

PROVERBS



We live in a distracted age. I was thinking about how hard it is to get people's attention today when I was driving down Fanshawe towards Hyde Park and I noticed an illuminated sign that was so bright it was blinding to my eyes. It wasn't enough to have an illuminated sign – it had to be super bright. Why? Because everyone's distracted, and everyone is trying to get your attention.

It is hard today to go for even a few minutes without checking our smartphones. Sociologists say that the average teenager has an attention span of 15 seconds when it comes to reading anything. Twitter's 280 characters are almost too long for us now; forget being able to read a sustained argument in a book. With the rise of TikTok, YouTube videos are too long.

Between the various social media platforms, our text messages, and every other type of attention grabbing sign, we slowly tune out other voices. We move from distraction to distraction. We doom scroll through Instagram or the news and find ourselves moving from one random piece of information to another. We have no comprehensive way of putting anything together anymore. We don't even consider it weird that the news is about various stories around the world that have no context, no relation to one another, and no coherence. We are totally comfortable living in a distracted world.

But there is a great danger about living in a distracted world: it can kill your soul. The rise of secularism and the rise of distraction seem to go hand in hand. We live comfortably with contradictions; we are tempted not to think; and we reduce any sort of serious conversation about meaning into some cheap tool to get our attention.

Proverbs, however, tells us something fundamentally different. There is a path of life in a distracted age. You can flourish in a distracted age. It will take work and effort and a commitment, but it's worth it. In Proverbs 1:20-33, what we hear is how we can live in a distracted age.

Hear Wisdom's call (1:20-23)

In verses 20-21, we hear the Wise Woman – if we will have ears to hear. But she isn't a dainty woman with a sweet soft voice. She's more like a street preacher on a bullhorn trying to get your attention. She's raising her voice, she's crying aloud. Why? Because there's so much noise. It's an age of distraction; she's trying to get your attention. She sees that people are heading on the path of death and she is trying to stop them from the way that seems right to them but ends in death (Prov. 14:12; 16:25).

Wisdom cries out to three different types of people who are on the path of death: the simple, the mockers, and the fools. She's screaming at them, trying to get their attention above all the noise of the streets and through the clamour of the day. There are many types of fools, but not every fool is the same.

The Good Life: Flourishing in a Distracted Age - Proverbs 1:20-33

CBC Ilderton

Andrew Hall
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First, she cries out to the simple. The simple are ignorant. They are gullible. They believe anything and everything because they are easily influenced by others. They're impressed by personalities, they can fall prey to every wind and wave of doctrine because they aren't rooted in wisdom.

The simple are in a position where they can profoundly change. They are at a crossroads in life. They don't realize how susceptible they are to the voices around them. But we need to be clear: being simple is not to be uncultured or undereducated. You can be sophisticated culturally and have all of the wealth of the world and still be simple. Wisdom is calling out to the simple with the desire to rescue them from the path of folly.

One of the wisest people I knew was my grandfather. He did not finish beyond a grade 8 education. He worked in a mill yard as a young man but applied himself to wisdom and worked hard in life to apply the wisdom of God to all of life. He had a common sense approach and was known for coming alongside people who were in financial trouble to help them to live skillfully with their money.

The second group that is described in v. 22 are the mockers or scoffers. They have an attitude problem. What makes them fools is that they are self-righteous about how right they are. They stand above others and take pot-shots at everyone. While there is a time and a place for satire and joking, the mocker has become cynical in the heart. They are actively rejecting wisdom.

The third group is called the fool. This person hates knowledge. They are right in their own eyes and don't care what other people think. They don't want to be corrected, they don't want to listen to others who they think aren't as good as they are. They're right, and no matter what, they're going to drive their agenda, do their thing, regardless of others.

Wisdom says that if any of these people respond to her teaching, she will pour out her spirit and teach her words. This sounds a lot like the Lord: to anyone who would be willing to listen, God will make you wise, he will give you his Spirit to guide you into all truth, and he will give you his Words.

In the midst of all of the distractions, there's a voice: the Wise Woman calls. But there's a warning:

Beware of rejecting Wisdom's call (1:24-27)

What happens when people don't listen to wisdom's call? She's been extending her hand, she's offered counsel, pointed out the correct path to life. But those who don't listen? Calamity and disaster will fall upon them. Just like the gang laid a trap and ended up falling into their own snare in 1:17, those who reject wisdom find that they fall into that trap.

