

Proverbs 12

Sunday 9/13/2015

If you have your Bibles today, I want to invite you to turn again to Proverbs 12. One of the things I love about the Bible and God is the fact that when God gets something that He really wants to make a point on, He just keeps hammering it. That is true in much of the Bible, but you really see it in Proverbs.

It is a lot like us. We get a pet peeve about something, and that is all we want to talk about. When God has something that is important to Him, He just keeps hammering it every way He can. We have seen in Proverbs 12, and we will see again today, that this chapter is dealing with what comes out of our mouth based on our attitude of heart. I do not know of anything that is more important to get control over than your mouth. Of course, the key to controlling your mouth is getting control of your heart or giving God control of your heart.

I have taught you that in dealing with people, dealing with life and circumstances, we learn a great principle. That great principle is basically attitude versus action. We have talked about it many, many times. The attitude we develop about something will always produce the action. If we develop the wrong attitude about something based on bad information or wrong information, or something that somebody gave us that is totally erroneous and totally not true, and we take that and build our attitude on it, then we will have an action based on that attitude.

A lot of people will hear somebody say about someone that they do not like, and they will say all kinds of things that are maybe not true or weighted one way to make them look bad. That person will take what that person says and they will develop the same attitude toward that person. So, attitudes we develop will always produce an action, whether it be good or whether it be bad.

Out of that attitude comes what we say. In the book of Proverbs, our theme has been, at least one of them, but the main theme has been a wise man. We have talked about the good fruit that comes forth from his mouth and the satisfying effect that it has on us and the people that we give it to. That is based on him developing the right attitude and then getting the right action that comes out of it based on his attitude of heart.

The book of Proverbs, and throughout the whole Bible too, talks about a foolish man, one who transgresses with his lips. We talked about the word transgression last week. It means to move beyond the principle, to literally run it over and pay no attention to it. Here, the man has the wrong attitude, so we see the wrong action based on his wrong attitude of heart. This is what a foolish man does. He completely forsakes the Bible principles with absolutely no regard for its truth or its impact on what it is going to do to him or what it may do to anybody else.

Today, we are going to be right back where we were last week with just a little different twist on it, but God is hammering home a great point in verses 15 and 16. We are just taking it a little step further. Let us read it.

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.

A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame.

Let us pray. Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus, and we do love You today. We thank You for all the good things that You do for us. We thank You for the great people that You put into our church. We thank You for the Word of God that You provided for us, and Lord, so many people here love it and love You and just want to be everything that You want them to be. We thank You, Father, for our time this morning. Lord, we thank You that You will take the Word of God and touch our hearts and touch our lives, and we will give You all the honor and the glory and praise in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

I. Understanding Fools And Wise Men

Today, we are going to look at two really practical verses. As you go through these proverbs and as you go through life, I am sure as we have talked about a wise man and a foolish man, all of us, probably if we take anything to heart, we could all look at our life, people we associate with, people that we know, and we all can put people into these categories of, "Yeah, I know a guy like that," or "Yeah, I know a guy that is like that," or "a gal like that."

You see how Proverbs really lays out the way people are and shows you, and shows us, why they are the way they are. It is not enough in understanding people just to label them as a fool or wise, but the real key is understanding why they got to be wise or a fool.

I have said many times, no other book in the Bible does what Proverbs does on such a continual basis. It reveals who we really are by what we say and what we do. No other book in the Bible, though the Bible does it as a whole, but you talk about Proverbs defining us, because the theme of Proverbs is you are either going to come out a wise man or you are going to come out a foolish man.

Verse 15 starts off by saying this: "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes." We know that doctrinally, just so we keep it all straight here, this fool will be the people who follow the Antichrist in the tribulation period, most generally the nation of Israel. We found in Matthew 25 that the nation of Israel is split into a segment of ten, and five virgins were wise and five were foolish. That is Israel, and that goes right along with Proverbs.

In the Old Testament, you see scores of examples of this that happens to Israel in its historical perspective. When you think about the book of Judges, the book of Judges is a time where the Bible tells that Israel is pretty much run by fools. The theme of the book of Judges is that there is no king in Israel and every man is doing what is right in his own eyes. That is what the verse said, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes." You see it all the way through Judges. It has not changed much. It gets better for a little while under David, but then after Solomon's demise, from Solomon up to 2 Chronicles 36, we see it coming up again, all the fools that are on the throne, right up to the deportation and the captivity of the nation of Israel. So, we know that doctrinally it is dealing with the tribulation, but historically it is dealing with Israel's history.

In Romans 10:1-4, Paul uses a great illustration and gives us a great verse that really shows us not only Israel, but really sets a pattern for every fool. Paul is talking about his tremendous burden for the nation of Israel for them to be saved and to trust Christ.

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

That is a perfect picture of Israel as a fool. We are looking at it in Proverbs from a historical standpoint and a doctrinal standpoint. Israel is a self-righteous fool who has forsaken the righteousness of God and went on to establish their own self-righteousness and the mess that it has got them in. The time frame for all of this will basically be Kings and Chronicles in a large segment of the Old Testament from Solomon to Zedekiah.

You will also see this in people today. I have told you many, many times, we have talked about it many, many times, about the parallels between the nation of Israel and Christianity. You see these exact same principles coming into Christianity. You will also see it coming into the world. In the ministry, you will deal with it all the time.

In my life in the ministry of 40 plus years, I have had tens of thousands of people that have had the opportunity to do what is right. We think about our little world here and what we do here. My life spans back in preaching and teaching and working with people for 40-some years. During that period of time, I can tell you there have been tens of thousands of people who heard the preaching of the Word of God or came to a Bible study, and they had the opportunity, thousands of them, to do right in their lives, and most would not do it.

