navigate all the problems in it, they will inevitably become one of the problems. And we've seen it over and over again. This struck me a few years ago when I was working in Polsmo Prison doing ministry.

I wasn't a prisoner. I was there when I was attached to Takah Community Church doing ministry in the prison. And I discovered that there was a survey that was done amongst the prisoners surveying their histories to try to see if there's a link between their history and them committing crimes.

And it turned out that 90% of the surveyed prisoners admitted to having no father figure growing up. And that just, it's proof, isn't it, of how a lack of good parenting, a lack of the presence of a parent or parents in a child's life really does affect them.

[1 : 22] It harms society. Bad parenting harms society, or no parenting for that matter. And that's one of the reasons the Bible places such an important role on parents.

It's why one of the Ten Commandments is submit to your father and your mother. It's right in God's law. And it's also why the book of Proverbs begins with no less than nine chapters of a parent lecturing a child.

You see, the Proverbs, the ones we're used to, the kind of small, memorable sayings of two lines, they start in chapter 10. But before that, you've got these nine chapters, before we get into Proverbs proper, that give us a reason for actually reading the rest of the Proverbs.

And it's framed in terms of a father lecturing his son, trying to persuade his son to get wisdom, to listen to what he's about to teach him before the son goes out and faces the big wide world.

Now, if you're a teenager here this morning, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking this is the last thing you've come to church to hear. You get enough lectures from your parents at home, right? In fact, you probably, you may have only come to church this morning to avoid getting another lecture, only to find out that's exactly what you're getting from the preacher.

[2 : 40] Bad luck, isn't it? Although maybe even you will learn something this morning. Yes, you, teenager, who already knows everything there is to know about everything, maybe even you can pick up something.

Because these chapters teach you why you also need to get wisdom. And the reason is this. The reason is that as you grow and as you go on to make your way in this world, you're going to hear thousands of different voices and opinions.

In fact, in our communication age, probably every day you are already bombarded with thousands of different opinions and voices. And so you need to have a way to be able to tell which of those voices is worth listening to.

You can't listen to all of them. So how do you tell? Are you just going to listen to the voices that your culture tells you to listen to, like a robot? Or are you going to learn to think for yourself?

Well, that's what these lectures in Proverbs 1-9 are all about. It's from a father helping his son distinguish between all the voices that he's going to hear.

[3 : 50] And being able to distinguish which are the voices of wisdom and which are the voices of foolishness or folly. And as we read on, we discover that these two voices are represented in these

chapters as two competing women competing for the attention of a young man who is entering a city.

That's the picture. So listen to verse 20, for example. Out in the open, wisdom calls aloud. She raises her voice in the public square.

On top of the wall, she cries out. At the city gate, she makes her speech. Okay, so there from verse 20, 21 of chapter 1, wisdom is trying to get your attention.

The lady wisdom is calling out as this young man is going to enter the city. But that's not the only voice that you're going to hear as you make your way in this world.

We soon discover there's another woman trying to get this young man's attention who we meet later in chapter 9. 9, 13. Chapter 9, verse 13, we read, Folly is an unruly woman.

[4 : 57] She is simple and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house on the seat at the highest point of the city, calling out to those who pass by who go straight on their way, Let all who are simple come to my house.

Okay, so the father is warning his son of these two women, figurative women, who are going to try to get his attention as he goes into the big wide world.

He's saying to his son, you're going to have these two competing voices calling you. And which one are you going to listen to? Because you can only listen to one or the other.

And so you're introduced to these two women. Chapter 1, chapter 9. And in between is the father teaching the son how to recognize the voice of these two women.

That's what all these lectures are about. But of course, as much as the son needed to know the difference between the voices of wisdom and folly, so do each of us in a world today that is filled with so many contradictory voices.

[5 : 57] We need a basis on which to evaluate all the stuff we hear. And determine whether it's wisdom we're hearing or whether it's folly, foolishness. And so how do we recognize the voices of wisdom and folly in our lives?

Because we will hear them, we just need to work out which are which. Well, the first thing we need to understand is where we hear those voices of wisdom and folly in our lives.

And it just so happens the first place you hear wisdom's voice is, in the most unlikely of places, teenagers, from your parents. Because look how these chapters begin.

