

## Welcome

Being a high school teacher for twenty years now I have heard hundreds of times, “Oh bless you, thank you, how are you a teacher to high school crazy teenagers?” Well, yes some days it is crazy, some days it is a piece of cake and some days it is like riding a bike, but the bike is on fire, you are on fire, everything is on fire and you still have to keep going! That is why we have to have rules in the classroom, but I don’t like to use the word rules in my classroom. ‘Rules’ have a negative connotation. Webster’s dictionary defines the word rules as :control of or dominion over an area or people. The word control is right in the definition so I find this harsh or regimented. I decided to have procedures in my classroom instead. I teach the students at the beginning of the year how we come in the classroom, how we treat our peers, where supplies belong, how to turn in papers, how we start and end our classes. After lots of practice, modeling and correcting the students understand these procedures.

You might be thinking, “Rules, procedures - isn’t that potato potahto?” And you’re right to a degree. But I use ‘procedures’ because I want my students to know that flexibility is an important characteristic of Mrs. Reese’ classroom. Why?

Because I have a really cool job: I get to teach high school students that want to be teachers. And any teacher will tell you: classroom management is an essential skill teachers have to develop. I get to help my students get a head-start, learning classroom management while they’re still in the classroom, being managed.

And that’s why flexibility is so important. My classes are all unique. The same principles won’t work from one year to the next, one class to the next. And I’m teaching kids who are going to go on to be teachers years from now, in other schools, other districts, other cities and states. Other settings.

I could just literally teach them to be me.

But that wouldn’t actually serve them very well, because none of them is me. And what Mrs. Reese does in one year may not work in the next. And what Mrs. Reese does with your class probably won’t work exactly right when you’re in a classroom of your own.

They have to learn to be flexible. My goal isn’t to teach them to imitate Mrs. Reese. My goal is to think like teachers. So that, no matter where they go, what district, context or city they find themselves in, they can navigate the classroom, make it their own.

I don’t teach my students what to think, so much as I teach them how to think. Not rules, but principles.

Today, we are going to explore Wisdom. If knowledge is about facts and figures - what to think, then Wisdom is about how to think. And the Bible has several collections of

Wisdom Literature. These collections are the scriptures designed to shape how we think, how we see ourselves and the world. They're procedures or norms meant to be followed, learned and shared with others to make our world easier to live in and be examples for others.

## Message

This summer, we've been talking about "How the Bible works."

We started with exploring what the Bible is - a library of books written over more than a thousand years, by more than a dozen authors in three languages. The Bible is inspired - a book that is both fully a product of human authors and full of God's spiritual authority. Because the Bible is a divine library, we can trust Scripture fully to lead us into a relationship with Jesus.

But how does the Bible work, exactly? Well, because the Bible is also a human document, the kinds of books in the Bible matter. Much like wandering the shelves in a library or bookstore, we need to pay attention to the genre. We're going to explore how they work and learn some tips for reading them. Our goal is twofold: first, we want to do the best job we can of learning what the Scriptures meant to the original readers. We want to know what the Spirit was saying then, through those ancient authors. All that so that, second, we can better listen for what the Spirit is saying to us today.

The goal of reading Scripture isn't to become experts on ancient literature. It's to know God. We read not to become informed but to be transformed.

We began this series with the Gospels, those ancient biographies of Jesus. Prophecy and apocalypse help us discern how to live not in the future, but the present. Acts. is a narrative history- a story of how the Holy Spirit worked in the early church and works in us today. Legal books help us live together as God's people in society. Poetry invites us to slow down and reach for the God who is beyond us. And today, we're exploring the genre of Wisdom literature.

When we refer to Wisdom literature, we're talking mainly about collections of poetic works in the Old Testament - Proverbs, the Psalms, Job, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs. As Tim mentioned a couple of weeks ago, these books are all poetic. They're pointing at a reality that is beyond us. Another way to say it is that these writings are inviting us into deep, foundational truths about our identity and existence.

