

Wisdom for Life...

Visit any bookshop and you'll see that self improvement books are selling like hot cakes. There are racks of books with titles like 'The Secrets of Success; 60 Ways to Make Your Life Amazing'; 'How to control your Time and your Life'; and even 'How to Be Sane, Sexy and Solvent.' According to one well known psychologist, the beauty of self improvement books like these is that they can actually work. The 'self' is in fact 'improvable.'

But why not start with God's own guide to a better way of living? The Book of Proverbs is God's instruction manual in how to "Get Smarter" – how to not just survive, but have a life that's stable, good, coherent and effective. This is a 'personal development book' all about making the best life choices; how to get the most out of this week.

The starting point for Proverbs is, however, quite different to self-help. It warns against self-reliance (see Proverbs 3:5-6), encouraging us instead to 'listening to our king' and to learn 'the fear of the Lord'. Through these studies we'll learn what those principles are all about... and apply them to key aspects of life such as parenting, work, money & speech...

Wisdom for Life
the wisdom of Proverbs

Study 1: Proverbs 1:1-7
Wisdom for Life

Pray that God will open your eyes to see Him and His Wisdom.

Why do you think there are so many self help books in book stores today?

Read Proverbs 1:1-7

According to these verse who can benefit from studying the book of proverbs and how?

How is wisdom (in v2) described by what follows and is it the same as intelligence? Why or why not?

According to v5-6 proverbs can come in all shapes and sizes. They are tools rather than rules. What do you think will be the challenges to applying them to our lives. (see Pr 26:9)

Who is the author of these Proverbs?

It is interesting that if we read about Solomon he actually forgets his own advice and goes astray.

Read Matthew 12:38-42

How is Jesus greater than Solomon?

What does that mean about who we should be listening too?

What does Proverbs 1:7 mean?

What kind of knowledge do we need most? And why (Look at 2:5 & 9:10)

How do you feel about the fact the we are to "fear God" ?

Read Luke 12:4-7 How do you explain the interplay between fearing God and not fearing God?

PUT INTO ACTION:

The book of proverbs touches on many areas of life, work, family, marriage, sex, money, parenting, words, friends and more. Take time to list a couple or areas in your life that you need to grow most in wisdom.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Who are you tempted fear other than God?

Accountability:

How many times have you managed to read the bible this week?
Is it better or worse this week?

What have been your struggles this week?

What have been your high's and low's?

Pray:

Spend some time praying about the areas that you need to hand over to God and look for His wisdom.

Pray also for God to fill you with His awe, wonder, beauty and power for you to know and fear Him that will lead you to wise living.

Spend some time praying for each other to be people devoted to wise living under the kingship of Jesus.

Study 2
Two Houses
Proverbs 9:1-18

Through out the book of Proverbs there is the continual contrasting between wisdom and folly. Between those that follow Lady folly and those that follow Lady Wisdom. Proverbs chapter 9 we see this classic match up between the two. Chapter 9 puts before us two ways to live. Lets look at it together.

Pray: For God to open our eyes and our hearts to His wisdom

Read: Proverbs 9:1-18

Look carefully at v 1-6 and 13-18 and write out the contrasts below and then discuss them.

v1-6

v13-18

Why do you think something forbidden seems more tempting? (v17)

What are the consequences of living for wisdom or for folly?

What areas of your life have you fallen for folly?

What can you do to correct this?

How does Jesus impact our living for folly or wisdom?

Read Ch 9:7-12

This gives us a glimpse of what a resident of the house of wisdom would look like. What does a resident look like?

How does your life match up to this resident?

Who is a member of the house of wisdom and how do we become a member? (John 14:1-6)

This chapter encourages us to choose wisdom, to pursue wisdom, seeing that Jesus is God's wisdom in person then who are we to pursue?

Action:

How can we pursue Jesus?

How can we help each other pursue Jesus?

What aspects of your life do you need to change so that you would be recognized as a resident of the house of wisdom?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

What do you need to put in place to help you to change those areas of your life?

What aspects of your life do show that you are a resident of the house of wisdom?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

How can you ensure that you keep these parts of your life strong?

Make a plan now to put into action how you will change the areas of your life that need to be changed and how you will strengthen the areas of your life that are in line with a person who is from the house of wisdom.
(House of wisdom is the family home of the follower of Jesus)

Accountability:

How many times have you managed to read the bible this week?
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What have been your struggles this week?

What have been your high's and low's?

Pray:

For your plan,
For the other members plans.
For you all to be people who are residents of the house of wisdom and that people will be able to recognize that.

Pure Sex
Proverbs 5:1-23
Study 3

Ask each person how they went at being a resident of the house of wisdom this week. How did they go at implementing their plan?

