

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

04.21.2023 | Why We're Tempted To Reject Wisdom | Proverbs 1:8-18

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As we've mentioned, we are going through a series in Proverbs looking at the wisdom that God's word has for us for the various aspects of life. We've considered what wisdom is and why we should want it. Now today, as we consider the things that draw us away from the path of wisdom, those temptations that we face, I'm honored to have with us Pastor James Westbrook. Pastor James has preached at First SF a couple of times before. Yeah, James has been here. It's been a minute, it's been too long. So we're glad that James is back. Pastor James is originally from St. Louis. That means he is a Cardinals fan. Don't try not to hold that against him as he preaches this morning. But James and his family moved out to the Bay Area to plant Realm Church in Oakland. It's a church that was planted five years ago, about maybe six months or so before the pandemic hit.

And so it is a praise to God that Realm Church is still in existence and still thriving. And so we're thankful for the Westbrooks, for their family, for Pastor James' ministry at that church, but also just their presence in the Bay Area. Recently, along with pastoring Realm Church in Oakland, Pastor James has stepped into the role of working with the North American Mission Board with really a goal of seeing more churches planted in the Bay Area. And being that that is on our heart, we find it just a great opportunity to partner with James and with his church and also with the North American Mission Board in ministry. James has become just a great friend of mine and his family, a great friend to our families. And so we're just so thankful for their presence here in the Bay Area for him being at our church this morning. So would you welcome Pastor James as he comes to bring us God's Word. (Congregation Applauding)

Well, good morning, First SF. It's so good to be with my family on the other side of the Bay. I'm so grateful for any invitation that I get to come into the city. This is one of the churches that I've said, and I've said these words before, that this is the church that we as a church planet wanted to grow up to be like. This church captivated our hearts back when we were in seminary, and I was in seminary with several of you all, including David. And so this was the church we said that, hey, we want to be like this church, a church that reflects the diversity of the city, a church that reflects its diversity in all of its rich layers, socioeconomically, culturally. We want to be able to reflect that, and it's always a good occasion for my family and I to be back into this place. I also want to say a big thank you from Realm Church, as well as from SEND Network on behalf of the Bay Area, a thank you to this church. You guys have continued to be an example of God's faithfulness to this area and what it looks like to be faithful to God's word. And I've been so thankful for the leadership and the friendship of the days to that end. And so we're just so thankful, once again, for this church and for your partnership with us at Sin Network as well as with Realm Church. I'm not sure if Realm Church would have made it without that partnership. So I praise God for the teams and then also the financial support through to our church planT.

Okay, well, I've titled this sermon, Why We're Tempted to Reject Wisdom. Why we're tempted to reject wisdom. And our text comes from Proverbs chapter one, verses eight through 19. I was off a little bit on my verse here, so I'm adding a verse. And so let's go ahead and read that together, starting with verse eight. Solomon writes, listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck. My son, if sinful men entice you, do not give in to them. If they say, come along with us, let's lie and wait for our innocent blood. Let's ambush some harmless soul. Let's swallow them alive like the grave in whole, like those who go down to the pit. We will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder, cast lots with us. We will all share the loot. My son, do not go along with them. Do not set foot on their paths, for their feet rush into evil. They are swift to shed blood. How useless to spread a net where every bird can see it. These men lie and wait for their own blood. They ambush only themselves. Such are the paths of all who go after ill-gotten gain. It takes away the life of those who get it. This is the word of the Lord.

We're now, for the first time, in the book of Proverbs, as you follow through chapter one, I know that you guys have done other Proverbs, but as you're following through chapter one, this is the first time we're going to approach the first exhortation in Proverbs in the Father's lecture to his son. Solomon admonishes his son to choose the path of wisdom over the path of folly. And in doing so, the Father now addresses the danger of the fool. The danger of the fool. When we think of a fool, perhaps you're like me, and you think of some of your favorite classic TV. Perhaps you think of Jerry Lewis,

or the Three Stooges. I have yet to introduce my kids to the Three Stooges. That is classic, I grew up on it, I love it. I know I may not seem that old, but it was a classic for us. Perhaps you think of the court jester. Innocent enough, right? The fool, that is.

