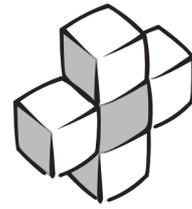




SMACC

Making Disciples of Jesus Christ



Bible Study Series:

Proverbs



Our Mission:

To glorify God together in response to his grace

by making disciples of Jesus Christ

About These Studies

These studies were written by various SMACC leaders for use among university students. You are most welcome to use and adapt these studies for your own context. Where you do so please provide the following acknowledgment.

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Study 1: “The Beginning of Knowledge” (Proverbs 1:1-7)

Getting started

1. What comes to mind when you think of a wise person? What makes a person wise?

Context

2. Divide the passage into smaller sections and give each section a title.

Verse	Title
<i>1:1</i>	<i>(One of) The author(s) of Proverbs, King Solomon.</i>
<i>1:2 – 1:6</i>	<i>The purpose of Proverbs.</i>
<i>1:7</i>	<i>Proverb’s thesis on wisdom.</i>

3. Before we begin with Proverbs 1:1-7, quickly check out the following verses through Proverbs. Who is talking to whom, and what sort of ‘talk’ is happening?

1:8

3:1-2

4:1

5:1

7:1

8:32-34

The gist of these passages (don’t go into very deep discussion about each verse!) is that the first 9 chapters of Proverbs are written like a wise father (in this case, Solomon) speaking to a child, imploring him to take hold of his words of wisdom.

4. Briefly pick out any chunk of verses from Proverbs 10-31. How does it differ in style from chapters 1-9? How do you think 1-9 relates with 10-31?

The aim here is to realise that 10-31 is the part of Proverbs we often think of when we think of the book of Proverbs – a treasure trove of wise sayings. Chapters 1-9 on the other hand gives us the framework by which we view the Proverbs.

Proverbs 1-9 is a sort of introduction to the chapters 10-31. It is kind of like a ‘prep talk’ rather than a ‘pep talk’ – the scene is of a father saying, “Come sit down and listen to what life is all about.” Chapters 1-9 provides the framework to view the wise sayings of chapters 10-31, imploring the listener choose wisdom over ignorance. To see how that works, let us begin with the ‘introduction to the introduction’ – Proverbs 1:1-7.

Digging in

5. Read Proverbs 1:1 and 1 Kings 4:29-34. Why is it so incredible that these are the proverbs “of Solomon”?

We get a snapshot of Solomon in 1 Kings 4:29-34; he was given wisdom from God ‘beyond measure’. He was not just wise in the ‘sage wisdom’ way we might be thinking, he spoke of proverbs and songs and of plants and animals. He was famed for his immense God-given wisdom. And this is a book of his proverbs – short wise sayings based on a general truth, common sense or experience.

6. Based off Proverbs 1:2-6, who and what is the book of Proverbs for?

Who is the book of Proverbs for?	
Proverbs 1:5	<i>This book doesn’t think it is only for foolish or young Christians. Verses 5-6 indicate that it is also for the wise, and those who already understand. “Add to their learning” indicates that growing in wisdom is a lifelong process.</i>

What is the purpose of Proverbs?	
Proverbs 1:2,6	<i>Intellectual virtues (growing in wisdom, understanding)</i>
Proverbs 1:3a, 4-5	<i>Instrumental virtues (wise dealing, prudence, discretion)</i>
Proverbs 1:3b	<i>Moral or communal virtues (righteousness, justice and equity)</i>

*Hopefully this specific division of the purposes of Proverbs isn’t too complicated. The aim here is not to end this question with a generic “To make people wise” kind of answer. Proverbs is a book of wisdom that gives knowledge and guidance **in line with God’s moral standard** (1:3b). This is an important idea when considering 1:7, where the idea of the “fear of the LORD” comes in. Try to get your group to understand these distinctions, but don’t fret if they cannot see the differences immediately.*

7. According to Proverbs 1:7, what is the key difference between wise people and fools?

The fear of the LORD is the key to gaining knowledge and wisdom; fools despise wisdom and instruction. It postulates that to be TRULY wise, you need the fear of the LORD. Fools on the other hand despise wisdom and instruction. If our logical train of thought now is ‘fear of the LORD = beginning of knowledge’, then fools, who despise wisdom and instruction, do not fear the LORD.

8. What does ‘fear of the LORD’ mean? How does it link with wisdom?

To fear this Lord involves knowing and trusting him, since he knows what is best for us. While terms like ‘reverence’ and ‘awe’ (which will likely be thrown out during your discussion) are true when it comes to talking about fearing the Lord, let us not dull the sting of the word fear. We should very much fear the Lord; rejecting him and being foolish would mean judgement and death at the hand of this powerful God. Hence, fearing him is a healthy respect for God’s definition of good and evil. It is knowing what God considers wrong and right, humbling ourselves, putting aside our own definitions of right and wrong, and obeying his set of morals. Remember, back in question 6 we talked about how Proverbs also builds up our morals – these are morals in line with God’s high moral standard. We become wise when we understand this.

*Bear in mind that wisdom is an attribute of God; this idea is explored in chapter 8. The Hebrew word used for 'wisdom' here is 'khokhmah' meaning applied knowledge and skill. Hence **the wisdom we gain in Proverbs through fearing the LORD** is more like a practical skill for **living well in God's world, under God's will.***

Fools, who don't fear the Lord, don't acknowledge his standards set for us. They despise wisdom and instruction because they come from the Lord they don't fear. Their destiny is destruction.

*If time permits, it would be good to end by asking them how they would use the book of Proverbs now knowing this. The gist of it should be that we are to **fear the LORD to attain the wisdom buried in Proverbs that guides our lives.***

Here are some supplementary questions you can throw out if your group is struggling.

- 1. What will fearing the Lord mean for how we live? (we will try to live in obedience to his Word)*
- 2. What are the attributes of God? (hopefully wisdom comes up, it might be a lightbulb moment for them)*

Application

9. How has this study changed the way you view the book of Proverbs?
10. In what areas of your life do you think you need the guidance of Proverbs to increase your 'wisdom quotient'?

Prayer

- Pray that we would fear God, being wise and avoiding foolishness, living in the knowledge of his power and Word.
- Ask God, who gives generously, to give your bible study group wisdom to understand the book of Proverbs over the next few weeks, to make us wise people.

Study 2: “Wisdom Says, ‘Don’t be Stupid’” (Proverbs 1:8-33)

Getting started

1. Why is it so annoying to hear someone tell you, “I told you so”?

Simply because that person did try to tell you and you didn’t listen.

Digging in

2. Read Proverbs 1:8-33. Divide the passage into smaller sections with a short title for each.

Verses	Title
V8-16	<i>Exhortation to listen to instruction and to refrain from living like sinners.</i>
V17-19	<i>Wise principle: Living in folly and sin will end up in death; it is a trap.</i>
V20-22	<i>Plea of wisdom: Stop being foolish and listen to what Wisdom says.</i>
V23	<i>Wisdom’s warning: If you ignore me, I will make myself clear to you</i>
V24-25	<i>The Issue: Wisdom calls and her hearers ignore her deliberately.</i>
V26-27	<i>Wisdom's warning: If you don't listen, she will show you that you are foolish by humiliating (humbling) you.</i>
V28-31	<i>Plea of sinners: Now when they want to turn to Wisdom, she will ignore them.</i>
V32	<i>Wise principle: Foolishness leads to destruction</i>
V33	<i>Reminder that those who listen to Wisdom shall live securely.</i>

3. Why is Solomon so concerned about how wisdom is treated?

First, we need to see that he is truly concerned. The word “hear” sounds neutral but in Hebrew, Sha.ma means to listen, obey, understand, etc. Solomon also wants his hearer to keep (as in follow) as opposed to forsaking wisdom. So, why? V9 shows that wisdom is precious like jewels. Look back to V7, Solomon is so concerned that people listen (not just hear) and obey wisdom (and instruction) because he holds to the principle that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge i.e. the chief part of knowledge is to fear God because He is God. In other words, the wisest thing for a man is to treat God really as God. If a person does not bother to listen or to keep wisdom, he wouldn’t fear God. No, he will despise wisdom and instruction; he is a fool (V7). It is

important to re-establish the premise of the previous study and the purpose of Proverbs, as V8 & 9 hang on V7.

4. What do the sinners offer? Will they satisfy?

The sinners in V11 offer the autonomy and freedom to do as you like without the need to reason. This is the opposite of listening and obeying wisdom as wisdom will never allow anything unreasonable to happen. That's not all; the sinners also promise that freedom will take from people what belongs to them (their lives and their possessions). This might satisfy for a while but for a very short while only. Solomon says that they are more stupid than a bird who sees someone laying a trap and runs away. These sinners will die because of their sin and they don't even see the trap that they are in. Being happily sinful is not cool, it's foolish.

5. Why is Ms. Wisdom so noisy? Why is she such an attention seeker?

No one cries, raises her voice and cries out unless there is something urgent to say. Also, note that she is in a few different places; she is everywhere and her urgent message concerns everyone. It comes in the form of rhetorical questions. "How long...?" in V22 shows that it's been too long. There is the sense of "you simple ones have been simple for far too long!" and "It's been too long that scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge!" Logically speaking, if you have been doing something foolish for far too long, then you should stop. Wisdom is pleading with people and making them realise (through the rhetorical questions) that they need to stop being foolish and stupid.

6. What happens if we don't listen to the cries of Ms Wisdom? Why?

According to Ms Wisdom, (V23) she will make herself and her message known to those who ignore her. She will pour out (Hebrew renders the word to mean gush forth; flow; spring) her spirit on them - there is no escaping it. In other words, whatever she has to say will be in your face when the time comes. Wait, there's more. We get a more visual image of V23 in V26-27; she will mock the foolish people when they suffer as a result of their foolishness. This is Ms Wisdom humbling the fool who doesn't recognise his folly; this is her passionately saying, "I told you so!" V24-25 Wisdom provides the reasons for this: we refused to listen, did not heed her words, ignored her counsel and would have none of her reproof. This chiasm locks the problem (V24-25) in the middle and surrounding 24-25 is what happens to the 'simple ones'.

7. Why is Ms Wisdom so harsh?

This is related to question 6. Ms Wisdom has an agenda, in V23 she wants to make herself known to fools. Otherwise, they would die if they continued living their way (V18-19). However, there is such a thing as too late. Ms Wisdom was urgently speaking since V20 but now, she will not answer these fools (V28) neither will they find her. V31 These stupid people must face the consequences of choosing to be stupid - V31 they will eat the fruit of their way since they chose not to treat God (V7) as God or listen to wisdom (V8-9, 29-30).

8. From her conclusion (V32-33), what is Ms Wisdom really saying about herself?

V33 Only those who listen to her will dwell securely and be at ease and as for those who turn away and are far too comfortable living as they are, they will all die. In other words, she wants us to know that we cannot live without her - sounds cliché but that is the truth. Without wisdom, our stupid decisions will ultimately kill us and perhaps others too.

Application

9. Would we regard what our parents teach us as wisdom? Have we given them the honour that is due them?

Help people to see that though the instruction and teaching of our parents may not be faithful to Scripture and may even be at some point, heretical, they were given to us by God. More often than not, what they want us to learn is wise and helpful. Ultimately, we need godly wisdom to learn how to use their instruction and teaching to serve God's purposes. Sometimes, God uses their human wisdom to teach us to fear Him more.

10. How are we enticed by sin? Have we given in to its promotion?

The question focuses on how we are tempted - we need to recognise and help others recognise that when we say, "The temptation was so strong, I just couldn't resist...", we are just being too indulgent to give ourselves excuses. More often than not, we put ourselves in unhelpful positions and cause ourselves to sin or worse, cause others to sin. Examples: Perhaps it's unhelpful and unwise to dress a certain way when we meet certain people; For the ladies, maybe it's not the best idea to wear fitting/revealing clothing when meeting with men. Men are weak and they struggle all the time with lust. For the men, are crude jokes helpful? Are younger Christians stumbled when they see that Christians are equally as crude as non-Christians?

