

The Ways of Wisdom

PROVERBS



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Introduction

Welcome to this series of five Bible studies on Proverbs. Proverbs is an ancient book likely to have been written and collated over centuries. In Proverbs we see the wisdom of Solomon, as well as other contributions such as the “inspired utterance” of Agur and the sayings of King Lemuel taught to him by his mother no less! Proverbs is a collection of Hebrew verse in places and one-verse sayings in other places.

There is so much to consider in this ancient collection of wisdom. In these studies we pick up on five themes – fear, wisdom, blessings, idolatry and relationships. Our hope is that as you delve deeper into God’s word in Proverbs that his wisdom will have an impact on your life and faith.



Study 1

THE FEAR OF THE LORD

Proverbs is about wisdom. It is wisdom provided in the context of our relationship with God. Our first study explores our relationship with God as we consider his wisdom.

Discussion question – What are some of the common fears that people have? When is fear a healthy thing, and when is it not so helpful?

Read Proverbs 1:1-33. Spend some time reflecting together – what stands out, what is surprising, what raises questions?

1. What are Proverbs for?
2. Why do you think “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (1:7)?



3. There are 20 references to fear in the book of Proverbs. Scan through the rest of Proverbs and pick out some other examples to share with your group. Do any themes emerge?

4. In Deuteronomy the Israelites were taught to fear God before they entered the promised land. Read Deut 4:9-14 and 6:10-19. Why was fear required for the Israelites?

5. Read Matt 10:26-31, Romans 8:12-17 and Phil 2:5-13. As followers of Jesus what should our attitude to fear be? Is it different to what we see in Proverbs?

6. How do you think people around you that don't know God would react to the concept of fearing God? How could you help them understand? What would be helpful for them?

7. What does "fear of the Lord" look like in our lives? What is one thing you can pray about this week to help consolidate this concept?



Study 2

THE NATURE OF WISDOM

People universally seek wisdom. We want to have our lives informed by wisdom, to benefit from making wise choices and decisions. In this study we look at the nature of wisdom, in particular, of the godly wisdom we see in Proverbs.

Discussion question – Who do you know that is wise? What is it about them that leads to wisdom?

Read Proverbs 1:8 to 2:22. Spend some time reflecting together – what stands out, what is surprising, what raises questions?

1. What are some of the aspects of wisdom that this part of Proverbs reflects on?
2. What are some of the behaviours that wisdom is contrasted with?



3. Many of the leaders in the Old Testament were considered wise, for example Joshua, Solomon and Daniel. Read Deut 34:9-12, 1 Kings 3:1-15 and Daniel 1:17-20. What is about these leaders that gave them wisdom?

4. The prophet Isaiah, looking to the Lord Jesus, says that he will have a spirit of wisdom (Isa 11:2). We see in Luke that Jesus grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52). Read 1 Cor 1:18-25. How did Jesus' wisdom play out in his earthly life? How does this contrast with the other "wisdom" that Paul writes about?

5. What sources of wisdom do we use in our lives? How does this wisdom fit in with wisdom that comes from God?

6. How do we know what wisdom is in our lives? What is one thing you can pray about this week for wisdom for?



Study 3

WISDOM AND BLESSING

As well as wisdom many of us seek blessing in our lives. Whatever that may look like we want the benefit of good things in our lives, of godly things. This study explores God's blessing and how it may relate to wisdom.

Discussion question – When have you been blessed in your life? What were some of circumstances that led to this blessing?

Read Proverbs 10:1-32. Spend some time reflecting together – what stands out, what is surprising, what raises questions?

1. What are some of the blessings described in Proverbs 10?
2. Do you think there is a relationship between being righteous and receiving blessing?



3. Blessings and curses are often featured in the Old Testament. Read Deut 28:1-19 and Zech 8:9-13. How do blessings become curses? How do curses become blessings?

4. Jesus spoke a lot about blessing. Read Matt 5:1-12. How do these statements compare with the blessings described in Proverbs? What are the parallels and what are the differences?

5. How do we recognise and respond to God's blessing in our lives?

6. What about when things are difficult and we can't so easily see God's blessing?



Study 4

WISDOM AND IDOLATRY

As we seek God's wisdom we also know that there are many distractions in life. In these studies we explore what those distractions might be and how we grapple with them.

Discussion question – How would you define idolatry? What are some of the idols we see in our modern culture that might draw us away from God?

Read Proverbs 11:1-31. Spend some time reflecting together – what stands out, what is surprising, what raises questions?

1. Proverbs doesn't mention the word idol, but there are many references to potential idols. Have a look at these passages and identify what might become an idol: Proverbs 6:20-25, 11:1-31, 23:19-21. From your reading of Proverbs are there other examples?



2. What is the effect of following these idols or sinful ways?

3. Read Ex 20:1-6 and 22-23. Why is idolatry such a problem for those seeking to follow God? Surely a little idol wouldn't be a problem?

4. Read Col 3:1-10 and 1 John 5:18-21. How do these passages help us deal with the usually more subtle idols in our lives?

5. What are the idols in our lives? How can we use godly wisdom to call them out and turn them away? What's one thing that I can pray about this week that will help with this?



Study 5

WISDOM AND RELATIONSHIPS

As relational beings we all want good relationships. But how do we foster good relationships? Proverbs has a lot to say about relationships.

Discussion question – What is a piece of advice that you have received that has helped with a relationship?

Read Proverbs 23:1-35. Spend some time reflecting together – what stands out, what is surprising, what raises questions?

1. What types of relationships are reflected in Proverbs 23?

2. What are the principles that are expounded in Proverbs 23?



3. How do we apply 23:13 and 14 in today's context? Are there any other challenging concepts in this chapter?

4. Proverbs is not the only time we've seen this kind of instruction about relationships. Read Exodus 22:1-26 and Micah 6:1-8. What is consistent with these passages and Proverbs, and what is different?

5. Read 1 John 4:7-21. What is the model for our relationships that John provides? How does this relate to the relational concepts we see in Proverbs?

6. How can we reflect God's grace to us in our relationships? Who is someone I can pray for this week for an improved relationship?

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