

The Wise and the Simple

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everyone. Good job. That was a good response. Everyone's awake. My name is Eric. If you don't know me, I'm one of the guys here on staff at Watermark Church, and it's great to be here with you today to get a chance to look at God's Word together. So last week, obviously, we had the typhoon, and we all stayed home for what turned out to be nothing. But the past few weeks before that, we've been going through the book of Proverbs together, and we've been looking at this idea of wisdom. And Chris defined wisdom for us as the skill of living well in God's world in the midst of the complexity of life. And so we've been looking at the book of Proverbs, trying to figure out what does it look like for us to be wise, and how do we become the type of people who can live with wisdom in our day-to-day life. And we've been looking at some different characters from the book of Proverbs to sort of see how we compare and contrast with those characters, and how we need to change to become more like the wise. And today, we're going to look at the character of the simple. And what we're going to see is that God calls us to forsake our simplicity and pursue wisdom, because the way of wisdom leads to life, and simplicity far too easily ends in foolishness that leads to death. So we're going to pray, and then we'll jump in, and we will look at the simple. Father, we thank you for today for this chance to look at your word and hear from you, and we pray that as we meet, that you would make us people who are wise, that you would make us people who know you and follow you and trust in you, and are able to live skillfully because of that.

In Jesus' name, amen. So I want to start out today with an introduction to the simple, because I don't know if you're anything like me. Historically, when I would read the book of Proverbs, I'd just sort of skim over the simple and read it as the fool. But actually, if you look closely at the book of Proverbs, yes, the fool and the simple have a lot in common, but they also have some key important differences. And I think the best way to compare and contrast the simple person and the fool is to look at both of them in contrast to the wise, and then see where they fall on that spectrum compared to the wise person. So like we said, wisdom is the skill of living well in God's world in the midst of the complexities of life. You can kind of think of it like this. The world is a game, and God is the creator and designer of that game. He knows the perfect strategy for how to play that game best, and he has shown it to us. And so wisdom is the rules and strategy to play that game of life properly in the best way possible, no matter what complexities come our way. And the book of Proverbs tells us that the ultimate key, the primary key to living life skillfully, no matter what happens, is something it calls the fear of the Lord, which is this awe of God that leads us to trust God and follow God. No matter what happens in our lives, we're trusting God, we're following him wholeheartedly, and that is, according to the book of Proverbs, we'll call it the ultimate cheat code to living wisely, to living skillfully. And wisdom starts with fear of the Lord and this relationship with God, but it impacts every single area of our lives. So if you look at Proverbs chapter 1 verse 21 from the passage that we just read, you see wisdom, she's crying out in the streets, in the markets, in the city gates, the places where everyday life happens, that's where wisdom is calling out to us and asking us to live by her guidance. So wisdom starts with fear of God and leads us to live all of our life with skill. And the book of Proverbs introduces us to the wise and the fool and the simple and almost draws these like caricatures of them. So you can picture like faces in your mind that go with these characters.

Or at least I do that when I read the book of Proverbs. And I wanted to introduce you to the characters that I think of when I see each of these descriptions so that you can have a face to go with it as well.

And these are not perfect parallels, but I think they give us a little idea of what's going on. So when I hear about the wise in the book of Proverbs, do we have any Lord of the Rings fans here?

A few in the back corner. They all like to stay in the back. I don't know why. But when I think of the book of Proverbs and I think of the wise, I think of Gandalf. Now if you know Lord of the Rings, you'll know Gandalf is a wizard. And he always seems to know exactly the right thing to do and the right time to do it. And that's the picture of the wise in the book of Proverbs. He lives skillfully, like Chris's definition of the wise said. So Gandalf will challenge people when they need to be challenged. And Proverbs 15, 31 says that the wise man challenges people who need to be challenged. Or Gandalf, he doesn't sit back while others fight, but he jumps in and fights in the battles himself. He gets involved in the battles of his day. And Proverbs 21, 22 says the wise man gets involved and scales the walls of the enemy city, just like Gandalf fighting the battles. And Gandalf works tirelessly for the causes of good and justice, just like the wise king in Proverbs 20, verse 26. So becoming this wise person, becoming more like Gandalf, is the goal of the book of Proverbs. Now obviously, like I said, it's not a perfect parallel. Wisdom is presented as an attractive woman. Not quite there. And in Proverbs, wisdom, like I said, starts with the fear of the