11. How different would your life look like if you were treating God as God as compared to those who don't?

It is important to see that there is a very clear line distinguishing wisdom and folly. We need to help people see that if we listen to instruction and obey teaching - if we follow the way of wisdom, we will look, talk, behave and decide differently from everyone else. The objective here is to get them to reflect and perhaps admit how they aren't so different from the world (i.e. how they are equally as foolish and sinful). It doesn't matter if they don't give you a clear goal with an improvement plan. No, the goal is to get people thinking hard. Wisdom sets the Christian apart from the world - in a sense, it makes us holy. Here, we also need to see that folly is tightly, closely associated with sin (no one can argue that sin is stupid because it offends God). If people give vague answers that are moralistic for the sake of avoiding the answer, kindly ask, "don't/ can't non-Christians do the same?" (if you have a gentler way of asking, go ahead). Ultimately, we need to see that living wisely according to the wisdom that God gives is not an option; staying away from folly and sin is not a friendly suggestion but a command.

Study 3: “Listen up, Son!” (Proverbs 2-4)

Getting started

1. Think of the last time you put a lot of effort into doing something. What led you to expending so much time and energy into this ‘something’?

Context

2. What has the fear of the Lord got to do with wisdom?

Overview of the text

God, the source of all wisdom.	2:6-8, 3:19-20
Seek wisdom.	2:1-4; 3:1, 3:3, 3:21; 4:1-10, 4:20
Wisdom in action.	3:9, 3:11, 3:25, 3:27-31, 4:14-15, 4:24-27
Perks of wisdom / what wisdom brings about.	2:5, 2:9-20, 3:2, 3:4, 3:13-18, 3:22-24, 4:1b, 4:6, 4:8-12, 4:22, 4:26b
The upright vs the wicked in God’s sight; and their outcome.	2:21-22, 3:32-35

Digging in and Application

3. From the verses in Box 2, what do they say about the *process* of seeking wisdom?

“make your ear attentive”, “incline your heart”, “call out”, “seek it like silver”, “search for it...”
These verses show us that seeking wisdom is an active process that requires our whole selves. There is no quick fix – Solomon doesn’t come up with a list of “10 STEPS TO BECOMING A GREAT PERSON!”. Rather, the process of seeking and gaining wisdom is ongoing, requiring constant effort of our hearts and minds. (It might help to bring up that being wise ≠ being legalistic; because it isn’t blind obedience to a set of rules, but rather – it’s obedience that comes with understanding and fearing God).

- a. How are you actively seeking wisdom? (If you aren’t, what’s stopping you?)

4. Proverbs 3:5-6 are widely memorised verses. What do these verses (along with 3:7) teach us about what it means to be wise?

*To be wise is to trust in the Lord completely with **all** our hearts, to acknowledge him in **all** our ways; emphasis on **ALL** – indicating that we are to look to God first and completely submit to Him in every area of our lives. This also means recognizing our limits – humbly acknowledging our weaknesses and hence, not leaning on our own understanding (v5), not being wise in our own eyes (v7).*

- a. What are the areas in your life in which you are prone to thinking that you'll do just fine without God?

While many of us would readily admit and recognize that we are completely helpless and in need of God in terms of our salvation, our justification (the 'spiritual' things), we might be tempted to be self-sufficient in the more 'secular' things (e.g academics, wealth, family, friends) – and that we don't need God's wisdom since it doesn't really seem like it's His domain. But we'll see in the rest of Proverbs that there really shouldn't be this distinction between the 'secular' and 'spiritual' realm – God's wisdom is applicable in every area of our lives.

5. Why does it make sense to do what v5-7 says? (ref: Box 1)

God is the source of all wisdom (v6), who created heaven and earth. He built the principles of wisdom into the way the world works. God's Wisdom is what holds the world together, running in order.

*In order to live the good life here as inhabitants of God's created world, it would only make sense to live in accordance to His wisdom, the way He's ordered things – following His definitions of good and evil, wise and foolish; rather than leaning on our own understanding and being wise in our own eyes. Doing so is really saying: "Hey God, I think I can care for myself (whom **You** have made) and **Your** world better than You can."*

Note that God's the creator of all heavens and earth and not just the "church" – and so, in relation to the previous question – it makes sense to seek to live in accordance to God's wisdom in all things, all areas.

- a. Are there times in which God's ways seem inconvenient / "impractical" to us? What do we tend to do in these situations?

6. What do 3:9,11 and 3:27-31 imply about wisdom?

Wisdom (righteousness) / foolishness (wickedness) don't exist in a vacuum – they're relational and they affect how we relate to God (3:9, 11) and those around us (3:27-31).

To be wise includes properly recognising God as LORD of all (e.g our wealth) and readily accepting the discipline of our Good Father. To be wise is also to be loving to those around us (e.g looking after their needs when it's within our capabilities to do so).

a. How has wisdom (or our lack of it) affected how we treat God and one another?

7. Compare Proverbs 3:4 with Luke 2:52. What has Jesus got to do with all that we've discussed so far – and what has this got to do with us?

While we don't want to lazily jump to the conclusion that "Jesus is always the answer/Everything points to Jesus" – there are obvious similarities between what Solomon says to his son in Proverbs 3:4 and the way in which Jesus is described in Luke 2:52.

Jesus, as Solomon's greatest Son, is wisdom personified, living the perfect life. He completely trusted and submitted to the Father – even to the point of death on the cross.

a. What has all of this got to do with us?

An honest examination of ourselves would reveal that we have indeed been wise in our own eyes, we have failed to trust in God completely and we've been stupid.

The fact that Jesus is the true, perfect Wise person that we've failed to be, is great news to us. The wise thing to do as people living on this side of the cross then, is to rely on Jesus daily; actively engaging our hearts and minds that we would imitate His ways.

8. Look again at the verses in box 5. Is this what's observed in the world today? How then, are we to understand these verses?

These verses (and almost throughout the whole of Proverbs) seem to present too simplistic a view of how the world works, as though it runs by the cause and effect mechanism. The righteous will prosper and inherit the land and be blessed, those who are wicked will be cut off from the land and their house be cursed.

Taking a quick look at the world - this surely does not always seem to be the case. The wicked thrive and prosper, and their 'house' seem to be 'blessed'. Other parts of the Bible - e.g. Job's unjust suffering, Paul's anticipation of persecution for those who live godly lives (2 Tim 3:12) – also seem to be at odds with these verses.

The quick and obvious answer would be 'the fall'. While we cannot deny that being wise and righteous do lead to some form of goodness and prosperity here and now, (and that being foolish and wicked is destructive to oneself and society) the Fall has resulted in a faulty system. We do not always see the positive results of wisdom and the negative effects of foolishness.

Thankfully though - as God's people who live on this side of the cross, we are fortunate to be given a glimpse of the 'big picture' - that sometimes, the good consequences of wisdom will only be experienced when Jesus returns; only then will we truly inherit the 'land' - living under God's perfect rule. Similarly, we can also trust that God will avenge all evil on Judgment Day, that folly of this world truly be revealed for what it is, and that the wicked will be cut off from God.

9. How are you tempted to be discouraged by the fact that those who foolishly reject God and live their own way seem to be doing so much better than those who “seek wisdom” and “fear the Lord”? What keeps you going in these moments of discouragement?

Study 4: “Wise is He Who Resists Temptation”

(Proverbs 5-7)

Getting started

1. When was the last time you felt tempted to do something that you knew it’s wrong? What was it that was convincing you to do it?

Recap

From last week’s study, we learned that:

1. God is the source of all wisdom, by wisdom He created the world.
 2. The process of seeking and gaining wisdom is ongoing, requiring constant effort of our hearts and minds.
 3. To be wise is to trust in the Lord completely with **all** our hearts, to acknowledge Him in **all** our way and completely submit to Him in **every area** of our lives.
 4. This also means recognizing our limits – humbly acknowledging our weaknesses and hence, not leaning on our own understanding.
 5. To be wise is also to be loving to those around us.
 6. Jesus is wisdom personified, living the perfect life.
2. **Read Proverbs 5-7.** Divide them into sections and give them a short title each.

Verses	Title
5:1-6	<i>Characteristics of an adulteress.</i>
5:7-23	<i>Young man, keep yourself away from the adulteress.</i>
6:1-5	<i>Feel the urgency of saving yourself.</i>
6:6-11	<i>Stop being lazy.</i>
6:12-19	<i>What God hates: intentionally doing evil</i>
6:20-35	<i>Young man, keep yourself away from the adulteress.</i>
7:1-23	<i>Characteristics of an adulteress.</i>
7:24-27	<i>Young man, keep yourself away from the adulteress.</i>

Digging in

Read Proverbs 5:1-6; 7:1-23

3. **Read 5:3-4 and 7:10-21**, what are the characteristics of the adulteress? How does she tempt people to commit adultery?
 - *What she offers is always attractive (sweet like honey, smoother than oil), but in the end, you will realize that she will bring no benefit but destruction into your life (bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword) [5:3-4]*
 - *She looks good in appearance [6:25; 7:10], but wily of heart (translated as having crafty intent in NIV). She lies in wait to seduce her prey.*
 - *She even looks religious on the outside [7:14], but on the inside she is an unfaithful woman who has already devised her plan to commit adultery.*
 - *She offers sexual intimacy and satisfaction to her prey, the young man.*
 - *She offers security, that no one will realise, and he will not face the consequence of the act of adultery because her husband is not at home. [7:19-20]*
4. **Read 5:5-6** What future is this adulteress going to face?
 - *She is heading to death, signifying that she will one day face the consequence of what she has done. Her sin will not be left unpunished.*
 - *This is because she does not think about the path of life; her path is not right, but she does not know it.*
5. In our life, what else seems to have the similar characteristics as this adulteress and is tempting us to sin?
 - *There are many sinful temptations in life that offer similar things: our heart desires it, it gives instant gratification, no one will realize if we do them.*
 - *E.g. watching pornography, watching videos from an illegal source, stealing, telling lies to others for selfish convenience, etc.*

Read Proverbs 6:1-19

6. Meaning of "Putting up security": Providing a pledge for someone else's loan.

The passage is setting up a scenario where you co-signed on a loan that the other person has no way of paying back, thus leaving you with the responsibility of paying it back, but you don't have the capability of paying it back either.

What did the author tell us to do in this kind of situation? What does it imply?

- *The author is telling us to be humble and plead urgently with our neighbour to save ourselves.*
- *Do not allow yourself to rest until you get out of the situation. It is telling us to have the urgency of saving yourself and preventing this kind of situation.*
- *It implies that being wise means being able to recognize when you are facing great trouble and you need to urgently do something to save yourself from the trouble.*

7. What warnings did the author give to those who are lazy?
- *The ways of the ant are wiser than the ways of lazy people. Because the ant knows to work hard to prepare for its future needs, but lazy people don't.*
 - *The attitude of laziness will bring us poverty which strikes us mercilessly. (or will bring us a desperate situation where we can't even fulfil what we need. E.g. You refuse to do revision throughout your semester, in the end, you struggle to even pass your exam.)*
8. List down the things that God hates. What is their similarity? What future are the wicked people who do these things going to face?
- *Haughty eyes; Lying tongue; Hands that shed innocent blood; Heart that devises wicked plans; Feet that make haste to run to evil; False witness who breathes out lies; One who sows discord among brothers.*
 - *Similarity: these are all sins that people commit intentionally.*
 - *Disaster will come upon them suddenly. When they think that nothing will happen to them no matter what they do, they will be punished one day, and they will be broken beyond healing.*

Read Proverbs 5:7-23; 6:20-35; 7:24-27

9. What are the consequences of adultery?

5:9-14 – *For the Israelites, it will eventually cause them to lose their honour, inheritance and blessing from God to the foreigner. Their unfaithfulness in keeping the marriage covenant becomes their failure of being God's faithful holy nation.*

5:21-23; 7:27 – *God sees the ways of a man and He ponders (ESV) (NIV: examines) his paths. A man will surely be judged by God for his sin. He who commits adultery will face death (same as the adulteress whom we discussed in Q2)*

6:26-35 – *It will cost the adulterer his life. It ignites the jealousy of the husband of the adulteress, he will take revenge against the adulterer, and there is nothing the adulterer can do to compensate him. The adulterer who gets caught will get wounds (physical damage) and dishonour (reputation damage which will never be wiped away)*

10. **Read 5:15-20; 6:20-25** Instead of giving yourself up to commit adultery, what did the author urge us to do?

