

Fool-Proofing Your Life

*He who walks with the wise grows wise,
but a companion of fools suffers harm.
Proverbs 3:13*

Do you have a fool in your life? Does the question fill you with a twinge of guilt or anxiety?

For many of us, the memory of our own foolish choices, make us hesitant to call anyone a fool. Yet, few of us would deny that we know someone who consistently makes choices which make their lives and relationships difficult and painful. Some of us live with people whose poor choices and refusal to change fill our own lives with pain and confusion. We desperately need words to honestly describe what is happening. For some, the word *abuse* accurately describes their experience, but when they turn to Scripture for answers, the word *abuse* is missing. On closer look, however, the reality of abuse is woven throughout God's Word in words like violence and oppression and fools. In the book of Proverbs alone, four different words describe the characteristics of fools that dovetail with read our contemporary descriptions of abuse.

God understands the pain of living in close proximity with a fool/abuser, and offers compassionate wisdom to those entangled in the confusion and reality with one. Let's take a quick look at just of the few of the proverbs (There are many more!) that describe fools and at how the biblical definition of fool describes the difficult people and relationships in our own lives. You may want to explore the Old Testament book of Proverbs to learn more about fools/abusers and how to respond to them.

◆ **Self-reliant and self-centered** believes his thoughts are right and his actions are acceptable because they are his

Proverbs 12:15 The way of the fool is right in his own eyes,
but a wise man is he who listens to counsel.

- Unwilling to seek counsel and refuses to accept feedback
- Unable to tolerate questions or input from outside sources
- Believes he can change on his own

◆ **Deceitful** entices others into relationship with false intimacy and dishonesty

Proverbs 15:5 The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life,
but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.

- Practices deceit in order to lure others into relationships
- Makes promises, that he does not keep, in order to keep others in relationship
- Can be very attentive, loving and romantic in order to get what he wants
- May present his controlling, manipulative or violent behaviors only in his primary relationships. Outside the home, he may be a valued worker, committed board member or respected colleague.

- May show signs of remorse for his behavior (apologies, gifts, service) but shows no sign of godly sorrow which leads to true repentance

✦ **Complacent**—his own sin does not bother him, he sees no reason to change.

Proverbs 10:23—*He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but he who walks wisely will be delivered.*

- Blames others for his own behavior
- Justifies, blames, denies, minimizes his own hurtful behavior
- Unmoved by the appeals of those he claims to love
- Mocks those who dare confront him

✦ **Controlling**—seeks to control or change others rather than take responsibility for his own choices

Proverbs 18:2—*A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions.*
Proverbs 18:2

- Seeks to define and control his partner's thoughts, emotions, choices and activities using whatever means he feels necessary (misuse of Scripture, verbal/emotional abuse, isolation or physical violence).

✦ **Lacks Empathy**—refuses to be moved by the pain his foolish and abusive choices bring to others

Proverbs 12:10—*Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs, than a fool in his folly.*

- Denies or minimizes the pain and/or injury his actions cause
- Has difficulty identifying his own emotions
- Has difficulty expressing his wants/needs in honest, healthy, and assertive ways
- Disregards his partner's emotional, spiritual and physical needs
- Disregards, or is cruel to, children and animals

✦ **Angry**—uses anger to get his own way

Proverbs 29:11—*A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.*

- Uses anger to produce fear and distance in a relationship in order to get what he wants (to be left alone, to not have to make decisions, to not have to listen or be involved).
- Uses anger to keep his spouse from enjoying relationships with family, friends or co-workers
- Anger may seem out of control, but it is very much in control

✦ **Causes Destruction**—the abuser becomes hardened and victims of abuse bear deep wounds

Proverbs 14:12—*There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.*

Proverbs 24:14—*Know also that wisdom is sweet to your soul; if you find it, there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.*

Foolish and abusive people create tremendous amounts of pain, fear and confusion in their relationships. Fools/abusers seldom take any responsibility for their own foolish choices or the pain they cause and often succeed in making their victims feel guilty and responsible for their own pain. When trust has been violated too many times to sustain love, relationships die—but deep wounds remain. But there is hope for healing. Wisdom brings sweet hope, even to the soul of the victim, and wisdom can be found in relationship with God and in community with safe, imperfect, growing, compassionate people.

