



AMPLIFY CHRIST

VOLUME 8

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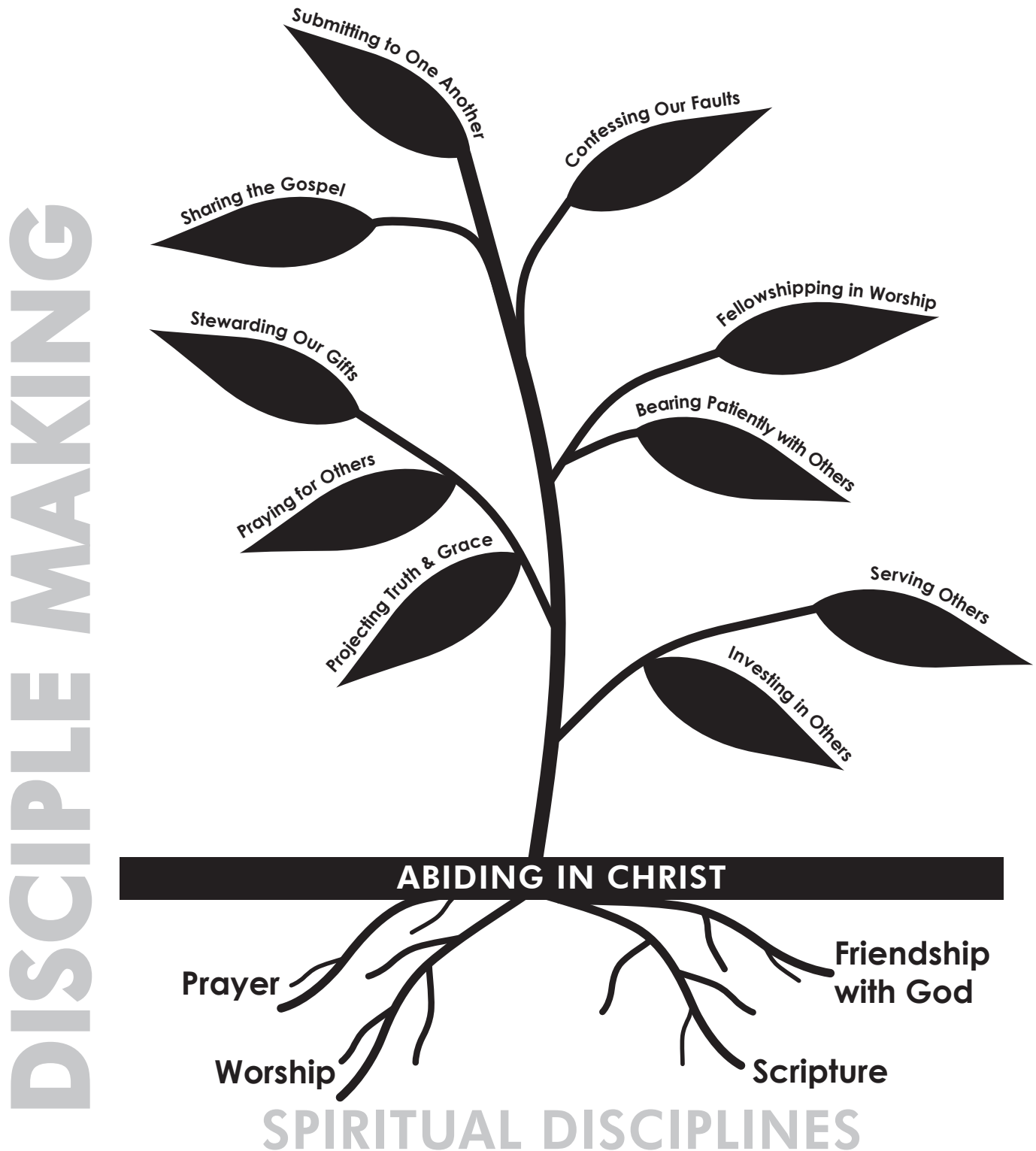
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OUR MISSION

LifeStone exists to empower **DISCIPLES** to make **DISCIPLES**. We seek to fulfill our mission by publishing Bible study and **DISCIPLESHIP** curriculum as well as offering real-life application training. We equip **DISCIPLES** as they journey through the various stages of life. As **DISCIPLES** grow in Christ, we continue to partner with them and their churches through training and other resources to empower **DISCIPLES** to make **DISCIPLES**.



