

Proverbs #2 - How to Become a Fool

Big Idea: We become fools before we know it.

Purpose: To challenge people to not fool themselves.

Passage: Proverbs 26:6-12, various

Verse: Proverbs 17:12

Opening

-When you think of a fool, who comes to mind? You may not want to answer that out loud if you are with other people. When you think of a fool, who comes to mind? I am guessing your perception of a fool has been shaped by TV and movies. Who are the top TV and movies fools? These would be classic characters from TV and movies who might fit your mental image of a fool. If you are watching on our new online platform or on Facebook go ahead and begin to list some of the classic fools from TV and movies.

I did some research and have assembled a Top Ten list of famous fools from TV and movies. We will see if my list corresponds with the people you list.

Top Ten List of Famous Fools from TV and Movies:

10. **Barney Fife** (*Andy Griffith Show*, Don Knotts, deputy, carried unloaded gun)
9. **Dory** (*Finding Nemo/Dory*, Ellen Degeneris)
8. **Cosmo Kramer** (*Seinfeld*, never had a job, always came barging into Jerry's apartment)
7. **Wayne and Garth** (*Wayne's World*, Mike Myers and Dana Carvey, Saturday Night Live, movies)
6. **Inspector Clouseau** (Peter Sellers/Steve Martin, 11 *Pink Panther* movies)
5. **Michael Scott** (Steve Carrell, *The Office*)
4. **Tommy Boy** (Chris Farley)
3. **Homer Simpson** (*Simpsons*, longest running American scripted TV show)
2. **The Three Stooges** (comedy team for 48 years, 190 short films)
1. **Lloyd and Harry** (*Dumb and Dumber*, Jim Carrey and Jeff Daniels)

-Generally, when we think of a fool, we think of someone who is incompetent, gullible, has no common sense and no self-awareness. They are also sincere, lucky, and a bit endearing. Our mental image of a fool is a lovable loser. We wouldn't want them to lead us, but we would like to hang out with them.

-The only problem with this mental image of a fool is that it does not correspond with the image of fool in Scripture. We can see this on full display through Jesus' words in Matthew 5:22. *Anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.* (Matthew 5:22b) When we call someone a fool, we likely have Chris Farley, Michael Scott or Homer Simpson in mind. We are referring to them as silly and naïve.

But Jesus felt calling someone a fool was one of the worst things we could do. Clearly, Jesus' view of a fool is different than our view of a fool. Jesus' view of a fool was shaped by the wisdom literature in the Hebrew Scriptures. It was particularly shaped by the book of Proverbs. Proverbs tells us *the way of the fool leads to death*. It is not telling us that being a lovable loser leads to death. To make sure we don't become a fool and travel the pathway to death, we had better properly understand the nature of a fool.

Review

-We are in the 2nd week of a series on Proverbs subtitled – *How Not to Be a Fool*. Last week, we launched the series by exploring the introduction to the book in chapter 1, verses 1-7. Proverbs is part of the *wisdom literature* of the Hebrew Scriptures. Wisdom literature was written by sages, wise men and women, who were experts at living. The Hebrew word for wisdom is *hokmah* (*hok-MAH*). It is a word that means a *high amount of skill in any arena*. It is *expertise*. In the book of Proverbs, *hokmah* means to live skillfully. A wise person is a person who is skilled at living. They understand how life is meant to work. *Hokmah* is an attribute God used to create the world and create us. It is woven into the fabric of who we are and how we are meant to live.

-The first 9 chapters of Proverbs are 10 parent-child talks. The remainder of the book largely consists of tried and true little sayings backed by generations of living. Reading Proverbs is like entering a room of really experienced and wise people and then having them give us advice on how to live well.

-We come to a *fork in the road* multiple times every day. We make up to 35,000 decisions a day, 200 just on food. We will be confronted with a choice

on which path we want to walk. One path is the way of foolishness. One path is the way of wisdom. Who is a wise guy? It is not this guy.

To be a wise guy or gal is to align our way with God's way.

-Proverbs 1:7 provides us the key to the walking the way of wisdom: we must have the *fear of the LORD*. This phrase is used 18 times in the book, at the beginning and at the end. It does not mean to be scared of God. It means to have a sense of awe or reverence. *It means taking God seriously*. When we take God seriously we are right sized. We understand who we are and we understand who God is. This provides us with the mindset and state of heart to choose God's way, the way of wisdom, the way of life, instead of our way, the way of foolishness, the way of death.



How to Become a Fool

-Today we will dig into Proverbs to get an accurate sketch of a fool. Our mental picture of a fool is different from the fool in Proverbs. We will also explore *how to become a fool*. Proverbs shows us the pathway to becoming a fool in hopes we won't travel it. No one wakes up one morning and decides to become a fool. It happens to us slowly and surely. It happens one step at a time. It is far easier to become a fool than you might think. ***We become fools before we know it.***

-We will take time to look at *three steps to becoming a fool*. I will briefly sketch each step. Those sketches will build to give us the full portrait of a fool. After each step, we will consider *things we can do to exit the pathway of becoming a fool*.