However, scripture means something a lot more serious when it broaches the subject of fools. So serious it was that Jesus forbids calling a spiritual sibling a fool. He forbids those that would follow him and take up their cross. He forbids them from calling one another fools. Why? Because it was to render the person the very antithesis of godliness. He says, be careful when you call a brother a fool, he forbade it. Solomon says, be watchful of the fool to his son. This loving father does this by encouraging the child to wear their instructions as a garland and chain gracing their head and adorning their neck as they would when they are getting dressed for the week and for the day. You know how we dress and bloom into nice and dressed up today. He says, treat wisdom that way. Wear it, let it adorn you. Let it go before you. Let these words that I give you, let it adorn you. Because as you enter the world, and here's where he's going to transition to our time this morning. As you enter the world, there will be a great temptation to remove or to depart from wisdom. He says, son, there's going to be a great temptation to depart from everything that I'm giving you right now. There's going to be a temptation to depart from it. And even for us this morning, as we learned over the past couple of weeks, there will be a great temptation to depart from Jesus' instruction, the very embodiment of God's wisdom in the world.

And because of that great temptation, to reject wisdom, our central question that we're going to look to answer this morning is, and that we're going to look at is, why we're tempted to reject wisdom. That's what we're going to look at this morning. And there's one primary way we learned this happens this morning, and we see that in the first point. We are tempted to reject wisdom because we are enticed by sinful promises. We are tempted to reject wisdom because we are enticed by sinful promises. We see this most clearly in the following three questions that I'm going to pose for us to help us get at this and understand this. One, the question that I want to ask as we go through this text is, when do we reject wisdom? When do we reject wisdom? Part of wisdom that we're going to see in this text is part of wisdom is this idea of withstanding.

Wisdom comes with the idea of withstanding, namely withstanding temptation when it comes. The wise person stands and withstands folly when it comes their way. However, part of the father's warning is temptation is going to be the primary threat to wisdom. Temptation, temptation is going to be the primary threat to wisdom, and it will come through enticements, he says. He says, to be aware of those that entice you, my son. Verse 10, he says that, my son, if sinful man entice you, do not give in to them. He says, don't give in to them. In other words, there are some things that you're going to hear or that you're going to see in the world that's going to excite you or going to excite hopes of things that you can have that's going to bring you or cause you to depart from God's instruction if you were to attain those things. It's going to call you away from wise living. He's just be aware of that.

Therefore, to the question, when do we reject wisdom? The simple answer here, as we're looking at the text and that Solomon's given his wisdom, therefore, we see that the rejection of wisdom, it occurs when we give in to sinful enticement. That's when we are most vulnerable, and that's when we're most likely to reject wisdom when we are enticed, and not only enticed when we give in to temptation, and in that moment, we've actually rejected wisdom. The second question is how does enticement come? How is it that enticement will come? That question is also answered in Solomon's description here, or in what form might it come, according to Solomon.

Solomon says that it'll come, it'll sometimes come from external pressure to join the crowd.

That's what he's going to say as he's preparing his child or as he's preparing this young man for life in the real world, he's going to say that that temptation is going to come from an external pressure to join in to the crowd, or join in with the crowd, and the wise parent of verse eight seeks to warn about the temptations of life in the real world. Solomon says when you're experiencing life in the real world, when you're experiencing real temptation, there will be a temptation to depart from the wise living, or excuse me, the temptation to depart from wise living increases. Why? Because there will be the reality of external enticement coming from people in the world. If anyone has children that has gone through the period of life that we call middle school, we all understand that. That's when it starts. I'm having conversations with my wife, and the pillow conversations with my wife every single night ever since my daughter started middle school, Lord,

keep my child from the temptation out there. Please, they get real creative these days in middle school. Every morning, we're asking our daughter, how are you? Anything you want to talk about? What was your devotion this morning? Let me pray for you. As you're dealing with the drama of middle school, let me pray for you.