[5 : 50] Lord. And obviously, the Lord of the Rings trilogy doesn't have a ton of spiritual elements in terms of the character's personal lives. But there's a lot of parallels between Gandalf and his skill in living and the type of skill in living that Proverbs wants us to have. So that's the wise. And you can think of the wise on one end of the spectrum. Now on the opposite end of the spectrum, Proverbs shows us the fool.

And going back to life as a game and wisdom being living with the right strategy and by the right rules, the fool is someone who looks at those rules, who looks at the instructions that God has given us, and says, nah, I think I can do better. I think I have a better strategy for living than the one that the creator and designer of this game has given me. And I think that by living my way, I can get better results. And so the fool looks at God's instructions and says, you know, God wants me to do honest business. But if I lie about how many hours a job takes, I can charge my clients extra money, and then I'll have more in my pocket, and I'll be richer, and I'll have better results. And so the fool cheats clients and does dishonest business for the sake of this game. And what the book of Proverbs tells us is that this may work out in the short term, but in the long term is typically going to catch up with them. And like we saw in Proverbs 132, it says, the way that the fool lives leads to death. And again,

I have a picture in my mind when I think of the fool, a face that sort of goes with that as a parallel for the fool. Again, not perfect, but I think a good one. Another Lord of the Rings name, but a little less well known, Wormtongue. Does anyone know who Wormtongue is? No? Okay. So Wormtongue is an advisor to a king, but he is sent to advise this king by the king's enemy. So he is sent to basically poison the king's mind and destroy the king's kingdom. And he comes in and he gives this advice to the king that will destroy him. And he intentionally sets out to cause mischief and discord, which Proverbs chapter 26 verse 10 says a fool is like an archer who just shoots everyone.

You can picture like a row of archers. He just pulls out an arrow, and rather than shooting at the enemy, he just shoots the guy in front of him in the back. That's what Wormtongue does. And the longer that Wormtongue spends as an advisor in this kingdom, the more the kingdom just falls into ruin. And the more rapidly the king ages and just becomes this frail old man. And Proverbs 10, 14 tells us the mouth of the fool brings ruin near. And we see this in Wormtongue's character in Lord of the Rings. And the moment that Wormtongue is removed from advising the king, the kingdom is able to be revived and things are able to go well again. And like Proverbs says, being a fool or following a fool, it leads to death. So we have the wise over here, Gandalf, who we want to be like. And we have the fool over here, Wormtongue, who we don't want to be like. And then right in the middle is the simple.

And the major distinguishing thing about the simple is not that they're evil, not that they're trying to be a terrible person and do terrible things. It's that they lack life experience, which leads them to making bad decisions again and again and again. So in Proverbs chapter 9, verse 15, we have Folly crying out to the simple. And it says she calls out to those who are going straight on their way. What that means is this guy's on the right path. He's doing the right thing.

[9 : 44] But the fool looks at him and says, he's doing the right thing now, but it's so easy to get him to stop. It's so easy to get him to turn from that path. And again, I have someone that comes to mind when I think of the simple, not from Lord of the Rings this time, someone maybe a few more of us, there's some disappointed faces out there, I see it, but someone that maybe a few more of us will recognize.

