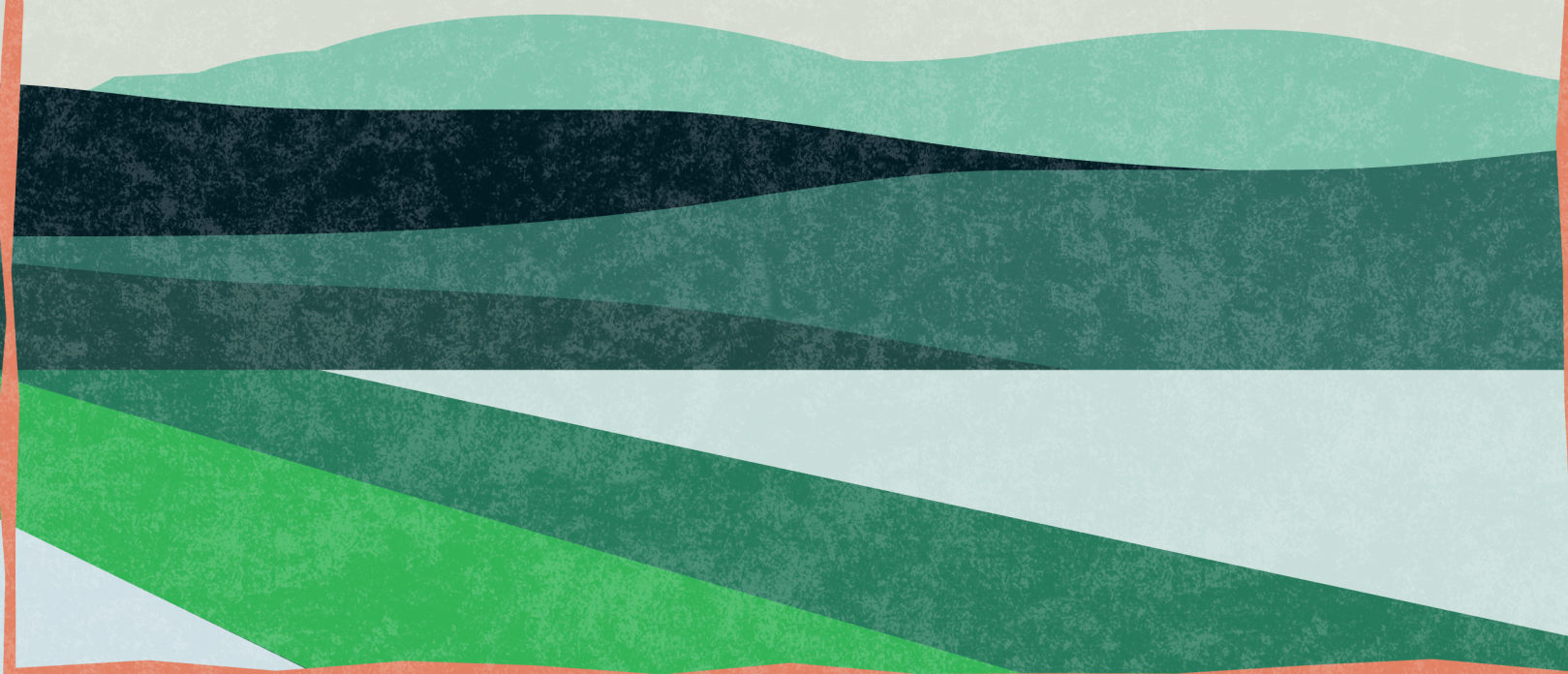


PROVERBS

learning to thrive



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Passage Schedule

PROVERBS CHAPTERS 1 - 9

WEEK	PASSAGE	TITLE
10	Prov. 8:1-36	Wisdom's World
11	Prov. 9:1-18	Choices

VARIOUS PROVERBS (CHAPTERS 10 - 29)

WEEK	PASSAGE	TOPIC
12	Prov. 10:8; 11:2; 15:25,33	Humility
13	Prov. 14:29; 15:18; 19:11	Outrage (Anger)
14	Prov. 19:13,14; 22:6; 18:22	Family Matters
15	Prov. 26:28; 18:21; 12:18	Talking, Typing, & Texting
16	Prov. 16:1, 4, 9, 33	Providence
17	Prov. 17:17; 18:24; 27:6,17	Friendship

PROVERBS CHAPTERS 30 - 31

WEEK	PASSAGE	TITLE
18	Prov. 30	The Gift of Written Wisdom
19	Prov. 31	Committed to Wisdom

Series Introduction

We all want to thrive. To live wisely is to experience thriving, and experiencing thriving starts with fearing God. What's this mean?

The thriving life is seen in the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve enjoyed life in God's world, God's way. Since God is the Creator, the first people knew that everything they thought, did and said was in connection to God. And connecting to God was no problem, because they knew the One they walked with - His faithfulness, His love, His power; in other words, Adam and Eve had the proper awe or "fear" of God.

Until they stopped taking God at His word.