Let's put the same heart here. There's going to be enticement out there. Solomon says, part of wisdom is watching the company that one keeps. He says, watch the company you keep. He loves this child, and he wants the best for this child, and he understands what it means to go and be with company that corrupts good character. He says, be careful, my son, my child. Urging him not to go with enticements of a gang. There is always something attractive about simply going with the crowd in our culture, perhaps with the setting been in Israel, perhaps with the setting been in Israel here, we are intended to understand that this is about life in the city and about what it's going to be like to live in a city context. This has been happening since the first temptation, though, hasn't it? This has been happening since the first temptation that we see in the Book of Genesis, that the serpent implants a compelling counter-thought of something more desirable to humanity in the garden. There's something greater, something better than what God has provided for you. You can get it, go for it. It'll make you feel good. It'll provide you some release. It'll allow you to fill for one. Stu it, stu it, you can, and you should do it. Even though we know that it is a direct departure from God's word and it's intent for human flourishing we were looking at, okay, when do we reject wisdom? We see that is when we actually give in to sinful enticement.

How does that enticement come in this particular narrative, in this particular pericope? It comes when people are going to be out there waiting to give you a bunch of ideas as to how you can make yourself happy in the world. That's how it's going to come. And the third question that I think that Solomon answers for us actually is that what might we be enticed to do? What might we be enticed to do? What might the child be enticed to do that Solomon's trying to warn him of? Solomon says that beware of sinful men attempting to lure you to do two things, to pray and to plunder. The feeling of empowerment offered by gains during this time was a strong temptation to the young men who felt overwhelmed by the life that confronted him every day. This was very similar to my upbringing in inner city St. Louis. There was this strong pull, a strong gravitational pull to pull towards numbers and pull towards gains that it will offer me safety, it will offer me relevance, but it also meant that there was instruction if I wanted the continued protection of those gains. Strong, strong temptation. And Solomon understands this and he's trying to warn the child not to fall into that temptation. This continued to be a real temptation for the modern world as well, especially for those living in the urban centers of the world.

But he says, listen, he wants to warn them against two things, praying and plundering, praying on the vulnerable. Verse 11 says that if they say, "Come along with us, "let's lie and wait for innocent blood, "let's ambush some harmless soul, "let's swallow them alive like the grave "and hold like those who go down to the pit, "to the place of death." What's the enticement here? What might be the enticement that he's making sure that he's warning his child of? He's warning them of the enticement of power and control. It's a real temptation for us in this world, of power and control. Exploitation is simply the expression of power and control. And there's so much of it in our world. So much of it in our world, so much suffering going on in our world, even in the Bay Area of people, exploiting right beneath our noses, and it gives this feeling of power with this advantage of control over people. He says, "Beware of those that would try to lure you away "with the enticement of praying "on the vulnerable of power and control." He says, "Also plunder." He warns him about plundering. He says, "Listen, that they may come "and they may plunder what's coveted in this world." Verse 13, he says that, "We will get all sorts of valuable things," they say, "We will get all sorts of valuable things "and fill our houses with plunder, "cast lots with us, we will all share the loot."

Wow, what's the enticement here? It taps into the greed of materialism. He says, "Be careful, be careful, be careful." We understand what this is, don't we? Living in the Bay Area. We understand it all too well. We see this in Oakland and San Francisco, both been the region of this country called the theft capital of the country. We have another crown, one that I hope that we shed pretty soon. These gangs that Solomon is referring to have been a horrible problem for the Bay Area. The governor had to announce recently an increased deployment and temporary search of California Highway Patrol officers to address the crime syndicates existing in the Bay Area alone. We see the signs all over the place, "Do not leave anything valuable in your cars." Perhaps maybe someone who's been in here has been assaulted before. It's been horrible what's been happening with this particular issue that Solomon is actually pointing out several millennia ago.