- *Be sexually satisfied by the wife of your youth alone and not others. Be intoxicated only in her love. (Keep your marriage covenant and love her)*
- *Notice that the author has many times asked us to keep his commandments and teachings. We are asked to love wisdom and live a life of discipline by resisting the temptations from the adulteress. Do not desire the beauty of the adulteress.*
-

Application: Living Out the Life of Wisdom

11. What can we do to promote faithfulness in our lives?

12. Often, we are tempted to be lazy, knowing that there are better things to be done, yet we choose to procrastinate. What are some of the actions we can do to change our laziness?

Study 5: “What is True Wisdom?” (Proverbs 8-9)

Summary Points

Wisdom is not an intellectual thing but a way of living (=able to make right choices in life and discern what is right) from day to day as God’s creation

Chapter 8 - characters of wisdom [WHY we should follow wisdom]

Chapter 9 - way of living in wisdom [HOW we live in wisdom]

Getting Started

1. Who out of the following list of people do you think would give the most reliable advice? Why?

politicians teachers friends family members talk show hosts
work colleagues doctors shop assistants psychologists

To think: whether they made the right/wrong decision, what was the outcome of them trusting that particular source of advice.

Context

In Proverbs 5-7, we read about a father advising his son to be wise and not give in to the lure of the adulteress, but rather, resist the temptation.

Digging in

Read Proverbs 8:1-9:18.

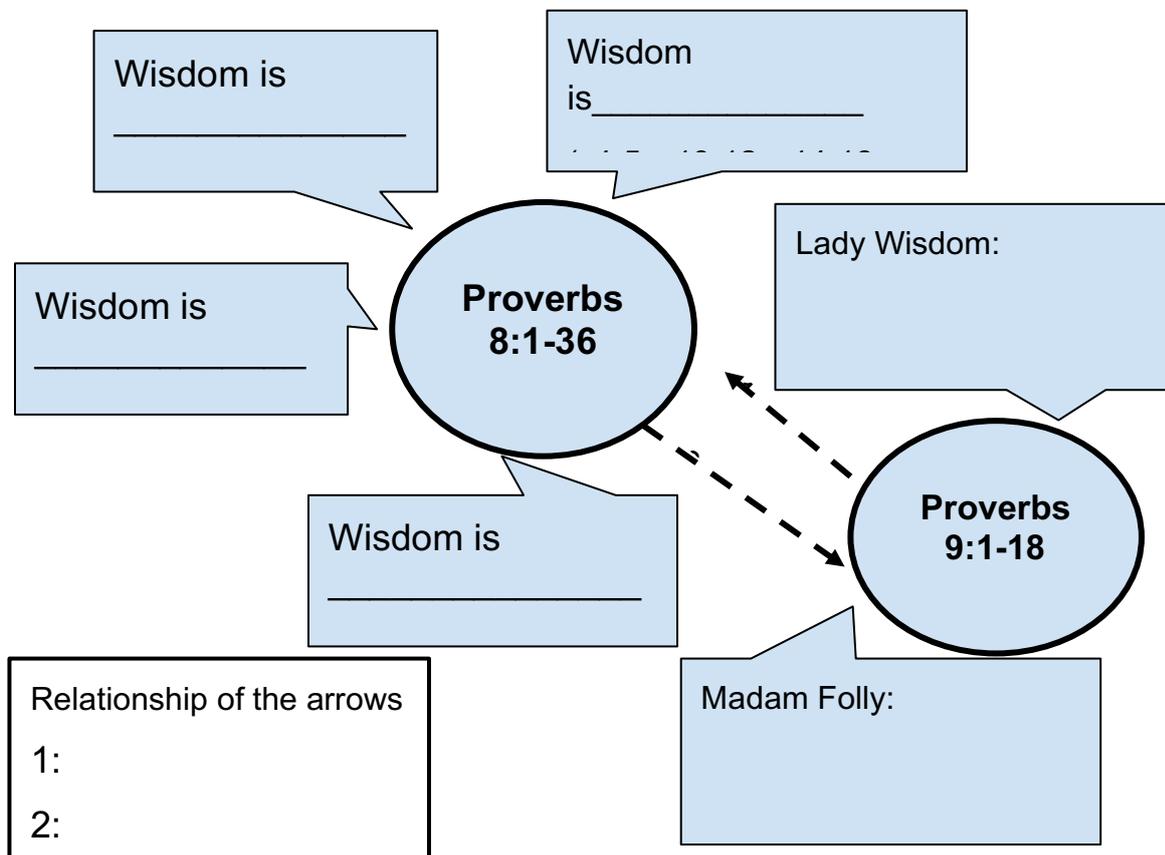
2. Fill in the appropriate descriptions for wisdom in the diagram below.

In Proverbs 8:1-36, Wisdom is

1. Foundational (22-31)
2. Practical (4-5, 10-12, 14-16, 18-21, 32-33, 35-36)
3. Moral (6-9, 13, 20)
4. Relational (17,34)

In Proverbs 9:1-18,

- Lady Wisdom speaks of and offers life by living in the way of wisdom (1-12)
- Madam Folly echoes after her and entices the way of living in folly, which ultimately brings death (13-18)
- The dotted arrows are (1) why listen to wisdom and (2) how to follow wisdom



Proverbs 8:1-36 Characters/Attributes of Wisdom

(1) Wisdom is foundational- She is part of the foundation of creation

3. How is wisdom related with creation?

Words we can observe throughout Chapter 8- *Set up (v23), brought forth (v24, 25), made, made firm(v26, 28), established (v27, 28), assigned (v29), marked out (v29)* points out that there is someone who creates and give purpose to what is designed. We know in Genesis God created the world, He created the world in order; wisdom was there, beside (v27,30) and it is by wisdom the world was made. She existed since creation, predated everything in the world. The creation was a thrilling order, wisdom rejoices; it is not dull. Since God is the creator and we are the creation, we ought to live according to the grain of the Creator, obeying and submitting to the instruction of the Maker.

(II) Wisdom is practical- She equips her listeners in every area of life

4. Who does wisdom call out to and what does she offer?

Wisdom calls out to man (5). The simple learn prudence, the fools learn sense(4-5); her words are righteous(8), easy to understand for those who seek her(9); blessings and wisdom who follow her, she gives life and God’s favour to those who find her whereas death awaits those who hate her (32-36)

5. What are the evidence that we can see in the practicalities of wisdom?

1) v14-16 By wisdom, government and kings rule greatly (The wisdom we are to follow isn’t necessarily a religious or pious wisdom which we only follow when we are associated with God’s people, but it is also shown in governing authorities)

2) v10-11 to choose wisdom over silver and choice gold (3:13-14) as those stones are of lesser importance than gaining wisdom, because the outcome of walking in wisdom, righteousness and justice grants inheritance from above, a far better reward, enduring riches and wealth. It fills treasuries and brings honour as the wise and righteous ones(v18-21)

(III) Wisdom is moral- She teaches her listeners discernment (to differentiate right & wrong)

6. What is the difference between earthly wisdom and wisdom from above? (cf. James 3:13-18)

Earthly Wisdom	Wisdom from above
wickedness, twisted, crooked, evil, prideful, arrogant, perverted speech, bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, boastful, be false in truth (unscrupulous, manipulative), unspiritual, demonic; leads to disorder	truth, order, meekness, produce good conduct, pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, good fruits, impartial and sincere, righteous, just

(IV) Wisdom is relational- She appeals to bring you into relationship with God

7. So far in Proverbs 8, we have seen some of the distinctive attributes of wisdom. How do we see the relationship between wisdom and God? (cf. Colossians 1:15-20, John 1:1-4)

Wisdom points us to life because we find the Lord through wisdom (v35-36), therefore having relationship with God is what gives us life. And how do we have relationship with God when it has been broken already? Jesus. He reconciled us to the Father through the cross. Wisdom identifying a real divine person, distinct with God yet one with God, pre-existing before all things, cocreates, a man who did what God can do, manifested in Jesus Christ.

Proverbs 9:1-18 Way of living in wisdom

8. The metaphor of two paths is evident from chapters 1-9, it is gradually subsumed under the theme of the ‘two women’. First, with the seductive adulteress (2:16-19 and chapters 5-7) vs Wisdom (1:20-33 and 8:1-31) , and now with two characters, Lady Wisdom herself and Madam Folly.

	Lady Wisdom	Compare & Contrast	Madam Folly
Description	(v1-3) Built her house, hewn(carve) her seven pillars, slaughtered her beasts, mixed her wine, sent our servants to call	Both calls out and invites the same audience. MF has no wine to offer, but manages to present stolen water in an enticing way, tempted her audience (makes danger attractive- like the forbidden fruit in Genesis) but LW invites to come in and choose wisdom (choose life)	(v13-15) loud, seductive, foolish, sits at the door of her house
Calls out to	(v4-6) the simple, those who lack sense	Same audience (target the simple-naive gullible, the young who have not decided their course of life).	(v16) those who pass by, simple ones, those lacked sense
Advice Provided	(v10) She warns to leave the simple ways, to fear the Lord = choose wisdom	<i>How does v17 reflect a failure to fear the Lord?</i> If she is the source of what she offers, she doesn't have to steal or eat in secret	(v17) stolen water is sweet, bread eaten in secret is pleasant
Consequences of following	(v6,11) live and walk the way of insight; days multiplied, years added to life	One offers life, one offers death (disguised in pleasure and danger)	(v18) death

9. On the surface, the contrast between the two women throughout chapter 8 and 9 seems mainly to be about adultery. Do you think it is about more than physical adultery? Discuss why or why not.

The book of Proverbs starts a father warning his son of many things, and in particular temptresses who are portrayed as female. For females, this applies the same way, to be wary of the Casanovas of the world.

The idea of casual sex (sex with no 'consequences') is growing increasingly common, and the added element of secrecy that comes with doing it makes it all the more appealing. But just as the highway robbers' promise of 'easy money' is the path of folly (in chapter 1), so the adulteress's offer of 'easy sex' epitomizes the overall folly of seduction?

The woman named 'Folly' stands for the life of foolishness (9:13). To embrace her can indeed be exciting. She promises pleasure (7:18) and secrecy (7:19). However, the writer in Proverbs has clearly argued, all folly is persuasive like that, it will have consequences and will not last (6:29; 6:32-35).

The closing verses of chapter 9 summarize the situation by saying in effect: “You want to end up in the company of the dead? Then go right ahead.” Adultery is exciting, but stupid. To embrace a life of folly is no different.

By contrast, the life of wisdom in Proverbs is personified as Lady Wisdom. She calls on the simple to turn to her and leave their simple ways (9:1-6). She draws a contrast between the scoffer, who scorns the opportunity to learn by abusing the one who rebukes him, and the wise man, who loves to be rebuked for he sees it as an opportunity to grow wiser still. She urges the simple to come to her for life (9:11). Basically, your future is at stake. If you know what’s good for you, follow Lady Wisdom.

