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October 8, 2000

Three Problem People Proverbs 1:22

This summer Erin and I drove our Opel Astra rental car down the Italian Autostrada. It is basically an Italian version of the German autobahn. It is a surprisingly well maintained road, where you are able to drive as fast as your car and stomach will allow...for a price of course. Each mile you drive costs a certain number of Lira. You pay at a toll booth upon exit. The only catch is the number of exits are quite limited. You do not want to miss your exit. Unlike here in the states, where there is an exit at least every couple of miles. If you miss one in Italy, the next one may well be another half hour drive down the road. And then another half hour back. A single miss could take you an hour out of your way. Add on to that darkness, torrential rain and the Italian language and we can come up with plenty of excuses as to why we missed our expressway three times, taking us away from the way we wanted to go. I am still convinced the map we had showed an autostrada that never quite actually got built. We never did get on the road we wanted to. It felt like we were stuck on some carnival ride, we wanted to get off but the thing just wouldn't stop...it just kept going and going.

What was our problem? We were inexperienced with driving in Italy. We had no one with us who could show us the right way to go. We couldn't even talk to them. We had a map, but with the reality we saw on the road...it was not that easy for us to match up the two and choose well the right way to go. It would have been great to have a friendly Italian, one who knew that area well, one who had traveled this route many times to simply ride with us and show us where to turn, when to get off, landmarks to look out for. It would have saved us so much time and emotional energy. There are few things more stressful than not knowing where you are, where you are going and how you will get there.

Have you ever felt kind of lost in some aspect of life? Maybe you are unsure of the direction to take. You know you must make a decision in the near future, but you aren't sure when to get off or whether to stay

on. Or maybe you need to get off and turn around going the other direction entirely. Maybe your decision involves direction for employment, maybe you are wondering about certain education possibilities. Maybe it has to do with a relationship; whether to commit to or put the ice on.

It could be you have made a few wrong turns. You know it. You know you're on the wrong path...but you don't want to stop at the nearest gas station and ask directions. You're not even sure they will speak the same language and understand your problem. What are you to do? Wouldn't it be great if there was someone with experience who had been down that road before and could point you in the right direction? Wouldn't it be great to get some advice from a wise seasoned veteran....even if they told you the bad news you've been driving in the wrong direction for an hour and half and need to turn around? Recognizing the wrong turns, the blind alleys and pitfalls is half the battle. So Proverbs does that for us in describing for us in great detail the pitfalls of three problem people. It whispers loudly in our ears to all who would listen. Pssst. Don't be like these people, avoid their actions and attitudes. They may look good at times but they are walking down the path to destruction, not the way of wisdom and life.

The book of Proverbs can be like a wise friend to point us down the right way, the way of wisdom. However, at times it will be very in-your-face, confrontive. Because it will tell us we are going in the wrong direction. It has no problem with telling us to stop and turn around. I don't know about you, but I don't always appreciate someone telling me that the direction I have been going, all the effort I have been expending going a certain direction is totally wrong. I have invested heavily in my choice and hearing that all that is a waste is tough to swallow at times. So, when the book of Proverbs tells me to change direction, and I don't like it. Should I put the book down and walk away because it insults me? Or should I read on and digest because this is exactly the kind of spiritual and mental and emotional medicine that I need. One doesn't have to read very far in the book of Proverbs to become insulted, and so if you are unwilling to keep your heart soft and ready to learn...just brace yourself to be offended. Otherwise you can grow up and learn, but putting yourself under the tutelage of God and His wisdom. To do that we need His help (Let's pray)

There are three problem people that the book of Proverbs spend a great deal of time to expose. They are the naive, the fool and the scoffer. These are three types of problem people that the Bible makes very clear you don't want to spend a great deal of time emulating their attitudes or actions. They are not on the path that leads to wisdom. Sometimes it can be helpful to describe and expose the attitudes and actions of the wrong way, what to avoid in order to know the right way to head. The book of Proverbs uses the naive, the fool and the scoffer extensively as a foil for those who pursue the way of wisdom. So it fits well with the purpose of Proverbs to expose the faulty path of life, in order to give people a chance to get back on the right road. By the end of this mornings talk you will know what the Biblical definition is for the fool, the naive and the scoffer and also be able to recognize their attitudes, recognize their actions when you see it in others...and in yourself. And that is the part I don't like. I don't want to admit when I have acted like a fool. When I'm reading through Proverbs I realize that sometimes I act like a fool, or one who is simple or even an attitude of a scoffer. Sometimes we all act like a fool. Proverbs exposes our folly and gives us a chance to change, a chance to do differently and walk down the path of wisdom.