But what about us though? I would venture to say that probably most of us, maybe there's one or two that belongs to a crime syndicate that the Lord wants to deliver you from. Praise the Lord, the people ready to pray with you. I'll stick around to you. But I would venture to say that most of us probably don't struggle with this issue. Probably don't struggle with joining up with gangs to bring harm against people in strong arm stealing.

****Diagram at end of transcript***

But the question still remains, what about us? I was just with an author by the name of Andy Crouch. And Andy Crouch is a thought leader in our country. And he was just in the Bay Area last week and I got the chance to spend some time with him. And I read a book that I recommend to you all as well. It's a pleasure to be in the mind, me recommending things from the pulpit. A book called Strong and Weak. And about Strong and Weak, it lays down a paradigm as to how we conduct ourselves in the world and when it comes to flourishing and also unhealthy living. I think that if we read some of his paradigms and it'll help us to actually dig a little deeper on how these enticements can lure us away even if we are not part of organized or petty crime in the Bay Area. If you look at this picture here that we're going to have here, look at this picture, you'll see that Andy makes an argument that God has created us to flourish in this world. He's created humanity in the garden to flourish and to live life in a flourishing way according to his definition. However, here's what the enticement is that I want us to see. You see the flourishing happens in the right-hand corner and what you see those two words there, you have, "Flourishing happens with a combination of vulnerability and authority." Andy, he defines vulnerability as existing with true risk and living vulnerability for people, which means that, "Listen, I'm going to live in such a way that I'm accountable to you and I'm honest with you and I'm open with you."

And there's real risk here. We can keep that picture up for a moment, just keep it. But it also happens with the combination of both vulnerability and authority. Authority is the ability to make meaningful action in the world or meaningful decisions in the world on your own behalf. It means that if you have authority or sometimes our kids have authority, once they reach a certain age, they had authority to pop torch into the toaster. They didn't have authority, David, to cook on the stove. I don't want you burning my house down, but you do have authority to make meaningful action to feed your hunger in the morning by going to the pop torch or eating some cereal. As you get older, that action, the ability to have that type of action, it increases. If we can just throw that back up on the screen, that first picture. But when you have authority, it says authority means that you are able to actually make meaningful action in the world. He says you need both of those to flourish in the way that we see over and over again throughout Scripture. Part of what I want to look at today is that, listen, he says that, if you stay with me with that analogy, it's very, very helpful, I think.

When you move to the left of the line of authority, when you move to the left of the line, he says that here's the enticement for all of us. All of us regular folks going to work or coming home or volunteering, whatever we're doing, says here is the temptation. The temptation is actually to do this thing called flourishing or do this thing called authority apart from vulnerability, which means that it leads us to control. Did you know what it's like to have authority without vulnerability? Authority apart from vulnerability, it leads to exploitation because it means that you are operating in a way that's controlling in the relationship or even in the enterprise that you are in. Vulnerability apart from authority, though, it leads to suffering. You don't have to memorize all of this. I'll bring this home. I'll end the play here in a moment. And lastly, when there is no authority and there's no vulnerability, it says it leads to withdrawing.

But if you look at this next picture, I think this is exactly what Solomon is concerned with. The next picture says that, listen, when you have people that are operating within authority and power, they have this control that they exercise in the world and it always leads to exploiting and who does it exploit? It exploits those that are vulnerable, those that do not have the ability to make meaningful action and those that do not have power or authority. He says that these are the people that I'm trying to warn you against and warn you about. Do not be this person. These are fools. They are dangerous people. They are those that want to live in the area of control and power apart from vulnerability. Solomon is warning the future generation of the enticement of living in the left-hand corner. And he says, don't give in. And we shouldn't give in either.