We're all now enslaved to this self-focused foolishness. Though we were created to make sense of life in God's presence, we instead choose to independently build stories about Him, the world, and ourselves.

Through Proverbs, God invites us back to Himself, the only place of true thriving.

As down-to-earth, ground-level, and practical as Proverbs is, we'll discover that wisdom and thriving aren't a matter of organizing our lives around great principles, but are instead a gracious gift from the God who gives both to those He loves.

In Proverbs we aren't being summoned to follow advice but to follow and fear a person, Jesus Christ, the gracious Lord who opened up the path of wisdom and thriving through His substitutionary death and triumphant resurrection.

Help for Studying Proverbs

Proverbs are *not* promises, guarantees, or laws but are instead observations about how life and situations *normally* unfold.

For example, Proverbs 22:6 says this:

“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”

There are probably more than a few parents who can attest to the fact that this simply isn't always true. However, as a general observation, life does work like this: children who are parented and loved well are set up a little better than children not parented well.

There are different kinds of these observations: instructions, sayings, and admonitions or exhortations based on life lived in relationship with God.

The Old Testament balances the “life-works-this-way” nature of Proverbs by setting it alongside the books of Job and Ecclesiastes, which show life in the face of God's mysterious sovereignty (Job) and life's imbalances and seeming futility (Ecclesiastes).

Life doesn't always work out as we expect it to work out because God does not reveal all of the details of His sovereign activity in the world. So the thriving life requires trust in God, who fully revealed Himself in Jesus and reveals Himself through His Word today.

The Fear of the LORD

Proverbs 1:7 is like the motto for the entire book of Proverbs:

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction."

What does it mean to have or live with "the fear of the Lord"?

To "fear the LORD" is to:

1. Live in awe of God, who is utterly holy and entirely different from us.
2. Be in covenant relationship with God, knowing and believing His promises.
3. Know that you are accountable to this incomprehensible God, and that He is entirely trustworthy.
4. Walk in holiness by trusting Him because of who He is.

So, does God want you to be *terrified* of Him?

The short answer is: if you've trusted in Jesus, **no!**

Some of the most clarifying passages for understanding the true nature of the fear of the LORD are found in the Psalms:

"Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind!" (Psalm 31:19)

"Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name." (Psalm 86:11)

"If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared." (Psalm 130:3-4)

Those who are God's children aren't being called to stand in terror of Him, but to live in trusting reverence and awe. As Jerry Bridges says it,

"I can know if I truly fear God by determining if I have a genuine hatred of evil and an earnest desire to obey His commands."

What is Proverbs?

Proverbs is a collection of individual wisdom sayings that “offers skill in the art of godly living.”¹

Chapters 1-9 act as a unit that introduces the entire book, urging readers to pursue wisdom. These chapters are poems or speeches from a father to his son that provide instruction and insight for understanding and reading the rest of the book.

Chapters 10-29 explore wisdom by applying God’s counsel to many areas of life. There are many comparisons between the wise and the foolish, Lady Wisdom (the personification of wisdom) and Lady Folly (the personification of foolishness and evil), tackling various topics that pop up throughout one’s life.

Chapter 30 presents Agur as a model to emulate - he knows he lacks wisdom, so he goes to the words of God for instruction.

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¹ See <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/knowning-the-bible-proverbs>

Chapter 31 presents the wisdom of King Lemuel's mother, along with a picture of the ideal wise woman in an acrostic poem. Some see Proverbs 31 as a picture of Lady Wisdom, whom all who love God should seek to commit themselves to and pursue.

Proverbs was collected over time and one of the main authors, King Solomon, likely started to pass these onto Israel's future leaders so that they could rule just like God rules: with wisdom, justice, and righteousness. So if you're wondering why there's so much said to young men throughout Proverbs, it's because they were the main original audience: they're being prepped to lead God's people in righteousness and justice.

Despite such a wealth of instruction and training, the Old Testament shows the failure of King Solomon and the rest of Israel's kings, highlighting the need for a better King who really does rule with wisdom, justice, and righteousness, King Jesus, the true Son of David.

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Here's what makes the wisdom of Proverbs unique amongst so many other forms of wise sayings, advice, good counsel, etc.: Proverbs makes it clear that true wisdom and thriving can only be found in a covenantal relationship with God.

Proverbs makes it very clear that there are really only two paths to walk in this world: the way of wisdom or the way of folly. That's it. Every choice has us walking further along with God, or further away from God. We do not have infinite choices before us, we cannot make our own path out of thin air; no, we are always either following God or turning from God. Proverbs invites anyone who hears to follow the way of wisdom.

Picture the wisdom in Proverbs as a hiking trail. To even get into the parking lot that leads to the entrance of the trail, you have to "enter" through the fear of the LORD. Why is this the case? Because God is the Creator, so all of life is related to Him. Apart from Him, there is no true wisdom and there is no true thriving.

Week 9

A DEAD END

PROVERBS 7

PASSAGE SUMMARY

The Lord Jesus once proclaimed that “out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person” (Matt. 16:19-20).