Lady Wisdom and Madam Folly thus represent two contrasting world views, and by extension two opposing lifestyles. The stakes are high, the choice ultimately results in either life or death.

Which woman are we going to follow? Proverbs 9 brings us climactically to this choice that we all must make. This choice undeniably will influence our response to all the individual proverbial sayings in chapters 10-31.

10. The recurring theme of fearing the Lord is seen in 9:10. (also in 8:13). Can you see any link between who the Lord is and what it means to fear Him?

We can say wisdom must not only begin with but also continue in the fear of the Lord who saved Israel—for it is this same God that we believe in as Christians today. Just as the Lord was Israel’s Father whom they were to fear, so he is our Father whom we fear and trust. Ultimately, the obtaining of wisdom revolves around not only heeding wisdom’s call, but also relating rightly to the person behind that call. His name is YHWH, our Father. It is not merely King Solomon we are to heed, who imparted wisdom as a father to his son, but we are to heed our heavenly Father, the Lord.

He is the creator and source of wisdom. He sees all we do and knows what we do. He hates sin and punishes the wicked. He loves and approves of godliness and protects the wise. The Lord lovingly disciplines us as a father would his son.

To fear *this* Lord thus involves knowing and trusting him, since he knows what’s best for us. It means not being wise in our own eyes, as Eve was when she ate the forbidden fruit. It involves hating the sin that the LORD hates and seeking to bring a smile to his face in all that we do. To fear him is to forgo pride, and instead to accept his loving reproof.

While ‘reverence’ and ‘awe’ are often used to describe our attitude of *fearing* the Lord, it blunts the sharp edge of the word ‘fear’. It is quite right to be afraid of the Lord. Be very afraid! For if we reject him and follow folly, the resulting bad consequences come not as some automatic impersonal, mechanistic ‘karma’, but at the hand of this personal God.

So there is not quite so much of a gulf between Proverbs and Israel’s history as we might be led to believe. What this means for us practically is that we are to read Proverbs as first and foremost wisdom *for God’s saved people*, rather than simply general wisdom for humanity. Proverbs shows how God’s people are to live in God’s Promised Land under his kingship. It is the fear of *this* Lord, not just any creator God, that is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 9:10).

Application

11. Following up from Q8, how are we still clinging dearly onto the earthly wisdom in many areas of our lives? Why?

We have seen that folly (i.e. living in foolishness (9:13) or not living in the fear of the Lord) will eventually lead to destruction instead of eternal spiritual blessings, even though it seduces us with temporarily attractive rewards.

12. After going through nine chapters of Proverbs, how do you think by knowing who God is can help you start living according to what Lady Wisdom offers i.e. getting you back on track to wise living?

13. For those who have been walking the way of wisdom, what are some ways that we can encourage one another to also follow Lady Wisdom in the aspects of the head, heart and hands?

Study 6: “Righteousness in the Lord” (Proverbs 10)

Context

Proverbs Chapter 10-21 are different from the longer poems of chapters 1-9. From here on out, individual proverbs are grouped into smaller collections and should be taken together to give the reader a more thorough understanding of a specific topic.

Digging in

Read Proverbs 10.

1. Try breaking down Proverbs 10 into different parts. Use topic names as titles (e.g. Work, money, words etc.)

This part is not easy, takes about 30-45 mins just to see the splits as they are very fragmented, so this part is optional. Another option is to just list out topics being covered by Proverbs 10.

Verses	Title
10:1	Obedience
10:2-5	Work
10:6-7	Righteous vs the wicked
8	The wise receive commandments (obedience?)
9-11	Living truthfully
12	Hatred vs love
13-14	Knowledge & understanding
15-16	Wealth & Money
17	Heeding instruction (obedience)
18-21	Words
22-24	Happiness and pleasure
25-30	God will keep the righteous and destroy the wicked

31-32	The mouth of the righteous
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2. Choose any part of Proverbs Ch 1-9 to read. How does it feel compared with Chapter 10?

Chapters 1-9 feel more like a conversation whereby a father is appealing to his son to seek wisdom. Chapter 10 onward feels much more mechanical, more confusing.

3. How do you think these two parts of the books are related?

They function as an introductory framework through which we are to read Ch 10-31 ie. First part: importance of getting wisdom. Second part: what wisdom looks like.

4. Observe verses that say “the Lord” (v3, 22, 27, 29), why do you think this is important in our passage?

It is in the Lord that blessings on the righteous and judgement on the wicked come. The blessings come in many different forms: material, prolonging of life etc. but ultimately dependant on if someone is righteous in the Lord or an evildoer.

5. There is a long list of topics mentioned in Chapter 10. Are there any that stand out to you and why?

6. Read onward to Chapter 11 as. Do you think that the arrangement seems a bit messy? Why do you think it was arranged this way? (hint: why aren't the topics arranged neatly – in topic by topic?)

Hint 2: Proverbs 3:6

The way the author writes proverbs is like what our daily lives are like most of the time. It's not compartmentalized into orderly themes, and neither is proverbs

Wisdom in one area of our life is often related to wisdom in another area. ie. You can't say I'll work on my friends, but not in my marriage. Life under God is interconnected.

He wants us to discover how his wisdom should inform all of life, with all its varied daily challenges. What's more, God desires us not only to act wisely in all of life, but also to be wise people. He wants us to be upright, righteous and humble rather than wicked, evil and proud.

7. Although each individual proverb speaks about different topics, what do you think is the main point of chapter 10?

Ultimately, we should strive to be righteous instead of being wicked. This righteousness is tied in to how we relate to God.

8. A young Christian says to you, "I don't have the time and patience to plough through all these verses! Can you just give me a few tips to get me through life?" What would you say?

9. In the book of Proverbs, we see that acting wisely is the stepping-stone for a good outcome and success. In reality, this isn't always the case.

Do you think the passages in Proverbs guarantees that the righteous will always be blessed and free from any form of suffering? Why or Why not?

Proverbs teaches us wisdom on what is good and what isn't but doesn't promise an immediate reaping of the fruit of righteousness.

Many argue that Proverbs tend to promise too much & that Job & Ecclesiastes was written as a counterbalance – often at odds with the simple cause and effect paradigm of Proverbs.

The wisdom of Proverbs however, points beyond itself to the New Testament and to Jesus. Through the lens of eternity, god delivers blessing and joy to those who follow Him and judgement on those who reject him.

The truths in proverbs are therefore general truths and not absolute truths that happen in every occasion.

10. How do you think Proverbs points towards Jesus?

OT wisdom	Jesus	How is it fulfilled
Proverbs 1:1	Luke 11:31	<i>Jesus is greater than Solomon's wisdom</i>
Proverbs 2:3-5	Matthew 13:44 Colossians 2:2-3	<i>The kingdom of God is worth more than treasures, Christ is where all treasure of wisdom & knowledge</i>
Proverbs 3:4	Luke 2:40, 52	<i>Jesus has the favour of the Lord</i>
Proverbs 8:22-31	Colossians 1:15-16	<i>All things were created by Jesus, through him and for him</i>

As with the rest of the OT, Proverbs points forward to Jesus Christ. It is written for us who have been redeemed by Jesus.

Although the proverbs are useful for anybody living in this creation, it is especially useful for us who fear not just the creator God, but God who was born as a man, who died and rose to be Lord of all: Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Thank God for giving us Proverbs 10-31 as a whole (as well as each individual saying) so that we may be challenged to live all of life in wisdom to please him.

Study 7: Topics – “Work and Career” (Proverbs 10-31)

Getting started

1. *“Do what you love: Choose a career path that will bring you joy and you’ll never have to work a day in your life!”*

Do you agree with this statement? Why/why not?

Digging in

Part I - Why we work?

2. Read the following verses in Proverbs - 11:26, 16:26, 19:15, 20:13, 27:23-27

Summarise your findings on the motivations and reasons for work.

- i. To provide food for oneself and his/her family, will not suffer from hunger
- ii. To provide clothing
- iii. To not fall into poverty

These are the basic low-level needs (e.g. air, water and food) based on the famous “Maslow’s triangle” (see below). The model suggests that our basic low-level needs are to be fulfilled first, then we move upwards to seek the satisfaction of higher needs. Note that the Bible did not mention much about achieving success or self-actualisation (i.e. upper levels of the triangle) through work. Hence, God’s wisdom is that work is about fulfilling the lower levels of the triangle, not the higher ones.



3. From Proverbs 31:13-27, why does the wife and mother work?
- To provide food for her household and maidens (v 15)
 - To plant a vineyard (v 16) as she perceived her produce/merchandise to be profitable (v 18)
 - To sew using spindle (a long spool to hold & spin the yarn) and distaff (a staff for holding the flax/wool in spinning) (v 18) – to make clothes & beddings for herself and her household to keep themselves warm during snow (v 21-22). She also makes and sells linen garments/sashes (v 24)
 - To help the poor and needy (v 20)
 - The wife/mother takes good care of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness (v 27)
4. How do the motivations and reasons discussed in Q1 & Q2 compared with the motivations and reasons for work found in the following verses?

Passage	Reasons/Motivations for work
Genesis 2:5-8, 15-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God created Adam (the man), put him in the garden to work and keep it. • God created the world as a good but unfinished project. He hands over His creation project to humanity for us to rule over creation as His stewards. He made humanity to share His work.
Ephesians 4:28	To do honest work with own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need
1 Thess. 4:11-12	To live quietly and mind your own affairs, work with your hands so that you may walk properly before outsiders and dependent on no one.
2 Thess. 3:6-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To set an example of hard work and not be a burden to anyone • Not to walk in idleness, not busy at work but busybodies • To work quietly and earn our own living

5. From the reasons/motivations discussed above, work is commended as a good thing. Are there any negative aspects of work?

In the world God created, work was meant to be both a privilege and a blessing. That is why we find satisfaction and fulfilment in work. We find delight in a job well done, that delight is an echo of the delight that the Wisdom of God found in crafting the world. But we all know that work can also be frustrating, oppressive and hard (Gen 3:1-19). This is because we live in a fallen world that is not yet redeemed. So we should not be surprised if work is often boring or frustrating. We will face the temptation to be idle, to oppress others or to treat work as idol. The answer is to have a gospel-centred understanding of work, as a good thing ruined by the fall and to set your eyes on the new creation when work will be a genuine delight.

Part II – How should we work?

6. Read the following verses in Proverbs and fill in the table accordingly.

Note to leaders: There are quite a number of verses to cover. Go through all of them if time permits, otherwise focus on the verses with asterisk ()*

Verses	Describe how one should work	Benefits of working in the manner described	Implications of not working in the manner described
10:4-5*, 12:24, 13:4*, 18:9*, 20:4, 22:13, 24:30-34*, 26:13-16*	Diligence	"Makes rich", "prudent", "will rule", "soul is richly supplied", "compensated for righteousness"	"Causes poverty", "bring shame", "forced to labour", "soul of sluggard craves and get nothing", "brother to destruction", "seek and have nothing", full of excuses
11:1*, 12:2-3*, 13:25, 16:11-12*, 20:10, 21:6 and 29:24*	Honesty	"Delight to the Lord", "obtains favour from the Lord", "satisfy his appetite"	"Abomination to the Lord", "condemned", suffers for not having enough, "fleeting vapour and snare of death", anyone who protects thieves must hate themselves for God will justly punish them along with the thieves.
10:9*, 10:16*, 11:18*, 15:6, 20:17* and 29:27*	Integrity	Walks securely, lead to godliness and life, "gets a sure reward", gets treasure, "abomination to the wicked"	Crooked ways will be exposed, lead to sin and death, "earns deceptive wages", gets troubles, lying may be sweet in the beginning but it will not be later (i.e. painful, impossible to enjoy), "abomination to the righteous"

1. Read Ephesians 4:28 and 6:5-9, 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, 1 Timothy 6:1-2 and Titus 2:9-10. Are there any differences in motivation or emphasis from the wisdom of Proverbs?

