

There is a certain trajectory in chapter 14.

The opening seven verses set up the two sorts of people you could hang out with.  
Lady Wisdom who builds her house.  
or Dame Folly who tears her own house down.

Then verses 8-15 urge us to distinguish between appearance and reality.  
Because folly often appears wise and prudent!

There is a way that seems right to a man –  
it’s easier – cheaper – let’s go that way!  
But the man of prudence counts the cost and sees the path of wisdom.

The final half of chapter 14 then deals with the way of wisdom in community,  
pointing to the Fear of the LORD  
as the foundation for wisdom in the neighborhood,  
and in the king’s court.

### **1. Who Are You Hanging Out With? Walking in Wisdom (v1-7)**

Verses 1-7 challenge us to consider our companions.  
Who are you hanging out with?

Verse 1 reminds us of chapter 9 – the contrast between Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly:

*The wisest of women builds her house,  
but folly with her own hands tears it down.*

It can be easy to cluck our tongues at “folly.”  
Those people over there who tear down their own house!  
But we are more like this than we like to admit.

She had a great idea!  
If this idea works – then I could bring harmony to my family.  
Everything will be better.  
If they just see what I am trying to do...

But they didn’t.  
And it backfired.  
The bright idea turned out to be a spectacular explosion...

And now her house is on fire.

What went wrong?

Verse 2:

<sup>2</sup> *Whoever walks in uprightness fears the LORD,  
but he who is devious in his ways despises him.*

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.  
And so every wise woman builds her house –  
every wise woman fears the LORD,  
and so is more concerned with what *God thinks* –  
than with what others think.

Folly will convince you to take a crooked path in order to avoid trouble.  
But a crooked path is a shortcut to trouble!

I realized this week that I was trying to “dodge” trouble  
by avoiding a conversation with Ginger.  
“I’m busy – I need to get to work” –  
had become my way to avoid a hard conversation.

Devious ways – crooked ways – only makes things worse.  
Of course – we *think* that our way makes so much sense!  
The fool regularly thinks that his way will work just fine!

(There is a way that seems right to a man, but it’s end is the way to death – v12)  
Verse 12 is at the heart of what Proverbs 14 is all about.

Verse 3 reminds us of the importance of *words*:

<sup>3</sup> *By the mouth of a fool comes a rod for his back,<sup>[a]</sup>  
but the lips of the wise will preserve them.*

Our words get us in trouble –  
and our words preserve us from trouble.

How often do you find yourself in that situation?!  
You *know* that if you say that –  
it will blow up!  
But you say it anyway...

“The fool’s pride finds a rod in his mouth that lashes himself –  
he is his own worst enemy” – as one commentator puts it (W, 585)

That is where “the lips of the wise will preserve them.”

Because the wise will recognize danger and avoid it.

Verse 4 is the center of the chiasm.

Verses 1 and 7 start with what sort of person you are –  
and what sort of person you should be with.

Verses 2 and 6 talk about the sort of walk you walk.

Verses 3 and 5 deal with our words.

Verse 4 illustrates:

*<sup>4</sup> Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean,  
but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.*

Ok. You have a problem.

The manger is a mess.

The stable is filthy.

(and since the stable is the lower level of your house –  
your house really stinks!).

So what is the solution?

Let's have a steak dinner!

A few roasts – some stew meat – no more ox!

Now the manger is clean.

Your house smells good.

Problem solved!

But now you have created a new problem.

You just ate your workforce!

How are you going to plow your ground without an ox?

Sometimes the easy, obvious solution turns out to be a terrible idea.

Life is messy.

Life is stinky.

If you eat your ox, then you won't be eating much longer!

But if you keep your ox, then you need to clean your manger every day.

Why do you weed your garden?

The weeds are just going to grow back!

So why not just let the weeds grow?

Because the weeds will choke the vegetables!

The weeds will take the nutrients that you want your food to get!

In the same way,

you need to *weed your life!*

Every day you will face sin and temptation.

If you let the weeds grow, they will choke the good fruit of the gospel.  
Sin and temptation are *not* one-time battles.  
The weeds are continually being sown.  
They have powerful root systems.  
And they're so cute – like dandelions!  
Someone blows on the seeds and the next thing you know –  
your whole life is full of dandelions!