When I think of the simple, I think of Joey. Anyone know Friends? I think of Joey from Friends. And here's the thing about Joey from Friends. He's a cool guy. He's sweet. He's lovable. He would never intentionally do anything to hurt anyone, but he is dumb. And he makes terrible choices again and again and again. Not because he's trying to hurt anyone, but because he's dumb. Joey. And, you know, just a picture of this, if you don't watch Friends, there's this episode where he's trying to sell this entertainment system that holds, like, TVs and DVD players and stuff. And he's trying to prove to this potential buyer how big this cabinet is in the entertainment system. And to prove how big it is, Joey climbs inside the cabinet to show him, like, look, it can fit a full-size human man.

And the potential buyer, once Joey climbs in, shuts the door, locks him in, and robs his entire apartment. Now, Joey's not trying to get his apartment robbed, but he's dumb. And he gets it robbed anyways. And that's exactly the picture that we have of the simple in Proverbs. You look at them, just like you look at Joey, and you think, don't do it, don't do it. And he does it. That's the simple.

Again, not malicious, but they do it when you know that it's going to end in disaster. And Proverbs chapter 7 shows us a super clear picture of this. In 7.6, it says, I looked out my window, and I looked through the lattice, and I saw among the simple, I saw among the youths, a young man lacking sense. Now, this young man in this passage is what we in our culture would call a teenage boy.

And you can sort of put yourself in the narrator's shoes. He looks out the window as the sun's going down, and he sees this teenage boy out there walking along the street towards the house of his neighbor who has a pretty bad reputation. And now, in this passage, there's nothing that says that this boy is out intentionally trying to do something wrong. He's just walking down the street.

[12 : 19] But because of the way that the story is being told, you know, you know that trouble is right around the corner, and you're sort of looking out the window with the narrator being like, don't do it. Don't do it, just like you would to Joey, right? Don't do it. It's going to end in disaster.

And he just keeps walking down the street. And he comes to the house of this adulterous woman. And if you look at what happens in this passage, he doesn't go up to her and start trying to cause trouble. She comes out to him and starts kissing him and talking to him. And it, like, if you look at the verbs that it uses, it says that she seizes him, that she compels him, she persuades him.

This is all initiated by her. He's not out there to do wrong things with someone else's wife. He's not out there to cause trouble. She is completely the one initiating it. And he gives in and goes and has sex with another man's wife. Now, the thing that sticks out to me about this passage is not that he's trying to cause trouble. It's simply that he hasn't taken the active step towards wisdom of fleeing this bad decision. He's a teenage boy. He doesn't expect that some woman's going to be out and be, come out and be like, hey, how you doing? And so he doesn't plan in advance how he's going to respond when that situation presents itself. And so in this moment, he's trying to decide, do I sleep with this woman or not? As she's kissing him, as she's dressed up like a prostitute, probably pretty scantily clothed, as she's speaking to him as seductively as she knows how, as she's grabbing him. And now this teenage boy needs to make a decision on the spot, am I going to say yes or no?

