

**SERIES: Win the Day! Wk. 5**

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**Message Title: Choices Matter Pt. 1**

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It's not at all uncommon that I get in conversations with people who express a pretty deep level of disappointment in life. Life has become dissatisfying; they're disappointed—oftentimes they're just miserable. But what seems to be more and more common, is some people seem either unwilling or unable to make the connection between the choices they've made, and the misery they're experiencing. They want to blame other people; they want to blame all kinds of circumstances, but there often seems to be this disconnect between their choices and their misery. Well, that's what we want to talk about, and remind ourselves that our choices do matter. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Proverbs, Chapter 14.

We've just been going a chapter at a time, and I pick some of the core proverbs and try to pull them together in some sort of an organized way. Eventually, we'll get all the way through the book of Proverbs—at least get a taste of what's found in this book.

So, Chapter 14, Verse 1:

**The wise woman builds her house,  
But the foolish tears it down with her own hands.** (NASB, Proverbs 14:1)

Throughout the Book of Proverbs, there are certain very consistent patterns and contrasts and tensions. One of the most common, is this tension between the wise and the foolish. The word *wisdom* is kind of vague. Sometimes it's hard to get your mind around it, but in the Book of Proverbs, it's primarily talking about someone who is skillful at living, who has the skills to live well, which leads to a high level of satisfaction/fulfillment in life. So the **wise woman builds her house**—I'm not talking about a literal house, but house is metaphoric for *a life*—with a high degree of skill, and builds a life that is deeply satisfying. That's contrasted with the **foolish**. Proverbs uses a number of different Hebrew words to talk about the foolish, but by and large the foolish *tears her house down*. As a matter of fact, there's a repetition in that verse that she not only tears it down, but she **tears it down with her own hands**.

There is a reality that there are many things in life beyond our control. There are things that happen to us every day that I can't control. It's not my fault, and it has the potential of making life very difficult. That's not what we're talking about today. We're talking about tearing our own houses down with our own hands, primarily talking about the choices we make, that begin to destroy our lives and leave us in misery and disappointment with life.

Verse 2:

**He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD,  
But he who is devious in his ways despises Him.**

This is another contrast that's offered again and again in the Book of Proverbs. The contrast is first with *those who fear God*. *To fear God*, is not talking about being afraid of God, but it's a sense of awe; it's a sense of reverence and worship. Basically, it would carry the idea of surrender—that I believe that there is a God; I believe God created the universe and that His path is the right path and is the path that leads to life. So, all of us have legitimate needs and longings and desires. We feel them deeply in our souls. The question is, "What is the path that's going to ultimately satisfy those deep longings in our souls?" Those who fear God, are those who believe it's found on God's path. Therefore, my life is dedicated to understanding God's path, to believing God's path, to obeying God's path, because I believe that's where I'll find the life I'm looking for.

That's contrasted with the fool, and *the fool despises the path of God*, so deviates from the path of God. "I don't want to travel God's path. I don't want to listen to what an archaic, two-thousand-year-old book has to say. I think I want to be in charge of my own life. I want to do it myself. I want to make my own decisions. Therefore, I'm going to deviate from God's path. I'm going to find my own path, because that's where life will be found." It's a pretty common contrast. Proverbs Chapter One says, "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*", but once you have rejected God's path, then you walk the path of the fool.

Skip then to Verse 12, which I think is like the heartbeat of this chapter:

**There is a way *which seems right to a man*, (or to a person)  
But its end is the way of death.**

**Death**, here, isn't speaking of physical death, so much as it is misery in life. Just like when we say that Jesus offers us life, we're not just saying that we breathe every day. We're saying He offers life that's fulfilling, life that makes life worth living. Well, this Hebrew word for death carries the idea of misery, of disappointment—it's just not the life that our souls are longing for. Stop and think about that, because it's a rather frightening statement. There is a way that seems right, but it's not! It's actually the pathway to misery! Think of the level of deception when I'm going down this path, because I think this is the path of life. I think this is what's going to make me happy, what's going to make me fulfilled. I think this is going to satisfy the longings in my soul. I really do think that, but it's not! It's the wrong path, and it's only going to lead to misery.

