

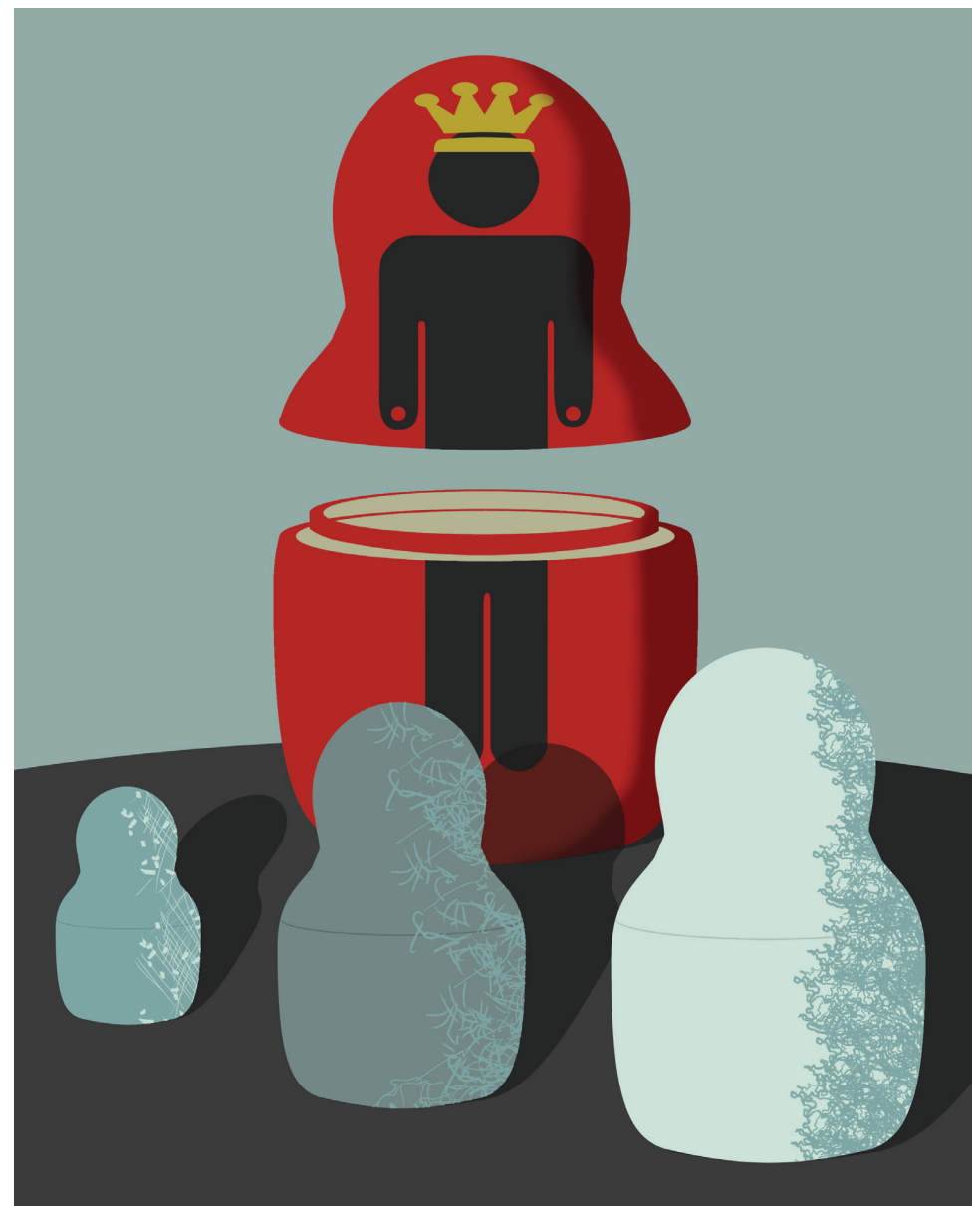
ABOUT THE PROVERBS IMAGE

“MATRYOSHKA DOLLS” by Jesse Eubanks

*The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:
for attaining wisdom and discipline;
for understanding words of insight;
for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life,
doing what is right and just and fair;
for giving prudence to the simple,
knowledge and discretion to the young-
let the wise listen and add to their learning,
and let the discerning get guidance-
for understanding proverbs and parables,
the sayings and riddles of the wise.
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools (a) despise wisdom and discipline.*
Proverbs 1:1-7

Solomon wrote Proverbs as a guide “for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight...” Solomon goes on to tell us, “let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance...”

Any godly wisdom that we possess comes from two sources - Christ Himself and the godly people that have gone before us and guided us. In this way, we are simply Matryoshka dolls. Matryoshka dolls open to reveal a smaller doll inside it to reveal another figure of the same sort inside, which has, in turn, another figure inside of it, and so on. Wisdom is like this. Ultimate wisdom comes from Christ, the King. Wisdom is then passed through the generations that have come before us until it reaches us. Isaac Newton said, “If I have seen further than others, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants.” Let us say, “If I have any wise counsel, it is by listening to the wisdom of the godly that have come before me.”