I have told you many times that in dealing with people, you want to learn the patterns that people follow. It is not complicated. Somebody says, "Well, I want to really work with people." It is one of the things we do in the people ministry. We basically started at the beginning of the Bible and I started laying out every pattern that is in the Bible of how people and why people do what they do. If you really want to learn people, then you have got to learn the patterns of human nature. It is not very complicated, but it takes some time to get them down, and this will be the key. The Bible lays out all the character traits of every person on this planet. Everybody may be different: tall, different ethnic group, short, heavy, slim, whatever. But the bottom line is they all follow the same patterns.

Dealing with people is not all that different from really going hunting. Most of you guys that know hunting, deer season is coming up in the fall here, and you guys are going next week, are you not? Going bow hunting, right? These guys are young guys and they like to get out there and hunt. We have got some seasoned hunters here, so they know what I am talking about. When you go out to hunt deer or turkey season is coming in here in probably a month or so, you do not just walk out in the woods and yell, "Hey, turkeys!" That is not what you do. If you want to get a bird or you want to get a deer, you have got to spend some time learning their habitat. You have got to follow their patterns.

If you go deer hunting, you will get out there long before the season and you will see where they have rubbed their antlers on the trees and the scrapings on it. I guess their head itches, I do not know, but they do that. You study their patterns, where they are, at what time of the year. When you go turkey hunting, you do not hunt turkeys in the spring like you do in the fall. In the springtime, you shoot the gobblers. In the falltime, you are allowed to shoot the hen. They have different patterns.

One of the things guys will do is go out there and the turkeys will get in the woods and they will want acorns or something. They will scratch a circle. So, you walk through the woods long before turkey season and you say, "There are turkeys all around here because look at the scratchings." If you want to find out where, if you are in the springtime and you want to shoot a gobbler, that is a male, or in the fall and you do not care and you want to shoot a hen, you will pay attention to turkey droppings. There is a difference. You can tell the difference between a male turkey and a female turkey by their droppings. There is a difference between the two. When you see that one, you know it is males are around here. When you see this one, you see, "No, it is females are around here." You have got to learn their patterns and you have got to learn where they are at. You have got to learn whether you go in the morning or you go in a late afternoon, or why you do not go in the afternoon. All of those things are very important. They are patterns. When you do that, you are probably going to get one. If you just walk in the woods and say, "Well, I am out here to hunt a turkey. I am out here to get a deer," and walk through the woods, you know what? You are not going to see anything.

A study of human nature is just like that. It is absolutely necessary to find out the patterns of people that you learn to work with, then based on their patterns, find out where they are at in the woods of life and the struggles that they have.

II. The Three Patterns Of A Fool

For a fool, this is basically today going to be a class on understanding fools 101. It takes you right back to the basic. For a fool, there will be just three basic fundamental patterns that you will want to look for. It is not complicated. Everything else will go back to these three that you see. Fools come in two flavors: you will find people who are saved that are fools, and you will find people who are unsaved that are fools.

When you find these three in a person's life, you know that what you are dealing with, there is no question about it. You are going to find out in dealing with people that there are people that come into your world and come into your life that you are not going to be able to help. There are going to be people that when they come in, I know because I know patterns, that before I ever do anything with them, I can tell you with almost a 99% accuracy, they are not going to make it. They are just not.

That sounds harsh, but in life, a lot of reality is harsh. Some people have a tough time with saying things like that, but I did not say you did not help them. I did not say you do not do everything in your power and give them the very best to help them. But what I am saying is, and what most people do not realize through lack of experience, there are some patterns you put in

your life. You do not break them after a while. I have seen people that wanted to do right and came to church and wanted to do this, and they never make it. They cannot stay with it. They keep failing, and they will fail all of their life, no matter who you put with them. You can put a thousand people around them, and they will fail every time because there are some patterns that are very hard to break. You give yourself over to them, and you do not break them. They break you, but you do not break them. So, there are things that you learn.

Let us look at these three areas here.

1. Self-Righteousness The first one will be, and this is what you want to look for, is what we have talked about so far with Israel, and that will be self-righteousness. You want to remember this: self-righteousness is the first and primary way of a fool. It always will be. The root of self-righteousness is pride, which leads to arrogance. It will produce what our verse says in Proverbs 12:15, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes." With Christians who are fools, they will replace the clear principles of God with their own version of it that keeps God out and leaves them in charge of any situation. Yet they will claim all the time how much they love God and what God is doing for them. When you understand the principles, you realize that that is not how God works. We see it in unsaved people justifying their lives in no need of salvation. We have all dealt with them here all the time. You try to win somebody to Christ and tell them that Christ died for them, and what do you get back? "Well, I have never killed anybody." "Well, I am not as bad as so-and-so." I had a lady one time I tried to win to Christ, and she went through her whole family, telling me why she was better. She laid out every dirty detail about her uncle, her dad, her mom, her sisters, her brothers. She just could never get to the place that she was a sinner because she was better than all of them. I have heard them say, "Well, I worship God my own way. You do not have to go to church to be a Christian." I understand that, but you need to go to church to be a good Christian. I have a friend of mine in Ohio, I go to breakfast with him. I love him to death. He goes all the way back to my early years when I worked at the Hoover Company. He was my supervisor, and I love him very much, but he is lost as can be. Every time I go to Ohio, we spend the morning together and we go to breakfast together, and he just loves me and I love him very much. I have witnessed to him, and I will tell you what. His answer is the fact, and he is one of the nicest guys on the planet. His answer is, "You know, Bob, I can be out in the woods or I can be out fishing and be just as close to God as you can in church on Sunday morning." That may be true, but that does not get you to heaven. That is man's self-righteousness, trying to come to the point that my righteousness is as good as God's Son's righteousness. Can you imagine how that must sound to God, who sent His Son down and watched Him agonize on the cross and die on the cross, and He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" God turned His back on Him and let all the world and the devil tear Him apart and cast Him in hell for three hours to pay for the sin debt of the whole world. Then we said, "Now, if you take My Son's righteousness, after all that He did, I will save you." And some pipsqueak looking at God and saying, "Well, you know what, God, my own righteousness is as good as Your Son's." That great white throne is going to be a barn burner. Yet you are going to be the barn. He substitutes the righteousness of God with his own righteousness. After 30 or 40 years, that is tough to change. We all have seen them, fools that

