A Study for Children on Wisdom and Foolishness

by Sally Michael
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The book of Proverbs is a book of great advice and an ominous warning. The advice is to pursue wisdom. The warning is to avoid folly. It is very black and white.

Wisdom speaks to us from the first chapter of Proverbs (1:32-33) and shows us how clear it is:

For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them...

That’s a pretty clear warning—avoid foolishness because it leads to destruction.

…but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.

That’s very good advice—listen to wisdom because it leads to life.

It sounds so simple. And yet it is so hard to live.

Why? Because “folly is bound up in the heart” (Proverbs 22:15). To avoid foolishness and pursue wisdom requires denying our sinful nature; it requires a heart change. And only Jesus can do that. We will not pursue wisdom, life-giving though it is, left to our own devices. We are bent on destruction. But Jesus can change our hearts and set our feet on the path of wisdom.

However, wisdom must be pursued—it takes effort, it takes discipline, it takes a teachable heart. It also takes instruction. The young and moldable must be diligently and relentlessly instructed. The wise must teach the naive. This curriculum has been written so that the wise may have a tool to teach the naive; and so that the naive may be encouraged to pursue wisdom. May you teach well both by your words and by your example. And may the naive that you teach “hold fast to your instruction.”
THE WAY OF THE WISE contrasts the foolish person and the wise person. The foolish person loves what is wrong and acts on that love; the wise person loves what is right and acts on that love. The way of the foolish ends in destruction but the way of the wise leads to life.

This is not a curriculum merely about behavior, but one about the heart. Since “folly is bound up in the heart” (Proverbs 22:15), we cannot change our attitudes and heart affections without Jesus. Jesus is the only bridge from the way of the foolish to the way of the wise.

The curriculum encourages children to pursue wisdom and to shun folly. The book of Proverbs is highlighted as a great source of instruction in wisdom and the children are encouraged to read and memorize from the book of Proverbs, and to act on the words of Proverbs.

God-Centered Curriculum

The Desiring God curricula has come about from a passion for presenting the truths of the Bible in a God-centered way. This is not a curriculum about good morals or right living—it is a curriculum about the transforming work of Jesus in the heart and the power of God in our lives to encourage us to pursue wisdom. The fear of the Lord is truly the beginning of wisdom. God is shown to be an awesome God, worthy of our admiration and our imitation.

Lesson Order

Although the lessons are independent units, they are designed to teach overarching truths and to encourage responsive hearts. Some lessons are dependent on truths taught in previous lessons and some lessons expand the truth taught in a prior lesson. For these reasons, it is very important that the lessons be taught in the order in which they appear in the curriculum.
LESSON 9

FOOLS: THE SIMPLE

SCRIPTURE: Proverbs 14:15; 1 Samuel 15:23b, 24; Proverbs 13:20
(Psalm 19:7)

KEY VERSE:

Proverbs 13:20—He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.

KEY THEMES:

A simple fool believes anything; a wise man thinks things through
Being with wise people can help you become wise; being with fools can help you become foolish

WORSHIP SONGS:

Because We Believe (Jamie Harvill/Nancy Gordon)
Believe in the Lord (Frank Hernandez)
Firm Foundation (Jamie Harvill/Nancy Gordon)
How Firm a Foundation (author unknown; attributed variously to John Keene, John Kirkham, and John Keith.)
Our Great Savior [Jesus! What a Friend for Sinners]
(J. Wilbur Chapman/Rowland H. Prichard)

VISUALS/MATERIALS: Bible; pen with a retractable point; photographs; a five-dollar bill; banner piece—SIMPLE FOOL (9A); SIMPLE MAN and PRUDENT/WISE MAN signs (Resource Pack); nametags—SAUL, DAVID, and DAVID’S MEN (Resource Pack); two celery stalks and two glasses of colored water (use two different colors; you could also use carnations rather than celery); materials for chosen activities

PREPARATION: Study the scripture passages carefully and prayerfully.
Ask God to make them real in your own heart. Be open to what God may be teaching you in this lesson. Study the lesson well. Pray for the children in your class.