If you look at chapter 1 and verse 8, look how all of this whole section begins to prepare us to hear wisdom. Look what it says, verse 8. Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.

In other words, don't ignore what your mom and dad say, kids and grown-ups. And there's a reason for that. There's a reason that we're not to ignore what mom and dad say.

[7 : 04] And it's not just because they pay me to preach this to you. No. They pay me to preach the Bible and the Bible makes such a big deal about listening to your parents. Why? I mean, why?

I mean, what do parents really know today? Come on. They don't even know how to change the privacy settings in Facebook. And that's why all your baby pictures are there for the world to see. They hardly know how to use a phone properly.

They still think it's for making calls. And they still don't even know what a meme is. How on earth can they possibly know anything about the real world? Well, they might not know technology or popular culture, but they do know wisdom.

Just by merit of the fact that they've been around longer than you have. And that, combined with the fact that they love you, means that they are worth listening to.

God has given you parents to be that first voice of wisdom in your life before you're bombarded with the rest of the voices in the world. And that's why Lady Wisdom, notice, it says here in verse 21 of chapter 1.

[8 : 17] She's at the city gate. Did you notice that? At the city gate she makes her speech. So she gets to speak to people first as they're entering the city, before they go into the city.

She's the first voice that people hear, before they hear the voices of folly. How does she do that? How does wisdom do that? How is wisdom the first voice in a person's life in this world?

Well, through parents. That's why God gave the institution of parenthood. And so children, no matter how old you are, don't write your parents off just because they're not as cool as you.

Okay, God has put them in your life for a good reason. Not just for food and clothes and money so you can go to the movies. But God has put them in your life for wisdom.

To be the first voice of wisdom you hear as you're growing up. Don't write them off. And listen to what they say, even if you don't agree with it. Because there's wisdom there. And parents, make sure you are being that voice of wisdom that God put you there to be.

[9 : 22] While you still have the chance. Because all too soon, your children are going to be out there. Before you know it, they're going to be leaving home. They're going to be out there facing the big wide world and hearing the many voices of lady folly.

And so are you using the time you have with them well to invest wisdom in their lives now? Are you taking time to go for walks with them and talk to them about the issues in this world and in their lives?

Are you chatting with them over the dinner table? Or are you too busy for that? Do you get to home too late to have those conversations? After all, you know, you're working to provide for them.

They shouldn't complain that they get no time with you. Except, what's the point of putting a roof over their head and food on their table to survive in this world if you're not going to give them the wisdom to navigate this world when they're in it?

They won't get that themselves. The internet and the TV and their friends are not going to give it to them. You have to, parents. God has put you in their lives for that reason.

[10 : 22] Don't let these years whittle away. And before you know it, your children are out of the home and you realize that you've hardly spent any time with them. And they're unprepared for this world because you were too busy.

So are you giving them wisdom? Are you? Godly wisdom from the word? Godly wisdom from the word? Or are you like that parent who was offended when their child asked them how much they get paid per hour only to find out that it was so he could save up enough to buy an hour of their time?

Parents, are you using your time with your children well? Now, all that being true, I'm not assuming everyone here has or had parents when you grew up.

And of course, not all parents were wise themselves. We remember from last week, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And so if parents don't fear the Lord, there's a limit, a great limit to the amount of wisdom they can give you.

And that's why we also discover parents are not the only place you can find the voice of Lady Wisdom in this world. Because she's also, verse 20, in the public square.

[11 : 34] She's available. Wisdom is available to be found from other people, not just parents. Of course, parents are the best placed to give you foundational wisdom. And God has put parents in children's lives for that purpose.

But even if you didn't have good parents growing up, you can still find people in your life, mentors to learn from, who do fear the Lord and who can help you navigate this life.

Seek out people who fear the Lord. People with experience. People who can serve as mentors.

Even if you're an adult, seek out people who have wisdom that you can bounce things off from, that you can learn from, that you can walk this road with.

Because God makes the voice of wisdom available through other people who fear the Lord in this world. And church is a great place to do that. In giving us church, God doesn't only give us a place to come gather and hear his word each week.

He also gives us a network of relationships with other people where we can get and give wisdom. He gives young Christians, godly older people, to learn from father and mother figures that they never had growing up.