And he's a sitting duck. And even the passage itself, it doesn't say what a terrible boy, how ashamed he should be. No, it presents him as a victim. If you look in verse 22, it says, he follows her as an ox goes to a slaughter. Think of an ox going to a slaughter. He's just like, hey, we're going for a walk. Oh, wait. No! It's too late, right? Verse 23, it says, he does not know that it will cost him his life. He's not trying to cause harm. He's not trying to do evil, but he's making a dumb decision that will kill him. And that is the simple in the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs. He lacks the life skill and experience to make the right choice, and it leaves him gullible and naive. And gullible and naive are great parallels for the simple in Proverbs. Gullible people and naive people, they make wrong choices because they don't have the life experience to know what the right choice is, and so they end up following the wrong crowd. And if you're a parent here, and you're hearing this description, and you're like, that kind of sounds like my kids, that's the point. Proverbs draws lots of parallels between the simple and the young. And in one sense, that's normal. That's a normal part of our development, right? You think about every 13-year-old boy that you've ever known in your life. The best behaved 13-year-old you've ever met still did tons of dumb stuff because they're 13 and they don't know better. And when they're 13 and they do dumb stuff, we're like, they're a kid, they'll figure it out. And it's a normal part of their development. But when a guy like Joey, who's in his 30s, does the same type of things that your 13-year-old would do, it's not funny anymore. Well, unless it's on a TV show. But if your real-life friend in his 30s is doing the same things that a 13-year-old boy would do because they've never taken the time to grow up and mature and learn to live as an adult, it stops being funny very fast. And instead, it becomes something that we look at them for and say, that's wrong. And so being simple is a normal part of our development, but it can easily become something that we are responsible for if we don't take the active steps to pursue wisdom. So Proverbs says, we have the wise over here, we have the fool over here, we have the simple in the middle. And the wise and the fool both look at the simple and see the simple right in the middle and want to pull the simple to their side. It's like a tug of war where you have the wise pulling and you have the fool pulling. And that's this conversation that you see in Proverbs chapter 9. The wise woman calls out to the simple and says, come over here. And the foolish woman calls the simple and says, come over here. And the simple might recognize that the tug of war is happening, but the trait of the simple is a lot of times they just want to stay neutral. They love their simplicity. They just want to stay there. And they don't realize that they have a default movement, which is always towards the side of folly. Proverbs 122 says, the natural state of the simple is to love simplicity and hate knowledge. Unless they put in effort to move towards the side of wisdom, I'm moving the right direction. Unless they move in effort to move towards the side of wisdom, they're always going to drift towards folly. Proverbs 14, 18 says that the simple will inherit folly. That the natural direction that the simple tend is towards the side of folly. They're like someone who's treading water in a river. And they think, oh, I'm just treading water. I'm staying still. But there's this current in the river that's always pulling them in this direction. And that's the picture of the simple that we see in the book of Proverbs, to simply drift towards the side of folly. And until the simple learn to put in effort to move towards the side of wisdom, they're always going to drift back to the side of folly. There's no such thing as simply staying neutral. So being simple is a basic stage in all of our development. There's nothing wrong with being simple when we're young, but moving towards maturity means taking active steps towards wisdom. And those steps are essential because if we don't take them, we're always going to move back to the side of folly.

[18:37] So each of us has a choice to make between wisdom and simplicity. And since the simple are primarily the young, and most of us here are a little bit older, that means we can just zone out for the rest of the sermon, right? We've all moved past that. We've all become mature. And so we can just take a nap.

No need to listen anymore, right? No, that's wrong. Because our problem, my problem, and I'm guessing all of our problem, is that even though we should have taken the steps to move towards wisdom, far too often we choose to remain in our simplicity rather than taking the active steps towards wisdom.

You know, it's like in Proverbs 9. Wisdom calls out to us, but other voices call out to us as well. And there are competing voices in our lives. There's a voice that says, you know, you worked really hard this week. And you just deserve a chance to relax. And pursuing wisdom, not relaxing.

There's this voice that says, you know, if you pursue wisdom in your free time, your friends and your co-workers and your family members, they're going to think you're so boring. You don't want to be boring. So don't worry about being wise. There are these voices that compete against the call of wisdom in each of our lives that hold us back from fully pursuing wisdom. And no matter who we are, there are parts of our lives where we live as the simple rather than as the wise, where we're like Joey, not Gandalf.

And I was convicted of this in my own life last week. I had a long flight back from the States. I was visiting family. And on long flights, they're great for watching movies. You just do these movie marathons with whatever's on the plane. You just, next, next, next, next, next. You can get through a ton of movies in a 15 and a half hour flight. And I typically think what I watch in a movie is not going to affect me.

[20 : 36] But when you watch a ton of movies in a row, you realize what you watch in movies affects you. And here's what I mean. Like as a Christian, I believe that sex outside of marriage is wrong. But if I'm watching a movie and there's this couple that's clearly perfect for each other, and they have near miss after near miss after near miss of connecting, and then finally they hit it off, and they connect, and they have this wonderful evening together, and the guy, as a perfect gentleman, walks the girl home at the end of the night, there's this little voice in my head that's like, invite him in. Invite him in. Now I know that that's not behavior that I should be celebrating or applauding, but I'm in entertainment mode, and I'm zoned out, and I'm cheering for things in the movie that I wouldn't normally cheer for in real life.