-I found a book entitled ***A Life that is Good*** by Old Testament scholar Glenn Pemberton was helpful in crafting this message. *Glenn argues that the way of wisdom leads to a life that is good - instead of the "good life."* That is a wonderful distinction.

-As you go through the three steps on how to be a fool, you will naturally think of people in your life. You will see others in the descriptions. First and foremost, ***look for yourself***. *An essential principle of the book of Proverbs is not to fool ourselves - because the easiest person to fool is ourselves.*

-Our public reading of Scripture is from Nancy Low:

-He who sends a message by the hand of a fool cuts off his own feet and drinks violence. ⁷ Like a lame man's legs, which hang

useless, is a proverb in the mouth of fools. ⁸ Like one who binds the stone in the sling is he who gives honor to a fool. ⁹ Like a thorn that goes up into the hand of a drunkard is a proverb in the mouth of fools. ¹⁰ Like an archer who wounds everybody is he who hires a passing fool or drunkard.^[a] ¹¹ Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool that repeats his folly.

¹² Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him. (Proverbs 26:6-12, RSV)

Do foolish things

-*Step one in becoming a fool is that we do foolish things* Here are just a few of the foolish actions that the sages of Proverbs warn us against.

Foolish Actions:

being easily angered (12:16; 14:17,29)

recklessness (14:16)

burning through money (21:20)

speaking too quickly/much (10:8,14; 12:23; 15:2; 18:2; 29:20)

dishonesty (19:1)

drinking too much (20:1)

-When I was in high school, I made the foolish decision to drink alcohol underage. I hung out with other athletes and that was the cool thing to do. I held out until my junior year, but then one night at a party, I got offered a beer and I thought, ***just this once.*** I knew it was wrong. I knew it was illegal. I did it anyway. **I behaved foolishly.**

-To be clear, we all do foolish things. Thankfully, **doing something foolish does not make us fools.** But it is **the first step to becoming a fool.**

Becoming a fool is not one foolish decision, but the culmination of many foolish decisions.

A flywheel is an incredibly heavy wheel that takes a huge effort to push. If we keep pushing, the flywheel builds momentum. The more it moves, the easier it is to push because the flywheel is starting to generate its own momentum. Then it becomes hard to stop. The point is that *it's more difficult to stop something that has momentum.* Our first foolish action is that first push of the flywheel. If we keep making foolish decisions, then

the flywheel becomes easier and easier to push. Eventually it moves itself.

That is why any foolish action is a step toward becoming a fool.

-After that first drink of alcohol, I found that I liked alcohol. It relaxed me and gave me confidence. That *one night* of drinking turned into *regular nights* of drinking. That turned into stealing beer from the grocery store where I worked. That turned into stealing beer out of the back of beer delivery trucks who left their back door open while making a delivery. That turned into sneaking into a beer distribution center, stealing a keg, and somehow getting it over a fence with barbed wire. ***The first step in becoming a fool is doing foolish things.***

What can we do?

-What can we do to stop the flywheel and ensure our foolish actions don't become habits which become lifestyles which become our lives?

Remember that foolish actions don't make us fools. *Repeating* foolish actions is what makes us fools. As we heard Nancy read earlier, *Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool that repeats his folly.* (Proverbs 26:11)

-One thing we can do is read a Proverb a day, or if you are ambitious, read a portion of Proverbs every day. Proverbs is essentially a guidebook for living life well. Shouldn't we be well versed in it? Families, you could incorporate this in the rhythms of your family life. Read a proverb at dinner and discuss it.

-Another thing we can do each day so we don't become fools is an ancient practice called the ***Prayer of Examen***. The Prayer of Examen is a time of prayerful reflection meant to be done at night. Here is a simple model.

-Prayer of Examen

Find a quiet place and be silent for 30 seconds

Recognize God's presence with the invitation - *speak LORD, your servant is listening*

Ask God's Spirit to reveal where we choose wisely. Thank God.

Ask God's Spirit to reveal where we choose foolishly. Ask forgiveness

-The Prayer of Examen reveals how we spend our days. And as Annie Dillard once said, ***how we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.*** It reveals where we choose wisely and where we chose foolishly. It can help us to see patterns so that foolish decisions don't become a way of life.

We travel with fools

-How do we become fools? We do foolish things and those choices become a habit and a way of living. The second step in becoming a fool is ***we travel with fools.***

You might remember the verse from last week that lays out this key principle from Proverbs. I promised to return to it this week: ***Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.*** (Proverbs 13:20) Wise people hang out with wise people. Fools hang out with fools. If you want to become a fool, then travel with fools.