FROM OUR PRESIDENT AND EDITOR IN CHIEF

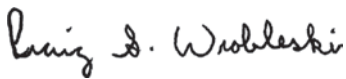
Dear Almighty Father,

Thank You for Your unconditional grace and mercy bestowed on LifeStone Ministries for 120 years. We are humbled by Your Son, the Master-Servant, who became the Living Stone rejected by men. You love us and build us up to be spiritual storehouses. We pray for Your strength and courage to be the living stones in our culture. We pray for perseverance to sacrifice ourselves to live wholly in subjection to Jesus Christ. May we glorify You in all our words and deeds as we strive to grow Your flock to spiritual maturity. We pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit as we engage Your flock.

Lord, we pray that this exposition of Your Word meets 2 Timothy 3:16. May the lessons contained in this labor of love emulate profitable teaching, graceful correction, and righteous training. We pray for all those who will be receiving instruction from these lessons. We pray for the teachers to approach this inspirational work with humility and meekness. May Your holy character and love for us leap from the pages and bring us all to our knees in thanksgiving.

Our glorious King, may we build the confidence and convictions of Christian leaders in our homes, churches, and missional fields to fulfill the Great Commission. Let us be renewed with strength and peace to empower Christian disciples to make disciples.

Under truth and grace,



Craig S. Wrobleski, M. Div., D. Min.
President & CEO
LifeStone Ministries

Dear Christ follower,

Our mission at LifeStone Ministries is to empower Christians to make disciples. We desire to partner with churches in this discipleship process. We have created a discipleship tool to help churches fulfill their calling. This new publication—*Amplify Christ*, as we call it—features a simple yet comprehensive five-step Bible study method that focuses on robust Bible learning and biblical application in a world that is often hostile to Christ's teaching.

Amplify Christ is not just another Bible curriculum. Discipleship requires a significant level of commitment from both teacher and student. Our discipleship tool likewise requires serious commitment. Leaders will need to inspire a group of people—maybe as few as one or two—to commit to spiritual formation and discipleship by investing their time and being willing to share their successes and failures. Group members can expect to read the lesson each week for an hour. Above all, group members will need to be honest with and encourage one another every week.

We have published this new discipleship tool and now prayerfully entrust it to you. We pray with all our hearts that the Holy Spirit will use it mightily to transform your lives and the lives of your group members, churches, and communities.

Sincerely,



James M. Leonard, Ph.D.
Editor in Chief
LifeStone Ministries

HOW TO USE AMPLIFY CHRIST

Christian discipleship is a matter of following the Master's footprints. The first disciples did just that—they followed Jesus from place to place, shared the same meals, slept at the same campsites, celebrated the same special occasions, and met the same people. In all these experiences, Jesus taught them verbally and through His actions. The disciples saw Jesus react to different people in different situations. They examined His work habits, observed His demeanor, and scrutinized how He practiced what He preached.

Even though we moderns can't follow Jesus physically, we are nonetheless called to be like Him in word and deed, conformed to His image. This is our calling, and we dare not ignore it. The only way we can know how to follow in Jesus' footprints is to learn about Him in the Bible. In the New Testament, eyewitnesses and other early disciples detail Jesus' life, ministry, and teaching. Similarly, the Old Testament helps us understand God's intentions for us through stories, worship materials, prophetic messages, and the Mosaic Law. God has given us His precious Scriptures to know how we should live. For this reason, disciples should have an intense thirst and hunger for God's Word.

Modern-day disciples, however, sometimes get discouraged about reading the Bible because of its antiquity and foreign culture. Sometimes they get so enthralled by the Bible's antiquity and alien culture that they fail to apply its teaching. Modern-day disciples may segment a familiar verse from its context and fail to understand its intended meaning, and sometimes they fail to integrate Scripture into theology.

For all these reasons, our new discipleship tool emphasizes five key elements for Scripture study. We hope *Amplify Christ* helps you become more like Christ.

