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Wisdom Worksheet: Fools—From Gullible to Godless (A Word Study in Proverbs)

Have you ever played the fool? The opposite of wisdom is foolishness, so we want to avoid the role of the fool at all costs. A study of Proverbs gives us five stages of fools from the Hebrew language. The list represents a cycle of increasing hardness of heart, from gullible to godless. A good analogy of this pride is cement. When it is poured, it is wet and formable, but afterward it begins a hardening process that culminates as cured concrete requiring heavy equipment to be moved. The gullible fool is still formable, but the godless fool has no hope unless he repents. Let's examine the five progressive stages of being a fool.

The first stage is the *simple fool (peti)* (Prov. 14:15). *The simple fool is gullible.* “A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps” (Prov. 14:15). The simple fool is naïve. *However, consequences experienced by the simple fool still leave hope for wisdom*** (Prov. 19:25; 21:11). If we are ever going to play the fool, we want to do it in stage one so that we will respond to consequences from our foolishness with repentance and wisdom. David's foolishness was simple, thought it carried significant consequences. When rebuked, the King responded with repentance and wisdom.**

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Give thought to your steps. Are you gullible to any foolish behavior? Open your calendar and examine your appointments for the week. Ask God to illuminate any gullible, or naïve, movements in your life. If He does, confess the pride underneath the



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foolishness (Prov. 28:13); humbly surrender it to Him (Prov. 11:2); and ask His Spirit to lead you to wisdom (Prov. 9:10).

The second stage is the *stupid fool (kesil)* (Prov. 26:11). *The stupid fool repeats his gullible behavior, which is folly.* “As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly” (Prov. 26:11). He repeats: anger (Prov. 29:11), strained family relationships (Prov. 10:1); wickedness (Prov. 10:23); deceit (Prov. 14:8); slander (Prov. 10:18); and shame (Prov. 3:35). His repetitive folly carries consequences. *The stupid fool is dangerous with money.*** Wise Solomon said, “Of what use is money in the hand of a fool, since has no desire to get wisdom” (Prov. 17:16). He went on to say that the stupid fool chases fantasies with his eyes (Prov. 17:24). This fool will make the same mistake over and over again (chasing yet another fantasy) until he exhausts all of his resources—his time, talent, and treasures. He is complacent with his foolish behavior (Prov. 1:32). The reason for his stupidity is clear. ***The stupid fool trusts in his own heart.*** The book of Proverbs states, “He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe” (Prov. 28:26). This self-trust leads to talking rather than listening. “A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions” (Prov. 18:2). The stupid self-reliant fool is hotheaded and reckless (Prov. 14:16) while hating knowledge (Prov. 1:22). Ironically, Solomon began to trust in his own heart chasing fantasies as described in Ecclesiastes.**

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Ask a close friend the following questions regarding your potential arenas of stupidity. Is folly evident in your life? Do you repeat the same gullible



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behavior—returning to your vomit? By biblical standards, are your time, talent, and treasures managed foolishly? Are you chasing fantasies? In relationships, do you talk more than you listen? If the answer to any of these questions is “Yes,” you are trusting in yourself rather than God.

The third stage is the *stubborn fool (evil)* (Prov. 12:15). This is the same Hebrew word translated as *evil*. ***The stubborn fool is right in his own eyes.*** “*The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice*” (Prov. 12:15). He is so sure of himself that he declines sound advice. ***The stubborn fool despises wisdom and discipline*** (Prov. 1:7). In his heart, he hardens his thoughts, choices, feelings, and prayers to connecting his life with God, closing the door on learning how to be transformed by God. ***The stubborn fool is full of folly*** (Prov. 16:22). This means that he repeats his stupidity at such a level that he is filled to the brim with folly. This folly often displays itself in outbursts of anger. His pattern of folly in terms of anger management can be remembered as *quick to pick and stick*. He is *quick* to quarrel (Prov. 20:3). Solomon said, “*A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult*” (Prov. 12:16). He will *pick* a fight. “*Stone is heavy and sand a burden, but provocation by a fool is heavier than both*” (Prov. 27:3). He will *stick* the blame to someone else, rather than reconcile. “*Fools mock at making amends for sin, but goodwill is found among the upright*” (Prov. 14:9). This pattern destroys relationships. Saul’s heart became hardened to the point of him becoming a stubborn fool.

