

Living Wisely
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Proverbs 14:8-15

Opening: There's a term that has emerged in modern language: "You don't want to be THAT GUY!" **What does that mean?** (Urban Dictionary's answer below)ⁱ

When you were a child did you ever hear your Mom or Dad say, "*Stop it, you're setting a bad example?*" Did you ever hear, "*You need to set a good example?*" Hopefully they never said, "*Why can't you be more like ____.*" Not wise parenting!

In education we often see instruction by comparing the "good example" to the "bad example." Do THIS, but DON'T do THIS! An award-winning astronomy professor from Berkley University wrote an essay on the effectiveness of teaching by showing "bad examples." She said when she showed good examples of how to write a scientific paper the students "tuned it out." She took a different approach by showing "bad examples." This resulted in the students becoming engaged, debating about what was bad about the bad examples.ⁱⁱ

Are you old enough to recall the documentary "Scared Straight"ⁱⁱⁱ or did your school show a graphic film about the tragedy of driving drunk? Experts debate the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of "bad example" techniques like those. Here is what I know from personal experience, sometimes witnessing the sad consequences in the lives of others is what it takes for us to exercise caution and good judgment to avoid the same outcome.

Teaching by showing "examples" must be effective or Solomon, the wisest man ever to live, wouldn't have dedicated so much of Proverbs to it. In the first nine chapters of Proverbs Solomon argued the value and reward of embracing wisdom. Beginning in chapter ten through chapter nineteen he contrasts the "upright and the wicked"—the good example versus the bad example. If we tried to cover it all we'd be

studying Proverbs for years. This week we're going to "dip" into this "good/bad example" teaching in chapter 14.

Big Idea: Following God's wisdom leads to joy, failing to do so leads to grief.

Before we get into our text, we need a "literature lesson." Hang in there with me!

When you read Proverbs it appears to be a list of random, short sayings. In some parts of Proverbs Solomon used a literary structure called "chiasm, or chiasmus."

"When writers employed this formation, they wrote the main idea or point in the center of the passage instead of at the beginning or the end. The verses before and after the central point helped them to develop it." The word "chiasm" comes from the Greek letter "chi" (pronounced "key") which to us looks like an X. The X illustrates this "crisscross" or mirror image literary structure. It flows like A,B, then B,A. (Not the 70s band!)

Here's an example: "John F. Kennedy told Americans to

A. Ask not what your **country**

B. Can do for **you**

X

B. Ask what **you can do**

A. For your **country**

Another "example Jesus's words in Matthew 23:12. "For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."^{iv}

In today's passage from Proverbs 14, verses 8 and 15 go together, then 9 and 14, then 10 and 13, and finally verses 11 and 12 are the central message.

Okay, enough of "Lit class," wake up and you'll see what I mean as we dive in. Looking at these "pairs" of verses we'll see the contrast of the PRUDENT (the upright) and the FOOL (the wicked.)

Proverbs 14:8 (ESV) — 8 The wisdom of the prudent is to discern his way, but the folly of fools is deceiving. [to deceive themselves]

Proverbs 14:15 (ESV) — 15 The simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps.

- **What does it mean for a prudent person to “discern his way?” How do fools “deceive themselves” by NOT doing that? Bonus question: How do you strike the balance of being prudent and having faith? That is a “hot topic” right now with COVID-19.**
- My take: I have faith but I don’t stand in traffic or handle snakes!
- The word for prudent here means “crafty” in a “good way.”
- The wise person prudently plans; the fool doesn’t and deceives himself.
- Verse fifteen is pretty straightforward. One of my favorite sayings is, *“never believe the first thing you hear.”* In these days of social media, massive “information” on the Internet and media bias, we shouldn’t just believe everything. Dig deeper, check it out, and compare it to scripture.
- The “simple” just needs instruction. The “fool” refuses instruction.
- Matthew Henry: *“...those are simple who thus believe every word, forgetting that all men, in some sense, are liars in comparison with God, all whose words we are to believe with an implicit faith, for he cannot lie.”^v*

Proverbs 14:9 (ESV) — 9 Fools mock at the guilt offering, but the upright enjoy acceptance. [

Proverbs 14:14 (ESV) — 14 The backslider in heart will be filled with the fruit of his ways, and a good man will be filled with the fruit of his ways.

- Verse nine in the NLT: *Fools make fun of guilt, but the godly acknowledge it and seek reconciliation.* ^{vi} A fool won’t take responsibility for wrongdoing.
- They won’t leave a note on your windshield if they hit your car. *“Who cares? They have insurance!”* They giggle at getting away and chuckle when they cheat whether it’s on their taxes or on their spouse.
- Verse fifteen talks about being “filled.” The fool is out for getting all they can get their hands on and sooner or later they will be

eating the “fruit” of their evil deeds. The “good” person will be “satisfied” with good fruit.

- If you break it, pay for it. If you offend, make amends. Don't dismiss “little transgressions.” Large or small the wise person makes good.
- Proverbs 11:20 (NLT) — 20 The Lord detests people with crooked hearts, but he delights in those with integrity.

Proverbs 14:10 (ESV) — 10 The heart knows its own bitterness, and no stranger shares its joy.

