

Proverbs: Living Just in an Unjust World

Study Guide

**Session 1
The Two Paths**

by George Stagg

Proverbs: Living Just in an Unjust World
Family Study Guide 1: The Two Paths
© George Stagg, 2011

Written by George Stagg.

Published by:
Twin Cities Church
Minneapolis, / St. Paul, Minnesota
www.tccmn.org
612-866-5848

All rights reserved. If you believe this tool would serve your efforts to help others know God and mature in their knowledge of Him, please contact us. We welcome opportunities to serve the churches of God.

All Bible references and quotations, unless noted, are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

The Two Paths

Proverbs describes two possible paths for people to follow in life. Those paths are the path of wisdom and the path of folly.

Wisdom: a life characterized by the fear of God; observed in the increasingly skillful living to all spheres of life

Folly: a life characterized as unteachable, void of any recognition or respect for God or any authority; observed in an increasingly failed life, beginning with those closest to the person

The intent of Proverbs is to steer people towards the path of wisdom and to sustain them in that path.

The path however, as it is a metaphor of life, is not a neutral environment. There are obstacles, diversions, and attractions that pull everyone on the path in a whole variety of directions. The end result, however, is fairly straightforward. A person is either on the path of wisdom or they are on the path of folly, and there is no gray area. Life and its challenges are full of ambiguity, complex problems, and can be very allusive. But over time, our decisions in these complex situations will work themselves out and reveal which path we are on. The pulls of life are categorized under three primary sources, 1) woman wisdom, woman folly, and fathers/mothers. We will explore the characteristics of these three voices in later studies, but a few important points are necessary at this time.

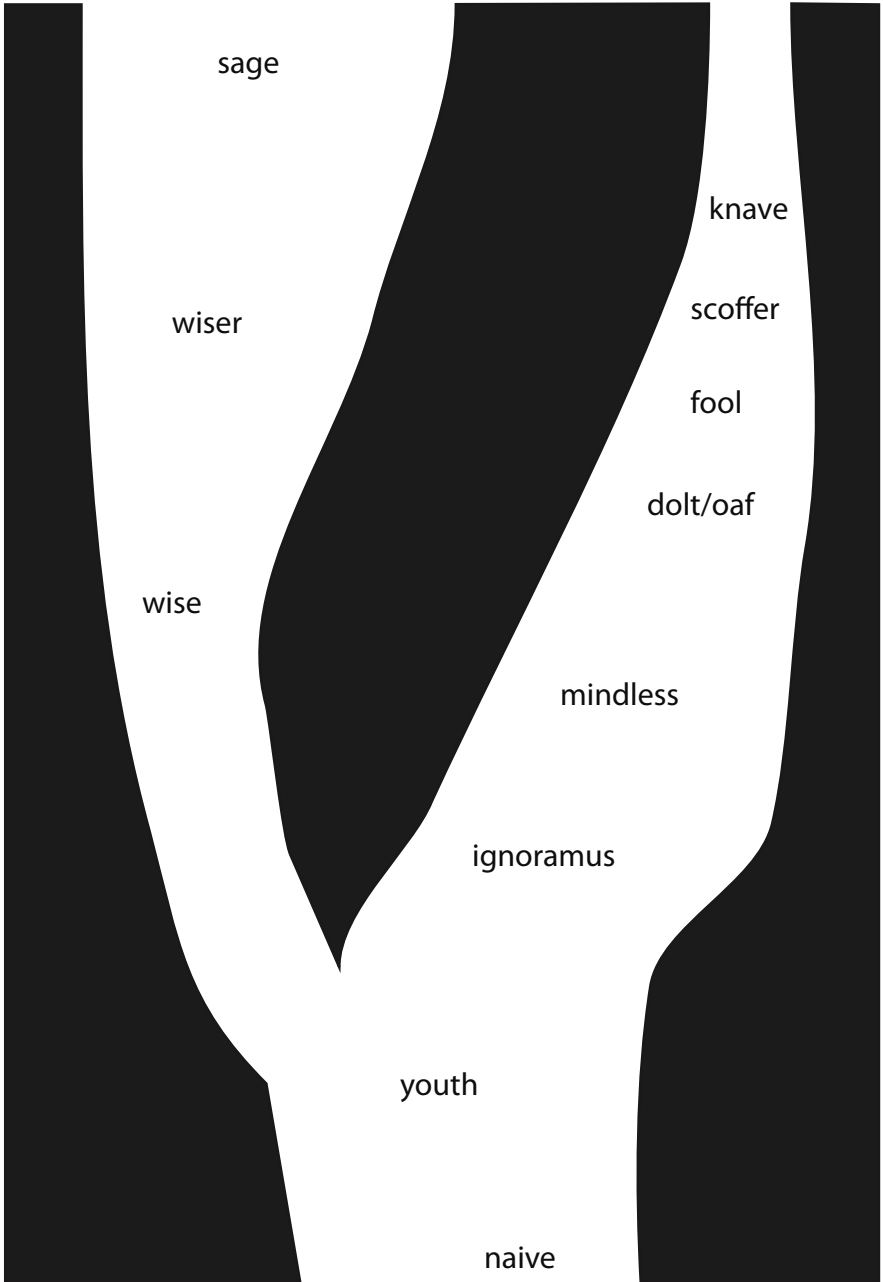
- Proverbs are most important at the time when young men and women are starting to become adults (early teens). Sexual temptations, as well as mature sexual desires, come in to play at this time. There are wise ways to fulfill/temper these desires and there are foolish ways. The Proverbs uses the metaphor of a woman to depict both wisdom and folly, and the young man in Proverbs to whom Proverbs is directed has to skillfully navigate his relationships with these two women.
- Parents play a key role in directing their children towards the path of wisdom.

