



Proverbs

LIVING WISELY IN GOD'S WORLD

Contents

Introduction to Proverbs:

Genre, Themes & Structure	page 3
Proverbs and the New Testament	page 4
Tips for Reading Proverbs	page 5

For Leaders:

How to use this material	page 7
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Summaries

	page 8
--	--------

Studies

1. Where Wisdom BEGINS	page 9
2. The ANATOMY of Wisdom	page 13
3. Wisdom in CREATION	page 19
4. HE IS the Wisdom of God	page 22
5. Words I	page 26
6. Words II	page 29
7. Sluggard!	page 33
8. Wealthy and Wise?	page 38
9. Feelings	page 44
10. Neighbours and Friends	page 49
11. Chasing Beauty	page 56
12. My Plans or God's?	page 60

Genre, Themes & Structure

1a. What is a proverb?

A saying. Generally short and pithy, often containing observations about the details of life and showing the path to well-being.

The book of Proverbs is a collection of both short, concise sayings, and also some longer meditations on wise observations about how life works.

b. What style of writing is Proverbs?

It's not narrated *history* (e.g. Genesis and Exodus, Matthew, Mark), not *laws* (e.g. Leviticus and Deuteronomy), not *prophecy* (e.g. Isaiah, Micah, Jonah), not a *letter* (e.g. Romans, Colossians, Titus). So what is it?

Proverbs belongs with the two other Old Testament (OT) *wisdom* books – Job and Ecclesiastes. *Wisdom literature* uses a teacherly, style – the student is addressed directly by the teacher. We are here to listen carefully and take it in!

2. What is Proverbs about?

Wisdom literature is generally more focussed on *questions* about life and *wise observations* about how life works in God's created world, rather than dealing with the big picture story of God's saving work in history (i.e. His promises, prophecies and accounts of His saving actions).

Proverbs builds a picture of the wise versus the foolish man. The challenge for the reader is to *listen* and *discern* which actions and attitudes make up a wise life.

So, we could say that its *purpose* is to 'encourage believers to use their minds in trying to understand life in God's creation'.

3. Structure

Proverbs is a *collection* of sayings written by several authors, but the major figure in the book is *Solomon*, the Israelite king who asked God for wisdom over and above everything else (see 1 Kings 3). Here is a summary of how the collection fits together:

<i>Introduction:</i>	1.1-7
<i>Six collections of sayings:</i>	1.8-31.9
i. Parental Instruction	1.8-9.18
ii. Proverbs of Solomon	10.1-22.16
iii. Thirty Sayings of the Wise	22.17-24.22
iv. More Sayings of the Wise	24.23-34
v. More Sayings of Solomon	25.1-29.27
vi. Sayings of Agur	30.1-33
vii. Sayings of Lemuel	31.1-9
<i>Epilogue:</i>	31.10-31

Proverbs and the New Testament

How does Proverbs fit with the rest of the Bible?

Fear of the LORD is key in Proverbs (Prov 9.10). In order to live wisely you must know and understand the big picture of how God is working in the world – his acts of creation and redemption. Wisdom only works because it plugs into the deeper reality that the LORD is God. So, as we read Proverbs, we need to keep the rest of the Bible in mind.

Proverbs and the New Testament (NT)

The Bible is made up of many books, but there is one story. At the centre of the story of God's saving work in the world, is the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything that comes *before* him (in the OT) *points towards* him, and everything that comes *after* him (the NT) *results from* his work of salvation – his death for our sin, and his resurrection that brings a new age, the hope of a new creation, and new life to believers. So, we need to read all of the Bible in light of the reality of Jesus.¹

What difference does Jesus make to Proverbs?

1. Context: Jesus changes the *context*. These proverbs were written in ancient Israel. As God's people now, we don't live in the promised land, and although Jesus' death makes us right with God *now*, we still *look forward* to the complete fulfilment of his promises when Jesus returns – the perfect new creation.

2. Time: This means that we don't expect everything to work out right now. In fact, if we follow Jesus in this current time, he promises us that

¹ This is called 'Biblical Theology'. If you'd like to read more, *God's Big Picture* by Vaughan Roberts, and *According to Plan* by Graeme Goldsworthy are great places to start.

we will experience persecution and hardship, because we live in a world that doesn't recognise him as Lord (Mark 8.34-38).

So, as we read about prosperity, safety, health, and relationships, we need to *remember* that these are *wise observations* that are *often true*, e.g. if you work hard, you will gain wealth, if you are lazy you will be poor. At the same time, we need to *remember* the big picture – that following Jesus may mean giving up our wealth, and may mean losing friends now, even as we wait for him to return and make everything new.

Remember: Proverbs are not guarantees, but wise observations; Jesus is our only guarantee, and the wisest action is to put our trust in him! It is only in him that we find the straightest path – the one leading to salvation – eternal life (Prov 3.4-8).

9 Tips for Reading Proverbs:²

1. ***Read Proverbs as a collection:*** The individual proverbs balance each other out, like the edges of a border which keep us safe, or the details in a map that show us the hills and the valleys. When they will appear contradictory (Prov 26.4-5), we need to ask ourselves, 'What does this show about these principles? What circumstances would require me to apply wisdom differently?'
2. ***Proverbs are not guarantees from God but guidelines for life.*** Proverbs describe actions and consequences, but contain enough contradictions to demonstrate that they are principles not fixed rules for the wise person to apply. (Look at Prov 22:26-27, 29:12, 15:25 – if all of these were guaranteed to happen, what would you never/always do? What might they mean instead?)
3. ***Proverbs are worded to be memorable, not technically precise.*** Simple statements are catchy, but lack details that reveal subtle differences. Again, the context of other proverbs, and the wider wisdom of the Bible help us to complete the wisdom they describe.
4. ***Proverbs are often two lines long.*** The two halves sometimes contrast each other, sometimes the second is a restatement that clarifies the first, sometimes it just adds to the idea. Ask yourself what the little words like 'and', 'or' and 'but' are doing. Reading the two halves together will help you to better understand the proverb's meaning.

² Adapted from *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, G. D. Fee and D. Stuart, 3rd Ed. 2003, pp 235 – 241.

5. ***Proverbs use metaphors, imagery, exaggeration and other devices to make their point.*** This means we often need to *first* understand the picture being described, *then* apply the idea to our circumstances, remembering that the proverb is designed to point beyond itself, rather than literally being about a pig with a ring in its nose (for example! Prov 11.22).
6. ***Proverbs are not exhaustive in their coverage.*** They give good advice for wise approaches to certain aspects of life, but there may be other wisdom in the Bible you need to add or draw on as you read.
7. ***Wrongly used, proverbs could justify a selfish, materialistic lifestyle.*** Rightly used, proverbs will provide practical advice for daily living. Another reason we need to read them in context!
8. ***Jesus is the final answer to all questions about life.*** So as you read proverbs, it's worth asking: What does Jesus (and his apostles) have to say about this topic? What do I know about God's story of salvation and how might this proverb fit within the story, or be changed by it
9. ***Remember to ask, 'What is it NOT saying?'*** A good way of ensuring you're reading in context, is to ask yourself what the proverbs cannot be saying. Your answer will come from what you know from other Proverbs, and the Bible as a whole.