PROVERBS
A Field Guide

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WELCOME TO PROVERBS

Have you ever been struggling with a problem only to have someone say to you, 'Well nobody said it would be easy'? They are basically saying, 'Life is hard.' And that it is. In love, family, friendship, work, money, the opportunity for mistakes abounds. What's worse, we often don't even see the trouble coming until we're smack in the middle of it. And even if something is easy, we often get that spooky, 'too easy' feeling and wait for the other shoe to drop. Life is hard.

Living such a troublesome thing as life, we all long to know this answer: How? How am I supposed to know what to do? How am I going to get through this? How do I respond to that? How am I going to have enough money? How can I give my kids the best start in life? How do I know what's best when I have so many choices? How can I live skillfully?

We are all longing to navigate life well. We are all longing to be wise.

The Bible has an entire book devoted to passing on wisdom: Proverbs. This book will disrupt your life in order to instruct you. This book will confront you and offer a better way. Proverbs holds great wealth if you come to it asking the right questions, ready to receive its answers.

WHO HAS WISDOM?

The most important thing you need to know is Proverbs 1:7: 'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.'

If you want to navigate your life well, you must always keep the Creator of life in mind. All wisdom comes from God and must be sought with him, through him and in him. The fact is we are all born fools. We can't stumble upon wisdom or figure it out on our own. We must be taught wisdom. We must seek wisdom at its source – the Living God of the Bible.

Even seeking wisdom with God, though, we will all foolishly stumble and God will correct us. Wisdom most often comes to us hard fought, through trial and difficulty. Those trials and difficulties are evidence of the artful hand of God at work in your life, disciplining and strengthening you, like a potter to his clay (HEBREWS 12:7-12; 1 PETER 1:3-8). If we reject the Lord's discipline, then we will never learn. We will stubbornly persist in foolishness and miss out on enormous blessings with God. That would be tragic.

Proverbs, as part of God's Word, will help you make the most of your successes and your failures – helping you clearly know the difference between true success and failure, and helping you walk the line of wisdom. This Field Guide will serve as a toolkit for carrying Proverbs' wisdom along your daily path – in work, in wealth, in friendship, in love and in family.

WHAT IS WISDOM?

Are you looking for a playbook for 'doing the right thing' so that life will be easy? Proverbs is not that book. Proverbs invites you to skillful living in a hard life. Proverbs invites you to live out of a heart and mind remade for wisdom. But, what is wisdom?

Wisdom knows how to navigate life well. Since true wisdom always comes from God alone, we can truly say that wisdom is living life in a way that pleases God.

Wisdom is not craftiness: knowing how to manipulate and take advantage of those around you to get what you want. Wisdom is ethical: it is from God and loves justice, fairness and what's right. Wisdom is not IQ: knowing all the right answers and doing what appears to make sense. You could memorize all of Proverbs and still act like a fool. Wisdom is action: knowing the right path and

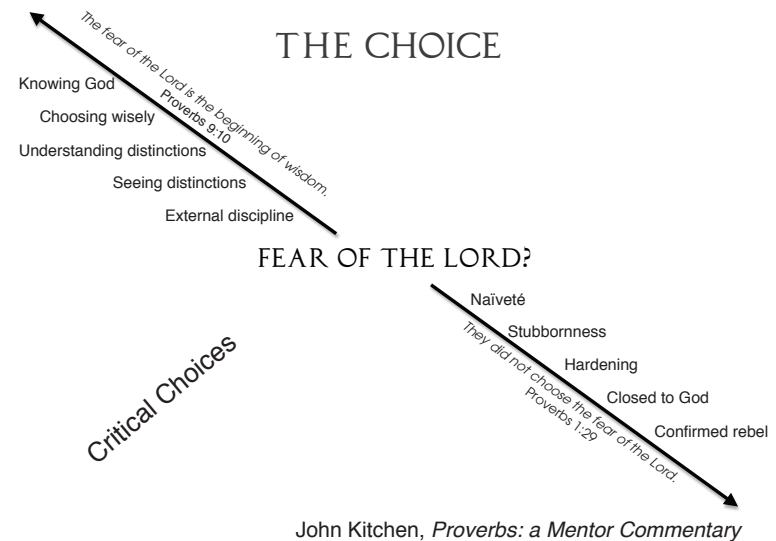
choosing the right path even when it's hard, when everything else says it doesn't make sense but God says it does. Wisdom knows how to navigate life *in a godly way*.

Wisdom is a rich concept and is not easily summarized. We will develop our understanding of it as we proceed through (Proverbs). However, since we have to start somewhere, we will begin with the basic idea that wisdom is the skill of living. It is a practical knowledge that helps one know how to act and how to speak in different situations. Wisdom entails the ability to avoid problems, and the skill to handle them when they present themselves. Wisdom also includes the ability to interpret other people's speech and writing in order to react correctly to what they are saying to us. (*Wisdom helps us spot fools.*)

- Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Proverbs*

Are you looking for a book that will train you to live skillfully, to suffer meaningfully and to choose wisely out of new, godly desires? Proverbs is that book.

HOW DO I FIND WISDOM?



