

AN OPEN INVITATION PROVERBS 9:1-18

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

M.I. GOD PASSIONATELY DESIRES FOR US TO LIVE FULL, JOYFUL, AND ABUNDANT LIVES BUT WE MUST COMMIT OURSELVES TO KNOWING HIM, SUBMITTING TO HIM, AND OBEYING HIM.

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Here we are at the last chapter of King Solomon's nine-chapter discourse on the nature and character of wisdom. As we have seen, wisdom is intricately tied up in the nature and character of God. Over these nine chapters, the teacher has personified wisdom. In other words, he has taken wisdom and made her into a person. Lady wisdom was elegant, graceful, and we found that her ways lead to life.

On the other hand, the personification of foolishness will find her completion in today's text where we will be introduced formally to Lady Folly this morning. However, we saw by using the specific sin of adultery, the author has already given us an introduction and we have met her as Lady Seduction. I would like to continue to refer to her as Lady Seduction since the English misses the intent when we call her Lady Folly. Lady Folly seems too benign in that we simply think of her as stupid. Lady Seduction gives us the full force of her evil intent where her goal is to destroy us and her desire for us is death.

This morning, Solomon is going to summarize the first nine chapters by reminding us that wisdom or folly is really dependent on our own personal choices. We are going to be invited to two dinner parties the problem is that they are both at the same time so we will have to decide which we will attend. Will we attend Lady Wisdom's party or Lady Seduction's party?

I think that all of us really do want to follow Jesus, but it seems as if this world offers us a lot of pleasure and excitement. We really are tied to this world, aren't we?

Let me give you an example. As an intern, I was required to run children's church. One Sunday, we sang songs about heaven. The kids really liked the song, "Rock-a-my-soul-in-the-bosom-of-Abraham" and, they were really getting into it. Since I didn't want to miss an opportunity I asked

the kids, “How many of you would like to go to heaven?” All the children raised their hands except little Tommy. I said, “Tommy, why wouldn’t you like to go to heaven?” Little Tommy answered, “I’m sorry, but I can’t. My mother told me to come right home after Sunday school.”

Jesus plainly invites us to enter a personal, intimate, and saving relationship with Him but we have all sorts of reasons why we do not get passionately involved, but in light of this morning’s passage, I am inclined to say that the reason we are not focused on our relationship with Christ and growing as believers, is because we have become seduced by the things of this world and we are in no hurry to go to heaven because we have fallen in love with this world.

Here is a good summary of what wisdom is and it is also the main idea of this morning’s passage. **GOD PASSIONATELY DESIRES FOR US TO LIVE FULL, JOYFUL, AND ABUNDANT LIVES. BUT WE MUST COMMIT OURSELVES TO KNOWING HIM, SUBMITTING TO HIM, AND OBEYING HIM.** There are no short cuts. Maybe that is why not many of us are enjoying the full abundant lives that Jesus promises us perhaps we are not totally committed.

I. AN INVITATION TO THE FULL LIFE (Vs.1-6)

JESUS HAS MADE THE WAY FOR US TO BE IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND TO ENJOY LIFE BUT WE MUST BE HUMBLE ENOUGH TO LIVE LIFE UNDER HIS CONDITIONS.

In Verses 1-6, Lady Wisdom extends to us an invitation to the full life: **JESUS HAS MADE THE WAY FOR US TO BE IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND TO ENJOY LIFE. BUT WE MUST BE HUMBLE ENOUGH TO LIVE LIFE UNDER HIS CONDITIONS.** I would like us to remember that from last week, we said Lady Wisdom in some sense was a type of Christ. In these verses, Lady Wisdom invites us into her house for a meal. In

the New Testament book of Revelation, Jesus said that He is standing at the door of each of hearts personally. He said that He is knocking and calling out for us to open the door. And then He concludes that verse by saying that if we are willing to open the door of our hearts to Him, He will come in, settle down, and share a meal with us. So as we look at Lady Wisdom's invitation, let us remember that Jesus extends this same invitation to everyone who is willing to listen.