This goes all the way back again to Genesis Chapter 3. When the serpent was talking to Adam and Eve, what he was offering them was to think about being your own god, deciding your own path, making your own decisions about right and wrong. When Adam and Eve were contemplating what the serpent was offering, I don't think they thought, "You know, if we choose to be our own gods, if we decide to go our own way, if we decide to define for ourselves right and wrong, if we dismiss the concepts of guilt and shame, I think life will be miserable, so let's do that!" I don't think that was the thinking at all. The thinking was, "Surely, that's the right way! How do I get the most out of life? Well, I think by probably being my own god, by directing my own path. I don't want to be told what to do. I don't want to listen to some old book. I want to decide for myself. Surely, that's the way to be happy. That's the way to be fulfilled. That's the way to get the most out of life. That seems right."

There's no question as a culture we've bought into that. We have drifted far from the path of God. God is kind of dismissed as a non-factor, because we're absolutely convinced by being an individual, deciding myself what's right or wrong, deciding for myself what's good or bad,

choosing my own path, deciding for myself what will make me happy, that *seems* like the right way! There's a way that *seems right*, yet virtually every survey taken these days, demonstrates that we are more unhappy, more disappointed, more disillusioned, more despairing and more hopeless; we're more addicted, more medicated, more depressed, and more suicidal, than any generation before us. And at some point, wouldn't we stop and consider: maybe this isn't the best way, and maybe there is another way?

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Those who fear God understand some fundamentals that guide us through life. We believe that God *is*. We believe that God has created the universe, and created the universe with certain laws in effect. There are natural laws, social laws, moral laws, and when you violate God's laws, you do so with consequence. No matter what you think, what you feel, what you believe, at the end of the day, God's laws prevail.

The easiest way to illustrate this is to think about the natural laws. So let's think about the law of gravity. You are free to believe what you want about gravity. You can like it; you can dislike it. You can believe it's true; you can deny it's true. You are free to believe that the law of gravity is some sort of a conspiracy, put together by the scientists to control your life. You can look at the birds, and you can determine: certainly the law of gravity is not true. "If the birds can do it, so can I!" You're free to believe that. But when you go up on top of the building and you jump, you hit the ground. What you run into is reality. Dallas Willard used to say, "Reality is what you run into when you're wrong."

You are free to believe as you wish. You are free to believe that your way is the right way, that you have the right to decide for yourself good and evil, right and wrong. You're free to decide for yourself what's moral and immoral. You're free to decide what path you'd like to travel, but at the end of the day, what you run into is reality, and reality always wins. At the end of the day, there are moral laws and social laws that are just as powerful and true as the natural laws in the universe. No matter what you choose to believe, what you choose to feel, you can't beat the system. *So there is a way that seems right, but it only leads to misery.*

Then that begins to create certain characteristics of people that travel that path. So there is a way that seems right: "I'm going to do it myself. I'm going to decide for myself."

One of those characteristics is found in Verse 9:

**Fools mock at sin.** (Vs.9a)

You're well aware, that sin is not a popular topic of conversation in our culture. As a matter of fact, the concept of sin is laughed at, scoffed at and mocked. It's basically the idea that there are no moral absolutes. Everybody's free to decide for themselves what's right and wrong, and the idea that there's such a thing as sin and guilt and shame, is foolish. People laugh and make fun of that, which then leads them farther down that path.

Look then at Verse 16:

**A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil,** (Vs. 16a)

If I do believe that God's path is the right path, I try to be very thoughtful and cautious about the steps I take. I'm well aware of the fact that there are a hundred ways I can mess up my life today, and so I'm cautious with the steps I take.

**But a fool is arrogant and careless.** (Vs. 16b)

That Hebrew word translated **arrogant** doesn't quite capture it. It's arrogant, but it's kind of the idea of *flaring up, of being agitated or offended*. The word **careless** is a term that means *reckless*. It means, basically, that, "I'm kind of offended that you would even suggest that what I'm doing is possibly wrong. I'm incredulous that you would say my path is the wrong path!"

So even though I'm kind of skipping around in the proverb, I'm trying to kind of build a thought here. So there is a way that seems right, that by going my own way, defining my own reality, defining my own morality, travelling my own path, I think this is what's going to make me happy. Therefore, I scoff at the concept of sin. "There is no absolute morality. I'm free to make up right and wrong. How dare you suggest that what I'm doing is somehow not right?!" And so the fool now is kind of offended, is agitated, is irritated at the suggestion that somehow my path isn't the right path. "As a matter of fact, I'm incredulous that you would even suggest that! Who do you think you are, to question the path I'm on, and to say that what I'm doing is wrong? It might be wrong for you, but it's not wrong for me, and how dare you even suggest that?!" So this starts to build an attitude that just takes someone farther and farther down that path.