Cut out the banner pieces.

Place each piece of celery in a glass of colored water. Leave the celery in the water long enough for the celery to absorb the color of the water—at least two days is best. The celery should absorb enough color so that there is a noticeable difference between the two pieces of celery. (If you do not have two days, you can use a sponge in class instead of the celery.)

For the Introduction illustration, you will need to choose a child who is not easily fooled. If you have a concern that the child may be gullible, you may want to instruct him ahead of time not to trade his money for the “camera pen”—or you may want to choose an adult to help you with the Introduction.

BACKGROUND NOTE: A fourth Hebrew word for fool is peti or pethi. It is “often translated ‘simple.’ The word derives from a root suggesting the idea of being ‘open, spacious, wide.’ Peti is the term for ‘fool’ which carries with it the greatest potential that one will welcome instruction and correction from a wise man. One who is ‘open’ is accessible. Though often immature, inexperienced, and easily led into all kinds of enticement, the peti is, fortunately, teachable. A ‘simple’ one might be naive, gullible, and easily fooled (see Prov. 7:7ff.), yet his mind is not barred to the entrance of wisdom. Openness has the potential of being turned into virtue as quickly as vice...The peti is a person who is usually approachable and hence educable...his folly could be corrected.”

Perhaps many of the children you are teaching fall into this category. It is both your privilege and your responsibility as a teacher of truth to lead these immature, easily influenced children into the wisdom of God. Pray that they will be open to God’s Word and closed to the foolishness of this world.

NOTE: You may want to ask a child at the beginning of the class to share a verse that he read in the book of Proverbs. You may want to arrange this before the class so the child is prepared.

NOTE: You may want to review the main points from the previous lessons using the banner or a completed workbook.

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Call a child to the front of the room and give him the five-dollar bill. Give the following illustration:

Pretend this is your five-dollar bill. I know that you have the five dollars so I pull this pen out of my pocket and say to you, “This is a special pen. I know it looks like an ordinary pen, but it is really a secret camera. When I click the end of the pen, it takes pictures. That way I can take all kinds of secret pictures.”

(Show the child the photographs.) “All these pictures came from this pen-camera. I paid $500 for this special pen, but I will let you have it if you give me your five-dollar bill.”

What would you do? Would you give me your five dollars for my pen? Why not?

Now, instead of offering the pen to you for five dollars, suppose I offered the pen to a five-year-old child for his five dollars. Do you think I would have a better chance of fooling the five-year-old? Why?

Explain to the children that it is easier to fool a five-year-old than someone their age because the five-year-old doesn’t understand about being fooled. He is more likely to believe what someone tells him instead of thinking things through. He might be smart, but he easily believes what someone tells him.

Lesson

Tell the children that the Bible tells us about a kind of fool who is like a five-year-old. This kind of fool is called the simple fool. He doesn’t think things through; he believes what others tell him because he doesn’t think for himself; he is easily led by others, and he is immature—he doesn’t have a lot of experience to help him figure out if what he is being told is right or not.

Explain to the children that most young children are like this—they believe everything. But as they grow up, they learn that they can’t believe and follow everything they are told. The simple fool is like a person who hasn’t grown up; he is like a person who is still five years old. He often believes whatever he hears and doesn’t stop to think about if it is right or true. (Place the SIMPLE FOOL [9A] piece on the Way of the Foolish side of the WAY OF THE WISE banner.)
Have a sword drill with the following verse: **Proverbs 14:15—A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps.**

Identify with the children the two different kinds of people that this verse talks about: (Post the two signs on the wall or the board as you identify these two people.)

Simple man—believes anything. **He doesn’t stop to think or check out if something is right.** (Post the “SIMPLE MAN” sign.)

Prudent or wise man—gives thought to his steps. **He thinks about what he has heard and decides if it is true. He asks God to help him be wise and to know what is right and what is wrong. He thinks about what will happen if he follows what he has heard.** (Post the PRUDENT/WISE MAN sign.)

