



1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: Proverbs

Theme: Pillars of Wisdom

Overview: The current world does not lack for information, but wisdom is in short supply. In Proverbs, Solomon (and others) shore up what is lacking in a moronic world. Students will learn the genesis of God's wisdom, how it shouts in the marketplace of ideas, and the rewards it gives to all who embrace it.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

INTRODUCTION

Author

Most of Proverbs is attributed to Solomon, son of David and king of Israel (Proverbs 1:1; 10:1; 25:1), whom God gave “wisdom and very great insight” and who “spoke three thousand proverbs” (1 Kings 4:29-32). The book also includes sayings of “the wise” (22:17; 24:23), the words of Agur (30:1), and the words of King Lemuel (31:1). Some of Solomon’s proverbs were “compiled by the men of Hezekiah king of Judah” (25:1).

Audience

Many of the proverbs are addressed to “my son” (1:8; 2:1; 3:1), a father’s instruction to the next generation. But the book was written for all of God’s people—“for gaining wisdom and instruction,” giving “prudence to those who are simple” and adding to the learning of the wise (1:2-5).

Date

Solomon reigned about 970–930 BC, and most of the proverbs come from that period. Hezekiah’s men collected additional proverbs of Solomon around 700 BC (25:1), so the book likely reached its final form during or after Hezekiah’s reign.

Setting

Proverbs grew out of the golden age of Israel’s united kingdom, when Solomon’s wisdom drew visitors from all nations (1 Kings 4:34; 10:1-9). Its sayings reach from the royal court to the home, the marketplace, the fields, and the city gate—wherever daily life calls for wise choices.

Theme

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7). Proverbs sets two paths before every reader—the way of Lady Wisdom and the way of Madam Folly—and calls us to choose wisdom, which is more precious than rubies (8:11).

Why Study Proverbs?

Proverbs offers practical, God-centered wisdom for real-life issues like work, money, speech, friendship, marriage, and parenting. This study calls believers to seek God’s wisdom, to walk in reverent awe of him, to listen to the right voices, and to reap the rewards of a life of wise decisions.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: Proverbs 1:7; 2:1-8; 8:22-26; 9:10

WEEK 2: Proverbs 3:1-12; 14:2; 22:4

WEEK 3: Proverbs 8:1-11; 9:1-6, 13-18

WEEK 4: Proverbs 2:12-22; 3:13-18; 13:20-25

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Ask God to reveal his wisdom to you as you study his Word.**

STUDY: Proverbs

THEME: Pillars of Wisdom

LESSON TEXT: Proverbs 1:7; 2:1-8; 8:22-26; 9:10

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Isaiah 40:28; Romans 11:33; James 1:5; 1 Corinthians 1:20-25

THE SOURCE OF WISDOM

BY MARK SCOTT

Bumper stickers are secular proverbs. For example, “Honk if you love Jesus. Text while you drive if you want to meet him.” Following the wisdom literature of the Sermon on the Mount and the Epistle of James, we turn to the classic wisdom literature of the Bible—Proverbs.

Proverbs are compressed narratives. They are stories in sentences. One can read the story of King David’s unfaithfulness in 2 Samuel 11:1-27 or one can read, “Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house [or peek at her from the balcony]” (Proverbs 5:8, *English Standard Version*). Proverbs are succinct, abrupt, and curt. They do not debate. They assert. They are short, pithy statements of “general” truth. They are always true but only in the intended context. They are not promises. They sometimes come clustered in various themes (Proverbs 1:8–9:18; 31:10-31), but they often are seemingly without context, held together loosely by chiasms (literary patterns such as A-B-C-D paralleled by D-C-B-A) and contrasts.

The Source of Wisdom Predicts Reverence

Proverbs 1:7; 9:10

The climax of the prologue to Proverbs (1:1-7) is verse 7. The negative side is mentioned first: “but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” The positive side is mentioned chapters later: “and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” There are at least 18 references to “the fear of the Lord” in Proverbs. *Fear* can mean dreadful and terrifying, but it also can mean respect, reverence, or piety, as it does in these verses.

This fear is the *beginning* (starting point, essence, or capstone) of *wisdom*, *knowledge*, and *instruction*. In the realm of epistemology and presuppositions, starting points really matter. These terms are part of the semantics of cognition in Proverbs. They, along with other terms (e.g., *insight*), are terms of the mind. But they are not just cognitive. They also deal with the volition and skill in living. They even have moral fabric to them. That is why *fools* (translated from three different Hebrew words in Proverbs and occurring 71 times) despise them. Fools are not so much atheists as they are stubborn and thickheaded. In contrast to fools are the humble who understand that knowledge of God is the most important knowledge of all (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

The Source of Wisdom Produces Benefits

Proverbs 2:1-8

Solomon pleaded with his son (Rehoboam?) throughout the book of Proverbs to consider the wonderful benefits

of embracing wisdom. Both kings would have profited by listening to this inspired wisdom (for, sadly, Solomon later forgot much of his own advice). The verbs are intense as to the benefits of doing so. Solomon pleaded for us to *accept*, *store up*, *turn your ear*, *apply your heart*, *call out*, *cry aloud*, *look for*, and *search for this wisdom*, *understanding*, *insight*, and *knowledge*. Solomon did not want us to forget his *words* (speeches) and his *commands* (precepts).