As the chart shows, wisdom is a choice between two paths that both begin with the question: 'Do you fear the Lord?' Along the path to wisdom, there is growth – beginning with acting wisely even though it seems unnatural, maturing toward truly knowing wisdom and choosing wisely, and ending with knowing God. Along the path to foolishness, there is decay – beginning with simply being naïve, continuing in persistently ignoring God's instruction and ending truly hostile toward God, even claiming he doesn't exist at all.

Proverbs tells of this perilous crossroads, pointing out the traps and snares that make hazardous the path of life. The path of wisdom winds between these dangers toward God, the path of foolishness grows choked and dies far from God. To teach wisdom, Proverbs points out those risky times in life where foolishness will



bring drastic consequences. Strikingly, though, Proverbs doesn't always dictate which path to choose – it is not a list of dos and don'ts.

The individual proverbs are not detailed expressions of the law of Sinai handed down from God, but human reflections on individual experiences in the light of God's truth. Thus, they show us that being human as God intends means learning to think and act in a godly way. It means that, in revelation, God gives the framework for godly thinking but he will not do our thinking for us. We are responsible for the decisions we make as we seek to be wise (to think in a godly way) and to avoid being foolish (to think in a godless way).

- Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*

In Proverbs, the wise, knowing what is at stake, teach the young who need wisdom. The teaching draws you in, laying out hard sayings, vivid images and puzzling scenarios, inviting you to wrestle with them, ponder them.

FINDING WISDOM IS POSSIBLE BECAUSE OF JESUS CHRIST

We were all born fools, but much more gravely, we were all born sinners. We were all born with completely warped and broken hearts and desires. Our actions are ruled by darkness. We stagger around blinded to truth, inevitably destroying ourselves and taking others down with us. We have absolutely no hope of being wise, because all wisdom comes from God and sin has completely cut us off from him.

Jesus died to rescue us from that very hopelessness. Jesus lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died so that we may enjoy a restored relationship with God. Jesus had the wisdom we should have had and suffered the consequences of folly we should have suffered so that we might have access to the one source of all wisdom, God, and learn to walk the path of life skillfully, pleasing God.

As you read Proverbs, the worst thing you can do is try to drum up wisdom within yourself. You will fail. It's not in you. It's in Jesus. The best thing you can do is realize that Jesus *is* wisdom and His wisdom is now yours *as a free gift*. If you're a Christian, God has prepared the path of wisdom for you. You will still wrestle with foolishness, for you still wrestle with sin. But fix your eyes on the prize, fix your eyes on Jesus, and walk your path in the new light he gives you.

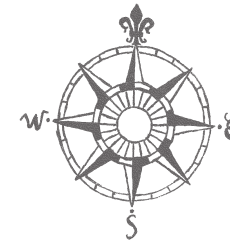
THE PROVERBS FIELD GUIDE

God's Word is good and true and powerful, and worthy of a place in your daily life. Too often, our experience with the Scriptures is limited to Sunday and possibly a community group meeting during the week. The purpose of this devotional guide is to help you integrate the Sunday teaching with your everyday living, carrying the Word with you in your mind and on your heart throughout the week.

The Proverbs Field Guide takes the sermon topic for the week and gives you just a few verses each day to meditate on. If you are looking to grow more disciplined in reading your Bible this year, this field guide will help you develop the practice of opening your Bible regularly. Proverbs is a great place to start learning to love your Bible. It's designed to be taken in small pieces. Even one verse a day will give you plenty to chew on. So this field guide won't overwhelm you with pages and pages to read, but rather give you a few morsels of Scripture to savor so that you can experience how good God's Word is, and grow in your desire to know it thoroughly.

If you want to read more than a few verses a day, commit to reading the entire book of Proverbs this month. Reading just one chapter a day will get you there, and the devotional can help you think more deeply on a few select passages that you've read or will read.

Whatever your situation, simply start where you are and expect God to grow your appetite over time. You have a lifetime to fall in love with this book, so let's get started.



PROVERBS AT A GLANCE

Who

Most of Proverbs was authored by King Solomon, one of the wisest men to ever walk the earth. (With contributions from the likes of Hezekiah (25:1), Agur (30:1) and Lemuel (31:1)). Solomon was given one request by God and Solomon asked for wisdom, and through the book of Proverbs, we can share in the wisdom God blessed him with.

What

Proverbs isn't a part of the storyline of the Bible, it is a sort of sidebar, a collection of wisdom that was gathered and recorded during the history written in the Old Testament.

When

960 B.C. – 686 B.C. during the reigns of Solomon and Hezekiah.

Where

Proverbs was written in Israel, a desert land familiar with the seasonal ebb and flow of farming and the hustling, bustling complexities of city life. Think New York City meets rural Kentucky.

Why

Proverbs is not meant as a book of promises of wealth and health in exchange for obedience. It is not a collection of formulas 'obey command A and receive blessing B'. Proverbs teaches the *path* of wisdom, not merely the *choices* of wisdom. Begin with the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7) and go from there.

FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR READING PROVERBS

Here are a few principles for reading proverbs and questions to ask yourself as you read.

Proverbs uses parallelism – The two lines of a proverb often balance one another, with the second line emphasizing or contrasting the first. Look for the words *like*, *as*, or *but*.

Ex. 1 – These men lie in wait for their own blood;
They waylay only themselves.

