



Week 1 – Quit Eating Vomit

Proverbs Intro

When most of us think of the book of Proverbs, we think of a collection of colloquial sayings like 'You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink' or 'Look before you leap'.

And we certainly find those sorts of sayings in Proverbs, but if we think this book is *just* a collection of cute sayings, we miss the point.

Proverbs is a book about wisdom. Wisdom is a term that was common in Ancient Near Eastern cultures. And the idea behind wisdom was that when God created the world, God had a certain order, a logic to how the world works. We call those today the laws of science - The Laws of Thermodynamics or Newton's Three Laws of Motion, the Law of Gravity in physics. Life has its own laws, too. Biology has taught us how photosynthesis works, how our own cells produce energy. Diets work because calories affect our bodies certain ways.

In all creation, there's a rhythm. And order. A Way things are to be.

The ancient Israelites understood this, too. They believed it was because God created the world by speaking it into being, and that everything works, everything keeps running and growing and flowing because that Word of God moves through everything.

That's what the ancients called Wisdom.

And people have a Way we're meant to live, too. There're choices we make that bring life and choices that bring death. Ways we can live that align with God's Way and ways that don't.

For the first Christians, Jesus was the incarnation of this Wisdom. Jesus is the Way of God, the Wisdom of God, the Word of God. John describes Jesus this way:

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He existed in the beginning with God. ³ God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. ⁴ The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone -- John 1:1-4 (NLT)

So when you see Jesus, when you read about him and study his life and pray to him, you're communing with the very force that created and sustains everything - including you and me.

So when we study Proverbs, we're studying Jesus. When Proverbs tells us "Wise people do this..." it's really saying "You were created to live this way:"

And when Proverbs says, "Foolish people do this", it's really saying, "People do this all the time, but it's not the way they were made to live. That action ultimately results in death. Stay away."

Proverbs is our teacher, and it's teaching us how to look more like Jesus.

So this is going to be a fun series. We're going to explore some very practical, down-to-earth, nuts-and-bolts kind of Wisdom.

<offering and greeting>

I know I shouldn't, but...

<play my iPhone text tone> How many people just reached for their phones or looked around just now? How many of us felt a small internal tug when we heard that sound?

How many of us have smart phones? Or any phone that lets you get texts or emails? You know what your notification sound is, right? Or if you have a computer station at work, have a sound or icon that pops up when you get an email?

How many of us, when we hear that sound, are tempted to stop whatever we're doing and check it?

It's an almost Pavlovian response by now, isn't it?

We live in a culture that Daniel Pink describes as "feedback rich". That means that almost everything we do gives us feedback. Every time we push a button or flip a switch, something happens. We're trained to expect instant results, instant gratification.

Have any of you ever gotten in trouble because someone texted or emailed you and you didn't respond immediately?

This little thrill we get from instant feedback shows up all over the place. How many of you have ever gotten something new and experience what's called "Buyer's High"? The thrill of opening a shiny, new package, of experiencing for the first time what's inside.

It's the thrill of a new relationship - usually romantic, but not always. The thrill of a new restaurant or seeing a new movie.

This little thrill keeps us coming back, even when we know something's not good for us.

How many of us have stood before a decision - something to buy, a relationship to initiate, a class to cut, whatever - and thought to ourselves, "I really shouldn't, but..."

Vomit? Really?

You're probably not surprised that Proverbs says No! to this sort of thinking. Proverbs wants us to learn the wisdom of delayed gratification, the wonder of refusing to make the same mistakes over and over. So in striking, beautiful, elegant and refined poetry, Proverbs teaches us to say No.

"As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his foolishness. -- Proverbs 26:11 (NLT)"

Eloquent, isn't it?

This is one of those proverbs you read and then read again and say, Really?!

Vomit?

Disgusting.

And that's exactly the point. This is a quintessential example of Proverbs using the natural world to teach us about ourselves.

How many of us have ever owned a dog? If you have, then you know the first half of this proverb is 100% true. Dogs vomit sometimes. And when they do, they eat it.

Which is just gross. Nothing about vomiting is cool or interesting. It's just sick.

And that's exactly *why* Proverbs uses this image. It's powerful. It's strong. It sticks in your head. When you see this:

Dog eating vomit :: A person repeating foolishness

You *really* don't want to be a fool, that person who repeats the same mistakes over and over. Because if Proverbs is right, that's disgusting.

Crazy Talk

According to Proverbs, we all make mistakes (I hope this isn't a news flash for anyone). That's the way of the world - no one's perfect. Everyone trips up from time to time. Dogs vomit.

That means you and me. We both make mistakes. Big mistakes, small mistakes, it doesn't matter. None of us is perfect.

What's your vomit? Are you an impulse buyer? Is your spending so undisciplined you run out of money before you run out of month, as Dave Ramsey likes to say?

Are there certain relationships you find yourself returning to over and over again, no matter how badly they hurt you?

Or maybe a person in your life you just can't seem to get away from?

A habit you'd love to kick but just can't quite seem to leave?

Mistakes are mistakes. We all make them.

But some people don't learn from their mistakes. Some people go back to the same mistakes over and over again. Proverbs calls those people fools.