-for leaders~

How To Use This Material

1. In most contexts these studies will probably be ***too long***. Consider them as a ***tool*** to be used, with materials collated and given shape for you to employ at your discretion. For this reason, work through the material carefully beforehand. Get a sense of ***timing*** for the study so you don't miss the second half every week. Some question *can* be answered quickly! Perhaps ***flag key verses*** to focus on as you prepare or think through how the group might work through passages in smaller groups to get through more of the material.
2. The ***summary page*** is there to help people map an overall picture of the features of wisdom. If you decide to use it, try to do so every week so that they really do have a decent summary.
3. While it may not be possible, ***try to get to the New Testament*** at least some weeks (especially in the week on wealth). It's important to learn to read all of the Bible through the ***lens of Jesus Christ***. Often the NT will connect the wisdom of Proverbs with the big picture of salvation, giving it more purpose, clarity, and perhaps perspective too (particularly when it comes to promises about wealth, security, and prosperity).
4. Encourage group members to be ***reading Proverbs*** outside of the group, ***looking up extra verses*** (the verses in brackets) for further thought, or reading and working through the ***NT material***.

5. It would also be worth encouraging people to ***memorise some key verses***. Proverbs are written to be short, punchy, and memorable. It's a practical way to help us to continue to ***listen*** to wisdom's call.

6. Although the major passages are printed in the studies, having the full text of Proverbs (and the rest of the Bible) is ideal! It helps you to explore the context of the passages both within Proverbs itself, and within the whole of the Bible.

-summaries~

A Framework for Wisdom

Use this space to summarise the first four studies,
which give us the framework for reading Proverbs

A Picture of Wisdom

Construct a picture of the wise person
using the various attributes and attitudes we explore in Proverbs.

Other Wise Observations

Collect some of your favourite proverbs here,
so that you might *listen*, *understand*, and *live* wisely.

-Study No.1~

Where Wisdom Begins

Blessed is the man³ who finds wisdom,
the man who gains understanding,
for she is more profitable than silver
and yields better returns than gold.

Proverbs 3.13-14⁴

1. Who do you consider wise? What characteristics make them wise?

Where do we start?

Proverbs 1:1-7

¹The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

²for attaining wisdom and discipline;

for understanding words of insight;

³for acquiring a disciplined and prudent⁵ life,
doing what is right and just and fair;

⁴for giving prudence to the simple,
knowledge and discretion to the young –

⁵let the wise listen and add to their learning,
and let the discerning get guidance –

⁶for understanding proverbs and parables,
the sayings and riddles of the wise.

3 Generally when Proverbs speak about 'man' or 'men', it's referring to 'a person' rather than men only.

4 All biblical excerpts taken from The Holy Bible: New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, International Bible Society, www.ibs.org. All rights reserved worldwide.

5 *prudent*: well judged, sensible, shrewd, wise

⁷The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and discipline.

2. According to the book's introduction...

a. What is a proverb? (v6)

b. What are they useful for? (vv2-6)

c. Who are proverbs for? (vv4-5)

d. From these answers, how would you explain to someone the *purpose* of reading Proverbs, and *who* would you encourage to read them?

3a. Where does v7 tell us that knowledge (and wisdom) begins?

Look at these other references to 'fear of the LORD' in Proverbs. (see also 1.29, 2.1-5, 10.27, 14.27, 19.23)

3.7-8

Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD and shun evil.

This will bring health to your body
and nourishment to your bones.

8.13

To fear the LORD is to hate evil;
I hate pride and arrogance,
evil behaviour and perverse speech.

9.10

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

15.32-33

He who ignores discipline despises himself,
but whoever heeds correction gains understanding.
The fear of the LORD teaches a man wisdom,
and humility comes before honour.

16.6-7

Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for;
through the fear of the LORD a man avoids evil.
When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD,
he makes even his enemies live at peace with him.

23.17-18

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.

29.25

Fear of man will prove to be a snare,
but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.

b. What do these passages add to our understanding of what 'fear of the LORD'⁶ *is*, and what it is *not*? In what way is it a good thing?

c. Prov 29.25 talks about the fear of man. How does this compare with the fear of the LORD?

d. Try to put 1.7 into your own words.

6 Note: Whenever you see 'LORD' in capital letters in the Old Testament, it means that the original Hebrew used the word for God's name – Yahweh, which means 'I AM' (see Ex 3.13-15) – which they never actually say aloud out of reverence (another word we could use for 'fear') for his greatness.

*e. What difference might Jesus make to our definition of 'fear of the LORD'?

Bringing it together

4a. How might v7 affect what is meant in vv1-6? What do we expect these 'sayings of the wise' to ultimately be about?

b. How might the statement of v7 shape the way we read the rest of Proverbs? What could be the effects if we ignored it?

c. Think of the person you consider to be wise. Do they 'fear the LORD'? Is it possible to still call them wise if they don't?

Wisdom this week

From what we've read in 1.1-7, what will wise living look like this week?
At university? In res? While you study? With friends? At church?
Listening to music? Watching tv? Who you listen to? How should you
listen to wisdom of someone who doesn't 'fear the LORD'?

Summarise

Turn to the 'summaries' page. Create some kind of summary of the
beginning of wisdom in the 'framework for wisdom' section.

-Study^{No.2}~

The Anatomy of Wisdom

Ears that hear and eyes that see –
the LORD made them both.

Proverbs 20.12

From last week...

1. What is a proverb?

2. *Read* 'Genre, Themes and Structure', in the introduction (p3 of this booklet).

Last week we saw that wisdom begins with 'fear of the LORD'. But how do we make sure we've actually taken this wisdom in? This week we'll see how our bodies are involved in the process of becoming wise.

3. *Read* Proverbs 2.1-11 and *mark* the words related to the body and its actions.

¹My son, if you accept my words
and store up my commands within you,
²turning your ear to wisdom
and applying your heart to understanding,
³and if you call out for insight
and cry aloud for understanding,
⁴and if you look for it as silver
and search for it as for hidden treasure,
⁵then you will understand the fear of the LORD

and find the knowledge of God.

⁶For the LORD gives wisdom,
and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding,

⁷He holds victory in store for the upright,
he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless,

⁸for he guards the course of the just
and protects the way of his faithful ones.

⁹Then you will understand what is right and just
and fair – every good path.

¹⁰For wisdom will enter your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.

¹¹Discretion will protect you,
and understanding will guard you.

¹²Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men,
from men whose words are perverse,

¹³who leave the straight paths
to walk in dark ways,

¹⁴who delight in doing wrong
and rejoice in the perverseness of evil,

¹⁵whose paths are crooked
and who are devious in their ways.

a. From 2.1-6 what do you discover about the senses (ear/hearing, mouth/speaking, eyes/looking)?

b. Next to each set of verses above, try to summarise the role each body part has in acquiring and expressing wisdom. How do they affect each other?

Ears/listen/hear/heed

13.1

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

17.4

A wicked man listens to evil lips;
a liar pays attention to a malicious tongue.

18.13

He who answers before listening –
that is his folly and his shame.