Ex. 2 – A cheerful heart is good medicine,
But a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

How does the second line of the proverb amplify, contrast, or make more vivid the first line?

Proverbs uses imagery – The book abounds with vipers, oxen, ants, rotting bones, rivers, oceans and prostitutes. It lights the imagination on fire.

What thoughts, feelings and ideas do the images in the proverb trigger in my mind? How do the images interact?

Proverbs addresses all people – Men and women, young and old, kings and beggars: God's wisdom is universal.

How does the proverb address me personally, even if it seems to address someone other than me?

Proverbs is God's Word – it isn't filled with suggestions and helpful hints, but with the very words of God (II Timothy 3:16). Proverbs is also part of a larger whole: the Bible. We should always let Scripture interpret Scripture.

What is God telling me about being wise? Does the proverb remind me of other passages in the Bible, Old or New Testament? How does the rest of the Bible help me understand the principle of wisdom in this particular proverb, i.e. if a proverb is about money, what does the rest of the Bible say about money?

Proverbs points to Jesus – only through faith in Jesus do we have the ability to live out the wisdom of Proverbs.

How does my relationship with Christ and all of its benefits – oneness with Him, adoption as God's child, complete forgiveness, present and future restoration – inform my understanding of this proverb? How does Jesus help me digest my failure? How can Jesus help me grow?



Proverbs' Instruction for Parents

Proverbs are “rules of thumb” for living a life of faith in God’s world. In chapters 1-9 of this book, Solomon addresses the “son” and encourages him to listen to the “rules of thumb” his father and mother teach him, because this instruction will prove to be a great prize (1:8-9). Parents, especially fathers, should not ignore the emphasis in this book on their role in teaching their kids. Parents are the primary educators of their children in Proverbs, and that role should not be neglected.

Topics to Talk About With Your Kids

Teaching must have a goal. Modern educational theory sees knowledge (cognitive skills), attitudes (affective skills), and abilities (psychomotor skills) as the goals of teaching. ***In the ancient wisdom of Proverbs, the goal of teaching is (1) Faith, (2) Character, and (3) Wise Living.***

Faith

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” Proverbs 9:10—We must cultivate in our children a reverence for God and a personal knowledge of how He works rather than a sense of their own personal achievement.

Conversation Starters: Instead of asking your child, “What did you do/learn today at school,” ask, “Where did you see God working today? How did he show you His beauty? His love? For what do you need his direction? His forgiveness?”

“My son, if you accept my words and treasure up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.” Proverbs 2:1-5—We should not just seek passive acceptance of the Bible’s teaching, but rather an active desire by children to seek wisdom for themselves.

Conversation Starters: Ask your child, “What is most important to you? If you had one thousand dollars to spend on anything you want, how would you spend it? Where does God rank next to these things? What is it about God that makes him more valuable than things money can buy?” Be prepared to answer these questions yourself.

Character

“Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse. Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you. Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning.” Proverbs 9:7-9—Proverbs focuses on the inner person. Two virtues admired in this book are a teachable spirit (Proverbs 3:11; 9:7) and the treasuring of justice (Proverbs 2:6-9; 6:12-19; 8:5-9).

Conversation Starters: Ask your child, “Are you quick to be critical even when you know nothing about the subject being taught? Do you seek the advice of wiser Christians before you make important decisions? Do you find out what the Bible says about the subject? Does it bother you when you are treated unfairly?”

Does it bother you when others are treated unjustly but you are blessed? Do you feel pain when others are hurting? When you see unfairness in the world, do you want Jesus to come and repair it?”

Wise Living

“(These proverbs are) for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young—let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance—for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.” Proverbs 1:2-6—Proverbs are written so that the young and simple can acquire wisdom, discretion, guidance, and sound judgment.

Conversation Starters: Ask your child, “Do you typically learn from being punished for mistakes or by listening to the advice of older and wiser men and women? Do you think first or speak first? What do you dream about? Would God consider your dreams to be pure and virtuous? What would you watch on TV if your mom and dad weren’t around? Would God be pleased? Have you ever gotten in trouble because of something you said? Is there anything you’ve said today that you wish you didn’t say? Are others encouraged or discouraged by your words? Would you say that your words are “life-giving” or do they destroy and kill? Do others succeed in God’s eyes when they follow your advice? Do you regularly obey God even when it is not popular? Do you think too highly of yourself? Are you aware of any sin in your life? Do you regularly pray for God’s forgiveness and grace to help you live wisely?”



WORK

Work. We all experience it; not just with a job, but with life. Life takes work. This week, we will look at what Proverbs has to say on the matter.

Day 1 - On Being Driven (Proverbs 13:4, 12)

God created people and he built them to do work (Genesis 1:28). We derive great satisfaction from doing our best and accomplishing our goals – and that’s truly a blessing from God. Having desires that motivate us (desires for financial stability, higher education, a healthier lifestyle, etc.) and pairing them with diligence to work hard can bring great glory to God. However, when desire is divorced from diligence, we become sluggards and whine about what we want without doing any work toward our goal. Clearly wisdom is found in working hard (13:4). Wisdom is also found in having the right ultimate desire. What we work for will ultimately fade – money gets spent, unexpected hardships come. This can leave our hearts sick. God, however, is constant and will never fade, so our longing for him will always be fulfilled through Jesus. Our lesson today is twofold – God has called you to work and has given you desires to motivate you, but God wants to be your ultimate desire so that you will never be ultimately disappointed.

