

Series: Making Life Work In A Screwed Up World

Sunday August 14, 2011

THE HARD WAY

Proverbs 15:5-7, 9-12, 14, 21, 32-33

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1. Has anyone here heard of the **Darwin Awards**? It's an actual organization that documents the stupid things people do that prove the concept of **natural selection!** That is—dumb people do dumb things that permanently remove their DNA from the human race. Let me give you an example. Dave of Anniston, Alabama, is a member. He apparently replaced a fuse in his Chevy pickup with a .22 rifle bullet--until the electricity ignited the bullet and shot him in the kneecap as he was driving.

-Larry Walters, who a truck-driver from Los Angeles is one of the most renowned members. The police said Walters went to his girlfriend's house in San Pedro inflated 45 six-foot-tall weather balloons with helium and attached them to an aluminum lawn chair tethered to the ground. Friday morning, with half a dozen friends holding the tethers, Walters donned a parachute, strapped himself into the chair and had his friends let him up slowly.

-Minutes later he was calling for help on the CB radio he had with him. He was getting numb from the cold. No wonder. He was spotted by two airline pilots on approach to LAX who told the control tower that they had spotted a man in a chaise lounge at 16,000 feet!

-Fortunately, Larry had packed a BB pistol—and shot out several balloons before it fell overboard. He slowly drifted back down where his ropes got tangled in a power line with his lawn chair dangling 5 feet above the ground. He was immediately arrested, fined \$1500 by the FAA, and won the Bonehead of the Year award from a local club. When he was asked, **Why?**, Lawnchair Larry said, "A man **can't** just sit around!"

-Is there anyone here who has **never** played the fool? I have. One time I...no, I'm not going to tell you! I might sabotage everything else I say! But there is a difference between doing foolish things—and being a fool. **Fools**, by definition, do life the hard way. Proverbs says:

**Simpletons only learn the hard way, but the wise learn by listening.
(Proverbs 21:11 MSG)**

It's a school of hard knocks for those who leave God's path, a dead-end street for those who hate God's rules. (Proverbs 15:10 MSG)

This morning, I would like to look at what the ultimate book of wisdom, Proverbs, says about fools. You may be surprised. I was.

2. We know that most of Proverbs was written by Solomon, King of Israel. Bible experts think that the book was intended as a kind of manual for boys being groomed for leadership.
- a. Boys, especially, are risk-takers who will do incredibly dumb things to impress their friends. Actually, that fits one of the ways the Proverbs defines a fool; someone who's just inexperienced. Green. Wet behind the ears. You see this reflected in the first words of the book:

A manual for living, for learning what's right and just and fair. To teach the *inexperienced* the ropes and give our young people a grasp on reality. (Proverbs 1:4-5 MSG)

-We all pass through a phase of life where we're too naïve to know how much danger we're in. I've often said that the main job of the parent of a toddler is to keep them from living the death wish they seem to have. They stick forks in wall sockets, eat poison, and stuff erasers up their noses. It's inexperience. We've all been there, right?

- b. But Proverbs defines "fool" a second way.

Start with God--the first step in learning is bowing down to God; only FOOLS thumb their noses at such wisdom and learning. (Proverbs 1:7 MSG)

-Know what the common ingredient is in all of the definitions of a fool found in these proverbs? It's a person who, by definition, is unteachable. They stubbornly refuse to listen to anyone -if you think I'm exaggerating—listen to some of these proverbs.

Fools are headstrong and do what they like; wise people take advice. (Proverbs 12:15 MSG)

Know-it-alls don't like being told what to do; they avoid the company of wise men and women. (Proverbs 15:12 MSG)

- c. Now, let me ask you. If a person won't learn from their *own* mistakes—or listen to people who love them—what's left? We call it, the SCHOOL OF...? **HARD KNOCKS. Two by Four university.**

-Anyone here been to this school? Anyone who's graduated—got your doctorate? Truth is—most of us, in our teens, attend, right? People tried to help us—tell us about life in the real world—about jobs, cars, responsibility, money. We *acted* interested—but were thinking, "I don't need anyone telling me what to do. I need to experience it *myself!*" Translated? "Bring on the *pain!*"