18.15

The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge;
the ears of the wise seek it out.

Mouth

12.13

An evil man is trapped by his sinful talk,
but a righteous man escapes trouble.

12.18

Reckless words pierce like a sword,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

12.22

The LORD detests lying lips,

but he delights in men who are truthful.

15.2

The tongue of the wise commends knowledge,
but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.

Eyes/view/perceive

3.7

Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD and shun evil.

4.21

Do not let [my words] out of your sight,
keep them in your heart...

5.21

For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD,
and he examines all his paths.

10.10

He who winks maliciously causes grief,
and a chattering fool comes to ruin.

17.24

A discerning man keeps wisdom in view,
but a fool's eyes wander to the ends of the earth.

23.31-32

Do not gaze at wine when it is red,

when it sparkles in the cup,
when it goes down smoothly!
In the end it bites like a snake
and poisons like a viper.

24.32

I applied my heart to what I observed
and learned a lesson from what I saw.

Heart (See also 3.3-4, 5.11-14, 10.8, 12.20, 12.23, 14.30, 19.3, 19.21.)

4.23

Above all else, guard your heart,
for it is the wellspring of life.

15.14

The discerning heart seeks knowledge,
but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly.

16.23

A wise man's heart guides his mouth,
and his lips promote instruction.

17.3

The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold,
but the LORD tests the heart.

27.19

As water reflects a face,
so a man's heart reflects the man.

Bringing it together

4a. Not only are these proverbs literal – we need to use our physical ears and eyes, but they are also metaphors – ears can physically hear but we can still fail to listen! What kind of response to wisdom does each organ *represent*?

b. What does 2.6 remind us about the source of wisdom? How might that affect where we look for, what we listen to, who we listen to in our search for wisdom?

c. In light of this, what do you think this proverb is saying?

20.12

Ears that hear and eyes that see –
the LORD has made them both.

d. What are the consequences of ignoring wisdom, i.e. failing to use our ears, eyes, and hearts properly?(2.12-15)

Wisdom in the NT

5. Why is listening to Jesus the ultimate act of wisdom? Why is all other wisdom without Jesus, eventually useless? (See also Luke 8.21, 11.28.)

Matt 7.24-26,

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

Matt 17.5

While [Peter] was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

John 5.25-27

I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

John 10.27-28

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand.

Wisdom this week

6a. What are things you have observed or heard that you might need to *listen* more carefully to? Have you been ignoring wisdom?

b. Are there other things that you are *looking* at and *listening* to, which are taking you from the words of God's mouth, which are affecting your *heart* and *mind* in ways that are leading you away from wise living?

Summarise

Turn to the summary page. Under 'A Picture of Wisdom' draw a picture of a human (a stick figure will do nicely). Attempt to label parts of the body according to how they relate to wisdom.

And/Or

Finish this sentence: The mark of a wise person is...

-Study^{No.3}~

Wisdom in Creation

Wisdom is personified a number of times in the book of Proverbs, i.e. it is pictured as a human, addressing the discerning *listener* (remember last week!). In Chapter 8 Wisdom speaks, helping us to understand *what* she is, by understanding something of *where* she has come from.

Understanding the *origin* of wisdom helps us understand *why* all these observations about life – all these proverbs – actually *work*.

1. *Read* Proverbs 8.1-2, 22-36. As you go, highlight words related to the *origin* of wisdom – *when*, *where* and *what* she does.

¹Does not wisdom call out?

Does not understanding raise her voice?

* * *

²²“The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works,
before his deeds of old;

²³I was appointed from eternity,
from the beginning, before the world began.

²⁴When there were no oceans, I was given birth,
when there were no springs abounding with water;

²⁵before the mountains were settled in place,
before the hills, I was given birth,

²⁶before he made the earth or its fields
or any of the dust of the world.

²⁷I was there when he set the heavens in place,
when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep,

²⁸when he established the clouds above
and fixed securely the fountains of the deep,
²⁹when he gave the sea its boundary
so that the waters would not overstep his command,
and when he marked out the foundations of the earth.
³⁰Then I was the craftsman at his side.
I was filled with delight day after day,
rejoicing always in his presence,
³¹rejoicing in his whole world
and delighting in mankind.

³²“Now then, my sons, listen to me;
blessed are those who keep my ways.

³³Listen to my instruction and be wise;
do not ignore it.

³⁴Blessed is the man who listens to me,
watching daily at my doors,
waiting at my doorway.

³⁵For whoever finds me finds life
and receives favour from the LORD.

³⁶But whoever fails to find me harms himself;
all who hate me love death.”

a. Where does wisdom come from? (vv22-29)

b. When did wisdom originate?

c. Look at 8.27-31. What role did wisdom have in creation?

d. Does 3.19-20 add anything to this picture?

By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations,
by understanding he set the heavens in place;
by his knowledge the deeps were divided,
and the clouds let drip the dew.

2a. If wisdom isn't a person (i.e. not someone literally working alongside God in creation), what point *is* being made about the relationship between wisdom, and how creation has been designed?

b. Why does wisdom's involvement in creation, qualify her to call people to listen to her in vv32-36? Does the passage make any distinction between the wisdom needed to *create* and the wisdom needed to *live*?

c. Much of the wisdom in this book talks about how morality works, rather than about the workings of creation. How do you think the careful design of the *material* creation might relate to the *moral* design of how human relationships work?

3a. How does this information about the *origin* and *role* of wisdom , help us to understand why we can make 'wise' observations by *looking* and *listening* carefully to the world around us?

b. How does the description of the origins of wisdom, help us to understand why 'fear of the LORD' is at the heart of being wise?

c. Is it possible to make wise observations, without fear of the LORD? If so, what do you think are the limits to this kind of wisdom?

Wisdom this week

4a. How often do you think of Christian 'dos' and 'don'ts' as random rules handed down by God?

b. How might this passage help you to think of them differently?

c. Why does listening to God actually make the *most sense* when thinking about how to live this life?

Summarise

Turn to the 'summaries' page and under the 'framework for wisdom' add a description of wisdom's origins and role in creation.

-Study No.4~

He Is The Wisdom of God

1. Have you ever heard Jesus described as wise? What reasons do you think people would give for this?

Or

How would you explain wisdom to someone in your next class?

2. *Read* 'Proverbs and the New Testament in the introduction (page 4).

If we agree that the story line of the Bible culminates in the person, work, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then we must consider how Jesus relates to Wisdom. If the 'fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom' (Proverbs 9.10), and wisdom's work began before the creation of the world, where does Jesus fit in?

3. *Read* 1 Corinthians 1.20-31. *Highlight* words related to *wisdom* and *foolishness*.

²⁰Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

²²Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom,

²³but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the

weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

²⁶Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no-one may boast before him. ³⁰It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

a. What two kinds of wisdom does this passage identify? How do they compare?

b. Why does 'Christ crucified' (v23) appear foolish to some? What actually makes him the 'power...and wisdom of God (v24)?

c. Verse 30 describes how Jesus 'became for us wisdom from God – that is our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.' How did he do this? In what way are righteousness, holiness, and redemption, wisdom *from God*?

d. How does Jesus, this wisdom from God, end up shaming the strong? (vv27, 31)

e. Think back to your answer to the first question. How does it compare with this explanation of Jesus as the wisdom of God?