The benefits of this wisdom are likened to material wealth. The similes are twofold: look for wisdom as for *silver* (money, shekels, or talents) and as for *hidden treasure*. Solomon could write such words with integrity since he “made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones” (1 Kings 10:27). The benefits of this wisdom were also promised in terms of success (hidden things stored up) and protection. God *holds* things for the upright, he is a *shield* (as in armor and buckler) to the blameless, and he *guards* (just like a watchman) the just and *protects* his faithful ones. God is the source of the benefits of wisdom (James 1:5), and Jesus is the one “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3).

The Source of Wisdom Predates Creation

Proverbs 8:22-26

In keeping with Proverbs’ love of contrasts, two women in this book play prominent roles—Madam Folly and Lady Wisdom (Proverbs 8–9). Madam Folly is foolish and something on the order of a harlot (chapter 9). But Lady Wisdom is wise (chapter 8) and evidently was created before anything else in the created order (Genesis 1–2). Lady Wisdom is referred to in feminine terms (i.e., “she”).

The Lord *brought forth* (purchased) wisdom as the first of his works. Wisdom predated God’s *deeds of old* (a reference to creation *ex nihilo*) and was *formed* (set up or poured out) long ages ago. Wisdom predated the watery depths, springs, mountains, hills, fields, and even dust. Some find this to be a reference to Christ, but he was not formed or brought forth. He always was. But Jesus became to us the source of “wisdom from God” (1 Corinthians 1:30).

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TEN OFFICES

BY DAVID FAUST

Life's highway contains many intersections, but it's hard to beat the street address of New York's Staten Island Christian Church—at the intersection of Church Avenue and Victory Boulevard. Wherever God's people gather and his Word is preached, victories occur. Eternity intersects with everyday life when Christians interact with others in neighborhoods, classrooms, and workplaces—even in church offices.

My first "minister's office" was a small corner room at Hickory Lane Church of Christ in Washington Court House, Ohio, whose members bravely called me to preach at age 22. My office contained a gas heater, a rotary phone, and a mimeograph machine I cranked by hand to print the weekly bulletin. One of my weekly tasks was burning trash in a barrel in the parking lot. I didn't own many books then, but on the shelf I displayed a wedding photo of my bride. For a seminary graduation gift, Candy bought me a brand-new set of William Barclay New Testament commentaries that looked sharp on the shelf with their blue, green, and red covers.

Soon we moved to New York to lead the newly planted South Nassau Christian Church. We rented an aging facility where our church met on Sundays. Lonely but determined, on weekdays I worked in a corner of that rented building (my Office Number 2). Eventually God enabled us to purchase a church building on Long Island's south shore where our congregation took root and grew. There in my Office Number 3, I continued using a rotary phone and wrote sermons on an IBM Selectric typewriter, but (a sign of progress) we bought our first copier.

Years later I joined the faculty at Cincinnati Bible College & Seminary and occupied my fourth office. I learned to use a desktop computer and felt sincere gratitude (and a touch of awe) when the janitorial staff removed my office trash each week.

Office Number 5 was a cubicle at Standard Publishing where I edited *The Lookout* magazine. Once again, I

composed articles on an IBM Selectric typewriter.

When I became senior minister of East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis, my sixth office included a private bathroom, and I got my first laptop computer and cell phone. During 12 years as president of Cincinnati Christian University, I occupied three different workspaces, one of which had a window with a scenic view of the city skyline.

For the last seven years I've been back at East 91st Street Christian Church serving as associate minister. My current workspace (my 10th office, if anyone is counting) is across the hall from the lead pastor's office (the one with the bathroom). My wife's wedding photo sits prominently near my desk, and those Barclay commentaries still look sharp on the shelf.

Through the years, all 10 of my offices have been places for planning and problem-solving, study and prayer, hard work and heartache, successes and failures, laughter and tears. In each office I have made decisions—good ones and not-so-good ones—and I have begged God for strength and discernment.

The Lord's wisdom shows up "where the paths meet" (Proverbs 8:1-2), like a traffic light at a highway intersection that reveals when to slow down, stop, or move ahead. More than comforts, conveniences, or technological tools—in every place and in every role—we need the wisdom of God.