Resources: Jan Silvious, *Foolproofing Your Life* (Colorado: Waterbrook Press) 1998
The Holy Bible, New International Version, Zondervan Publishing House, 1977

Solomon, the wisest man in the ancient near eastern world, asked God for a discerning heart to govern his kingdom with wisdom and justice. God was delighted with Solomon's prayer and granted him, discernment, insight, breadth of understanding and wisdom that brought peace and justice that started in Israel and spread to the surrounding nations.

Solomon not only personally enjoyed the benefits of a life lived with wisdom but believed that any person who took his words seriously could put them into practice and enjoy wisdom's fruit in their own relationships. But he was under no illusion that everyone would desire wisdom. In fact, he used four different Hebrew words that have been translated into one English word (fool), to describe the beliefs and choices, the character, of those who had no desire for wisdom.

Do you have a fool in your life? Would you know how to define what the word means? Does the question alone fill you with a twinge of anxiety.

A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct, but a man of understanding delights in wisdom. Proverbs 10:23

It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel. Proverbs 20:3

Most people feel an uneasy twinge of anxiety about calling another person "a fool." Others express contempt And we should. Jesus had strong words (Matthew 5:22) for those who contemptuously labeled others as "fools." The word Jesus used, "Raca" is an Aramaic word of contempt. What Jesus seems to be saying is that we are not to speak to another human being, made in His image, with contempt (as in saying, "You stupid fool!"), thereby assaulting the dignity and worth of a person for whom Jesus would willingly lay down his life. This word, however, is used only in this verse, suggesting that those listening to Jesus knew exactly what he was telling them to avoid.

Throughout the book of Proverbs, the King (Solomon) using a collection of concise and pithy and sayings which detail for his sons the characteristics of a wise person, often comparing and contrasting the wise and the foolish as he describes the the beliefs and behaviors consistent with each. Solomon used three different words for fool that have been translated into English simply as "fools." The three words, *kesil*, *nabal*, and *ewil* are descriptive words, observations about the characteristics of foolish behaviors.

Solomon, in the book of Proverbs uses these three different words to describe "fools", those who consistently and habitually choose foolish strategies for dealing with life.

to describe people who consistently choose that have been translated into English as fool. Three different words are used in the book of Proverbs. All are translated as "fool" in English yet each has a different meaning. Solomon uses these words to describe the characteristics of a foolish person

- Dishonest
- Unwilling to take responsibility for choices
- Unwilling to feel real emotions
- Self-reliant, unwilling to be interdependent
- Uses manipulation and control to get needs met
- Lacks empathy

A controlling person uses his power to make choices for self-centered ends. He manipulates people and circumstances to fit his agenda.

- ★ **Self-reliant and self-centered** "believes his thoughts are true and his actions are acceptable because they are his.

*The way of a fool is right in his own eyes,
but a wise man is he who listens to counsel.*

Proverbs 12:15 NASB

- Unwilling to seek counsel and refuses to accept feedback.

- Unable to tolerate questions or input from sources outside himself.
- Mistrustful of others. Mocks, discounts, or criticizes others' ideas.
- Unmoved by new ideas that challenge his perspective or invade his comfort zone.
- Believes he can change on his own.

Deceitful □ entices others into relationships with false intimacy and dishonesty.

*The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life,
But a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit. Proverbs 15:5
The folly of fools is deception. Proverbs 14:8*

- Lures others into relationships with words and behaviors that conceal past abusive behaviors and relationships. May be extremely charming, thoughtful and attentive while he is pursuing a new relationship.
- Makes promises he does not intend to keep in order to keep significant others in relationship.
- May only present his controlling or violent behaviors in his primary relationship while displaying his charming side at work, church and community events.
- May express remorse or sorrow but shows no signs of true repentance.
- May seek counsel from religious leaders, mental health professionals or batterer treatment programs and convince them all that he is truly changing while at the same time continuing to abuse those closest to him.

Complacent □ his own sin does not bother him therefore he sees no reason to change.

*He who trusts in his own heart is a fool,
But he who walks wisely will be delivered.
Proverbs 10:23*

- Blames others for his behavior
- Justifies, minimizes or denies his behaviors
- Unmoved by the appeals of those he claims to love
- Unmoved by the pain, sorrow, or injury his actions cause
- Is right in his own eye

Controlling □ attempts to control others thoughts, choices, beliefs

Attempts to control his partner's or children's time, money, friendships, vocation, self-image, and relationships with others.

