

LESSONS FROM A DEADLY PRANK

From the Chattanooga Times newspaper, 6/21/97 . . .

- a. **Headline:** Deadly prank costs youths 15 years in prison
- b. An article written by Associated Press staff writer, Lisa Holewa:
 - ▶ *“As family members on both sides of the courtroom wept, three young friends were sentenced to 15 years in prison Friday for removing a stop sign for kicks -- and consequently causing the deaths of three teens who drove into the path of an 8-ton truck.”*
 - ▶ *“I understand your parents love you as much as these parents loved their children. There are no winners in this case,” Circuit Judge Bob Mitchum told the young woman and two young men who were convicted last month of manslaughter.”*
 - ▶ *“Three 18-year-old buddies who were driving around listening to music after a night of bowling were killed when their car breezed through the intersection and was broadsided. The stop sign was found lying on the roadside near the accident.”*

The newspaper article I've just read to you is telling the story of a horrible tragedy.

- a. It's a tragedy for everybody concerned:
 - ▶ the 3 teenage boys who died
 - ▶ the 3 teenagers who caused their death
 - ▶ the parents of the teenagers who died and the parents of the teenagers whose lives are ruined
 - ▶ the grandparents, brothers and sisters, and other family members.

Certainly, there are some lessons to be learned from this horrible tragedy -- or, at least, some lessons to be reminded of.

1. Foolishness is typical of young people.

When I say that foolishness is typical of young people, I'm just saying what is obvious to older, more mature people . . . and I'm just saying what the Bible says.

- a. **Prov 22:15** -- **“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child (youth); The rod of correction will drive it far from him.**
 - ▶ Foolish: lacking good sense or judgment, or exhibiting a lack of good sense or judgment (American Heritage Dictionary)

Listen to what the book of Proverbs says about fools (and this is true of old fools as well as young fools).

- a. Listen to how the book of Proverbs describes the fool.
 - ▶ **Prov 1:7** -- **“. . . fools despise wisdom and instruction.”**
 - **Prov 1:22** -- **“. . . fools hate knowledge.”**
 - **Prov 15:5** -- **“A fool despises his father's instruction, . . .”**
 - ▶ On the other hand, a wise person is the very opposite -- a wise person is teachable . . . he wants to be taught . . . he's willing to listen (even to his parents!)

- Prov 10:8 -- “The wise in heart will receive commands, But a prating fool will fall.”
- Prov 10:14 -- “Wise people store up knowledge, But the mouth of the foolish is near destruction.”
- ▶ Prov 10:23 -- “To do evil is like sport to a fool, . . .”
- ▶ Prov 14:16 -- “A wise man fears and departs from evil, But a fool rages and is self-confident.”
- ▶ Prov 15:2 -- “The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, But the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness.”
- ▶ Prov 23:9 -- “Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, For he will despise the wisdom of your words.

Please understand: I’m not saying that only young people behave foolishly.

- a. There is a saying: “There’s no fool like an old fool.”
 - ▶ That saying acknowledges that fullgrown adults can do some very foolish things.
- b. In fact, some young fools never grow up . . . never wise up . . . and they just become middle-aged fools and then old fools.

And I’m not saying that all young people are foolish, or that all young people do things as foolish as these 3 teenagers in Tampa, Florida.

- a. The Bible acknowledges that there are some young people who are wise beyond their years.
 - ▶ **Eccl 4:13 -- “Better a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more.”**
- b. But foolishness is typical of young people -- certainly more typical of young people than old people,
- c. And it is certainly a sign that a young person is growing up and gaining maturity when he begins to recognize and acknowledge how foolish some of his past actions really were.

2. Foolishness often results in very serious consequences.

Listen to what the book of Proverbs says about the consequences of the fool’s foolishness.

- a. **Prov 3:35 -- “The wise shall inherit glory, But shame shall be the legacy of fools.”**
- b. **Prov 17:25 -- “A foolish son is a grief to his father, And bitterness to her who bore him.”**
 - ▶ **Prov 19:13 -- “A foolish son is the ruin of his father, . . .”**
- c. **Prov 19:29 -- “Judgments are prepared for scoffers, And beatings for the backs of fools.”**
- d. **Prov 10:21 -- “The lips of the righteous feed many, But fools die for lack of wisdom.”**
 - ▶ **Prov 1:32 -- “For the turning away of the simple will slay them, And the complacency of fools will destroy them; . . .”**
- e. Certainly, in the case of these 3 teenage pranksters in Florida (1) they will leave behind a legacy of shame, (2) they have brought grief and

bitterness to their parents, (3) and they have brought severe judgments upon themselves -- all because of their foolishness.

There are examples in the newspapers almost every day of young people acting like fools, but I want to call your attention to 2 or 3 examples in the Bible of young people behaving very foolishly and bringing very hard consequences upon themselves and upon others.

- a. Example: The young man, Esau.
 - ▶ Heb 12:16-17 -- “. . . lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. 17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.”
 - ▶ Because of the foolish choice he made he suffered the loss of something that had great value . . . and his wife and children suffered the loss of it as well.
- b. Example: The foolish young fornicator described in Prov 7.
 - ▶ Prov 7:6-23
 - When v23 says, “He did not know it would take his life,” I believe that’s talking about his spiritual life (see Prov 2:16-19).
- c. Example: The sons of Jacob who sold their brother Joseph into slavery.
 - ▶ Gen 36:4, 11
 - ▶ Gen 37:17b-28

Young people, if you refuse to listen to wise instruction from your parents and to sound Bible teaching now, you may involve yourself in foolishness now that you will regret and suffer for throughout the rest of your life.

