

**Graham Beynon:** Hi, I'm, delighted to be joined by Zack Eswine. Zack, thanks for being with us. Could you just introduce yourself for people who won't know you?

**Zack Eswine:** Sure, Graham. It's great to say hello. I'm a pastor in St. Louis, Missouri in the United States. I've been serving the church that I've, I'm currently at for 17 years.

My wife, Jessica, we have four children. And, Jessica and I have founded a ministry through our church called Sage Christianity, trying to help folks who have doubts and questions find the wisdom of Jesus. And that's a bit about me.

**Graham Beynon:** Yeah, thank you so much. And I know, both through Sage, and then through a recent book you've written, you've been doing a lot on wisdom and Proverbs, and that's why we want to talk to you.

The particular area I wanted to ask you about was about characters in Proverbs. You identify a number of different characters who have different sort of characteristics about them. Could you just, could you list them and describe them for us?

**Zack Eswine:** Yes, when we encounter biblical wisdom, we're introduced to the simpleton, or who we might call the naive heart.

And that's a person that, will try to rejoice with those who weep. And then there's the foolish heart. And, that, that's the person that has anger lodged in there. And that person will try to instruct, correct, and admonish those who weep. And if they rejoice, the rejoicing has to orbit around them.

And then there's the scoffer. And, the scoffer takes advantage of those who weep and loves to steal the joy of people. That's the criminal heart. And then there's the crushed in spirit, and the crushed in spirit is the one who's been sinned against. By the naive, the fool, and the scoffer.

**Graham Beynon:** Yeah, thank you.

Thank you. So in, in, Proverbs in particular, we often, the simpleton, that's the person often called the simple? Or is it quite often the young? Is that right?

**Zack Eswine:** Yep, the simple is a common phrase. and the word there, if it's young, it has the idea of being naive. Gullible.

**Graham Beynon:** Yeah, Thank you.

Crushed in spirit. I think most people already recognise the simple and the, fool and the scoffer, where do you see the crushed in spirit?

**Zack Eswine:** And so we, readily recognise the first three characters because right up front in the book of Proverbs, they're just named, chapter 1, verse 21. But, then throughout the entirety of the book, those, we encounter those characters again, but we gradually, see this phrase, the crushed in spirit.

And, actually right in the beginning, in Proverbs chapter 1, the very first sort of case study that we encounter is a person being murdered, a victim of the fool and the scoffer. And so, both in terms of the way folks are victimised, but then also the explicit statement crushed in spirit in both ways we encounter that person.

Yeah.

**Graham Beynon:** Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. So I guess a real question for those in pastoral ministry is how we might treat those different characters differently, if you have someone who you recognise as a simple versus someone who's a fool, what might that mean for how we deal with them in our congregations?

**Zack Eswine:** We see in both Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and certainly the one greater than Solomon, Jesus himself, and the way he relates to people through the gospels.

We basically see this, the naive heart, there's all kinds of hope for the naive heart. And the basic way of dealing with a naive heart is invitation and instruction. But then the foolish heart, is unteachable in a, different way. And, we're going to learn to deal with the fool. Answer a fool according to his folly, don't answer a fool according to his folly.

So with a foolish heart we're going to learn, subversion. It's to the foolish heart I'd suggest that our Lord Jesus begins to tell parables. And then, the scoffing heart is, condemnation, woe to you, there's no conversation with a scoffing heart, the activity is confronted directly and immediately.

And then there's, the crushed in spirit, which is consolation, comfort. And so invitation, subversion, condemnation or confrontation, and, consolation.

**Graham Beynon:** That's great. Thank you. Just, tell me more about the subversion. What, might that look like in pastoral ministry?

**Zack Eswine:** If we're not going to answer a fool according to his folly, and there's a lot to say about that, but if that means that there's a time for silence, there's a time to be quiet.

There's a time to be sparse with our words. We might think of the Lord Jesus, and, we're often going to need, to, tell a parable or, in an indirect way because the person's not teachable or actually listening. And so you might think about the Lord Jesus with the man who wants to justify himself.

Jesus realises this is not an actual conversation. The man wants to justify himself. And so the thing Jesus does is tell a story and then ask the man, after hearing the story, which one proved to be the neighbour. And, and so there's a lot to unpack there, but that, that subversion is setting

boundary, being more sparse with our language, recognising this isn't a genuine conversation, the person's not actually seeking to learn, and then sometimes the way parable can be used, to expose and invite such a person.

**Graham Beynon:** Yeah, thank you. Thank you. I know in Proverbs they come as it were as discreet people, there's the scoffer, there was the fool and so on. Presumably it's going to be more complicated as in people could be a mixture of those or be one of them be one of them at one moment and another one another moment.

**Zack Eswine:** Yes that's a something important for us to grasp is that once we've put our faith in Jesus Christ we did a wise thing, to speak of it like that. We did a wise thing. We came to wisdom himself, and we did a wise thing. But that doesn't mean we're wise like Jesus now. We still have great need of the spirit of God, the spirit of wisdom, to teach us

to grow us and sanctify us. And so we did a wise thing, but that doesn't mean that we're wise. Or another way to put it, we still have a lot to grow. Another way to put it is, we can be wise in one area of our life, by the grace of God, and simultaneously be naive in another area, foolish in another area, tempted to scoff in another area.

As ministry leaders, we can think of it this way. This is why, we can encounter someone who's a wise teacher of the scripture. Podcasts, known, this kind of thing. But then we gradually learn that they're naive with women, they're foolish with their staff, and they're tempted to scoff with people who differ with them.