This morning we are going to use Proverbs 1:22 as a springboard for our study of the three problem people of Proverbs. (READ) In v. 20 wisdom shouts out to these three people and asks how long. What is it going to take for you to change? How long naive will you continue to wallow in your ignorance and pull your head out of the sand? How long cynics will you feed your cynicism? How long fools will you refuse to learn and shun advice? What is it going to take? It is available for all..but all will not change. Because it demands a spiritual and godly response. Remember, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It is that correct relationship with God that sets the foundation, the controlling principle for one who would be wise.

So what do I need? I need to recognize the certain areas in my life where I am acting like one of the three problem people, so can partner with God in the transformation process and get on the righteous path of wisdom. The first person is the naive. When we think of naive, there is a certain kind of innocence that is winsome and attractive. I don't want to be experienced in certain kinds of evil. God calls us to be innocent as

doves yet wise as serpents. I want to be innocent but not naive, unaware of what may cause me great harm. And I certainly don't need to experience evil to learn that it is not good for me.

The first group of people, the naive are the least harmful group of people...but they will end up sorry if they fail to wake up and change. Ultimately if they remain naive they will end up in the same place just like the other two. Ignorance is not bliss and many times it can be quite deadly. They tend to live without thinking. Proverbs 1:32 says "the Waywardness of the naive will kill them."

In March 1994 a German tourist checked into a hotel near the Miami International Airport. That night in his room he noticed a foul odor. But all travelers must put up with certain discomforts, he was tired so he slept in the bed all night without a complaint to the front desk. The next morning when he woke up, the odor was much worse. So when he checked out the hotel, he reported the problem to the front desk. On Friday March 11, the cleaning maid discovered the source of the odor. Under the bed she found a human corpse. You kind of wonder how the first cleaning maid missed it. Life is filled with stench, warning smells, problems. It's often far easier just to roll over and ignore it. But if you knew how truly serious things were, how close to death you were sleeping...we would do something, wake up and take action. The naive is complacent and tends to ignore serious problems hoping they will go away. Proverbs 22:3 "A prudent man sees danger and looks for protection, but the naive keeps right on going and suffers for it. The naive fails to see the danger, walks right into trouble and gets clobbered for it.

Like we learned from Prov.1:4 the naive need to learn the ropes of life. In certain areas the naive ones exposure to life has been limited, so he is inexperienced, easily influenced and gullible. Proverbs 14:5 "The naive believes everything, but the prudent, the sensible man considers his steps. The naive are unable to see the traps, the pitfalls and wrong turns. Prov. 22:3 The sensible sees the evil and hides himself, but the naive go on, and are punished for it.

Proverbs is written to give a naive one a sense of discernment and shrewdness. If it is an information problem, a lack of learning or need of experience. If the naive simply does not know the right, or righteous

thing to do. Mrs. Wisdom calls out to the naive and says, come on over here, sit down, let me tell you about the way life really works. Proverbs 9:4 Mrs. Wisdom has built her house she is ready to receive guests and begin her schooling in the fine art of wisdom. v.4 she calls out to the naive."let him turn in here, do you lack understanding? come on and eat my food and proceed in the way of wisdom." This is encouraging because it means it is possible for the naive to become WISE. This acquisition of wisdom is far easier for the naive than even the fool or scoffer. 9:6 Leave your way of folly and live."

But there is also another lady vying for the attention of the naive. That is Mrs. Folly. V.13 she is boisterous, and knows nothing of the way of wisdom. she too calls out to the naive v.16 She sits on her porch calling out to all who pass by. Come on in here, Stolen water is sweet. You can get something for nothing. Why bother to work hard when you don't have to. Bribe, steal and cheat your way to the top. Everybody is doing. Come on and walk down the easy and fun road with me.

Are there certain areas in our life that we are acting like a biblical naive one? Where do you need to wake and say. I'm naive in this area. I need wisdom. I have been living without thinking. I don't have the experience I need in this area. I have been gullible and sucked along by the crowd in this particular area. I don't like it. I want to have Mrs. Wisdom mentor me instead of Mrs. Folly.

