

Seek Wisdom

Lady Wisdom, Lady Folly, and the fool who thinks he is wise

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, February 2, 2020
PASSAGES	Proverbs 8:1-14; Proverbs 9:1-18; Psalm 119:97-105; Proverbs 1:5-7; 1 Corinthians 1:27-30; James 3:13-17; James 1:5; 1 Corinthians 3:18-20; Jeremiah 5:21-24; Ezekiel 12:2
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:00:00 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Wisdom is not a knack for solving puzzles. It is the very thoughts of God, and his thoughts are not our natural thoughts. So we grow wise not by emptying our minds and looking within, but by filling them with God's word, fearing him rightly, asking him in humility, and admitting that we are fools who need him. In the end wisdom is relational: Christ himself has become our wisdom from God.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Wisdom in Proverbs is personified, not a separate being. She is an expression of the very mind of God.
- ◆ Wisdom calls out to the simple and senseless — not to the best educated. That gives hope to all of us.
- ◆ Lady Folly calls from the same places with the same words. Not paying attention, you could mistake her for wisdom.
- ◆ Since God's thoughts are not our thoughts, looking within is a perilous source of wisdom. Fill your mind with God's word instead.
- ◆ Seeking wisdom is not a one-time plateau. Its foundation is the fear of the Lord — neither dark dread nor a chummy “respect.”

- ◆ The fool thinks he is wise; God's wisdom is not the average of human opinions, and it often sounds extreme.
- ◆ Rebellion makes us deaf and blind. Wisdom takes meekness: "Lord, I need your thoughts."

► 0:00:00

Matt opened with a long reading on the importance of seeking wisdom in the life of a disciple of Jesus — the voice of wisdom herself, calling out where the paths meet.

Wisdom calls out

► 0:00:36

"Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice? At the highest point along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand ... 'To you, O people, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind. You who are simple, gain prudence; you who are foolish, set your hearts on it.' ... Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her."

PROVERBS 8:1-14 ↗

► 0:01:50

"What a compelling opening statement from wisdom personified." She is not, Matt said, an actual woman you could run into in the kingdom of God; she is personified as someone calling out to those who need her.

► 0:02:29

Later she says she was there before the depths and the springs, before the mountains, when God set the heavens in place and marked out the horizon ([Proverbs 8:24-27](#)). Yet God says he made all things and stretched out the heavens "by myself" ([Isaiah 44:24](#)). So wisdom is not a third party. She is not an object or tool either. "Wisdom, the way I understand it, is an expression of the very thoughts and mind of God himself."

Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly

► 0:03:33

In the next chapter wisdom sends her young women to call “from the highest places in the town: ‘Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!’ ... ‘Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways, and live’” (Proverbs 9:1-6).

► 0:04:53

That gives hope: wisdom is not calling to those with the best education but to “those who have no sense,” inviting them to grow. Then the contrast. Lady Folly is loud and seductive and knows nothing. She sits at the highest places of the town — the very places wisdom called from — and says the very same words: “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!”

► 0:06:12

“And to him who lacks sense she says, ‘Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.’ But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.”

PROVERBS 9:13-18 ↗

► 0:06:49

Her target is anyone who can be deceived. She tells them what they want to hear, perhaps even disguising herself as wisdom by calling from the same address. Wisdom offers life; Folly’s house sits on top of a mass of dead. “If you’re not paying attention, Lady Folly could be confused for Lady Wisdom, which is sort of a frightful thought for all of us.”

Don’t empty your mind — fill it

► 0:07:32

Wisdom is from God. It is not just the capacity to solve riddles or schedule your time well; it has to do with the very nature and mind of God. And God says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8). So the thoughts that come naturally to us are not necessarily wisdom.

► 0:08:38

That matters because we are often told to look inside ourselves for wisdom: empty your mind, listen to the voice within. “If God is the source of wisdom, and God’s thoughts are not like human thoughts ... then it may be a perilous thing to clear your mind, clear off the desk, and then just look within.” A better idea is not to empty your mind but to fill it with the words of God.