-This is a truth we see in Scripture, but it is also self-evident in life. If I didn't know you at all, I could likely make a really accurate guess about the type of person you are by meeting the people you hang out with. It is just how life works. **Who we spend time with is who we become.** We are largely a reflection of the people we do life with and the people we turn to for advice. It has been said *we are the average of the five people we spend the most time with.*

What type of person are you? Let me meet your traveling companions. If you want to be wise, hang out with wise people. If you want to be a fool, hang out with fools. What can we do?

What can we do?

-We can seek wise traveling companions. Parents, this is one of the critical things we can do for our kids. Proverbs tells us to ***train up a child in the way they should go.*** The sages assumed we would need help. We are meant to raise up our children in community. As the African proverb states - *it takes a village.* Experts recommend that each of our children has five additional shaping influences in their lives to help them walk in the way of wisdom. Do you know who those influences are for your children? Are they wise people or fools?

New Hope's Kids Community and **Student Ministry** teams are designed to partner with parents in shaping the hearts of the next generation. Our teams have online experiences for you and your kids and students every week. My wife and I have made it one of our highest priorities to ensure that our girls are surrounded by wise traveling companions.

-We adults need to be surrounded by wise traveling companions as well. Your homework from last week was to reflect on the people you do life

with and the voices you listen to. If you forgot or didn't do your homework it is ok. You can do that work right now. *Who are your traveling companions? Who do you choose to do life with?*

I recognize we are in the middle of a pandemic. Presently our options may be limited. But reflect back to your life before quarantine. When we emerge, we have the opportunity to change our traveling companions. In this day and age our traveling companions are not just the people we live with or hang out with on a regular basis. **They are also the voices we listen to. This would include podcasts, TV and radio news shows, books and social media.** These voices guide our decisions and shape how we see the world. They are your traveling companions.

-Proverbs 12:26 tells us that *people who live right choose their friends carefully.* Are you choosing your traveling companions carefully? That was a critical mistake I made in high school and college. My traveling companions were not wise people. If I would have had wise traveling companions, someone would have said - *maybe we shouldn't break into the beer distribution plant and try to steal a keg.*

My life began to change when I began to hang out with wise people. One year from now, we will likely be exactly the same people unless we change our traveling companions.

-When we decided to have children, I knew that I would need wise voices in my life to help me become a good father. I sought out a man named Rick and asked him if he would be willing to meet with me once a month to help prepare me and teach me how to be a good father. I knew we were having a little girl and I had never been around little girls. Rick was an elder at our church who had raised two Godly daughters. Rick was an internationally known scientist; an expert in his field. Most importantly, Rick is wise. He graciously agreed and we met together for over 10 years.

When I moved to Portland and was faced with the challenge of helping rebirth New Hope, I knew I would need wise counsel. I met a man named Craig who has been the president of three seminaries and has played huge leadership roles in several large churches. Craig had experience in rebirths. He was an expert. Most importantly, Craig is wise. He graciously agreed to meet regularly with me and that continues to this day. Proverbs tells us more than once that victory is won through many advisors. When we are looking for wise traveling companions, what are we looking for?

-Wise traveling companions:

They take God seriously.

They have expertise. (I am always seeking expertise)

Their advice aligns with the way of wisdom. (peer review)

They are living skillfully.

We would leave our children with them for a month.

-Back to your homework. List out your traveling companions. List the people you choose to do life with. List the people you regularly read or listen to that shape your life. How do you feel about the list? What changes need to be made? **Wise people travel with wise people. If you want to become a fool, travel with fools.**

We think we are wise

-How do we become a fool? We do foolish things. We travel with fools. Finally, *we think we are wise*. That is the definition of a fool from Proverbs – *someone who thinks they are wise*. Proverbs 12:15 says, ***The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.*** (Proverbs 12:15) There is a perverse irony here. The person who thinks they are wise is actually a fool. And here is the scary thing – ***we become fools before we know it.*** No one sets out to be a fool. It is a process. And the person who becomes a fool is the person who doesn't realize they are a fool. Their foolishness blinds them.

-In Hebrew wisdom literature, a fool is not a lovable loser. The danger in becoming a fool is not the danger of becoming Michael Scott or Tommy Boy. The danger is far worse. Here is a more complete portrait of a fool from the book of Proverbs.

-Portrait of a Fool in Proverbs:

hates knowledge and learning (1:7,22; 14:7; 18:2-3)

refuses to listen and seek advice (12:15; 18:13; 29:29)

rejects discipline (15:5)

prideful (14:3a)

trusts in themselves completely (28:26a)

disregards sin (14:9)

-A fool is not a lovable loser. A fool is someone who thinks they are wise. A fool thinks they know better than any expert. A fool thinks they know better than God. A fool thinks they know best. It is a deadly path.