And verse five shows how easily that happens:

<sup>5</sup> *A faithful witness does not lie,  
but a false witness breathes out lies.*

Is he breathing?  
He's lying.  
Post-modernism has declared that there is no such thing as Truth.  
Or, better, everyone has their own truth.  
“I'm just speaking my truth.”

If everyone is allowed to have their own “truth” –  
then there is no such thing as “lying”  
(or more pointedly – the only “lie” is being false to your own truth!!)

I find it ironic that we have so many “fact-checkers” in a postmodern age.  
If everyone has their own truth – what is the point of “facts”?  
Facts are simply assertions made by one party in an attempt to control the narrative.

Lord, have mercy!

Of course, the reality is that the reason why we have fact checkers  
is because people *still* believe in Truth.  
They cannot escape Truth – because the one who is the Truth  
is the one who made all things.

And a faithful witness does not lie.  
A faithful witness acknowledges inconvenient facts.  
A faithful witness sees truly – because the faithful witness recognizes  
that *he is a witness*.

I do not have “my own truth.”  
I am merely a witness to truth.  
I am a witness to another.

And so (v6):

<sup>6</sup> *A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain,  
but knowledge is easy for a man of understanding.*

The scoffer is one who is devious in his ways –  
so no wonder he has trouble finding wisdom!  
He has left the straight path –  
and so his quest will forever take him down winding roads that lead to destruction

But knowledge is easy for a man of understanding.  
Because the man of understanding walks in uprightness – and fears the LORD.  
Therefore he is on the path where one finds knowledge.

So you find yourself wandering aimlessly in the midst of fools – what should you do?

<sup>7</sup> *Leave the presence of a fool,  
for there you do not meet words of knowledge.*

Stop hanging out with fools!

I remember once a friend came to me asking,  
“I’m trying to witness to my unbelieving friends –  
but I find that if I spend all my time with unbelievers,  
I start thinking and acting like them.  
What do I do?”

My encouragement was to find ways to connect the unbelieving friends  
with the believing community.  
Don’t just “hang out” with them all the time!  
Invite them to hang out us!

Two things happened:  
1) My friend was greatly strengthened through the bonds of Christian fellowship  
2) Her friends began to get connected to Christians –  
and we’re still connected!

Paul says it this way:  
“Do not be deceived: bad company ruins good morals.” (1 Cor 15:33)  
You will become like the people you are with.  
So “leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge.”

Our second section builds on the first by working through the importance  
of distinguishing appearance from truth –  
summarized in the aphorism,  
“it seemed like a good idea at the time...”

How do you avoid those situations where you look back and shake your head...

And – like usual – we start with wisdom:

## 2. “It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time...” Distinguishing Appearance from Truth (v8-15)

<sup>8</sup> *The wisdom of the prudent is to discern his way,  
but the folly of fools is deceiving.*

This is the problem.

The wisdom of the prudent is to discern his way.  
But the folly of fools is deceiving –  
because the fool *thought* that he had discerned his way!

The fool had everything worked out!

It’s worth noting that this section is also a chiasm –  
so look at the concluding proverb in verse 15:

“The simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps.”

This is why I say that in Proverbs, the simple is simply a fool waiting to happen.  
The simple does not understand the way of wisdom –  
and so will find himself mired in the slough of folly.  
The simple will be deceived by the folly of fools –  
because the folly of fools sounds quite plausible!

When I took on the task of being my own general contractor,  
the one thing I knew was that I didn’t know what I needed to know.  
My realtor advised me to do as many walk-throughs with as many contractors, tradesmen, etc.  
as possible.

When you acknowledge that you don’t know what you are doing,  
it helps you to learn.

Verse 9 then applies this to our standing before God:

<sup>9</sup> *Fools mock at the guilt offering,  
but the upright enjoy acceptance.*

The guilt offering was to be offered for inadvertent sins, ceremonial uncleanness,  
as well as moral guilt (such as taking false oaths, stealing, and cheating)  
(Lev 4-6).

Fools incur guilt regularly – and then scoff at the guilt offering.  
But the upright will first seek to avoid such guilt –  
    and then will enjoy acceptance both with God and man,  
    because the upright have the humility to accept the guilt offering!

Here's the irony of it:

the upright recognize that they need a guilt offering!  
The upright recognize that through weakness, failure, and sin –  
    I need a guilt offering!  
I need the blood of Christ to cover my guilt and shame and sin.