Day 2 - On Talking Big (Proverbs 14:23)

We have all gotten super excited about a project, made all sorts of big plans and told our friends how we were going to conquer that particular mountain – and then stopped halfway through. It’s discouraging, and wisdom says such big talk can lead us to poverty. It is an art to translate plans into results – and God calls us to become skilled in that art, skilled in the art of working hard. The promise of hard work is good results, and the promise of mere talk is poverty. Here’s the challenge: practice turning your words into works. As with any training, start where you are. You wouldn’t try to lift 300 lbs if you’d never lifted weights before. Start with reasonable goals, ones you know you can accomplish. Practice following through on little things. Practice the art of doing what you say you’ll do. Over time, step it up – set bigger goals and accomplish bigger tasks. God has wired us to learn and grow through repetition, working from simple to difficult – and learning to do what you say you’ll do is no different.

Day 3 - On Sleepiness (Proverbs 6:9-11)

Clearly, someone who sleeps through work is going to get fired and end up in the poor house. But this proverb goes deeper than that. Truly, God calls us to rest. John Piper has said that sleep is God’s way of letting us know he’s in control – for he still works while we need sleep. However, the foolish sluggard in us rears its groggy head when our work is controlled by the desire for sleep, for our next break, for our next vacation. Colossians 3:23 instructs Christians to work as though God were their boss. If we realized God is our immediate supervisor, we wouldn’t be constantly looking for down time, we would want to do a good job and we’d work hard to make that happen. In whatever you do, are you truly trying to do the best job possible or are you just skating by waiting to clock out?

Day 4 - On Being Satisfied (Proverbs 12:11)

Our culture places a premium on achieving huge things. We’ve grown up saturated with images of the wildly rich and successful – in business, movies, music, sports. It’s easy to feel like a failure if you didn’t end up a rockstar or a billionaire tycoon, and so the temptation is to stubbornly put everything on hold while you

‘chase the dream’. Chasing fantasies is foolish according to Proverbs. The wise person works with what they have, *resources* as well as *opportunities*. The foolish person lives in the fantasy future, not putting down roots, not cultivating their current resources and opportunities, but waiting... waiting. God’s call with this proverb is simple – cultivate your present resources and opportunities. If other doors open, that’s wisdom for another day. God calls us to live wisely in the present. Be where you are and trust God with the future.

Day 5 - On Spending Wisely (Proverbs 24:27)

If ever there was a time to understand this proverb of priorities, it is our present time of economic woe and bursting ‘housing bubbles’. This proverb addresses farmers in ancient times and says, basically, ‘You make your living with your farm; if it fails you lose everything. Make sure your source of income is secure before you start spending on luxuries like a house. Better to live in a tent for a while than to go broke.’ The basic principle is this: earn your money before you spend it. Remember, this isn’t just a good idea, this is wisdom from the Living God. We can get eaten up with cravings for luxury and go into debt for HD TVs and fancy homes, so God says, ‘Wait.’ Our lesson is to have our priorities straight so that we can be wise stewards of the resources God provides for us. Does your spending reflect wise priorities?

NOTES



WEALTH

Money is truly a two-edged sword – it can serve us and it can enslave us. Such a potent thing as wealth must be approached with godly wisdom, and so Proverbs addresses the issue often, as we will find this week.

Day 1 – On Identity (Proverbs 22:2)

We all tend to find our identity in the balance of our bank account. If we have a little bit of spending money, we tend to feel like we're going to be ok; and if we can only barely make ends meet, we feel like we're drowning. Today's proverb tells us this is nonsense. Rich and poor, God made us all. You have a worth that doesn't increase if you get richer and doesn't decrease if you get poorer. Money does not define you; the fact that you are God's creation makes you who you are. Our primary concern in life must be where we stand with God, not where we stand with creditors. Our primary happiness in life must come from the fact that Jesus died to save us, not that we have plenty of money. Hold this truth in the front of your mind, cling tightly to it. Don't believe the foolish lie that money makes you who you are.

Day 2 – On Thankfulness (Proverbs 3:9-10)

Here in Proverbs, and throughout the Bible, we are called to honor God with our money. As we saw yesterday, God created us – God made us and gave us the ability to work and earn money. We should rightly respond in thankfulness. If someone gave you the perfect tool to do a job that would have been otherwise impossible, you would thank them. In a similar but much deeper way, we should respond in thankfulness to the God who made us and also died to save us after we rejected him. We must honor God as Lord over even our money, and we do this by giving to God from our wealth. When we give to God, we are saying, 'God, you blessed me with this and I love you more than I love keeping this money.' We don't do this in order to purchase blessings from God, though. When we give in order to receive more, we are saying that we're not satisfied with God alone. We are saying we also need to be rich to be happy. But when we come to God with humble, thankful hearts, we will see that we are already abundantly blessed with what we have. Our 'barns' are just as full as God has made them, and we burst with joy because we God has made them much more full than we deserve. Today, thank God for what you have, counting your blessings, not your wants.