The second problem person is the fool. Now most of us have already decided. That is not me because we think of a fool as one who is mentally challenged. A biblical fool is not a court jester who wears a funny hat, is silly and the butt of jokes. It may not sound like it, but the biblical fools has far more "smarts" than the naive. In fact, the biblical fool may be quite intelligent and enjoy a reputation in the world for success. The fool is so smart and thinks he has it all together that he has no need for God. He can make life work well all by himself. "The fool has said in his heart, there is no God.". A Biblical fool has made a conscious decision to live by their own wits. Independent of God and independent of any advice. They consider themselves so clever that they know how to beat the system. They pride themselves on their silver tongue that they think they can get away with anything. And often they do beat the system. Yet it is their very cleverness that often leads them to ruin. They

become so addicted to playing the game of the fool, beating the system, acquiring something for nothing. discovering the easiest way to skate through without having to do the hard work and discipline of learning, they become far more interested in getting away with it, then doing life right. Now I'm sure you can see that sometimes we play like the fool. This second problem person, the Bible says; "Watch out..examine your life. Make sure you aren't playing the fools game. Isn't it fascinating how the humble, less educated, poor, but righteous person in God's eyes can be far more wise than those with a higher IQ. All of us have watched intelligent people do very foolish things...including ourselves.

The fool believes in his heart the world revolves around them. You can always anticipate what they will do, because they will always do what is in their own best interests. If it's an advantage for the fool, then they will do that everytime. They don't even consider how their actions will affect other people. You can see that pride tends to be a big problem with the biblical fool, Several times it says in Proverbs; "the fool is wise in his own eyes." Prov.28:26 "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool"

Another knowing trait of the fool is their inability to learn from others. They are unable to consider the possibility that someone else might have a wise answer or worthwhile input to the problem. The biblical fool is a know-it-all who believes he's always right. He can't even imagine himself of ever making a mistake. He is unable recognize or admit his own error. He pours out his own opinions and words unaware that he displays his own folly and ignorance. Prov. 18:2 A fool finds no pleasure in understanding, but delights in airing his own opinions. All they do is run off at the mouth. Prov. 12:15 "The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice." He has no reverence for the truth, but instead prefers his own comfortable illusions. They have a great penchant for distorting the truth. Major stretching of the truth when it helps make them look better.

A fool is also a hot-head. Ever played this fools game before? Prov.29:11 "A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back." Isn't that terribly convicting? I hate being called a fool...but realize sometimes I cat like a fool. At times we all do. Prov. 20:3 " Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, but any fool will quarrel." Prov.12:16 "A fool show his annoyance at once, but a sensible man overlooks an

insult." The fool is touchy thin-skinned. He can dish it out just fine, but woe to the one who steps on the fools rights. They are the ones that go ballistic when someone cuts them off in traffic. When someone makes them late, or shows up late, or annoys them in some way...everyone loudly hears about it. Why? They are filled with pride and the world revolves around them...when they feel their rights have been stepped on they scream. When people around them say they have violated their rights they simply cannot see it. They violently oppose or coldly withdraw. Whatever works best for them at the time. They tell them to quit being to sensitive. Get over it. Or simply pass the blame on to someone else. The fool will never take responsibility for any problem, but stake a claim on all the good results that happen. Have you ever had to work with a fool? Not much fun is it. When they blow up, watch out.

The Bible tells us the mouth of the fool often gets him in trouble. That's usually what gets me in trouble the most. Prov. 10:8 "The wise of heart will receive commands, but a babbling fool will be thrown down. Unable to accept advice, his teeth chatter him right into trouble." Prov. 18:6 "A fools lips bring strife and his mouth calls out for blows." His words ask others to smack him right in the mouth. Yes, this is the very same silver tongue he is counting on to get him out of trouble. Oh, if he would only heed the very famous Proverb in 17:28 " Even a fool when he keeps silent, is considered wise." Isn't there many situations when Tis better to keep your mouth shut and appear the fool, then to open it up and remove all doubt?

As you read through Proverbs you discover repeated warnings to stay off the path of the fool for it is a downward spiral. One foolish choice unchecked can easily lead to another and yet another. Foolish actions beget more foolish action and the end is destruction. Prov. 1622 "While understanding is the fountain of life to those who have it, folly bring punishment to fools". Proverbs says that this addiction to playing the foolish game can be tragically habit forming. One of my favorite Proverbs 26:11 "As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool to his folly." It is the grossest thing to see our little Gigi vomit and then go right back and start licking it up. Especially, when I know she loves to lick the boys faces. The fool will vomit out his foolishness...then turn around and go right back to licking it up all over again.