**[Scripture Slide 1]** We're going to spend our time today in Proverbs 26. It's tempting to treat the Proverbs like rules - strict instructions we have to follow if we want to live a life following God and live easier with our neighbors. Here is an easy one to go along with:

**Don't answer the foolish arguments of fools, or you will become as foolish as they are. -- Proverbs 26:4**

Seems pretty easy to follow, especially now right with social media, politics, just open up your phone to any news site and you can become as foolish as they are. What do you do when you see your co-worker sharing that conspiracy theory? Keep scrolling! What do you do when your relative starts in on inane political takes? Don't answer them!

It's... actually really great advice, right? Don't argue with fools. Wow. Thanks, Proverbs!

Now let's read the next rule:

**Be sure to answer the foolish arguments of fools, or they will become wise in their own estimation. -- Proverbs 26:5**

Uh. Wait a second. This one is saying *be sure to argue with fools*. Which is also good advice. When you see that co-worker sharing that conspiracy theory, speak up! Don't let false information spread! When your relative makes that racist joke, don't let them get away with it! When you see something that is not right, fight for those that are not able to fight for themselves. When you hear false facts and information give the truth and accuracy. When you witness someone being treated unfairly, be the kind hand that helps rescue them and be an example for those watching that they might remember your small act of kindness and spread it on. Use your knowledge to be a spokesperson for truth and justice!

Which one is it? Do we stay out of arguments with fools so we don't become foolish? Or do we answer their foolish arguments so they don't end up thinking they're wise?

Before we dive into that, can we stop for a moment and look at the bigger picture? If we try to come to Proverbs expecting a strict rulebook for life, then these verses right here don't let us hold that belief.

Because these two verses contradict each other.

And it would be one thing if they were in different chapters. Like maybe two different authors wrote them, had different opinions on whether or not we should argue with fools. But these verses are *right next to each other*. They're meant to be read together.

Because sometimes, you need to ignore foolish people. It's not worth your time, your emotional energy. All you're going to do is end up on their level.

But there are also times we *need* to speak truth. To stand up for what's good and right. To call out injustice. Advocate for those on the margins.

So how do you know which situation is which? How do you know when to shut up and keep scrolling and when to slow down and speak up?

Well... there's not a rule for that. Knowing the difference takes... *wisdom*.

Wisdom literature can be hard when we read with the wrong expectations. We come looking for black and white rules, clear-cut answers. But that's an unreasonable expectation for books written almost 3,000 years ago, in a very different culture and language.

Take these two proverbs, for instance:

**Don't cheat your neighbor by moving the ancient boundary markers set up by previous generations. -- Proverbs 22:28**

**Put your outdoor work in order and get your fields ready; after that, build your house. -- Proverbs 24:27**

Much like when we explored ancient legal code, we recognize here that these Proverbs are pretty useless to us if we treat them as strict rules to be followed literally. How could that ancient wisdom possibly help us navigate our complex modern world?

If we're looking for rules, it can't. But rules are knowledge, and Proverbs (and the other Wisdom literature) aren't about knowledge. They're about wisdom.

It's easy to think "wise" = smart and "foolish" = dumb. But that's mistaking wisdom for knowledge. Being wise isn't about how many facts you know, or what you score on an IQ test. A wise person sees the world the way God sees the world. A foolish person sees the world through their own eyes. A wise person treats others as God does. A foolish person treats others however they feel in the moment.

So let's be very clear: there are *very intelligent* fools, and plenty of wise people who don't have enormous IQs. Wisdom and knowledge are two different things.

Proverbs teaches wisdom, not knowledge. Proverbs is not a rule book but a *way to think*. Wisdom literature was a category of literature in many cultures in the time of the Old Testament. Wisdom literature deals with the way the world "works." The goal wasn't for students of wisdom to become clones of their teachers. Rather, Wisdom Literature helps us think like a Godly person. Wisdom literature is an invitation. It's meant to *begin* conversations, not end them. If you want to be successful-reading WL is going to help you grow spiritually.