These New Testament passages echo the wisdom of Proverbs regarding the how to work – do honest work with your own hands; be obedient to earthly masters with fear and sincere heart; to live quietly and mind your own affairs; honour and respect your masters; bondservants to submit to their masters and show all good faith.

7. In light of what we have learned about why and how should we work, how should we view work as Christians today?

- i. Work should be regarded as being a good and important activity we do to put food on the table and to serve the society – hence "work to live". Faithfulness – in diligence, integrity and honesty, is what God wants for us to work. Not the wealth, success, recognition nor self-actualisation that the world yearns for – hence "live to work". This is the true wisdom of God that leads to success in life in God's eyes.

- ii. In God's wisdom, our identity is not found in our work but in Christ—in being a new creation, in being his child (2 Cor 5:17). Indeed, our aspiration is to live quietly, to mind our own affairs and to work with our hands (1 Thess. 4:11). This is a far cry from seeking the approval and accolades of others by pursuing our careers.
- iii. We are also to work for the glory of God. We work with “sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord”, it is the Lord Christ that we are serving (Col 3: 22-24). We are to work as if Jesus is the boss. That applies to employers/bosses too (Read Col 4:1). Paul does not simply say we can take delight in our work. We can also take delight in the fact that God takes delight in our work.

Application

8. “How we work is far more important to God than what work we do.” Do you think this is true? Why/why not?

9. What wisdom does this give us when we are looking for guidance as to which job we should work in?

Key Takeaways

- What matters is making those choices for God's glory, not just for personal gains.
- If we want to be truly happy in our jobs, we cannot base our happiness on our jobs/our abilities. Our worship and happiness must be anchored and rooted first and only in God. For He alone has done all the work worthy of worship

Study 8: Topics – “Wealth” (Proverbs 10-31)

Getting Started

1. How much money is too much money?

For the purpose of this study, we want to ask a few questions about wealth - what is it? How do you get it? How should it be used wisely? What can't you do with it. Some people might shoot out actual figures from zero all the way to infinity and some will understand that it's subjective as wealth is even though the world thinks it knows what true wealth looks like. Wealth is, by definition, having a lot of money or possessions but that really depends on who is being compared to who. This question is supposed to get the ball rolling on this initial idea.

2. *“The chief goal of humanity should be to eradicate poverty for good!”* What do you think?

Context

Last week we considered wisdom on work - what work is, why we work, how we should work and even what type of work we should or should not get into. Proverbs provides us practical ways of thinking about work through the lens of a person who truly treats God as God (Proverbs 1:7).

Digging in

3. Considering what we now know about work (Proverbs 10:4, 20:13), how do we get wealth? Is this fair?

Proverbs 10:4 highly encourages a diligent work ethic and provides a warning against being lazy. Likewise, Proverbs 20:13 echoes the idea of not being lazy. Wealth goes to he who works for it. If it is earned, it's the worker's wages. The perceptive person in the discussion group would (hopefully) bring up that there can't be a one-to-one correlation and that's because there isn't. The principle of hard work is one that brings glory to our God in front of our superiors and bosses. Also, it trains us to be subordinate and faithful to earthly masters as we should be to our King. Therefore, wealth accumulated from such work is commendable. So, even though we don't get paid as much as we want to, we should continue working well.

4. According to Proverbs (10:22, 22:2, 22:4), where does wealth come from?

Obviously, it comes from God. What's important here is that wealth or riches is seen to be a blessing or a reward from God. In that sense, we shouldn't always expect it and not having it does not mean that God doesn't love us or doesn't want to bless us. Also, monetary provisions and physical possessions are not the only way that God blesses people. We'll explore more of that later. An important follow-up question would be, “are the poor lesser beings as compared to the rich?” The answer is a big fat no! Proverbs 22:2 shows that God made both the rich and the poor and they are equal before Him. Both have the same reason to fear Him.

5. "There is no such thing as dirty money. It doesn't matter where it came from; it's still money." What do you think? What do the authors of Proverbs think? (Proverbs 13:11, 15:6, 16:8).

A running theme within Proverbs (and all of Scripture) is morality. There is a right way to do things and an absolutely wrong way of doing it. Pro 13:11 shows that wealth gained "hastily" or "in fraud" as it can also be translated will diminish eventually. Just look at any corruption issues - it was only a matter of time until those behind it were found out. Pro 15:6 re-emphasises the comparison made in Proverbs 13:11. Finally, Proverbs 16:8 makes an even clearer comparison: it's better to be poor and righteous than to be wealthy and unjust. One might think that the comparison here is merely between wealth and poverty (or "little") or between being righteous and being unjust. The real comparison here is between righteousness and wealth. The point of the verse is not to assert that money and material possessions are completely unimportant but that the righteousness of a person created in the image of a righteous God is far more crucial. The phrase above is of a person who is indifferent and worships the utility that he can get from money. Money meets a lot of needs, but it can never truly satisfy.

6. Since we're on the topic, what else can't money do for us? (Proverbs 11:4, 11:28, 15:16-17, 17:1)

All the wealth we have cannot deliver us from God's wrath against us for our sin. In other words, we can never buy a ticket to Heaven (11:4). Trusting in our gospel of "Money will solve everything" will not solve anything. In fact, it will buy us a one-way trip to Hell. Consider Pro 15:17 and 17:1 which shows us that money can't buy peace or happiness. Being really rich does not mean better relationships. One can be way happier eating bitter herbs in poverty among people s/he loves as compared to someone enjoying prime cuts of beef while harbouring hate (15:17). Following from the question before, earthly riches cannot satisfy. Read Matthew 5:6 consider what Jesus says and how righteousness and wealth are compared here in Proverbs.

7. What is the potential danger of being crazy rich? (Proverbs 28:11, 30:7-9)?

Being in a state of great wealth provides an environment for self-sufficiency and the illusion of independence from God. A rich man may think that he is the master of himself (as do all of us now in our mediocre incomes, what more a rich man!) and he decides, "I will listen to whom I will listen". Proverbs 28:11 shows that man can be totally self-conceited and thinks that he is wise. It's so ironic because it is this sort of unrighteous and egotistical pride that Proverbs is against. The essence of the wisdom that God showed here is Pro 1:7. Agur in Pro 30 recognises this danger of having *too much* material wealth. V7 shows his personal fear that he might deny God thinking that he doesn't need Him.

8. "Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man..."
-John Lennon-

Well, can you imagine? Would giving away all our possessions solve the issue of greed and self-obsession? (Proverbs 30:9b)

Interestingly, he is not a fan of the other side of the wealth spectrum i.e. being crazy broke. One might think that the solution to greed is not having anything at all will take away the platform for selfishness. Well, Agur sees another risk - he might be so impoverished and destitute that he would resort to stealing and cursing God for his misfortune. Remember Job's wife? What did she say in Job 2:9? And for the sake of not having loose ends, how did Job respond in V10? By now, we should see that the real issue has arguable nothing at all to do with money or possessions. Those things are not evil.

9. So, what's the real issue? (15:27, 28:20, 28:22, 28:25)

The real issue here is greed which seems to offend God. Consider what Paul tells Timothy in 1 Tim 6:10. Money is a mere medium for evil but the real evil is the love of it. Looking at the bigger picture, the issue is idolatry of self and of wealth. By placing higher importance on money, we get stressed and anxious to say the least when there isn't enough and we become greedy and insecure when we have more than we need.

10. What does Jesus say about being overly attached (in love) with money and possessions (Mark 10:17-31)?

The rich man has a false sense of righteousness to begin with. He thinks he knows what good (and moral) is - we see that in the way he addresses Jesus who would have appeared as human as any other person who sins. Now Jesus is definitely good because He is God but this guy doesn't know that. Interestingly, the rich man understands that salvation is conditional on the Law but what he gets wrong is thinking that he can fulfill it. Jesus' checklist for him is to prove to him that it is impossible to fulfill the Law completely. Ironically, he seems to be able to obey all the commandments that involve human relationships directly but the one he is unwilling to obey is the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me". His wealth was his idol which he refused to give up even though his salvation is worth so much more. It is no wonder why Jesus says that it is so difficult for wealthy people to enter the Kingdom of God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning or chief of all wisdom. If we fear God and treat Him properly as God, would we not want to leave all that we have to follow Christ? How much do you love your money and your possessions, comfort and standard of living? Can you really sing "Christ is enough for me" with a clear conscience or are you a liar? If He was enough on the cross to pay the ultimate price for our freedom to follow Him, then we can be assured that there is treasure

in Heaven that far exceeds any form of wealth this life offers. With man, it is impossible (to be saved or enjoy true riches) but not with God (v27).

Application

11. All of us have some form of wealth (some big and some smaller). What do we do with it? (11:24-26, 14:31, 19:17, 21:13, 2 Cor. 8:1-7)

Being generous is a commendable thing - everyone knows that. But not many people consider it a privilege. To be able to be generous, one must have enough to give in the first place. Generosity is a gift: God gave some of us a little more than we need not to store up wealth (and eventually wrath) for ourselves but to give to others. Remember the Macedonian Church that Paul praises in 2 Corinthians 8? They gave out of their poverty.

12. Do we use our money to support our church ministries?

It's not about giving 10% and it's no pressure. But running a ministry is hard work and guess what? The ministry workers deserve their wages. If their ministry to us is their preaching, teaching, following up with us, cleaning our church, managing the church's finances, maintaining the equipment in church, then our ministry to them is to provide them financial support the best we can so that they can continue their ministry without starving and worrying for their families. If you are a member of the church should you really just pass on tithing every Sunday? Or are you going to say, "I'll put more in when I start working"? Remember, God doesn't need your money to complete His mission on earth; He will do it with or without you. The reality is that God is providing an opportunity to serve Him through your giving. Would you be a fool to give that up?

13. Does our expenditure show people around us that we are gospel-centred and mission-minded?

We can spend on an array of things: Avocado toast, artisan coffee, cigarettes, slightly more expensive food, monthly shopping spree at a local sale, new gadgets, movie tickets, Nike Airs and so much more. Can you name one of those things that non-Christians would not buy? Which of these things do not show people how much we love ourselves?

How we spend matters not just in terms of managing our finances but also how people perceive them. Might we try minimising expenditure on our lifestyles to save up money for conferences and camps that can build us up in God's Word and provide us a place to encourage with other gospel partners?

Maybe spend less on ourselves so that we can have more disposable income to take care of the people around us that are less fortunate? There are so many more ways to spend wisely.

Study 9: Topics – “Pleasure” (Proverbs 10-31)

Getting started

1. *“What’s best for you is to do what makes you happy.”*

Do you agree or disagree? Why?

2. What are some things that bring people pleasure? Why?

This is just to get the ball rolling on the topic. Give them space to discuss what makes them feel good and why. Try discussing the feelings that are associated with the act that makes them feel pleasure. Gladness, joy, happiness, relief... these terms should hopefully come to mind, as the book of Proverbs rarely uses the word ‘pleasure’ explicitly. The verses used would often describe joy, gladness and cheerfulness. These are the feeling we usually get from something pleasurable.

End by asking this question: *“Do all these pleasures go against the teaching of the Bible?”*

Digging in

3. Does Proverbs think that pleasure is anti-Christian? (10:28, 15:13, 15:15, 17:22, 29:6)

Not at all! In fact, quite the contrary. Pleasure is a product of being Christian. We see in these verses an association of righteousness, which Proverbs (and God) care very much about, with joy, cheerfulness, and images of celebration even (29:6). Our hope, when we live in the fear of the Lord, yields joy (10:28). Pleasure seems to be a good thing. After all, ‘a joyful heart is good medicine’ (17:22). On the other hand, there is nothing inherently good with pain and suffering. 15:13 and 15:15 say that sorrow crushes the heart and that the days of the afflicted are evil. A crushed spirit dries the bones (17:22).