Do you have a good picture of a biblical fool. A fool is not an F student, its a smart guy, a worldly clever person who has made a decision to live by his own wits, independent of God or anybody else. Intensely proud with a big mouth and a hot head.

Not too many people like going to the doctor, and even fewer seem to up here in the north county, Whether its fear, lack of trust or pride and independence I'm not sure but too I am one of those who avoid going to the doctor. However, in 1994 one London accountant took that to an extreme. The 63 year old man knew he needed bladder surgery but he hated doctors and hospitals. so he self-reliantly did what had to be done; He tried to perform the surgery on himself. Tragically he got an infection from the self-surgery and later died. The coroner said, "Unfortunately, his drastic remedy went wrong, where a simple surgery would have solved his problem." Just like this man didn't trust doctors or hospital, many people don't want to trust God. In their own foolish self-reliance, they slowly destroy themselves.

When I think of the scoffer, the classic person that comes to mind is Ted Turner, chairman of Turner Broadcasting. This is the guy that is violently opposed to God and makes no efforts to cover up his disdain for the people of God. According to a September 1990 article in Pinnacle Magazine. Turner made a speech at the Copacabana, New York's fading symbols of nightclub nirvana, delivered to the people who give out the emmy's, the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. Turner the scoffer stated that "Christianity is a religion for losers" Christ died on the cross but He shouldn't have bothered, I mean Christ was a great guy and all, but I don't want anybody to die for me" says Turner. The whole idea that Christ had to die to forgive my sins is really pretty weird. I've had a few drinks and a few girls and if that puts me in hell, then so be it. Most of my friends will be there. I certainly wouldn't want to be in a place that's perfect. Think about it. How boring. The standing room only Emmy crowd is going wild, screaming in appreciation. Turner is their hero, the consummate scoffer.

The third problem people mentioned in Proverbs are the scoffers. And these people are the worst of all. Their mental attitude not their mental aptitude classifies this person. They are arrogant, self-sophisticated people filled with plenty of criticism, insults and contempt.

They view themselves as above everyone else, especially God. The scoffer, or mocker is a rebel against God and they will go out of their way to let others know of their prideful positions. They mock God (1;26) but in the end God will mock them. Proud and arrogant Scoffer is his name. He behave with an overwhelming pride, Prov.21:24 He display not just the random acts of mischief like a fool, but is a deliberate trouble maker. Don't even attempt to correct a scoffer for Proverbs explains at best, he will not listen and probably you will hear a snide retort and be forever hated by the scoffer. For the scoffer resents correction. Prov. 9:8 "Do not reprove a scoffer lest he hate you."

Often when I need to confront someone, I ask myself, "Is this a wise person who is following God and confident enough to take my words well? Is this person naive who simply needs more information or life experience? Or is this person a fool, one who has ignore God. Or worse yet a scoffer who is violently opposed to God. The last two refuse to listen to correction anyway. They will have a very difficult time learning anything. Yet, even though they may not benefit from discipline at times it may be still worth doing for in Prov. 21:11 It says to discipline a scoffer, not so he will learn, but so the naive who are watching will see the results of foolish action and learn wisdom and moral sensibility.

The naive, the fool and the scoffer. There are times when I step off the road of wisdom and act like some of these people. There will be certain areas in your life where God is gently whispering to you. OK. Lets work on that right now. If I am acting naive...maybe I need some wisdom. If its an information problem and I am unsure of the righteous thing to do. Then here is a great place to gain wisdom. Maybe I am naive and need to discipline myself to pursue the path of Godly wisdom. Maybe you tend to live without thinking and need a moral mentor to help guide you and keep you accountable. Maybe you see certain areas in your life where you are playing the fool. God is not a present reality in your life. He doesn't influence your decision the way He must if He is to be Lord of your life. Then you need to realign your attitudes from a godly perspective. Listen, be teachable, learn. Ask questions and keep your mouth shut and your pride subdued. If you are a scoffer and a rebel against God. I'm glad your here this morning...even though you were probably forced. If you ever want a chance of becoming wise, you must

repent and get right with God. Do you want to live wisely? Then get into God's word. Psalm 19:7 says, "The law of the lord is perfect, reviving to the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy...making wise the simple. More to be desired are they than gold, yes, much fine gold and in keeping them there is great reward.