THE METHOD

FIVE KEY ELEMENTS

1. **Amplify the Background.** Because the Bible was written long ago in a culture different from ours, we investigate rigorously to bridge the gap separating us moderns from the biblical writers. We present to our readers those backgrounds that help them understand the biblical passage.
2. **Amplify the Text.** One of the legacy features of our publications is the exposition of the text. We focus on the original author's intended message to his original audience, addressing the question, What was the author conveying to them back then? We hone in on the verse-by-verse details to explain the passage's big picture.
3. **Amplify the Context.** Many Christians see Scripture as piecemeal. We want disciples to see how individual stories and texts are connected to the whole biblical story. We read the text as sentences within a paragraph and paragraphs within a larger text unit. This is basic exegesis. But our readers should also understand how the entirety of a book fits into the whole of Scripture and the larger biblical history. We write to show how each text interconnects to form a majestic and awe-inspiring picture of God's plan.
4. **Amplify the Faith.** Christians need to allow Scripture to inform their thinking and basic Christian doctrine. We believe that God inspired His Word and that we should accept it as the rule of our lives as we seek to follow the Spirit's guidance. To this end, we spell out how the biblical text informs Bible doctrines and how we should think.
5. **Amplify Your Life.** Our goal is not to create a bunch of smart, brainiac Christians. Yes, we want Christians to be competent readers of the Bible, but this is not enough. We do everything we can to help disciples apply the text to their lives so that they grow in Christ's likeness. We think deeply about the text, explicitly seeking ways to articulate the principles of the ancient text to us today and to the specific individual. We are most urgent about the Christian formation of Christ followers.

TIMELINE

Unknown	Adam and Eve
Unknown	Noah
Unknown	Tower of Babel
2166-1991 B.C.	Life of Abraham
1916-1806 B.C.	Life of Joseph
1876-1446 B.C.	Israelites in Egypt
1446 B.C.	Exodus
1446 B.C.	Law at Sinai
1446-1406 B.C.	Wilderness wandering
1406-1399 B.C.	Joshua leads the conquest
1360-1075 B.C.	Judges Period
1051-931 B.C.	United monarchy
1011-971 B.C.	David reigns
959 B.C.	Solomon builds the temple
931-586 B.C.	Divided monarchy
722 B.C.	Assyria conquers Israel
605 B.C.	Babylon conquers Assyria
586 B.C.	Babylon conquers Judah/temple destroyed
539 B.C.	Persia conquers Babylon
538 B.C.	Exiles return to Judah
515 B.C.	Temple rebuilt
458 B.C.	Ezra returns to Israel from Babylon
445 B.C.	Nehemiah rebuilds the wall
331 B.C.	Greece conquers Persia
175-164 B.C.	Seleucid rule over Israel by Antiochus IV Epiphanes
63 B.C.	Rome captures Jerusalem
7 to 4 B.C.	Birth of Jesus
A.D. 26-30	Jesus' ministry
A.D. 30	Jesus' death and resurrection
A.D. 45-56	Paul's missionary journeys
A.D. 70	Rome destroys the temple

IMPORTANT DATES

Wisdom for the Foolish

Written by Matthew Swale

READ AND TAKE NOTE

Read Proverbs 1:20-33. Look for:

- the personification of wisdom
- the theme of hearing or listening
- the choices that lead to foolishness

FIND IT

Job
Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon

Who: Lady Wisdom (wisdom personified)
the simpleton

What: Lady Wisdom's invitation and warning to the simpleton

When: between 971 and 931 B.C.

Where: probably Jerusalem

Why: to save the simpleton from destruction

How: by vivid warnings about the simpleton's folly

Spiritual Formation: Humility can rescue the disciple from a dark future.





AMPLIFY THE BACKGROUND

What is everyone talking about today? Many phenomena could answer that question. The words “mental health” might be one answer. At the turn of the century, Y2K could have been an answer. When King Solomon took the throne in 971 B.C., the word “wisdom” could have aptly been an answer.

For centuries, more than one major ancient Near Eastern culture had been producing wisdom literature (writings aimed at helping people develop the discernment and character necessary to live effectively in a complex world). Not long before King Solomon’s reign, an Egyptian sage wrote these words in *The Instruction of Amenemope*: “Give your ears and hear what is said, Give your mind over to their interpretation.” Sounds a lot like the book of Proverbs!