Bringing it together

4a. Last week we looked at the way that wisdom can be gained by observing the world around.

What prevents the book of Proverbs from being a collection of human wisdom?

b. What does the statement about Jesus as God's wisdom clarify about the central idea of Proverbs, that the 'fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom'?

c. How might this affect how we read the rest of Proverbs? What could be the consequences of reading the rest of Proverbs without considering this?

Wisdom this week

5a. Have you listened to God's wisdom in Jesus Christ – have you put your trust in him for your righteousness, holiness, and redemption, rather than in your own wisdom?

b. What/who tempts you to see Jesus' death as weak and foolish, rather than wisdom from God? What will help you to listen more to God's wisdom more, and less to human wisdom?

c. What difference will this picture of Jesus make to the rest of your day?

Summarise

Turn to the 'summaries' page and under the 'framework for wisdom' add a description of how Jesus shows us the heart of God's wisdom.

-Study^{No.5}~

Wise Words I

An honest answer
is like a kiss on the lips.
Proverbs 24.26

In the next few studies we will jump around the book of Proverbs a little more than we have been, in order to get a broad picture of each of the themes we'll look at. As we do this, don't forget the framework of the last four weeks.

1. *Read* '9 Tips for Reading Proverbs' in the introduction (pages 5&6). As you work through the following passages, try to apply the tips – particularly as you wrestle with tricky ones. This is part of listening carefully to the voice of wisdom!

2. Look at the proverb below. What role do words have in gaining and giving wisdom? Why is this significant as we look at our use of words?

Proverbs 2.6

For the LORD gives wisdom,
and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

3. As you *read* the following passages, work out what each is saying about the power of words, and/or what words reveal.

The Power of Words

12.18-19

Reckless words pierce like a sword,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.
Truthful lips endure for ever,
but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.

26.17-21

Like one who seizes a dog by the ears
is a passer-by who meddles in a quarrel not his own.
Like a madman shooting firebrands or deadly arrows
is a man who deceives his neighbour and says, 'I was only
joking!'.
Without wood a fire goes out;
without gossip a quarrel dies down.
As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire,
so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.

11.11

Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted,
but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed.

13.3

He who guards his lips guards his life,
but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.

13.14

The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life,
turning a man from the snares of death

What Words Reveal

10.18-19

He who conceals his hatred has lying lips,
and whoever spreads slander is a fool.

When words are many, sin is not absent,
but he who holds his tongue is wise.

10.32

The lips of the righteous know what is fitting,
but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse.

11.12

A man who lacks judgement derides his neighbour,
but a man of understanding holds his tongue.

12.13-4

The wicked desire the plunder of evil men,
but the root of the righteous flourishes.

From the fruit of his lips a man is filled with good things
as surely as the work of his hands rewards him.

16.23

A wise man's heart guides his mouth,
and his lips promote instruction.

a. In what ways is speech powerful? Do you think speech can be neutral (i.e. not wise or foolish)?

b. What does speech reveal about the heart and wisdom of the speaker? Do any of the scenarios here surprise you?

Wise Words from the New Testament...

Colossians 3.16 (see also Heb 4.12-13)

Let the word of Christ [i.e. message about him] dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

3a. What particular 'word' should dwell at the heart of the Christian community?

b. How might this word lead to other wise words – helping us to 'teach and admonish [rebuke]' brothers and sisters?

Wisdom this week

4a. How have you been using the power of your words – to hurt or to heal?

b. What has your speech today been revealing about your heart?

c. How might all your speech be centred on, and shaped by the message about Jesus?

Summarise

Choose one proverb from today that strikes you. Try to paraphrase it. Write it on the summary page and see if you can memorise it for next week so that you *listen* to wisdom, take it to *heart*, and let it flow from your *lips*.

Wise Words II

In study 5 we saw that words are powerful – they do things to others, and they reveal the true state of our heart. But what *kinds* of speech are foolish, and what kinds are wise?

Read the proverbs below and as you do, try to answer the following:

1. What kinds of words are unwise? Why? (observe the consequences)

What kinds of words are wise? Why? (observe the effects)

Wise and Unwise Words

Gossip, Quarrelling, Loose words, Foolish Speech

11.13

A gossip betrays a confidence,
but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.

12.23

A prudent man keeps his knowledge to himself,
but the heart of fools blurts out folly.

25.9-10

If you argue your case with a neighbour,
do not betray another man's confidence,
or he who hears it may shame you
and you will never lose your bad reputation.

26.4-5

Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
or you will be like him yourself.

Answer a fool according to his folly,
or he will be wise in his own eyes.

26.17-22

Like one who seizes a dog by the ears
is a passer-by who meddles in a quarrel not his own.
Like a madman shooting firebrands or deadly arrows
is a man who deceives his neighbour and says, 'I was only
joking!'.

Without wood a fire goes out;
without gossip a quarrel dies down.
As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire,
so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.
The words of a gossip are like choice morsels;
they go down to a man's inmost parts.

27.2

Let another praise you, and not your own mouth;
someone else, and not your own lips.

Lies, Deceit

12.22

The LORD detests lying lips,
but he delights in men who are truthful.

26.23-28

Like a coating of glaze over earthenware
are fervent lips with an evil heart.
A malicious man disguises himself with his lips,
but in his heart he harbours deceit.
Though his speech is charming, do not believe him,

for seven abominations fill his heart.
His malice may be concealed by deception,
but his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.
If a man digs a pit, he will fall into it;
if a man rolls a stone, it will roll back on him.
A lying tongue hates those it hurts,
and a flattering mouth works ruin.

Truth and the Healing Tongue

12.17-18

A truthful witness give honest testimony,
but a false witness tells lies.
Reckless words pierce like a sword,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

15.4

The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life,
but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.

16.24

Pleasant words are like honeycomb,
sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

24.26

An honest answer
is like a kiss on the lips.

Rebukes

25.11-12

A word aptly spoken

is like apples of gold in settings of silver.

Like an ear-ring of gold or an ornament of fine gold

is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear.

27.5-6

Better is open rebuke

than hidden love.

Wounds from a friend can be trusted,

but an enemy multiplies kisses.

28.23

He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favour

than he who has a flattering tongue.

a. What kinds of words are unwise? Describe in a sentence what unwise speech is like. What motivates it and what are the consequences of such speech?

b. What kinds of words are wise? Describe in a sentence what wise speech is like. What motivates it and what are the effects of such speech?

2a. How would fear of the LORD help us to choose our words carefully?

Wise words from the NT

In addition to Colossians 3.16 from last week...

Romans 16.18

For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naïve people.

Ephesians 5.4,6

Nor should there be any obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ... Let no-one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

2 Timothy 4.2

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.

James 3.9-10

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

3. How do they connect wise speech with a relationship with Jesus?
What is the real danger with listening to 'empty words'? What might his add to our definition of 'wise speech'?

Wise words this week

When have you recently used unwise speech? Is it a habit? How is affecting others?

What kind of wise speech could you be using more of? Are there people around you speaking wise words that you should pay more attention to?

