

Peopling: Fools & Evil
Glen Elliott - August 6, 2017

Series Big Idea: The Bible is clear that there are different kinds of people and we need to respond to each kind of person in a different way. There is no “one size fits all” way to engage with people. There are some people who outright reject the truth and are intent on hurting us. There are some people who refuse to deal with truth and reality. Then there are the wise who listen to the truth and allow God’s wisdom to transform how they live. In this series we’ll look at each kind of person and figure out how to do “peopling” well with different people types. The Bible and especially the book of Proverbs gives us wisdom on how to learn to people well.

Message Big Idea: The Bible teaches us that there are three kinds of people who respond differently when they are presented with the truth. The evil person will reject the truth and tries to destroy the messenger. The fool tries to adjust the truth to fit their way of life. The wise person listens to the truth and lets the truth transform how they live. We must learn to identify the kind of person we are dealing with and respond accordingly. And most of all, we need to move from from evil and foolishness and embrace wisdom ourselves.

Main Idea: How a person reacts to truth determines how you respond.

Main Text: Proverbs 9:6-9;

Supporting texts: Proverbs 4:14-16; 18:2; 19:19; 27:12

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

1. Who is your difficult person right now (name not needed)? Why are they difficult? Is it a problem or a pattern? How have you tried to respond? Has it worked? If not, why? Can you identify if they are a wise, fool or evil type of person?
2. The key to determining whether a person is a wise, foolish or evil type is how they react to the truth or reality when presented. How do you typically respond to the truth when presented? Listen, welcome the feedback or become defensive or even angry? Be honest. How do you best hear or prefer to hear the truth told to you?
3. A wise person is willing to listen to feedback and the truth. But how should feedback be given to a wise person? How is feedback best given and received?
4. How is the best way to respond to each of the types according to Glen’s teaching and the Proverbs? How do we respond to evil, foolish and wise types?
5. We often want to help and guide a person. So what is the difference between trying to help someone with a problem and someone who is stuck in a foolish pattern?

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Main Idea: How a person reacts to truth determines how you respond.

Message:

People...we can't live without them. We struggle to live with them! I've heard many a pastor say to me: "I love my work, except for the people!" We all have difficult people in our life. Today we are starting a series called *Peopling*. We need to learn to people well. We especially need to learn to respond in the right ways to people who refuse to people well. In this series, we are continuing to pursue the idea of wisdom. In our last series we looked at how to make wise decisions. In this series, we are looking at how to apply wisdom to people and relationships.

Peopling - what is that? Here's the Urban Dictionary definition of peopling: *the ability to tolerate people and their stupidity, as well as your own stupidity in a public setting. To people or engage in the act of peopling is to be able to remain tactful despite a person's obvious stupidity, and/or, lack of social skills.* That definition was a bit blunt. But peopling is the ability to know how to deal with different types of people.

In this series we'll discover that the Bible teaches us there are actually three basic kinds of people - evil, foolish and wise types. Each type responds differently when they are presented with the truth. The Bible uses broad labels to describe a person and how they react to the truth. **Evil people - reject the truth, hurt the messenger.** The Bible also calls this type wicked sometimes. The evil person just outright rejects the truth or the reality of a situation and then tries to hurt or silence the one speaking the truth. **Foolish people - adjust the truth to fit their way of life.** The fool tries to twist the truth to fit their way of life. The Bible also calls these people mockers. **Wise people - listen to the truth and let the truth transform them.** The wise person listens to the truth and lets the truth transform how they live. The Bible also calls these folks "prudent" sometimes. In this series we are going to learn from the Bible how to identify each type of person and then how to respond appropriately. This is also a challenge to make sure we are choosing to be wise and move away from evil or foolish actions.

We all have at least that one person in our life who causes and creates chaos. We have that person who upsets us. They never listen, they continue in their bad behavior and continue to make bad decisions. Their lives are a mess and they blame everyone and everything else for the mess. It is often a family member. Sometimes it is someone at work or school. We all have that someone. Some of us have too many someones! Sometimes we have people in our lives who try to ruin us and hurt us. We try to help people but all the talking does no good. There are days when we are just done peopling. I have those days. There are days when I wish I could turn my shirt around so the back were on the front!

We've all learned to cope and deal with difficult people in different ways. Too often our ways don't work. Sometimes we try to rescue. We want to help them. But also we often discover that we end up working way harder than the person we are trying to help.

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Sometimes we want to change someone. To do so we find ourselves nagging or trying to control their lives and of course the change never happens. Sometimes we get angry and find ourselves in a fight, just trying to show them how wrong or bad their behavior is. After we say some ugly things, we regret what or how we said it. But the fights and arguments keep coming. And sometimes we try to hide from difficult people. We are done! Peopling is messy. Sometimes I'm the problem. In those cases, we need to become wiser. Sometimes we need to learn to better respond to messy people.