Or as a Christian, I believe that we should treat other people with love. But sometimes in a movie, there's a character who's just been mistreated again and again and again. And then they reach this point where they can't take it anymore, and they just have this like bit of rage where they go off on someone, and they're vindictive and angry, and it's usually filled with profanity. And there's this little voice inside my head that's like, yeah! You get them! In real life, if I saw that behavior, I would be appalled and embarrassed.

But in a movie, I'm celebrating it, right? And what I realized from watching several movies in a row is that when I'm celebrating these things in the movie and approving a behavior I wouldn't approve of in the real world, when I walk away from the movie, it's way easier to continue approving of that behavior.

And so for a couple days after my flight, there would be these like normal everyday situations that are like mildly stressful, and I would just want to like go off on people. And I'd have to catch myself and be like, Eric, that's not the type of person you want to be, right? You're being shaped by those movies that you watched, and you need wisdom to stop and come back to the right path.

And I realize I'm simple in my consumption of entertainment. I assume, I'm not watching these movies trying to be like, all right, how can I corrupt my thoughts and make myself more susceptible to just getting angry? But I assume that by consuming this entertainment and this media, it's not going to affect me when it's bound to. And that's the simple approach to life. And all of us are simple in some area. How are you simple in your life?

[23 : 11] Just a couple examples of ways that maybe we can be simple. For some of us, we're simple in our consumption of teaching about the Bible. You know, I've grown up in and around the church, and there are certain phrases that Christians love that are very strongly actually opposed to what the Bible teaches, but Christians will sometimes repeat them as if they're from the Bible itself. So for example, God helps those who help themselves. Yes, the Bible says that we should work hard, but the Bible also says that we should live other people-focused lives rather than just focusing on ourselves. And this focus on helping ourselves, first and foremost, is actually opposed to the teaching of the Bible. But we hear it maybe from someone in the church, and it sounds good, and it's catchy, and it's easy to repeat, and so we repeat it. Not trying to cause harm, but simply because we're simple in our approach to the Bible, and we don't take the time to figure out whether it's actually in God's Word or not. Or another one, this is like my personal pet peeve. Preach the gospel at all times.

Use words when necessary. Now, I get the message that's trying to be spread there, right? Like, we should live lives that back up what the Bible teaches. But in the Bible, sharing the gospel or preaching the gospel always, always, always, 100% of the time requires words. And when we live lives that back that up, we might be, we might be, we could call it adorning the gospel, or we might be backing up what we say with our words, but it can never, ever, ever replace our words. And I think by repeating that, that saying, preach the gospel at all times, when necessary, use words, what can actually happen is it can discourage people from actually sharing the gospel, because they'll be like, well, I could say something with my words, but I'm just saying it with my actions. And it ends up that we never actually end up sharing the gospel with people, because we're like, well, I'm just sharing it with my life. That's not actually sharing the gospel. It might be adorning the gospel, it might be helping the words that we're saying have more weight, but it's not a replacement for the words themselves. And again, no one repeats that trying to cause harm, but we're simple. We don't take the time to think it through, and we end up repeating things that aren't true. Or some of us are simple in our parenting, right? As someone who's worked with kids and youth for years, I've had several conversations with parents where they're like, you know, I really want my kids to read their Bible. I really want them to be involved in these activities at church, but I want them to do it because they want to do it, not because I'm forcing them to do it.

