



LIVING WISELY

Following God's wisdom leads to joy, while failing to do so leads to grief.

PROVERBS 14:8-15

Making a soufflé requires following the instructions precisely. The egg whites must be beaten until they hold soft peaks and look glossy. The eggs need to be at room temperature if you want them fluffy. Following the recipe exactly will lead to a great soufflé; failing to follow the recipe will lead to a messy kitchen and disappointed dinner guests. Something similar is true when it comes to God's wisdom. Solomon contrasted following God's wisdom with the foolishness of failing to do so.

Tell about a time when you failed to follow a recipe, and it ended in a kitchen disaster.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

PROVERBS 10:1–14:35

In Proverbs 14 Solomon used a literary device known as a *chiasmus*. This term refers to an arrangement of ideas that is then repeated in reverse order. The purpose behind this type of literary feature was for repetitive and comparative emphasis. Below is the chiasmic form of Proverbs 14:8-15.

- A: The prudent and the fools (v. 8)
- B: Making amends for sin (v. 9)
- C: Secrets of the heart (v. 10)
- D: Destruction of the wicked (v. 11)
- D: The way to death (v. 12)
- C: Secrets of the heart (v. 13)
- B: Being repaid for sin (v. 14)
- A: The simple and the prudent (v. 15)

Notice that Solomon began by comparing the prudent with the foolish (v. 8). He then addressed the subject of cause and effect in regard to the outcomes of foolish living as opposed to wise living (v. 9). In verse 10 Solomon wanted God's people to understand that wisdom is a matter of the heart. He then noted that foolishness always leads to destruction (v. 11). Then Solomon repeated these themes in reverse order so that God's people would understand the contrast between wise and foolish living.

In these verses Solomon put side by side two very distinct ways of thinking and living. His point was clear: the end of foolishness is destruction and the end of wisdom of godliness and peace.

Consider the stark contrasts Solomon highlighted between the wise and the foolish in Proverbs 14:8-15. How does the contrast give us a clearer view of the two paths?



EXPLORE THE TEXT

PRUDENT (PROV. 14:8,15)

⁸ **The sensible person's wisdom is to consider his way, but the stupidity of fools deceives them.**

¹⁵ **The inexperienced one believes anything, but the sensible one watches his steps.**

VERSE 8

Solomon contrasted the wise and the foolish, characterizing the wise as *sensible* and the foolish as gullible. Some translations use the word *prudent*. Solomon was urging God's people to be prudent in their thoughts and actions. The word *prudent* often conjures up notions of being a killjoy, unloving, and unconcerned. Too often it is wrongly used with a negative connotation. In reality, prudence involves thinking through an opportunity or a challenge carefully before drawing a conclusion and coming to a decision. A person who practices prudence would be referred to as *sensible*.

VERSE 15

In verse 15 Solomon contrasted the prudent with the foolish and gullible: *The inexperienced one believes anything, but the sensible one watches his steps*. People can easily be enticed by the next new, shiny thing that comes along.

DON'T BE GULLIBLE

- “The complacency of fools will destroy them” (Prov. 1:32).
- “Look, I’m sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves” (Matt. 10:16).
- “They deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting with smooth talk and flattering words” (Rom. 16:18).
- “Don’t be childish in your thinking, but be infants in regard to evil and adult in your thinking” (1 Cor. 14:20).

Solomon desired for God's people to consider their decisions and actions in light of the precepts and principles of God's Word.

He wanted them to avoid being open to ill-considered fads and false deities. Experience can be a great teacher if coupled with the wise counsel of God. But experience without God's wisdom can cause a person to be gullible and spiritually duped by the many allurements of the world. The wise person seeks to know, understand, and apply the knowledge of God to every life decision.

When you think about a sensible Christian, who comes to mind? How does that person's example help you to be prudent?

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Scriptures*

Scripture is the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried (Acts 17:11).

CONTENT (PROV. 14:9,14)

⁹ Fools mock at making reparation, but there is goodwill among the upright.

¹⁴ The disloyal one will get what his conduct deserves, and a good one, what his deeds deserve.

VERSE 9

Solomon contrasted *fools* who mock at *making reparation* with the *upright*. The Hebrew word rendered *making reparation* can have different nuances of meaning, but the primary usage is as a designation for the guilt or trespass offering (see Lev. 5:14–6:7; 7:1-10). The *upright* demonstrate a willingness to make a peace offering or to make reparation with others when needed. He referred to this posture of peace as *goodwill*.

Making reparation recalls Old Testament law, which was exceedingly clear regarding the need to make restitution for sin. For example, a man who cheated, stole, or lied had to make restitution to the individual who had been victimized by his sinful



actions. Further, he had to present a guilt or trespass offering to the priest. (See Lev. 6:1-7.) The amount of the restitution had been established in the law, and God's people had been instructed to regard the matter of restitution as something holy. (See Lev. 7:1.)

The contrast Solomon was making in verse 9 was actually the contrast between contentment and discontentment. Foolishness will lead to discontentment, but wise living leads to contentment. This was Paul's point in Philippians 4:10-14, where he spoke of being content in Christ. Paul insisted that contentment is something that can be learned and applied. Paul applied this contented knowledge of God in times when there was plenty and in times when he lacked even the basic necessities of life. In each and every circumstance he had learned to be content in the person of Jesus. Contentment in Him means that we can be content *in* our circumstances without being content *with* the circumstances. Paul was used of God to be an agent of change within undesirable circumstances.