And that's happening all at the same time. And the wonderful provision of grace through the wisdom of God is to give us a holistic picture of ourself. Now the flip side of, of it, the good news is this, because we're foolish in one area of our life, doesn't mean we're foolish in every area of our life by the grace of God.

We can give thanks to Him for that.

**Graham Beynon:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Thank you. And as we're thinking primarily about how we help people in our churches and what category they might fit in, but from what you've just said there, of course, we might be one of those as, a ministry leader ourselves.

Any reflections on that and how that will shape how we treat people?

**Zack Eswine:** Yes. One of the, one of the risks of talking the way we're talking of highlighting the characters that are pedagogically used to train people in wisdom. A naive heart will take those characters, Ah, now I understand. There's the naive, there's the fool, there's the scoffer, there's the crushed in spirit.

Got it. And then they'll just run with that, those categories, not really understanding anything about, about them. Or then there's the foolish heart can take those categories and now twist them with anger and self righteous condemnation. "Ah, you are a fool, obviously." But the totality of the, wisdom perspective there is that each of us, have naive, foolish, scoffing, crushed in spirit parts of us, and the gospel is going to reach us there.

**Graham Beynon:** Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. Just thinking then, last question, I think, to, think about, it's really important that we, know who it is we're talking to. And which category they might be in, in whichever area of life we're talking about. How do we tell the difference? What are the telltale signs of someone being, say, naive versus a fool, and so on?

**Zack Eswine:** Yeah, that's a great question, and there's a great deal of depth to unpack there. But I'll say it briefly in this way. First of all, wisdom will slow us down. we'll, have to grow attentive to people, a listening posture, a posture of love for other human beings, that people aren't something we use to leverage our own ministry, but we don't consume them.

We grow to love them and understand them and learn what the Lord knows about them and what he understands about them. And as we begin to learn that kind of cultivate that kind of posture, then we'll begin to recognise subtle things. And so the naive heart, has, so let's put it this way. If you have a naive critic in ministry, they're not going to ask you what's the right thing to do.

They're going to say, "what do we got to do to get momentum back?". "What do we got to do to get a good, vibe going again?". The naive critic, it really struggles with anything sorrowful or hard or difficult or complex. Whereas wisdom can go there to those places. The foolish critic, is going to bluster with you, the naive critic is going to smile the whole time, they're saying we've got to get back to a good vibe, but the foolish critic is going to bluster at you. They're going to quote Bible verses at you. They're going to put some things in all caps. And, you realize that, their whole goal isn't to learn from you or to collaborate. Their goal is to get you to change.

And until you change, nothing will help them. And so and then the scoffing, the scoffer is harder to detect because the criminal heart. is good at deception and loves it that way. Now the naive heart thinks that sounds mean. "How can you say that there's a certain kind of person that loves meanness?".

We can say it that way because wisdom tells us it's so. When we tell another person, "you just do you", at its best we're acknowledging the individual dignity of somebody. But at its worst, we're encouraging someone who, what they would do is meanness, we're encouraging that. So that can be harder to detect.

And the Lord Jesus, he's three years into his ministry before he begins the litany of woes. Woe to you. So there's been a lot of data collected to learn who he's dealing with. And once he, in the fullness of his humanity, discerns that they're scheming to kill him. They're not just foolish and unteachable They're scheming to kill him in the name of God.

Woe to you. He says and then the crushed in spirit I try to think of it this way: we can break apart or as others have said we can break open and so there's the ordinary grief of what we encounter, but then along the way we can get stuck in our grief, and if we break apart, which is we're not being healed in those areas of our grief, that person will either, will not be able to rejoice with others.

It's understandable, especially early on if there's been a miscarriage, in our life and then a family member is about to have a child or someone at church is about to have a child. It's we can't rejoice with them. It's almost like we can't go there. And in the beginning, that's absolutely understandable.

Over time, we could get stuck there, and find it difficult to rejoice. And the healing of wisdom in the gospel will gradually break us open. We'll still have our tears. But we'll also be able to rejoice for another human being.

**Graham Beynon:** So I imagine many in our churches that actually count as broken hearted, they've been sinned against in some way.

Just tell us more about how we handle them.

**Zack Eswine:** There's multiple other Proverbs and Psalms we could look at to see this same kind of thing. A proverb that talks about the person in poverty who, berates and mistreats other impoverished people. They're tempted to injustice because of the injustice they've received.

Sometimes a person presents themselves as foolish. Really, they're hurting. Now they, ultimately they could get stuck there. But in the beginning, it's understandable. And so, there are multiple stories I could tell about that. But that's the idea. And so in pastoral ministry, someone sends an email to you and, it's a, it's an angry lion,

foolish hearted, unteachable, I'm going to change you email. And you've never known this person to be like that. Other folks in the congregation

or in your ministry, that's par for the course. You know that's, the way they relate. But this person, this is so unusual. And so you invite them to conversation, "Hey, I see you're concerned. I hate the thought of having, hurt you in some way. Let's talk.". And then the email comes back and it's even more escalated and more angry. And then you, try again. "Hey, I, let's talk. I care about you. We, go way back. Let's" And what, you begin to think to yourself is, I bet there's a wound here.

Something's happened here, and I'm guessing there's pain here. It doesn't excuse the foolish attack, it doesn't. But it does reframe it. This isn't just a foolish heart. This is a wounded heart who's, in this moment, trusting folly rather than the gospel to relate to me. And our wounds can do that to us, can lead us to try to trust naivety, folly, or scoffing as the way to deal with our wounds, when what we need again is of course the person of Jesus to deal with our wounds.

**Graham Beynon:** Thank you. That's really helpful. That's really helpful. Zach, thank you so much. That's great.

**Zack Eswine:** Thank you, Graham. It's been great to be with you.