- d. Some people attend classes there—and pass, move on. Some just keep flunking! You may have one in your life. There are people who have been to

jail multiple times—and **still** think crime is a decent way to make a living. There are people whose hearts are a mass of scar tissue—and **still** think picking people up in bars and sleeping with them is a way to find a meaningful relationship. Some people have had 30 different jobs—and **still** blame their unemployment on the jerks they had to work for. People burn down through friendships, money, cars, their health—and they **just keep flunking classes!**

-Anyone remember the definition of insanity? It's doing **the same things over and over again, but expecting different results.** It's crazy. It's destructive. Proverbs says, "That's what **fools** do!"

3. Let's read the passage again about where **wisdom** starts—and what **fools** do with it.

Start with God--the first step in learning is bowing down to God; only FOOLS thumb their noses at such wisdom and learning. (Proverbs 1:7 MSG)

-We live in a world that **seriously** doubts that you need to start with God—and bow to Him. Looking back over my own life, I've always **said** I believed in starting with and bowing to God—but I haven't always **done** that. And when I haven't, I've played the fool. And so have you!

-You may have heard me compare God's wisdom, particularly in the **10 Commandments--to guardrails.** Anyone here ever hit a guardrail? It's not fun—but it's better than the alternative. Guardrails once kept me from going over a 50 foot embankment. Almost exactly 14 years ago—August 31, 1997—Princess Diana was killed in an awful auto accident in Paris where the car she was in slammed into a pylon in the tunnel at a high rate of speed. In one of the interviews that followed, a safety expert said that **guardrails** in the tunnel would've likely saved her life.

-God is not some kind of giant joy killer in the sky—trying to ruin everyone's fun. He gives us information on **the way things are** to save our lives and keep us from excruciating pain.

...Only fools thumb their noses at such wisdom and learning (Proverbs 1:7b MSG)

-Sometimes it helps to have some specific descriptions of what foolishness looks like. Proverbs—a **very** practical book—gives us that perspective. A fool is someone who ignores **practical** wisdom—mostly because they're too proud or stubborn to listen. (Friends, Foes, and Fools; p. 148-149)

- a. **Fools care nothing for thoughtful discourse; all they do is run off at the mouth (Proverbs 18:2 MSG)**

A fool is someone who loves to hear himself talk--and forces everyone else to do the same.

- b. **Fools have short fuses and explode all too quickly; the prudent quietly shrug off insults (Proverbs 12:16 MSG)**

A fool is someone who just can't hear an insult—and resist the urge blast others with their mouths; they **have** to throw the last knife!

c. **Fools are headstrong and do what they want. (Proverbs 12:15a MSG)**

Fools are know it alls—virtually unteachable. A fool is often wrong, but never in doubt.

d. **The stupid ridicule right and wrong, but a moral life is a favoured life. (Proverbs 14:9 MSG)**

A fool is someone who loves what's wrong—and hates what's right. They think obedience is for losers and wimps.

e. **A fool lets it all hang out; a sage quietly mulls it over. (Proverbs 29:11 MSG)**

To put it crassly—a fool is an impulsive talker—whatever drops into their head falls out of their mouths.

f. **Exploit or abuse your family and end up with a fistful of air; common sense tells you it's a stupid way to live. (Proverbs 11:29 MSG)**

A fool is a ladder climber who puts achievement, money, and stuff ahead of the happiness and well-being of his or her family.

g. **It's a mark of good character to avert quarrels, but fools love to pick fights. (Proverbs 20:3 MSG)**

A divisive person who loves to start arguments and hates to stop them is a fool. The main goal in life is to be **right**—even if it costs them their job, their friends, or their family.

h. **Valuables are safe in a wise person's home; fools put it all out for yard sales. (Proverbs 21:20 MSG)**

A fool is someone who blows money faster than he can earn it, saves nothing, and gives even less to God and others. A fool knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

i. **Liars secretly hoard hatred; fools openly spread slander. (Proverbs 10:18 MSG)**

The fool is the gossiping big mouth who spreads slander, lies, and half-truths. They inevitably use their mouth to dig a graves most of their friendships.

j. This ones a little gross—but, then, Proverbs is not for the squeamish.