A. GOD HAS DONE ALL THE WORK (Vs.1-3)

The first part of the message is found in verses 1-3. God has done all the work. Wisdom takes all the initiative and does all the work. If you quickly scan verses 1, 2, and 3, you will notice the flurry of activity, she has built her house, she has carved the pillars out of stone, she has butchered her own meat and mixed the wine, she has set the table and she has sent out the invitations. She has done everything. The only thing we will be required to do is to accept her invitation. I want to make a quick comment here and I will explain it later. Lady Wisdom will be directly contrasted to Lady Seduction in Verses 13-18.

First, Lady Wisdom built her house she did not have contractors build it and she carved out the pillars herself. In the last chapter, we saw her observing God create the universe. She knows how to build and the 7 pillars probably have to do with completion. In the Bible, the number 7 usually refers to perfection and completion oftentimes the number refers to the holiness of God. This house is a place where we can find wholeness, completeness, fulfillment and purpose. Jesus built the church and keep in mind that we must constantly remind ourselves that the church is not a building or an organization the church is the gathering together of all people who confess Jesus as Lord, with Jesus as the head. We are the church and Jesus is the One Who built it; He shed His blood, He died, and He rose from the dead. The church is the place where we find wholeness,

completeness fulfillment and purpose. The church is where we find our saving relationship with Christ.

Secondly, in Verse 2 we see that Lady Wisdom has prepared a feast for us. “She prepared her meat,” is too weak, it actually says that she slaughtered the meat, she mixed the wine with spices to give it a unique flavor and she set out the best China. This is a beautiful dinner party, and Lady Wisdom has gone through a lot of work to prepare it. It is a feast. As we have said, wisdom is found in knowing and living God’s Word, the Bible. Many prophets, apostles, and dedicated men and women throughout history have given their lives so we could have the Bible. It is a feast of wisdom.

The problem is that most Christians in the West are baby Christians. They cannot feast on the tasty meat and rich, full-bodied wine of wisdom. Because we are lazy and preoccupied with the things of this world, the most we can handle is milk. The author of Hebrews chastises most Christians because we neglect our Bibles. God has prepared the Bible for us. God the Holy Spirit inspired all the writers of the Bible “All Scripture is inspired by God” (II Timothy 3:16).

Lady Wisdom has built the house and she has prepared the party and now in Verse 3, she sends out invitations to anyone who is willing to come. The more I pastor, and the older I get, the more I realize how confused the church is regarding salvation and life in Christ, I want us to understand this in the clearest possible terms. True Christianity realizes that we are nothing in fact we are but dust of the earth, we are mud. The only thing that gives us value is our contents. When Jesus comes to live in our hearts through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we become valuable containers. We are the dwelling place of God we become the Holy of Holies. Here is the important part, anything that is not done by the power of God the Holy Spirit, is done by Satan. There are only two options, just as this passage portrays two dinner parties. If we are doing

anything, even church stuff, under our own power and abilities, then it is actually being done by Satan. That is frightening for me to even think about. Imagine, I may have been doing a lot of Christian things, but if they were done under my own initiative and with my own power, then all those works are attributed to Satan. That is why so many Christians burn out in the ministry, that is why many Christians are angry, worried, and frustrated, that is why many Christians do not ever enjoy the abundant joyful life that Jesus promises. We must remember that God has done all the work and will continue to do all the work; all we need to be are willing partners.