There are many temptations around us, but the bigger problem is internal: we *want* what’s offered to us by the world and the devil. Within each of us is the desire and capacity for adultery in all of its forms - lustful fantasy, pornography, or voluntary sexual acts outside of marriage. We therefore need stark, vivid, and frequent reminders of what sits at the end of adultery’s path: destruction and death. As Paul writes in Romans, “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

Solomon reminds his son - and us - that sexual immorality, no matter how attractive it’s dressed up, is a disgusting dead end. As God’s people, we must be willing to call sin “sin”, and help one another put it to death.

GROUP INTRO

What are some pieces of God's wisdom that have stuck with you as we've studied Proverbs? Why did that particular wisdom stick out to you?

TEXT

1. Summarize verses 1-5, then answer the question. According to the Bible itself, why is it crucial to read, study, and memorize God's Word?

Leader help: These verses are a call to truly treasure and keep God's Word in our minds and hearts. Two other passages of Scripture that summarize some of the results of keeping God's Word close are 2 Timothy 3:14-17 and Psalm 119:11. We can also look at Jesus's example in Matthew 4:1-11, where He uses Scripture to answer satan's temptations.

2. How specifically is the adulteress tempting the young man in verses 13-21? How are her actions similar to the devil's?

Leader help: She's flattering the young man and trying to make sexual immorality appealing by convincing him that their sin will be beautiful, harmless, and without consequences. Satan is the father of lies, and uses deception to try to make all sin look similarly good and harmless, as he has done since the Garden of Eden.

3. What or who does the adulteress represent in Proverbs? What is considered adultery and why does God hate it?

Leader help: In Proverbs, wisdom is personified as a woman - the adulteress here represents wisdom's opposite: folly or sinful foolishness. Both call out for our attention, so who will we listen to? We either listen to wisdom and thrive or listen to folly and die.

Solomon is here using the adulteress as a tangible example of what folly looks like in the real world. To commit adultery is to follow folly.

In the time of Proverbs, Israelites would have understood adultery to be any voluntary sexual activity outside of marriage. Jesus later defines adultery in this way: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:27-28).

God hates adultery because it defiles His gift of marriage, it is a violation of a covenant, and it is an assault on His glory. Ultimately, marriage is a picture of the gospel: Jesus, the bridegroom, sacrifices Himself for His bride, the church, out of love and grace. Adultery dismisses this reality.

4. Why do you think Solomon uses a dramatic story in verses 6-23 to warn his son?

Leader help: Like Jesus did in His ministry, Solomon is using storytelling as a way to impact his son not just mentally, but emotionally. We are all born sinners, and even after being given a new heart after trusting Jesus, we battle the flesh, so we need stark, dramatic reminders about the ugliness and destructiveness of sin to help fuel our desire to fight it.

APPLICATION

1. How does the temptation to commit sexual sin show up in our culture? What steps can we take as a Community Group to pursue wisdom and holiness instead of giving in to these temptations?
2. Read Romans 1 Corinthians 6:18-20. How does the Apostle Paul exhort us to fight temptation and sexual sin? What's the difference between what Paul exhorts here and what Solomon exhorts in Proverbs 7?

Leader help: One key difference is that Solomon is commending wisdom and showing his son what's wise while Paul is calling Christians to act in line with their new identity. As God's people, we're also now God's temple because His Spirit indwells us.

3. One of the consequences of sexual sin is the experience of shame. Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. How does the gospel free us from sexual sin, God's judgment against us, and the shame that comes with sin?

PRAYER

Pray Psalm 51:1-12.

Week 10

WISDOM'S WORLD

PROVERBS 8

PASSAGE SUMMARY

The adulteress of Proverbs 7 was portrayed as someone who waits to tempt and persuade us to sin, which leads to death. Now we meet the personification of God's wisdom, "Lady Wisdom" as theologians call her, who cries out at the city gates, inviting all to hear and follow her into thriving.

In this passage Solomon shows his son the beauty and goodness of wisdom, along with all that wisdom offers. Instead of the death that awaits those who heed the adulteress, wisdom offers unimaginable goodness, showing that wisdom is "better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her." Wisdom is presented as the one worthy of our allegiance and attention.

Not only this, but we'll see that this world is *wisdom's world*, so to daily follow her is to live in line with reality. Those who reject God and live in folly walk into damning fantasy.

GROUP INTRO

What we most often pray for can reveal what we actually desire. What are the top 3 things you most often pray for? Why?

TEXT

1. Like many sections of Proverbs, Chapter 8 uses some *synonymous parallelism*, where the author matches two thoughts or ideas to clarify and expand meaning. An example is in Proverbs 8:8
“All the words of my mouth are **righteous**;
there is **nothing twisted or crooked** in them.”

“Nothing twisted or crooked” clarifies the word “righteous”.

Where do you see synonymous parallelism in Proverbs 8?

Leader help: We believe that God’s Word is completely true and authoritative, and observing and recognizing parallelism can help us more fully understand and treasure His Word.