**As a dog eats its own vomit, so fools recycle silliness.
(Proverbs 26:11 MSG)**

Remember the law of the harvest the Bible talks about? You harvest what you plant? A fool keeps *planting* stupidity—and guess who gets blamed when they harvest pain?

People ruin their lives by their own foolishness and then are angry at the Lord. (Proverbs 19:3 MSG)

4. Proverbs say a lot about the fact that if you want to play the fool—as it defines the fool—you have chosen a tough life. You may impress your friends—for a while, anyway. You may *think* you're just being a free spirit—but what you've actually chosen is pain; pain that will ultimately drive people *away* from you. Listen to these proverbs:

A prudent person sees trouble coming and ducks; a simpleton walks in blindly and is clobbered. (Proverbs 22:3 MSG)

For people who hate discipline and only get more stubborn, there'll come a time when life tumbles in and they break, but by then it'll be too late to help them. (Proverbs 29:1-2 MSG)

-Know what the problem with foolishness is? People who play the fool are sometimes *very* intelligent—and extremely talented. The problem is that they see themselves as superior to others; that they really don't need to listen to people who don't seem as intelligent as they see themselves. To some extent, they're unteachable by *choice*.

-If we won't listen to people who genuinely care—and a God who loves us—what's the only choice left? Well, all that's left is **the hard way**. When you won't listen to reason—pain becomes the instructor. Believe me, the pain of blowing up a marriage or bankrupting the family or getting publicly humiliated or losing a job isn't worth it! But when we refuse to listen to a God who *warns* us about pain—what's left if we refuse to listen?

-And if we have someone in our lives who is playing the fool—their pain seeps over into our lives. And the Bible has some interesting things to say about how to deal with them.

- a. The first thing Proverbs says about fools is, **Try not to raise one!**

Intelligent children listen to their parents; foolish children do their own thing. (Proverbs 13:1 MSG)

Having a fool for a child is misery; it's no fun being the parent of a dolt. (Proverbs 17:21 MSG)

-Proverbs says that foolishness comes naturally to kids because of their inexperience. The best we can do in terms of helping them to make wise choices—is to let them taste the pain of *bad* choices. Kids need love and limits.

Proverbs says that parents who just let their kids go without any discipline **hate** their children. Strong word—but what it's saying is that trying to be their buddy and not their parent is to set up them up for a painful life—and the pain will leach over into **your** life! There's a lot of weird advice out there on child-rearing--so be careful who you're listening to.

-One key issue that gets raised again and again in Proverbs is the **teachability factor**. According to this book, one of the key roles of a parent is to teach their children how to live responsibly—and to reinforce that teaching as necessary.

-See, the key question is—if our children won't learn to listen to and obey us—where **will** they learn that? At school? In boot camp? From the police? From 2X4 university? Remember what Proverbs says: **Having a fool for a child is misery.**

- b. The second principle you see in Proverbs on dealing with fools is this: **Don't hang around with them or get in their way.** Proverbs is real specific about this one.

Become wise by walking with the wise; hang out with fools and watch your life fall to pieces. (Proverbs 13:20 MSG)

-There are two simple reasons for this. First, God wants to get through to them and one of his key learning curves is loneliness. Remember the story about the Prodigal Son that Jesus told? He didn't come to his senses and start for home until he found himself all alone standing knee-deep in used pig feed—with **lots** of time to think.

-Secondly, God wants to spare **you** some heartache. Read these verses about fools. Ask anyone who's tagged along with a fool for a number of years--"So, did you have fun?" My guess is—they didn't. Proverbs says:

Carrying a log across your shoulders while you're hefting a boulder with your arms is nothing compared to the burden of putting up with a fool (Proverbs 27:3 MSG)

- c. The third principle in dealing with fools; If you value something, don't entrust it into the hands of a one. Again, Proverbs is real specific on this one.