Personal Challenge:

God delights in saying yes to requests for wisdom (James 1:5). In what situations do you need divine guidance right now? This week, following Daniel's example, pray three times a day (Daniel 6:10), and each time, ask God to give you wisdom.

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Did you share something you've learned from God's Word with someone outside the group last week? How? With whom?
2. What challenge did you face last week?

Ask three people—two readers and one reteller—to help. Ask the readers to read **Proverbs 1:7; 2:1-8; 8:22-26; and 9:10** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. (Leader, for the sake of continuity, it may help to print these as handouts before the meeting.) Ask the third person to summarize the main points of the passages.

3. What do you learn in general about the source (beginning) of wisdom from these passages?
4. Let's dig deeper into these passages:
 - Compare and contrast Proverbs 1:7 with Proverbs 9:10. What do these verses reveal to you about wisdom, instruction, knowledge, and understanding?
 - What effect does "fear of the Lord" (respect, reverence for him) have on wisdom?
 - Proverbs 2:1-8 presents an elaborate conditional statement (if-if-if-then). How would you characterize, in general, the hypotheses (the *if* statements)?
 - What are the conclusions (vv. 5-8)?
 - In Proverbs 8:22-26, Wisdom is personified and speaks to humankind (actually sings a hymn) describing her role. What does this teach you about wisdom?
5. What do you learn about God from these passages?
6. What do you learn about humankind from these passages?
7. In what specific way will you seek God's wisdom? (Reread and perhaps circle the *if* statements in Proverbs 2:1-4; e.g., "Accept my words," "store up my commands within you." Then choose how you will live out that instruction consistently. Share this with the rest of the group.)
8. Look again at the *if* statements in Proverbs 2:1-4, but this time, consider this: How will you teach someone else how to seek God's wisdom by following at least one of these instructions? Be as specific as you can.
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What challenges might you face this week as you seek to live in reverence and awe of God?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Proverbs 3:1-12; 14:2; and 22:4**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **With reverential awe,
love God and follow his
ways.**

STUDY: Proverbs

THEME: Pillars of Wisdom

LESSON TEXT: Proverbs 3:1-12; 14:2; 22:4

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Deuteronomy 10:12-16, 20-21; Psalm 36:1-3

THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

BY MARK SCOTT

The source of wisdom is God (last week's lesson), and the beginning of wisdom is also God. Thus, the line between source and beginning is thin. The content of Proverbs 1–9 holds together quite well thematically, and the overall thesis is to do whatever it takes to get wisdom and understanding. Proverbs 1 contains the prologue (formal introduction), the contrast between wise people and sinners, and the call to wisdom. Proverbs 2–3 contain the values and benefits of wisdom.

The main part of this week's text features an alternating pattern of command (Proverbs 3:1, 3, 5-6a, 7, 9, and 11) and reward (3:2, 4, 6b, 8, 10, and 12). When God's people begin with God's wisdom, they can . . .

Enjoy Long Life*Proverbs 3:1-2*

Following God's *teaching* (*torah*, the word here, means God's law, as in the Ten Commandments) and God's *commands* (*mitzvah* is used here, meaning precepts or ordinances, as in *bar mitzvah* [i.e., "son of the law"]) prolongs life and brings about a state of *peace* and *prosperity* (*shalom*). In certain contexts this literally can be the case. Obedience to parents prolongs life (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16). But proverbs are not promises in every context. Godly people can experience an earlier-than-normal death (Acts 12:2). But following God's wisdom provides the best kind of life no matter how long or short it is (John 10:10b).

Win Favor and a Good Reputation*Proverbs 3:3-4*

When *love* (the loving-kindness of God himself) and *faithfulness* (truth) are bound around the neck (also see Deuteronomy 6:8) and embraced in the heart, then vertical and horizontal dimensions of *favor* and a *good name* (reputation) are enjoyed. Love and faithfulness are two of God's greatest qualities, and they should be ours as well. Our love for God and faithfulness to him result in us finding favor (grace) in him (cf. Luke 2:40, 51-52). When fellow human beings see love and faithfulness in others, they respond positively. Even the most hardened criminals appreciate loyalty and love.

Experience Straight Paths*Proverbs 3:5-6; 14:2*

Straight paths were rare in the ancient world. The people had no heavy equipment to move hillsides and fill in valleys. A straight path, figuratively speaking, meant living life the way God intended it to be lived. This is best done by following God's word (2 Timothy 2:15). Proverbs 3:5-6 is very familiar to most. *Trusting* God (having confidence, hope, and boldness in him), not *leaning* (supporting oneself) on one's own *understanding* (knowledge or discernment), and *submitting* to

(literally "knowing") him will guarantee *straight* (level or direct) *paths*. These paths are always better than our own and are as high and lofty as God (Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 11:33-34). The opposite of this is given in Proverbs 14:2. To fear God is to walk uprightly, but to despise God leads to *devious* (perverse) paths.