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Take Proverbs' stubborn fool test. Are you always right...do you listen to or resist advice? Do you despise wisdom and discipline? Are you full of folly—repeating stupid behavior including outbursts of anger? Is your heart so hard that you show your annoyance at once refusing to overlook an insult? Is your quickness to quarrel evidenced in your provocation of more negative conflict? Are you characterized by reconciled relationships or do you mock at making amends for your sin? If the answer to any of these questions is affirmative, then it is time for a heart change.

The fourth stage is the *scorning fool (letz)* (Prov. 21:24). The scorner's pride (hardness of heart) is so great that he is drunk with presumptuousness and often referred to in Proverbs as a mocker. *"The proud and arrogant man—"Mocker" is his name; he behaves with overweening pride"* (Prov. 21:24). He has moved from anger to mocking. ***The scorning fool is averse to wisdom.*** It does not flow in his life. *"The mocker seeks wisdom and finds none, but knowledge comes easily to the discerning"* (Prov. 14:6). *Discerning* means *separating*. A scorner struggles to separate wise choices from foolish ones. ***The scorning fool causes dissension in organizations.*** This is due to the fact that he ignored all previous rebukes (Prov. 9:7-8; 13:1). Thus, he must be removed from an organization in order for it to thrive. *"Drive out the mocker, and out goes strife; quarrels and insults are ended"* (Prov. 22:10). Relationships are fostered when the scorner leaves. ***The scorning fool is opposed by God.*** He is known as a scoffer who picks a fight with The Almighty, mocking at reconciliation (Prov. 14:9) and justice (Prov. 19:28). However, God has a pattern in His response to this level of hard heartedness. *"He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble"* (Prov. 3:34). God takes direct opposition



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to the scorner in an effort to bring him back to wisdom. King Nebuchadnezzar was a scorning fool who eventually responded in humility to God's opposition (Dan. 4).

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Is it a challenge for you to separate wise choices from foolish ones? Would anyone at work, home, or play say that you are the cause of organizational dissension? Do you feel like you are kicking against the goads with God? If so, you are behaving like a scorner.

The fifth stage is the secular, or godless, fool (*nabal*) (Prov. 30:32). *The secular fool exalts himself rather than God. "If you have played the fool and exalted yourself, or if you have planned evil, clap your hand over your mouth" (Prov. 30:32).* His self-exaltation perpetuates a desire for more manipulative idolatry and disappoints those who have invested in him. Proverbs communicates that the godless fool is unsatisfied by spiritual things (Prov. 30:22). He brings no joy to his father (Prov. 17:21). This secular fool has hardened his heart with the image of his handprint impressed solidly in his inner being. Nabal, the husband of Abigail who later became David's wife, was a godless fool (1 Sam. 25:25). It didn't work out so well for Nabal; God struck him dead.

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Carefully consider your heart. Is there any area inside you that has exalted yourself above God? Do you omit seeking God's heart in any thought, choice, feeling, or prayer? Are you living your life on autopilot apart from God? Are your desires truly satisfied in Christ or do you need more and more of your fix of choice to advance your



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own earthly kingdom at the expense of His? You might be coming dangerously close to playing the secular fool.

Conclusion

It's easy to read through this list and think of someone else who fits each stage, but the list is for our own self-examination. Each of us must ask, "Is there any area of my life where I have hardened my heart to the Spirit of God?" The answer will be "Yes" more often than we think. After identifying the foolish behavior, we must (1) confess our pride to God, (2) humbly surrender it to Him, and (3) ask His Spirit to lead us to wisdom.