There are many lines of synonymous parallelism, but some examples include:

1:1, 1:6, 1:9, 1:18, 1:20

2. How is wisdom described in this passage? How does this foreshadow Jesus in His earthly ministry?

Leader help: Wisdom is presented as a woman who is actively calling people to abandon folly and instead hear, follow, and love her, because she offers truth, righteous instruction, abundance, and justice. Jesus is the ultimate wisdom of God who called people to abandon their sin and foolishness and embrace and follow Him as Savior and King. In Jesus's kingdom, the gifts offered here by wisdom are received by faith alone in Jesus.

3. How does Proverbs 8 provoke a deep desire for wisdom?

Leader help: By highlighting the human desires for understanding, truth, justice, wealth, and flourishing, and stating that these realities only come through heeding wisdom's call. Ultimately, these desires are met in Jesus, who is Himself the wisdom of God (see 1 Corinthians 1:22-24) - Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life", He is the only one who can ultimately provide flourishing and fulfillment, and He is the only one who provides the security we think we'll get through wealth.

4. Why does God draw our attention back to Genesis 1 and 2 in Proverbs 8:22-31? What do we learn about wisdom and its role in our lives from these verses?

Leader help: By highlighting wisdom's presence at creation, Solomon is showing how God's wisdom applies to every area of life lived in God's creation. There's no way to live in line with reality and how things work apart from fearing God because there isn't some aspect of existence in God's creation where we don't need God. It was because of Adam and Eve's desire to live life on their own terms (defining good and evil for themselves) that sin and death entered the world. God is calling us to live in the fear of Him and in dependence upon His words in all areas of life.

Looking ahead to the New Testament, where we see that Jesus is the one with all of God's wisdom and truth (Colossians 2:1-3), we understand that following Jesus means submitting all of our lives to Him (1 Corinthians 10:31).

APPLICATION

1. How do you know if you are or aren't neglecting God's wisdom? How have you personally neglected treasuring, pursuing, and applying God's wisdom in your daily life?

Leader help: Some may believe that suffering or loss in their lives is evidence of a lack of God's wisdom, but this isn't always true - Jesus suffered much, even having no home of His own. Many of His disciples suffer as well.

2. To follow God is to love what He loves and hate what He hates (see verse 13). When in your own life do you most struggle with arrogance and pride? According to the Bible, why should we fight this and how can we?

3. In the next two weeks, how can we together love and diligently seek wisdom?

Leader help: The most solid ground to stand upon in seeking wisdom is reading, studying, believing, and applying God's Word. Make sure this fact is highlighted.

4. What is the most desirable aspect of God's wisdom, and ultimately Jesus Himself, as described in Proverbs so far?

PRAYER

Call out to Jesus, who holds all of the treasures of God's wisdom, asking Him to shepherd and lead you with wisdom in your day to day life.

Confess to God the specific ways you've neglected to trust in His words.

Ask God to reveal to you the ways that you try to live independent of His words and wisdom so that you can repent and begin to thrive.

Week 11

CHOICES

PROVERBS 9

PASSAGE SUMMARY

The world we live in - wisdom's world - offers two distinct ways to exist: the way of wisdom or the way of folly.

Solomon has spent 8 chapters expounding the beauty of wisdom and the ugly destruction of folly, trying to convince Israel's future leaders to pay close attention to the wisdom he will deliver in Proverbs 10-29. In Proverbs 9, Solomon presents one last contrast between wisdom and folly, personifying each as a woman who is calling for us to receive either life or death.

The gracious offer of God is put on fully display: even if you have lived your entire life in folly you can answer wisdom's invitation and live. Wisdom's way starts with the fear of the LORD, and ends with thriving. The alternative is to refuse to fear God, pursue a life independent of Him, and eventually end up in death with all who choose such folly.

GROUP INTRO

In Proverbs 1-9, what characteristic of God has stuck out to you most?

TEXT

1. Compare and contrast wisdom in verses 1-6 with folly in verses 13-18. What similarities do you notice? What differences do you notice?

Leader help:

Similarities: They share surface-level similarities: both are personified as women, they both extend invites to the "simple", they both offer food & drink.

Differences: wisdom has skillfully prepared a feast which shows her prudence, wealth, and honor, she sends out young women to call guests, offers life.

Folly knows nothing, is alone in her inviting, emphasizes the fleeting pleasure of sin (stolen water, bread eaten in secret), and brings guests into death.

2. Why is it key for someone to begin this pursuit of wisdom by fearing the Holy One?

Leader help: We have to study Proverbs with the rest of Scripture. The reason we do not live with wisdom and the reason that folly is attractive to us is because we naturally reject God due to our sin nature. The primary problem we have is that we want to define reality ourselves, and pursue life on our own terms. To "fear God" is to be in a covenantal relationship with Him. This is really a call to repent and trust God, following Him and depending upon Him.

3. What does this passage teach us about the nature of wisdom and how someone grows in wisdom?

Leader help: Wisdom is life-giving, beautiful, and freely available from the God of grace. It also takes attentiveness, and action on our part. Not only this, but we must walk in humility and recognize we always have more to learn, new ways to grow, and areas of our lives that need God's grace and sanctification - we must respond to the invitation to get wisdom and ready ourselves to receive correction so we can grow.