It is in your face everyday. There is no where that you can go to escape it. It seems to be the defining point of humanity. It sells more items than Tiger Woods. You name it, it will sell it. It pervades every part of our society. It is sex. How should we understand sex as members of the house of wisdom? Lets have a look at Proverbs has to say to us on the issue of sex.

Pray: For God to open our eyes and our hearts to His wisdom.

Why do you think our society is obsessed with sex?

What is the maker's intention for sex? Lets look at Proverbs ch5

Read: Proverbs 5:1-13

Who is the proverb aimed at and why? (v1-2)

What is the big warning? (v3-6)

What does it say about adultery and we could include in that pre-marital sex?

What does v 7-10 say about pre-marital sex and adultery?

What are some practical ways of doing that? (internet, books, TV, entertainment)

How can we help each other with that?

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

What does this have to say to the topic of sex?

Never forget Jesus in all this and what He has accomplished for all on the cross.

Read: Proverbs 5:15-23

What should we be doing?

What does this say to those who are married or will one day be married?

Read v18-19 and also 1 Cor 7:1-5 discuss what these two passages have to say about keeping a marriage strong.

How does v21-23 impact you?

Action:

Marriage is God's ordained relationship to enjoy the privilege of pure sex. It is to be passionate, enjoyed, loving and just one part of a strong marriage.

Write out a summary of what you have learned from Proverbs 5:1-23

Write out a plan of action to enable you to stay pure for your wife/husband.

Accountability:

How many times have you managed to read the bible this week?
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What have been your struggles this week?

What have been your high's and low's?

Pray:

For you and your group to stay pure in our sex lives.
Pray for the leaders of our churches to stay pure in their sex lives.
Pray our congregation to stay pure in their sex lives.
Lay our lives before our creator as He is the only one able to give us the strength to stay pure.

Study 4
Wise Parenting
Proverbs 1

Pray: For God to open your eyes and heart to His wisdom

Why do you think the idea of disciplining children has become such an issue in Australia today?

Read Proverbs 1:1-8

The key verse here is v8. It implies that parents will have a plan for their parenting. Looking at v1-7 what do you think will be at the heart of that plan?

How do you think that parents understanding "the fear of the Lord" is vital to how parents should raise their children?

Verse 8 refers to the role of both father and mother and many other proverbs stress the importance of both father and mother. (5:18, 6:29,12:4, 18:22) Why is a loving caring relationship between father and mother vital to parenting?

The issue of discipline is emphasized through out proverbs (13:24, 23:13-14) Discipline is also the word that we get "disciple" from.

What is the aim of discipline?

Why is it loving to administer it?

Why do we need to be careful?

Read Ephesians 6:1-4. What are the connections you can see between what we have learnt in proverbs and this?

What role might the bible play in raising our children? (2Tim 3:14-17)

ACTION:

For parents:

What have you found most challenging about this study?

- What are you going to do in response to what you have learnt?
- How can the group help to keep you accountable?

For others:

How can you help support parents in their great task?

As a church family:

How can we help to uphold marriage and honour marriage?

How can we encourage and support single parents and families?

How can we help raising our children of our church family to be followers of Jesus?

Accountability:

How many times have you managed to read the bible this week?

Is it better or worse this week?

What have been your struggles this week?

What have been your high's and low's?

Pray:

For our families in our church

For the families of our community

For us to be people who encourage children to be followers of Jesus.

Study 5 **Wise Words**

Pray For God to open your eyes and heart to His wisdom.

“Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me...”

Is this true or false? why?

1. What do the following Proverbs say about lying: 6:16-19; 8:13; 12:22

2. In contrast, how does “wisdom” speak: 8:7-9?

3. Lying is not the only way we can misuse our tongues. What are other bad (& good!) uses of words: 12:6; 12:13; 12:18, 13:3?

4. In among all the warnings about chattering, lying, gossip, mocking... according to 10:19, what’s the best way to prevent tongue-trauma?

5. We might not want to admit it, but our words say more about us than we would care to admit. From Proverbs 16:23, 18:4, 26:23, 26:24-26, where do our word comes from? What do they reflect?

6. We need to be wise listeners too! What do the following proverbs say about...
 - listening to correction (12:1; 12:18)
 - listening to rebuke (17:10; 25:11-12)
 - listening to advice (Proverbs 12:1,15; 13:1,13)

In Matthew 15:19, Jesus says something very similar to Proverbs: “...out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.” We Christians are people with changed hearts. And if that’s not reflected in the words of our lips, there’s something very wrong!