And so I enjoy acceptance with God because I admit that fall short!  
The fool doesn't think that he needs a guilt offering.  
    "I'm not such a bad person!"  
    Why should I waste a good animal on a guilt offering?  
    Me and God – we're good!

Fools mock at the guilt offering...

Verse 14 is the partner verse at the end of the chiasm.  
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.

It's one of the few exact parallels in Proverbs –  
    reminding us that a bad tree will produce bad fruit –  
    and a good tree will produce good fruit.

Deed and destiny are inseparable.  
    Whatever direction your heart is going is where you will end up!  
    If you don't like the direction that you are going –  
        then repent!  
    Turn!

Verses 10 and 13 form in the inner bracket of the chiasm –  
    which focuses on joy and grief:

<sup>10</sup> *The heart knows its own bitterness,  
    and no stranger shares its joy.*

(and verse 13 – “Even in laughter the heart may ache, and the end of joy may be grief.”)

You may have noticed that earlier in Proverbs 10-12  
    there wasn't much emotional language.

The focus was on wisdom, righteousness, diligence, faithfulness...

Part of the point has been that doing the right thing is the right thing to do!  
Whether it makes you feel good or bad isn't a reason to do it – or not!

*But* – that doesn't mean that emotions are irrelevant!  
Last time we heard about desire and appetite.  
Now we hear of joys and bitterness.

And we start with the utter isolation of emotion.  
The heart knows its own bitterness.  
Other people may be aware of your circumstances –  
but appearances can be deceiving.  
I had a friend once who appeared to be fine – on the outside.  
I didn't see the bitterness and pain on the inside –  
and so I contributed to the bitterness and pain!

That's why the second part of verse 10 is so important as well:  
“no stranger shares its joys.”  
As long as you remain strangers – you will have no companion for your joys.

Again we see the importance of wisdom in community –  
no stranger can share your joys –  
but those real friends – those who are faithful –  
they can share your joys –  
even when “in laughter the heart may ache”  
even when “the end of joy may be grief.”

Because there are times when the sorrows of life overcome the joys.  
This happens in every life.

As I often say at weddings – “this is not going to end well”!  
Every marriage – at its best! – begins with joy and ends with grief.  
Hopefully it begins with joy!  
But it always ends in grief.  
Every marriage ends in death (or divorce).  
It's why I like the traditional wording,  
“till death us do part.”

If there is no resurrection, then all of human history is an unspeakable tragedy.

But at the heart of this chiasm (in verses 11-12) we have the key to wisdom in community:

<sup>11</sup> *The house of the wicked will be destroyed,*



*but the tent of the upright will flourish.*  
<sup>12</sup> *There is a way that seems right to a man,*  
*but its end is the way to death.*

In verse 11, the reference to the “tent of the upright” uses the word “tabernacle.”  
The tabernacle of the upright will flourish.

Yes, it’s a tent.

But it is a tent that is connected conceptually with the tabernacle of Moses.  
It is a tent that is connected with the Word who became flesh  
and tabernacled among us.  
Paul plays off of this tent image when he speaks of our bodies as tents –  
(2 Cor. 5).

The tent of the upright will flourish.

The house of the wicked will be destroyed.

Sure, it may take a few generations  
(think of the house of Omri – and Ahab his son).  
Omri and Ahab were two of the most powerful kings of Israel.  
During their lifetimes, they were too powerful to resist.  
Naboth the Jezreelite tried to withstand Ahab –  
but Jezebel was too crafty.  
And so Ahab turned the vineyard of Naboth into a vegetable garden.

But for all of her craft, Jezebel was the embodiment of folly –  
and she tore down her house with her own hands.  
She was thrown from a window by her own servants –  
and eaten by dogs.

And in so doing she illustrated verse 12:

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”

That is where folly *always ends*.

Again, it may take generations to get there – but that’s where it always ends.

Name a powerful dynasty:

there are still some in existence.

But none have endured through all history.

Some of the longest dynasties can be found in ancient Egypt or China.

They lasted for generations – even centuries!

And when righteousness prevails, that is a good thing!

But when wickedness prevails, don’t worry – it cannot last!

- <sup>13</sup> *Even in laughter the heart may ache,  
and the end of joy may be grief.*
- <sup>14</sup> *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.*
- <sup>15</sup> *The simple believes everything,  
but the prudent gives thought to his steps.*

I will just give you the briefest of overviews of the second half of the chapter.