So let's look at the three kinds of people the Bible talks about and how to respond to those different kinds of people. To really help someone, you have to know which kind of person you are dealing with and each requires a different response. Peopling is knowing how to best help and knowing when you can't help at all! Here's my main text today. It describes the different types of people we've talked about: evil (also called wicked), foolish (also called simple and mockers) and the wise (also called righteous). Listen to the wisdom God gives us in **Proverbs 9:6-9 (pg. 299 - NIV)**;

***⁶ Leave your simple ways and you will live;
walk in the way of insight."***

***⁷ Whoever corrects a mocker invites insults;
whoever rebukes the wicked incurs abuse.***

***⁸ Do not rebuke mockers or they will hate you;
rebuke the wise and they will love you.***

***⁹ Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still;
teach the righteous and they will add to their learning.***

Did you see the three kinds of people in what we read? We just read about evil, foolish and wise people types. The key to understanding each type is how they respond to wisdom and truth. Look at verse 7 again. The fool or mocker's response to the truth is that they insult the messenger. And in verse 8 it says they will hate you! The wicked or evil will attack you and abuse you. But look again at that last verse, verse 9. It's key. Instruct the wise and what?..... they will be wiser! They listen and learn from great feedback. They want to know and hear the truth and will allow the truth to change how they live. They want to be better and grow.

So how do we respond? Our mission is *Loving people to Jesus, launching passionate people to make a difference*. It is based on the command and will of Jesus. Would you repeat it after me please. **Loving people to Jesus, launching passionate people to make a difference**. But loving certain types of people is not easy. It is an easy phrase to say. It is so much harder to do. Why? You try to love someone but they react in ways that are totally opposite of how you and God want them to react. God calls us to love. He also calls us to be wise. So our focus over the next few weeks is learning wise love. So in this series we want to learn how to engage, love, serve and stay in a relationship when that normal response won't work. When do we need to change our approach? What approach should you use with different types of people? Is there a time when you should separate, disconnect, leave or avoid the person? Please hear this clearly. There are times to love people. There are times to pull away from people. But we have to

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know which is the best, wise and truly loving response for the person you are dealing with. We call that peopling! We are all learning to people (front of t-shirt).

So the Bible talks about three kinds of people: evil, fools and wise. How do you know the difference between the three? There's one clear compelling key to knowing what kind of person you are and what kind of person you are dealing with. This is the foundational principle. You need to get this because it is the key to how we love wisely. Here's the key principle: **How a person reacts to truth determines how you respond.** How does a person, or you for that matter, react when with the truth and reality is presented? What is your response or the other person's response to the truth? Defensive? Anger? Attacking? Dismissive? Listening? How do you or the person typically respond to feedback? So, the test of whether a person is basically an evil, foolish or wise person or type is in how they respond to the truth, to the reality of a situation and the light of God's Word. Remember our main idea: **How a person reacts to truth determines how you respond.** An evil person outright rejects the truth. A fool tries to change the truth and adjust it to fit their life. A wise person listens to the truth and lets the truth adjust how they live. And just a reminder, we often have a little of all three in us at different times or in different situations. I can be wise in one area, foolish in another and even be tempted to be evil in yet another.

Let's start with how to deal with people who have chosen to follow what the Bible calls an evil way. This might be the easiest to recognize. We don't like to even think that people can choose evil, but they do. They do because the Devil is evil and he's alive and active and tempts us. The core characteristic of evil people is that they reject the truth. They have bought into the lies of the evil one. And their purpose is the same as the Devil; to damage us. These folks, for whatever reason, want to hurt you.

The Bible teaches us to resist and flee from the Devil. We want to get as far away as we can. Evil people have allowed the Devil to guide and influence their behavior and thinking. They intend to hurt and destroy. So our strategy is the same as how we are to deal with the Devil - resist and pull away.

The Bible teaches that there is only one method of dealing with evil people - protect yourself. How? You might need to get a lawyer or gun. Okay, I'm kidding about the lawyer part. You get what I mean. What I mean is that your only good response to evil people is to protect yourself. Please hear this: you can't help an evil person. You can love them, but not help them. Does that sound strange? I can love evil people. I can forgive evil people. I do pray for them. I want the best for them. But I can't help them. They only want to hurt and abuse you or me. This is not just theory for me. I have and had have evil people in my life who are only about hurting me. I sincerely want to help them. But they don't want my help and don't even believe I have anything good to offer them. They see me as the enemy. Part of my prayer is often that God will use someone else to help them.