What needs to change in order for you to sound more like the wise man than the fool this week? The words that flow out of your mouth? The amount of words? The heart from which the words flow? More words centred on Jesus Christ?

Summarise

Turn to your summary page and add the following completed statements:

Wise words are...

Unwise words are...

Sluggard!

The sluggard's craving will be the death of him,
because his hands refuse to work.

Proverbs 21.25

1. Are you a hard worker? Do you think you work hard enough? What compels you to work hard, and what puts you off?

Read Proverbs 6.6-11

⁶Go to the ant you sluggard;
consider its ways and be wise!

⁷It has no commander,
no overseer or ruler,

⁸yet it stores its provisions in summer
and gather its food at harvest.

⁹How long will you lie there, you sluggard?
When will you get up from your sleep?

¹⁰A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest –

¹¹and poverty will come on you like a bandit
and scarcity like an armed man.

2a. What contrast is created between the sluggard and the ant? In what way is the ant considered 'wise' compared with the sluggard?

b. Use the passages below to add to your description of the lazy person, aka. The Sluggard.

What is their life like? What are their priorities? What are the effects on themselves and others? (See also 21.25, 24.30-34, 26.13-15)

13.4

The sluggard craves and gets nothing,
but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.

15.19

The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns,
but the path of the upright is a highway.

18.9

One who is slack in his work
is brother to one who destroys.

19.24

The sluggard buries his hand in the dish;
he will not even bring it back to his mouth.

20.4

A sluggard does not plough in season;
so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing.

22.13

The sluggard says, "There is a lion outside!"
or, "I will be murdered in the streets!"

26.16

The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes
than seven men who answer discreetly.

The lazy person:

3a. In contrast, what is life like for the one who works hard?

10.4

Lazy hands make a man poor,
but diligent hands bring wealth

12.11

He who works his land will have abundant food,
but he who chases fantasies lacks judgement.

14.23

All hard work brings a profit,
but mere talk leads only to poverty.

b. Proverbs 31 contains the description of a hardworking woman. What are the features and fruit of her work?

31.13

She selects wool and flax

and works with eager hands.

31.15-16

She gets up while it is still dark;

she provides food for her family
and portions for her servant girls.

She considers a field and buys it;

out of her earnings she plants vineyards.

31.25

She is clothed with strength and dignity;

she can laugh at the days to come.

31.27

She watches over the affairs of her household

and does not eat the bread of idleness.

31.31

Give her the reward she has earned,

and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

c. The hard working person...

Bringing it together

4a. Is laziness a neutral thing? How might it affect yourself/others?

b. Is all poverty a product of laziness?

c. Conversely, does hard work always guarantee wealth?

d. Look back at your descriptions of the lazy and hardworking people. How would you go about diagnosing laziness in a person? How does this help you answer the question of whether you work hard enough?

5a. How is laziness/hard work related to wisdom?

b. How might 'fear of the LORD' motivate an individual to be wise, rather than foolish when it comes to work?

Work in the New Testament

6. *Read* the following NT passages.

Colossians 3.23-24

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

a. While this is addressed primarily to slaves, who had no choice about their work. How might our relationship with Jesus motivate us as Christians to work hard?

2 Thessalonians 3.10-13

For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.

b. What are the results of laziness in this passage? What motivation and command is given to remedy this?

Hebrews 6.11-12

We want each of you to show the same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

c. What are some eternal consequence of laziness?

Wisdom this week

Observe your own patterns of work and rest (refer back to your answer to 4d.)

7a. Think about what *motivates* you to work hard? Is your motivation to work hard Jesus-centred?

b. What *prevents* you from working hard? How is the affecting yourself and others? What wisdom will motivate you to change this?

c. How will you apply wisdom this week to avoid mimicking the sluggard in your attitude towards your salvation?

Summarise

Add your summary of 'wise work' to the summary page.

-Study^{No.8}~

Wealthy and Wise?

Rich and poor have this in common:

The LORD is the Maker of them all.

Proverbs 22.2

You may feel you receive mixed messages from Proverbs in this study. Some may conflict with your experience, or other parts of the Bible that you know, some may conflict with each other. Remember that proverbs are wise observations about life. Seeming contradictions help to point out that real life is not always as straightforward as it seems, or that some patterns observed in life have limitations. Look out for these things, write down questions, and *work hard* to see how this picture of wealth fits together...

The Origins of Wealth

3.9-10

Honour the LORD with your wealth,
with the firstfruits of all your crops;
then your barns will be filled to overflowing,
and your vats will brim over with new wine.

10.4

Lazy hands make a man poor,
but diligent hands bring wealth.

12.27

The lazy man does not roast his game,

but the diligent man prizes his possessions.

21.17

He who loves pleasures will become poor;
whoever loves wine and oil will never be rich.

22.4

Humility and the fear of the LORD
bring wealth and honour and life.

1a. According to the passages above, where does wealth come from/
how is it gained?

b. Do you think this is *always* true? Why/why not?

Unjust Wealth

10.9

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

11.1

The LORD abhors dishonest scales,
but accurate weights are his delight.

13.11

Dishonest money dwindles away,

but he who gathers little by little makes it grow.

20.14

“It's no good, it's no good!” says the buyer;
then off he goes and boasts about his purchase.

22.16

He who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth
and he who gives gifts to the rich – both come to poverty.

2a. According to the passages above, what are the problems with wealth gained unjustly?

b. Do you think these consequences *always* happen?

Generous Wealth

11.24-25

One man gives freely, yet gains even more;
another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.
A generous man will prosper;
he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.

14.31

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

21.13

The one who shuts his ears to the cry of the poor
will himself also call out and not be answered.

22.9

A generous man will himself be blessed,
for he shares his food with the poor.

22.26-27

Do not be a man who strikes hands in pledge
or puts up security for debts;
if you lack the means to pay,
your very bed will be snatched from under you.

3. What are the consequences of generosity? What does 22.26-27 warn about unwise generosity?

The Limits of Wealth (see also 11.18)

Compare the following two proverbs:

10.15

The wealth of the rich is their fortified city,
but poverty is the ruin of the poor.

13.8

A man's riches may ransom his life,
but a poor man hears no threat.

4a. What contradiction appears between these two proverbs?

b. What point might we understand if we hold them as both true observations?

5. What do the passages below indicate is *more valuable* than wealth? What reasons are given for this? (see also 3.13-18, 11.28, 17.3, 17.16, 22.1)

3.13-14

Blessed is the man who finds wisdom,
the man who gains understanding,
for she is more profitable than silver
and yields better returns than gold.

11.4

11.16

A kind-hearted woman gains respect,
but ruthless men gain only wealth.

15.16

Better a little with the fear of the LORD

Wealth is worthless in the day of
wrath
but righteousness delivers from
death.

than great wealth with turmoil.

Bringing it together

6a. What is a wise attitude towards wealth, according to Proverbs?

b. Should we expect to have wealth if we trust in the LORD?

Wealth in the New Testament

7a. What do these passages warn about wealth and our relationship with God? (see also Luke 18.18-30)

Matthew 6.24

No-one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Matthew 13.22

The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

b. How does this description of the early believers, challenge some of the wisdom of Proverbs when it comes to wealth?