are experts in everything. No matter what you talk about, what subject, there is somebody who does it better than everybody else. "I am the best hunter." "Well, I got four fish down here." "Oh, I caught a lot more fish than you. I am a great fisherman." "I am the best singer." "Oh, she was really good." "Oh yeah, I sing that song a lot better than that." "We had a guy here one time, and some of you remember this kid. He fancied himself being a cook. They had us up to dinner one night when we first started coming to church. They did not last very long, but they brought us up there, and I am glad by the way he cooked anyway. But he brought us up there, and all I heard all night long was the fact that he was the greatest cook in the world. He told me, and I think he told you too, John, because John tried to disciple him, but he never could get past the self-righteousness, could he, John? He was the best cook on the planet. He told me, "Now, you can tell me a lot of things and I will believe it, but I was in the army." He told me that when he was in basic training, they came and pulled him out of basic to go cook for the President of the United States. I know one thing, if he cooked that chicken cordon bleu we had that night, whatever it was, that is some rough stuff, boy. You know it is bad when I have to stop at a Taco Bell afterward to get something to eat, Burger King a little more down the road to take care of that, and an ice cream to smooth it all on top. I have seen them where we are in a conversation and you talk about what you are doing, and they bust right into your conversation and they will start just taking over the conversation and start telling you how good they have done that. That was not your point. You were just laying out what you did, but they just cannot stand for you to not know that they are the best at what they do. You also see it with God's people, saved people, Christians. Some of the most self-righteous people I ever met were people that, in my opinion, were saved and on their way to heaven. You see it in pastors, you see it in deacons and trustees and finance committee members, especially in those old dead Baptist churches that have been in existence for a thousand years. Nobody ever comes. It is a bunch of old people. It looks like a dinosaur graveyard on Sunday morning. But these guys have been entrenched in power in those churches forever. Their attitude is complete superiority over everything. I remember as a kid back at the Canton Baptist Temple, I was just a little guy and I was goofy. Okay, I get that. But there was a deacon there that did not like me from whenever. I do not know why. But I remember as a little kid that had this long hallway, and I walked over there, and I am a goofy kid, and I turned a light switch on and off. I shut down the lights in the whole corridor and I turned them off. I thought that was a big deal. Cool, man. Turn them back on again. Then I decided I will leave them off. I turned around and there was Marshall Bennett, the deacon. He had been a deacon since the Civil War. He grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and he said, "You know what? You just burned up your whole little offering today that you put into church by turning off that light, turning off that switch." I was pretty stupid. I was not even being smart, but I was just, I said I was too honest a moment ago. I looked up and said, "Well, sir, I did not put anything in there." Oh, crazy, man. They will always live by two sets of rules: one for you and one for themselves. They will exclude themselves from the same rules that they want to have you to follow and then make up their own rules for themselves. Honestly, many times this is why people turn off and do not want to go to church. I get it. I understand it. Basically, they live a life of absolute denial for 30, 40 years, and it gets you in time. Your whole life becomes a sham based on who you think you are, who you are really

not. The older I get, the less I want to hide valuable things when I go on a trip. We always put things in places where if somebody breaks in the house while you are not there, they will not find it. I hate doing that because I forget where I put them. I am terrible with passwords. I am terrible with key codes. I call AT&T to get some work done on my cell phone. They ask me for my password. I do not know. "Can you give me a hint?" They made it real easy for me because they will let you pick a key thing like the street you lived on when you were growing up or your dog's first name. I forgot that. The older I get, I cannot remember where I put the good stuff that I did not want somebody to steal. In a spiritual sense, the more you forsake the Bible, the good stuff, you will come to a place in your life where you cannot find the good stuff anymore. You cannot remember where you put it. You forsook it. You built your whole life on self-righteousness, and now there comes a time in your life when you really need the good stuff, but you cannot remember where you put it. If you all get a safe, the safest place you have is by the Word of God in your heart that you might not sin against Him. That would be a good place to start.

2. Self-Serving The second characteristic will be they are self-serving. Life and everything in life will be about them. They will love things more than they love the things of God, things for them, things that they think make them happy. 2 Timothy 3:2 talks about these folks when it says they are "lovers of their own selves." I knew a guy one time that everybody that was his friend was afraid he would never get married because we would never find anybody that loved him as much as he did. I have seen it where you get to that point in your life that it is all about you. In many times, not every case, but in a lot of cases, they will always have some drama going on. You know what I am talking about? There will always be some drama going on in their life. Every time you see them, some drama that casts them into the spotlight, some drama that is going on that gives them the center of attention. When they do not have real drama, they make drama up. In ministry, let me change gears here for a minute. In ministry, this is the danger of what we call mega churches today. This is why, based on the Bible, a church probably, based on the Word of God, should never get past about 400, 500 people. You say, "How do you accomplish that?" Oh, that is easy. You just preach the book, and that will keep everything in check. But when you do hit 400 or 500, then the church is ready to split off and reproduce itself. That is the model in the Bible. In modern church history, in modern times, from the 1950s on, no mega church ever survived. I grew up in the era of the big churches. Akron Baptist Temple ran 10,000 on Sunday morning. Jack Hyles over there in Indiana, he ran 20,000 in his church. You know what that did? It became a pride thing. It gave birth to the Sunday school campaign where you try to top other churches. You try to have the biggest crowd you can have. So you have "Friend Day," bring all your friends. You have "Heaven Sunday," bring all your people and talk about heaven because people want to know about heaven. It is all gimmicks. I used to sit in staff meetings when they would put those up and I would say, "How about a 'Hell Sunday'?" That would be a good one. I came up one time with a, they loved it. I was joking. They loved it. It was a competition between another church someplace out there. They were running close to us. So we had an eight-week Sunday school campaign going on where whoever won the majority of them, the pastor had to fly out there and present the trophy. Oh, it was a big deal. They loved it. I said, "What it will be, it will be God against the devil." They thought that was great. "If we meet our goal,