► 0:09:19

“Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation.”

PSALM 119:97-100 ↗

► 0:10:01

It may sound like bragging, but the psalmist is giving credit where it is due: “because God’s testimonies are your meditation, not your own inner silence.” Matt wasn’t knocking quiet; we all need a deep breath, and you can have an aha moment in silence. But what we fill our minds with should be God’s wisdom.

► 0:11:04

“More than the aged,” the psalmist adds. Age brings wisdom, “but the God of the universe is totally way older than anyone you’ve ever met,” so understanding beyond your natural capacity is “an open invitation, even to the fool.” And “you have taught me” suggests not just words God once spoke but God speaking through them now.

► 0:11:49

“How sweet are your words to my taste ... Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:103-105). On a dark path you don’t light the whole way once and switch off the flashlight.

Never a plateau

► 0:12:32

“Seeking wisdom is not, in my opinion, a one-time thing.” Since wisdom reflects the very heart of God, seeking it is like seeking the Lord himself. It is dangerous to say, I’ve reached a plateau of wisdom and can coast.

► 0:13:06

“Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance ... The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

PROVERBS 1:5-7 ↗

If the foundation of wisdom is the fear of God, then if that fear erodes, the foundation crumbles. So keep the light on the whole way, and keep a proper fear of the Lord.

What the fear of the Lord is — and isn't

► 0:14:22

Some rightly point out that we don't serve God the way you would serve a dark master. But the opposite extreme is silly too: being so chummy with God that the fear of the Lord shrinks to the knowing nod at the end of a movie, or "respect" the way friends say it — "a wink and a nod in the general direction of the Lord."

► 0:15:54

Jesus says, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body" ([Matthew 10:28](#)). Not in a dark way, "but we should acknowledge who he is."

► 0:16:24

"The foolishness of man is often just deception. It's a phantom, smoke and mirrors. But the mind of God completely corresponds to what really is — and what really is, is that he is God and we are not."

► 0:16:56

He made us and sustains us; "in him we live and move and have our being" ([Acts 17:28](#)). We do approach him as Father — but beware another rut. Our culture often treats fathers like doormats, "eroded to the point of you're just Homer Simpson": he says things, we nod, and we don't do them. That, Matt said, is part of why Proverbs insists on disciplining children. Our natural thoughts aren't wise, and teaching a child that a father's word can be ignored sets them up badly for their relationship with their heavenly Father.

The fool who thinks he is wise

► 0:18:24

The fool doesn't walk around admitting he is a fool. "The thing about deception is you're deceived." The one who most needs to hear Lady Wisdom is the one most likely to scoff. "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes" ([Proverbs 12:15](#)). Folly tells him exactly what he was already thinking — "that just proves it; I knew I was a smart man" — not knowing she sits on the grave of many. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death" ([Proverbs 14:12](#)).

► 0:20:40

Paul says the same: “Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God” (1 Corinthians 3:18–20). We seek God’s thoughts not to solve a Rubik’s Cube faster but because, like Moses, we want to know his ways (Exodus 33:13). “This is part of our pursuit of him relationally. This is not just an academic pursuit.”

► 0:21:47

Why does James speak of “the meekness of wisdom”? Because human thoughts “are not always bright, from my experience,” and it takes humility to say, “Lord, I want your thoughts. I am weak and wrong — often wrong.”

► 0:22:57

“This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”

JAMES 3:13–17 ↗

Wisdom is not the middle of the road

► 0:23:31

Another shortcut, like the kid always looking for one in school: skip seeking the Lord on complicated matters and just take the path of moderation. “But God’s thoughts are not always halfway between human thought one and human thought two.” Sometimes they sound extreme: if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; whoever looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery (Matthew 5:28–30).

► 0:25:15

“Which is also why wisdom is not democratic.” You can’t poll everyone and assume God’s thoughts are “right in the middle of all this madness,” because often we are walking in blindness.

