

PROVERBS: ETERNAL WISDOM FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

Growing in the Fear of the Lord and Godly Character for Life in a Fallen World

Walking With the Wise

Key Idea:

The way of wisdom is not walked alone — our companions on the journey will shape our character, sustain us in adversity, warm us in cold seasons, and protect us in spiritual battle.

Key Text:

Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

Proverbs 13:20 ESV

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. ¹⁰ For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! ¹¹ Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? ¹² And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 ESV

Key Points:

- **Wisdom and Folly Are a Way — a Path to Walk** — Both the Jews and the Greeks understood wisdom as something discovered in motion — in walking, conversing, and living alongside others, not in isolated introspection. Proverbs consistently describes both wisdom and folly as paths: “The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day” ([Prov 4:18–19](#)), while “the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble.” The contrast could not be sharper — growing light versus deep darkness, sure-footed progress versus stumbling. This stands in direct contrast to Descartes, who in the winter of 1619 retreated into a stove-heated room to rebuild human knowledge from scratch through isolated reasoning. His “I think, therefore I am” became a founding moment of the modern Enlightenment — and its assumption that wisdom is found by looking within is still with us. Scripture says the opposite: wisdom is found by walking with others.
- **Our Companions Reveal and Determine Our Path** — There is a diagnostic and a determinative dimension to [Proverbs 13:20](#). Diagnostically, I can know which path I am actually walking by looking at my companions — the path of wisdom is populated with the wise, and the path of folly is populated with fools. Determinatively, my companions will shape who I am becoming: “whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.” Thomas Watson captured this with his unforgettable phrase: “Association begets assimilation.” You will “smell” like the people you spend the most time among. This is not a

marginal observation — it is one of the most important practical truths in all of Proverbs. Wisdom therefore chooses its companions carefully and deliberately.

- **Walking with the Wise Makes Me Wiser** — The first and most direct benefit of wise companionship is growth in wisdom itself. Wisdom is a journey, not a destination, and the journey requires companions. It is not merely difficult to grow in wisdom while spending your time with fools — it is impossible. The reverse is equally true: sustained, close proximity to those who fear the Lord and walk wisely will inevitably produce growth in wisdom. The community of believers is not merely a support structure for individual spiritual growth — it is the primary environment in which God grows his people in wisdom.
- **Walking with the Wise Multiplies My Efforts** — “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil” ([Ecccl 4:9](#)). A team consistently outperforms an individual working alone — this is the blessing of synergy, in which the fruit of combined effort is greater than the sum of individual contributions. The lone-genius model of achievement that our culture celebrates is largely a myth. What God actually designed — and what wisdom recognizes — is that we accomplish more, bear more fruit, and bring more glory to God when we work and walk together than when we insist on going it alone.
- **Walking with the Wise Sustains Me in Adversity** — “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” ([Prov 17:17](#)). “If they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!” ([Ecccl 4:10](#)). Adversity is not a possibility to prepare for — it is a certainty. The question is not whether we will fall, but whether we will have companions who can lift us back up when we do. And crucially, that question is answered not in the moment of crisis but long before it — by the quality of the relationships we are building today. Prepare for future adversity now by cultivating deep friendships with the wise.
- **Walking with the Wise Gives Me Comfort in Cold Seasons** — “If two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?” ([Ecccl 4:11](#)). Emperor penguins survive the Antarctic winter not by individual toughness but by huddling together. The same is true spiritually. There are two kinds of cold seasons addressed here: the outward cold when hard circumstances press in, and the inward cold when our own hearts grow spiritually tepid. Wise companions warm us in both. When we grow cold toward God — when love and devotion and desire begin to wane — it is close friendship with those who are walking with God that stirs the embers back to life. An ember removed from the fire grows cold; an ember placed among the coals burns brightly.
- **Walking with the Wise Protects Me in Spiritual War** — “Though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him — a threefold cord is not quickly broken” ([Ecccl 4:12](#)). We are in a real spiritual war, and the lone-warrior approach — the Rambo fantasy — is how people get killed in battle. Watson warned that “there is no wisdom in fighting with an enemy to give him the advantage of the ground. We give Satan the advantage of the ground when we are alone.” The community of believers provides three specific forms of protection: (1) wise counsel for how to wage our warfare ([Prov 24:5–6](#)); (2) mutual exhortation that guards against the deceitfulness of sin ([Heb 3:13](#)); and (3) the stirring up of love for God that is the ultimate source of victory over temptation ([Heb 10:24–25](#)). To resist Satan, the world, and the flesh, we must have a white-hot love for Jesus — and that love is kindled and sustained only in close, regular, in-person fellowship with other believers.
- **Practical Steps: Walk with the Wise Intentionally** — Because we do not live in a small village where we encounter one another naturally throughout the week, walking with the wise requires

intentionality. Four practical steps: First, gather with the church regularly on Sundays — [Hebrews 10:24–25](#) addresses corporate worship, and those who treat it as optional are walking the path of folly, not wisdom. Second, take advantage of special fellowship opportunities — breakfasts, lunches, bonfires — which are not mere social events but critical community-building occasions. Third, join a connect group, where the kind of deep mutual knowledge, prayer, and care that [Proverbs 13:20](#) envisions can actually be built. Fourth, invite someone to lunch, dinner, or a walk around Annapolis — simple, unhurried time together is how the deepest friendships are formed.

