

FOOLPROOF

LIFE LESSONS FROM PROVERBS



Bathurst Presbyterian Church 2018

Proverbs is all about how to live well—how to spend our money, how to work, what to say (and how to say it) and a whole host of other topics. Because of who God is, certain types of behaviour are good and certain types of behaviour are bad. Because of the way he established the world, we can observe certain patterns about the way it works, reflect on them and then act accordingly. Proverbs offers instruction that will enable us to live stable, good, coherent and effective lives.

We would, quite literally, be fools if we ignored what Proverbs teaches us.

In this set of studies we will dip into some of the profoundly practical lessons of Proverbs.¹ Amongst other things we will learn to fear God and ultimately fear his Son, Jesus Christ. The world doesn't like that message. And yet Jesus, as God's king, has been endowed with all wisdom and understanding, which makes him the pre-eminent authority on wisdom—the only truly wise man. In fearing him, we come to understand the real purpose of life, and therefore the real goal of wisdom.

In fearing Jesus, we foolproof our life.



¹ Material for these studies was adapted from "The Art of Living" by Bryson Smith (2008, Matthias Media).

Proverbs 1:1-6

Read Proverbs 1:1-6.

1. According to verses 2-5, what is the purpose of the Book of Proverbs?

2. Verses 2-5 mention lots of things. What do you think is meant by the following?

wisdom

prudence

discretion

3. Do you think the things mentioned in verses 2-5 are popular or unpopular in today's world? Why?

4. Which of the things listed in question 2 would you like to have more of? Why?

5. Verse 6 alerts us to the fact that the book of Proverbs is going to contain a range of different types of expressions of wisdom (e.g. proverbs, sayings and riddles). How would you define each one?

proverb

saying (this is translated as 'parable' in the NIV)

riddle.

6. According to verse 1, who are the contents of the book of Proverbs attributed to?

Read 1 Kings 4:29-34.

7. Why is Solomon a good person to learn life from?

Read Isaiah 11:2-3

8. The connection between Solomon and wisdom is the start of an ongoing association in the Old Testament between wisdom and God's king. Isaiah 11:2-3 describes God's future king (i.e. Messiah or Christ)—the one who will rule Israel. How do these verses strengthen the link between wise living and God's chosen king?

Read Matthew 12:38-42

9. The connection between wisdom and God's king reaches its most profound moment with the coming of Jesus Christ. If Jesus is even wiser than Solomon, what implications does this have for our attitude to the things Jesus says?

Think it through

- Are there certain things about following Jesus which don't make sense to the world, and which seem a bit silly to do?

- How does this study strengthen our trust in what Jesus says?

- Are there any particular life issues that you'd like wisdom with? Keep an eye out for these issues as the book progresses.

Prayer

Thank God for the wonderful wisdom of our Lord Jesus. Ask him to give you the wisdom to be obedient to him.

Proverbs 1:7-9:18

Read Proverbs 1:7.

1. In many ways this opening verse serves as a summary of this whole section in Proverbs. What do you think it means to "fear the LORD"?
2. What is there about God to be fearful of?
3. What do you think the phrase "the beginning of knowledge" means?
4. Look up the following references as well: Proverbs 2:5, 3:7, 8:13, 9:10-12. List some of the consequences of having the "fear of the Lord".

Throughout Proverbs 1-19 we hear various voices which tempt us to NOT fear the Lord.

The voice of the sinner. Read Proverbs 1:10-19

5. What is tempting about the voice of the sinner? What are the consequences of behaving this way?
6. Are there particular areas of your life where you are tempted by the voice of the sinner? If so, how?

The voice of the adulteress. Read Proverbs 5

7. What is tempting about the voice of the adulteress? What are the consequences of behaving this way?

8. Are there particular areas of your life where you are tempted by the voice of the adulteress? If so, how?

The voice of the sluggard. Read Proverbs 6:6-11

9. What is tempting about the voice of the sluggard? What are the consequences of behaving this way?

10. Are there particular areas of your life where you are tempted by the voice of the sluggard? If so, how?

Think it through

- What are some of the ways in which you are tempted to 'fear' things and people other than God and His Christ?