Give the children the background of Saul’s pursuit of David:

† Saul was the king of Israel but he disobeyed God. Saul was a rebellious fool. Saul did not walk in wisdom but was foolish.

† God sent the prophet Samuel to Saul and God spoke these words to Saul through Samuel: **Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king.** (1 Samuel 15:23b)

† God took the kingdom away from Saul and promised to make David king of Israel in place of Saul.

† When Saul saw that God was with David, Saul was jealous and angry and tried to kill David. He threw a spear at David in the palace but he missed. When David fled from Saul, Saul chased David in order to kill David. David lived in the wilderness in caves, and moved from place to place because Saul was looking for him so that he could kill him.

Tell the children the story of David sparing Saul’s life from 1 Samuel 24. Call three children to the front to role play the parts of Saul, David, and David’s men. Place a nametag identifying each role. Make the following points:

† David and his men were hiding far in the back of a cave.

† Saul went in the cave and David’s men gave him some advice—they told him to do something. Have a child read **1 Samuel 24:4a:** [The men said.] "This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, ‘I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.’"
What did David's men want David to do? [Kill Saul.]

What would a simple fool do in this situation? (Point to the simple man sign that you have posted.) [Listen to the men and kill Saul.]

Let's see if David was a simple fool.

† Read 1 Samuel 24:4b-6a: Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. He said to his men,

Ask “David” to read 1 Samuel 24:6b: "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the LORD."

Ask a child to come to the front and take the posted sign that describes David and give it to “David” to show the class. [Prudent or wise man.]

Was David a simple fool? Did he listen to what his men said and just follow it? No. David was a prudent or wise man. He thought through what his men said and what it would mean if he killed Saul. He thought about what his men told him to do and if it was the right thing to do. He “gave thought to his steps”—he thought about what would be right for him to do.

Remind the children that young children often don’t think things through. They just blindly follow what others tell them. They often believe whatever they are told. Tell the class that although they are not young children, they are still children and are much more easily influenced than an adult is. They don’t always think for themselves and will often believe what others tell them. If the person teaching and leading them is trustworthy, they can learn good things. But if the person influencing them is not trustworthy, they can learn bad things.

Tell the children that the Bible tells us about this. Have a sword drill with the following verse:

Proverbs 13:20—He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.

Ask the children to paraphrase this proverb.

Tell the children that you are going to show them what this verse means. Then give the following illustration:

Show one piece of celery. Ask the children to note the color. Explain that you placed the celery in the water of that color. Then show them the other piece of celery. Explain that you placed the celery in the water of that color.
Why do you think that this piece of celery became (name color)? What do you think would have happened to it if I had placed it in (name the other color)? The (color) celery is (color) because it was placed in the (color) water; the (name the other color) celery is (other color) because it was placed in the (other color) water. The celery became the color of the water in which it was placed.

You are like celery. Just like the celery becomes the color of the water, you can become like the people with whom you spend time. This verse is saying that if you are with wise people you can become wise; if you hang around with foolish people, you can become foolish. And when you are foolish, you could come to harm—hard and painful things could happen to you. (You may even want to go back through the illustration, this time equating one color of water as “wise people” and the other as “foolish people”, and the children as the celery. That is, this water is foolish people. The celery is you. Put the celery in the water. If you are with foolish people you can become foolish…)

Choosing the right people to be with is very important. If you want to be wise, you must be around wise people, not around foolish people.

End by reviewing that the simple fool listens to everyone and doesn’t think things through; the wise or prudent man gives thought to his steps—he thinks things through and decides what is right and acts on what is right. Being with wise people can help a person become wise, but being with fools will encourage a person to become foolish.

You may want to do this review by turning the SIMPLE MAN and PRUDENT MAN signs over and see if the children can give you the definitions—or teach the children these truths using motions. For example, listens=hand to ear; everyone=arms stretched out, doesn’t=shake head, think=point to head, steps=walk in place, decides=quick nod; acts=make a fist and bend your arm.