Discussion Questions:

- Bret opened with Descartes retreating to a heated room in the winter of 1619 to rebuild knowledge from scratch through isolated reasoning — a moment that helped launch the modern assumption that wisdom is found by looking within. Do you recognize that assumption in yourself or in our culture? Where do you see it most clearly? How does Proverbs' vision of wisdom-in-community challenge the way you have typically thought about spiritual growth?
- Proverbs describes both wisdom and folly as paths being walked ([Prov 4:18–19](#)). The path of the righteous grows brighter; the path of the wicked grows darker. Looking honestly at the direction your life is trending right now — not just individual moments, but the overall arc — which direction does the path seem to be going? What does that tell you?
- Thomas Watson said “association begets assimilation” — you will smell like the people you spend the most time with. Bret noted that we inevitably spend significant time with people who do not fear the Lord (at work, in neighborhoods, in daily life), which makes it all the more critical to deliberately choose close relationships with those who do. Who are the five people you spend the most time with? How are they shaping you? Are the people who have the most access to your life pulling you toward wisdom or away from it?
- Bret said I can know which path I am actually walking by looking at my companions, and that my companions will determine my eventual character. This is a diagnostic and a determinative truth. How does it land for you? Is there a relationship in your life right now where you know, if you are honest, that the companionship is pulling you away from wisdom? What would it look like to wisely address that?
- “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil” ([Eccl 4:9](#)). Our culture celebrates the lone genius and the self-made person. Where have you most experienced the reality that walking and working together produces more fruit than going it alone? What made that partnership or community so fruitful? What would it take to build more of that in your current season?
- “A brother is born for adversity” ([Prov 17:17](#)). Bret said the question of who will lift us up when we fall is answered not in the moment of crisis but long before it. Think honestly: if you went through a season of serious hardship right now — job loss, illness, family breakdown, spiritual darkness — who would be there? Do you have relationships deep enough to hold you through that kind of adversity? If not, what is preventing you from building them?

- The image in [Ecclesiastes 4:11](#) is two people keeping each other warm. Bret applied this to both outward hardship and inward spiritual coldness — those seasons when our love for God and our desire to walk with him begin to cool. Have you experienced a season of spiritual coldness? What brought warmth back? Was community part of that? Is there anyone in your life right now who you sense is growing spiritually cold and who needs someone to come alongside them?
- Watson warned that “we give Satan the advantage of the ground when we are alone.” The outline identifies three specific ways community protects us in spiritual warfare: wise counsel ([Prov 24:5–6](#)), mutual exhortation against the deceitfulness of sin ([Heb 3:13](#)), and the stirring up of love for God ([Heb 10:24–25](#)). Which of these three forms of protection do you most need right now? Do you have relationships close enough to provide it?
- Bret said that an ember removed from the fire grows cold, but an ember placed among other coals burns brightly. Where are you most tempted to be a lone-ember Christian — present enough to feel connected, but not close enough to actually be formed by the community? What is the real reason for that distance? Is it busyness, self-sufficiency, past hurt, fear of being known, or something else?
- The four practical steps — regular Sunday worship, special fellowship events, a connect group, and personal invitations for lunch or a walk — are all concrete and accessible. Which of these is the weakest area for you right now? What one specific action could you take this week to strengthen it? Is there someone in particular you could invite, a group you could join, or an event you have been putting off attending?

For Further Study:

- Read [Ecclesiastes 4:9–12](#) slowly alongside [Proverbs 13:20](#) and [Proverbs 17:17](#). The four images in Ecclesiastes — doubled toil, mutual lifting, shared warmth, and the threefold cord — each address a different dimension of what wise companionship provides. Which image speaks most directly to your current season of life? What would it mean practically to pursue that kind of community right now?
- Study [Hebrews 3:12–13](#) and [Hebrews 10:24–25](#) as companion texts. Both passages connect the community of believers to spiritual protection and perseverance. Notice that Hebrews 10:25’s warning against “neglecting to meet together” is framed explicitly in light of “the Day drawing near.” How does an eschatological horizon — the return of Christ — intensify the urgency of walking with the wise?
- Meditate on [Romans 15:5–6](#) — the benediction text from Sunday. Paul prays that the God of endurance and encouragement would grant harmony in the community so that together, with one voice, they might glorify God. Notice that the goal of community is not primarily our own comfort or growth — it is the unified glorification of God. How does that reframe the way you think about investing in relationships within the church? What would it look like for your relationships here to increasingly produce that kind of unified worship?
- This week, make one concrete move toward walking more intentionally with the wise. Options: join a connect group (check the [website](#), the B’Ridge, or the church app), attend an upcoming

fellowship event, or invite one person from the church to lunch, coffee, or a walk. Do it this week, not someday.

- Watch [After Hours](#) (available Tuesday) for additional teaching and application on this week's topic.
- Visit the church website to explore teachings organized by [series](#), by [Scripture](#), or by [topic](#) for deeper study of [fellowship](#), [community](#), [wisdom and knowledge](#), [spiritual warfare](#).