God wins. If we do not meet our goal, the devil wins." The pastor loved it because he could get up there and embellish the people. "But you let the devil win. How embarrassing it will be." Oh, he worked the angles. The devil beat us six Sundays out of eight. Ridiculous. Those churches are all gone now. Akron Baptist Temple probably runs maybe 800 or 900. Jack Hyles' church, it is down to probably, if you take the school out of it, he is probably down there. They are all gone. They are all gone because they were all built with the wrong motive. They were built to have great numbers, great buildings that you could say, "Look what we have done," that you could brag at the fellowship meetings. I want to tell you from the practical side. You get a thousand people, 2,000 or 3,000 people, and your pastor cannot minister to that many people effectively. It ceases now to become a church. In most churches today, they do not even look at themselves as a church anymore. They look at themselves as a business. I do not know how many big churches I know and have been associated with that the pastor has now looked at as a CEO. He gets four or five personal assistants. They fill his car up with gas. They do every little thing that he needs so he can stay focused on what? I am not sure. So now they have to hire 20, 30 other pastors to do the job of the pastor. The pastor is out of a job. Oh, he still gets paid, but now he is taking himself out of the number one job of a pastor: that is your people. Any pastor anywhere has one thing that he is responsible for. That is every person sitting in that chair this morning. There is no other priority in a pastor's life than that. You do not worry about the building. You do not worry about the carpet, obviously. You worry about the people. The key to a church will be the pastor and his attitude about his people. So you lose touch with them. You are now isolated from them. Oh, you go out and preach on Sunday morning and Sunday night and Wednesday night in some cases, but Monday through Saturday, you are unapproachable. I have known pastors who liked to preach but hated people. In time, you really start to believe that you are really that important. The "God syndrome" sets in. The pastor is unapproachable. The pastor is untouchable. The pastor is somebody that we talk about. "Oh, there he goes." When we meet him in the hallway, "Oh, we do not know what to do." "Our stomach flutters." Whatever that means. The "God syndrome" that he thinks that he is above everybody. He expects to be treated differently. He wants all the adoration of everybody around him. You know where that comes from? That is Isaiah 14:14. Lucifer said: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Instead of being a pastor that serves his people, now you are a pastor whom the people serve. You are a king. You are a king like Philip II, Peter the Great, or Lord Godfrey. Now you have violated the basic biblical principles of pastoring found in 1 Peter 5:3, where it says: Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. You see that? An example and an ensample are two different things. I have told you before. An example is something that you do, but an ensample is something that you are. He is saying that a pastor should be an example. Yes, he should be an example, but before that, he should be an ensample of what you are. He is supposed to embody what Christianity is supposed to be. I know every pastor is imperfect, and if you follow him around long enough, you will see all kinds of holes in his character, but the bottom line is simply this: he is to be an ensample. But now the "God syndrome" sets in. I knew a guy one time who was a doctor, and he was a Christian psychologist. This kid was the stupidest kid on the planet when it came to helping people. I spent quite a bit of time with him, and we had a mutual

relationship, and I always thought he was an idiot, and he probably did not care for me. We talked about the Bible many, many times. He is the guy that told me one time that he believed that the Bible contained truth, but just that the Bible did not contain all truth. That is where he was coming from. I would go to lunch with him, and he would come in there and he would tell the lady at the front to give you how many, two, and he would say, "Yes, my name is Dr. So-and-so, and we would like to have two, me and him going to lunch." Then if she went away, he would say, "Oh, by the way, I am Dr. So-and-so. If I would get any calls, would you please let me know of him?" Nobody was going to call him. He wanted to project that he was a doctor. He wanted her to know. He wanted the people around to know. He wanted her to go back and say, "Oh, Dr. So-and-so is sitting over here. He is right over down through here. If he gets any calls for Dr. So-and-so, make sure he gets them, because he is a doctor." What a clown. But that is what happens, you see. Oh, yes, now you are a reverend. Unfortunately, when you get ordained, the reverend comes with it. But I have watched these guys. They put it on their checks. They put it on their driver's license. They put a little name tag, "Reverend." Because they think it means something. They think it means because you are a reverend, you are more spiritual. Because you are a reverend, now somebody is going to reverence you. Then they get really puffed up when they get the doctor's degree. You know what a theological doctor degree is? It is called a DD, a Doctor of Divinity. Oh, would you like to have one of those? I want to tell you something. Now maybe this is just me, but I think that is a joke. You and I are godless, rotten sinners who need to die and deserve to die in hell. You are saved by the grace of God on the cross of Calvary. Then you are going to go through life as a dirty, rotten, saved sinner, putting behind your name a Doctor of Divinity like there is something divine about who you are. Boy, you have got it bad, kid. A degree makes you more like Christ. I have heard all the rationalization. Do not even go there with me. I have had it and heard it for years. "Well, we do not really like these, but when we get these and we take these, oh, it opens up all kinds of doors that we would not have if we did not have a doctor behind our name." Oh, gee whiz, folks. I thought it was God's Holy Spirit's job to open the doors. I think I read that someplace. And a great joke. God has got the greatest sense of humor you ever saw. I do not believe this look in the mirror. I mean, it is a great. The Laodicean church. We are living in a world that has thousands and thousands of doctors, religious doctors. And yet the church of Jesus Christ is the most disease-ridden, sickly, weakling church you have ever seen in your life. This church does not need any more doctors. The church does not need any more doctors. You know what it needs? It needs some combat medics. That is what it needs. But they are not going to get it. An old Kansas farmer one time never got out of the sixth grade, but he farmed all of his life. His brother lived in the city and had a nephew, and his nephew was a really smart kid. He had five degrees, been in colleges all over the country. One of the smartest men you would ever meet in your life. He called his uncle out in Kansas, the farmer, and said, "Would you take me camping?" And the old farmer said, "Well, sure, I will take you camping. Come on down." So he comes down there to, out there in the Flint Hills, man. It is beautiful. So they were out there camping at night. In the middle of the night, the farmer shakes him and he says, "Look up and tell me what you see." He says, "I see millions and millions and millions of stars." He says, "That is what I am talking about. What do those stars tell you?" He says, "Well, astronomically, it tells