B. WE MUST BE HUMBLE ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND (Vs. 4-5)

Having said that, I know there will be a lot of resistance. I have said this before, but I'd like to say it again and I want it to sound as horrible and offensive as possible. If any of us think we are indispensable to the ministry, if we think we are smart, or talented, or clever, if we think God needs our money or anything we have, keep this in mind: God accomplished His mission through a talking donkey. God used a jackass to do ministry and if He could use a jackass, then just maybe He can use you and me. That is what Verses 4-5 are all about but we must be humble enough to understand. Even though Lady Wisdom invites all to come to her table, she offers a special invitation to those who need her the most, the simple and those who lack judgment. Look at the first sentence in verse 4. She says, "Come in here!" The literal translation is, "Turn aside in here!" In other words, the simple would have to alter their course to turn into Lady Wisdom's house. In Hebrew, the concept of repentance is to turn around; repentance is altering one's course. I was going in the wrong direction, but I turned around. In the New Testament, repentance is a matter of changing one's mind; my thinking was wrong, and now I have turned it around by changing my mind. When the Prodigal Son repented, the text says that he "came to his senses" and after he did, he left the country he was in and headed for home.

All of us are simple in one way or another. We all need to turn into Lady Wisdom's house for some re-direction but that takes humility. The word simple in Verse 4 describes young, gullible, silly, and easily led people they drift into temptation easily, and the second description of this simple person is that he lacks judgment. The Hebrew says, "He lacks heart." Lacks heart describes someone who is too lazy to pursue what's right. It takes too much energy to think about it. The one who lacks heart has nothing better to do than to be stupid, let the world define value for him, and chase after the things of this world. All of us have blind spots in our lives we all need to change our thinking and behavior, we need to repent, turn our attention away from the things of this world, and turn our attention to Wisdom.

Look at the generous invitation in verse 5, it is an all-inclusive vacation. She says, "Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed." Jesus invites us to eat His Body and drink His blood. Like Lady Wisdom, Jesus prepared the abundant life for us. All there is left for us to do is humbly accept it, enjoy it, and say, "Thank You." The church is a place where we are invited to partake of life through God's word the Bible, and through God's people, fellow believers.

C. JESUS SAID WHOSOEVER WILL MAY COME (V.6)

I don't think we say this enough. As Lady Wisdom does in verse 6, Jesus said, "Whosoever will, may come." Too many times, people think they have to reach some level of holiness before God will accept them. People say to me, "Pastor, if I came to church, the roof would fall in." I respond, "I have been going there every day for the past 14 years, and it hasn't fallen in yet." You see Christianity starts from the premise that we are all sinful. None of us are good. Look how to find eternal life! Look how to find abundant life! Look how to find a life filled with joy and peace! Verse 6 says, "Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding." In other words, simply repent. Change your thinking and change your behavior so

that they conform to the nature and character of God. It really does take humility to accept Jesus' invitation, because we have to first admit that we are nothing and He is everything. Put this picture in your mind; we are dust, all of us are dust, we are different genders, different races, and different ethnicities. Some of us are educated some are not, some are rich and some are poor, some of us have titles, some of us don't. Lest someone think they are better than another because of gender, education, wealth, ethnicity, or status of any kind, remember, we are dust. We all look like lumps of mud to God. There is no cleaner or more important mud, it's still all mud. If we want to have the courage to turn into Lady Wisdom's house, if we want to come to Jesus, we have to first acknowledge the fact that we are totally and completely useless without Him. Here is the point: **JESUS HAS MADE THE WAY FOR US TO BE IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND TO ENJOY LIFE BUT WE MUST BE HUMBLE ENOUGH TO LIVE LIFE UNDER HIS CONDITIONS.**

II. PARTY FAVORS (Vs. 7-12)

THERE ARE CONSEQUENCES TO ALL OUR CHOICES. GOOD CHOICES BRING PEACE AND JOY. BAD CHOICES BRING MISERY AND DISASTER.

Verses 7-12 remind us that at all great dinner parties, there are party favors. I'm a simple man, and I was a simple kid, I always looked forward to the party favors when I went to other kid's birthdays. I didn't care how junky they were or how valuable they were, I just remember looking forward to getting my bag and bringing it home. Well at the two dinner parties in today's passage, they both have party favors to send home. Here is the point for our everyday lives: **THERE ARE CONSEQUENCES TO ALL OUR CHOICES. GOOD CHOICES BRING PEACE AND JOY BAD CHOICES BRING MISERY AND DISASTER.** In this section, we will get a description of the guests, the hosts, and the party favors.