When used with the book of Proverbs, this booklet will help individuals get on and stay on the path of wisdom. It is also designed to help parents steer their kids towards the lifelong path of wisdom.

The Two Paths

Wisdom

Folly



This chart is modified from a chart by Jeff Reed.

Characteristics of the Path

See if you can draw out some observations (and more) from the path before reading these. Read through the following characteristics. If you are a parent, talk them through with your family.

- Children start out with a natural tendency towards the path of folly, therefore correction is needed from the beginning (Proverbs 1:1-7, note the word “instruction” has a strong character of “correction” or “reproof”).
- It is important that parents incorporate guidance and correction at an early age in order to prepare their children for a lifelong process of learning, which required humility and teachability. If a child does not get correction and guidance from his/her parents at an early age, it is much more difficult to orient their minds and hearts to correction later.
- The path of folly is wide and easy to get into at the beginning, and its the more natural path. It will appear to be more attractive, especially to the lazy.
- The path of wisdom is narrower and “off the path” at the beginning, and therefore more difficult to start.
- There is a steady progression in each path. The fools get more foolish and the wise get wiser.
- The path of the wise become broader and easier as it is followed.
- The path of folly gets narrower and narrower and becomes more difficult to follow.
- The longer one stays on the path of folly, the more difficult it becomes for him/her to get onto the path of wisdom. In fact, correction is almost impossible once one becomes a scoffer, fool, or knave.

Definitions

Words Associated with the Path of Folly

naive - simple, inexperienced, easily seduced

youth - up to late teens, unmarried

ignoramus - animal-like brute

mindless - empty-headed, imprudent

dolt/oaf/fool - smug mental sloth, obtuse and complacent, overconfident, lacks clarity of vision, hard to educate

scoffer - arrogant, scornful, mocker, treats others with insolence and disdain, very difficult to change

knave - refuses to make good moral choices; morally corrupt; maybe shrewd and an expert, but is stupid by warped values and distorted vision; persistent and beyond remedy

Words Used in Association with Wisdom

understanding - intellectual discernment and interpretation

knowledge - could mean minimal awareness up thru great shrewdness and mental acumen

planning - deliberation; careful thinking, capacity and skill

expertise - high degree of knowledge and skill

shrewdness - cunning; skill in hidden and secretive thinking

discipline - instruction whose intent is to correct faults

cunning - talent to devise and use wily tactics to attain goals

discretion - ability to grasp the meanings or implications of a situation or message

strategy - leadership or guidance

good sense - pragmatic, applied thought, know-how; realm of attitude and social skills

resourcefulness - clear, efficient thinking in the exercise of power and practical operations

Exercises for Individuals and Families

1. Read through the definitions while referring to the chart. Talk about these kinds of people. Try to think of people from books, movies, or TV that depict these characteristics. This is one of the benefits of media that does a good job of character development. We can see and evaluate them and ourselves through them.
2. For Adults. Meditate on (maybe even memorize) Proverbs 3:13-18. If one believed these teachings about wisdom, how would it affect the path they chose?
3. For Families with Children. Memorize Proverbs 1:8-9. Talk about what needs to happen on the side of the parents and the children to apply this verse. Talk about what this verse means.