4. According to Proverbs, what brings happiness and delight? (10:1, 12:4, 24:13-14)

These Proverbs describe how pleasure can be gained through wisdom. A wise son makes a glad father (10:1), the excellent wife (Proverbs 31:10, 26 – a woman of wisdom) helps her husband live faithfully and brings him honour. 24:13-14 contrast wisdom and honey; just as honey is sweet to the taste, wisdom is sweetness to the soul, fostering a secure hope. The important context to this contrast is that the pleasure we speak of here is one that comes from the fear of the Lord, that brings the wisdom of Proverbs – the hope of a God who will right all wrongs, who is just and punishes the foolish and wicked will see to the best end for the wise and righteous. It is a pleasure that looks at the bigger picture. Again, Proverbs contrasts these sayings with the opposite truth – foolishness brings sorrow to the mother and the shameful wife is bad for the husband. Proverbs, the book of wisdom, when studied and applied correctly, is pleasing to the soul. Not only does wisdom make us happy, it is pleasing to those around us. More on that later.

5. What about material pleasures? Contrast Psalms 104:14-15 and 1 Timothy 6:17.

While wisdom makes us happy and brings pleasure, we cannot deny that other, material things can also make us happy. Psalms 104:15 shows that wine, oil and bread can indeed bring gladness. But the important takeaway in this regard is found in Psalms 104:14 and the 1 Timothy passage; God provides these blessings (think back to the previous study). Paul reminds us then to 'set our hopes on God', who provides us with everything to enjoy, just as Proverbs has said we can find joy in the 'hope of the righteous'. All these blessings come from God. Note that it's not that we need to 'set our hope on God' *because* he provides us with everything to enjoy but *because* all these things are not an end in themselves. In fact, these blessings are *uncertain*, but they point to the God in whom we can have *certainty of his goodness*.

6. Is pleasure always a good thing? (11:6, 18:2, 20:17, 23:26-28)

While Proverbs points out that there are good things to be enjoyed, it does warn us about the potential dangers of pleasure. 11:6 shows us that we can be taken captive by our desires. This is echoed in 23:26-28, where we get a wise saying that describes a prostitute (source of pleasure) as a deep pit; go in, and you'll have a hard time getting out. She is also seen as a robber, going to her will cost you dearly. Of course, this is a very specific example, but all forms of pleasure seeking can become a deadly trap, as we will see later in the questions 4 and 5. On top of these verses, 18:2 and 20:17 show that in a world twisted by sin, pleasure can stem from sin. Fools take pleasure in only expressing their (foolish) opinion (it's not that expressing your opinion is bad but *only* expressing your opinion while not also seeking understanding), while stolen bread is 'sweet' (this has to do with *how* we obtain pleasure - through legitimate or illegitimate means). This pleasure is only momentary, however.

7. What does Proverbs 23:20-21 and 23:29-35 teach us about pleasure?

The wise saying in the 20-21 and the almost comical portrait of the drunkard in 29-35 point out that pleasure can become addictive when it goes unchecked. And we can become numb to the injuries that our addictions bring upon us. They can be hurting us and we don't even realise it. This is when we are taken captive as described in 11:6; we begin to serve pleasure instead of God. It becomes our idol. Again, be sure to emphasize that this is true of many things, not just alcohol. Gaming, studies, our friends and family, pornography, etc.

8. Why are lovers of pleasure never satisfied, as far as Proverbs is concerned? (14:13, 25:16, 27:7, 27:20)

Proverbs provides a lot of wisdom and insight into why; 14:13 shows that even through laughter, the heart may ache, and that joy may be met with grief. Pleasure seeking cannot fix an underlying problem of an aching heart (or what looks like pleasure – laughter – may actually be a vain attempt to cover up pain), and pleasure is often short lived and fleeting. 25:16 shows that too much pleasure seeking, and overindulgence can often become bad for you (yes, sometimes you can have too much of a good thing), leading to disappointment. 27:7 shows that after getting our fill of something desired, we could end up loathing it. 27:20 straight up tells us that the eyes of men (sinful hearts, see Additional note) are never satisfied. The take home message is that pleasure can never be enough. It will never be something fulfils all our desires, nor fixes our problems.

Additional note: -If it comes up, or if time permits, it might be helpful to explore 27:20 a little deeper. 27:19-22 as a chunk speaks of the heart. Verse 19 opens with a statement on how the heart reflects the true nature of a man. Verse 20's Sheol and Abaddon are appeared before in 15:11a. The crucible and furnace of verse 21 also appear in verse 17:3a. Both verses are followed up by a second line on the heart as being open before (15:11b) or being tested by (17:3b) the Lord. Hence, verse 20-22 show that pleasure seekers will never be satisfied due to the condition of the heart; dissatisfaction and greed always want more, just like the grave (Sheol) will always take more and more.

9. Read Luke 8:14, Titus 3:3 and James 4:1-3. How are the dangers of pleasure echoed in the New Testament?

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus explains that pleasure of life can stunt a Christian's growth. Those who initially embrace the message may not persevere to maturity as a result. We may not become fruitful believers – are we bearing fruit? If not, then maybe other things are more important to us than the kingdom of God. It could be a matter of salvation!

Paul in Titus explains how before the readers were converted, they were slaves to various passions and pleasures. Paul categorizes this as a trait of how we lived before receiving the Gospel. In fact, he calls this foolish! Do we recognise the fact that this is how unregenerate people live? And that it is a life that we are dependent on God to save us from?

James points out that hedonism can lead to quarrels and fights among the believers. These are selfish passions, as stated clearly in verses 2-3. Selfishness, the drive to serve ourselves, not God and others, can manifest as a desire for self-pleasure that is ultimately divisive and destructive.

Hopefully it is clear now that pleasure isn't an inherently bad thing, it is a good gift of God. The fallen state of humanity has led to the corruption of this good gift. We find pleasure in sinful activities, and even if not sinful, we let pleasure control us. Things that God gave to make us happy, we crave more and more until it becomes an addiction since we will never be fully satisfied when we get our fix. Our motives then shift from serving God and others to serving ourselves. We are to enjoy pleasure in things that are good and godly without idolising them. Ultimately, these things are there to point us to the God who is good, as reflected in his gifts. We are to find lasting pleasure only in Him! 'Pleasure in Proverbs' informs us to live in the fear of the LORD.

But is pleasure in Proverbs really all about us?

10. Read Psalms 16:11, 19:7-11, 37:4 and Revelations 21:1-6, 22:1-5. Where can we find good, lasting pleasure?

We can only find good lasting pleasure in God. The Psalms passages here point out that in living in obedience to God, we find the fullness of joy. Pleasures are at his right hand. 7-11 describes the law of the LORD as being able to revive the soul. It echoes the sentiments of Proverbs – God's way is to be desired more than gold, it's sweeter than honey. In keeping them there is a great reward (again, seeing the bigger picture of things). We are to delight in the LORD for he is good to give us the desires of our heart (given they are right).

The Revelations passages show that our certain hope in God will lead to the best, purest, everlasting pleasure we will ever experience. No more sorrow or pain; a world free of the corruption of sin. There will only be good forevermore, as we delight in God and the Lamb for an eternity.

11. Who should we seek to bring pleasure to? How?

Verses	Who?	How?
11:1, 11:20, 12:22, 15:8	God	Justice, blamelessness, acting faithfully without deceit, being upright. Ultimately, God delights in those who are righteous. Note how serious these matters are to the LORD; the opposite characteristics are said to be 'abominations' (disgusting) to the LORD.
12:4, 12:25, 23:24-25	Others	We are told in Proverbs how the excellent wife is the crown of her husband, how good words can make others glad, how the righteous will make their parents glad. Pleasure in Proverbs isn't even all about pleasing God only, it's about serving others and making others glad through living a life in the fear of the LORD.

See also Colossians 1:10 and 1 Thessalonians 4:1.

We are encouraged to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully *pleasing* to him. The characteristics? Bearing good fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Bringing Things Together

12. How does Proverbs guard us from pursuing pleasure for the sake of pleasure?

Always go back to the thesis of Proverbs (1:7). To be wise is to fear the LORD, to treat God as God. Considering this truth, we live in obedience to his word. And we find there that pleasure is a good gift from God. It stems from wisdom, from obedience. Seeking pleasure for the sake of pleasure is dangerous. It could end up being a trap, ensnaring you and making you its slave. We are then reminded that pleasure is not all about us; just as Jesus came as a servant, we too are to imitate Christ and serve. We aim to please God first, then others in the way we walk. Our own pleasure is secondary, God who is sovereign over all will see to it that the righteous and the wise are rewarded. The pleasure of Proverbs lies in the liberating truth of a God who is moral and just. We cannot please God and others when we give in to hedonism. So, guard ourselves. God is gracious to give us pleasure. Pleasure should be one of the motivators to living as a wise Christian in God's world. Do not let it become our God. Instead, let it drive us to find fulfillment in a deep and growing relationship with him.

Application

13. *"Christianity is just so boring. I'll wait till I'm on my deathbed, then become a Christian. I just don't want to miss out on life."*

Imagine someone tells you this. How would you respond?

It is important to make clear the difference between the pleasures of the world and the pleasures of walking in the fear of the LORD. We have seen that the pleasures of the world are often disappointing and destructive to self. We may think that we are happy, but Proverbs points out that the pleasure only lasts a moment. We end up back in the same sad state as before. Walking in wisdom on the other hand leads to pleasure not just for us, it's pleasure to God, and to others as well. And though we may have struggles in life, we can be happy in the knowledge of a God who will right all wrongs. We can enjoy the pleasures of life that God has given, without letting them control us.

Bear in mind that the chief goal of life is to walk in fear of the LORD. The example above shows someone who sees self-gratification as the chief goal of life. It takes true repentance and the regenerative work of the Spirit to make the paradigm shift. These people will miss out on the joy of knowing and loving God now, and if they don't desire this now then they will certainly not desire this at the end of their lives.

14. *"God wants to give you a fulfilling live of happiness, health and wealth!"*

What do you think of this statement, considering today's study?

While it is true that God will bring ultimate happiness, we need to really be careful with such statements and examine the heart behind the person saying it. Yes, God calls us to walk in wisdom. Yes, pleasure can result from that as we've just seen. But we need to be careful that following God is not merely a means to an end – that end being pleasure. Again, our chief goal in life is to live in the fear of the LORD, to acknowledge and trust him with all our heart. This is not a means to an end; this is the end itself. Ultimate fulfilment of happiness, health and wealth can only come about in the kingdom of God – Revelations.

15. Reflect on your past week or months. Has pleasure captured your heart? Discuss honestly.

16. What kind of steps can we take to apply Proverb's wisdom on pleasure?

Consider limiting activities, how we can serve others, how we can please God more.

Prayer

- Thank God for providing us with all that we have, not only what for our daily needs, but with even more for our enjoyment.
- Pray that we will not be lovers of pleasure, but lovers of God who seek to please him first, that our pursuit of 'life's little luxuries' don't come at the gargantuan cost of our salvation.

Study 10: Topics – “Marriage” (Proverbs 10-31)

Getting started

1. “Marriage is just a piece of paper – a social construct!” Do you agree? Why or why not?

Context

As we’ve seen throughout our study of Proverbs, God’s wisdom is applicable in **every** area of our lives. In order to live the good life here as inhabitants of God’s created world, it would only make sense to live in accordance to His wisdom, the way He’s ordered things.

Today, we’ll be zooming in to one of these many areas: **marriage**.