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In the face of evil you are always kind, but you don't have to engage them. Don't give into their demands. Don't try to reason with them. Don't give them another chance...to hurt you. Stay away! You make sure you are safe! Don't engage. Don't return their calls. Block their number. Change the locks on your doors. Get a restraining order if you need to. This is not my idea. These are God's words. Listen to the Bible on how we are to respond to an evil or wicked person: **Proverbs 4:14-16 (pg. 297 - NIV)** -

***¹⁴ Do not set foot on the path of the wicked
or walk in the way of evildoers.***

***¹⁵ Avoid it, do not travel on it;
turn from it and go on your way.***

***¹⁶ For they cannot rest until they do evil;
they are robbed of sleep till they make someone stumble.***

That's about as clear as it can be. Don't go near them. Avoid them. Turn from them. They won't stop until they choose to repent. Now, if they repent, then you can help, but not until then. Hopefully you don't have a lot of evil people in your life, but we all do from time to time. Avoid them. Don't respond. But pray for them. I know many stories of how evil people were changed. Not by talking, but by prayer. God has to change their heart. If you find yourself being evil, your only hope is asking God to change your heart.

Now let's look at the second kind of person - the fool. This type of person is a much trickier kind of person. An evil person is obvious. A fool is harder to recognize. Here's how the **Proverbs 18:2 (pg. 304 - NIV)** describes a fool:

***Fools find no pleasure in understanding
but delight in airing their own opinions.***

So you bring light, truth, good feedback wrapped in genuine love to a fool. But the fool won't listen. They just want to spout their opinion and demand what they want. They want to shape the truth to fit their way of life. They often know that their decisions are unwise but won't change. And the fool will shoot and insult the messenger of truth. You know who those folks are in your life. Sometimes we are foolish.

Fools rarely own their problem. The problem is always someone else. They can't or won't receive good feedback. If you bring them the truth they will blame you, others or a circumstance. They are defensive. And one way they refuse to listen to the truth is that they minimize how bad they are or things are. They are experts at excuses and at creating their own versions of reality.

They will continually create friction in relationships and often damage relationships. They have little awareness or care how they hurt others. They are forever the victim so they blame you and everyone and everything else for their problems. Instead of admitting their problems, they get angry. Know anyone like that?

Remember our principle: **How a person reacts to truth determines how you respond.** You can't help a fool by giving them honest, loving truth because they won't listen to it. So stop talking! Good peopling with a fool means means we STOP talking!

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Talking about a problem with a fool will result in no change. So stop trying to use a method that doesn't work! Try another strategy. The Bible gives us that strategy in **Proverbs 19:19 (pg. 304 - NIV)** -

***A hot-tempered person must pay the penalty;
rescue them, and you will have to do it again.***

I love the wisdom of the Bible! The Bible is so practical! Fools don't listen. They keep doing the same things over and over and you have to keep rescuing them over and over. There's a huge clue here in how to respond to foolish people. Let them pay the penalty. Let them face the consequences of their actions. You can't keep them from foolish decisions. So let them pay the price and then maybe they'll learn....or not. Now, hear this. This is important. There is little hope we can change an evil person. Only God can. But there is hope for helping a fool. But it requires a strategy that fools can understand.

Here the strategy to help a fool. Stop talking about the problem or their foolish decisions. That is NOT the problem. The issue is the pattern that traps the fool. **It isn't about the problem, but the pattern.** The pattern is that they won't listen. That's the real problem now, not just the foolish decisions. So, change the conversation and ask a fool; "How can I give you feedback that you can hear? "How can I share what I see to be the reality and truth here?" This might open a door to a real conversation. If that helps the fool to hear, now you can try to help and correct them.

But if that doesn't change the pattern of not listening, we still have hope. We then move to these two critical actions. We limit their options and we give consequences. **Give fools limits and consequences.** For example, an addict (any kind of addict or continual foolish behavior) won't stop. You've talked and nagged and got angry over and over about the problem. Stop talking. Now set limits. It might look like this. I'm not willing to let you stay in our house while you _____. So here are your options. You choose. Get help, Get sober, or move out, no allowance, or whatever is appropriate to the situation. Set limits. Then set consequences. If you don't choose one of these and things stay the same, then I will move out or whatever. You make it clear - it is their choice, but the consequences will happen. Unfortunately, sometimes it is only the pain of a consequence that will cause a foolish person to change.

Our children and grandchildren often act foolish. Right? But there's hope! After teaching and talking and setting the house rules, if they continue to be "foolish" which means they are not listening or obeying; we do what we do with all fools - we set limits and consequences. You can choose this (your way) or that (our way) but here's the consequence if you choose this or that. This is the core of our parenting course called Love and Logic. We've taught over 1800 parents and grandparents this course. I encourage you to take it if you haven't. Go online to sign up - we have two classes starting in early September - one on Sundays at 12:45pm and one on Wednesdays at 6:30pm. Go to our website under classes to get more information and sign up.

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Here's the key principle in peopling: **How a person reacts to truth determines how you respond.** We need to learn to people (t-shirt) well. If you are dealing with an evil person, get away, protect yourself, avoid them and pray. If you are dealing with a fool, set limits and consequences. What about the wise? Next week we are going to look at what a wise person looks like so we can become wise and we'll learn how to best respond to the wise as well.

May I pray for you today? Peopling is really hard stuff. There are broken people in our lives. We are also broken people. We need help to be able to people well. God wants us to be wise and love others. So let's go to God.