Which by process of elimination means that people who learn from their mistakes are wise.

And in the world of Proverbs, wise means like God. Wise means living the way we were created to live. The world is our teacher. God expects us to use our brains, to pay attention to our lives and to *learn* from our mistakes. When we do that, we're wise.

When we don't do that, we're fools. We're like dogs eating our own vomit. Disgusting.

Proverbs says Look:

There's a reason dogs vomit in the first place. That mistake you made? It traps you in a cycle.

[illustrate this: "The Vomit Cycle"

1. Make a mistake
2. Experience a benefit (short-term)
3. Benefit wears off, only consequences remain
4. Repeat the mistake]

Proverbs says this cycle is unhealthy. It's not what you were created to be.

As long as you persist in that cycle, as long as you keep making that same mistake, you're going to be unhealthy.

Like you're eating vomit.

That *should* disgust you. That *should* make you want to stop.

If you're feeling that sense of disgust, you're exactly where Proverbs wants you to be.

Albert Einstein famously defined insanity as "Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." [CHECK QUOTE]

We're all fools. We all do this.

We're all - apparently - a little bit crazy.

But that's the beauty of Proverbs. This is an instruction book. It's meant to *teach* not just to describe.

We're crazy. We're fools. We're dogs. (at least a little)

But we can change.

Break the Cycle

For a lot of my 20s, I was an impulse buyer (still definitely a tendency I have). I love gadgets, love the newness of stuff.

I'd go to the store and come back with 10 things I didn't need. So not only did I amass a wonderful collection of useless stuff, but I always ran out of money way before I ran out of month. I always dreaded the last few days before a paycheck.

Spending was (and can still be) my vomit. I wasn't created to live that way. To spend my weeks worrying and agonizing over money. To spend and spend on myself so I didn't have any money with which I could be generous.

I made one small change that has helped me learn to control my money (rather than letting my money control me):

Now when I want to buy something, I wait a week.

Every time I'm in a store or on the internet and I have that OOOOOO! SHINY! moment, I stop. I admire it. And then I wait.

99% of the time, a week later, I can't even remember what it is I thought I couldn't live without.

That one small change has helped me fight that instant gratification impulse. Because the thrill I got from spending money, from acquiring something new wasn't ever about the *thing* I got. Nothing is *that* cool.

I was a slave to my desire. I was like a well-trained dog. Plenty of people would probably have looked at my spending habits and thought I was crazy. I was a fool.

But I've learned from my mistakes. I'm getting better. I'm not crazy anymore (or at least not as crazy). I say No! to the vomit.

This is what Proverbs wants to teach us: that if we persist in our mistakes, we will reap the same results over and over. It's crazy. It's like a dog eating its own vomit.

Proverbs says you're not a dog. And you don't have to be crazy.

The next time you're confronted with that situation, recognize that it's vomit. It's disgusting. And make a change. Do something differently.

Deciding how to change can be tricky. Especially if we're not used to stepping back from our lives and looking from the outside, this can be challenging. Here're some steps you can take:

[This can be a 'break out' of the vomit cycle... we stand outside our cycle and examine it. Learn from it.]

1. **Find a friend you trust.**

Dogs don't know that eating vomit is gross. But we see it right away. Friends are the same way - friends can tell that relationship is unhealthy, that your Facebook status was probably a keep-it-to-yourselfer. That you don't manage your money well or that you need to tweak your parenting patterns a little. So ask for their help. Ask for their insight. But choose someone who's not in the same boat you are. We don't want the blind leading the blind.

As you begin your conversation, pray together and ask God to give you wisdom. Ask God to show you how to live the way you were created to live.

2. **Talk about your vomit** (not over a meal, probably).

Don't be afraid to dig in. Pick it apart. Be brutally honest with yourself.

3. **Identify what draws you back to that mistake.**

Is it the thrill? A sense of fulfillment? Safety? Most often, the behavior isn't actually what you enjoy. There's some deeper level of satisfaction you get, some less tangible benefit.

4. **Brainstorm a change.**
What different behavior can you implement that will cause you to pause, that will help you to remember this is vomit and you should do something else? This is the hardest part, but also the most important.
5. **Stay accountable.**
Change is hard, and you won't do it overnight. Have that friend check up on you. Encourage you when you slip up and celebrate with you when you succeed.

Don't wait to have this conversation. Do it today. If that's not possible, set up an appointment with your friend today. Mark it on your calendar. This is too important.

We're not dogs. We're not crazy. We don't have to stay trapped in the same cycle of mistakes over and over. Today's the day to make a change. To live like the person you were created to be, the wise person who looks like Jesus.

Communion Set-up

Today, we observe communion because we want to eat good food. We want to celebrate Wisdom in the person of Jesus, the very Word of God who became one of us to show us what a wise life looks like.

Jesus gave us his body to be broken for our sins. He gave us his blood to be a new agreement between us and God.

Jesus invites us to eat from his table of wisdom. His food is better than vomit. His table is better than the one we set for ourselves.

Let's pray together.

Prayer of Consecration

Today, if you would commit to follow the way of Wisdom, if you would choose to break the vomit cycle, to say NO to the insanity of instant gratification, then come to Wisdom's Table and share in Wisdom's meal.