4. How does Proverbs 1-9 prepare the reader for the rest of the book of Proverbs?

Leader help: Proverbs 1-9 clarifies for us that there really are only two choices: we can choose to try thinking and living on our own terms or we can submit to and trust God, seeking Him and His wisdom in His Word.

These chapters also clarify what's at stake, and it's nothing less than life and death. Refusing to repent and trust God (i.e. refusing to fear Him) is a choice for death and destruction. As we recognize the high stakes, and the gracious invitation to live in God's world, God's way, we're ready to engage with the all-of-life wisdom that comes in chapters 10-29.

APPLICATION

1. God's Word here tells us that a wise person receives correction, while a foolish person rejects correction. Think of the last time someone corrected, exhorted, or rebuked you - what was your response? What does your response reveal about your heart?
2. How would you know whether someone is a scoffer or a wise person? What makes wise people worth the discipleship investment of time and energy?
3. Where in your life are you choosing folly (sin) instead of wisdom (God)? How do you return to wisdom in this area of your life?

Leader help: As Christians, we can always confess, repent, and trust that Jesus's life, death, and resurrection cover our foolishness. There's no ladder to climb or penance to make in order to get right with God. We may, however, by the power of the Spirit, need to strive to change or adjust how we're thinking and living in order to put folly to death.

4. Through Proverbs 1-9, how has God prepared you personally for the lifelong journey of looking for and applying His wisdom to your life?

PRAYER

Confess the ways you've tried to live independent of God and chosen the offer of folly.

Ask God to intervene in the lives of those around you who regularly reject Him, don't fear Him, and are on their way to death.

Ask the Spirit for help to be the wise person who can joyfully receive correction in order to grow.

Week 12

Leader Note: For the next several weeks we're exploring several topics that Proverbs addresses in Chapters 10-29. While some theologians have attempted to categorize the proverbs found in these chapters, no categorization has been ultimately agreed upon. Therefore, we are approaching this section of Proverbs in a way we believe is faithful to the meaning of the text: topically.

It may be helpful to read Pages 6-7 and Pages 10-12 of this guide together to remember the context of Proverbs.

One of the most important facts to remember is that proverbs are not promises, but observations about how life normally works.

HUMILITY

PROVERBS 10:8; 11:2; 15:25; 16:5

SUMMARY

The Bible is full of passages that call us to humble ourselves or highlight the benefit of humility. But what role does humility play in living a wise life?

Without humility, we can't even begin to walk the path of wisdom. Proverbs 1:7, the theme verse for the entire book, tells us that we have to start with fearing God. You can't have awe of God if you have a high view of yourself.

Not only this, but someone who is humble is someone willing to receive rebuke, instruction, correction, and help. If you believe you can thrive on your own, you won't seek wisdom, and you won't receive it.

The ultimate danger of pride is that God opposes it. We were never meant to try to take God's place. If we try to climb above God and others, we will eventually receive judgment and destruction. But if we will repent of pride and trust Jesus in all of His goodness, grace, and holiness, He will lift us to the highest possible place: sharing in His glory and honor (Eph. 2:6; 1 Pet. 1:7).

GROUP INTRO

Who in your life has been an example of humility?
What is it like to be around that person?

TEXT

1. Read Proverbs 10:8. How is someone “receiving commandments” a demonstration of humility? Why will a “babbling fool” come to ruin in God’s world?

Leader help: To “receive commandments” is to take a lowly, humble position in life and admit to yourself that you’re not in charge. The wise person will recognize that God is the ultimate authority, and He has placed authority figures in our lives (at work, in school, in the church, in the home, in government).

A “babbling fool” is someone who rejects God’s words and is more concerned to make themselves heard. If you take the posture of a know-it-all, you reject your status as a creature made by God. This pride is at the heart of unbelief, and it ultimately manifests in a rejection of God’s gift of salvation in Jesus.

2. Read Proverbs 11:2. Where else in Scripture are the proud told that they will receive disgrace and shame? Why does wisdom come to the humble?

Leader help: The warning about the proud being shamed is throughout the Bible: Isaiah 2:12; Daniel 5:20; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5. Wisdom comes to those who ask God for it. But in order to ask for wisdom, we must first recognize we lack it, and that God is generous enough to give it.

3. Why is the proud person contrasted with a widow in Proverbs 15:25? What does this proverb tell us about God's responses to pride?

Leader help: Widows in the Bible are often presented as particularly vulnerable. In ancient times, they would have been especially very dependent on others, meaning they likely lived with more humility. This is the opposite of the proud person who owns property and thinks they're untouchable.

This proverb shows us that God is personally and actively against the proud. He may allow the proud person to get more and more proud as a way to hand them over to their sin so He can judge them on Judgment Day, or He might tear down all that the proud build for themselves in this life.

4. What's it mean to be an "abomination to the LORD" like we read in Proverbs 16:5? How is this proverb both a warning and good news?