Acts 2.45

Selling their possessions and goods, [the believers] gave to anyone as he had need.

c. What *riches* are we promised now in Jesus? How do these compare with literal financial wealth?

Ephesians 1.7-8

In [Jesus] we have redemption through his blood. The forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

Ephesians 3.8

Although I [Paul] am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Colossians 2.2-3

My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know...Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

d. What riches do we wait for?

Ephesians 1.18-19a

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

Colossians 1.12

...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

Hebrews 10.34-35,

You sympathised with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.

1 Peter 1.3-4

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you.

e. Do you think the NT message about wealth is different from Proverbs'? How can we reconcile the two?

The difference between the book of Proverbs and the New Testament, is that the first is making observations about patterns in human world, and creating general principles for how think about wealth in a life lived before God. The New Testament adds another layer of insight to this. It tells us what ultimate riches are, and how they fit into God's salvation plan for humanity. So it is better to be poor and to trust Jesus, because only he can help you on the day of wrath (Proverbs 11.4 paraphrased). In the same way, prosperity *is* the gift of God to the godly (Proverbs 3.9-10), but we are told that we now expect that to be fulfilled in the new creation – when Jesus returns.

f. So how do we apply these proverbs? Ignore them completely? Despise wealth? (see 1Tim6.17)

Wisdom this week

8a. Do you aspire to be wealthy? What does Proverbs have to say to you? Do you remember where wealth *comes from*, aspire to be *just* and *generous* with it; remembering its limitations.

b. Do you actually believe that the riches that we have in Christ now, and the inheritance we look forward to, that these are worth more than all the wealth in the world?

Summarise

Add a summary of the value and limitations of wealth to your summary page.

-Study^{No.9}~

Feelings

Like a city whose walls are broken down
is a man who lacks self-control.

Proverbs 25.28

Emotions: 'A natural or instinctive state of mind deriving from one's circumstances, mood, or relationships with others.'

1a. Do you think much about your emotions? Have you ever considered if your emotions control your thoughts, or do you think your thoughts control your emotions? Or both? Or neither?

b. Can emotions be wise?

Anger & Patience (see also 4.17, 15.18, 29.22, 30.33, 25.15, 29.8)

14.29

A patient man has great understanding,
but a quick-tempered man displays folly.

15.1

A gentle answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.

16.32

Better a patient man than a warrior,
a man who controls his temper than
one who takes a city.

19.11

A man's wisdom gives him patience;
it is to his glory to overlook an offence.

22.24-25

Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man,
do not associate with one easily angered,
or you may learn his ways
and get yourself ensnared.

2a. What are the consequences of anger? What is the incentive to avoid hot-tempered people?

b. What are the consequences of patience? Why is it so much better to be patient than to be a warrior?

c. Why does patience have the opposite effect to anger?

d. How are wisdom and patience related? How might the way we express anger relate to our fear of the LORD?

e. How might these verses help someone struggling with anger? How might we feed our patience?

Jealousy & Envy (see also 3.31, 24.19-20)

23.17-18

Do not let your heart envy sinners,
but always be zealous for fear of the LORD.

There is surely a future hope for you,
and your hope will not be cut off.

24.1-2

Do not envy wicked men,
do not desire their company;
for their hearts plot violence,
and their lips talk about making trouble.

27.4

Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming,
but who can stand before jealousy?

4a. What kind of things are people tempted to envy? What reasons are given to not envy these things?

b. What feature of jealousy is depicted in 27.4? Why is it seen to be the worst?

c. Why is fear of the LORD the alternative option?

d. Do you agree that this is the better thing to desire? Why/why not?

e. What do these passages have to say to someone struggling with envy of people who seem to get away with evil, who seem to have a good life because of it?

Hatred & Love

1.29-31 (also 1.22)

Since they hated knowledge
and did not choose to fear the LORD,
since they would not accept my
[wisdom's]
advice
and spurned my rebuke,
they will eat the fruit of their ways
and be filled with the fruit of their
schemes.

6.16

There are six things the LORD hates,
seven things that are detestable to him.

8.13

To fear the LORD is to hate evil;
I [wisdom] hate pride and arrogance,
evil behaviour and perverse speech.

9.8 (also 12.1, 13.24)

Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate
you;
rebuke a wise man and he will love
you.

15.10 (also 5.12-14)

Stern discipline awaits him who
leaves the path;
he who hates correction will
die.

13.5 (also 28.16)

The righteous hate what is false,
but the wicked bring shame
and
disgrace.

26.28

A lying tongue hates those it
hurts,
and a flattering mouth works
ruin.

29.10

Bloodthirsty men hate a man of
integrity
and seek to kill the upright.

5a. What does the fool hate? Is any of it a surprise? What is the result? Why do think this is? Can you think of an example of this in our present day?

b. Is hatred always wrong according to these proverbs?

c. What does the wise person hate? What is this equated with in 8.13, and why?

d. What, then, is the difference between wise and foolish hatred? What do you love and what do you hate? Does what you hate expose your folly or show your wisdom?

Pride & Humility

11.2

When pride comes, then comes disgrace,
but with humility comes wisdom.

13.10

Pride only breeds quarrels,
wisdom is found in those who take advice.

15.25

The LORD tears down the proud man's house
but he keeps the widow's boundaries intact.

16.18-19

Pride goes before destruction,
a haughty spirit before a fall.
Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed
than to share plunder with the proud.

21.24

The proud and arrogant man - "Mocker" is his name;
he behaves with overwhelming pride.

6a. What are the features of pride? What are the consequences of pride?

b. What are the features of humility? What are the consequences of humility?

c. What is the issue with pride? Do you genuinely think 16.18-19 is true?

d. What is the LORD's issue with pride?

e. How do you know if you are proud? How do you avoid becoming proud about your humility?

Bringing it together

7a. Do these proverbs imply that emotions are uncontrollable impulses, or do we have some say?

b. How are emotions related to some of the earlier topics of wisdom that we've looked at? Wealth? Work? Words?

c. How will fear of the LORD help us to control emotions/express different ones? How might we learn to *love* wisdom, discipline, rebuke, the LORD more than anything else?

Emotions in the New Testament

8. How do these NT verses relate our emotions to other actions, and to our relationship with God, and what God has done in Jesus Christ? (see also Col 3.5-14, Titus 3.3-7, Gal 4, 1 Jn 2.16)

Ephesians 4.1-2

As a prisoner of the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Ephesians 4.31-32

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

James 1.19b-20

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 the God desires.

Wisdom this week

Is there a particular emotion you struggle with? Is there an emotion that is worth nurturing (love for..., humility)?

What might motivate you in this? How is it possible to change?

Summarise

Choose an emotion and write in a single sentence why it is wise or foolish.

-Study No.10~

Neighbours & Friends

A man of many companions may come to ruin,
but there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother.

Proverbs 18.24

1a. Do you make a distinction between friends and acquaintances?
How important do you think friendships are?