And you know what? If your kids want to read their Bibles, and they want to be involved in the activities at church, that's wonderful. Encourage that. Bless that. But the tendency of the young is to be simple, and the tendency of the simple is to make bad choices. Not just bad choices, but Proverbs tells us bad choices that lead to death. And if we're sitting back, not giving the input to help our kids make the right choices, then what we're doing as parents is simply sitting back and watching our kids as they take a path that's going to lead them to destruction. We're being simple in our parenting. We can't simply assume that our kids are going to make the right choices because they're young, they're simple, they need that help to take the steps towards wisdom that we as parents are uniquely equipped to give them.

So all of us, I don't know whether you relate to either any of those examples or whether it's somewhere else in your life, but all of us have areas where we live simply, not wisely. And Proverbs warns us about the dangers of being simple because all of us are simple in our lives.

It's kind of like God is watching us in the same way that we watch Joey, just shouting out to us, don't do it! It's going to end in disaster and pointing us back towards the path to life.

[27 : 21] And so how do we choose this way of wisdom? How do we leave our simplicity and move towards the way of wisdom? Well, I think to understand that, we first need to look at what leads us to being simple and moving from simple to foolishness, what keeps us on that path in the first place.

And so I've come up with a couple traits of the simple to help us run a heart diagnostic on ourselves to see where we can relate to that. And then hopefully once we see that, we can see where the path to wisdom lies. Sound good?

So the first attribute that I saw of the simple is that the simple want to be loved. Now this is a good desire. It's a God-given desire. God created us to experience love from him and his people.

If you look at Proverbs chapter 7, the young teenage boy is walking down the street. The adulterous woman comes up to him and in verse somewhere in here, verse 18, it says, come, let us take our fill of love until morning. Let us delight ourselves with love. He hears this offer of love and he has this voice. It's like the desire of your heart is to be loved. And he gives in to her invitation because he wants to be loved. It's this good human desire, the desire for love.

It's one that you and I share. But because he's simple, he seeks the fulfillment of this desire in the wrong place. And it makes a choice that leads to death. Right? This is why pornography is so popular in our culture. We all desire love. And pornography offers something that resembles love that's immediately available anytime, anywhere. And so people, men and women, all struggle with pornography. They make this choice in their pursuit of love that actually leads to destroying real life relationships. So the simple want love, but they have this short-sighted approach to love that leads them to seeking it in the wrong place. Second trait of the simple, the simple want to belong. Both wisdom and folly recognize this in Proverbs chapter 9. That's why both wisdom and folly prepare a meal and invite the simple into their home because they know the simple want a place to belong. And if I can offer the simple a place to belong with me, he's more likely to follow in my ways. And again, the Bible says we were created for community. Wanting to belong is a good God-given desire.

[29 : 55] But the simple, because they lack wisdom, can have a tendency to seek that belonging in the wrong place, a place that will lead to death. Not out of a desire to pursue death, but simply because they don't know.

If you look at Proverbs 9.18, it's talking about the meal with this woman folly, and it says, he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol. He goes and makes that choice because he doesn't know that it's going to lead to death. He's seeking the good desire of his heart in a wrong way that's going to lead him to destruction. You know, I was reading a study once, and they said the vast majority of Christian students who go off to university and become heavy partiers and binge drinkers don't actually plan to be heavy partiers and binge drinkers when they go to university. But they show up at university, and they realize that everyone else is doing it, and if they want to belong, then they need to do that to fit in. And so this good desire for belonging gets sought in the wrong place and leads them to this behavior that's going to be destructive to them.

Good desire, wrong perspective, leads to a wrong choice. And again, we have these desires, all of us. We're normal, we're human. The simple are normal and human. They want love just like us. They want to belong just like us. But the thing that sets the simple apart is that because they have a short-term view of life, they can't see the full impact of their choices. They don't live with the fear of the Lord, which we said is the cheat code to unlocking a skillful life. And they end up making these wrong choices because they seek immediate fulfillment of these desires rather than ultimate fulfillment of these desires. And seeking the immediate fulfillment rather than the ultimate fulfillment leads to choices that lead to death. It's why the teenage boy in Proverbs 7 chooses to go sleep with the adulterous woman, not realizing her husband will kill him when he finds out what has happened.