God led Solomon to write a type of literature similar to other cultures in part so that His perfect truth could enter an international dialogue about what it means to live well. Unlike Sumerian and Egyptian wisdom literature, the book of Proverbs roots effective living in the fear of the one true God. Because Solomon’s wisdom came from God, it possessed an authority and quality not contained in *The Instruction of Amenemope* or similar ancient works. No wonder 1 Kings 4:29-34 says that Solomon’s wisdom exceeded the contemporary sages and gained him an international reputation. In 1 Kings 10:1-10, the queen of Sheba realized that Solomon’s wisdom was evidence of the love and justice of the God Solomon worshipped.

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Like any renowned figure, King Solomon wanted to pass on his wisdom to the son who would succeed him as Israel's king. The repeated refrain "my son" in the book of Proverbs is a literary strategy that characterizes the whole book as keen parental wisdom being passed on to the reader. The phrase "my son" also reflected Solomon's desire to see his son Rehoboam reign well after his death. He had high hopes for his son. Sadly, 1 Kings 12 describes Rehoboam's disastrous rejection of his father's wisdom and how it led to Israel splitting into two separate kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

That does not mean the book of Proverbs failed. Thankfully, the book was not written solely for Rehoboam but for all who would turn from sin to trust and fear the Lord. Even though Solomon's son rejected Solomon's wisdom, two centuries later, Solomon's descendant Hezekiah would choose differently. Proverbs 25:1 says that King Hezekiah commissioned the copying and compilation of Solomon's proverbs. Perhaps Hezekiah is responsible for the way the book of Proverbs has come to God's people in its present form. As King Hezekiah made the tough leadership decisions necessary to return Judah to covenant faithfulness, Solomon's proverbs must have helped him grow as a leader. Such is the beauty of God's written Word; one never knows how and when Scripture's wisdom will bear fruit. But it always will bear fruit.

AMPLIFY THE TEXT

The book of Proverbs possesses two main sections. The first, chapters 1 through 9, contains the text of our passage. While there are memorable one-liners in chapters 1 through 9, the section mostly contains longer poetic explorations of the need for wisdom and barriers to gaining it. Chapters 1 through 9 woo readers into a posture of heart and character (the fear of the Lord) that puts them in the position to benefit from the proverbial sayings in chapters 10 through 31, the second section. The second section includes the kind of pithy wisdom sayings that earned the book its fame.

Throughout Proverbs 1 through 9, readers meet four main characters or types of people. The first is the book's implied speaker: an experienced wise person. This character is the one saying "my son" to the reader. Another experienced wise person is the famous woman of Proverbs 31. She is presented as the pinnacle of hard-earned wisdom to conclude the book. The experienced wise person has been through a lot, learned from God's Word and discipline, and shares wisdom with those who will listen. Next, Proverbs features an inexperienced person growing in wisdom. The inexperienced need humility and correction, but they have begun to heed the invitation to wisdom throughout the book.

Now for the less savory pair. The main character of the present text is the simpleton. This person is described in Proverbs 14:15 as inexperienced and naive. Simpletons are not yet on the path to wisdom, but Proverbs 19:25 holds out hope that they can be convinced to turn toward wisdom. Often they are young. For this character, simplicity does not mean complete ignorance, but gullibility that is manifested in foolish decisions. Finally, there is the fool. Fools in Proverbs have turned their backs on humility and the fear of the Lord so consistently that they are recalcitrant in their rejection of God (cf. 1:7). Nowadays, the word "fool" connotes ignorance. In Proverbs, the word often connotes a deep, settled disposition of opposition to God (cf. 14:9). No

wonder Jesus warned against calling one's brother a fool in the Sermon on the Mount! Listen to Lady Wisdom try to convince a group of simpletons not to become fools.

THE SIMPLETON'S INVITATION (Proverbs 1:20-22)

The text introduces a vivid figurative scenario. A gaggle of simpletons was milling around town. They moved through the street, on to town center, and then walked by the city gates. All the noises of a crowded ancient downtown were present. Suddenly and jarringly, a woman's voice shattered the city's white noise. Her voice was filled with a passionate seriousness that garnered everyone's attention. But she was not so much talking to everyone as she was to the unsuspecting simpletons. She did not mind that everyone was staring, because the simpletons' destiny rode on whether they heard and took her wisdom to heart. Who was this brazen woman interrupting peaceful commerce? She was Lady Wisdom.