Day 3 – On True Worth (Proverbs 11:4; 23:4-5)

It is important to honor God with our money, to enthrone him higher than our paycheck, because money is worthless in the end. When you die, you won't bribe God into sneaking you through the back door of his Kingdom. Money can do a lot of things in this life, it can certainly help make this life easier, but money does nothing once you're dead except get divided up amongst those still living. So, of course it's foolish to wear yourself out for money. You should wear yourself out for *righteousness* – for living a life of faith in Jesus that pleases God. Faith in Jesus will affect every bit of your life, including how you work (as we studied last week), and God may very well bless your faithful work with financial reward. But in the end, even if you live your whole life poor but righteous in Christ, your life will be a success story. Today, honestly ask yourself what you find most valuable and remember that faith in Jesus has brought you forgiveness and a new heart with new values.

Day 4 – On Earning an Honest Wage (Proverbs 16:26)

Before we get too carried away and declare that money is horrible and we should all just be poor, let's hear some more wisdom from Proverbs. Our appetite works for us, our hunger drives us on. As we saw last week, God can give us good desires to motivate us to work and enjoy them. In our society, money can buy many of the things that we can desire in a godly way. Money can buy food for our families, clothes to keep us warm, gifts to give as a blessing to a friend or child. Money is not bad, it's just a means to an end. True wisdom is knowing when you've come to that end, when you have enough. We must fervently seek the Lord's wisdom because having can make us foolishly want to have more and more and more. If we're never satisfied, then our hunger for more money grows and grows until it swallows us up. Today, consider this question: how much is enough?

Day 5 – On Being Generous (Proverbs 14:31; 11:24; 28:8)

Proverbs urges us to be generous to the poor. If our hearts and desires are truly transformed by God's grace, then we will love what God loves – and God loves people. If our hearts and desires are truly transformed by God's grace, then we will want to be like God – and God is generous. Oppressing the poor, either directly or by ignoring their need, shows contempt for God. But we honor God when we see need and we step in and meet that need. There's a curious thing about giving, it makes you feel truly rich. When you meet someone's need, you realize just how much you have. Proverbs also tells us that if we live our lives ignoring and oppressing the poor, we will ultimately forfeit everything we have to another who *will* love the poor. That Other is Jesus Christ, who will come back to lift the downtrodden and administer God's justice to the poor. It's far better to seek God's justice by being generous *now* than to experience God's justice *then*, after a life of selfishness. Today, consider one way that you can be generous. Find one need that you can meet for someone and do so.

NOTES



FRIENDSHIP

Having a true friend, someone who you can count on, someone who you can laugh it out and cry it out with, someone who knows you well and can call you out when you're not at your best – truly such a companion is a blessing from God. This week, Proverbs counsels us on how to find and how to be that kind of friend.

Day 1 – On Sharpening (Proverbs 27:17; 12:26; 13:20)

God wants your friends to help you grow in holiness. The best kind of friend is one who loves you enough not to leave you alone, someone who is willing to hurt your feelings for a moment for the sake of helping you turn away from sin. Iron sharpens iron by shaving away those bits that make the blade dull, and a friend sharpens a friend by urging their companion to repent of the bits that make their spirit dull and ungodly. If God has such a great plan for friendship, we should be careful to choose godly friends (this doesn't mean that we never befriend an unbeliever, for that friendship can also be redemptive, but we should not *only* be friends with unbelievers). Do you have at least one person who will lovingly call out your sin and stick by your side while you battle it? Are you that kind of friend for someone else? If not, just ask someone to be that kind of friend for you.

Day 2 – On Patient Friendship (Proverbs 27:6, 9)

How do you react when a friend calls you out? Do you get resentful and avoid them for a while or end the friendship altogether? Proverbs tells us that anyone who only makes us feel good all the time could very well be an enemy, not a friend at all. Our encouragement today is to endure in friendship. If your friend has wounded you because they wish to see you more freed from sin, stick with that friend. Your friendship will deepen and mature. On the other hand, if you have had to confront your friend and they pull back to lick their wounds, patiently pursue your friend with love. Truly, the deep goodness of friendship comes from this kind of honesty and care for one another's spiritual well-being.

Day 3 – On Your Words (Proverbs 15:28; 12:25; 16:24)

One of the worst feelings is when your mouth gets ahead of you and you end up hurting someone's feelings accidentally. Proverbs wisely counsels us to weigh our words. They can indeed be powerful, so we shouldn't just spew out words without any care. We feel the power of words when a friend's encouragement lifts us on a hard day. Truly, pleasant words are sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. Too often, we wait until they are dead and gone to eulogize someone. As wise, godly friends, we should always speak encouragement to one another without waiting until our words can do no good. The task of the day is to call (or, even better, visit) a friend and speak kindly to them from your heart. If you are the kind of friend who will honestly confront another's sin, then a compliment from you will truly be taken and cherished.