Enjoy Good Health*Proverbs 3:7-8; 22:4*

Taking care not to promote a "health and wealth gospel" (or handle all the exceptions) . . . when humility marks God's people and they are not wise in their own eyes, and when they fear God and shun evil, they will experience God's best in life. They will enjoy *health* in body and *nourishment* (like a refreshing drink) in their bones. The Old Testament actually teaches that if God's people obey his word, then he will cause rain to fall, crops to grow, and wombs to be full. This teaching can easily be distorted, but there is a grain of truth to the teaching that obedience to God grants good health.

Gain Wealth*Proverbs 3:9-10*

Again, caution is necessary in applying this teaching for a balanced biblical perspective. However, if God's people put God first in their lives with their *wealth* (substance or sufficiency)—this is what honoring God with the stewardship of finances means—and giving to the Lord from the *firstfruits* of the crops (yields), then God will bless his people with abundance (Malachi 3:10). He will see to it that their *barns* will be filled to overflowing and their *vats* will *brim over* (burst or break) with new wine. The psalmist said, "I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging for bread" (Psalm 37:25). God is committed to supplying our needs (not our greeds). He will either give us more or see to it we can get by on what we have (Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 4:10-20).

Receive Love*Proverbs 3:11-12*

Love can sometimes come in strange packages. Sometimes it comes in *rebuke* and *discipline* (correction and punishment). In fact, discipline is proof of God's love and evidence of our identity in him (Hebrews 12:5-11).

When we begin with God's wisdom, then our heart, neck, eyes, body, and bones (the physical parts of our lives mentioned in the text) will be sound and healthy.

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AWE TO HIM I OWE

BY DAVID FAUST

Awe is a two-sided coin. When you hear bad news or eat unpleasant-tasting food, you say, “That’s awful!” But when you hear good news or taste delicious homemade pie, you say, “That’s awesome!”

Awe is the amazement and admiration you feel when you gaze across the Grand Canyon, view a double rainbow in the sky, stand next to a roaring waterfall, or view the Hubble Telescope’s photos of outer space. Awe is evidence of the image of God in you. It puts tears in your eyes when you hear great music and grateful wonder in your soul when you cuddle a newborn baby.

Healthy Fear for God

Awe and fear are closely related. Proverbs 14:16 says, “The wise fear the Lord and shun evil,” and Job was commended for doing those very things (Job 1:1). Yet, “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear” (1 John 4:18). How can these verses be reconciled? Why does the Bible say to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12), but also to approach God’s throne “with confidence” (Hebrews 4:16)?

The “great and awesome God” is “for us” (Deuteronomy 7:21; Romans 8:31). “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1), so we don’t have to cower in terror or wallow in shame; yet the Lord always deserves our highest reverence and respect. Awe is a stepping-stone toward wisdom. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7). Paul was brilliant and well-educated, but he humbly exclaimed, “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Romans 11:33). Awed by God’s grace, John wrote, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1).

Remember the time Jesus calmed a storm on the Sea of Galilee? The frightened disciples thought they were going to drown. Jesus stilled the wind and waves, but

afterward a different kind of fear gripped the disciples. Who was this passenger in the boat with them who could control nature with a few simple words? “They were terrified and asked each other, ‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!’” (Mark 4:41). Their fear of dying in the storm gave way to overwhelming awe for Jesus.

Two Challenges to Consider

Be an awe-full Christian. First-century believers were “filled with awe” when they saw God’s hand at work (Acts 2:43). Do you give and serve cheerfully? Do you pray and read Scripture with a humble, receptive mind? If you’re a Christian, you’re a once-lost sheep sought and found by the Good Shepherd. Never quit being amazed by grace.

Help your congregation be an awe-full church. The first-century church grew when the disciples lived “in the fear of the Lord” (Acts 9:31). One of the most evangelistic things the church can do is to take God seriously and have the kind of gatherings where if unbelievers or inquirers visit, they can’t help but exclaim, “God is really among you!” (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).

Rejoice when new believers are baptized. Pour your whole self into worship. Imagine joining a huge multitude in Heaven—“from every nation, tribe, people and language” (Revelation 7:9), praising God before his throne. Now that will be awesome!

Personal Challenge:

On a piece of paper or in your personal journal, write a list of God’s attributes and actions that stir your sense of awe. Using this list as a guide, offer a prayer of praise for the Lord.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How did you seek God's wisdom over the last week?
 - How did you teach someone else how to seek God's wisdom?
2. What challenge did you face last week?