Look then at Verse 6:

**A scoffer seeks wisdom and finds none,  
But knowledge is easy to one who has understanding.**

In other words, when I fear God, I do believe that His path is the right path. Therefore, my life is dedicated to *understanding*, to believing and obeying what God says. God has not left us alone to grope in the darkness, to figure our way out of the jungle. He's given us a road map. If I believe that, it is right here, and I can figure it out. I can be very thoughtful about my steps.

But the fool who rejects that - **a scoffer - seeks wisdom, but finds none**. The **scoffer**: there is a way that seems right to a man, "I think this is the right path," and so the fool begins to travel down that path, begins to mock at sin, is actually kind of offended, and reacts to anybody that suggests, that my path is not the right path. But there's a problem, and the problem is: my life doesn't seem to be working out. It does seem like things are falling apart. I'm unhappy; I'm disappointed; I'm disillusioned. It does seem like there's a high level of misery, and I really would like to find something better, so I'm looking for the answer. I'm looking for a way out of the jungle. I'm looking for some sort of skilled living—a different path that will improve the experience of my life. The problem is, once I have rejected God's path, there is no other path out of the jungle. So the **scoffer**, the **fool**, is seeking wisdom, but **finds none**, because once you've rejected the fear of the Lord, once you've rejected God's path, there is no other path. I'm stuck in the jungle, and I can't figure a way out, which only intensifies my unhappiness, my bitterness. It makes me more disillusioned, feeling more hopeless. It makes me more dissatisfied with life. I'm just now stuck in this spiral, and I have no understanding how to get out.

Turn over to Verse 15; this leads to believing everything:

**[The naïve believes everything,** (Vs. 15a)]

The naive—which is another one of the fools identified in the Book of Proverbs—isn't someone who's dumb or stupid. It's someone who is untaught. It's someone who simply doesn't know the truth. So now imagine this scenario: *there is a way that seems right* - I'm going to go my way - it seems like that's the most likely way to make me happy, to give me what I'm looking for in life. So I scoff at the idea of sin. If somebody suggests that my path isn't the right path, I'm incredulous, I'm offended, and I react with a degree of anger. "How dare you say that?!" But the problem is, when I'm alone at night, I realize I'm really unhappy; I'm kind of miserable. My life isn't working. It feels like it's falling apart. I'm trying to find the path out of the jungle, but I can't, which means that now I'll believe anything.

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You know, people are funny. Sometimes they come in to see me as a pastor. They're miserable, they're unhappy, but they won't change anything. They even say things like, "Well, why would God do this to me?" or, "I thought God was supposed to be loving." They seem either unable or unwilling to connect the dots, that it's their choices that have made a mess of their lives. Sometimes, people even will say things like, "I know God has a reason," or "I know God has a plan and a purpose," and it can be very difficult to get people to see, God isn't doing this to you. You're just making bad choices. I think it's a legitimate question to ask people, "How is that working for you? Are you happy? Are you joyful? Are you fulfilled? Is it everything that you wanted it to be?"

Years ago, I had a couple of friends that spent all day ice fishing at a little state park with a small pond on it. And I saw them that evening, and we were talking about it, and I asked them, how many fish they caught. They said, "Zero, didn't even have a bite." At that point, I informed them that, that Fall, they had killed all the fish in the pond, because they were going to renovate it and redo it. So, it made sense, they didn't catch any fish. Now we had a good laugh over that. Okay, so they made a mistake; that happens. But just imagine, if they would have continually gone out to the same pond all winter long to ice fish. I would have had to tell them, "Hello, there's no fish in the pond." Or, imagine they're offended at me, because I had the nerve to tell them, "Hey, by the way, there's no fish in the pond." That's how people act today. People say, "Hindsight is 20-20". I'm going to tell you as a pastor, it's not. I see so many people making the same foolish decisions again and again and again. So the proverb is clear: choices matter. If life isn't working for you, maybe it's time you make some different choices. *In the words of The Proverbs, stop tearing down your own house. Make a choice to listen to God, and experience the life that he longs for you to experience.*