May be jealous and possessive

Lacks Empathy

*Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs,
Than a fool in his folly.
Proverbs 12:10*

Unmoved by the
Proverbs 22:3 says, Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child. Foolishness seems to be our natural state. Left to ourselves, we all choose foolish strategies to fill up the

empty places in our souls. Without outside information, our lives would not be long enough to gain the God doesn't use truth to condemn us but to help us move into life giving relationship with Not a condemnation but a truth that can lead us to seek wisdom

□It can be challenging to tell the difference between being self-compromising, controlling and committed. A self-compromised woman gives up her power to make choices and is unable to take responsibility for her life. A controlling woman uses her power to make choices for self-centered ends. She manipulates people and circumstances to fit her own agenda. In contrast, a committed woman accepts her God-given responsibility to make choices and desires that her choices will reflect God's character to others.□

The truth will set you free.

Honesty vs. deception

Taking responsibility for ones choices vs blaming, minimizing or denying

Using personal power to make

A fool refuses to:

Be honest – lives by deception, enters and maintains relationships by deception

*Who is wise among and understanding among you?
Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility
that comes from wisdom.*

James 3:13

Solomon, King David's son, was known throughout the ancient near eastern world, for his wisdom. His best known work, the Book of Proverbs, was written to teach his children to think accurately about life and to encourage them to pursue wisdom and avoid foolishness. Solomon uses several different Hebrew words when describing foolish behavior. One word, translated naïve or simple, is used to describe people who lack insight. They may be bright, accomplished people who make decisions according to what feels right rather than intentional choice. The good news for the naïve and simple is that they often learn from the consequences of their choices and gain wisdom.

Throughout the book of Proverbs, the King (Solomon) using a collection of concise and pithy and sayings which detail for his sons the characteristics of a wise person, often comparing and contrasting the wise and the foolish as he describes the beliefs and behaviors consistent with each. Solomon used three different words for fool that have been translated into English simply as "fools." The three words, *kesil*, *nabal*, and *ewil* are descriptive words, observations about the characteristics of foolish behaviors. Although Solomon never uses the word abuse, he accurately describes many of the beliefs and behaviors common to abusive people. The Hebrew word *kesil* is used 49 times to describe those who have a "dull and closed mind." Today, we would use the words stubborn, thickheaded, lazy, short-sighted. These are people who refuse to hear truth and apply it to themselves. They are "always right"

Solomon uses the word 'kesil is used forty-nine times to describe 'fools. The root word means

listen to God's word, yet fail to understand that God's principles are meant to help us live wisely and well. The Hebrew language contains at least four words which have been translated in our single English word, fool. Knowing each of these words helps us make sense of what both the writer of Proverbs and Jesus meant when the word fool is used. The word wisdom, in the ancient writings of God's people, amounted to understanding the Lord's principles in order to live wisely and well. Solomon, King David's son, collected and wrote hundreds of short pithy

meant How much physical and emotional abuse does a Christian woman have to take from her husband? Must she accept beatings in the name of Christian submission? Should she take verbal abuse without rejoinder? Is that what Peter means when he writes that women are to be submissive to their husbands as Christ was to those who reviled and battered Him? (I Peter 2:11-3:6)

We don't think so, and we don't think that's what the biblical writers mean by submission. In fact, we believe that if a woman does not resist her husband's attempts to humiliate her, she is participating in his sins.

John Calvin once wrote to Antoinette Fumee, a woman being harassed by a cruel husband, that she should endure persecution bravely. She responded, "A number of people think your assertions are thoroughly wretched. They accuse you of being merciless and very severe to those who are afflicted; and they say that it is very easy for you to preach and threaten over there, but that if you were her you would perhaps feel differently."

Women like Antoinette do feel differently, particularly if they've been told by their leaders that women must submit meekly to injustice and suffer silently. The real issue, however, is not how one feels but what Scripture says. Does the Bible present a way to suffer that is more successful than merely taking it? We believe it does.

Since I Peter 3:1-6 is the passage most often quoted in defense of passivity, we should try to understand what Peter is saying to us there. The apostle affirms the principle of a husband's headship by instructing women to submit even to their unbelieving husbands. The purpose of such submission is to win their men, if they are to be won at all. The most impelling argument for the truth of the Gospel, Peter argues, is the tranquil, respectful behavior of an unbeliever's wife.