[12 : 45] And church gives older people who have wisdom to share. Church gives you children, even if you're not biologically a parent. In God's family, you may be a mother or father figure to those who don't have those things at home.

You see, church is a God-given web of relationships over which wisdom can be given and received. And so wisdom's voice is heard primarily through the family, but also through the wider church.

In fact, it's heard wherever there are people who fear the Lord. Are you making sure you spend time in those circles where you can hear the voice of Lady Wisdom? But what about the voice of folly?

Because that's another voice. We hear, where is that heard? Well, we see first in chapter 1 verse 10. Have a look. First warning the father gives his son. He says, My son, if sinful men entice you, do not give in to them.

If they say, come along with us. Let's lie in wait for innocent blood. Let's ambush some harmless soul. Let's swallow them alive like the grave and whole like those who go down to the pit.

[13:52] We will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder. Cast lots with us. We will all share the loot. Okay, so one of the places you hear folly's voice trying to entice you is through evil people wanting you to join them to make easy money.

That's what's going on here. Now, it's not always in this extreme form. It's not like your friend will, you know, regularly come to you and say, hey, let's go kill someone. Although, it can be. And think of gangsterism on the Cape Flats. That's exactly what's going on. In the absence of the voice of parents, with no father figure to guide young men, they end up in gangs doing exactly what these verses are saying because they don't listen to the voices of their fathers, often because they don't have those fathers at home.

And so why do they join gangs? Why is the Cape Flats riddled with gang violence? Because not only do young people find their identity there that they never got at home, that their fathers and mothers never gave them.

But they also find a way to get easy money without having to work hard. And that's always attractive. But of course, this doesn't only happen in gangs.

[15:04] Any pressure from a group to benefit at the expense of others is a form of this. In fact, any promise of easy money, by definition, will be benefiting at the expense of someone else.

If you're getting a lot of money without working hard for it, someone else somewhere is losing out. It's just the way economics works. And so any pressure to benefit at the expense of others.

So a white-collar version of this is cooking the books at the office. Or just looking the other way because everyone's expecting you to play along and not speak up.

Easy money at the expense of others takes many forms. Those get-rich-quick schemes that you see in those Google ads that pop up when you're on the internet. Come join us and get rich without hard work.

You see those Cape Town women becomes a millionaire in five days. And you see her driving around in a Ferrari. It's all rubbish, but it's all promises of easy money.

[16:06] Well, that is the voice of Lady Folly, and it's all over. But that's not the only way Lady Folly speaks, not just through the promise of easy money, but also through the promise of free sex.

Here's another example of her voice the father warns of in chapter 7, and he doesn't hold back. As the young man walks through the city, chapter 7, verse 9.

At twilight, as the day was fading, as the dark of night set in. Then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent.

She is unruly and defiant. Her feet never stay at home. Now in the street, now in the squares. At every corner she lurks. She took hold of him and kissed him.

And with a brazen face, she said, verse 15, I look for you and I've found you. Verse 16, I've covered and perfumed my bed. Verse 18, come, let's drink deeply of love till morning.

[17:07] Let's enjoy ourselves with love. My husband is not home. He's gone on a long journey. This is the voice of Lady Folly, but it sounds all too much like the voices that we hear in this world.

It's day in and day out. Notice, first of all, this happens at night, verse 9. When the senses are dulled, when self-control is at its weakest. That's when we hear these voices of Lady Folly.

Late night in the office. On the internet at one in the morning. That's when Lady Folly calls and offers us the satisfaction of all our lusts.

And she appeals to your feelings as well. Follow your desires. You have a right to enjoy yourself. You have a right to feel good. And she offers sexual satisfaction with no consequences, which we see everywhere, don't we?

Like you see in TV shows with friends sleeping around like it's no problem. All of that is the voice of Lady Folly. And these are the primary ways she speaks.

[18:14] Folly's voice comes in many ways in our world, but the main way she speaks in this world, according to these chapters, are through the promise of easy money and free sex. Whenever you hear that, know you are hearing the voice of Lady Folly.

But so what? Easy money is great. Free sex is cool. Right? Why should I avoid it? Dad? Preacher man?

You know, what's so bad about it? It sounds great. Well, it's a good question. And let me tell you why. Let me tell you why you need to take care to what voices you listen to in your life. Why you

need to listen to wisdom rather than folly.