- a. You may foolishly make a decision or choice now that will have lifelong consequences -- for yourself and for others.
- b. Just think of the agony and misery those 3 teenagers in Florida have caused their parents and the parents of the kids who were the victims of their prank.
 - ▶ And there is nothing they can do about it.
 - What was done can never be undone.

3. The fool will pay for his foolishness.

You never really get away with it.

- a. Ultimately, in one way or another, you pay a price for your foolish behaviors -- even the foolish behaviors that are not sinful.
 - ▶ Sunbathing = premature aging and wrinkling of your skin; skin cancers.
 - ▶ Smoking = health problems and a poorer quality of life when you’re older; heart disease, lung disease, cancer; death
 - ▶ High-fat diet or chronic over-eating = same kinds of problems as smoking
 - ▶ Over-working (“burning the candle at both ends”) = health problems; family problems; mental problems.

- b. But the price you pay is much higher for the foolish behaviors that are sinful.

God may be more merciful and longsuffering toward young fools than old fools, but God will see to it that even young fools pay for their foolishness -- when their foolishness is sinful foolishness.

Those 3 young pranksters in Florida are certainly paying for their foolishness -- 15 years in prison!

- a. And it could have been much worse -- they could have been sentenced to life in prison!

But even if they had not been caught and convicted, they would have felt a tremendous burden of guilt for the rest of their lives.

- a. And they would have lived in constant fear that they would be found out, or that one of them would confess to the authorities.

When your foolishness is sinful foolishness, you never really get away with it!

- a. **Ecc 11:9-10 -- "Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; Walk in the ways of your heart, And in the sight of your eyes; But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. 10 Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, And put away evil from your flesh, For childhood and youth are vanity."**
- b. **Gal 6:7 -- "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."**

4. Foolishness does not have to be incurable: A fool can change and become wise.

It's possible for a fool to wise up and quit his foolish ways.

The Bible says a fool can become wise.

- a. **Prov 9:6 -- "Forsake foolishness and live, And go in the way of understanding."**
- b. **Prov 4:7 -- "Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding."**

And the Bible tells us how a fool can become wise.

- a. He must look to the Lord.
 - ▶ **Prov 9:10 -- "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."**
 - ▶ **Prov 2:6-7 -- "For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding; 7 He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; . . ."**
- b. He must put this life into proper perspective.
 - ▶ **Jas 4:14 -- "For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."**

- ▶ Psa 90:12 -- “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”
- c. He must associate with the right kind of people.
 - ▶ Prov 14:7 -- “Go from the presence of a foolish man, When you do not perceive in him the lips of knowledge.”
 - ▶ Prov 13:20 -- “He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed.”
- d. He must respect his parents and listen to their instruction.
 - ▶ Deut 5:16 -- “Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you . . .”
 - ▶ Prov 4:1 -- “Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, And give attention to know understanding; . . .”
- e. He must listen to the counsel of people who have shown themselves to be wise.
 - ▶ Prov 19:20 -- “Listen to counsel and receive instruction, That you may be wise in your latter days.”
- f. He must be willing to accept reproof and rebuke.
 - ▶ Prov 15:31-32 -- “The ear that hears the rebukes of life will abide among the wise. 32 He who disdains instruction despises his own soul, But he who heeds rebuke gets understanding.”
- g. He must read and study the word of God.
 - ▶ Psa 119:98-99 -- “You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For they are ever with me. 99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation.”
- h. He must pray for wisdom.
 - ▶ Jas 1:5 -- “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

So if you have been living and behaving like a fool, you can change that if you really want to.

Conclusion.

This tragedy in Florida should serve to remind us that life is far more fragile and uncertain than we want to believe.

Three 18-year-old boys went bowling that night in Florida, and then they went riding around, and then they died.

- a. They weren't supposed to die.
 - ▶ They were supposed to graduate high school and go on to college or get a job.
 - ▶ They were supposed to get married and have children and grand-children.
 - ▶ They were supposed to live a long time and enjoy life for a long time.
 - ▶ They were supposed to live for another 50 or 60 years.
- b. But they died that night.

- ▶ The foolishness of 3 teenage pranksters killed them.

The fact is: Every day people from every age group die.

- a. Oh yes, more old people die each day than young people.
 - ▶ But every day some young people die too.

And anyone who doesn't take that reality into account in the way he lives his life is a fool.

- a. Jas 4:13-16 -- "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; 14 whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. 15 Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.' 16 But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil."

- b. Lk 12:16-21 -- The Parable of the Rich Fool.

- ▶ v20 – "But God said to him, 'You fool! This night your soul will be required of you; . . .'"

• At any stage in your life, if you are not being "rich toward God" you are playing the fool.

If you have not yet obeyed the gospel to become a Christian, it would be very wise to do that today, and it would be foolish to put it off for even one more day.

- a. And as a Christian, with God's help, you can put the foolishness of your past behind you.