Leader help: "Abomination" translates a Hebrew word that essentially means "very despicable" - this is someone or something that God absolutely hates.

God's hatred of pride should drive us to cry out for His mercy, forgiveness, and grace. The good news is that God is gracious, as we ultimately see in Christ. It's also good news that God will judge the proud and arrogant who refuse to repent and believe the gospel: we can be certain that God won't let pride go unpunished.

APPLICATION

1. In Matthew 11:25-30, the only place where Jesus tells us about the core of Himself, He tells us that He is “gentle and lowly” (the word translated “lowly” could be “humble”). What about this lowly and humble Lord is most amazing to you?

Leader help: In terms of practical application, exploring who Jesus is and how He treats us, even in our worst sin, is one of the best ways for us to grow in humility. Jesus is, by His very nature, gentle and humble - He is accessible to anyone who comes to Him, and He deals gently with all who come to Him.

Here are some other passages to explore related to this concept: Matt. 14:13-14; Heb. 4:14-16; John 6:37.

2. How would you explain the root and source of pride? What are some of the ways God deals with human pride?

3. Read Philippians 2:3-8. How will we practically live out this call to humility? How can we as a group ensure that we're pursuing having "the mind of Christ"?

Leader help: The first step is to thank Jesus for living for us, dying for us, and rising for us. He was under no obligation to save us, but freely chose to save us even when we were His enemies. The fact that we needed saving, and that we were saved without contributing a single thing to our salvation, should humble us.

Author Karl Graustein gives these suggestions for growing in humility:

- 1. Pray for more humility.*
- 2. Understand the immense difference between God and us.*
- 3. Be aware of your weaknesses and limitations.*
- 4. Study God's promises to the humble (see James 4:8-10).*
- 5. Study creation.*
- 6. Spend time with people who are more gifted than you.*
- 7. Learn a new skill.*
- 8. Spend time with humble people.*
- 9. Spend time with people who are honest with you about yourself.*
- 10. Serve others.*

4. Read 1 Peter 5:5-8. How are you tempted to live in self-sufficient pride? What concerns, worries, or burdens do you need to give to God in light of this?

PRAYER

Confess your pride to God however it may show up specifically in your life (self-sufficiency, arrogance, self-focus, self-hatred, not praying, not asking for input, etc.)

Week 13

OUTRAGE & ANGER

PROVERBS 14:29; 15:18; 19:11

SUMMARY

Dane Ortlund writes that *“the Old Testament speaks of God being ‘provoked to anger’ by His people dozens of times [...] But not once are we told that God is ‘provoked to love’ or ‘provoked to mercy.’ His anger requires provocation; His mercy is pent up, ready to gush forth.”*²

This is the opposite of what we see around us. Many in our culture seem ready to strike or able to jump from calm to outraged in seconds. The impact of anger and outrage are becoming more frequent within the church as well.

In Proverbs we see that being slow to anger is being wise. The call of wisdom is to pursue God, who is the source of patience, and ask Him to make us who are so prone to outrage more like Him. We need God to change us from the inside out, something He’s promised to do for those who trust in Jesus.

² Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*, page 148.

GROUP INTRO

This week we're talking about the wise way to handle anger. Being wise with anger starts with awareness, so, of the following places, where do you most often feel angry:

On the road, at work, or at home?

Why?

TEXT

1. Read Proverbs 14:29, Proverbs 15:18, and Proverbs 16:32. What stands out to you and why?

Leader help: Several key observations include:

- "Slow to anger" is mentioned in each proverb and assumed to be valuable & desirable.
- It isn't anger itself being discussed, but how a person responds to or expresses their anger. Anger is neither good nor bad - it's how it's expressed that needs to be addressed.
- Circumstances are not mentioned. We often speak of someone or something "making us mad", but these proverbs indicate that the wise person isn't overcome by their emotions.
- A person can be known by their "slowness to anger" or by their foolish lack of self-control. If we want to know how wise we're living, we might want to ask others how they perceive us.

2. Read Exodus 34:4-6. What is the connection between God's character (He is slow to anger) and living wisely? In other words, why is it wise to be slow to anger?

Leader help: Our ultimate pursuit in becoming wise is to become like God, who is Himself slow to anger. Since God created the world, and He is slow to anger, to pursue and cultivate this characteristic in our own lives is to live more in line with reality. It also shows God's character to others, which is what we as image bearers should be all about.

Additionally, sinful human anger will not produce righteousness (see James 1:19-20). Our goal as humans is to represent and enjoy God, and God is righteous. Therefore, our sinful anger takes us in the complete opposite direction of where we need to head in order to thrive.

3. Think of a specific biblical example of how and when God expresses anger. How is this different than human expressions of anger? Why is God's anger both terrifying and good?

Leader help: Some examples include: Judges 2:11-13; Mark 3:1-5. God's anger is always an intentional, righteous, decision on His part in response to sin or evil. The fact that God is angry at sin shows His goodness and love, but it is terrifying because we are sinners. This should drive us to see our need for salvation.