(Note to leaders of members who are not yet considering marriage: It could be helpful to point out from the get-go that while this seems to be very distant and irrelevant to most of us, it is still useful and important to be looking at God’s wisdom in this area. It may not be directly applicable to ourselves; but knowing about it can help us help our fellow brothers and sisters who are in that stage of their lives of looking for a spouse etc.)

Digging In

A. Faithfulness

2. What do movies (or just people in general) nowadays depict to be important elements in a marriage?
3. What is deemed to be important in marriage in Proverbs 2:16-17, 5:15-20 and 20:6? Why is it fundamental to marriage?

Faithfulness. It is the foundation of marriage; which involves the keeping of your word and pledge. While there are many things that we can do without in a wedding (fancy deco, good food, maybe even sermon) – the one thing that is essential in a Christian wedding is the vow; the promise “To be faithful for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, to cherish and honour, till death us do part”.

4. In Proverbs 5:18-19; what strengthens marriage as a whole?

Sexual intimacy. Sex is a gift that God has designed to be enjoyed within the confines of marriage; it’s an essential ingredient to be desired, and even commanded. Sexual pleasure within marriage is good.

5. From 1 Corinthians 7:3-5, how does this encourage faithfulness in marriage?

In v5; we read that the pursuit of sexual intimacy is meant to keep each other from temptation of sexual immorality, of looking for love and intimacy elsewhere; hence encouraging faithfulness in marriage. Also, sex is about lovingly serving one's partner, rather than self-gratification – as opposed to how the world today views it.

B. Excellent Spouse

6. In looking for a spouse, what are some things that are important to you?

7. What characteristics does Proverbs advise women to look for in a husband?

Verses	Characteristics
31:11, 31:28	<i>Trusts and appreciates (praises) his wife – indicating that he values his wife highly</i>
20:6, 28:20	<i>Faithful</i>
10:4, 20:4, 21:5	<i>Diligent / hardworking</i>
14:29, 15:18	<i>Slow to anger / patient / not hot-tempered</i>

8. What characteristics does Proverbs advise wise men to look for in a wife?

Verses	Characteristics
12:4	<i>Crown of her husband</i>
19:14	<i>Prudent</i>
21:9, 21:19, 27:15-16	<i>Not quarrelsome</i>
31:11	<i>Trustworthy</i>
31:15, 27	<i>Industrious, hardworking</i>
31:19-20	<i>Generous</i>
31:26	<i>Wise, teaches kindness</i>
31:30	<i>Fears the Lord</i>

Application

9. In what ways does God's wisdom (question 5 and 6) conflict with what's usually important to us (question 4)? In your own life, which do you find yourself prioritizing?

Take time to point out that a lot of preferences – even things like physical attraction - aren't wrong / sinful per se; but we want them to see that the things that God cares about should be prioritized.

The second question is more “stabby”; try to get people to go beyond the textbook answer of “i-try-to-follow-God’s-ways-but-still-fail”, but to carefully evaluate why it’s tempting to prioritise their own preferences, and get them convinced that following God’s wisdom is really better for us.

10. Looking at the characteristics in question 5 and 6 – how do you fare? How does it make you feel?

The point of this question is to help people realize that their job isn't merely to go look for an excellent partner, but to be the excellent partner.

It is possible that these descriptions make us feel unworthy and intimidated (and maybe rightfully so) – or maybe we feel like they aren't relevant because we're not yet husbands / wives. However, this advice is applicable for all people. These aren't just qualities we work on when we're married.

And we don't seek to do these things with the goal of making ourselves more marry-able but strive for these qualities because we want to be like Christ, the perfect embodiment of all of these characteristics.

Study 11: Topics – “Family” (Proverbs 10-31)

Getting started

1. Do you notice a growing trend of younger couples deciding not to have a family (bear children) or to have small families after marriage? What do you think are some reasons for this decision?

-No longer have time to do what they love doing (hobby)

-Expensive to have children

-Difficult to discipline

-Prefer to focus on their career

Digging in

Last week we learnt what Proverbs teaches us about Faithfulness in a Marriage. This week we look at what comes beyond Marriage- building a Family under God’s wisdom in Proverbs.

2. What does Proverbs 10-31 say about this topic – Family? What is the key message from these verses?

Verses	Detail
13:24	<i>Whoever spares the rods spares hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him</i>
22:6	<i>“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it</i>
22:15	<i>Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him</i>
23:25-26	<i>Let your father and mother be glad; let her who bore you rejoice. My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways</i>
29:15	<i>The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother</i>

Key message: Parents are called to be involved in their children’s lives, especially fathers who have the responsibility to discipline his son in observing the way of the Lord.

3. What does “rod” in Proverbs symbolize and why is it important?

“Rod” symbolizes discipline (physical). It is used in Proverbs on occasions involving correction and training of a child; to teach him to avoid wrong behaviour, to embrace what is right, and to build godly character. Physical discipline is an expression of love for a child, and fathers who actually “spare the rod”-do not discipline their sons, are not loving but hating their sons.

4. What roles are fathers commonly associated with in today's context?

To be successful in their careers and pay for everything in the household. To be a role model to sons in the family. To pamper and be protective of daughters. To perform difficult chores or family duties (changing the light bulb, leaning the toilet, changing car tyres, etc)

5. What are the roles of a father in accordance to the passages below?

Passage	Message
<i>Proverbs 3: 1-2</i>	<i>Appeal to his son to live in light of the Lord in every aspect of his life. And obeying this instruction means living in the Lord's delight.</i>
<i>Proverbs 5:1-2</i>	<i>To warn his son with his wisdom, so that his son will speak only true wisdom and knowledge</i>
<i>Proverbs 13:22</i>	<i>-Provide material inheritance to his children (even to grandchildren). -Provide moral discipline to his son, to lead a righteous life.</i>
<i>Ephesians 6:4</i>	<i>Fathers shouldn't provoke his children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.</i>

6. What are the key similarities and differences in a Father's role from the Bible as compared to what the world perceives?

Fathers have the key responsibility to provide financially for the household. Fathers play a key role to train and discipline their children to live their lives in light of God's instructions.

7. What roles are mothers commonly associated with in today's context?

- To cook for the family*
- To manage all household matters*
- Some career women take the role of breadwinner of the family, and leave the care of household matters either to the dad, or the caretaker, or parents in law*
- Bring the family together*
- Nurture the children*

8. What is the role of a Mother in accordance to Proverbs 31:10-31?

- Manage the household excellently (husband, children and servants)*
- However, the most important trait of a mother that is praise-worthy is her fear of the Lord (this is foundational to the wise and right use of all other skills).*
- A godly woman may have outward charm and beauty, but these are secondary to her godliness.*

9. What are the similarities and differences in a Mother's role from the Bible as compared to what the world perceives?

Mothers are called to take care of the household. In contrast to what the world agrees on feminism, the Bible focuses on a woman's godliness instead of seeking their identity at work as a career woman.

Applications

10. What are some of the common concerns or practices related to parenting we are familiar with in the Asian family that contrast with what we learnt from Proverbs today?

*-Parents will always discipline their child to study hard instead of fearing of the Lord.
-Parents will encourage their children to pick a career that yields the most wealth instead of growing in the wisdom of the Lord.*

11. From the discussion of parental roles today, is there anything you would do differently from your parents when you parent your own children?

Study 12: Topics – “Friendship” (Proverbs 10-31)

Getting started

1. What do you consider a real friend to be like?

Digging in

2. Read the passages in Proverbs regarding friendship below:

Passage	What does it say about friendship or being a neighbor?	Categorise them (does it describe who is a good or bad friend or how to get friends)
11:9	A godless man’s speech destroys his neighbor	Bad friend
11:12	<i>Someone who belittles his neighbor lacks sense</i>	<i>Bad friend</i>
12:26	<i>Someone who is righteous guides his neighbor. The wicked lead them astray</i>	<i>Good friend / Bad friend</i>
14:20	<i>Poor – disliked, rich – many friends</i>	<i>How to get friends</i>
14:21	<i>He who despises his neighbor is a sinner</i>	<i>Bad friend</i>
16:28	<i>Dishonest man spreads strife, a whisperer separates close friends</i>	<i>Bad friend</i>
16:29	<i>Man of violence entices his neighbor and leads him in a way that is not good</i>	<i>Bad friend</i>
17:17	<i>A friend loves at all times</i>	<i>Good friend</i>
18:24	<i>A man of many companions may come to ruin / a friend sticks closer than a brother</i>	<i>A good friend is like this</i>
19:4	<i>Wealth – brings new friends, poor – deserted by friends</i>	<i>How to get friends</i>
19:6	<i>Everyone is a friend of someone who is generous</i>	<i>How to get friends</i>
19:7	<i>Being poor has your friends go far away from you</i>	<i>How to get friends</i>
22:11	<i>Purity of heart & gracious speech gets even the king as a friend</i>	<i>How to get friends</i>
25:18	<i>Bearing false witness is like a weapon</i>	<i>Bad friend</i>
26:18-19	<i>Deceiving your neighbor is like a person who throws weapons / death</i>	<i>Bad friend</i>
27:10	<i>Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother who is far away</i>	<i>Good friend / how to get friends</i>
27:14	<i>Waking up your neighbour when they want to sleep LOLLOLOL (inconveniencing your neighbor)</i>	<i>Bad friend</i>

3. There are also some important themes that underline Proverbs about friendship. Read Proverbs 10:12 & 13:20 and describe how we should think about the topic of friendship?

10:12 – Hatred vs love as a basis for friendship

13:20 – The idea of forming and growing a community of believers

The New Testament's perspective on friendship:

4. Read Luke 10:25-37. What is Jesus' answer to "who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replied with the parable of the Good Samaritan. The neighbor was not the priest nor the Levite (even though they were of status and probably Jewish ie. Same race, religion) as they passed on the other side. It was the Samaritan who showed mercy and took care of the man.

5. Read Matthew 11:19 (also Luke 7:34). This is the only place where Jesus is called our friend. How is Jesus being their friend? (what are the social dynamics at play here?)

Jesus was eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners. He is fellowshiping with them disregarding their status. While on earth he was the perfect friend / neighbor to not just people who were nice to him or easy to be with. He was friends and showed love and mercy to the very people who offended him (God). Imagine eating with and fellowshiping with someone that showed absolute disregard and disrespect to you and your family.

6. Read Romans 12:9-21. Paul quotes proverbs 25:21-22 here. What echoes from Proverbs' teaching on friendship? Are there any new ideas?

Echoing proverbs – Love as a basis for friendship & growing the community of believers.

New ideas - blessing those who persecute you as well

Seen through New Testament eyes, the wisdom of Proverbs is not so much about who is my friend or neighbor, or how I can get good friends, but how I can be a friend or neighbor to those around me. This indeed goes beyond real friendship, for it means loving others as I have the opportunity, whether I am in a close 'real friendship' relationship with them or not.

Application

7. Does Proverbs resonate with your experience of what makes friendships work / not work? Is there anything different or surprising?
8. Sometimes Christians tend to be "walked over" where hospitality and good deeds are taken for granted. What are your thoughts?
9. Who do you find it hard to be a neighbor to? Why?
10. If there is one thing to change about how you can be a friend to others, what would it be?

Prayer

Thank God for the friends and neighbors he has given you. (Think of specific people, and specific things to thank God for about those people.) Give thanks especially for the wonderful privilege of being Jesus' friend.

Ask God to help you to be a godly and loving neighbor and friend to those around you. (Again, think of specific people and specific ways in which you can be a friend.)

Study 13: Topics – “Words” (Proverbs 10-31)

Getting Started

1. *“The tongue has no bone, but it is strong enough to break a heart”*

Do you agree/ disagree to this statement? Discuss it in your group.

Digging in

2. Read the following verses in Proverbs. What do you discover about the power of words?

Note to leaders: The main idea of this exercise is to recognise that our words are incredibly powerful. Our words can do enormous damage as well as bring wonderful comfort.