Day 4 – On Gossip (Proverbs 11:13; 16:28; 20:19)

The short word on gossip is 'don't'. Few things can kill a friendship faster than telling everyone something your friend told you in confidence. A wise, godly friend is trustworthy, but a gossip is called 'perverse' and a betrayer. Often, the motive of gossip is to bring someone else down a peg when we think they've gotten too high and mighty. We intend to wound them, or at least wound their reputation. We shouldn't do this, but we do. Jesus, however, did what we should have done – He didn't strike us down when we got too high and mighty, He died to save us.

He took the wounds we deserved. Our lesson isn't to be like Jesus, but to realize that he succeeded where we failed, and our faith in Him means His success is now ours. This can transform our hearts and therefore our words (Luke 6:45b). Jesus died so that we might be free of the impulse to gossip. What would it look like to live in that reality today?

Day 5 – On Keeping Your Friends (Proverbs 27:20; 17:9)

Keep your friends around, for they can be as valuable as family in a time of need. Even though friendship can be hard work and sometimes heartbreaking, wisdom says it's well worth it. We've studied the benefits and promises of friendship all week, so our final challenge is to cultivate and maintain the friendships we have been blessed with. The surest way to do this is to practice forgiveness regularly. He who covers up an offense promotes love (but he who keeps dragging up old hurts ruins the friendship). Love, genuine love, will grow us in godliness and wisdom, and that's much more worth promoting than continually seeking restitution when you're wounded. Is there someone you need to extend forgiveness to today? Go and promote love.

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SEXUALITY

Sex gets a lot of attention in our culture. We are barraged with 'advice' for navigating our sexuality, and a lot of it may even seem to make sense. But is it truly wise or does the advice just appeal to our urges? Let's sit under the teaching of Proverbs this week - it has a thing or two to say about sex.

Day 1 - On Bad Sex (Proverbs 5:1-14)

While we might not have a man or woman outright beckoning us to an illicit sexual encounter, we all face a culture that overwhelmingly urges us in that direction, and internal desires that really want to follow along. For men, it's often lust - longing for the physical pleasures of sex. Men are told they're not men unless they have a string of conquests and so men are beckoned to chase sexual gratification with real and virtual women. For women, it's often wanting to be lusted after. Women are told they're not beautiful unless a man chasing after them and so women are told to use their bodies to catch the attention of men. All kinds of problems arise from the root of foolish sexuality. When whatever sexual promise doesn't pan out, men and women are left hurt, on the brink of utter ruin - a devastating breakup, a draining divorce, deep marital and family problems. Clearly the path that leads to the adulteress, whomever or whatever that might be, leads away from God - clearly that path leads to destruction. Hear Paul's word in I Corinthians 16:19-20: 'You are not your own, you are bought with a price (the blood of Jesus). Therefore, honor God with your body.' That's wisdom for today.

Day 2 - On Good Sex (Proverbs 5:15-20)

Contrasting the foolishness of the adulteress, we have the wisdom of the deep cisterns in our own house. God has provided us with all that we need for true satisfaction and fulfillment, first in himself, but also in our circumstances. We must understand that whether we're single or married, God has brought us to that very place in order for us to be most satisfied in him. In singleness, that takes the form of reserving your sexual intimacy until God provides you with a spouse. In marriage, that takes the form of finding complete satisfaction in the sexual relationship God has provided for you with your spouse. That is the only wise path for human sexuality: one man, one woman, one lifetime. It's worth waiting for. It's worth the hard work of maintaining. Why go down the path to destruction when God has provided the path to true contentment in him and his blessings, through his Son Jesus? Today, consider what temptations you face regarding your sexuality and spend time praying for wisdom to guard your heart and body.

Day 3 - On Privacy (Proverbs 5:21-13)

Probably the biggest contributing factor to men and women abusing and misusing their sexuality is that they think no one knows. We go to great lengths to hide our sin, to maintain our privacy, especially when it comes to sex. But the wisdom of Proverbs reminds us that with God, we have no privacy. God knows what we do and does punish sin. The flip side of that coin appears in 1 John 1:19: 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive and purify us from all unrighteousness.' What a promise! God knows every single thing we've done, but God can forgive every single thing if we confess our sin, confess that God is present and knows, and cling to Jesus. Today, be encouraged to search your heart for sin (sexual and otherwise) and confess it to God. He will forgive *and purify* you, enabling you to live without fear of his constant presence.

Day 4 - On Necessity (Proverbs 6:30-32)

Another common lie about sex is that it's a necessity. Proverbs tells us that someone who steals bread for starvation still receives justice, but on some level people think it's reasonable to steal to save your life. But someone who steals sex from someone else's spouse (which is what all sex outside marriage is), what a fool! Why would you destroy yourself for something you don't even need? Many of us need to wake up from that lie - we don't need sex! Jesus has set you free from that lie if you're a Christian. Meditate on that truth today. The shame of feeling like you need sex, or like you need to be wanted for sex - all of that disappears with Jesus. How can this freedom transform your daily life?