THOUGHTS

Wisdom can be found almost anywhere if one knows how to look for it. Wisdom calls out in everyday places like busy streets and crowded shopping centers (cf. Proverbs 1:20).

One of the book of Proverbs' most arresting literary devices is personifying different life paths as intriguing women. Lady Wisdom invited readers to learn from her life experience in chapters 1 and 8. Lady Seduction invited people to follow their hearts and desires into a life of short-lived pleasure in chapters 5 and 7. Lady Seduction's job was much easier. She spoke in low breathy tones to earn a captive audience. Lady Wisdom fought against the current of human sinful inclination, so in Proverbs 1:20-33, she ignored marketplace protocol and made quite a racket. Solomon used four terms in verses 20-21 for how she raised her voice: a ringing cry, a loud noise, a cry, and a speech. She might be ignored by the unrepentant masses, but she would be heard.

Lady Wisdom was a master teacher, so she began in verse 22 with rhetorical questions. Like a good teacher, she cared about her listeners, so her questions began the same way that suffering psalmists began their laments, asking, "How long?" She was not mocking the simpletons, but she wanted them to see where their path of indifference lead. She first asked about their affections. Why did the simpletons love gullibility? Were they tired of being so moldable in the world's hands? After asking about their affections, she asked about their penchant for arrogant speech. They loved running their mouths. She also wanted to know about their distaste for learning. The wisdom and knowledge that could awaken them from plummeting toward folly was the very thing they despised. They were like curably ill people who hate medicine.

THOUGHTS

City gates sound to modern ears like an entrance only, but in Old Testament villages, they also functioned like a city hall, where elders conducted business and arbitrated legal matters.

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THE SIMPLETON'S OFFER (Proverbs 1:23)

Lady Wisdom labeled her entire speech with a word that connotes rebuke, correction, and warning. While the simpletons goofed around, she sounded an alarm. She repeated the word again in verses 25 and 30. When this word, often translated as “reproof” or “rebuke” in English translations, occurs in the book of Proverbs, it often focuses on the discomfort of being rebuked. At best, Proverbs 29:1 says people bristle at reproof. At worst, Proverbs 5:12 shows that people hate being rebuked.

Before unleashing a flurry of ominous warnings, Lady Wisdom wanted the simpletons to know the payoff for those willing to be corrected. Why should they heed her warning? She did not reward with mere droplets of wisdom. She dumped boatloads of durable, sturdy, transformative wisdom on her pupils. All or nothing. They could swim in wisdom or have none of it. She would even unleash her spirit—that underlying and animating energy that made her prudent—on the willing simpleton (1:23). What did the simpleton need to do to receive Lady Wisdom’s riches? She used one of the Old Testament’s favorite words for responding to God. The prophets used this word hundreds of times. Lady Wisdom was not imploring anything different from other biblical spokespeople—turn from sin and folly and turn to God.

THOUGHTS

Wisdom is not the same as being smart; there is a moral element to wisdom. Wise people avoid sin by walking the path of righteousness and accepting rebuke when they wander from it.

THE SIMPLETON'S WARNING (Proverbs 1:24-27)

It was not too late for the simpletons to turn, but they had stiff-armed Lady Wisdom in the past. When she called, they shut her down. She extended a helping hand to the simpletons, but they ignored her hand. She offered advice, but they overlooked it. The simpletons were tolerant of a great many things but not of Lady Wisdom’s rebukes.

Her words and outstretched hand would not be unlimited, though. A storm was coming into the simpletons’ lives. Final judgment is certain for all who reject God’s Word, and the book of Proverbs is especially attuned to earthly consequences for foolishness. Lady Wisdom’s judgment vocabulary is stirring. One of her judgment words in verse 26, often translated as “disaster” or “calamity,” also describes falling on hard times in Proverbs 27:10. Another of her judgment words used in 1:27, often translated as “anguish” or “distress,” also describes self-made, avoidable adversity in Proverbs 11:8. Like the early signs of a tornado, the simpletons created conditions that later would cause grief and horror. Lady Wisdom knew that fun and mischief would unexpectedly turn to tomorrow’s terror.