Here is a picture of a fool.



What can we do?

-How do we know we have become a fool? The danger of becoming a fool is that a fool is often the last person to realize they have become a fool. Here are some warning signs to reveal if we have become a fool or if we are heading in that direction.

-Warning Signs for Becoming a Fool:

Fools talk more than they listen. (We have one mouth and two ears. Fools don't ask questions.)

Fools have an answer for everything. (Fools hardly ever say things like *I don't know* or *I am not sure*.)

Fools rarely admit they are wrong. (Fools don't say they are sorry. Fools don't ask for forgiveness. Fools don't do repentance.)

Fools are their own counselors. (Fools don't seek advice & are skeptical of experts.)

Fools are surrounded by people who agree with them. (Echo chamber. Fools don't associate with people who are different than they are. They only hang out with those who reinforce their view of the world.)

Fools haven't changed their minds about anything in a long time. (Fools are closed-minded. Fools are not works in progress. Fools don't value change.)

-How should we respond to fools in our lives? If we encounter a fool what should we do? The sages who wrote the wisdom literature, that room full of super-wise people, are clear on this. *When we encounter fools, we should run.*

A lot of times we do the exact opposite. When we encounter fools, we argue with them. You will never win an argument with a fool. As the ancient saying goes - *never wrestle with a pig - you will get dirty, and the*

pig will like it. Don't ever argue with a fool, especially on social media. You will get dirty in the process.

-The wise sages of Proverbs tell us to avoid relationships with fools at all cost because no one can help a fool. You can't help someone who isn't looking for help. The wise sages warn us that having relationships with fools is not just unwise. It is dangerous. Think back to that portion of Proverbs 26 that Nancy read earlier. The sage tells us that *engaging with fools is like grabbing a thorn bush when you have had too much to drink, cutting off your feet, hanging out with someone who is randomly firing arrows in all directions, or drinking poison.*

In Proverbs 17:12 we read, *better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool bent on folly.* Having a relationship with a fool is like getting between a mama Grizzly and her cubs. Good luck with that.



-There is little hope for a fool because fools think they are wise. They think they are wiser than everyone else including God. The only hope for a fool is for God to break them. You do not want to be around for the breaking. The shrapnel is brutal.

Closing

A matter of life and death

-Becoming a fool is not like becoming Barney Fife or Dory or the Lloyd and Harry from *Dumb and Dumber*. It is far, far worse. Jesus was strict on calling someone a fool, but Jesus knew that becoming a fool is the worst thing we could become.

-The scary thing is that ***we become fools before we know it.*** It happens slowly and subtly like the frog being slowly heated up in water until it is too late. We don't even sense it is happening unless we are really paying attention. It also happens naturally because of our broken hearts. If we are not actively seeking wisdom, we will become fools by default.

The goal of this message today is to get you to pay attention. Take a hard look at your life and the lives of those you love. **Are you becoming a fool? It is no joke. The wise sages from Proverbs tell us again and again that it is a matter of life and death.**

-Jesus and the writers of the NT were steeped in wisdom literature. They understood what was at stake. In Jesus' first big teaching he ended by proclaiming that *foolish people build their houses on the sand of their own opinions. Wise people build their houses on God's word.* Paul, at the beginning of his letter to the church at Rome, writes *For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.* (Romans 1:21-23)

-Did you catch that? **People turned away from God.** They no longer took God seriously. What is the effect of that decision? They became fools. How does Paul define fools? He defines it the same way the sages of Proverbs define it - *people who think they are wise.* They think they are wiser than everyone, including God.

-When you come to the fork in the road which way will you go? Will you take God seriously and follow the way of wisdom that leads to life? Or will you be a fool, thinking you are wiser than everyone else? Will you go your own way? That is a road that leads to death. There is so much at stake. Every decision matters. And the scary thing is that if we are not careful, we *become fools before we know it.*

Communion

-What is our hope? **Jesus is our hope.** Jesus is the *hokmah* of God, the embodiment of wisdom. The ultimate *fork in the road* is what we think about Jesus. Will we go our own way? That is the road that leads to death. Or will we look to Jesus for life? As we follow Him, we find the way of wisdom.

-*At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.* (Titus 3:3-7)

Benediction

-Then they will call to me, but I will not answer; they will diligently seek¹ me, but they will not find me. ²⁹ Because they hated moral knowledge, and did not choose to fear the LORD, ³⁰ they did not comply with my advice, they spurned all my rebuke.³¹ Therefore they will eat from the fruit of their way, and they will be stuffed full of their own counsel. ³² For the waywardness of the simpletons will kill them, and the careless ease of fools will destroy them.³³ But the one who listens to me will live in security, and will be at ease from the dread of harm.” (Lady Wisdom, Proverbs 1:28-33)