Proverbs was written for God's people to follow but do these rules hold up in today's world. How do you know if you are living in tune with God? Life is complicated and it is

not always clear what to do, an answer to come up with or a path to follow. Wisdom Literature is about learning how to see the world.

The next verse is another timely word for our age of fake news:

**T**rusting a fool to convey a message is like cutting off one's feet or drinking poison! --  
Proverbs 26:6

The world is in a weird place right now, one we have never had to navigate and we are all learning as we go. I have been a parent and a teacher for many years and when I talk to my son's friends' parents, I am scrolling through social media, reading articles online or even watching the news I have to decide if I want to engage or not engage with others that don't have all of the facts or are not in the same profession as me. Do I want to engage with these people? They lack the wisdom my profession brings. Is my frustration and irritation going to change them? Will they listen to me or trust the foolish voices in our culture? Am I contributing to the chaos or am I allowing the Spirit to give me wisdom? Have you found yourself in the same situation recently? With a family member, a coworker, neighbor, friend? Were you on two different sides of an issue or concern? Was this discussion or situation hard to navigate the right words or lay out the map to the path you wanted to lead them to?

As I talked with people that had different viewpoints or arguments as me I prayed about it. I asked God to lead me as I spoke with these friends and acquaintances of my life. "Speak truth to power" The fool is the person that doesn't care about God's way but only their way. Wisdom can't be learned like knowledge can. True wisdom can only come from a relationship with God through the Holy Spirit.

At first blush, a lot of the 'rules' in Proverbs seem pretty straight forward and could even be used today. But as we just saw, they get complicated pretty quickly. After all, how do you distinguish between fake news and trustworthy news? How do you know when to argue with a fool and when to move on? Life is complicated, and these 'rules' aren't as helpful as they first seem.

In my classroom I don't want my students that I am teaching to be teachers to be Reese clones. I want to present information, suggestions, knowledge, facts to help them find their own way of teaching or own way to navigate the curriculum or their classroom. I want to help each one of them see through a teacher lens and pick what the best frame that fits what they are wanting to create and accomplish. I want to teach you how to think like a teacher, not check off the boxes or follow a list of steps one by one. I want them to become wise educators, not just know a bunch of facts about teaching.

Here's one more verse in Proverbs that really grabbed my attention:

**As a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly. -- Proverbs 26:11**

If you're a dog owner, you've seen this. Your dog eats something that is bad for them, and throws it up. But two minutes later, they're back eating it again.

Now, that's incredibly disgusting. Sit with that visual picture! It made you move around in your chair, on your couch, made you look at your dog sitting on the floor by you, but then it made you really think about that visual didn't it?

It's not *just* gross, though. Because there's a reason your dog threw up in the first place. Whatever they ate was *bad for them*. Their body *rejected* it. And yet they come back to try to eat it again.

What's that famous definition of insanity - doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results?

That's what Proverbs calls foolish. A foolish person is one who returns again and again to that thing that doesn't give us life, that relationship that has not and will not ever nourish us. That habit that poisons us and our relationships. We go back over and over to this thing of death and expect maybe this time it will give us life.

Bad relationships, toxic people, social media posts, losing patience, eating an entire bowl of chips and queso! When we see someone else doing it we say STOP! DON'T DO IT! You will not be happy with your consequence. But when we do it, it is ok! We can give advice, but when we step into it ourselves we don't do it. The wise person knows it has made you sick, you know that it is enough. The wise person refuses to return.

So yeah... it's a really gross Proverb. But wow... what a powerful visual. Can you imagine that thing, what Proverbs calls your folly, is as disgusting as dog vomit? Does that change how you think about it? Does that picture influence your desire to approach it?