It's why the simple in Proverbs 9 is tempted to go to this meal with folly because he doesn't know that the dead are there. It's why the porn addict clicks into the video, not thinking how it'll affect their relationship with their spouse or their children. It's why the uni student goes out and starts binge drinking, not thinking about the emotional and physical problems that can come from binge drinking. They simply make a choice because they believe this is where the deep desires of their heart can be fulfilled. Doesn't that explain so much of teenage behavior? But doesn't it explain so much of our behavior as well? We have good desires, we seek them in the wrong places, and we make choices that cause pain and problems. And ultimately, Proverbs tells us that lead to death.

So how do we turn from this love of simplicity that leads to death to a love of wisdom that leads to life? We need to go back to the way we were designed. See, this desire for love, is it good or bad?

[33 : 12] It's good, yes. We're created to have a loving relationship with God. The desire for community, is that good or bad? It's good. God created us to live in community as a people, together. According to the design that God gave us. These are good desires, but the way to fulfill them is not through the most immediate opportunity, but through the ultimate opportunity, which is found in the fear of the Lord and in having a relationship with Him. And when we look at Jesus in the Bible, we find someone who didn't take this short-term approach to life, but the long-term approach. He lived in the fear of the Lord, even when it cost Him dearly.

See, Jesus chose to suffer immensely for the sake of obedience to God and for the sake of having a relationship with us. And this is huge for us. This is hugely important.

Because when we look at Jesus, we see someone who saw our rebellion against God and was willing to die to forgive us and restore us to God. And so when we have this desire in our hearts for love, we need to look no further than Jesus. Because in Jesus, we find someone who loved us so deeply that He was willing to die to have a relationship with us.

And when we have these desires in our hearts for belonging, we need to look no further than Jesus. Because in Jesus, we have someone who knew us fully at our worst. He had no pretenses about us being better than we are. He knew completely how messed up and terrible we are. And yet He chose to die so that we could have a place to belong with Him forever. He didn't take the short-term approach to life. He took the long-term path, looking at the fear of the Lord so that we can have this relationship with Him that will lead us to a life that's not headed for destruction.

And if you're here today and you're not a Christian, I know that you, just like all of us, have these desires for love and belonging. And just like all of us, you've probably pursued these desires in ways that cause harm and hurt in the past. And my encouragement for you today is to look to Jesus. Find this love that you desire. Find the belonging that you desire in Him.

[35 : 45] And for all of us, whether we're Christian or not, until we see who Jesus is, until we see how Jesus loves us, until we see the love that's available in Him and the belonging that we have in Him, we're going to constantly make these short-sighted, short-term decisions that cause harm, that cause destruction, rather than live with this skillful, long-term view that leads to life. So in light of this, we're going to have two responses today to the sermon. First, we're going to take communion together because it's a celebration of what Jesus has done for us. And then second, after communion, I'm going to come up for a couple more minutes and talk through some application points. So don't like just zone out after communion because there's a couple more minutes, like sermon part two coming after that. But first, communion. See, although we should find the fulfillment of our desires in Jesus, you, I'm sure you do it because I do it, I forget. I forget that I'm supposed to find this in Him. And one of the amazing things about God is that He has built into the rhythm of the church's life, this reminder. This reminder of the great extents to which Jesus went out of His love for us, to rescue us, to save us, to love us, to give us a place to belong. And on the night before Jesus was killed, He had a meal with His disciples, and He gave them this bread and this wine, and He said,

I want you to eat this and drink this when you get together so that you can remember me. And why do we need to remember? Because we forget. And so as we come together now, we're going to celebrate the fact that Jesus has rescued us, that Jesus has saved us, that He's loved us and given us a place to belong with these physical reminders that He has given us of His love and His acceptance. And He didn't just give them to us as individuals, He gave them to us as a community because in the community is supposed to be where we also find tangible pictures of His love and a place to belong here on earth as we await that ultimate reunion with Him in eternity. If you're here today and you're not a Christian, we would ask that you don't take the elements, but instead just take this time to reflect.