Lady Wisdom was more interested in truth and life change than politeness, so she warned that when the storm came, she would laugh. Laughter and judgment seem a strange pairing, but God’s laughter in the Old Testament is associated with judgment. For example, in Psalm 2:4, God laughs at nations who think they can derail His Son’s kingdom. Lady Wisdom’s laughter is not

borne of hatred but borne of the unshakable conviction that willfully rejecting the Lord's wisdom is a ridiculous decision.

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THE SIMPLETON'S REGRET (Proverbs 1:28-31)

The simpletons were a mysterious bunch. At some point, they crossed the point of no return and become recalcitrant fools. The very fact that Lady Wisdom was appealing to them means they were not beyond hope. But Lady Wisdom knew the danger of repeated, ongoing, unrepentant sin. At a certain point, it may be too late. Psalm 95 attests to this reality when it says to listen to God's call to repentance *today*. A day will come for simpletons when there is no time to turn around their lives, their relationships, or their reputations. While God's forgiveness can be received by faith up until one's last breath, like the thief on the cross, that does not mean the disrepair and damage of a lifetime of foolish living can be undone (cf. 2 Chronicles 33:13-17).

Lady Wisdom painted a grim picture of reversed roles. She called, and the simpletons ignored her. They would call to her one day, and she would rebuff them. Of course, she said that to convince them to turn to her, but it was a real possibility that they could wander into self-made, irreversible disaster. They would look for Lady Wisdom but would be unable to find her. The simpletons could not blame Lady Wisdom when judgment came. She would not unfairly give them a failing grade; the simpletons would earn it. And now she distilled the core issue: the simpletons did not choose to fear the Lord.

Proverbs 1:30 indicates that it is a choice to fear the Lord. Fearing the Lord is not an automatic state for humans who inherit sin from Adam. Proverbs 1:7 famously says that fearing God is foundational for a life of wisdom. Psalm 130:4 declares that fearing God flows from receiving God's gracious forgiveness. To fear God is to trust and respond to Him as King. The concept bundles repentance, trust, reverence, worship, and service all into one powerful shorthand phrase for life under God. Simpletons today are in danger not of a one-time bad decision not to fear God. Instead, they are sewing together a life tapestry that consistently rejects God as their King.

Lady Wisdom moved from a storm metaphor to a feast metaphor in Proverbs 1:31. Rejecting her invitation set the table for the simpletons' eventual banquet. The good news was that it was an all-you-can-eat buffet. The bad news was that the menu was all the mockery, pride, selfishness, and carelessness that they had sown throughout life.

Lady Wisdom used a phrase referring to "the fruit of their way." As fruit grows from one's gardening or farming efforts, so people's lifestyle produces their character. The fruit on the menu at the simpletons' banquet grew out of their *way*. This word can refer to a literal path, or figuratively to one's life path. Proverbs 2:8 says the way of those who fear God is guarded by God. Proverbs 4:19 says the way of rejecting God is vulnerable and dark. Proverbs uses the word "way" about seventy-five times to present readers with two options: God's way or their own way. The former is the fruit of grace and the latter the fruit of sin.

THE SIMPLETON'S DESTINY (Proverbs 1:32-33)

Lady Wisdom invited the simpletons to turn to the fear of the Lord in verse 23. She entertained the opposite outcome in verse 32 by using a similar word that means "turning away." If the simpletons, malleable as they were now,

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decided to turn away from the fear of the Lord, then they would die. Proverbs 14:15 characterizes simpletons as listlessly drifting through life. Eventually, indecision becomes a decision, and the simpletons found themselves turning their backs on the fear of the Lord. That posture leads to death. The next line of Proverbs 1:32 describes this turning away with a word that connotes ease. The easy life that seems right and does not consider one's way leads to destruction. The simpletons followed their hearts right into the arms of death.

THOUGHTS

Ease often leads to complacency, which leads to destruction

(cf. Proverbs 1:32).