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What does wisdom do when people fall into their own calamity? She laughs. Now this seems downright cruel. Who laughs at another person's downfall? Wisdom does. Not because she doesn't care, not because she has a cold heart; Wisdom laughs at human folly. God laughs at the nations who mock him, Psalm 2 says. Why? Because when hardship comes, what we need is to hear the voice of life. We need to hear Wisdom.

Regina Spektor, a Russian/American born singer, song-writer, and pianist, left Russia during Perestroika in 1989. As Russia began to open up, her family moved to New York City, and from the age of 9 she lived in the Big Apple, growing in her love for music. She's known for her anti-folk music. Having seen first-hand how terrible life had been in the Soviet Union and how it had been a nation that had mocked God, she wrote the song "Laughing With" where she sings:

*No one laughs at God in a hospital; No one laughs at God in a war;
No one's laughing at God when they're starving or freezing or poor.*

*No one laughs at God when the doctor calls after some routine tests
No one's laughing at God when it's gotten real late and their kid's not back from the party yet*

*No one laughs at God when their airplane starts to uncontrollably shake
No one's laughing at God when they see the one they love hand in hand with someone else
And they hope that they're mistaken.*

*No one laughs at God when the cops knock on their door
and they say we got some bad news, sir
No one's laughing at God when there's a famine or fire or flood.*

*No one laughs at God on the day they realize
that the last sight they'll ever see is a pair of hateful eyes
No one's laughing at God when they're saying their goodbyes.*
(quoted in Ray Ortlund, *Proverbs*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 47.)

There is a storm that is coming on the horizon. Everyone is going to have a hard day. How will TikTok and Instagram and social media help you then? Wisdom laughs not to belittle you, but to show you how absurd it is not to follow her ways.

Don't Wait for Wisdom's Call (1:28-33)

If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (1:7), then being unresponsive to wisdom is to do what 1:7 says – to despise it is to be a fool. And here, we have people being fools.

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After a while, what happens is that wisdom won't answer. When you despise and reject someone or something for so long, there comes a point of no return. We know this in friendship – you can lean on a friend too long and one day they've had it. Or you can cross a line and they decide that enough is enough. The same is true with wisdom. When you reject Wisdom's counsel and correction.

God doesn't play games with us. He cries out to us, just like wisdom does. And he offers himself. If you want to gain your life, you have to lose it. If you want to be wise, you have to admit you're a fool. This is where the apostle Paul began: "If anyone thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he might become wise" (1 Cor. 3:18). The reason for this statement is that Christ offers security (1:33), and the only way to be safe is to hide yourself in Christ. Listening to him is hard. It requires dying to ourselves. It requires tuning our hearts to sing his praise. It means being willing to look stupid in the eyes of this world so that we might be wise in his own eyes.

What will kill you is complacency (vv. 32-33). You can think you're fine. You can think you have time. But Wisdom is only available for so long. You can only live and reject wisdom for so long because wisdom isn't something that you gain immediately. It takes a life time of pursuing, studying, thinking, and reflecting. You can reject wisdom and find that you are like a foolish man building your house upon the sand. When the storm comes, your security will be washed away.

But when you build your life upon the wisdom of God, when you follow his plan, what you discover is that you build your life upon a solid foundation. Wind and rain and storms will come, distractions will threaten you, but when your life is built upon the solid rock of Christ, you're more than secure (Matt. 7:24-27).

There is a wisdom that has come from God – and that Wisdom is Jesus Christ. He holds out his arms, pleading with you to come, to listen, to follow. He offers a firm, solid footing for you to build your life upon. There are lots of other designs offered to you. But one will keep you secure.

The reason he can keep you secure is that he is the wisdom of God who went to the cross to be rejected and despised. In a world of distracted voices, he listened to the One voice that mattered – his Father. He faced the tumult and torment of the storm to establish a firm foundation. He suffered and yet was not shaken, so that you might be established on something that won't ever be distracted.

For his love for you is laser focused. Nothing can distract the heart of God. That's why he's calling to you in this distracted age. Will you hear him?