I think that's a real temptation for us even this morning. What about in our relationships? Let's do some application here. Are you living under the enticement of what the left-hand corner promises? Power and control. Do people in your relationships, as a question, have a voice or do you live vulnerability before God and before people? In your

relationships, even with your spouse or with your girlfriend or with your siblings or with your parents or your parents or the child, when you are in a relationship with these people, do they feel that you always have to control the narrative? Part of what Solomon is getting at is that even the spirit of the action is still present even if we don't commit the deed. That's what I want to warn us of today. It's the sense of control and sense of power that this enticement is something very enticing about that. What about do we struggle with this with material possessions? Part of the Lord that Solomon is going to speak to is that it may sound enticing to you because it promises material possession. And do you heed the voices of the crowds that says that your worth is determined by your external world as opposed to your internal world? Over and over again, Scripture's going to place much more emphasis on what's happening in the internal world and how one's heart is before the Lord versus the external world. Are you tempted and enticed by the external world more than you are about making sure that you're right before the Lord internally? Part of this means that it's a good test of this is that the question is, is your life riddled with credit card debt, which the Proverbs tells us enslaves us to the lender because we want to keep up with the Joneses.

I was living in Oakland. We were living in Oakland for the longest time until our landlord said that, "Hey, we want to sell the house to you, Mr. Westbrook." I said, "I would love to buy the house, landlord." And he says, "Great, great, great, great. We're all both in agreement." He says, "We're going to sell it to you for \$1.2 million." I said, "You don't want to sell it to me then, not for \$1.2 billion. I'm a church planner, come on, give me a break here." Got a great deal and the Lord provided and we finally were able to purchase in the Bay Area and we moved to the other side of the Cattle Cut Tunnel. Anybody know what this is on the East Bay? You might get out of it. We don't have no reason to go over there. All right, we got some books. We moved into one of the first towns in the Bay Area on the other side of the Cattle Cut Tunnel and it's in the town of Moraga and I got to tell you, it's a stuffy town. I'm thankful for it, just stuffy. Everything closes at 4 p.m. But if I can be vulnerable for just a second here, I would tell you that that was a great pressure internally for me to fit in. I'd tell Desiree almost every week. The first several months we were there, "Hey, Des, let's see how much Tesla costs. We need a," there's nothing wrong with Tesla. If you got a Tesla, that's right. There's something wrong when your budget doesn't add up with the Tesla, that's the problem. I said, "Des, I need to step my wardrobe up a little bit." Desiree just said that I don't know if it's because she's cheaper than me or in terms of her taste or I don't know, but I think it was wisdom from my wife. You're worrying too much about your external, James. You're okay. Thank you for that, Desiree

Maybe another application here before we close with our last point is do we take advantage of the vulnerable in our own business practices or in our own consumption as consumers? Do we overwhelm people when we're doing business with them with technical jargon and smooth talk in order to make the sell? Or do we participate in industries that plunder for our own modern conveniences? There's more than one way to participate in the very thing that Solomon is warning the child of. This is a serious warning from Solomon because he knows just by looking over his own life, just read the book of Ecclesiastes, he knows by just looking over his own life that we are tempted to reject the safety, the blessing and the joy from living a wise life that the Lord provides. We are tempted to leave that safety and that joy because we are enticed by the promises that it is possible to get more and to get it sooner and to get it easier. There is some hope for us this morning because it's something that I believe it grips the heart of humanity and it grips it in a very unique way to the richest nation that has ever existed on the face of the planet.