Ask three people—two readers and one reteller—to help. Ask the readers to read **Proverbs 3:1-12; 14:2; and 22:4** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. (Leader, for the sake of continuity, it may help to print these as handouts before the meeting.) Ask the third person to summarize the main points of the passages.

3. What aspects of life do these passages say are affected by someone's wisdom or lack of it?
4. Let's dig deeper into these passages:
 - Look at how the main passage (Proverbs 3:1-12) is arranged. You'll see six commands or actions (do this or don't do that) followed by corresponding results or rewards ("wages"). In what ways do you find this format to be beneficial?
 - As a group, look through the main passage again and read aloud each positive action (do this). What most stands out to you about these commands?
 - Now read aloud each negative action (don't do that). What most jumps out to you from these?
 - What role does reverence/respect for the Lord (fear of the Lord) play in gaining wisdom?
5. What do you learn about God from these passages?
6. What do you learn about humankind?
7. Look again at the actions (both positive and negative) in these passages. For each one, silently and prayerfully evaluate how you are following that command. (Leader, allow participants a couple minutes to look through the passage and reflect on this.)
 - Which ones do you sense you are doing well?
 - Which one are you struggling with the most?
 - What action step will you take to grow in that area of discipleship?
8. How can you help someone else (inside or outside this group) to mature in an area of weakness?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What challenges do you anticipate this week as you seek to grow in wisdom?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Proverbs 8:1-11; 9:1-6, 13-18**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Spend the time and do the hard work required to cultivate a discerning intellect.**

STUDY: Proverbs

THEME: Pillars of Wisdom

LESSON TEXT: Proverbs 8:1-11; 9:1-6, 13-18

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 2 Timothy 3:14-17

THE CALL OF WISDOM

BY MARK SCOTT

Sometimes we just do not think. A former NBA player-turned-coach said, “We are going to turn this team around 360 degrees.” Would that not land the team right back where it started? Or what about the person who says, “There are no absolutes.” Did that person not just state one? Maybe we need a fountain of smart more than a fountain of youth. Discernment does not seem to be in strong supply today.

Many voices call out for our attention. But those voices are not all equal. Learning to pay attention to the right voices takes great wisdom. As the more “unified” section of Proverbs comes to a close in chapters 8–9, we hear two voices. They are the voices (and paths) of Lady Wisdom and Madam Folly. “Almost every verse in the remainder of the book points to one or both of these paths and/or consequences,” according to *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

Lady Wisdom's Voice*Proverbs 8:1-11*

In contrast to the “wily of heart” woman in Proverbs 7:10, the virtuous Lady Wisdom called out in the public square of life. She desired to be heard so she *raised her voice*. Since she wanted all people to hear her wisdom, she went to the *highest point* and *where the paths meet* (the crossroads where the public traffic is thick with people). She even went to the *city gate* (where court and debate were conducted in the ancient world). She did not confine her wisdom to a corner (Acts 26:26).

Proverbs 8:1-3 deals with the public nature of her voice, while verses 4-5 deal with the result of her voice: *all mankind* (not just the Jewish people) will move from being *simple* (foolish and naïve) to gaining *prudence* (shrewdness) and from being *foolish* to learning *sense* (setting their hearts on it).

The content of Lady Wisdom's voice is in verses 6-9. She had *trustworthy* things (excellent, noble, or princely) to say, *right* things to speak, *true* things to voice, and *just* words to utter. Her voice contained no *crooked* or *perverse* (abominable or wicked) things. When her words are heard, there is a subjective sense that they are right. Much like Jesus taught in John 7:17, “Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”

The value of Lady Wisdom's voice is in Proverbs 8:10-11. It is more valuable than silver, gold, or rubies. In fact nothing can compare with her. And Solomon knew something about opulence (1 Kings 10:14-29).

Lady Wisdom's Banquet*Proverbs 9:1-6*

The rest of Proverbs 8 shows the company that Lady Wisdom kept (vv. 12-21), the origin of Lady Wisdom (vv. 22-31), and the plea of Lady Wisdom (vv. 32-36). In Proverbs 9, two banquets take place—one provided by Lady Wisdom and the other by Madam Folly. These “formal dinners” could not be more different.

Lady Wisdom's banquet took place in a majestic house set up on *seven pillars*. While seven is a number of completeness in the Bible, this phrase probably should be understood that the house was large and spacious, maybe even luxurious. In this majestic house the exquisite meal was prepared (*prepared her meat* means the animals had been slaughtered). The wine was also *mixed*; wine in the ancient world often was mixed with water to make it go further.