Valuables are safe in a wise person's home; fools put it all out for yard sales. (Proverbs 21:20 MSG)

-Don't do business with them, trust them with your reputation, hire them, or let them watch your kids. Why? They have not sense of what's valuable or important. Fools, people who learn the **hard** way, have a broken sense of what's valuable and what's important—and what's not.

- d. Fourth, don't try to win an argument with a fool. Think about it. If a person is unreasonable—and won't **learn** from reason—why would you try to convince them by reason? See, a fool doesn't value wisdom. Even **Jesus** said: "Don't

throw your pearls to pigs; they'll trample on them and then turn on you and tear you to pieces." Proverbs says puts it like this:

Escape quickly from the company of fools; they're a waste of your time, a waste of your words. The wisdom of the wise keeps life on track; the foolishness of fools lands them in the ditch. (Proverbs 14:7-8 MSG)

- e. Fifth—don't marry one! People say things like, "I'm in love! I can't help myself!" You'd **better** help yourself—because you could end up in a **lot** of pain!
5. There's one more thing that is **very** important to know when it comes to fools. Foolishness is not always easy to spot—even in our own lives. A guy like Larry Walters flying a lawnchair to 16,000 feet with helium balloons—well, that sticks out, doesn't it? People see that and think, "What a bean-eater!" But there are things in our own lives that we're just too close to see. Things we don't **want** to see!

-The fact is that you and I will run into fools, maybe hire one, or set one off by being in the wrong place at the wrong time. We may even raise one. But that's not our greatest danger. The greatest danger is that we may play the fool—while the world system we live in treats us like we're brilliant and successful!

-There's an account in the Bible about a rich man with a fertile farm—a man who ran out of storage room for his own success. It's a story deftly told in a few verses by Jesus--a master storyteller. It's about someone people in his world—and ours—would envy. But the ending is a shocker! John Ortberg, a guy whose writing and speaking I really admire, retells this story in a way I think we can all relate to. I **know** I've read this before—but, I want to read it again this morning.

-Jesus' story is about a busy guy who was committed to his work. Who was willing to do whatever it would take to succeed--and it would take everything. He's a busy guy. So he finds himself consumed by his work in the agri-business--working 12-14 hour days. Works weekends. Joins professional. organizations and boards of directors to expand his contacts.

- a. And even when he's not working, he finds his mind drifting toward work, so that work becomes not just his occupation, but his preoccupation. His wife often tries to slow him down. Reminds him that he has a family. And he's vaguely aware that his kids are growing up.

-And at times they complain about books they want him to read, games of catch they want him to play. But eventually after enough books not read and games of catch not played, they stop complaining because they stop expecting. And he says to himself that he will become more available to the important people of his life in 6 months or so "when things settle down." It's one of his favourite phrases, "when things settle down."

- b. And although he's a very bright guy, this man in Jesus' story, he doesn't seem to notice that things never settle down. "Anyway," he says to himself when he's feeling guilty, "I'm doing it all for them."

-He woke up once at 1 AM in the morning and feels this twinge in his chest. His wife calls the hospital and makes an appointment. The doctors tell him he's had a slight heart attack--and warn him that he's got to make some changes in his life.

-And for a while, he does--diet, working out, bio-feedback. But when he feels better, he goes back to the old ways. He says, "I'll get around to it....When things settle down."

-He recognizes that his life is out of balance. His wife urges him to go to church regularly with her, but when Sunday morning rolls around, that's the only day during the week when he can crash. He says, "Besides, I can believe without the church. And there will be time for that...when things settle down. When things settle down a little."

- c. One day the comptroller of his company comes to him and says, "You're not going to believe this, but business is booming to such an extent that we can barely keep up with it. It's like a miracle. We're about to strike the mother lode. If we can stay on top of this wave, we'll be set for life.

-But it's gonna take major changes. We've got inventory headaches like you wouldn't believe. Demand is outstripping supply, and our software is outdated, and if we don't overhaul this whole company from top to bottom, it's going to be a disaster.

