

Bible Study Discussion Guide

Proverbs

The book of Proverbs is a wonderful collection of wisdom for people to meditate on throughout their lives. This study series is designed to encourage discussion about some key principles and themes of the book of Proverbs. We have provided recommendations for prior reading and reflection to encourage each group member to come prepared to contribute to the discussion.

We have provided two introductory studies which we recommend that you begin with.

Study One: Which path will you choose?

Study Two: A wise use of Proverbs

After that we have provided a selection of eight topical studies for you to choose from. We recommend that your group decide together about which of these topics they wish to cover.

HOW MUCH BETTER
TO GET WISDOM THAN GOLD,
TO CHOOSE UNDERSTANDING
RATHER THAN SILVER!
PROVERBS 16:16

For further copies, visit the Bibleworld website and follow the link to Bible Study Resources. The notes can either be printed off or if you prefer to remain paperless, you can view the questions online.

www.bibleworld.org.nz

**Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom.
Though it cost all you have, get understanding.
Proverbs 4:7**

Session One: Which path will you choose?

Preparation: Encourage everyone in the group to read through Proverbs chapters 1—9 in the week prior to this study.

Jesus describes the choice that every person needs to make between a wide gate and broad road, and a small gate and narrow road. Read Matthew 7:13-14.

In a similar way the book of Proverbs presents the choice of two paths:

The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day. But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble. Proverbs 4:18-19.

Can you identify a time in your life when you made a deliberate choice about which path to follow? What factors influenced your decision?

We will look firstly at the path of folly (wickedness). How is the path of folly described in Proverbs chapters 1—9? What entices people onto this path? Why do you think this path appeals to people? What are the words and actions that describe those who travel this path? What are the consequences of following this path?

How is the path of wisdom (righteousness) described in Proverbs chapters 1—9. What entices people onto this path? What is the appeal of following this path? What are the consequences of following this path?

In chapters 1—9, what are the attitudes and actions that someone needs to embrace in order to gain wisdom?

The book of Proverbs teaches that there is a cost to following the path of wisdom.

Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Proverbs 4:7

In what ways are you currently investing time and money and effort in gaining wisdom? What else could you do, individually or as a group, to help you in the pursuit of wisdom?

The book of James reminds us that God wants to give us wisdom:

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. James 1:5

As a group, take a few minutes to pray and ask God for guidance as you seek to grow in wisdom.

Session Two: A Wise Use of Proverbs

Preparation: Encourage everyone in the group to read through Proverbs chapters 10—31 in the week prior to this study.

It is important to read the proverbs wisely. Here are five guidelines for reading Proverbs:

- 1) Proverbs describe general principles. They don't cover all the exceptions.
- 2) Proverbs are not promises or guarantees from God.
- 3) Wisdom is rooted in relationship with God. It is God who created us and who teaches us wisdom.
- 4) We need to become wise in all areas of life, and learn to apply proverbs correctly to different situations.
- 5) Life is complex. We also need to draw on the wisdom of other books of the Bible, including James, Job and Ecclesiastes, to understand the complexity of life and suffering.

Discuss Proverbs 10:27. The fear of the Lord adds length to life, but the years of the wicked are cut short.

What is the general principle? What exceptions can you think of? What is the danger of reading this proverbs as a promise or guarantee? What does this proverb teach us?

Consider these proverbs about poverty and hard work:

Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth. Proverbs 10:4

All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty. Proverbs 14:23

A poor man's field may produce abundant food, but injustice sweeps it away. Proverbs 13:23

He who increases his wealth by exorbitant interest amasses it for another, who will be kind to the poor.
Proverbs 28:8

What is the general principle in each proverb? How do these proverbs work together to describe the links between hard work, wealth, poverty and injustice?

Consider these proverbs about gift giving:

A gift opens the way for the giver and usher him into the presence of the great. Proverbs 18:16

Many curry favour with a ruler, and everyone is a friend of a man who gives gifts. Proverbs 19:6

A gift given in secret soothes anger, and a bribe concealed in the cloak pacifies great wrath. Proverbs 21:14.