A. THE GUESTS (Vs. 7-9)

Verses 7-9 describe the guests. These two verses are set up to contrast the type of guests. If you look closely, you will notice that each line in Verse 7 parallels each line in Verse 9. Verse 8 is split in half where the first line contrasts the second line.

1. THE ARROGANT (Vs. 7-8a)

Verse 7 through the first half of verse 8 describes the arrogant. Take note of this interesting point; Wisdom does not address the foolish directly she is talking to the teacher. That fact in itself has a lot to say about fools. Look what she says these types of fools are arrogant, they mock godly things their thinking is evil and their behavior is described as wicked. Not only do they hate God, they hate people who have dedicated their lives to following God. What Lady Wisdom is saying is that it is pretty much a waste of time to try to correct arrogant people. We have all run into these kinds of people when they ask you for advice or an opinion, they are really not interested in what you have to say, they are only looking for someone to agree with their position. Over the years, I have enjoyed reading Dr. Leo Buscaglia's books and I loved hearing him lecture. One of his famous sayings that stuck with me over the years is, "Don't give advice wise people don't need it, and foolish people won't heed it." In 30 years of ministry, I have found that to be generally true. Lady Wisdom takes a risk by inviting these arrogant people to the party, but she knows the risks.

2. THE HUMBLE (Vs. 8b-9)

But the second half of verse 8 and verse 9 reminds us that there are people who genuinely love God and want to mature in their relationship with Him. Humble people want to be and do better each day. They don't mind being rebuked and corrected because they want to improve themselves each day. About 10 years ago, I read a book called, *The Greatest Salesman in the World*, by Og Mandino. I took the theme from that book and made it my life's mission statement which is; "I want to be better today than I was yesterday, and I want to be better tomorrow than I

am today.” I am thankful that I played competitive sports because they taught me a lot about life one of those lessons was that success does not come without pain and sacrifice. If you want a good relationship, it takes hard work and a lot of sacrifice. If you want to be a good student, it takes hard work and sacrifice. If I want to mature in my relationship with God, it will take hard work, pain, and sacrifice. Being rebuked or corrected is not fun, but it is beneficial. I do not know about you, but I want God to mold me into the person He wants me to be. My realistic expectation is that I am in for a lot of rebuke and a lot of correction but it is worth it. If we contrast these two types of dinner guests, we could characterize the arrogant as dumb and dumber, while the wise could be characterized as smart and smarter and do not miss the religious statement here; the arrogant are characterized as stupid and wicked, the humble are characterized as smart and righteous.

B. THE GRACIOUS HOST (Vs.10-11)

Now to continue on to the host of Lady Wisdom’s party. Verses 10-11 describe the gracious host; Lo and behold, it is God Himself. These two verses could easily be the theme to the book of Proverbs. They could be the theme of human existence. Let us take them one verse at a time. Verse 10 starts out, “Fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” I hear people mock God and mock Christian values. I hear people make their own rules for living the Christian life. Here is what I want us to understand; for those of us who come and go during the service, wake up, because if we only get one thing from this morning’s service, it is this: If we really knew God, we would fear Him. Lady Wisdom told us how God created the entire universe. He is the One who holds our eternal destiny in His hands. He is the One who will send us to heaven or hell for an eternity. He is a holy God and we are unholy by nature. He is a dangerous God. To know God is to fear Him. I think people often compare themselves to other people and they say stupid things like, “I’m a pretty good person, I try to do

good or I'm not as bad as so and so." That is not the right focus. Are you good compared to God? Are you not so bad when you compare yourself to God? He is a holy God He does not tolerate any ungodliness He made the rules for life and He expects them to be followed. You can make up any story you want, but the fact is, we are all going to die and we are all going to have to stand before this holy and all-powerful God. There is only one proper response, fear. This is not some philosophical awe or respect. This is pee your pants, crap in your pants fall down like a dead man fear. That is the God we serve. Why is this fear the beginning of wisdom? Because it humbles us and prepares us to listen to His Word.