-From that moment on, this guy is a man consumed. Every waking moment is eaten up by this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Then it hit him. He could put the company through a technological revolution. 24 hour a day service availability to all the clients--completely rebuild the company.

- d. That night, he goes home to his wife and he's all excited. And he says, "You know what this means, don't you? After I get through this project, we can relax. Our future will be assured. We'll be set for life. Because," he says to her, "I know the market. I've covered every base, anticipated ever contingency. We will finally have financial security. Be able to take the vacations you've always wanted."

-But she'd already heard that song before. She's learned not to get her hopes up. About 11 PM that night, she said, "I'm going to go up to bed. Do you want to come up with me?" He said, "I'll be there in a few minutes. I got a little more work I want to do, but I'll be there in a few minutes."

-About 3 in the morning, she wakes up and she's alone in bed. She says, "This is ridiculous." She goes down to drag him up, and he's still there sitting in front of his terminal, his head resting on the table. She says, "This is like being married to a child. He'd rather fall asleep down here than come up and go to bed."

-She touches him on the shoulder to wake him up, but he doesn't respond. His skin is cold to her touch. When the paramedics arrive, they tell her that he's had a massive heart attack and he's been dead for hours.

- e. His death is a major story in the financial community. His obituary is written up in the Business Weekly, Forbes, and the Wall Street Journal. It's too bad he's dead, because he would've loved to have read what they wrote about him.

-And then they had this amazing memorial service for him. Because of his prominence, the whole community came to it. They all file past his casket and they all make the same stupid comment that people always make at funerals, "He looks so peaceful." Rigor mortis will do that to a person.

-People get up to eulogize him at this service and say wonderful things.

*"He was one of the leading innovators of his day."

*"He was one of the leading men in technology and delivery systems."

*"He was a man of principle! He was a straight arrow guy. He would never cheat on his taxes, his expense account or his wife."

-And then they all got together and they had a memorial constructed for him. And they wrote inspiring words on it--words chosen to memorialize his life. "Entrepreneur. Innovator. Leader. Visionary. Pillar. Success." So they buried him, and they put up the memorial. Then they all went home.

- f. When it was dark and there was no one around to observe, the angel of God came--unseen, unheard--to this cemetery. He walked through all the graves to the grave of this man, and then traced the single word that God chose to summarize the meaning of this man's life.

-You know what the word was? **FOOL!** "YOU FOOL!" God said. For all of this man's entrepreneurial acumen, his ability to run cost-benefit analyses, and cash-flow projections, there's one scenario he'd forgotten account for in his scenario. Do you know what it was? It was death.

-This man neglected to plan for the most obvious fact of human existence. "So, what other word besides FOOL," Jesus asks, "can you use to describe behaviour as irrational as that?"

Q & A

6. No one wants to play the fool. Playing the fool in life is dangerous. It causes accidents, alienates friends, earns you the nickname, Jerk. It steals your money, your time, your freedom. And it's **painful!** **MAN** is it painful!

-But there is one place where playing the fool is devastating--and that is when it comes to the things of eternity. There comes a time in **everyone's** history, friends, when **reality** will be clear—and **foolishness** will be blatantly obvious. That is where people who have lived for the temporary will be struck with what they have missed. That is where God's wisdom will be seen for its beauty, purity, wisdom and truth.

-But we aren't there yet, and God calls to those who will listen. God says, "There is a part to life that you don't see. There is a part that you will have to trust me with if you're going to live well and have a future!"

-See, God is able to work with fools like me--bound and determined to go our own way—do stupid things--even if we die in the process. But when we bow our knee to Him--He gives us life; He gives us eternity; He gives us perspective--so we don't play the fool. God has told us not to hang around with fools--but this is one place where He doesn't practice what He preaches. He does. And if they'll listen--if we'll listen, He'll make us wise.

-It's possible this morning that you're doing life the hard way—or you've got someone in your life who is. Life is *painful*. If it's you—*the hard way* is wasting the most valuable thing you have...your life! And you are hurting—driving away—the people who love you most. Proverbs says that the first sign of wisdom—is to bow your knee to the One who gave you life.