- What are some other 'voices' or examples of how Folly is seeking to tempt you in your life? What are some practical ways that we can help each other to resist?

- The voices of Folly often tempt us with short-term worldly gains and experiences at the expense of long-term spiritual blessings. What are some ways that we can keep our focus as Christians?

Prayer

Ask God to fill you with a reverent fear of him and his Son.

Proverbs 10-29

Read Proverbs 16

In this study, Proverbs 16 is treated as a representative chapter of the entire section of chapters 10-29.

1. What is your overall impression of this chapter?

2. List the sorts of topics and subjects which are covered by these verses.

3. Is there any order or pattern to the way the topics are arranged?

4. Are there any verses which you find especially helpful or surprising? Why?

5. Many of the sayings in Proverbs stem from what the Lord is like—what he approves of, hates, commends, and so on. These sayings make a value judgement about what is the morally right or wrong way to live, based on who God is and his righteousness. What verses in chapter 16 (if any) lay down obligations about how we must live if we are to live in the fear of the Lord?

6. Many of the sayings in Proverbs are based on careful observations of what happens in life. These observations describe the way things usually happen in God's world without always making a value judgement on how right or wrong these regularities are. What verses in chapter 16 (if any) describe the way things usually happen without making any real value judgement?

7. It can be difficult sometimes to know whether a saying in Proverbs is a statement about what is always right and wrong (which we should therefore obey), or whether it is a wise observation about the way things usually go in our world (which we should therefore apply more carefully, depending on our circumstances). Some people find this a little disconcerting. However, it's helpful to remember that Proverbs wants us to think carefully about its sayings so that we might live wisely and well in the world as people who fear the Lord. (Prov 1:4-6)

Are there any verses in Proverbs 16 where it's difficult to decide whether they are 'obligations' or 'observations'?

8. The many obligations and observations of life found in Proverbs 10-29 reflect the fact that this world is not completely chaotic. There are regularities and patterns in life. How does knowing Jesus help us to understand the pattern and purpose of this world even more (cf. Eph 1:9-10; Col 1:15-20, 2:2-3)?

Think it through

- "There is no rhyme or reason to life. It's all just chaos and chance!" What would you say in response to this?

- When is it hardest to believe that life has a pattern and order to it? How is Proverbs helpful for us during those times?

Prayer

Ask God to fill you with a reverent fear of him and his Son.

Proverbs 10-29

In our last study, we discovered that the large middle section of Proverbs (chapters 10-29) provide us with many insights about how best to live this life. In this study, we will dip into these chapters to see what wisdom they offer on the important topic of words.

1. Read the following proverbs. What do you discover about the **importance** of our words?

Proverbs 11:9

Proverbs 12:18

Proverbs 15:4

2. Read the following proverbs. What do you discover about the way we **should** speak?

Proverbs 10:19

Proverbs 15:1-2

Proverbs 16:23-24

3. Read the following proverbs. What do you discover about the way we **shouldn't** speak?

Proverbs 16:28

Proverbs 17:4, 9

Proverbs 26:28

4. Read the following passages from the New Testament. What else do they tell us about words and how we should speak?

Matthew 5:33-37

Ephesians 4:14-16

Ephesians 4:29

James 3:1-12

Think it through

- "There's nothing wrong with a little white lie. It won't hurt anyone." What would you say in response to this?
- Is there any particular verse from this study that has especially struck you as wise advice? In what way? Can you think of some practical ways that you might be able to implement it?
- How does knowing Jesus and following him as our king reinforce the lessons we have learned in this study?

Prayer

Ask God we might use our words and speech to honour him and build each other up.

Proverbs 10-29

In study 4, we discovered that the large middle section of Proverbs (chapters 10-29) provide us with many insights about how best to live this life. In this study, we will dip into these chapters to see what wisdom they offer on the important topic of wealth.