He who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth and he who gives gifts to the rich—both come to poverty.
Proverbs 22:16

What is the general principle in each proverb? How do these proverbs work together to teach about the wise giving of gifts and the potential dangers?

**INSTRUCT A WISE MAN
AND HE WILL BE WISER STILL;
TEACH A RIGHTEOUS MAN
AND HE WILL ADD TO HIS LEARNING.
PROVERBS 9:9**

Suggestions for a topical study of Proverbs

1. Choose a topic to study each week. You may like to use one of the topics listed below or choose your own topics.
2. During the week prior to the study, each person identifies two Proverbs from the Bible that they think say something important about the topic.
3. Meet as a group to discuss the Proverbs that group members have identified. Encourage each person to share the proverbs they have chose and why they think they are important.
4. We have provided some additional questions for the following topics.

Topical Bible Studies

Choosing wise friends and being a wise friend

The benefits of choosing Kindness and Generosity

Using the tongue to heal not destroy

Choosing success: Hard work vs laziness

Learning to be content

Choosing self control instead of anger

The importance of Honesty and Integrity

Seeking wise advice

Choosing Wise Friends and being a Wise Friend

He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm. Proverbs 13:20

See also Proverbs 12:26; 17:17; 27:17; 27:9

In what ways can friends help us to become wiser? Can you describe a wise friend that has helped you in your life? What did they specifically do that helped you?

In what ways do you seek to be a good friend to others? Do you deliberately seek to help your friends grow in wisdom? What specifically can you do to help a friend grow wiser? What can you specifically do to help your friends grow in their knowledge of God?

The book of Proverbs teaches about the importance of honesty within friendship.

Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. Proverbs 27:6

He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favour than he who has a flattering tongue. Proverbs 28:23.

Can you think of any situations in which it would be important to confront a friend about a concerning issue? Can you describe a time when you have benefited from a 'wound from a friend'? How can this type of rebuke be done in a loving way? In what ways can Jesus help and guide us through this process?

Any other ideas about what you can do this week to be a wise friend?

The Benefits of choosing Kindness and Generosity

One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed. Proverbs 11:24-25

A kind hearted woman gains respect, but ruthless men gain only wealth. A kind man benefits himself, but a cruel man brings trouble on himself. Proverbs 11:16-17

How would you define kindness? How would you define generosity? Who do you particularly try to show kindness to in your life? Who benefits most from your generosity? In what way do we benefit from being kind and generous?

He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God. Proverbs 14:31

He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done. Proverbs 19:17

If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you. Proverbs 25:21-22

Why do you think God wants us to show kindness to the poor and to our enemies? What impact does our kindness and generosity have on our relationship with God?

Are there any changes you can make in your life to help you become more kind and generous? Who is there in your circle of friends (or enemies) that could benefit from your kindness or generosity?

Using the Tongue to heal not Destroy

The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Proverbs 12:18

In what ways can we bring healing through our speech? Can you describe a situation when someone's words brought healing to you?

A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin. Proverbs 26:28

This proverb warns against lying and flattery. What damage can come through a lying tongue? What damage can come through flattering speech (see also Proverbs 28:23; 27:5-6)?

Those who guard their mouths and their tongues keep themselves from calamity. Proverbs 21:23.

What does it mean to guard our mouth and tongue? How can we do so?

Jesus himself is an example of speaking with wisdom and love. What can we do to learn to speak words that bring healing to others?

What types of speech do the following Proverbs encourage? Proverbs 12:25; 16:24; 17:9; 25:11-12; 27:9;

Is there someone you know who could benefit from your encouraging words this week?

Choosing Success: Hard work vs Laziness

Read Proverbs 24:30-34. What are the lessons that can be learnt from this passage?

A sluggard does not plow in season, so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing. Proverbs 20:4

He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son. Proverbs 10:5

He who works his land will have abundant food, but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment. Proverbs 12:11

These proverbs describe the importance of hard work at all stages of the farming year. Are there times or seasons when you are less inclined to work hard? How might you compose a proverb to describe the importance of hard work your life/study/volunteer or employment situation?

All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty. Proverbs 14:23

One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys. Proverbs 18:9

What are the dangers/consequences of being lazy in your life/study/volunteer/employment situation? What do you do to seek to be an ideal employee/student? Read Colossians 3:23-24. What does this passage say about our motivation for working hard?

Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Proverbs 23:4

Are you tempted to wear yourself out to get rich? What can you do to show restraint? How can you honour God through your work habits this week?

Learning to be Content

A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones. Proverbs 14:30

Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy? Proverbs 27:4

Do you consider yourself to be a contented person? On a scale of 1-10, how contented are you? In what areas of life, do you experience envy or jealousy?

The fear of the Lord leads to life; then one rests content, untouched by trouble. Proverbs 19:23

Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the Lord. There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off. Proverbs 23:17-18

Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of the wicked, for the evil man has no future hope, and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out. Proverbs 24:19-20

Why might someone be envious of sinners or of the wicked? How can a relationship with God help with contentment? What can we gain from fearing God and being zealous for him?

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. Proverbs 17:22

Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife. Proverbs 17:1

Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10. What can you do to learn to be content? How can you cultivate a cheerful heart? How can you cultivate peace within your home?

Choosing Self Control instead of Anger

The book of James describes the age-old battle that we all struggle with:

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. James 1:19-20.

The book of Proverbs teaches the same three principles mentioned in James: Learn to listen, Don't talk too much and Take extra care when you are angry.

He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame. Proverbs 18:13

1. Learn to listen — Has there ever been a situation when you wished that someone had listened to you more carefully? How did it make you feel when you were not listened to? Can you describe a time when you are glad you listened before speaking? How can you learn to be a better listener?

When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise. Proverbs 10:19 (see also Proverbs 13:3)

A gossip betrays a confidence, so avoid a man who talks too much. Proverbs 20:19

2. Don't talk too much — Are there situations when you find it most tempting to talk too much? How can we learn to hold our tongue?

A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult. Proverbs 12:16

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

3. Take extra care when you are angry — What advice have you been given that has helped you to control anger?

The Importance of Honesty and Integrity

The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out. Proverbs 10:9

Would your friends describe you as a person of integrity? In what areas of your life is integrity exceptionally important to you?

The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity. Proverbs 11:3

Kings take pleasure in honest lips; they value a man who speaks the truth. Proverbs 16:13

Why does honesty matter? What are the dangers of dishonesty? Is there such a thing as a small white lie? Does it matter if you cheat on a parking meter? Does it matter if you misrepresent your expenses on your tax return? Does it matter if you lie to a friend about your plans?

The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful. Proverbs 12:22

The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight. Proverbs 11:1

These verses use very strong language to describe God's dislike of dishonesty. Why does honesty matter to God? Why do honest scales matter to God?

Is there any area of your life where God is convicting you to exercise more integrity?

Seeking Wise Advice

A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke. Proverbs 13:1

The book of Proverbs emphasises the importance of listening to parental advice and instruction. What was some of the best advice your parents gave you? In what ways did their instruction and their example help you? The book of Proverbs can be particularly helpful for people who missed out on good parenting. Were there other adults in your life who gave you good instruction?

He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm. Proverbs 13:20.

The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice. Proverbs 12:15

In our modern world, there is no lack of self help books, websites and TV programmes full of advice about how to live. There is wise advice and foolish advice. How do you choose who to listen to? What guidelines do you use to assess the 'advice' you hear? Who are the godly people in your life that you go to for guidance and advice?

Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise. Proverbs 19:20.

Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed. Proverbs 15:22

Can you give an example of a time when you accepted instruction and benefited from doing so? How can you learn to become someone who can give wise advice to others?

Final Reflections

The book of Proverbs provides instruction for people of all ages.

Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning. Proverbs 9:9

We encourage you to spend a lot of time in the book of Proverbs. You may like to memorise some Proverbs that you think are particularly helpful for you. Some people find it helpful to read a chapter of Proverbs each day of the month. We encourage you to return to the wonderful book of Proverbs throughout your life.

May God bless you on your journey as you seek to grow in wisdom.

**HOW MUCH BETTER
TO GET WISDOM THAN GOLD,
TO CHOOSE UNDERSTANDING
RATHER THAN SILVER!
PROVERBS 16:16**