Differences: We are often overtaken by our anger, and express it (or suppress it) in ways that are self-centered, destructive, and unloving. James 4:1-3 also explains that we often get angry when we don't get what we want.

4. Where or when in Scripture do we see God demonstrating that He is slow to anger? Why is it good news that God is slow to anger?

Leader help: Hosea 11:8-9; Jonah 3:10; Acts 9:4-6; 1 Timothy 1:15-16; Acts 17:29-31.

APPLICATION

1. The goal of pursuing wisdom is to live and become like God, so where in your life do you need God's grace and power to be more patient, gentle, or slow to anger? What are some ways you can fight for holiness in this area?

Leader help: Sometimes we separate the gospel from our personal growth in holiness, but the gospel is what empowers and motivates our growth in holiness - make sure to draw attention back to Jesus as you discuss becoming more like Him. For an example of this, see Romans 6:1-6.

2. How do these proverbs challenge you to think differently about God, yourself, and your own anger?
3. In what ways does Jesus' sacrificial death display both God's outrage toward sin and His mercy toward you? What might be the personal impact of meditating on this truth regularly?

4. How will studying God's character - seen most clearly in Jesus - transform our own impatience, pride, and outrage?

PRAYER

Charles Spurgeon once wrote,

"Do not say, 'I cannot help having a bad temper.' Friend, you must help it. Pray to God to help you overcome it at once, for either you must kill it, or it will kill you. You cannot carry a bad temper into heaven."

And R.C. Sproul once said,

"How long did God endure your unbelief before you were redeemed? If not for the long-suffering of God, we would perish."

In light of these truths:

Confess your pride and sinful anger to God, and ask for His help to put these to death.

Ask the Spirit to specifically transform you so that you are patient, gentle, and kind even in the most agitating circumstances.

Thank Jesus for having mercy on you, and for being patient with you in the midst of your sin.

Week 14

FAMILY MATTERS

PROVERBS 19:13-14; 22:6; 18:22

SUMMARY

The family we grow up with, as well as the family we may have with a spouse, makes a huge impact upon our lives. Yet the busyness of modern life makes it difficult for us to step back and ask foundational questions such as, "What is family for?" Living wisely with family requires us to think about the answer from a biblical perspective.

The family is God's invention, given to provide order, protection, and structure to human existence, as well as making a way for God's glory to spread. God defines the proper design, structure, and purposes of family, and a God-honoring family acts like a training ground where we learn to trust, love, obey, and honor others, ultimately learning how to do the same with God.

But the story of Scripture shows us that families - even those chosen by God to carry His covenant promises forward - are deeply broken by sin. Even our closest, most trustworthy relationships need the redemption and power of the gospel.

GROUP INTRO

What has been your favorite family vacation? Why?

TEXT

1. Read Proverbs 19:13. What do we need to remember about the author and audience as we interpret this proverb? Thinking back on Proverbs 1-9, what could a son do that would harm his family and make him foolish?

Leader help: The original audience was comprised of males, which is why the pain of a father and the agitation of quarreling wife are highlighted. It's also true that a foolish son or daughter is ruin to his/her mother, and that a husband's quarreling is agitating.

A foolish son might:

Live in unbelief (violating Proverbs 1:7), prioritize wealth or status over wisdom, commit adultery, participate in crime, ignore or not learn God's Word, give into laziness, etc.

2. The author wants us to imagine a house with a leaking roof as we think about a quarreling (constantly combative, argumentative) wife (or husband). How is quarreling with a spouse an offense to God? What might combativeness reveal about someone's heart?

Leader help: This kind of behavior is the opposite of God. God is our helper, He strengthens, encourages, empowers, and warns us for our good. Someone who is constantly combative tears us down, slowly bringing lasting damage.

3. Read Proverbs 22:6. Although this verse is not a promise (see pages 6-7 of this guide), it does offer genuine wisdom. What kind of training, guidance, and correction is most important according to Proverbs (hint: see Proverbs 1:7)? What other passages in the Bible help us know how to train children?

Leader help: The most important thing for children to learn is who God is, what He has revealed in the Bible, and how to know Him - in other words, the most important thing for children to learn is to fear the LORD.³

Other passages that direct our discipline and training of children include Ephesians 6:4 and 2 Timothy 3:14-15.

4. Read Proverbs 18:22. What does this verse tell us about marriage? How does this verse reveal God's grace and goodness toward humanity?

Leader help: Marriage is a gift from God, and He is active in true marriages. From a human perspective, we might be tempted to think we were the only ones involved in pursuing marriage, but God is at work in all of life.

This reveals that God loves to give good gifts, even to the undeserving.

The fact that any sinner can possibly obtain "favor from the LORD" shows just how merciful God is. He has every right to destroy us, but instead brings favor, ultimately in the person and work of Jesus.