Eyes that see, ears that hear

► 0:25:44

With a wedding waiting to decorate the room, Matt pressed one more thought. Behind Jesus’ “he who has ears, let him hear” runs an Old Testament thread. God tells Ezekiel he lives among a people “who

have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house” (Ezekiel 12:2).

► 0:26:14

Jeremiah says the same of a foolish and senseless people with eyes that don’t see — because “this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart ... They do not say in their hearts, ‘Let us fear the LORD our God’” (Jeremiah 5:21–24). If God is the only source of wisdom, anchored in reality, then rebelling against him leaves us “untethered from the very fabric of reality,” with eyes that don’t really see. Moses says it too (Deuteronomy 29:4).

► 0:27:43

The opposite of rebellion is submission, and that takes meekness: putting down your weapons and your ways, and admitting that you are often a fool.

How we grow in wisdom

► 0:28:21

First, build on the fear of God — our Father and Maker, who cannot be reduced to the way we treat earthly fathers. Second, ask: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” (James 1:5). Why can you ask in faith? Because he is the source of wisdom, and he is generous.

► 0:29:05

Third, answer wisdom’s call: “You who are foolish, set your hearts on it.” That requires accepting the label and seeking her sincerely. “This is the hardest” — cutting out the arrogance and rebellion that rise up and convince you that you know better, “which will cause you to become spiritually deaf and blind.”

Christ, our wisdom

► 0:29:50

Lastly, wisdom is not raw puzzle-solving ability but part of the fingerprint of God’s own nature, “a relational thing, perhaps more than we thought.”

► 0:30:22

“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God.”

1 CORINTHIANS 1:27-30 ↗

► 0:30:54

So what is the mind of God toward you? It is made manifest in the life and work of Jesus Christ: God the Son becoming man and living with us, “us of all people — and what did we do? We murdered him.” Yet he had authority to lay down his life and take it up again ([John 10:18](#)), “to give life, as a divine donor, to the dead. That is God’s wisdom, which is insane — most of that sounds foolish from the perspective of the world.”

► 0:31:29

“We seek wisdom by seeking the very person of God himself. He’s the one we ask, he’s the one we fear, he’s the one who teaches us.”

► 0:32:04

It is him we bow before in meekness, asking him to forgive our sins, “correct us of our madness,” and straighten our path as his pupils, “no matter how humiliating and embarrassing that may feel.” From beginning to end, seeking wisdom is relational, “made finally clear to us that Jesus Christ himself is our wisdom from God.” Matt prayed for ears to hear and eyes to see, and for fearful, reverent respect “as you deserve.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [Proverbs 8:1–14 \(NIV\)](#)
- [Proverbs 8:24–27 \(NIV\)](#)
- [Isaiah 44:24](#)
- [Proverbs 9:1–6](#)
- [Proverbs 9:13–18](#)
- [Isaiah 55:8](#)
- [Psalm 119:97–100](#)
- [Psalm 119:103–105](#)
- [Proverbs 1:5–7](#)
- [Matthew 10:28](#)
- [Acts 17:28](#)
- [Proverbs 12:15](#)
- [Proverbs 14:12](#)
- [1 Corinthians 3:18–20](#)
- [Exodus 33:13](#)
- [James 3:13–17](#)
- [Matthew 5:28–30](#)
- [Ezekiel 12:2](#)
- [Jeremiah 5:21–24](#)
- [Deuteronomy 29:4](#)
- [James 1:5](#)
- [1 Corinthians 1:27–30](#)
- [John 10:18](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Lady Folly calls from the same places, with the same words, as Lady Wisdom. Where do you find it hardest to tell them apart?
2. Matt warned against emptying your mind and looking within. What are you filling your mind with most days?
3. Which distortion of the fear of the Lord do you lean toward — dark dread, or a chummy “wink and a nod”?
4. Where have you assumed God’s wisdom must be the moderate middle, when Scripture actually sounds more extreme?
5. What would it look like this week to say, “Lord, I am often wrong — I need your thoughts,” and ask him for wisdom in one specific matter?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0tR-XDV1Vw&t=0s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.