Interestingly, the main Hebrew word for *friend* is the same word we use for *neighbour*. Should we make any distinction between a friend and a neighbour? If you read all the verses that contain the Hebrew word for *neighbour* and *friend*, you'll see they sometimes depict people who live near each other – what we might call neighbour, and sometimes depict a relational intimacy that we might associate with friendship.

b. Reflect on other proverbs you've already looked at. Do any of them have wisdom that apply to good relationships?

Neighbours: Proximity (see also 6.1, 16.29, 21.10, 24.28, 25.18, 27.14)

3.28-29

Do not say to your neighbour,

“Come back later; I'll give it tomorrow” -

when you now have it with you.

Do not plot against your neighbour

who lives trustfully near you.

11.9

With his mouth the godless destroys his neighbour,
but through knowledge the righteous escape.

14.21

He who despises his neighbour sins,
but blessed is he who is kind to the needy.

25.16-17

If you find honey, eat just enough -
too much of it and you will vomit.
Seldom set foot in your neighbour's house -
too much of you, and he will hate you.

29.5

Whoever flatters his neighbour
is spreading a net for his feet.

27.10

Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father,
and do not go to your brother's house when disaster strikes you
-
better a neighbour nearby than a brother far away.

2a. Who is our neighbour, according to these verses?

b. How does a considerate neighbour act?

c. In what way is the closeness of a neighbour a good thing?

d. What is challenging about these verses?

e. What from the NT are you reminded of as you read these?

Keeping these in mind, let's think about close *relational* interactions, i.e. friendship...

Friendship: Relational Proximity

12.26

A righteous man is cautious in friendship,
but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

13.20

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

22.24-25

Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man,
do not associate with one easily angered,
or you may learn his ways
and get yourself ensnared.

16.28

A perverse man stirs up dissension,
and a gossip separates close friends.

19.4,6

Wealth brings many friends,
but a poor man's friends desert him.
Many curry favour with a ruler,
and everyone is the friend of a man who gives gifts?

27.9

Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart,
and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest
counsel.

27.17

As iron sharpens iron,
so one man sharpens another.

3a. According to these passages, how might you 'choose your friends wisely'? How important is this wisdom?

b. Why do you think gossip is seen as particularly destructive to a friendship?

c. How can wealth affect friendships? Do you think these kinds of friendships are the same as those depicted in 27.9&17?

d. What are the features of good relationships, according to 27.9&17?

Friendship: The Need for Love and Faithfulness

3.3

Let love and faithfulness never leave you;
bind them around your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.

11.13

A gossip betrays a confidence,
but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.

14.22

Do not those who plot evil go astray?
But those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness.

16.6

Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for;
through fear of the LORD a man avoids evil.

4a. How is love and faithfulness found? What is its power (16.6)?

b. How are love and faithfulness related to each other?

c. How are they related to fear of the LORD (16.6)?

d. How important are they in keeping a friendship going? Why? What difference do they make?

Friendship: The Features of Love and Faithfulness (see also 11.17, 19.8, 21.21)

17.9

He who covers over an offence promotes love,
but whoever repeats the matter separate close friends.

17.17

A friend loves at all times,
and a brother is born for adversity.

18.24

A man of many companions may come to ruin,
but there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother.

19.22

What a man desires is unfailing love;
better to be a poor man than a liar.

20.6

Many a man claims to have unfailing love,
but a faithful man who can find?

27.5-6

Better is open rebuke
than hidden love.

Wounds from a friend can be trusted,
but an enemy multiplies kisses.

5a. How are love and faithfulness manifest in relationships?

b. Why is covering over an offence a good thing? Is it always?

c. How do you know if you've found one of the 'faithful men'? Why is it so important in adversity?

d. How is faithfulness/trustworthiness related to truthful speech? How might these affect friendships?

e. What does 27.5-6 tell us about the place of rebuke in a friendship?

Bringing it together

6a. Which of the above characterise your relationships? Do any strike you?

b. Reflecting on the wisdom of these verses, do you think every relationship we call 'friendship' meets the standards set here? What ought we to do about this?

Neighbours in the New Testament

These verses don't deal with friendship in the NT. Not because it's absent, but because the emphasis is on love for neighbours, and we don't really have time! There's still plenty of application to be drawn from Proverbs about good friendships, and it is evident from the way we are to treat our neighbours in the NT, that the same applies for friends.

Mark 12.30-31

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these.

7a. Although we often value the close relational nature of friendships, why do you think Jesus (and the Ten Commandments!) emphasises love for neighbour?

b. How might 'fear of the LORD' relate to the first commandment listed here?

Romans 5.8

But God showed his love for us in this:
while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

c. How do God's actions towards us, motivate us to love our neighbours?

Wisdom this Week

8. *Reflect* on your relationships:

- with those you are physically close to (neighbours, work colleagues)

- with those you would consider friends.

a. What are these relationships like? How do they compare with the descriptions we've seen in this study?

b. What needs to change? What motivation is there to change? What power is there to change?

c. What should we do if we feel like we lack these ideal friendships being described?

Summarise

Turn to your summaries page and write a one sentence description of a wise neighbour, and one of a wise friend.

-Study No.11~

Chasing Beauty

Like a gold ring in a pig's snout
is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion.

Proverbs 11.22

1. What do you find beautiful? Have you ever observed someone as being beautiful and then changed your mind after you'd spoken with them?

2. *Read* the following passages. What are the contrasting features of the two women they describe. Who do you think the women are?

5.1-6

My son, pay attention to my wisdom,
listen well to my words of insight,
that you may maintain discretion
and your lips may preserve
knowledge.

For the lips of an adulteress drip
honey,
and her speech is smoother than
oil;

but in the end she is bitter as gall,
sharp as a double-edged sword.
Her feet go down to death;
her steps lead straight to the grave.

She gives no thought to the way of
life;
her paths are crooked, but she

12.4

A wife of noble character is her
husband's crown,
but a disgraceful wife is like
decay in
his bones.

31.10-11

A wife of noble character who can
find?

She is worth far more than rubies.
¹¹Her husband has full confidence in
her
and lacks nothing of value.

31.28-31

Her children arise and call her

knows it

not.

6.25-26

Do not lust after her beauty

or let her captivate you with her
eyes,

for the prostitute reduces you to a
loaf of

bread,

and the adulteress preys upon your
very life.

blessed;

her husband also, and he praises
her:

“Many women do noble things,
but you surpass them all.”

Charm is deceptive, and beauty is
fleeting;

but a woman who fears the LORD
is

to be praised.

Give her the reward she has earned,
and let her works bring her praise
at

the city gate.

2. What two kinds of women are represented here? What is the attraction of each? What is the consequence of chasing after each?

3. *Look* more closely at the two kinds of women portrayed.

9.13-18

The woman Folly is loud;

she is undisciplined and without
knowledge.

She sits at the door of her house,
on a seat at the highest point of
the

9.1-6

Wisdom has built her house;

she has hewn out its seven pillars.

She has prepared her meat and mixed
her

wine;

she has also set her table.

city,
 calling out to those who pass by,
 who go straight on their way.
 “Let all who are simple come in
 here!”
 she says to those who lack
 judgement.
 “Stolen water is sweet;
 food eaten in secret is delicious!”
 But little do they know that the
 dead are
 there,
 that her guests are in the depths
 of
 the grave.