And we find out in chapter 8. This is Lady Wisdom talking and she says this. You can turn there if you want chapter 8 or you can just listen. Listen to what Lady Wisdom says.

Verse 22. The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works before his deeds of old. I was formed long ages ago at the very beginning when the world came to be.

[19 : 20] Verse 25. Before the mountains were settled in place. Before the hills I was given birth. Before he made the world or its fields or any of the dust of the earth I was there.

See, Lady Wisdom was there at creation. She is, what she's saying here, she is part of the created order of things. It means that wisdom is not just good advice that we've picked up along the way. Wisdom is knitted into the fabric of creation itself. It's the order that gives creation its structure. Wisdom teaches us how things in creation are to be rightly used.

It's not like wisdom came later. It's not like God created everything and said, okay, well now how should people best use the life that I've given them? No, wisdom was there before.

Wisdom is the structure that gives order to life. Wisdom teaches you how your life and your body and your relationships are meant to be used.

[20 : 26] Wisdom is the structure that gives you the purpose of creation. Wisdom is the purpose of the creation itself. And that's not going to be very helpful to you. It's like putting petrol in a diesel engine.

Anybody done that? Putting petrol in a diesel engine is going to mess up your engine. It's not designed for that. If it's a diesel engine, it's not designed for petrol. It's going to eventually break. And so you as a creature of this world have been designed to live on wisdom. There's a right way to use your life, which we read about here in the Proverbs and the other wisdom books. They tell us the right way, the wise way to use the things that God has given you.

Your life, your body, your resources, your relationships. For example, there's a right way to use your sex drive. For more on that, see Song of Songs, the steamiest book in the Bible.

But in the meantime, now you're all going to go home and read Song of Songs. But in the meantime, listen to chapter 5, husbands, because it gets pretty saucy right here. Chapter 5, especially husbands, but of course this applies to everyone.

[21 : 32] Verse 15, Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares, let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers.

May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer, may her breasts satisfy you. You always, yes, that is what it says.

God wants you to be satisfied with your own wife's breasts, so that you're not satisfied with someone else's. This is very practical and very good advice. May you ever be intoxicated with her love.

The primary antidote for adultery, husbands, is to learn to be intoxicated with your wife. What this is saying is, God made your sex drive to be satisfied within the boundary of marriage.

That is how it is designed. That is what it's for. And that's where it will flourish. And that's where it will be at its maximum enjoyment. And when you mess with that design, it can only lead to damage.

[22 : 44] And it will, and I've seen it. When you mess with God's design for sex within marriage alone, it will lead to damaging your lives, damaging your relationships.

But I'm not married. I have urges. I have needs. What must I do? Well, would you put petrol in a diesel engine just because there was no diesel petrol around?

No. Because it's always harmful to go against God's design. And it will eventually destroy it, the engine, if it's a diesel car. It's damaging to go against design.

And so don't have sex outside of God's design. Young people especially, where the world is telling you, free sex, the voice of folly. You hear it every day. You turn on the TV, you will see it.

The promotion of free sex, of sex without consequences. Well, listen to Lady Wisdom. Who's saying, don't. Because that will eventually destroy you, no matter how attractive it might seem.

[23 : 47] Listen again to Woman Folly in chapter 9. I'm going to read a little further than I read before. To see the consequence of listening to her voice.

Chapter 9, verse 16. Let all who are simple come to my house. To those who have no sense. She says, stolen water is sweet. Food eaten in secret is delicious.

It's attractive. It's nice. It's pleasurable, isn't it? To listen to her voice. But look what happens next. Verse 18. But little do they know that the dead are there.

That her guests are deep in Sheol, the realm of the dead. It's a very scary picture. It's like a horror movie. You've got this attractive voice promising you all this pleasure.

And then you walk into her house and it's full of corpses. Dead, rotting bodies. And chapter 5 says this. For the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey.

[24 : 48] And her speech is smoother than oil. But in the end she is bitter as gall. Sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death. Her steps lead straight to the grave.

This is some of the best advice a father has ever given to a son. Because that's what happens when you go against the fabric of creation. You are led to eternal death.

But if you listen to wisdom's voice. Look what happens. Chapter 9 verse 34. This is the consequence of listening to woman wisdom.

