

Dr. August Konkel, Proverbs, Session 16, Living with Fools, Proverbs 26, Podcast Audio Overview

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Hey everyone, and welcome back for another deep dive today. We're tackling something that I'm sure you've all come across at some point. Fools, oh, but not the kind of, you know, like the jester hats and bells, right? We're going deeper. We're looking at the fool as it's described in Proverbs. Yeah, and specifically we're looking at a lecture from Dr. August Konkel on Proverbs 26, okay? And one of the things that really struck me was that fools in Proverbs aren't necessarily uneducated. Yeah, they can be really smart.

They can even have really important positions. That's one of the most fascinating things, actually, about the way that fool is used in Proverbs. It's not about a lack of intelligence, right? It's a lack of wisdom. Okay, so a fool can be book smart. They can have all the, you know, the degrees and the accolades, right? But they still make foolish decisions, and Konkel uses this really interestingly in art. Oh, yeah. He says that giving honor to a fool is as nonsensical as snow in the middle of harvest. Yeah, like what damage would that do? That's Proverbs 26.1 giving honor to a fool, right? Like, it's just completely inappropriate.

It doesn't make sense. You're actually causing damage. So then how do we deal with these so-called fools? Like, do we engage? Proverbs seems to have some conflicting advice on that. You hit a really important point there. Yeah, because in Proverbs 26.4 It says Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you yourself will be just like him, right? But then, just one verse later, Proverbs 26.5 says Answer a fool according to his folly, or he'll be wise in his own eyes Wait, so which is it? Do we answer them, or do we just walk away? Well, this is where it gets really interesting. Konkel uses a really interesting illustration. Okay.

He talked about Richard Dawkins. Okay. I know Dawkins, the biologist who wrote The God Delusion. Yeah, and Alistair McGrath.

Okay, remind me who McGrath is. McGrath is a theologian who, instead of debating Dawkins directly, took a different approach. Okay, he wrote an entire book very carefully dissecting Dawkins' arguments, exposing the flaws in his reasoning gotcha and Konkel actually tells a story about a lecture he was giving where there was this real die-hard Dawkins fan in the audience, and I guess it's just furious after the lecture, like McGrath had shaken his whole world by exposing the flaws in Dawkins' arguments. Wow, oh, in a way, McGrath answered a fool according to his folly. Yeah, but he did it very strategically to a larger audience. He didn't waste his time trying to convince Dawkins personally. Yeah, he saw that as kind of a lost cause, right, but he wanted to make sure that other people who might be persuaded by Dawkins arguments, right? We're aware of the problems with them, so it's a really good example of knowing how to engage and when to engage. Absolutely, because sometimes the best response to a fool is to not engage directly, but to, like you said, expose their thinking.

Yeah, to other people, and so it really comes down to discernment: knowing when it's appropriate to engage and when it's best to just avoid a fruitless argument. So sometimes you walk away. Sometimes you speak up. It depends exactly. I've got to use some judgment there, and here's the thing about fools that I think is so interesting: they tend to repeat the same mistakes over and over.

Oh, are you talking about the dog returning to its vomit? That's the one Proverbs twenty six point eleven Proverbs twenty six point one. That's a vivid image It's a pretty graphic image, but it really drives home the point it does fools get stuck in their ways I'm thinking about that person who just complains about the same problem over and over but never does anything to fix it Yeah, like do something different and that's why it's so important for us to understand the dangers that are associated with fools Right for our own sake and for the people around us Konkel outlines a whole bunch of dangers He does doesn't he yeah like the one about if you send a fool to deliver a message It's as effective as cutting off your own feet and who thinks of these things. I know, right? Proverbs twenty-six, point six. Where do they come up with these? It's amazing. Yeah, he also points out that even Proverbs could be dangerous in the mouth of a fool.

What do you mean? Because they'll twist the meaning; they'll misapply them. They'll completely miss the point. Oh, it's like giving a loaded weapon to someone who doesn't know how to use it exactly. You know, actually I had this boss once who told me Oh, well, let's just say she loved to quote inspirational quotes Uh-huh, but her actions never ever matched her words. Oh, classic fool, and it was so frustrating for everyone who worked for her. Just this complete disconnect between her words and her actions. So another danger is giving fools any kind of power or authority? Oh, yeah, Konkel brings that back, talking about snow and harvest. Yeah, you're just asking for trouble. It's like putting a fool in charge, and everyone will see how foolish they are. And I remember him giving some colorful examples from Proverbs. Yeah, to drive home this point, like, wasn't there one about the sluggard who won't even feed himself? Yeah. Yeah.