She has sent out her maids, and she
 calls
 from the highest point in the city.
 “Let all who are simple come in here!”
 she says to those who lack
 judgement.
 “Come, eat my food
 and drink the wine I have mixed.
 Leave your simple ways and you will
 live;
 walk in the way of understanding.”

a. What does each woman represent? What are they offering? In what ways are their different offers appealing? Which offer is the better one? Why?

4. Read chapter 31.10-31

¹⁰A wife of noble character who can find?

She is worth far more than rubies.

¹¹Her husband has full confidence in her

and lacks nothing of value.

¹²She brings him good, not harm,

¹⁹In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers.

²⁰She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy.

²¹When it snows, she has no fear for

all the days of her life.

¹³She selects wool and flax
and works with eager hands.

¹⁴She is like the merchant ships,
bringing her food from afar.

¹⁵She gets up while it is still dark;
she provides food for her family
and portions for her servant girls.

¹⁶She considers a field and buys it;
out of her earnings she plants a
vineyard.

¹⁷She sets about her work
vigourously;
her arms are strong for her tasks.

¹⁸She sees that her trading is
profitable,
and her lamp does not go out at
night.

and faithful instruction is on her
tongue.

²⁷She watches over the affairs of the
household

and does not eat the bread of
idleness.

²⁸Her children arise and call her
blessed;
her husband also, and he praises
her:

²⁹“Many women do noble things,

her

household;

for all of them are clothed in
scarlet.

²²She makes coverings for her bed;
she is clothed in fine linen and
purple.

²³Her husband is respected at the city
gate,
where he takes his seat among the
elders of the land.

²⁴She makes linen garments and sells
them,
and supplies the merchants with
sashes.

²⁵She is clothed with strength and
dignity;
she can laugh at the days to come.

²⁶She speaks with wisdom,

³⁰Charm is deceptive, and beauty is
fleeting;
but a woman who fears the LORD
is
to be praised.

³¹Give her the reward she has
earned,
and let her works bring her praise
at
the city gate.

but you surpass them all.”

a. What characteristics does the wife of noble character display? Which ones exemplify the different facets of wisdom which we have been exploring over the past studies?

b. What is ultimately brings her praise? Would you consider this a form of beauty?

5. The woman of noble character seems impossibly wise – this is because she is a picture of Wisdom Herself, at work in the world. Having said this, she shows us plenty to look for in others/and aspire to be ourselves.

a. What kind of qualities are worth pursuing in/as a prospective partner? Why are these qualities better than the allure of the woman we read about in 5.1-6?

b. While it is good to pursue *a person* with these qualities, what is the book of Proverbs telling us to pursue even more? Why?

Beauty in the New Testament

1 Peter 3.3-6

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and the wearing of fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful.

6. What does this NT passage add to our understanding of beauty? What is it *not* saying about jewellery and fine clothes?

Wisdom this Week

7a. Reflect on the qualities of Wisdom that we've been reading about in the last 10 weeks. Do you see their beauty and desire to pursue Wisdom more than anything else – starting with knowing God?

b. Do you value the qualities of Wisdom in others, more than their physical beauty? What might help you to value these more?

c. How will you remain faithful to the call of Wisdom, pursue and hold onto her for the rest of your life?

Summarise

Turn to the summary page and capture the beauty of Wisdom which we have seen in this study.

-Study No.12~

My Plans or God's?

There is a way that seems right to a man,
but in the end it leads to death.

Proverbs 16.25

1. What kinds of guidance do you seek? What kinds of plans do you think God has for you in terms of the details of your life? Which details about life matter the most to you? What is the purpose of guidance?

In order to answer questions about guidance, it's worth considering what paths are actually available for us to travel in life...

The Different Paths Available (see also 1.15-16,19, 4.13-14, 10.17, 11.5, 13.6, 13.20, 15.21, 15.24)

3.5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make your paths straight.

4.11-12

I guide you in the way of wisdom
and lead you along straight paths.
When you walk, your steps will not be hampered;
when you run, you will not stumble.

4.18-19

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.

5.6

She gives no thought to the way of life;
her paths are crooked, but she knows it not.

5.21

For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD,
and he examines all his paths.

6.23

For these commands are a lamp,
this teaching is a light,
and the corrections of discipline
are the way to life.

2a. What different paths are available in life, according to these verses?

b. What helps you to choose which path?

c. When you think about making life decisions, planning for the future,

do you think of these two paths as your two options? If not, what kind of 'options' are you generally considering?

If, broadly speaking, these paths *are* our only options, where does our planning fit into this? How do we approach the future wisely in order to stay on the path? Use the passages below to think this through...

Man's Plans and God's

12.15

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

14.8

The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways,
but the folly of fools is deception.

14.22

Do not those who plot evil go astray?
But those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness.

16.1-3

To man belong the plans of the heart,
but from the LORD comes the reply of the tongue
All man's ways seem innocent to him,
but motives are weighed by the LORD.
Commit to the LORD whatever you do,
and your plans will succeed.

16.9

In his heart a man plans his course,
but the LORD determines his steps.

19.21 (20.24, 21.30)

Many are the plans in a man's heart,
but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails

27.1

Do not boast about tomorrow,
for you do not know what a day may bring forth.

3a. What do these passages tell us about man's plans? What are some problems with the way we can plan? What do we forget? What attitudes make for poor plans?

b. If the LORD's plans always prevail, how does this affect how we plan?

c. If the LORD's plans always prevail, should we bother making plans at all?

d. In our planning, what matters to the LORD (16.1-4)? How does this help us to plan well?

Our Desire for Guidance

4. When we think about plans, we often wonder about how we should spend money, what kind of job we should have, where we should live, who our friends should be, who we should pursue a romantic relationship with.

a. On reflection, how has Proverbs given you guidance in answering these questions?

b. Do you consider this 'wisdom' to be guidance? Why/why not? What else do you expect from guidance?

c. What is the *purpose* of guidance? Why do we want it?

Read the passage below. (see also 9.6, 16.17)

8.35

For whoever finds me [wisdom] finds life
and receives favour from the LORD.

But whoever fails to find me harms himself;
all who hate me love death.

d. What is the purpose of *wisdom*? How does this differ to your answer to the previous question?

God's Plans and the New Testament

Colossians 1.9-12

⁹For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

¹⁰And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience and joyfully ¹²giving the thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

5a. What result will come from the Colossians being filled with the knowledge of God's will? (v10).

b. How is this similar to the purpose of wisdom in Proverbs?

Our Plans and God's

6a. How should we then answer the question, 'what is God's will/plan for my life?'

b. If God's will is for us to live wise lives, where does this mean we should look for guidance? Is there anything surprising about this answer?

c. Does this mean it doesn't matter what job we choose, where we want to live, who we desire to marry? Where do we find the answers to these questions?

d. Is it possible for careful, wise, and God-centred plans, to not work out (14.22, 16.1-3)? How should we respond in this situation?

Summarise

Think of one thing you have learnt from studying Proverbs. How will this help you to discern God's will in the decisions that are currently facing about money, work, relationships?