Typical to ancient-world protocol, a second invitation was issued by the servants once the banquet was finally ready. The announcement was once again made from a most prominent place (*highest point of the city*). The invitation was for the simple to come and eat. By consuming Lady Wisdom's food, foolishness can be jettisoned, and the way of insight can be embraced.

Madam Folly's Lies*Proverbs 9:13-18*

Madam Folly's banquet was a mockery and sham compared to Lady Wisdom's. The contrast is seen in the almost identical language describing them. Madam Folly was precisely what her name implied—stupid. She was an *unruly* woman (loud, clamoring, or turbulent). She was *simple* (seductive, naïve, and undisciplined).

She used an identical call to her banquet as that of Lady Wisdom: “Let all who are simple come to my house!” But she lied. She could not deliver. Whatever wisdom she peddled was stolen. Whatever nourishment she promised was coming from a *secret* (hidden) place. People who eat at her banquet end up getting food poisoning and find themselves in the *realm of the dead* (Sheol). To whose call do you listen, and to whose banquet will you go?

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LIFE ON THE GROUND REQUIRES WISDOM FROM ABOVE

BY DAVID FAUST

If you want to be savvy and streetwise, read the book of Proverbs. It's a jewelry box filled with nuggets of spiritual gold. It's a toolbox full of blue-collar common sense—hardworking truths that wound us and heal us, break us and mend our broken places. It's a handbook of godly wisdom about real-life issues like anger, marriage, money, and sexuality. It's a manual for parenting children, managing businesses, making friends, and leading teams.

The book of Proverbs doesn't tell a story, but it helps us separate truth from falsehood in the other stories we hear. It presents a practical, no-nonsense approach to serving God. Do an honest day's work. Don't be lazy. Control your temper. Be faithful to your spouse. Don't eat or drink too much. Cultivate healthy friendships. Spend, save, and give money prudently. Control your tongue. Replace destructive habits with constructive ones.

Random Bits of Rugged Truth

Do you ever feel frustrated because the book of Proverbs isn't topically arranged? You wonder, *Where is that verse about gossip?* Then after a bit of research you discover not one but several verses about the tongue scattered randomly throughout the book. I don't mean to second-guess the Lord, but why didn't he put all the subjects in topical order for easy reference instead of scattering them randomly throughout the book?

On the other hand, daily life contains a lot of randomness too. I need wisdom not only when everything goes according to plan, but when my best-laid plans fall apart. I need wisdom to handle unexpected interruptions, unplanned encounters with neighbors, disturbing news, and alluring temptations that come out of the blue. Life doesn't happen in an orderly sequence of events moving smoothly from one subject to the next.

Viewed that way, the book of Proverbs makes perfect sense—even the way it's arranged. We don't need an

easy-to-read reference with alphabetical tabs. We need godly discernment to navigate the jumbled-up give-and-take of daily life. Worldly wisdom (street smarts) and academic training (book smarts) only take us so far. It's good to hear the voice of reason, but do we hear the voice of God? Life on the ground requires wisdom from above.

Wise Up!

Want to wise up? Here are three suggestions.

Get serious about it. Make the pursuit of godly wisdom a conscious goal. Pray for discernment. Watch and listen carefully to others wiser than yourself.

Get active with it. Wisdom is a call to action. Scripture equips us “for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:17). The Bible isn't just a source of quips and quotes; it's equipment for life. According to Jesus, the wise builder (who constructs his house on a bedrock foundation) is the one who hears his words “and puts them into practice” (Matthew 7:24).

Go public with it. Wisdom doesn't huddle in a church building. Its voice can be heard “out in the open . . . in the public square . . . on top of the wall . . . at the city gate” (Proverbs 1:20-21). True wisdom doesn't dodge real-world problems; it engages them.

Let's all be philosophers (lovers of wisdom). After all, “Wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her” (Proverbs 8:11).

Personal Challenge:

“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God” (James 1:5). In your personal journal or on a piece of paper, write: “God, I need your wisdom to deal with _____.”

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What action steps did you take last week to grow in an area of discipleship?
 - How did you help someone else mature in an area of discipleship?
2. What challenge did you face last week?

Ask three people—two readers and one reteller—to help. Ask the readers to read **Proverbs 8:1-11; 9:1-6, 13-18** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Ask the third person to summarize the main points of the passages.