Blessed are those who listen to me. Watching daily at my doors. Waiting at my doorway. For those who find me find life. And receive favor from the Lord.

Blessed are those who listen to lady wisdom. And not just once. But watching daily at my doors. Constantly seeking wisdom.

[25 : 51] The father in these chapters tells his son more than once. Get wisdom. Seek wisdom. Chase after it. Value it. Like it's the greatest treasure which it is. It's better than any riches.

And so as we close. I want to ask you which voice will you listen to? Because every day you will get that choice. I promise you. Every day you will get the choice to listen to lady wisdom or lady folly. Which one are you going to choose? Every day you will hear on the internet. On the radio. You will hear the voices of lady folly. In the gym.

At school. In the office. In popular music. Promising easy money. And free sex. You will hear her voice. But hopefully also you will hear the voice of lady wisdom.

In godly parents. In wise people that God has put into your life. And most of all in his word. And in the people who open his word with you. But which voice will you listen to?

[26 : 55] Which voice will you respond to? Which have you listened to in the past? You know maybe you realize this morning. That you've been listening to the wrong voice.

In your life. You look back and you go. I've been listening to lady folly. I see it now. Maybe you realize that you've missed. The direction of wisdom in your life. And truth is.

None of us have always chosen. The path of wisdom. Even now. I can't trust myself to listen to the voice of wisdom. When I hear it. So what can we do? Well be encouraged this morning.

Because. We don't only have the Old Testament. We're Christians. And so be encouraged. That even though you've failed to be wise. There is someone who came to be wise. For you.

On your behalf. Jesus Christ. Jesus was the perfect son. You see these chapters. There's a father talking to his son. It's no mistake that the relationship of Jesus.

[27 : 51] With his father. Is portrayed as a son to a father. Because Jesus is the perfect son. That we have failed to be. Jesus always listened to his wise father.

And lived the wise life. That we have failed to live. And he came to do that. On behalf of his people. Because he knows. That we're idiots. And he knows.

That for us to. To benefit. From the voice of wisdom. For us to. Enjoy the blessings. And the life. That wisdom promises. He needs to come and be wisdom.

For us. And that's what he came. To do. On your behalf. He died on the cross. And he did that. To swap places with you. That's the amazing thing. About the cross.

That Jesus. There swapped places. Nice. As the sermon. At the royal wedding was. Sadly. The preacher missed that. Sadly. He didn't mention.

[28 : 48] The purpose. For which Jesus came. Which was to swap places. With you. To take your sin. And give you his righteousness. To take your foolishness.

And give you his wisdom. And so in 1 Corinthians. Chapter 1. We're told. Christ Jesus. Has become for us. Wisdom from God. That is our righteousness.

Holiness. And redemption. And so how do you follow. The voice of wisdom. In this confused world. Well. You do it by following Jesus. Who is.

Made wisdom for us. By trusting. And obeying him. As your savior. And Lord. You will live wisely. In God's created order. And you will find life. Useful.

And important. As understanding. And reading the proverbs. Are. If they don't point you. To Jesus. Then. It's missing the point. Because Jesus. Ultimately. Is where. We. Fools.

[29 : 45] Find wisdom. And so parents. The best way. To prepare your children. For this life. To give. Them. True wisdom.

To navigate this world. Is to lead them. To know. And love. And trust Jesus. That is the best. Kind of parenting. You could possibly do. And in a moment.

Lord. I want to tell you. About how St. Marks. Is going to help you. To do that. But before. I'm going to pray. That these truths. Would remain in our minds. And our hearts. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father. We do thank you. So much. For wisdom. For showing us. Our need for wisdom.

For showing us. How wisdom. Is knitted. Into creation itself. Thank you Lord. Not for leaving us.

To our own devices. Because we are fools. We wouldn't go the right way. We don't naturally. Listen to the voice of wisdom. And so help us Lord. Help us. From now on.

[30 : 41] Not just to listen. To the voice of wisdom. When we hear it. But to seek out that voice.

And ultimately. To seek it in Jesus Christ. Help us to follow him. Help us to devote ourselves.

Daily. To disciplining ourselves. To following him. To listening to his voice. And living. The wise life.

That you've called us to. So that we might enjoy. Your blessings. And enjoy life in eternity.

We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.