Think & Apply

7. According to Prov 27:6 and 9, what is the value of the right words from a true friend?

Read: 2 Timothy 3:16-4:4

As a pastor-teacher, what is Timothy told to do, and how does he do it? (4:2) Correcting, rebuking and encouraging one another from God’s word is what ministry to one another is all about.

**“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another”
Proverbs 27:17**

ACTION

Reflect on the relationship between speech and friendship in this study and consider the following questions together...

- can your small group become a circle of true friends?
- what could help this to happen?
- what could stop it happening?
- what ground rules should a group adopt to encourage true and honest friendship?

It's one thing to dish up homespun advice and folksy wisdom. But when Christians are called to speak a word of instruction or rebuke, we have a much better source. Why not commit yourself as a group to being "open to correction" as you meet together to encourage one another. Ask God to give both the wisdom and the opportunities to do this.

Accountability:

How many times have you managed to read the bible this week?
Is it better or worse this week?

What have been your struggles this week?

What have been your high's and low's?

Pray:

For your group to be a place where true, open honest, Christian friendships are developed.

Pray for each other to be wise with our mouths.

Other prayer points:

Study 6
Wisdom about Friends

Pray: For God to open our hearts to His Wisdom.

When it comes to friends they can be the most influential people in our lives, but yet how often do we think seriously about who we have as close friends. Often it is just if you have a common interest and nothing to do with good character, or positive attributes that you could learn from. Friends are people that we are going to spend a lot of time with, they will be your “walking partners” in life. They are important so who should we have as close friends? Lets have a look at what Proverbs has to say about friends.

Read: The following proverbs and write out what they say about friends:
12:26

13:20

27:17

Try to summarise these three into one sentence:

What do you think is meant by a friend in these passages and also 1 Cor 15:33.

Read: Proverbs 6:16-19 Make a list of what characteristics should NOT be in a friend.

Why?

Apply: Spend a moment and think if any of these character traits are in you and think what are you going to do about it?

Read: 14:21, 17:17 and 27:6,9-10 and make a list of the characteristics that should be in a friend.

Apply: Think about if these characteristics are yours and if so praise God for them and if not pray to God to change you to have them.

Think:

How does this all relate to building friendships with people who are “Not Yet” Christians?

Apply:

The bible is very clear that close relationships are very important, Jesus had 12 very close friends. Who he hand picked. It is clear from these passages that friendships are vital to all of us and that we should develop good relationships in line with the principles set out in Proverbs.

Think about and write down a plan of action to put into practice, to develop the type of friendships proverbs talks about.

Accountability:

How many times have you managed to read the bible this week?

Is it better or worse this week?

What have been your struggles this week?

What have been your high's and low's?

Pray:

That you can be a Godly friend.

For your group members to be Godly friends.

For you all to be transformed by God's Spirit to be the friend God intended you to be.

Pray for a friend that you want to introduce to Jesus and that you will be able to be a friend that leads that friend to Jesus not away from him.

Study 7
Wisdom about Work

Pray: For God to open your eyes and heart to His wisdom.

Is laziness or greed the biggest problem in most peoples attitude to work?

In this study we are going to look at two academies and what type of people they produce. The academy of the sluggard and the academy of the ant. Lets see what we can learn from this two academies about work.

Academy 1 THE SLUGGARD

Read the following verse and write out what they teach us about work:
6:6-9

12:27

19:24

22:13

15:19

18:9

24:30-40

What would a graduate of this academy look like?

What areas of your life are like the sluggard?

Academy 2: THE ANT

Do the same with these verses:
6:6-9

10:4

21:5

22:9

27:23-24

Col 3:23-24

What would a graduate of this academy look like?

How can you implement this in your work place?

Read: Proverbs 23:4-5

What does this teach us about keeping life and work in balance?

Think and Apply:

The New Testament takes this further by commending another sort of work (see Colossians 1:28-29). What is Paul conscious of working towards? why?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:58. Apart from our work for an income, what is this 'work of the Lord' we are to all "give ourselves fully to"?

What have you been challenged about in this study with regard to paid work?

How does the "fear of the Lord" and knowing that telling and showing people Jesus are our goal impact how we view work?

From this study what do you need to change in your work habits? And what are you going to do this week to change that.

From this study what are you doing well in relation to work and how can you strengthen those qualities/attributes/character traits.

Accountability:

How many times have you managed to read the bible this week?
Is it better or worse this week?

What have been your struggles this week?

What have been your high's and low's?

Pray:

For others in the group that they may have a Godly attitude to work.
For yourself that you have a Godly attitude to work.
For God to change you in how you view your work and His.

Study 8 **Wisdom and Money**

Pray: For God to open your eyes and heart to His wisdom.

Why is it that often the last part of us to be converted is our hip pocket?

Read: The following verses and list the advantages of wealth

19:4

22:7

Look at the following verse and list the disadvantages of wealth.