3. What are the most conspicuous similarities and differences between Lady Wisdom and Madam Folly?
4. Let's dig deeper into these passages:
 - Where does Lady Wisdom make her appeal, and what does that signify?
 - To whom does Lady Wisdom call, and what does that imply about wisdom?
 - How does Lady Wisdom characterize the content of her message, and what does that teach us about wisdom?
 - Dig deeper into the comparisons and contrasts between Wisdom and Folly's invitations. What does each one do and what does each one say?
 - What do Wisdom and Folly offer to the ones they invite?
5. What do you learn about God from these passages?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. These passages call us to make a choice between two extremes. God invites us to listen (8:6), choose (8:10), come (9:4-5), leave our simple ways (9:6), and walk in the way of insight (9:6). Which of these four actions do you most need to take right now, and what will you do to accept God's invitation?
8. With whom will you share this teaching about the choice between Wisdom and Folly?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What challenges will you face this week as you seek to make wise choices?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Proverbs 2:12-22; 3:13-18; 13:20-25**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Reap the practical and spiritual rewards of a life of wise decisions.**

STUDY: Proverbs

THEME: Pillars of Wisdom

LESSON TEXT: Proverbs 2:12-22; 3:13-18; 13:20-25

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Psalm 119:97-104; Matthew 7:24; James 3:13-18

THE REWARD OF WISDOM

BY MARK SCOTT

There is wisdom, and then there is wisdom. Some wisdom is from heaven, and some wisdom is from earth (James 3:13-18). On the first Palm Sunday, it might have seemed like people were expressing heaven's wisdom, but within five days the earth's wisdom seemed to have won out. Jesus' six trials (three Jewish and three Roman) gave evidence that not all people experience the true reward of God's wisdom. As we enter this Holy Week we must be careful of unjust accusations against our Jewish forefathers for missing Jesus. If we do not embrace the wisdom from heaven, we might miss him too.

Wisdom Guards You

Proverbs 2:12-22

Proverbs 2 traces the real value of godly wisdom. Solomon wrote, "Wisdom will save you" (keep, guard, and protect). This wisdom guards against the wrong men (vv. 12-15) and the wrong women (vv. 16-19). Fools are not gender-specific. We have already been introduced to wrong men (Proverbs 1:10-19). Their feet are swift to shed blood. This text describes them as being *perverse* in their words and as walking in paths that are *crooked*. Consider all the things they do wrong—*left straight paths, walk in dark ways, delight in doing wrong, rejoice in the perverseness of evil*, and are *devious* (twisted, distorted) in their ways.

Wisdom will also guard us against *adulterous* (strange or alien) and *wayward* (foreign) women. (See lengthy descriptions of such women in Proverbs 5:1-23; 7:5-27.) An adulterous woman is *seductive* (flattering, slippery, or smooth), she has *left* (forsaken) her husband, and she has *ignored* (forgotten) the covenant of marriage she made. The end result is a house that leads to death and a path that is ghostly (spirits of the dead). People that do not guard against her never return to their lives again and they never *attain* (regain) the paths of life (Proverbs 5:5-6; 7:26-27).

But wisdom is not satisfied with just helping us guard against the bad influences. It also helps us embrace the good (Proverbs 2:20-22). Wisdom helps us walk in the ways of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous. In doing so, we remain in the land of the living (i.e., being fulfilled in the Promised Land). In contrast, the wicked will be *cut off* (disinherited) from the land, and the *unfaithful* (treacherous) will be *torn* from it (rooted out of it).

Wisdom Blesses You

Proverbs 3:13-18

Some have found that while the Christian life is not easy, it is consistently best. God's blessings are placed upon those who find wisdom and gain understanding. In fact the

blessings of wisdom are compared to wealth, long life and happiness, *pleasant ways* (beauty and delight), and *paths of peace*.

Wisdom is spoken of in terms of financial gain. Silver, gold, and rubies are mentioned as metaphors of blessings. The right hand and the left hand are ways of speaking of God's generosity toward us (Matthew 6:3). God blesses the wise with long life and honor. Solomon takes us back to Eden as a final blessing of wisdom. The tree of life is seldom mentioned outside of Genesis 2-3 and Revelation 22. But it does appear in Proverbs (11:30; 13:12; 15:4). If we take hold of wisdom contained in God's tree of life (trusting in the goodness of God), we will be blessed beyond measure.

Wisdom Distinguishes You

Proverbs 13:20-25

The Jewish people loved contrasts. They were famous for saying, "On the one hand . . . on the other hand." Contrasts frame up the subgenre of this section of Proverbs. The six proverbs in this section offer a thesis in the first line and the antithesis in the second line. It is like a protagonist fighting against the antagonist. For instance, walking with wise people makes one wiser still. It is called intelligence by association. On the other hand, if one spends time with fools, *harm* (the root word is the word for "evil") typically results from such pooled ignorance.

In verse 21, *trouble* (once again the root is the word for "evil") *pursues* (like a hunter pursuing an animal) the sinner. In contrast, the righteous are rewarded with good things.