At her monologue's grimmest point, Lady Wisdom surprised the simpletons by ending with a note of hope. One of the band of simpletons' hearts might be pricked by her words. She simplified the way to life with a simple yet profound word that means "hear." Whoever would merely listen would have life. It sounds so simple, but this little word dwells at the heart of responding to God. Deuteronomy 6:4-6 famously uses the term to call Israel to respond to the Lord with all-encompassing covenant love. Turning, trusting, obeying—all of this is wrapped in one little word, "hear."

No wonder Lady Wisdom promised so much to the one who heard her out. Rather than death, the listener would receive life. She described this life in two ways that capture the deep longing of the human heart. She first described the listener's life as firm, solid, confident, and secure. Security here does not refer to a life free of suffering but the steadiness that comes from trusting God's provision and eternal care. She then described the listener's life as an ease that is free from fear of disaster. Once again, this does not refer to a pain-free life but a life that does not fear the judgment of God or the fallout of bad decisions.

The unperturbed stability of the listener is the exact opposite of the fearful dread of disaster described in Proverbs 1:26-27. Ironically, the simpletons sought ease all along with their lackadaisical approach to life and God, but instead they forfeited the peace available in submission to God.

AMPLIFY THE CONTEXT

PLACE IN THE BIBLE

For ancient Jewish Bible readers, the Old Testament was divided into three sections: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Law contains Genesis through Deuteronomy and explains God's saving purposes for the world through a covenant relationship with Abraham and his descendants. The Prophets contain Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and the books of prophets like Isaiah. These books trace the rise and failure of God's people in their covenant relationship with God. The Writings include books like Psalms and Proverbs. They explain how God's people have interacted with the Lord in the complexities of life in the real world. Proverbs 1 personifies the decision before every

person since Adam and Eve, to humble oneself before the Lord or to live for oneself. Psalm 1 and Proverbs 1 present every generation with these two ways to either life or judgment.

PLACE IN THE STORY OF SALVATION

Many figures in biblical history fit the profile of the simpleton on the way to destruction. Lot allowed himself and his family to be influenced by the folly of Sodom and Gomorrah to their own eventual shame. Israelites in the days of Judges allowed the normal patterns of Canaanite worship to sweep them along into painful judgment. King Saul operated like the kings of other nations by doing his own bidding rather than accepting the wisdom of Samuel. King Solomon's son Rehoboam typified the simpleton by following his foolish peers rather than the unpopular wisdom of the elders. Because of sin, everyone runs the risk of going the way of the simpleton turned fool, headed for destruction. But, like King Manasseh, who squandered his reign in folly and evil and later turned to God, God graciously sets people on the path of wisdom when they repent and believe.

PLACE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Jesus taught about Lady Wisdom when describing how His critics saw Him as a fool. In Matthew 11:19, people thought Jesus was a fool for ministering to those whose lives lacked the religious trappings of the Jewish elite. How tragically ironic that God incarnate—the apex of wisdom—would be considered a fool! They accused Christ of being the glutton of Proverbs. Jesus responded by referring to wisdom with a feminine pronoun, declaring that her works would prove her wisdom.

Similarly, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 juxtaposes the wisdom of the world with the wisdom of God. The wisdom of the world scoffs at the cross of Christ, but only the cross makes sinners righteous, holy, and truly wise. At the cross, Jesus received the judgment that simpletons deserve. Whoever trusts Him is saved from sinful folly. As history nears the return of Christ, wisdom will be needed increasingly. Until then, the throne room of heaven praises the Lamb who was slain for His unparalleled and eternal wisdom (Revelation 5:12).

AMPLIFY THE FAITH

If during King Solomon's day everyone was talking about how to be wise, in the fourth century A.D. everyone in the early church was talking about Lady Wisdom. Specifically, they were talking about how Lady Wisdom related to the Lord Jesus. Lady Wisdom spoke in Proverbs 1:20-33 and has another speech in Proverbs 8. As in Proverbs 1, she stood out in public and called out to all who passed by to humbly seek wisdom. In Proverbs 8:22-31, she declared that she was present before and during Creation.