That is where wisdom comes in, in Verse 11. Wisdom speaks and says, "If you listen to me, you will find the full, abundant, and joyful life." Here is the balance. God is a holy, all-powerful, and dangerous God but He also is a passionate lover. He sent Jesus to die for our sins. The Bible says, "If we confess with our mouths that Jesus is our Lord and if we believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead, we will be saved." There is no other way that I'm aware of. God sent His One and Only Son Jesus to die a horrible death for us. If there are many ways to God, then doesn't it seem a little cruel for God to sacrifice Jesus? And if God said that it is only by the death of Jesus and our faith in Him that we can be saved, shouldn't we be frightened by making up other rules or to say there are other ways to God?

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by Me." Now in the end, we either believe that or we don't.

C. THE TAKE HOME FAVORS (V.12)

And like all wedding and birthday parties, the take home favors are passed out in Verse 12. This is pretty plain; if you are wise, and attend Lady Wisdom's dinner party, you will take home the abundant life with you, you will enjoy peace, joy, contentment, and true happiness and this

abundant lifestyle is not dependent on the circumstances around us. Even in the midst of suffering and death, we can experience Jesus' abundant life.

On the other hand, if we chose to follow the world and attend Lady Seductions' party, we alone will suffer. I have heard a lot of proud people say 'I want to do life my way and I'm willing to take the consequences.' The problem is that these people usually start moaning and complaining when consequences hit. I would say in the last 10 years, I have become a little hardened towards arrogant people. I have taken the second half of Verse 12 seriously. My attitude towards arrogant people is, "Hey, you go and do what you want to do. You are the one who is going to suffer, not me. You go boyfriend you rebel and run headfirst into that wall. It doesn't hurt my head it hurts yours. You go girlfriend you punch that brick wall with your fist it won't hurt my hand." The book of Proverbs is filled with examples of this point: **THERE ARE CONSEQUENCES TO ALL OUR CHOICES. GOOD CHOICES BRING PEACE AND JOY BAD CHOICES BRING MISERY AND DISASTER.** I am tempted to say, "Who would be stupid enough to attend Lady Seduction's party? After all, Lady Wisdom has so much to offer." But as I look at the world we live in, I am reminded that Satan has street smarts.

III. AN INVITATION TO DEATH (Vs. 13-18)

EVEN THOUGH THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD LOOK GLAMOROUS, THEY LEAD ULTIMATELY TO SORROW AND DEATH.

In verses 13-18 Lady Seduction offers us an invitation to death. **EVEN THOUGH THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD LOOK GLAMOROUS, THEY LEAD ULTIMATELY TO SORROW AND DEATH.** I don't want us to be fooled, so let me lay this out for you.

A. SATAN NEVER HAS CREATED A THING (Vs. 13-15)

Verses 13-18 illustrate nicely that Satan has never created a thing. Do you remember Lady Wisdom? She built her house she carved her pillars out of stone and she butchered her own meat and mixed her own wine. She was a doer.

Look at Verse 14. Lady Seduction does nothing but sit on her fanny. Verse 13 describes her as loud. She is loud, not only in voice volume, but she dresses seductively. She is clueless. She acts like she is smart and sophisticated, but in reality she is stupid but because she is flashy and sexy, she catches our attention.

And here is the sad thing, look at verse 15 where Lady Wisdom tried to get those of us who were going down the wrong path to turn around and get on the right track. But, here, Lady Seduction is trying to get people who are trying to walk on the straight path, to turn into her house where crooked ways are taught. Keep in mind; that this works with all sin, but, since we are dealing with the seduction of sex, let us use sex. Satan did not create sex, God did. He made it to be passionate, pleasurable, intimate, and most of all, relational and since He has so much power to affect our minds, bodies, and souls, God protects us by putting a boundary on it. Sex is supposed to happen only in the context of a heterosexual, monogamous marriage.