me that there are millions and millions of galaxies out there. Meteorologically, it tells me it is going to be a wonderful, beautiful day tomorrow." He says, "You know, when I look at it in all of the different ways, it gives me so much information." He says, "Uncle, how do you look at it?" He looked at it and he says, "Somebody stole our tent."

3. Self-Sufficient / Unteachable The third characteristic of a fool will be, now keep in mind, there is a little revising here. We saw our verse, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes." First, we saw he is self-righteous, then we saw that he is self-serving, number two. The third thing is he is self-sufficient. In other words, you cannot teach a fool anything. He is unteachable. He knows it all. When you hit this level and it comes full circle, in most cases, 99% of the time, you are unable to change. The roots are down too deep. Let me say this, I am not necessarily talking about some loud, obnoxious bully; many of them are. But I have seen these three areas in some of the most passive, quiet, meek people you ever met in your life. Some are of great conviction. Some are very legalistic. Some wear the right clothes, do not go to certain restaurants, do not do this, do not do that. Oh, they are so godly. They are the nicest people you ever met right up to the point that they are faced with doing it the Bible way against their way, and then, brother, look out. They are so spiritual. I have known pastors that it has always bothered me how they ever baptized anybody because when they go down to baptize, they just walk on the water. They project such a falsehood of spirituality. You cannot teach them anything. Over the years in every pastor's ministry, you find people just like that. Every pastor has, every church has them, young men and moms and dads and ladies who simply cannot, you cannot teach anything to. Totally unteachable. They get a little bit of Bible under their belt, and then they want to do something for God, and that is it. You cannot give them anything. In some cases, they are just so completely dysfunctional on the basics of life that they cannot get anywhere. They hear a message like this, and all they do right now, if they are hearing it, whatever church they are in, is they are looking around in their mind, pointing out in their mind who he is preaching to, and they never make the application back to themselves. They completely reject any advice or constructive criticism to show them the right way. They think they know all they need to know, and, in fact, they know nothing, and they just make a mess out of it. A couple of thirty nights ago, I do not know how we got on it, but I told you about a kid that I had in my ministry thirty-some years ago. This kid was a nice kid. He was a good kid, but you could not teach him a thing. He always knew more about it than anybody else. I do not care what it was. He wanted to go out and start a church over thirty years ago, and I told him then, and I would tell him today, he is not a pastor. He did not have any of the things that he needed. He could not preach a lick. Sitting in your backyard, listening to the grass grow, was much more exciting than him preaching. That is being generous. You could not tell him anything. "God called him. God called him. God called him." So he went out and started his church some thirty years ago, and I told him then. He would go to my people, and he would say, "You know, God has taught me some things that He has really never given to Bob." He thinks, "God showed me things that He has never shown him, and I have a deeper understanding about it." You know that old Absalom at the Gates Syndrome thing, back in the Old Testament. He went out and started his church over thirty years ago, and today after thirty years, he is probably running ten to twelve to fifteen, and half that is his family. He could haul a roll call in a 1963 VW bus this morning. I am not

sure what God showed him that He did not show me, but I am sure glad God did not show it to me. What a joke. After thirty years of failure, thirty years of never getting anybody to come to your church that wanted to be part of it, he still will not admit that he failed and made a mistake. He will just keep blaming it on everything else and insist that he is the only one who has the truth. You know why? Pride. Self-righteousness. He is self-serving. Proverbs 6:16 talked about the seven things that God hates, and one of them that is the worst is the sowing discord among the brethren, but number one, the number one problem with the devil was the first sin in the Bible. It was a proud look. These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: When they get that proud, arrogant attitude, you cannot teach them a thing. It has been thirty years since that kid went out, and it taught me a great lesson about foolish people. I have told it to you before, make no bones about it. Somebody comes in to me and tells me what they want to do, do not include me in it, do not ask my advice. Just walk in and say, "You know what, I want to go do this," or "I want to go to the mission field," or "I want to go do this," or "I want to go do that," and "I just want you to put your blessing on it." They have never talked to me about it. They have never spent any time with me. I have not seen them in my church for six or seven or eight months. "Hey, you want my blessing? Hail Mary, Mother of God, flute of the room, you got it, brother." Now you want to come in and talk to me, be part of my work, and let me help you and show me what God is doing and prove it by doing it in my church, you have got my full attention. That is the way you have got to handle it. You know why? Proverbs 12:15, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes." You are not going to change it.