18:11

23:4

How might the concept of the “fear of the Lord” help us understand these passages on money? (look at 15:16-17 to help here)

What other traps of wealth are warned against in these Proverbs:

15:27;

18:23

11:4

How are these warnings about money extended in the New Testament (see 1 Timothy 6:3-10)?

Think and Apply:

As God’s people, what should our attitude to money be? What should we set our hearts on (read on to 1 Timothy 6:11-17)?

The book of Proverbs is always setting before us two alternate paths—wise and foolish. With regard to money, Jesus makes this choice all the more stark: “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one & love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Matthew 6:24).

10. Do you get uncomfortable when the issue of money is raised in church? If so, what are some possible reasons for this?

11. Are you giving enough?

What’s a biblical way to go about answering this question?
(look at 2 Cor 8:1-13)

Proverbs sees wealth as a blessing from God but also delivers severe warnings against its traps. The New Testament amplifies these warnings and encourages generosity for gospel work

Putting it into practice – Write in both columns

DANGERS of pursuing wealth

BENEFITS of giving for the gospel

Write out how you are going to be generous with your money, to

- 1) Church
- 2) Missionaries
- 3) Relieving poverty

Accountability:

How many times have you managed to read the bible this week?

Is it better or worse this week?

What have been your struggles this week?

What have been your high's and low's?

Pray:

Praise God that he has lavished his riches upon us in Jesus

Confess that we have not valued these riches, chasing instead the riches of the world

Ask that we would recognise what true riches are found in Jesus—and that we would be generous with our earthly riches so others might come to know the true riches of God's love and forgiveness

Study 9 **Marry Wisdom**

When have you been faced in life with a real 'crossroads' decision—two paths with very different destinations?

Key Verse: Proverbs 4:6

Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you.

Israel was God's 'son', called out of Egypt. Proverbs calls this son to marry wisdom not foolishness—to follow his commands. The ideal wife in Prov 31 is a picture of the life God's people should embrace.

Investigate:

1. Which two women are pictured in Proverbs (1:20-33; 2:16) and what paths do they represent?

2. Proverbs 1-9 is framed as instructions from 'a father' to 'a son.' From Proverbs 4:5-9, who should 'the son' fall in love with?

The Old Testament constantly ties together the ideas of Israel's faithfulness to God and their integrity in marriage. To worship at the shrines of the fertility goddess Asherah was a constant temptation... and in fact, destroyed both faithfulness to God and your marriage at the same time! In Proverbs 5 to 7, two sections about adultery (5:1-23 and 6:20-7:27) sandwich a section about foolishness (6:1-19).

3. What do you see as the overall message of Proverbs 7:6-27?

Lady Wisdom speaks in detail through Chapter 8: her mouth speaks what is true and just... Wisdom was with God right from the very beginning. (8:22-31). Now, in 9:1-12, Lady Wisdom is throwing a party – and you're invited.

4. What alternate invitation is offered by the woman Folly in 9:13-18?
What parallels/differences can you spot in the invitations?

5. Remember this one? According to verse 10, where does true wisdom begin? How will this guide who you listen to?

6. Read Proverbs 31:10-31, the last word from Lady wisdom. How does this woman sum up everything we've seen in Proverbs? In what ways does it portray a bigger picture than just the character of a good wife?

7. Folly often tempts us with short term worldly gains and experiences, but at the expense of long term spiritual blessings. How can we keep our focus as Christians? What do you find hardest?

Think & Apply

8. Consider how the excellent wife of Proverbs 31 re-inforces all we've

learnt in Proverbs.... e.g.:

- 'the fear of the Lord'
- a wise and prudent life
- warning against being a sluggard
- compassion for others

9. Look back through the previous studies. Have you been challenged

or encouraged to change in any particular areas of life? How will you respond to these challenges?

“if any of you lacks wisdom...”

prayer

points

& relationships with believers (for other members/links of your group)

& relationships with unbelievers

& relationships with family/household

& relationships through ministry you're involved in

-

“it is a fact that those

whose lives are daily

being conformed to

the Word and

purposes of God will

be given the ability to

see issues more

plainly”

Malcolm Watts

& praise God that he is

perfectly faithful and steadfast

in love

& confess that we are fickle

and so often unfaithful,

serving God more as a matter

of 'when convenient' rather

than being devoted to him.

& ask that God's Spirit

would transform our hearts to

learn pure devotion to God,

growing in our faithfulness to

him.

& pray also:

for our upcoming world

mission series, that many

might be challenged to

consider mission work

throughout the world.

for those of us having
holidays that we would be
wise in how we spend this
time, with great priority on
listening to God in his Word.