



# Wisdom Versus Foolishness

A Study on the Characteristics of Wisdom Versus the  
Characteristics of Foolishness in Proverbs

Written by Jackie McMullen  
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# Proverbs: A Book of Wisdom

*All verses referenced, unless otherwise noted, are from Proverbs.*

Renowned for its wisdom, the book of Proverbs, traditionally attributed to King Solomon, offers profound insights into understanding and living a life guided by discernment and morality. Although there may be some variation in authorship, it is largely believed to be either Solomon's direct writings or a compilation of his wisdom by others. Its stated purpose is outlined in Chapter 1:

*1 The Proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:*

*2 To know wisdom and instruction,*

*To perceive the words of understanding,*

*3 To receive the instruction of wisdom,*

*Justice, judgement, and equity;*

*4 To give prudence to the simple,*

*To the young man knowledge and discretion –*

*5 A wise man will hear and increase learning,*

*And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel,*

*6 To understand a proverb and an enigma,*

*The words of the wise and their riddles.*

In 1 Kings 3:5-12 God comes to Solomon in a dream and tells him he can ask for anything and God will give it to him. Solomon, demonstrating a degree of wisdom even in that moment, asks God for an “understanding heart to judge Your people that I may discern between good and evil” (vs 9), knowing that he does not have the discernment and understanding he needs to do the task. Solomon asks for wisdom and God grants him his request. The result is that Solomon becomes wise such that “there has not been anyone like [Solomon] before, nor shall any like [him] arise after...” (vs 12).

Ultimately, Solomon would go on to record this wisdom in the book of Proverbs. “Proverbs” is a word that means “to be like.” It is a collection of comparisons or analogies of tangible concepts to illustrate truths about life. This is meant to compliment the law given by God in the first five books of the Old Testament and give a more nuanced explanation of certain aspects of living. This wisdom is both practical and ethical and gives the believer applied behaviors to adopt in their life.

We must, of course, remember that the living embodiment of this Wisdom is found in Christ Jesus and his walk on this earth. Therefore, though Old Testament wisdom has sometimes been discounted, we know that it is a complimentary book to the New Testament and Christ’s wisdom demonstrated through his actions and parables.

The Proverbs are not just a list of ways to live, but they are made to draw us nearer to Christ. They encourage moral and ethical living which can only be achieved by a right relationship with God. John MacArthur refers to them as this: “Themes of scripture brought to the level of practical righteousness.” You will find joy and encouragement in the Proverbs when you count them for what they are: a guidebook to knowing God more deeply and a map for your path when navigating life.





# Themes

*All verses referenced, unless otherwise noted, are from Proverbs.*

There are two major themes in Proverbs: wisdom and foolishness. The theme of Wisdom in Proverbs applies to both moral and intellectual wisdom. The term “wisdom” also includes knowledge, understanding, instruction, discretion, and obedience. Its foundation is fear of the Lord:

*“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” - vs. 1:7a*

Attainment of wisdom is accompanied by several rewards; 1) The knowledge of God and understanding of the fear of God. (vs. 2:1-5), 2) Discretion, understanding, and deliverance from the evil way (vs. 2:10-12), 3) Length of days, long life, and peace (vs. 3:1-2), 4) Happiness (vs. 3:13) and 5) Profit better than silver or gold. (vs. 3:14). Furthermore, in the book of Luke, Jesus tells us that wisdom is proven by the outcomes it produces:

*“But wisdom is justified by all her children.” - Luke 7:35*

As wisdom has alternate meanings, so does foolishness. Foolishness also includes rebellion, unbelief, folly, corruption, and wickedness. How does foolishness align with wickedness? Psalm 14:1 says:

*“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good.”*

According to John MacArthur, this is a moral fool, rather than an intellectual fool (The MacArthur Study Bible, notes on Psalm 14:1). Biblehub.com says that “Fool’ is a moral term: one who suppresses truth, not merely lacks information.” Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers states, regarding Psalm 14:1, “...This is not, therefore, speculative atheism but practical – a denial of the moral government of God – so that fool and wicked become almost synonymous.”

In Isaiah 32:6 we read that a fool is characterized by several behaviors: 1) speaking foolishly, 2) having a heart that works iniquity, 3) practicing ungodliness, 4) uttering errors against the Lord, and 5) unwillingness to care for the needy. Ultimately, the fool is one who has denied God so deeply in his heart that he rejects even the basically accepted moral law. This leaves him open to wickedness of all varieties. In Romans 1:21,22 we read:

*“Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.”*

Finally, not only are we to strive towards not being foolish, we are also to avoid a fool at all costs:

*“Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs, rather than a fool in his folly.” - Proverbs 17:12*





# Comparison of Each

*All verses referenced, unless otherwise noted, are from Proverbs.*

Now, let us compare and contrast some of the characteristics of foolishness versus wisdom in the Proverbs:

Wisdom:	Foolishness:
<p>Is precious – 3:15            Is pleasant and peaceful – 3:17            A source of life and happiness – 3:18            Was used by God to establish the earth – 3:19-20            Is safety for us – 3:21-24            An inheritance of glory – 3:35            Brings honor – 4:8            Crowns the believer with grace and glory – 4:9            Preserves – 4:6            Better than rubies and cannot be compared to anything you desire – 8:11            Is a companion to prudence, knowledge, and discretion – 8:12            Can be found by seeking diligently – 8:17            Is better than gold and silver – 8:19            Is one of God’s beginning attributes – 8:22            Pre-dates the earth – 8:23            Brings blessing to those who keep it’s ways – 8:32,34            Is a multiplier of years – 9:11,12            Accompanies humility – 10:2            Is peaceful – 11:12            Loves instruction – 12:1            Brings commendation – 12:8            Heeds counsel – 12:15            Has self-control, not easily angered – 12:16            Conceals knowledge until the appropriate time – 12:23            Heeds a father’s instructions – 13:1            Brings wisdom to the wise man’s companions – 13:20</p>	<p>Is a legacy of shame – 3:35            Causes you to wrong your own soul – 8:36            Is clamorous, simple, and knows nothing – 9:13            Encourages iniquity – 9:15-17            Brings about death and damnation – 9:18, 10:21            Is grief to parents – 10:1            It’s “treasures” profit nothing – 10:2            Causes its possessor to fall – 10:8,10            Is burdened or punished by wisdom – 10:13            The mouth of the possessor is destruction – 10:14            Causes one to go astray – 10:17            Does not hold value – 10:20            Delights in doing evil – 10:23            Brings conflict with neighbors – 11:12            Hates correction – 12:1            Is self-assured, without seeking counsel – 12:15            Does not conceal wrath – 12:16            Proclaims foolishness, making sure all hear one’s folly – 12:23            Does not listen to rebuke – 13:1            Is openly foolish – 13:16            Is relentless – 13:19            Brings destruction to companions – 13:20            Tears a house down – 14:1            Cannot find wisdom – 14:6            The presence of a fool should be avoided – 14:7            Deceitful – 14:8            Mocking – 14:9            Raging and self-confident – 14:16            Quick-tempered and hated – 14:17            Impulsive – 14:29</p>





Wisdom, continued:	Foolishness, continued:
<p>Builds a house up – 14:1 Fears and departs from evil – 14:16 Is crowned with knowledge – 14:18 Is slow to wrath – 14:29 Rests in the heart of the possessor, waiting for the time of proper use – 14:33 Brings favor – 14:35 Uses knowledge wisely – 15:2 Receives correction – 15:5 Disperses knowledge through speech – 15:7 Seeks knowledge – 15:14, 18:15 Has an ear to hear – 15:31 Gains understanding – 15:32 Speaks sparingly and is calm spirited – 17:27 Allows a man to store up good things – 21:20 Cannot contend peacefully with a fool – 29:9 Holds back feelings – 29:11</p>	<p>Will be made known – 14:33 Brings wrath – 14:35 Despises instruction – 15:5 Its ways are an abomination – 15:9 Does not seek wise counsel or correction – 15:12 Despises parents – 15:20 Only brings joy to one who is destitute of discernment – 15:21 Despises his own soul – 15:31 Delights not in understanding but in expressing one's own heart – 18:2 Is destroy by its own mouth – 18:6,7 Is hasty to respond before hearing a matter – 18:13 Squanders good things – 21:20 Is not fit to be honored – 26:1 Doesn't learn a lesson – 26:11 Its possessor is in the assembly of the dead – 21:16 Vents feelings and frustrations – 29:11</p>

## Conclusion

As we look at the stark contrast between wisdom and foolishness throughout Proverbs, we're reminded that these are not merely abstract ideas but two very real paths set before every believer. Wisdom leads to life, peace, stability, and intimacy with God, while foolishness leads to corruption, destruction, and distance from Him. The difference between the two is not found in intellect, but in the posture of the heart—one that reveres God, welcomes correction, seeks counsel, and walks in obedience. As you close this study, take time to honestly examine which path your daily choices reflect. Ask the Lord to cultivate in you a humble, teachable spirit and to strengthen your desire to pursue His wisdom wholeheartedly. Commit today to seeking Him diligently, trusting that He will honor your pursuit and faithfully guide your steps.

### Resources from this study:

1. The MacArthur Study Bible, New King James Version, edited by John MacArthur
2. Biblehub.com
3. Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers





# Questions for Reflection

## 1. Taking Inventory of Wisdom:

Review the list of wisdom's characteristics.

Which qualities of wisdom do I see growing in me right now? Which ones feel difficult or underdeveloped? Why do I think that is?

## 2. Recognizing Foolish Tendencies

Spend time identifying behaviors or patterns that reflect foolishness.

Are there moments where I resist correction, act impulsively, or speak too quickly? What tends to trigger these reactions?

## 3. Noticing Wisdom's Rewards

What are the rewards that wisdom brings, according to the Proverbs? Can you find other places in the Bible where obedience is rewarded?

Where have I experienced peace, stability, understanding, or joy as a result of choosing wisdom? How can I thank God for these gifts today?

## 4. Influences and Companionship

Consider the people who shape your thinking or behavior.

Who in my life consistently draws me toward godliness? Who tends to pull me toward unwise choices? What boundaries or changes might God be prompting me to make?

## 5. The Words of My Mouth

Examine the recent tone and content of your speech.

Do my words bring life, calm, and clarity—or do they create conflict, confusion, or harm? What specific changes do I need to make in how I speak?

## 6. Pursuing Wisdom Intentionally

Journal about your current habits of seeking God's wisdom.

How am I actively pursuing wisdom through Scripture, prayer, or godly counsel? What is one practical way I can begin to "seek diligently" (Prov. 8:17) this week?

*Thank you for studying the Word with us today! We hope you have enjoyed this study and look forward to learning and growing in God's Word with you in the future!*