Proverbs 14:13 (ESV) — 13 Even in laughter the heart may ache, and the end of joy may be grief.

- The heart of every individual is a “deep well” and no matter how many close relatives and friends you have, there are some emotions so deep in the heart (both joy and sorrow) that only God really knows about them.
- I thought of several applications for these verses.
- As we look at others we should keep in mind that quote from Ian McClaren – *“Be kind; everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.”*^{vii} Some people are just better at hiding their sorrow so don't assume “it's all good.”
- Looking into our own hearts, we need to remember not to look to other people (even spouses) to make us happy. You may have the most wonderful mate in the world but only God can ultimately give us real joy.
- It's wonderful and in God's plan to have a support system of close family and friends around us, but there are times when it's just Jesus and me.
- My heart breaks when I think of people at the end of their life alone in a hospital because of COVID-19. It's just them and God. The situation is tragic enough; if they haven't trusted Christ it's a double tragedy.
- An old hymn speaks to those “just Jesus and me” moments.
*“Does Jesus care when my heart is pained
Too deeply for mirth or song,
As the burdens press,
And the cares distress,
And the way grows weary and long?”*

*O yes, He cares, I know He cares,
His heart is touched with my grief;
When the days are weary,
The long night dreary,
I know my Savior cares.*^{viii}

- Wise person knows that the only real comforter in sorrow and source of joy is Jesus. The only way to experience his joy and comfort is through trusting Him as Savior and Lord.
- Our final two verses, right in the middle of the “X” of this “chiasm” speak to that ultimate wise choice of following Christ or going our own way.

Proverbs 14:11 (ESV) — 11 The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish.

Proverbs 14:12 (ESV) — 12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

- “Tent” or “house” describes a person’s family and possessions. Verse eleven describes the ultimate outcome for the wicked and the upright.
- How many times have we witnessed a family “dynasty” of power, wealth, and privilege that ended in tragedy, heartbreak, and destruction?
- On the other hand, how many upright people have we known who may live in a meager dwelling here on earth, but it’s a house filled with love!
- Living by the godly wisdom of scripture leads to that love-filled “tent.”
- While I’m quoting old songs, here’s another from the Easter Brothers:

*“As the world looks upon me, as I struggle along
They say I have nothing, but they are so wrong
In my heart I’m rejoicing, how I wish they could see
Thank you Lord, for your blessings on me*

*There’s a roof up above me
I’ve a good place to sleep*

*There's food on my table
And shoes on my feet
You gave me your love Lord
And a fine family
Thank you Lord, for your blessings on me”*

- I believe the fallout of this pandemic will cause many to reassess what's really important and what's not.
- As in the Great Depression of our grandparent's generation, many of us will learn to embrace **Proverbs 15:16 (NLT) — 16** Better to have little, with fear for the Lord, than to have great treasure and inner turmoil.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- That last verse, verse twelve, is the Takeaway.
- *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”*
- This is a picture of why a small child needs parents. To an immature toddler everything looks like a good idea. Parents have to teach them what to avoid because it could lead to pain and maybe even death.
- Sadly, the fool never grows out of that “everything seems right” mindset.
- For many “fools” their plans and schemes lead to a destructive end.
- Feelings are the “doorway” to being deceived by a “way that seems right.”
- One commentator wrote: *“Many people make crucial life decisions in areas such as marriage, finances, and vocation not based upon God's revealed Word but their feelings. Proverbs tells us that our feelings are unreliable: ‘There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death’ (14:12); ‘he who trusts in his own heart is a fool’ (28:26a). A man may feel that he would be happier if he were to divorce his wife. A mother may not feel like using the rod of discipline on her children...The wise man does not lean on his own understanding but trusts that God's way is best. The one who chooses his own way arrogantly claims that he knows better than God.”^x*

- The ultimate foolish choice of rejecting Christ as Savior and Lord literally leads to death, the “second death” of an eternity of suffering without God.
- You definitely don’t want to be “that guy.” I’m grateful I won’t be!
- The good news is that a person can choose NOT to be a fool! Godly wisdom will allow the fool to become WISE.
- Which will we choose? The good example of the upright or the bad example of the wicked and foolish? There are plenty of specific life lessons available in Proverbs 10-31.
- Let’s embrace them so we won’t be “that guy.”

ⁱ “That Guy” - That Guy

The person everyone loves to hate and never wants to become.

~~The person everyone gets stuck in the middle of the wants to clear just as the light turns red. Now, because of you no one can get by. You have now become "That Guy".~~
 You no longer get stuck in the middle of the intersection just as the light turns red. Now, because of you no one can get by. You have now become "That Guy".

ⁱⁱ <https://gsi.berkeley.edu/comerfordj-2006/>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scared_Straight!

^{iv} <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/bible/what-is-chiasmus-definitions-and-examples.html>

^v Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (p. 985). Peabody: Hendrickson.

^{vi} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Pr 14:9). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^{vii} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian_Maclaren

^{viii} <https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/695>

^{ix} Newheiser, J. (2008). *Opening up Proverbs* (p. 60). Leominster: Day One Publications.