### **3. Wisdom in Community (v16-32)**

#### **a. When Fear Is Prudent (v16-18)**

- <sup>16</sup> *One who is wise is cautious<sup>[d]</sup> and turns away from evil,  
but a fool is reckless and careless.*
- <sup>17</sup> *A man of quick temper acts foolishly,  
and a man of evil devices is hated.*
- <sup>18</sup> *The simple inherit folly,  
but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.*

There are two sections – both of which begin with a reflection on *fear*,  
and then a discussion of communal wisdom.

Verses 16-18 connect the theme of wisdom and prudence with the Fear of the LORD.  
If you recall, verse 2 had opened the present chapter by reminding us  
that whoever walks in uprightness fears the LORD.”

Verse 16 now says that one who is wise *fears* and turns away from evil.  
I wish that the ESV had translated it that way,  
because “cautious” does not quite capture what the text is doing.  
Certainly the contrast would suggest caution:  
“but a fool is reckless and careless.”

But it is not mere *caution* that the proverb endorses.  
It is *fear*.

The wise man fears and turns away from evil (this word is often translated “disaster”).

But the man of quick temper acts foolishly, and a man of evil devices is hated...

The course of wisdom and prudence recognizes disaster and turns away from it!

Verses 19-25 then applies this to the neighborhood:

#### **b. Wisdom in the Neighborhood (v19-25)**

- <sup>19</sup> *The evil bow down before the good,  
the wicked at the gates of the righteous.*
- <sup>20</sup> *The poor is disliked even by his neighbor,  
but the rich has many friends.*
- <sup>21</sup> *Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner,  
but blessed is he who is generous to the poor.*
- <sup>22</sup> *Do they not go astray who devise evil?  
Those who devise good meet<sup>[e]</sup> steadfast love and faithfulness.*
- <sup>23</sup> *In all toil there is profit,  
but mere talk tends only to poverty.*
- <sup>24</sup> *The crown of the wise is their wealth,  
but the folly of fools brings folly.*
- <sup>25</sup> *A truthful witness saves lives,  
but one who breathes out lies is deceitful.*

These verses describe the path of wisdom in community.

Then verses 26-27 return to the theme of the fear of the LORD:

**c. The Fear of the LORD Is a Fountain of Life (v26-27)**

- <sup>26</sup> *In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence,  
and his children will have a refuge.*
- <sup>27</sup> *The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,  
that one may turn away from the snares of death.*

The way that seems right to a man leads to death.  
But the fear of the LORD is a fountain of life.

This provides a strong foundation for your home  
(his children will have a refuge) –  
and in a nation – as verses 28-35 show us:

**d. Wisdom in the Nation (v28-35)**

- <sup>28</sup> *In a multitude of people is the glory of a king,  
but without people a prince is ruined.*
- <sup>29</sup> *Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding,  
but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.*
- <sup>30</sup> *A tranquil<sup>[f]</sup> heart gives life to the flesh,  
but envy<sup>[g]</sup> makes the bones rot.*
- <sup>31</sup> *Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker,  
but he who is generous to the needy honors him.*
- <sup>32</sup> *The wicked is overthrown through his evildoing,  
but the righteous finds refuge in his death.*
- <sup>33</sup> *Wisdom rests in the heart of a man of understanding.*

*but it makes itself known even in the midst of fools.*<sup>[h]</sup>  
<sup>34</sup> *Righteousness exalts a nation,  
but sin is a reproach to any people.*  
<sup>35</sup> *A servant who deals wisely has the king's favor,  
but his wrath falls on one who acts shamefully.*

We'll have more chances later in Proverbs to talk about kings and rulers.  
(the word "king" is used 32 times in Proverbs – we have only encountered the first four!)

So for tonight we'll focus on the broader principle of wisdom in community,  
and stop with verse 33:

<sup>33</sup> *Wisdom rests in the heart of a man of understanding,  
but it makes itself known even in the midst of fools.*

Notice the difference:  
wisdom *rests* (settles – resides – reposes) in the heart of a man of understanding.

This is where wisdom belongs.

But wisdom makes *herself* known even in the midst of fools.  
Remember how Wisdom called in chapters 1-9 –  
calling the simple to come –  
warning the fools that if they refuse to repent,  
she will have nothing to do with them!

Do you want wisdom to make her home with you?  
Then leave the path of the mocker – leave the way of the simple –  
and come, walk with the wise –  
walk with Jesus  
and become wise.