VERSE 14

The Hebrew word translated *disloyal one* is related to the concept of backsliding. It suggests someone who begins as a follower of the Lord and then turns back. It is the person who takes steps on the path of God's wisdom but returns to a lifestyle guided by his own desires. He *will get what his conduct deserves*. On the other hand, *a good one* (a person who walks in God's wisdom) will get *what his deeds deserve*.

This is similar to what Paul said about sowing and reaping. (See Gal. 6:7-10.) The apostle wrote that true contentment is not only found in God, but there is a deep sense of peace that comes from a clear conscience. A clear conscience comes from avoiding what is sinful and embracing what is righteous. When a person's conscience is clear, that person can be at peace with God. In other words, contentment not only comes from being right with God but from being on the right side of wise decision-making. Living out God's wisdom brings the true reward of lasting contentment.

How does pursuing God's wisdom lead to contentment regardless of the circumstances?

JOYFUL (PROV. 14:10,13)

¹⁰ The heart knows its own bitterness, and no outsider shares in its joy.

¹³ Even in laughter a heart may be sad, and joy may end in grief.

VERSES 10,13

Because appearances can be deceiving, no one really knows what another person is feeling in his or her heart. Solomon declared that the person who appears to be happy may actually be bitter. We also know that laughter is not to be confused with joy. The Hebrew word translated *sad* can also mean “pain.” A person’s laughter can mask his pain. That’s why Solomon noted that *even in laughter a heart may be sad, and joy may end in grief.*

As believers, we don’t need to wear masks to conceal our pain and grief.

Pursuing godly wisdom results in joy—a genuine joy that comes from an intimate relationship with God. Such joy holds up under the trials of life. Consequently, as believers, we don’t need to wear masks to conceal our pain and grief. Instead, we can count on the joy that comes in our walk with God to sustain us even when our hearts ache. Grief awaits all of us, but our joy in Christ will hold us up in the times of grief.

The desire to be happy is common to all people. But how a person defines happiness makes all the difference in the world. Real, lasting joy comes from knowing and doing the will of God; it comes from being in the center of God’s purposes for one’s life even when that purpose may take a person through the valley of the shadow of death. (See Ps. 23:4.)

What if someone asked you about the joy that’s abiding in your heart? How would you describe it?



THRIVING (PROV. 14:11-12)

11 The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish. 12 There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death.

VERSE 11

Recall that in this section Solomon was using a literary device known as a *chiasmus*. (See p. 65.) When writers employed this literary device, 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 to develop it. The main point of this section in Proverbs, therefore, is in verses 11-12. Solomon pronounced judgment on those who ignore God's wisdom and blessing on those who follow God's wisdom.

God's people thrive even though it appears they have little according to worldly standards.

In verse 11 Solomon contrasted the path of the wicked with that of the righteous: ***The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish.*** Notice that the wicked have what seems to be a more permanent dwelling place—a *house*. The righteous, on the other hand, have only what appears to be a temporary dwelling place—a *tent*. Yet it is the wicked who *will be destroyed* while *the upright will flourish*. In other words, God's people thrive even though it appears they have little according to worldly standards.

VERSE 12

Again, in verse 12 Solomon makes a contrast. Godly wisdom and joy do not always line up with what the world thinks is wise or with how the world thinks true happiness is obtained.

Some people depend on their own ingenuity or shrewdness to guide them as they choose the way they want to live. They make decisions only on the basis of their opinions, ambitions, or prejudices. They ponder the options before them and make a decision that seems to them to be the right one. Then they set out on the path that seems to make sense to them. But when they set out on a path without being wise in the Lord, they may end up where they did not intend to go. Without the wisdom that comes

from God, they will not have the wisdom they need to make the best choices with their lives

What matters most is knowing and doing the will of God. At times following God’s will leads to days of peaceful tranquility. At other times knowing and doing the will of God can lead to great sacrifice and difficulty. But what matters is knowing and doing what is right by the Lord as revealed in His Word—not by what we think is right.

What is a “wrong way” someone you know is following? Where will that person end if he or she continues on that path? Pray now for that person.

BIBLE SKILL: *Dig deeper into the background and usage of key words or phrases.*

Reflect on Proverbs 14:12. Read Judges 1–2 and identify the number of times the Israelites ignored God’s direction and set out on their own path. Then read Judges 17:6 and 21:25. How do these verses give you deeper understanding into Solomon’s statement in Proverbs 14:12?



IN MY CONTEXT

- The wise person seeks to understand knowledge.
- Following God’s wisdom leads to contentment.
- God’s wisdom produces joy even when there is grief.
- God’s wisdom leads to His blessings.

As a group, make a list of the biblical criteria by which a believer can make wise and prudent decisions. How can you implement this criteria in your own life?

List the causes and cures for the lack of contentment and joy people may experience. With whom do you need to share the cures you identified?

What blessings have you experienced as a result of following God’s wisdom? How do these received blessings encourage you to continue to follow His wisdom?

Prayer Needs