He's like Oh, there's a lion in the street. Yeah, Proverbs twenty-six point one: too lazy to eat. He's too lazy to even get up and find food, and he's using this flimsy excuse to justify his inaction. It just shows how fools can be so blind to their own faults. Yeah, they just blame everything on external circumstances. Yeah, they won't take responsibility. Then there's the fool who jumps into arguments that have nothing to do with him, right? Always stir in the pot Proverbs twenty six point seven like one who seizes a dog by the ears is a passerby who meddles in a quarrel not his Own.

Oh, yeah. I know a few people like that. Oh, me too.

Love to create drama. Oh, yeah. Yeah, but it's a good reminder that, you know, wisdom also means knowing when to stay out of it. Absolutely, and then Proverbs also points out that fools just don't understand the damage that's caused by deceit and gossip. It's like they don't have a filter. Yeah, I don't think before they speak.

They lack that self-awareness or act. Yeah, which could be really Dangerous, so we've covered kind of defining the fool and all the dangers that fools can bring, right? But what about the deceivers themselves? Yeah, what does Proverbs have to say about them? Well,

Proverbs 26:28 says, "A lying tongue hates its victims; oh, wow, a flattering mouth works a ruin. Yeah, so it's saying that liars don't just hurt other people, right? They ultimately destroy themselves, like their deceit poisons their relationships, and it leads them down a path of destruction. That's kind of sobering, a lot.

Yeah, like, you know, dishonesty might seem like a good idea at the time, yeah, but ultimately it comes at a cost, always. Yeah, and speaking of deceit. There's another aspect of folly that I think is Conville brings out; it's really interesting.

Okay, and that is the whole area of deceitful speech and flattery. Oh, yeah, Proverbs twenty-six, point two three through twenty-eight. Yeah, I love that first line. Oh, it's so good. It's like a coating of silver dross on earthenware, fervent lips with an evil heart. That imagery is so vivid. It's like, you know, you see that shiny silver. Uh-huh.

It looks appealing on the surface, but underneath it's just a cheap imitation, right? It's covering up something worthless and deceitful speech. Especially flattery; it works the same way, right? It might seem attractive, but it's hiding bad intentions, and Konkel actually gets kind of personal here. He does; he talks about his own struggle to distinguish between genuine compliments and flattery. Yeah, he's like, I don't even know how to take a compliment half the time. Yeah, because he doesn't know if people are being sincere or if they're just saying what they think he wants to hear. Oh, I think a lot of people struggle with that. Yeah, because you just don't know, like, are they being genuine, right, or are they trying to manipulate me? It makes you wonder how much of the, like, quote-unquote praise that we get is genuine. Yeah, is it genuine, and how much is actually manipulation? That's a great question, and it's something to really be mindful of as we navigate these complex relationships.

Absolutely. We'll actually dive more into that in the next part of our deep dive. Stay tuned. We'll be right back after the break. You know, it's interesting how Proverbs doesn't just point out these fools, right? It actually gives us practical strategies for dealing with them. Yeah, it's like, okay, you're going to meet these people.

Here's how you handle it. Exactly, it even talks about how different situations might call for different approaches. Yeah, and he highlights this tension between two seemingly opposite Proverbs. Yeah, Proverbs 26:4, which tells us not to answer a fool according to their folly, right? And then Proverbs twenty six point five which says to do exactly that. Yeah, that's the part that I think a lot of people get tripped up on. Yeah, that's what I'm still trying to figure out. Like, how do we reconcile those two pieces of advice? Right? They seem totally contradictory. Well, I think the key is understanding the context and the purpose.

Okay, behind each proverb. Okay, so Proverbs twenty-six point four is warning us against getting sucked into those pointless arguments with fools, right? You know the ones where you go back and forth and back. Oh, yeah, and you get nowhere, and you just end up feeling drained. You're just, yes, spinning your wheels, exactly.

So it's like picking your battles, right? Exactly, not every disagreement is worth your time and energy, right? Sometimes the wisest course of action is to just disengage, right, and avoid fueling the fire makes sense. But then what about Proverbs twenty-six point five? Yeah, when does it make sense to answer a fool according to their folly, right? Well, this is

where I think discernment comes in. Okay, Proverbs twenty-six point five is suggesting that there are times when it's necessary, okay, to expose a fool's foolishness, right, especially when their words or their actions are misleading others or causing harm. So it's about protecting other people. Yes, from being taken in by that fool's whatever exactly. Think back to Konkel's example of Alistair McGrath and Richard Dawkins, right? McGrath recognized that directly debating Dawkins would probably be a waste of time, right? So instead he chose to address Dawkins' arguments in a way that exposed their flaws to a wider audience. Right, right. So it was more strategic. He was answering a fool according to his folly, but he was doing it in a way that could help other people see through those arguments.

