

Mark Driscoll: How to Recognize and Avoid a Foolish Person

The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity; to give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion—a wise man will hear and will increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, to understand a proverb and the interpretation, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction (Prov. 1:1-7).

Foolish people are not necessarily less intelligent or less educated. However, they are unteachable, defensive, unyielding, arrogant, irresponsible and prone to make excuses for themselves and wrongly blame others when things go poorly. Sadly, if we are honest, everyone is foolish in certain areas and seasons of life. None of us is immune to folly.

But people who are primarily foolish have an ongoing pattern of folly that infects and affects most if not all of their lives. Rather than changing, they want everyone and everything to change to accommodate them. Efforts to correct and instruct foolish people result in a fight or flight response where they fight back or run away. They have low empathy and tend to see themselves as both morally superior to others and a constant victim.

When dealing with a foolish person, you tend to have the same conversation over and over, and to them it sounds like nagging. The more you address the areas in which a foolish person keeps making the same error, the more conflict and

disagreement ensues, and the relationship deteriorates.

The way to respond to a foolish person is with less—less time arguing, less frequently having the same conversation, less being on the defensive trying to get them to come around and take responsibility for their own life. This response sharpens through consequences and boundaries. Proverbs 1:7b provides a reason when it says “fools despise wisdom and discipline.” Because a foolish person will not change but instead plows ahead in the same direction of destruction, the best thing to do is to impose consequences and limit the ability they have to harm themselves and others.

A foolish person pushes their responsibilities and the consequences of their folly onto responsible people, and the best thing to do is push the responsibilities and consequences back onto them.

A foolish person lives by the power of the sinful flesh (our sinful human nature). A foolish person will waste what you give them because they do not embrace it. They are like a bucket in which the bottom has rusted out; anything you pour into it just spills onto the ground. Peter started out as Jesus’ most foolish disciple. Jesus helped Peter move from foolish to wise by rebuking him and inviting him to change. Jesus knew Peter was foolish and asked Peter to walk with Him toward wisdom. {eoa}

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