What Satan does, since he cannot create anything of his own, takes sex and tries to distort it, he separates the pleasurable part of the sex act from the relational part of it. He gets us focused only on our bodies and the pleasure we derive from them he then makes us believe that God does not want us to have sex and that God does not want us to have pleasure. Listen, what Satan does is cause us to expect too little out of sex. God wants us to enjoy sex, mind, body, and soul. The problem is that we believe the lies of Satan and that is why we are so sexually scarred. We may think we are engaging our bodies in pleasure, but then, when it's too late, we realize that our

emotions, our minds, and our souls have been damaged. With unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, we find our bodies broken as well.

I used sex, but any sin works the same way. We have natural, God-given appetites, and proper ways God gives us to fulfill them. Satan distorts them and holds out some excitement or pleasure we can have immediately however, when the novelty, excitement, and pleasures wear off we are left with the consequences. Our time, our energy, our money, our health are often spent on chasing these pleasures.

B. TOO ARROGANT TO UNDERSTAND (Vs. 16-17)

Why do we continue to do it? Verses 16-17 say that we are too arrogant to understand. Listen, sin is fun and it is pleasurable for a time but here is the problem; we take our cues from Hollywood, we see these actors and actresses living glamorous, wealthy, fun-filled, exciting, and sexually wild lives then we become disappointed with our boring, mundane work-a-day lives. We are arrogant and think somehow we deserve all this excitement and so married people get involved in affairs and people turn to pornography, drugs, alcohol, gambling, and thrill seeking. It all feels like fun for a while but when the consequences kick in, the reality of what we are left with is ugly; broken marriages, single parent families, credit card debt, lost jobs, lost homes, health problems, and even death. Satan is very careful not to let you see those things.

D. SATAN SAYS WHOSOEVER MAY COME (V. 18)

Satan wants us! In Verse 18 we can see that Satan also says whosoever will, may come. Like I said before Satan makes sin and rebellion look fun and pleasurable and how many times do we fall for his tricks? Look at who the other guests are at this dinner party. We get in, find our seat at the table, look to the person next to us so we can introduce ourselves, and there is a corpse sitting there. In fact, all of the dinner guests around the table are corpses, and they are in various stages of

decay. Does that freak you out yet? It should because when we choose to ignore God's design for life, we are headed for death. The people who attend Lady Seduction's party never come out again.

EVEN THOUGH THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD LOOK GLAMOROUS, THEY LEAD ULTIMATELY TO SORROW AND DEATH.

We have come to the end of this first section of Proverbs. Solomon clearly laid it out for us, "Fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." We have been introduced to Lady Wisdom. We have been instructed to the dangers of getting involved with Lady Seduction but here is the point; our destinies depend on how wisely we choose. **GOD PASSIONATELY DESIRES FOR US TO LIVE FULL, JOYFUL, AND ABUNDANT LIVES. BUT WE MUST COMMIT OURSELVES TO KNOWING HIM, SUBMITTING TO HIM, AND OBEYING HIM.**

Maybe over these past nine chapters you have been convinced that you are living foolishly, yet for some reason you haven't been willing to change. There are all kinds of excuses, but let me gently remind you there are no good excuses.

Listen to what Jesus has to say about this. Jesus replied with this illustration:

"A man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations. When all was ready, he sent his servant around to notify the guests that it was time for them to come. But they all began making excuses. One said he had just bought a field and wanted to inspect it, so he asked to be excused. Another said he had just bought five pair of oxen and wanted to try them out. Another had just been married, so he said he couldn't come. "The servant returned and told his master what they had said. His master was angry and said, 'Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the city and invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.' After the servant had done this, he reported, 'there is still room for more.' So his master said, 'Go out into the country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full. For none of those I invited first will get even the smallest taste of what I had prepared for them.'"

Luke 14:16-24 (NLT)

You see, there is no good excuse for putting off repenting. Turn away from this world. Start correcting your thinking so that it conforms itself to God's Word, the Bible. Start correcting

your behavior so that it conforms itself to the nature and character of Jesus Christ. The abundant, joyful, and full life is offered to each one of us, but we must choose wisely.