So the goal isn't to win an argument or to change the fool's mind. Okay, it's about safeguarding truth, gotcha, and preventing the spread of harmful ideas. So, to recap: disengage when it's pointless. Yes, but engage strategically when you need to protect truth or prevent harm. Got it.

Got it. Okay, but this is the tricky part: it takes careful judgment. Yeah, to know when to speak up and when to stay silent. Absolutely, because you're dealing with someone who's so convinced that they're right, right? It's like that saying: never argue with a fool; onlookers may not be able to tell the difference. Oh, I know, so true. Yeah, sometimes the best way to expose a fool is to let them keep talking, right, because their own words will reveal their lack of wisdom. So have you? I'm just curious.

Have you ever been in a situation where you've had to, like, apply this? Oh, yeah, these proverbs in real life. Absolutely, like with someone who was exhibiting classic fool behavior, you know. I think we all encounter these types of people at some point in our lives, right? It could be a co-worker who's always taking credit for other people's work or a friend who keeps making the same mistakes over and over again, or even, dare I say, a family member who just can't seem to see reason. Oh, especially around the holidays. Oh, tell me about it. Family gatherings can be a real test.

But in all seriousness, the wisdom of Proverbs gives us such valuable tools. Yeah, for navigating these challenging relationships, right? It teaches us to recognize the signs of folly, to discern when to engage and when to disengage, right, and ultimately to protect ourselves and others from the harm that fools can inflict; it's like a guidebook for dealing with difficult people. Exactly, but it's not just about dealing with other people's folly, right? You know, Proverbs also challenges us to look inward, yeah, and to examine our own tendencies towards foolishness. That is a good point. It's so easy to point the finger.

Oh, yeah, and call other people fools. It's so easy to do, but you have to look at yourself, too. Yeah, true wisdom starts with recognizing our own shortcomings and being aware of those right before we call someone else a fool. Yeah, we should ask ourselves. Am I the fool in this situation? Oh, that's a tough question. It is a tough question, but it's a necessary one. But you have to ask it; you do, because Proverbs is reminding us that we're all capable of making foolish choices. You know, we all have those moments where we let pride or deceit or just, like, a lack of self-control get the better of us. Yeah, and so the question is: how do we identify those blind spots? Yeah, how do you not do that? How do we avoid falling into those traps of folly? That is the question. Yeah, well, one key is to pay attention to patterns in our lives. Okay, are we making the same mistakes over and over again? Are we quick to

blame others when things go wrong? Okay, are we more concerned with being right? Than with seeking truth.

Ooh, tough questions. They are tough questions. Yeah, but they're the questions that we need to be asking ourselves, right? You know, I think that's part of what makes Proverbs so powerful. It holds up this mirror to our hearts, and it challenges us to become wiser and more discerning people. And so it's not just about not being a fool. It's about actually striving to be the opposite.

Yes, make those good choices. It's about actively pursuing wisdom that leads to a good life. Yes, for yourself and the people around you, you nailed it. I like that. It's not just about avoiding negative consequences.

It's about pursuing a life that's marked by wisdom, integrity, and compassion. Yeah. Yeah, and that's not always easy.

It's a journey. It is a journey, sure, and it requires Constant self-reflection and humility. Uh-huh, and a willingness to learn from our mistakes. I feel like I'm a lot more aware of my own potential for foolishness after this conversation. Me too. But hey, at least we're aware of it. Recognizing our own falling is the first step towards growth, right? So what else can Proverbs teach us about this whole fool business Well, there's this fascinating passage in Proverbs 26 that talks about the dangers of deceitful speech and flattery Yes, which we kind of touched on earlier Proverbs 26 point two three through twenty eight. Yeah, it's so relevant today. Yes, social media and everyone, like, oh, absolutely crafting their online persona. It's so easy to get caught up in presenting this, you know, perfect image of ourselves online, you know, making our lives seem more glamorous or successful than they really are, right, right? And so it's like, and that could create this culture of insincerity.

Yeah, flattery and empty praise become the norm. So, how can you tell the difference? Yeah, how do you know if someone is giving you genuine praise? Yeah, or if they're just, you know, laying it on thick. How do you know? That's such a great question. It is a good question, and it can be tricky. Yeah, you know, sometimes our own insecurities can cloud our judgment. We might be so desperate for approval that we're quick to accept any compliment that comes our way, right? Even if it feels a little off even if it feels a little off.

Yeah, right, or like, oh, they're just being nice. They're just trying to butter me up. Yeah, then sometimes, like, you dismiss genuine compliments. Oh, absolutely, because you don't feel worthy. We've all been there.