This is a celebration that's for Christians specifically. And what we're going to do is we're going to have the band come up. We're going to have the communion stewards come forward. And the band's going to play. We'll line up. We'll come grab the elements, take them back to your seat, and in a couple minutes I'll come back up here and we will take them all together.

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus had one last meal with His disciples. During the meal, He took the bread and He said, this is my body, which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

Then He took the cup and He said, this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant of my blood. A lot of times I think it can be tempting to think that my faith in Jesus goes over here, and the way that I live my life goes over here, and there's not really a need for there to be an interaction between the two of them. But according to the book of Proverbs, that's not actually true.

[39 : 23] See, according to the book of Proverbs, our faith in Jesus is actually what is the key to unlocking us to have a skillful life in all the rest of our lives. And once we turn to this fear of the Lord and we trust in Jesus, it empowers us to live a healthy all-around life, to live with skill in God's world, no matter what complexities come at us.

So I want to take a couple minutes and just look at how having the fear of the Lord and having this understanding that our belonging and our love come from Jesus impacts the rest of our lives. One area that it could impact, we talked earlier about simplicity and parenting. And I think our relationship with Jesus has a huge impact on this area, because when we don't remember that Jesus is our source of love and belonging, it can be so tempting to seek that in our children. And that makes us afraid of how they're going to respond to us if they don't like what we say. But when we understand our love and our belonging come from Jesus alone, we can have tough conversations with our kids. Because even if the conversation doesn't go like we would hope, and they don't walk out of the conversation with a smile on their face saying, wow, mom and dad, I'm so thankful God gave me you as my parents.

We know that we're loved. We know that we have a place to belong. And having this fear of the Lord isn't just helpful in parenting. It's helpful in all of life. When we face temptation, having this fear of the Lord gives us the strength to stand up against it that we would never have otherwise. It gives us this perspective to see that certain choices are destructive and short-term. It gives us the perspective to see that, like the teenage boy, going and sleeping with another man's wife, is not a good choice. It gives us the knowledge that we are loved even if we don't drink our fill of love until morning. And it gives us the strength to walk home to our own bed alone, but knowing that we're still loved, that we still have a place to belong with God. And it's not just sexual temptation, but any temptation. When your boss comes up to you at work and says, hey, I need you to change some numbers to help us improve our sales, knowing that you have a place to belong with God means that you don't need to fear your boss's rejection. Knowing that you're loved by God gives you a strength to stand up to temptation in that moment that you couldn't have otherwise. Having this fear of the Lord helps us to live with skill in all of life. Knowing that God loves us and accepts us gives us a strength that we can't have apart from that. And these are just a couple examples of how it works. But the book of Proverbs tells us the fear of the Lord, this relationship with Jesus, is the cheat code we need to live a skillful life no matter what complexities the real world throws at us. And this way to wisdom, it's not natural to us. It takes effort. It takes pushing against the natural trend towards foolishness.

But God has given us tools in Jesus, in the community around us, in his word, the Bible, to help us make that conscious choice to pursue him even when it's difficult.

So my challenge to us this week is don't be like Joey. Let's be like Gandalf. Pursue God and pursue the skillful life that comes from a relationship with him. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for today. We thank you for your word, for your truth, for the challenges that it gives to us, and for the way that you give us the strength to respond in obedience to you because you have loved us first and you have given us a place to belong first. I pray that this week we would be people who live with a relationship with you at the front of our minds, who live with skill because of that, who live with love and joy. I pray that that we would be a people who are different than the world around us and who stick out in an amazing and positive way so that others can see how great a life pursuing you is and that they would be drawn to know you as well. In Jesus' name, amen.