The last four proverbs in this section deal with inheritance, the poor, discipline of children, and contentment. Following God's wisdom in these areas will distinguish God's people from those who follow the wisdom of the world. When God's wisdom is not embraced, sinners will lose their wealth, injustice will reign, children will be left to their own devices, and contentment will be compromised. No wonder the writer of Proverbs says, "Get wisdom" (Proverbs 4:7).

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ARE YOU IDEALISTIC OR REALISTIC?

BY DAVID FAUST

Idealists enjoy dreaming about the future. Vision comes naturally to them, and they eagerly embrace change. Christians who are idealistic have no problem praying for miracles and trusting God to do big things. The problem is, unbridled idealism can lead to foolhardy decisions, financial overreach, and overlooking important details that need to be addressed.

Realists, on the other hand, are practical and down-to-earth. Visionaries often view them as pessimistic and resistant to change. Realists ask, “What will it cost?” When a new idea is proposed, they immediately see the obstacles and bring up cautionary lessons learned in the past. Christians wired to be realists believe in prayer, but they know prayer isn’t just wishing on a star or rubbing Aladdin’s lamp to get what you want.

Must we choose between idealism and realism? Actually, it’s wise to embrace certain aspects of both. Christians should be realistic, because God exists and his Word is true—and truth is simply another word for reality. At the same time, the upward call of God should stir our vision and cause us to pursue ideals the world considers impossible to achieve.

I coined a word that pulls these concepts together. I think Christians ought to be *idrealists* (pronounced “I-DREAL-ists”)—idealistic and realistic at the same time. We can keep our feet on the ground while our eyes are on Heaven. We can be realistic without being cynical, and we can hold onto our ideals without being wild-eyed dreamers. We can live in the “now” while we anticipate the “not yet.” We can see the present and its problems honestly while viewing the future hopefully. This is the way of wisdom.

Jesus was an idrealist. He described both sides of the coin in John 16:33 when he said realistically, “In this world you will have trouble,” and then went on to say, “But take heart! I have overcome the world.” The apostle Paul constantly faced real-world problems. He was pressured, perplexed, and persecuted, but he never gave up his ideals. He believed in the resurrected Christ, so he fixed his eyes on the unseen (2 Corinthians 4:7-18).

Finding the Right Balance

The book of Proverbs advocates neither faithless realism nor foolish idealism. Instead, it urges us to pursue the way of wisdom, which I call “faithful idrealism.” Here is how it works:

Faithless Realism	Foolish Idealism	Faithful IDREALISM
“The evildoer has no future hope” (Proverbs 24:20)	“Those who chase fantasies will have their fill of poverty” (Proverbs 28:19)	“There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off” (Proverbs 23:18)
Unhealthy pessimism about problems	Unhealthy denial of problems	Healthy optimism about God’s ability to overcome problems
Negative attitude about the future; no solutions—just questions, doubts, and fears	Unrealistic dreams about the future that never come to fruition	Positive attitude about the future; pursues practical solutions with faith and persistence

In the real world, the ideal mingles with the not-so-ideal. A generous woman pours out her expensive perfume while Judas complains (John 12:1-8). One thief mocks and insults Jesus, while another repents (Luke 23:39-43). Generous donors support God’s work, while others give with dishonest, selfish motives (Acts 4:36-5:11). Through it all, God is at work, sculpting servants and saints out of rough-cut stones.

Dare to dream, but be wise. Be an idrealist.

Personal Challenge:

If you tend to be more idealistic, what can you learn from your down-to-earth, practical-minded friends that might help your vision become reality? If you tend to be more realistic, how do you think the Lord wants to stretch your faith?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. With whom did you discuss the choice between Wisdom and Folly last week?
2. What challenge did you face last week?

Ask three people—two readers and one reteller—to help. Ask the readers to read **Proverbs 2:12-22; 3:13-18; 13:20-25** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Ask the third person to summarize the main points of the passages.

3. Of all the benefits/blessings of walking in wisdom listed in these passages, which is for you the most important or valuable?
4. Let's dig deeper into these passages:
 - What kinds of negative influences does wisdom save you from?
 - What do these passages convey to you about choosing the best paths to take in life?
 - Note the contrasts between the good and the wicked, the righteous and sinners, and the wise and fools throughout these passages. What perspectives on life do these contrasts reveal?
 - In what ways do these passages illustrate the New Testament "proverb" of Galatians 6:8, "Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life"?
5. What do you learn about God from these passages?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. What is one practical way you can walk on the path of wisdom over the next week?
8. How would you use these passages to convince someone to live God's way rather than living their own way or the world's way?
 - Who will you share this with?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What challenges will you face this week as you seek to walk in wisdom?

For Next Week: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.