1. Read the following proverbs. What do you discover about how we should earn money?

Proverbs 12:11

Proverbs 13:11

Proverbs 28:20-22

2. Read the following proverbs. What do you discover about how we should use our money?

Proverbs 11:24-26

Proverbs 19:17

Proverbs 22:9

3. Read the following proverbs. What do you discover about how we should think about money?

Proverbs 11:4, 18, 28

Proverbs 16:8, 16

Proverbs 23:4-5

4. Read the following passages from the New Testament. What else do they tell us about money and wealth?

Luke 12:13-14

2 Corinthians 8:1-12

Philippians 4:10-13

James 1:9-11

Think it through

- What are some of the ways you've seen money negatively affect people? What are some ways you've seen money positively affect people?

- Is there any particular verse from this study that has especially struck you as wise advice? In what way? Can you think of some practical ways that you might be able to implement it?

- How does knowing Jesus and following him as our king reinforce the lessons we have learned in this study?

Prayer

Ask God we might use our money wisely and that we might find contentment in Christ.

Proverbs 30:1-31:9

Read Proverbs 30:1-4.

1. In this section, we meet a man searching for wisdom in life. What is his name and how does he describe himself?
2. Possibly the best translation of verse 1 is the one mentioned in the footnotes of the ESV (and NIV). In other words, Agur is "of Massa", an Ishmaelite clan (cf. Gen 25:14). How does this make sense of verse 3? (Hint: look at what the Apostle Paul says about the predicament of Gentiles in Ephesians 2:11-12.)
3. In his search for wisdom, Agur calls out for help from a competent teacher. What characteristics does he think this teacher should have (v. 4)?
4. Who would qualify to be Agur's teacher?

Read Proverbs 30:5-9.

5. How does Agur describe the word of God?
6. Interestingly, verse 5 is a quote from Psalm 18:30, and verse 6 is a very strong echo of Deuteronomy 4:2. What does this show us about where Agur found answers to his search for wisdom?

7. From what you have discovered about Agur, do you think that he has the “fear of the Lord” (Prov 1:7)? What makes you think this?

Read Proverbs 30:7-33.

8. In the remainder of the chapter, Agur offers different insights he has gained from having come to see that the word of God proves true. In general terms, what sorts of topics does Agur cover? (Some of these sayings can seem a little obscure so don't worry too much if you can't follow absolutely everything that's said; you're in good company.) What lessons (if any) are repeated from earlier chapters of Proverbs?

Read Proverbs 31:1-9.

9. In these verses we meet another person who is presented as a case study for us to learn from. What sorts of topics does king Lemuel cover? What lessons (if any) are again repeated from earlier chapters?

Think it through

- Do you think that Christians are wiser than other people? Why or why not?
- Proverbs 30 provides us with a wonderful case study of a person who has only been able to make sense of life by coming to know the true and living God. How has his experience been reflected in your own life?
- How does knowing Jesus and following him as our king reinforce the lessons we have learned in this study?

Prayer

Thank God for lavishing his grace upon us “in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ” (Eph 1:8-9).

Proverbs 31:10-31

Read Proverbs 31:10-31.

1. In study 1, we discovered that the Book of Proverbs can help us live a wise, righteous and prudent life (1:2-4). How does the "excellent wife" of Proverbs 31 exemplify each of these qualities?

wisdom;

prudence;

discretion.

2. In study 2, we learned that the "fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (1:7). How does the "excellent wife" demonstrate this?

3. In study 3, we saw wisdom described as a woman. What are the similarities between the description of wisdom in Proverbs 9:1-12 and the description of wisdom in Proverbs 31:10-31?

4. In study 4, we were given advice about the foolishness of the sinner, the adulteress and the sluggard. How is the "excellent wife" the exact opposite of each of these three types of people?

the sinner;

the adulteress;

the sluggard.

5. In study 6, we were given life lessons about wealth, words and work. How does the "excellent wife" exemplify those lessons? (You might need to look back over study 6 to refresh your memory.)

6. "The description of the excellent wife has as much to say to men as it does to women." What do you think?

7. How does the "excellent wife" make you feel?

8. Are there any areas of life where you would like to be more like the "excellent wife"? What can you do in order to make this happen?

9. What characteristics of the "excellent wife" do you see displayed in Jesus Christ?

Think it through

- Have a look back over the previous studies. Have there been any lessons which you have found especially helpful? What made them helpful? With God's assistance, what changes are you going to make in your life as a result?

Prayer

Thank our heavenly Father for promising that "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him" (Jas 1:5).