Let me go ahead and close our time this morning with a smaller point here in terms of size and emphasis but sinful enticements cannot deliver what it promises. The first point there that we looked at was that we are tempted to reject wisdom because we are enticed by sinful promises but rest assured Solomon is going to make sure his son knows here that sinful enticements cannot deliver what it promises. He says in verse 15, "My son, do not go along with them, "do not set foot on their paths." Don't do it. Don't keep up with the Joneses. Nor do not go about with ill-gotten gains. Do not set foot on the paths. Do not get started on this road. What does it promise? What is it that it promises? Sinful enticement and promises power and plunder and flourishing and control through shortcuts and easy paydays it can never truly deliver on. That's what it does.

Everything in our culture, it pushes us towards this. I am literally in a war with Apple right now. I will not update my Apple phone even though I get texts that I keep on missing from you all and phone calls. I took my, I'm not going to switch. They call it throttling by the way. They're in a lawsuit right now. I'm thankful for Apple and all the good stuff but gee whiz, why do I need another phone? I just bought this one and it cost me a thousand bucks that I paid off incrementally. Praise the Lord. Everything in our culture, it pushes us. It pushes us, it pushes us to for the shortcuts and

the easy paydays and there's always something more. In other words, folly is tempting because it makes a promise of easy reward. However, the one that travels the road of folly becomes the full of the road. So this is essentially what we see. Some point, point that he's making. What does it actually deliver? You see what it delivers. Psalm verses 17 and 18. How useless to spread a net to where every bird can see it. These men lie and wait for their own blood. They ambush only themselves, he says. What the fool does is useless, he says. The picture that he's painting there, he says how useless it is to spread a net where every bird can see it. The point that he's making there is that the bird sees the person spreading the net. They're not going to fly into the net. It's a useless action.

What he's saying is that what all of this amounts to be in your life, in their lives, as they are investing in this type of life, of taking advantage of people and plundering, he says it amounts to nothing. It amounts to nothing. He says don't listen to them because they only deliver destruction to themselves. What's the solution here for the proverb and for this portion of the series? I think the solution is we simply have to be enticed by something greater. Enticed by something greater. To entice the very definition of it and the word has been used here is simply to lead on by exciting hope or desire. It's the thing that excites us to give us some hope about what we can have or what we can attain. It's not bad in and of itself. The question is what are we enticed by? What are we enticed to do? What is it that it promises?

As I close, we learn that we're drawn away, this is important, we're drawn away by that which is within. Making it possible for that which is without to lure us away. James 1.4 says this, James says that, "But each person is tempted when he is lured and when they are lured and enticed by their own desire." That's what the text says. Nothing can be found enticing externally without first being enticing internally. In other words, you cannot entice me with a roller coaster ride. It's not going to happen. I'm done with that part of my life. I don't need to put myself in this steel cage or whatever it's made out of and just go through the world. I mean, go through the air. I don't need to do it. And I tell my kids that every single time we go to Disneyland and they don't seem to understand. I think last week my daughter asked me, "Daddy, can we go to Six Flags?" No. You can go but don't ask me to ride. That's what I said. I'm a loving parent. All right. (Congregation Laughing) But you can entice me with a long conversation about history, theology, and culture. Yeah, that may make me late for my next meeting. Yeah, that's enticing.

I believe our call this morning is to be enticed and heed the voice of wisdom. That is the instruction of Jesus himself through the work of the Spirit. Jesus, the very wisdom of God. And I love this quote by our brother, C.S. Lewis. Listen to what C.S. Lewis says. Lewis says that desire is essentially not the problem. Enticement is not the problem in and of itself. He says that it was seen that our Lord finds our desire not too strong but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are too easily pleased, he says. As we're looking at what it means to live the life that Christ has set before us, this life that is full of taking up our cross and certainly suffering, but also unexplainable joys that is multiplied unto us as we both share in the sufferings of Christ but also we share in the victory and the triumph of Christ as well. There will always be the temptation from the enemy. That there's a different road, that there's a better way, you can get it now. Why wait for that? Let's be reminded of our words, so the words of our brother, C.S. Lewis. Let's not be so waddled down and weighed down with lesser desires. We are too easily pleased.