III. The Wise Man: Heeding Counsel

Look at the last part of Proverbs 12:15: "but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise." Getting wise counsel before you make a major move in life is always a smart thing to do. The counsel here in this passage is the counsel of Proverbs 1:25, 1:30, 8:14, 11:14, and other places, the principles of the Word of God, the counsel of the Word of God, doing it by the book.

So you learn from those who have been successful at it, those who have already paid the price of learning and made the mistakes and had the failures of what you are trying to do and have learned from them, and then God has blessed them and they become successful. That is how you learn.

Now what I am about to say, I want you to listen very carefully. I know that there is no shortcut, no fast track to learning the Bible and ministry. I do not have that, but in one sense there is. You watch and learn and take good advice and counsel from somebody who knows what he is doing. That is what I did. It took me 20, 30 years to learn some of the things that I give you.

We talk about when you start to deal with people with problems, you are never smarter than the problem. You never treat the symptom. You always deal with the problem. We talked earlier about attitude versus action. I have told you before about responding to something versus reacting to something. You know how many years I had to watch that in play? You know how many years I spent watching that happen, observing it, dealing with it, taking all the pieces, taking them apart, and putting them back together? I talked earlier about learning the basic

patterns of human nature. You know how long that took me to do that? Learning the Bible, doctrine, inspiration, historically. It took me 30 years, and I still just scratched the surface. You have no idea how long it took for me to see those things, get those things down, observe those things, understand them, and most of those important things. It took most of my adult life.

My job as a pastor is to make sure that if you are serious with the Word of God, it does not take you nearly as long. You benefit from it. You get past all of it quicker, 20 or 30 years quicker. You can get ahead faster. You still have got to do the work, but that is my job. That is the only job of a pastor, by reproducing what I have learned into somebody who wants to learn.

You go back to that bookstore, and you know what? I do not sell my books on Zondervan. You cannot go online and get them. You will not go into your Christian bookstore and say, "Where are all the volumes by Bob Alexander?" You will not find them there. You know why? I never designed to put them there. I never laid that stuff out. I never took that stuff that I have done and put it out for anybody other than you. How to study the Bible, charismatic movement, Bible notes, history in the Bible, church history, marriage and divorce, child training. The Thursday night, a girl sitting in the back, Rose, and them still back there, Nancy, they take every question and they detail it out. So when you go on the website, you can find exactly what subject you want. The Thursday night Bible studies, the special classes on New Year's, or the special church histories we did on Wednesday night, the people ministry, the single ministry. Just hoping that somebody somewhere will pick up what God has given me and run with it and do something with it before I pass off the scene. That is the job of a pastor. That is what his job is. Taking all that he learned and then making sure that the people that God gave him get a head start on it to get it quicker, that you do not have to pay to get there, or you will have things you will have to pay. But to help you get there quicker.

I just learned from the people who had accomplished what I wanted to accomplish. Something that a wise man will take and seek counsel from the men who have been there and done it and done it right. In my life, God had put over the years four main men that helped me along the way. I needed it because I was pretty stupid when I got into the ministry. One taught me the Bible the right way. One taught me the ministry the right way. One taught me the balance between grace and truth the right way. And one taught me how not to do the ministry by doing it the wrong way. As stupid as I am, I was smart enough to see the value of God putting those men in my life. I learned from them. I gleaned from their experience. Spending time with them, asking them questions about ministry, about people, about churches, about history, about the old boys that they knew.

You hear me talk about J. Frank Norris. I never met J. Frank Norris. He died before I was even born. But I spent a lot of time with his boys, the ones that he trained. I would sit down with him and ask them all about what it was like being under J. Frank Norris. "Tell me the good things. Tell me the bad things. Tell me everything you can remember, the positive and the negative." I wanted to learn everything I could because I knew that those old boys too were going to be gone someday and all that knowledge would be lost. I have always appreciated them for what they did for me, all of them. I never thought I knew more about the Bible than they did. I never thought I knew more about ministry or building a church than they did. I was too busy absorbing what they

had because I knew someday they were going to be gone off the scene and it would all be lost. I wanted to get whatever I could before they were gone. Today, they are all gone.

Even after I got into ministry, their help to me was invaluable. There were times when I got into the ministry all the way out here, and I lived back in Ohio, and now I am out here, there were things that I came up with. I thank God I had two or three guys I could call on the phone and say, "Hey look, what do I do with this? How do I help them?" It taught me a great lesson. You know what it is? Do not ever burn the bridges of the men that God has put in your life. Not a day goes by in my life that I do not use something that they taught me. I do not fall back on it. I remember what they said. Those years of good, solid counsel were invaluable to me. If I have any success in ministry today at all, I owe it to them, those men who were patient with me and allowed me to ride on their coattails to learn from their wisdom and from their mistakes.

Yet I know how a fool reacts to that. "Well, you are just following a man." You are absolutely right, you self-righteous clown. I am. I am doing it just like Timothy, Philemon, and Titus, and a thousand others followed Paul. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1:

Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

Every man, he says, you are following somebody who is following somebody. That is the biblical process for a wise man. Not a fool, he knows it all. You cannot teach him anything. Follow the man whom God put in your life. Follow the man who follows Christ. Learn from him, glean from him, watch his success, watch his mistakes, and let God use it to mold you to make you who you are.

Now we are all down through history. Back in about 100, 200 AD, there was a guy by the name of Montanus. When everything started to fall apart and everybody started to go sprinkling babies, Montanus said, "That is not what the Bible teaches, we are sticking with the book." His church separated from all those other churches, and they said, "Well, why do not you come with us?" They said, "We are sticking with Montanus and the Bible." He says, "Oh, you are just following a man." They called his followers Montanists after a man.