The world is chaos, the world is full of questions and uncertainty. And when the world around me feels like this I stress eating- finding comfort in food-it just makes me feel better in the moment, once the bowl of chips is gone then the problem is still there. All of my life I have struggled with food and what it can offer! How I show love towards others is by offering hospitality, food, a party, opening my home. But food is always at the center of these occasions. In America it is the center of all occasions and can be found on every corner and street readily available to all. I can literally walk a few yards to my kitchen and get what I want. I can drive down the street and see any restaurant or stores I can buy food in to cover my feelings, cravings or self-pity. Food is powerful!!! I am the dog that goes back to it's puke, which for me is food knowing I will always have

the same results.

Is food good or bad? Both! And knowing the difference... that takes *wisdom*.

Where in Proverbs we are given the wisdom to find God and have a relationship with Him to be given grace from the puke we go back to over and over again as the fool and we find the words and wisdom can only be learned through Him.

How do we read Wisdom Literature?

### **1. Rules are rigid. Principles are flexible.**

Wisdom Literature isn't about knowledge, but wisdom. Don't treat the words in the Wisdom literature like an instructional manual. Wisdom literature doesn't offer facts about how to live in the world of ethics of driving a car and democracy. If we used the Bible like a rule book we wouldn't be able to live. The times are changing and the world is different—who cares.

We don't have rules in my classroom, we have procedures. Rules are so set and have specific consequences but with procedures they are more fluid, can be changed as we go and become the norm or second nature because they have been taught.

When you read wisdom literature, remember you're looking for principles that shape how we see the world, not rules we follow blindly.

### **2. Context Matters**

We've seen this again and again in this series, but especially for the stuff that is less clear (like the one about ancient boundary markers). Have a good study bible on hand, or some trusted resources and commentaries. Remember to be wise - as Proverbs 45:13 says, "Only a fool believes everything they read on the internet."

### **3. Pay attention to the images!**

Think back to Proverbs 26:11 - the image of the dog and vomit! How did you react to that? How did you feel? What did that image do in your spirit?

Now, connect that image and those feelings to the thing you identified as "your vomit". Is this something that is something I should try again like the vomit? Should I argue with the foe or Karen again?

Where does this *not* apply in my life?!

Note that timeless principle - It doesn't matter your culture or life choices, we all go back to things that are not good for us.

Learning to navigate life is challenging! Learning to navigate life in 2020 seems to get more challenging everyday and we are in a time that no other human has had to encounter. Proverbs invites us on this journey! There is no right way to follow God. No right way to be a teacher, a parent, a friend, a spouse, an employee or a neighbor. There is the way to follow God's words and practices by reflecting his Son's love for us.

## Communion + Examen

[**Communion Slide**] We receive communion together because we follow Jesus to the meal he shared with his followers the night before he was killed. This is a table where our seats are not earned by knowledge. There's no IQ test that makes us worthy to share this meal. Jesus invites us to follow him, to become wise reflections of him in our world.

Before we receive communion together, we're going to do a prayer of examen together. I'm going to ask you some questions and give you some time to reflect and pray with them. Then I'll pray for us all together.

1. When in the last week have I shown Jesus to those around me?
2. When have I allowed myself to get pulled into pointless arguments or return to toxic relationships and habits?
3. When in the next week will I be tempted toward foolish, ungodly choices?
4. How can I show those around me Jesus' love this week?

## Prayer:

God, you have gathered us today that we might confront the complexities and challenges of our world today. We've been told countless times now that these times we find ourselves in are 'unprecedented'. And yet as we have worshipped together today, we remember that though they are unknown to us, they are known to you. We confess now that it is only by your guidance that we can find a way forward in this confusing age. So now we come to your table, to receive from you these elements. We ask that they become a spiritual food for us, that you bless us with the grace we need to grow in wisdom. Make us your people, that we may be a light to the world around us.

We offer these prayers and approach your table today in the name of your son, Jesus.

The night he was betrayed, Jesus ate with his disciples. During the meal, he broke bread and offered it to them, saying, "This is my body, broken for you. Take and eat." After the meal was over, he gave them a cup of wine, saying, "This is my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sin. Drink it all." So too, we eat and drink and announce Jesus' death until he returns. [[Receive Communion](#)]

## Blessing