📌
"Each year more abuse victims, perpetrators, and family members seek help from clergy and religious leaders than all other helping professionals combined."
Abuse and Religion
Anne Horton &
Judith Williamson, pg. xi

The text is introduced by the phrase, "Wives, in the same way be submissive", which connects the command to the preceding verses which describe Christ's demeanor when He was abused. The argument is usually made this way: Jesus, like a lamb led to slaughter, did not open His mouth; women in the same way should not open their mouths when their husbands abuse them. But that explanation misunderstands the text. Nothing is said in 2:21-25 about our Lord's suffering in silence. The text's emphasis is not on His silence but rather on the fact that He did nothing wrong when He was unjustly treated. His example lies in the fact that "He committed no sin... When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats" (vv. 22-23).

It's a matter of record that during His trial, Jesus did in fact speak out against injustice (John 18:22-23; see also Acts 23:3 for an example of the Apostle Paul doing the same thing). He was not servile or utterly silent. Therefore we believe that when Peter says women are to submit to injustice "in the same way," he is not saying that women can say nothing. He is asking them to say nothing wrong, that they not revile or threaten their husbands.

We believe that abused women have a redemptive way to proceed that preserves a man's headship and yet deals with the offense. Suffering in silence seems to be no answer at all; it may, in fact, only make things worse. Some men, as Agatha Christie once pointed out, will be as bad as their women will let them be. To allow cruel behavior is to enable it. Therefore, the way to save both the abusing husband and the abused wife is for the women to speak out against abuse whenever it occurs. It's a matter of redemptive concern.

Of course, how something is done is often just as important as what is done. One must speak from a quiet spirit, which, it's important to note, is not merely a feminine trait. It is an attitude that ought to characterize men under attack as well as women. Both men and women are taught by Scripture to be tranquil, gentle, and strong.

Whatever one says in response to abuse should be said with respect for the person and without malice. As Paul says, "The Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 2:24-25). A gentle spirit is significant; for truth to penetrate, it must be coupled with grace. As the proverb puts it, "Pleasant words promote instruction" (Proverbs 16:21).

But the truth must be declared. One must hold one's ground. No one, not even a husband, has the right to abuse another human being. His right to leadership does not give him the right to do harm. To abuse one's wife either verbally or physically is wrong; therefore, it's proper to put a stop to such treatment. It is very Christian to say to a verbally abusive husband, "It's not right to speak to another person that way." This must be said with dignity and grace but it must be said.

It's right to put a stop to physical abuse also. Though most women are unable to defend themselves against a male assailant, they can and must resist violence, speaking out against it, walking out if possible, and refusing to stay in a house where they are likely to be hurt. In addition, legal ways exist to maintain one's safety until tempers cool and long-term solutions can be implemented. A woman can invoke the law, what Paul calls "God's servant to do you good" (Romans 13:4); she can call the police.

If further help is needed, abused wives may appeal to the elders of their church or other mature men or women for protection and asylum. In extreme cases, a temporary legal separation may be necessary in order to safeguard the family until counseling can be secured. We stress, however, that the goal of that separation is not the dissolution of the marriage but its ultimate healing.

"No one, not even a husband, has the right to abuse another human being."

It should be obvious that these principles apply to child abuse as well as to wife abuse. A mother should not permit her children to be physically or verbally abused by her husband any more than she would permit a stranger to abuse them. Those under our care are entitled to protection from harm. It's wrong for anyone to abuse a child, and it's wrong for anyone to permit it.

What we're saying is that submission does not entail servility or consent to evil and injustice. It is thoroughly Christian to bring such wrong to an end; in fact, it is un-Christian to permit it to continue. Certainly the Bible gives us the right to defend ourselves against assaults, and the mere fact that the assaulter is a family member does not vitiate that right. Jesus' word about turning the other cheek refers to insults for Christ's sake, not assaults by people intent on doing us harm.

We are convinced then, that a woman has the right and the responsibility to protect both herself and her children from verbal and physical attack. At such times, she can and must speak up. The manner in which she speaks is very important. As Peter says, she must do no wrong. She must not retaliate in the same spirit, hurl insults, or make threats, but she must speak up and confront her

husband about his evil. It's our experience that when this is done kindly and firmly, it can bring a man to his senses. The alternative is to be responsible for perpetuating another's sin.

*Reprinted with permission from David & Carolyn Roper
For more articles by the Ropers, visit their Web site at: www.pbc.org/dp/dcroper/index.html*