Yes. It's such a delicate balance. It is, but Proverbs gives us some really helpful clues. Okay, for distinguishing between true praise and false praise, okay, tell me, tell me: one key is to consider the source. Okay, is this person known for their honesty and integrity? Uh-huh, do their words generally align with their actions? That's a good point. So if someone who's always pretty straightforward gives you a compliment, you're like, okay, I think they mean it. You're more likely to take it at face value, right? Another thing to consider is the content of the praise. Okay, is it specific? Is it focused on your actions or your qualities? Uh-huh, or is it vague and overly gushing? I see what you mean. You know, for example, if someone says you did a fantastic job on that presentation, right? That's more specific and meaningful Than just saying Oh, you're amazing, right? It's like they actually paid attention, exactly, and so

specific praise tends to be more sincere, okay, and more helpful, right, whereas vague, over-the-top compliments can be a sign of, you know, insincerity or manipulation.

So it's all in the details. It's paying attention to those details, yeah, both in the words themselves and who's saying them and the person who's speaking them, right? And then ultimately I think it comes down to trusting our intuition. Okay, you know, we often have this gut feeling, yeah, about whether or not someone is being sincere.

You're right. There's that little voice that says Hmm. Something's not right here. Exactly.

Yeah, I get that, and so well, we don't want to be overly suspicious of everyone who gives us a compliment, right? It's important to pay attention to those intuitive nudges. Yeah, because they can often protect us from being deceived or manipulated. So Proverbs is basically giving us, like, a crash course in emotional intelligence. I love that. I love that way of putting it. It's like helping us figure out what's real and what's not. It's about developing that wisdom to see through the facades, to recognize the true intentions behind the words, right, and to build relationships that are based on honesty and authenticity, and real, genuine mutual respect.

Yeah, so what other gems of wisdom are there as we continue to explore Proverbs? Well, you know, there's this fascinating passage in Proverbs 29. Okay, that caught my eye. Okay, and it talks about how fools vent their rage, but wise people ultimately bring calm, and I think this speaks volumes about the power of self-control. Okay, and the importance of responding to Difficult situations with wisdom rather than just reacting emotionally. That sounds interesting.

We should dive into that in our next segment. Let's do it. Welcome back. We were talking about that passage in Proverbs 29.

Yeah, the one about fools and rage. It's Proverbs 29.11 fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end. I like that bringing calm in the end. Yeah, it's like, you know, you see those two images: yeah, the person just totally losing it, and then the person who takes a deep breath, right? Right, thinks about it, and it goes back to what we talked about earlier, like sending a fool to deliver a message, which is just asking for trouble. Proverbs 26.6. Yeah, now that connects to this idea of emotional regulation. Absolutely, you know, a wise messenger is someone who's calm and collected, right? They're not going to make things work. They're going to be able to get the message across clearly and effectively, so it's not just what you say, right? It's how you say it exactly, and it's who's saying it. It applies to so many areas of life. Yeah, think about it, like talking to your family.

Yeah, negotiating a deal. Trying to resolve a disagreement. Yeah, just being able to manage your emotions. It can make all the difference. Really, you can't control the wind, but you can adjust your sails.

I love that, and that's so true. It reminds us that even when things feel out of control, yeah, we still have the power to choose how we respond. So it seems like Proverbs is saying that when it comes to fools, it's not about trying to change them. Yeah, but learning how to, like, navigate them in their presence, you know, with grace. Recognize their patterns. Yeah, set boundaries. Set boundaries. Take your battle, take your battle, and I think maybe most

importantly, yeah, develop wisdom and self-control in our own lives. Okay, so that we can be the calming influence. That makes sense. And I love how Proverbs doesn't just point out problems, right? It actually offers solutions real solutions. Yeah, practical, if it's like a guidebook for living a wiser, more fulfilling life, a treasure trove of wisdom. So as we wrap up this deep dive looking at fools and Proverbs, uh-huh.

What's one thing you want listeners to take away? I think the biggest thing for me is remembering that, you know, we all have the capacity for both wisdom and falling, right? It's not about judging other people or labeling them, right, but about recognizing those tendencies in ourselves. Okay? Yeah, and choosing to pursue a path that leads to growth. Yeah, integrity and compassion I love that, and that's what it's all about.

Yeah, becoming the best version of yourself. Absolutely, even when you're surrounded by fools, even when you're surrounded by fools. So, to our listeners, how will you use this wisdom to deal with the difficult people in your life? Great question. And how will you challenge yourself to grow in wisdom and avoid the pitfalls of folly? Thanks for joining us for another deep dive. Until next time, keep seeking wisdom