Application

KEY THEMES:
A simple fool believes anything; a wise man thinks things through
Being with wise people can help you become wise; being with fools can help you become foolish

What does the Bible mean when it says that a “simple man believes anything?” What should you do instead of believing everything?
Does not wanting to be a simple fool mean that you never believe what others tell you?
How can you tell if something is good advice

Application can most effectively be done in a small group setting. The questions are just suggestions of possible directions to take the discussion. Pray for wisdom and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. Be sensitive to the answers and the needs of the children. Be sure to pray for the children and encourage them to pray for each other.
or foolishness? How can you find out what is right and good in a situation?

What happens to simple fools? Does this mean that nothing hard or painful or bad or hurtful can happen to a wise person? What is the difference?

Do you want to be a simple fool or a wise person? What will you do to become a wise person?

What kind of people do you have for friends? What do you think about that?

What are other ways that we are negatively or positively influenced? [Books we read, television, etc.] What kinds of influences should we look for? Why? Is there any bad influence in your life that you need to get rid of? What will you do about this? What are some good influences you need to add to your life?

Read and discuss the following verse:

Psalm 19:7—The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

You may want to encourage the children in their reading of the book of Proverbs. You may also want to encourage them to share with the group some of the verses they have read in Proverbs.

Activities

1. If the children did not work on the workbook page during the discussion, they can work on it now.
2. Play a Key Verse game.
3. Children can print out and illustrate Proverbs 14:15.
4. Option One: Take a bowl of vinegar and liken it to foolish people. Then take a glass of milk and liken it to the children. Ask the children what they think will happen if the milk is poured into the vinegar and sits in the bowl with the vinegar. Then pour the milk into the bowl of vinegar. Talk about Proverbs 13:20 as they are watching the milk change.
5. Option Two: Two pans of colored water (two different colors) can be used to illustrate fools and wise men. Take a piece of white fabric and lay it in each pan of colored water. Watch the fabric change color as you discuss Proverbs 13:20.
6. Work with the children on their badges, or give them opportunity in class to work on their badges.
Send Home

† PARENT RESOURCE SHEET

Teacher’s Notes
Lesson 9

FOOLS: THE SIMPLE

SCRIPTURE: Proverbs 14:15; 1 Samuel 15:23b; 24; Proverbs 13:20
(Psalm 19:7)

KEY VERSE:

Proverbs 13:20—He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.

KEY THEMES:

A simple fool believes anything; a wise man thinks things through.

Being with wise people can help you become wise;
being with fools can help you become foolish.

A PROVERB TO THINK ABOUT

Proverbs 28:19 He who works his land will have abundant food, but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty.
Fools: The Simple

A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps.
Proverbs 14:15

Illustrate this verse. For example: You might want to draw an ear for a simple man who believes anything he hears and an ear and a head for a wise man who hears and then thinks about it.

KEY VERSE:
Proverbs 13:20—He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.

KEY THEMES:
† A simple fool believes anything; a wise man thinks things through
† Being with wise people can help you become wise; being with fools can help you become foolish

THIS WEEK:
As you encounter false but believable statements this week, share them with your child (e.g., a slogan from an advertisement, a bumper sticker, something someone at work said, a line from a political speech, etc.). Remind your child that the simple fool believes anything but a wise man thinks things through. Help your child to think these collected statements through and see the foolishness in them. (Or you may want to collect true and false statements and help your child discern which things are true and which are false.) Encourage your child to start collecting statements to evaluate, and then help him to evaluate them Biblically and logically.

Make an effort for you child to spend time with a wise person this week (and regularly). For example: visit a godly grandparent or older person. Ask questions that will help reveal to your child the wisdom this person has acquired over the years (e.g., “Tell me about some of the lessons you have learned in life.”; “Was there a time when you learned your lesson the hard way?”; “What have you learned about the faithfulness of God during your lifetime?”). After the visit encourage your child to contrast the experience with time spent with his friends. Ask him what he learned from the older person. Remind him that being with wise person helps a person become wise. You may want to make a conscious effort or a regular time to visit with wise people.

Encourage your child in his Proverbs reading and memorizing.