Day 5 - On Watching Your Step (Proverbs 7)

Proverbs 7 tells the story of a fool who wandered too close to the wrong house and got swept away by sin and carried off to his death. We can apply this wisdom to our sexuality, but also to anything that causes us to sin. We should not wait until we are right on the brink of sin to try to find a way out. We should pray now that God would give us discernment of what triggers a sinful response in our heart so that we can avoid it. As Jesus taught us to pray, 'Lord, lead us not into temptation.' There are circumstances and situations that strike us deep with temptation and make it awfully hard to resist sin. Jesus has set us free from those chains and provided us a path to resistance, a path to wisdom and godliness. He leads us away from those dark alleys of temptation. What are some situations in your life away from which you can follow Jesus?

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FAMILY

We all have family and we all need wisdom to navigate the sometimes (if not often) stormy waters of our family relationships. We will finish our Proverbs study here, where work, money, friendship and love all meet.

Day 1 & 2 – On Manhood (Proverbs 9:10; 6:16-19) & Womanhood (Proverbs 31:10-31)

Since Proverbs is largely addressed to sons, the entire book can be read as a primer for biblical manhood, but we'll just look at a couple of verses. Strong families need godly men to lead them, and a godly man first fears the Lord and then wisely puts off ungodly traits: like pride, lying, murderousness, devious scheming, a heart that quickly goes to evil and words that stir up dissent. The godly man hates what the Lord hates and longs to be the kind of man the Lord loves. Men, only your faith in Jesus and the new heart He gives you will enable you to be this kind of man, and you are certainly called to nothing less than this. So, prayerfully make plans with the Lord to combat your sin and grow in this kind of godliness for your own sake and the sake of your family, now and as it may expand in the future. Step into your family's struggles and seek the Lord. Women, expect this from the men in your family and encourage them along the path to godliness.

Proverbs takes special care to close with the praise of a virtuous woman – strong and clothed with dignity, resourceful and a gifted caretaker, wise and capable, trustworthy and treasured. Strong families need godly women to complement the godly men. The godly woman longs to be the woman God loves, whether or not culture agrees. Ladies, only *your* faith in Jesus and the new heart he gives you will enable you to be this kind of woman, especially in a culture that pushes you to be one of the boys. So prayerfully seek the Lord's wisdom and courage in putting off cultural womanhood and putting on godly womanhood. Men, seek this for the women in your family and encourage them along their own path to godliness.

Day 3 – On Marriage (Proverbs 18:22; 12:4)

Marriage is indeed a good, godly thing and the bedrock of strong families. When godly men and women are united in marriage, it demonstrates Christ and the church to the world. Marriage must be held in high regard and submitted to God's wisdom. Men, Proverbs' wisdom for you is that your wife is a treasure: are you loving her like a treasure? Ladies, Proverb's wisdom for you is that your noble character is a crown for your husband's head. Is your character crowning your husband?

If you are single and you desire marriage, are you preparing yourself well? Men, cultivate wisdom in how to pursue a treasured woman in a godly way. Our church has scores of godly women and you as single men need to seek wisdom and cultivate a culture of noble men who pursue noble women by noble means to a noble end. Ladies, cultivate wisdom in how to grow in character and patience. Men, don't make them be too patient, step up!

Day 4 – On Parenting and Being Parented (Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 23:13-14; 3:12)

Parents, you have the high calling of teaching your child discipline and the stakes are high. Just as it was a matter of your own life and death that you learn authority in order to accept the Lord's authority, so it is for your child. But you must remember that ultimately, it is the Lord's work to transform your child's heart. And so you have a wonderful ally in those times when it seems your children will never learn. Rest your confidence with God so that you can step into your child's life and

bring discipline with courage and conviction.

Even if you're not a parent, remember that you are still a child. That's not to say that you have to do everything your parents tell you if you're 30. That is to say that you are always God's child. Remember that God loves you enough to discipline you as a parent disciplines their children (Hebrews 12:9). Rest your confidence in the fact that God wants what's best for you so that you can step into his correction with courage and conviction.

Day 5 – On Dysfunction (Proverbs 3:12)

Family life can be very difficult. The relationships are so complex and so close that great hurt can come from them. We call this dysfunction, but truthfully, there really aren't any perfectly functional families because families are all full of sinners. But for the Christian, God is the heavenly Father as Proverbs 3:12 infers. Our relationship with God, restored by Jesus, is wonderfully functional. When family life seems hard and insurmountable, remember your heavenly Father. He has rescued you from despair and will strengthen you to face your family's dysfunction with renewed courage, armed with the promise that one day all things will be made right in Jesus and the hope of seeing things move to that end in this present life. Take heart!

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND RECOMMENDED READING

Family devotional

Tim Chester, "On Answering a Fool: Making Sense of the Book of Proverbs" <http://beginningwithmoses.org>; Daniel J. Estes, *Hear, My Son: Teaching and Learning in Proverbs 1-9*; Ian Fry, "God-Centered Teaching" Children's Desiring God Conference, 2009

Field Guide & Recommended

John Kitchen, *Proverbs: a Mentor Commentary*; Max Anders, *Proverbs: Holman Old Testament Commentary*; Anthony Selvaggio, *The Proverbs Driven Life*; John Crotts, *Craftsmen: Christ-Centered Proverbs for Men*; Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Proverbs & Proverbs: Baker OT Commentary*; Paul Koptak, *Proverbs: NIV Application Commentary*; Graeme Gosldworthy, *According to Plan*