A little bit later on, they had a guy by the name of Novatian. He said, "Hey, all this stuff of putting a priest class over the lay people, uh-uh, brother, I am sticking with the book. You guys and me are splitting ways." And they said to his people, "Why do not you come with us?" They said, "We are sticking with the man God gave us in the book." And he said, "Oh, you are just following a man." They called those Novatians.

There was a guy by the name of Donatus back in the third, fourth century. He would not go along with the corruption, split from all of the churches that were going the wrong way and heading toward Rome. They called his followers Donatists. John Hus, in Czechoslovakia, stood against all the established church, and everybody hated him and the people that followed him. They called him Hussites. The Waldensians, the largest Bible-believing group down through the Dark Ages that were persecuted beyond belief, got their name from Peter Waldo. J. Frank Norris' boys were called Norisites. J. Frank Norris' followers are called Rockmanites.

You see, the real problem is prideful, self-righteous men. That is his main desire. He wants people to follow him, but he is such a fool that nobody will ever follow him. So he goes around quoting all this false spiritual stuff, "You are following a man, following a man." What he is really saying, if you allow me to translate, "I do not like people following you because I want them to follow me, and nobody is following me because I am a fool."

IV. The Fool's Wrath Versus The Prudent Man's Discretion

Look at Proverbs 12:16. Here is why nobody follows him: "A fool's wrath is presently known." Everybody knows you are a fool. What comes out of your mouth? When you have to transgress with your lips and slander and lie and tear down others to make yourself look spiritual, good people see right through that. That is why some of your children will not follow their parents. If I can put it into a practical application, they see the phoniness. You act one way at church and cuss everything out at home. Then you scratch your head and say, "I wonder why my boy will not go to church. I wonder why my daughter will not go to church." Because he knows you are a fool. That is why. You live two different lives, you have two different value systems, and he is smart enough to see what you are dumb enough not to see.

That is why wives will not follow their husband. I do not know how many times the husband said to me, "Well, she will not follow my leadership." My labs would not follow your leadership. She sees your double standards. She sees your one way here and another way here. When you say, "Follow me," or "I am the spiritual leader," she sees you as a fool. Your ranting and your raving give you away. Your wrath, when it is not based on the Bible, but your own personal insecurity or pride or self-righteousness, will betray you every time.

I watched Ohio State play this week. I have been in Missouri for well over 40 years. I still like Ohio State, that is where I am originally from, Ohio. I never watched Ohio State play without thinking of Woody Hayes. Woody Hayes, back in the 60s or the 70s, probably the 70s, was their coach at Ohio State. Woody Hayes had a volatile temper. He would lose it on the field, off the field. When a play did not go right, he would absolutely, he looked like a three-year-old not getting his weenie. He would throw a temper tantrum. What got him fired was during a game, one of his players missed the catch in a key thing. When that player came off, took his helmet off, Woody went up and grabbed him and punched him right in the face on national TV. That is anger, boy. It was not just a, he nailed him, man. Well, obviously he was fired, he was let go. Every time I watch Ohio State play, and I watch, they are a pretty good ball team, and they have had their ups and their downs, like everybody else, but they are a great school and they are a great team. I always feel sad a little bit. He is probably one of the guys who did more in the early years to make that team what it is today. Nobody even remembers his name. You know why? Because he was a fool. He made a fool out of himself, letting a ball game become to the point where he lost his temper on national TV and punched the player.

I remember one time all the pastors up here, Baptist pastors, I did not do it. I was not in their caliber. But they used to play a softball match with all the professors from BBC down in Springfield, the BBF. They would get all the teachers down there and all of the staff and all of the pastors that were connected to the BBF. We would have a big softball tournament up here in

Kansas City. Not a year went by, the last year they had it, it broke into a riot. The pitcher was one of the pastors in this city that if I told you who it was, you probably would not remember him. But he was a pastor up here in South Kansas City. Great preacher. But he had a temper. When it was all over, nobody cared about the score. There were two broken arms, three broken noses. The police were called. The whole world looked at the pastors up here and the Baptist Bible Fellowship. What do you think they thought? "That is where I am going to church tomorrow."

Let me say this, in the Bible, anger and wrath are okay when it has a cause behind it, a biblical one. Matthew 5:22 says that:

But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

If you have got a righteous cause, it is one thing. But a fool will lose it over anything. When he does not get his own way, because he is self-serving. You see it in road rage. Somebody pulls in front of you and you are having a bad morning and you ram him or you shoot him. People get shot just because they pulled out and did not use a turn signal. I have seen parents cussing out their kids, calling them the filthiest names on the planet, hitting them, smacking them, losing their temper and cussing them out, cussing their wife, calling them filthy names. You are a fool, and your speech betrays you. It is no wonder nobody takes these people seriously.

Ben Franklin said, "Explosions of anger will always have a reason behind it, but it is just not ever a very good one." Edmund Howe, an American novelist and newspaper editor, 1853 to 1937, said that when people explode in anger, they always say they are not themselves when they do it. When in fact, they just have revealed who they really are.

Look at the last part of Proverbs 12:16: "but a prudent man covereth shame." The word prudent is a really good word. You do not hear it much anymore. In fact, most people probably could not even tell you what it means. But it means to be cautious. It means to be wise in a practical way, careful of the consequences. It means careful and conscious not to act when the end result is not clearly seen and yet in doubt. A prudent man or woman will see a situation and not react to it, but rather take time to get the facts and respond to it biblically. A prudent man will solve problems because he is a wise man and fruit comes out of his mouth. He works to a solution. He does not cause problems or inflame them to make them worse.