Because the Word was with God in the beginning (John 1:1), Lady Wisdom's claims invited early Christian readers to connect her to the Son of God. A false teacher named Arius, however, highlighted verses in Proverbs 8 about wisdom

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personified being formed and born before the foundation of the world. He convinced many people that the Son did not always exist with the Father but was Himself created. Church leaders like Athanasius strenuously argued that the Second Person of the Trinity had no beginning. Against Arius, the early church asserted in the Nicene Creed that biblical texts like Proverbs 8:22-31 do not depict the creation of the Son of God.

Modern Bible teachers look back on the debate with mixed feelings. Some think that the whole debate was misguided and that Lady Wisdom did not relate to Christ and was merely a literary device. To find Christ in Proverbs 8, they say, is to allegorize the text in a way not intended by the original author.

Other scholars defend the interpretation of the early church. Proverbs 30:4 may refer to Proverbs 8:22-31 when it asks about both the Creation of the world and God's Son. After all, Colossians 2:3 says that the bounty of wisdom is hidden in Christ the Son. If He is the wisdom of God, then personified wisdom's claim to be present at Creation can only make sense if wisdom refers to Christ. These scholars think that when John 5:39 says Scripture points to Jesus, it includes Proverbs here.

Whatever one makes of the debate, it helped the early church clarify the truth about the Lord Jesus being both eternally preexistent and becoming incarnate in a normal human body. Lady Wisdom helped them clarify Christ's full divinity and full humanity. After Athanasius and the Nicene Creed, Augustine encouraged Bible readers that even imperfect biblical interpretation helps the church if it promotes the love of God and love of neighbor. So whether readers see a connection between Christ and wisdom personified in Proverbs or not, may they cling to the wisdom of Christ and seek to love God and others with their whole hearts.

AMPLIFY YOUR LIFE

The only way to benefit from the wisdom of Proverbs is to humble oneself. Proverbs 3:34 says that God gives grace to the humble. Believers can grow in wisdom only by God's grace. Few people would readily admit to being like the simpleton of Proverbs, but it is an exercise in humility to at least consider ways that the simpleton's characteristics show up in the mirror.

Proverbs 1:25 implies two common characteristics of simpletons then and today. First, simpletons neglect good advice. Receiving advice is easier for some than for others, but an inability to listen to counsel from wise Christians is one of Proverbs' warning signs. Advice from Christian friends, parents, and fellow church members should be sought and not quickly dismissed. If someone consistently ignores godly counsel, that person is a simpleton.

Next, verse 25 mentions simpletons' unwillingness to receive correction. Although accepting correction is more difficult than receiving advice, a person on the path to wisdom is willing to accept rebuke. One way to remain open to correction is to regularly submit to the preaching of God's Word in a local church. Sitting beneath the biblical teaching of a trusted Christian leader exposes one to the discipline of God's Word. Christians who assume their own personal Bible

reading can replace gathering under biblical preaching resemble simpletons who think they know best and do not need anyone else.

The rest of the book of Proverbs provides at least three additional diagnostics for simpletons who should wake up and pursue wisdom. Proverbs 7:7 links the simpleton and the young. Not all young people fit that description, and not all elderly people avoid that description. Many young Christians, however, think that their passion better equips them for life in the kingdom than the more measured, long obedience of older saints. Such young believers should be careful.

Proverbs 14:15 says simpletons believe everything they are told. Like the Bereans, Christians ought to develop a Bible-borne shrewdness that tests fads and trends against Scripture and traditional Christian wisdom. Proverbs 14:15 then contrasts simpletons with those who carefully observe their lives. Simpletons do not take stock and examine their ways, but the humble interrogate their habits and life patterns.

Finally, Proverbs 27:12 says that simpletons ignore warning signs and suffer the consequences. Correction functions as a warning sign. The Holy Spirit's conviction also functions as a warning to the believer. Jesus alluded to Lady Wisdom in Matthew 11:19 and a few verses later invited everyone to come to Him and learn from Him (vss. 29-30). Will you receive His invitation to become wise by His grace?

NOTES

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is the fear of the Lord so important in avoiding foolishness and pursuing wisdom?

2. How does it feel to have someone reject your hard-earned wisdom, and what role does prayer play in helping such people?

3. Where have you observed the wise walking securely and simpletons needing to worry about the fallout for their way of life?

4. Has anyone ever given you advice or correction that helped you grow in wisdom?

5. Have you ever realized a lack of wisdom in your life? What did you do about it?