³ Here's a helpful article: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/train-up-a-child-in-the-way-he-should-go>

APPLICATION

1. We may be tempted to celebrate the notion of “family first”, but Jesus challenges us to put Him and His mission at the top of our priorities. In what ways have you put family before Jesus?
2. Our families can be sources of profound pain and distrust. If you’re a Christian, how has God’s adoption of you through your faith in Jesus brought healing and redemption to this pain?
3. Proverbs frees us to see “success” in our families differently - it’s not a great job, happy family, good education, or athletic ability that ultimately matters. With this in mind, what are some ways we can encourage one another when we feel like failures because family is difficult?
4. Read Romans 8:15-18. What will we do to help one another remember and believe that, if we have trusted Jesus, we are God’s kids?

PRAYER

Thank God for adopting by grace through faith in Jesus.

Offer Jesus your family-related burdens, confessing any fears or doubts you have about family.

Ask the Spirit to make your group more trusting, more vulnerable, and more holy so that you can live like family.

Week 15

THE TONGUE: TALKING, TYPING, & TEXTING

PROVERBS 12:18; 18:21; 26:28; 29:5

SUMMARY

One of the Bible's frequent warnings has to do with the *tongue*, or how we communicate. Jesus even warned that the person who angrily calls someone a "fool" is, without repentance and faith, in danger of hell.⁴ As one theologian put it, *"Examining one's attitudes and speech are just as important as refraining from homicidal violence."*⁵

But our TV's, social media, texts, and blogs are filled with unexamined foolish speech. As we develop more ways to communicate, we devise more ways to sin. The stakes are incredibly high. As James writes, *"With [the tongue] we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God."*⁶ Our unwise communication, then, is a personal offense against the Holy One. We need His wisdom to bring us to forgiveness and perform desperately needed transformation.

⁴ See Matthew 5:22.

⁵ Jonathan Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, page 183.

⁶ James 3:9.

GROUP INTRO

Several of the most popular websites, blogs, and TV news shows are filled with slander, deception, and exaggerations. Why do you think we enjoy this kind of foolish speech?

TEXT

1. Read Proverbs 12:18; 18:21; 26:28; and 29:5. How is the impact of foolish communication described? Why? What images come to mind when you read these descriptions?

Leader help: The impact is described as stabbings, death, ruin, and entrapping. Our communication has a big impact; foolish words can tear apart trust, ruin reputations, reenforce lies, and lead people to believe false ideas about God.

2. What different kinds of foolish communication are highlighted in these proverbs? How are these kinds of communication different from God's?

*Leader help: **Rash words** (could be translated "thoughtless speech", see Psalm 106:32-33 for an example), **Lies**, **Flattery** (false or deceptive affirmation; see 1 Thessalonians 2:5).*

God is always truthful and His Word is the very standard of truth (John 17:17). God's words are also sustaining and life-giving (Psalm 119:11). We can bank everything on God's words because He is good, gracious, and righteous.

3. In the story of the Bible, what are some key moments that show how God communicates and what He communicates? What does this tell us about Him?

Leader help: Some key moments include:

God speaking creation into existence (Gen. 1:3); God commanding humanity to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28); God cursing the devil and creation (Gen. 3); God making a covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15); God speaking through His prophets (Isaiah 6:8-9); God "communicating" through Jesus, the eternal Word (see John 1:14; Hebrews 1:1-3).

God communicates personally, truthfully, and clearly through His Word, speaking life for the good of undeserving sinners. He also speaks warnings and woes about His justice for those who won't repent. Ultimately, God has spoken a message of grace, truth, and mercy through Jesus.

4. Look again at Proverbs 12:18. How can the "tongue of the wise" bring healing to a person or a community?

Leader help: The one who speaks wisely is one who fears the LORD, and someone who fears God will know and communicate His truthful words. God's words bring healing to us by calling us to turn from the destruction of sin, by clarifying what's true and what's false, by telling us who God is and what He is like, and by reminding us of our value, dignity, and worth in God's sight.

APPLICATION

1. Look again at Proverbs 12:18; 18:21; 26:28; 29:5. Of the foolish kinds of communication, which are you most often tempted towards? Why?
2. How can the gospel help us be wiser in our communication?

Leader help: If God did not speak wrath and condemnation, but grace, to us, we are free from guilt, shame, and fear, and empowered by His Spirit to walk in the freedom of wise speech. We are now ambassadors for Jesus, speaking about the reconciliation available through faith in Him. We can also trust that God will either put deserved condemnation on Jesus or on those who refuse to repent, and we therefore don't need to use our words to tear others down.

3. Think of a time in your life when a biblically wise person spoken life-giving truth to you. What was the impact of this? How did their words help you?
4. The church must be a place where foolish slander, accusations, flattery, deception, and other evil communication is continually repented of; how can we make our group a place where wise communication thrives and we repent of foolish communication?

5. Think of the media you consume on a weekly basis (social media, TV, movies, blogs, etc.). Are any of these impacting how you view others or speak to/type about/text others? Are you willing to get rid of these for the sake of faithfulness to Jesus? Why or why not?

PRAYER

Confess to God the specific ways you have foolishly communicated, and the inner motivations that drive you to do this.

Praise God for providing warnings, wisdom, and grace through Proverbs.

Ask the Holy Spirit to transform how you think about, speak about, and talk to those around, especially those with whom you disagree.