When a foolish man will tell all he knows through gossip and slander and sow discord, just look at what was on Facebook. Some of the goofiest, stupidest stuff on the planet put out there for everybody to read, and people actually think when I put this on that the only one who is going to see it is the person that I want to see it. The whole world sees it. A wise man, a prudent man, will cover it so the cause of Christ will not get hurt. He is not thinking about himself. He is thinking about the ministry. He will not sweep it under the rug. He will deal with it, but he will not let it get outside the smallest circle of people who are involved, and he works to keep it that way because he has wisdom. He has understanding in these matters, and he knows that the devil will use people that are wicked and a fool to his advantage to destroy the work of God. So he does

not think about himself. He does not think about his own personal interest. He thinks about what God is doing. So he covers it so that it does not hurt the work of Christ.

V. The Ministry: Finding Gold Nuggets

Brother, those are tremendous verses, but I want to give you one more thought. In this chapter so far, we have seen some of those practical applications of principles on what is in our heart and what comes out of our mouth. We have seen the way of a fool, and now we understand the way of a wise man: one who is righteous in his own eyes and knows everything, and one who is always seeking counsel and hearkening to it. A fool will reveal who he really is by his wrath, but a wise, prudent man works at solving problems and keeps issues from getting out of control.

For me, the ministry has always been different aspects, but in its simplest form, the ministry is just people. Fundamentally, a ministry is simply to those people preaching the truth and staying faithful with the things of God. As I told you before, you are going to have people come into whatever ministry you have down the line someplace, someday if you pastor a church, you are going to have people come through that you see them and you know in the moment they walk in there are problems, and they are probably not going to go very far, but you give them a shot. You do everything you can to try to help them. Never let it be said that you look back and do not have a good conscience about what you tried to do. You may get hosed in the end, you may get abused in the end, but a good conscience toward God covers and overrides all of that stuff.

Then you have to wade through the fools of life to get to the wise of life. It is just the way it is. You have to go through the people who will not change and learn and apply what they are getting in their life to get to the ones who will. In any church, you can see the difference immediately between the fools and the wise men. You see a difference in their marriage. You see a difference in their children. You see a difference in their attitudes. You see a difference in the ministry they do. You see a difference in their relationships. You see a difference in their value systems. That is true of just about everything in life. You have to go through a lot of foolish things to get to the good.

I was at Bass Pro the other day looking around, and I walked over there in one section, and I could not believe it. They were selling pans that you pan for gold, you know, like in the old days. I asked the guy, "You really sell these?" And he says, "Oh, it is really a big thing now. People buy them, go out west. People find gold so high, people find gold going out there." I do not know if you know what they do, but you go out there and you get a river coming down there, you stick your pan down there and get a little water, a lot of dirt, and you shake it around and shake it around, and nothing. You get some more. You might go through five or 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 pans before you find a nugget.

I thought to myself when he told me that, "You know, that is just like the ministry. You have got to go through a lot of dirt to find one gold nugget." In farming, you have got to go through a lot of tears to get to the wheat. In farming, you have got to get all the husks before you get to the corn. In coal mining, you have got to dig a couple of tons of dirt before you hit the coal vein. In a diamond mine, you have got to move tons of rock just to find one diamond. It is true in life. It is

true in ministry. Going and giving chances to people who will not change, but you have got to go through all of them to find the one who will. That one makes it worth it all.

A guy does not look back and say, "I shoveled 20 tons of dirt today." He focuses on, "Whoa, look at the nugget I found." "Well, I was digging down there and I dug for 20 hours and I am so tired." No, no, no. "Whoa, look at the diamond I found." That is the ministry. You have got to go through a lot of foolish people, but what makes it worth it all is when you find that nugget of gold. It takes all your mind off the ones that do not want to learn when you have one who does. You people who work with people know that is exactly the way it is. You are going to have three zeros. You get a little down about it. You get a little frustrated about it, but then God gives you that golden nugget that falls out of heaven right in your lap. About three weeks into that, you do not even know who the other ones were anymore.

You know why it makes it worth it all? I will tell you why. Because Proverbs 10:1 says:

A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.

You as a spiritual father make you glad, but it makes your Heavenly Father glad. The Bible says in Proverbs 17:25:

A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him.

Proverbs 19:13

A foolish son is the calamity of his father: and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping.

I always think Solomon had a thousand wives. In Proverbs 31, he goes through all of those thousand wives to find one virtuous woman. When he finds her after looking at 999, he finds the one he says:

Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.

Not one time did he complain about all the other ones because he finally had found the one that he was looking for. Let me tell you something. In the ministry, you are going to have a lot of fools that do not go anywhere. But when you find that one who has the virtue, who has the gold, who wants to learn and wants to know, it makes it worth it all.

I think of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The Lord went through 12 apostles to find one who would go all the way with Him, John. That is the ministry. You go through the fools of life for the nugget that just wants the truth of God. Then you just pour yourself into it. This is what God made you for, what God designed churches for, what the pastor's job is. When a pastor translates out to everybody else and everybody starts mining for gold, you start to find a lot of nuggets. I can go out all day long and I could work all day and find one little nugget. If I send 150 of you out, we find more than one nugget. The more people panning for gold, not worrying about the dirt you have got to go through to get to it, the more nuggets you find. That is how you build a church. That is how you build a ministry, one person at a time. But you have got to go through

the ones who do not want to learn to find the ones who do want to learn. That is what makes the ministry work. That is what makes it rewarding, not only here, but at the seat of Christ.

Every head bowed and every eye closed. Father, we thank You for this book. We thank You for its great principles. We love You. Thank You for all You do for us.