Verses	In what ways can words be powerful for good?	In what ways can words be powerful for ill?
10:18-21 *10:21	<i>A person who speaks with wisdom/ righteousness or remains quiet benefits many</i>	<i>A fool who lacks wisdom will stumble/die</i>
11:9	<i>The righteous would be delivered as he/she gain knowledge and understanding to reject words of godless men</i>	<i>A godless man’s words would deceive/mislead his neighbour and destroy him</i>
12:13-14	<i>The righteous who speaks with wisdom escapes from trouble and will be rewarded</i>	<i>The evil speaks and is trapped by his transgressions</i>
12:17-19	<i>A person who speaks the truth proves that he/she is honest; brings healing and will endure forever.</i>	<i>A witness that misrepresents the truth is deceitful, rash words are like sword thrusts and lying is temporal</i>
12:25	<i>Good words can make a sad heart glad</i>	-
13:3	<i>A person who guards his mouth preserves his life</i>	<i>A person who talks freely destroy oneself</i>
15:1	<i>Gentle speech turns away anger</i>	<i>Harsh words stir up anger</i>
16:24	<i>Gracious words bring sweetness to the soul and health to the body</i>	-

17:27-28	<i>A person with knowledge uses few words and only talks when necessary</i>	-
18:6-7	-	<i>A fool's mouth bring himself into a fight/ needs to be beaten/ destroy himself</i>
25:15	<i>A person with patience/ soft tongue will be able to persuade others with authority/power.</i>	-
26:20	<i>Fights and disputes end as soon as there is no more irritation made</i>	<i>Gossips/spreading of false rumours will aggravate fights and disputes</i>

3. What does Proverbs say about the connection between our speech and our hearts? Read verses 15:28, 16:21-23, 17:20.

- *The heart of the righteous thinks carefully about what to say before saying it but the wicked pours out evil words*
- *The heart of the wise strives for gracious, gentle and appropriate words; hence increases persuasiveness*
- *The heart of a crooked, together with a dishonest tongue brings trouble to themselves*

4. Read Proverbs 26:24-25. Discuss in your group what the problem of this form of speech is.

“Seven abominations” is symbolic of the whole or entire sphere of wickedness that is in the malicious man’s heart. At times it can be hidden and even coated with polite and charming speech, but in the end the mouth will reveal what is in the heart.

- a. To match these “seven abominations”, read the verses below and list down the seven kinds of malicious and destructive speech in Proverbs—‘seven deadly sins’ of the mouth, as it were.

Verses	Form of speech
<i>10:8, 18:2, 18:13, 29:20</i>	<i>Babbling fool</i>
<i>11:12, 25:14, 27:1-2</i>	<i>Boasting/ mocking/ belittling</i>
<i>6:1-3</i>	<i>Pledges</i>
<i>6:12, 10:31</i>	<i>Corrupt speech</i>
<i>12:19, 12:22, 17:20, 26:28</i>	<i>Lies</i>
<i>10:18, 16:28, 17:9, 25:9-10</i>	<i>Gossip and slander</i>
<i>17:14, 20:3, 26:21</i>	<i>Quarrels</i>

- b. Following from the table above, which forms of speech are you most prone to or in danger of?

5. What does Jesus say about the connection between our heart and our speech? (Matthew 12:34-37)

Jesus uses the analogy of the tree and its fruit to explain the connection of our heart and our speech. If the tree is good, it will bear good fruits (and vice versa). Similarly, if our motivation is good; what we think, say and do will be good. If our heart is evil; what we think, say and do will be evil.

We are again being reminded of the power of words. Our words are outward evidence of our inward character (i.e. Words reveal our heart). As such, we need to watch our speech as we will be justified or condemned by our words.

6. To have wise speech, we need wise hearts. How do we have wise hearts?

Proverbs 1:20-23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ms Wisdom is pleading with people and making them realise that they need to stop being foolish and stupid. She will make herself known and her message known to those who ignore her. She will pour out her spirit on them – there is no escaping it.</i>
Proverbs 2:6-10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>God is the source of all wisdom (v 6-7)</i> • <i>He will guard our paths/watch over our ways (v 8)</i> • <i>We will understand righteousness; justice for wisdom will come into our heart and knowledge will be pleasing to our soul (9-10)</i> • <i>As such, in order to live (and speak) wisely, we need to live in accordance to His wisdom, follow His definitions of good and evil, wise and foolish.</i>
Ephesians 1:15-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Paul prays that the Father “may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him”, through faith in Jesus Christ.</i> • <i>Our hearts are enlightened that we may understand the blessings that are ours in Christ (i) our future hope; (ii) God’s inheritance in the saints; and (iii) power in Christ</i> • <i>Ultimately, it is the work of the Father - by his Spirit operating in and through the wisdom of the gospel of his Son - that changes our stubborn hearts. Now with a changed heart, there is hope for our speech to be godly.</i>

Application

7. God’s wisdom about our speech relates to friendship, marriage, work and more. (We know this because of the interconnectedness of the many themes in Proverbs). Are there special challenges or changes you need to make concerning your speech in any aspects of your life?
8. Proverbs tells us that silence can help us avoid sinning (10:19), gain respect (11:12), and is deemed wise and intelligent (17:28). In other words, you may be blessed by holding your tongue. Are there any circumstances where silence is unhelpful or harmful?

Study 14: Topics – “Pride” (Proverbs 10-31)

Getting started

1. How does Pride relate to the sin in Genesis 3?

The sin of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 is falling in the temptation of wanting to know good and evil (Gen 3:5) – to be just like God.

With this temptation, they did not listen to God’s good advice and rejected His warning about the fruit and deemed that it is good for them (the food was a delight to the eyes and they desired to make themselves wise). “God doesn’t know what’s best, but I know what’s best for me! I want to be the one to decide what’s good and evil, not God!”

Context

This study will focus on the topic of “Pride”. It is the perfect theme to help us think about how we respond to the entire series of Proverbs. Are we going to fear God and listen to his commands, or are we too proud to let God be God in our life?

Digging in

2. Read the following verses in Proverbs and share about what is the nature of pride (or proudness)? What are some consequences we see for those who are proud?

Verses	Detail
11:2	<i>Disgrace follows pride; wisdom comes with humility</i>
13:10	<i>Insolence causes conflict; those who take advice is wise</i>
15:25	<i>The Lord opposes the proud and stays close to those who act in humility</i>
16:5	<i>All who are arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord and will be punished</i>
16:18-19	<i>Those who are haughty will end in destruction</i>
18:12	<i>A man with a haughty heart will lead to destruction; those who are humbled will be honored</i>
21:4	<i>The thing that will most likely bring judgement is pride (haughty eyes and proud heart)</i>
29:23	<i>Pride brings humiliation; humility brings honor</i>

3. Proverbs 21:24 tells us that “Scoffer” is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride. How does the scoffer act proudly?

Verses	Detail
13:1	<i>The scoffer rebukes without listening</i>
14:6	<i>Seeks wisdom in vain</i>

15:12	<i>Does not like to be reproved/rebuked. Will not go to the wise</i>
17:5	<i>Mocks at the poor and is glad at calamity (disaster)</i>
19:25	<i>Does not learn prudence or take instruction from the wise</i>
19:28	<i>Mocks at justice and devours iniquity</i>

4. How else is the proud illustrated in the verses below?

12:15, 18:2, 26:12, 28:26:

The proud is described as a fool who does not listen to advice, take interest in understanding but only interested in expressing his opinion. He considers himself wise and right in his own eyes.

25:14, 25:6-7, 27:1, 30:8-9

Make and boast of the promises he does not intend to fulfil. Filled with falsehood and lies.

5. What will happen to the scoffers/mockers?

God hates scoffers, hence they will be dishonoured and punished

The previous studies in Proverbs 1-9 is oriented around the key message that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. In chapter 9, the father urges his son to choose one path (one Woman) which is Lady Wisdom instead of Lady Folly.

6. From Proverbs 9, both Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly calls out to the “simple”, how are they similar or different to the scoffers/mockers? (Proverbs 1:22, 8:5, 13:1, 15:12, 19:25 and 21:11)

Lady wisdom urges the simple to leave their simple ways, practice prudence, not reprove a scoffer, but to be wise. Most importantly, fear the Lord; Lady Folly lacks sense, is proud without wisdom and asks the simple to continue to be simple and further form in foolishness.

7. What are the consequences of following Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly?

Lady Wisdom: Increase in wisdom and learning, leads to the path to life

Lady Folly: End of the way of wisdom, which is the path to death.

8. In between the calls from Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly, what is the key advice/message in 9:7-12?

Those who reprove a scoffer will be hated while a wise man would love to be reproved, as it leads them to wisdom. And the wise desire to be more and more wise in humility.

And this wisdom starts with the fear of the Lord, to listen to God’s words, commandments and advice instead of with pride like the scoffers.

9. Read Proverbs 31, how similar is the wife described in the Chapter with Lady Wisdom om Proverbs 9?

The wife in chapter 31 is the picture of how good Lady Wisdom is, the personification of wisdom. She brings good, not harm, to any man who finds her. And at heart, her beauty is this: she fears the Lord

Application

10. Looking back the past week, have you been tempted to act pridefully (because you think you know better)? How did this study urge you to respond differently?

11. Have you experienced difficulty in accepting rebuke from a caring friend? How did you react at that time and why do you feel that?

12. Is there wisdom from Proverbs in the previous studies that you find difficult to obey God in? Share honestly. How may your pride be getting in the way?

Other Leaders Notes:

Proverbs Chapters 1-9 and chapter 31 are like a frame around the wisdom that is found in chapters 10-30. The frame says that the fear of the Lord—the creator and God of all the world—is the beginning and foundation of wisdom; and that the choice between wisdom and folly lies before all of us. Yet the painting in the middle of the frame is also important. We have spent previous studies looking at the sayings in Proverbs 10-31 in detail. As we understand in detail what it means to live wisely in this or that area of life, so we walk step by step the path of wisdom of Proverbs 1-9. We also hear in detail the call of Lady Wisdom.

Study 15: “The Search for Wisdom” (Proverbs 30:1-31:9)

Big Idea: God’s word exposes the folly of man-made wisdom and is revealed for our instruction, to live in His creation.

Getting Started

1. Do you think that Christians are wiser than other people?

Time to explore the perception that we know better than non-believers. We often think that we’ve made some pretty wise decisions in our lives, but we fail to realise that we depend on human philosophy, societal norms and even clichés a lot more than we think. And in thinking that we don’t just because we know biblical jargon, we think ourselves better than those who don’t.

Context

The purpose of the Book of Proverbs is to make the simple wise and the wise increase in their learning (Pro 1:4,5). That’s why the author keeps telling the readers to listen up and pay attention to his teachings and instructions to fear the Lord i.e. treating God as God because we are not. We then saw how wisdom applies to all of life: in our wealth, relationships, speech and behaviour. And that’s what you missed on Proverbs!

Digging In

2. Quickly read through Proverbs 30:1-31:9. What does it mean? Discuss with the person next to you.

Verses	Short title/ remarks/ notes
V1-4	<i>A stark contrast between who God is and who man is in relation to God. There is a sense of fear and reverence for the God who transcends the natural world and There is a mystery to God's name that only God knows.</i>
V5-6	<i>Further insight into the character of God being trustworthy which promises protection to those who rely on him. The implication of God being true is that those who speak against him are telling lies.</i>
V7-10	<i>There is a danger if a person relies on his circumstances to live a life that pleases God. Having riches does not guarantee thanksgiving and praise to God and being in a state of poverty (like asceticism) does not guarantee contentment and more opportunities to worship God. V10 seems to add to this section and the one before (V5-6) as slandering (lying about) a servant to his master is in essence lying to the master. It comes with consequences</i>
V11-14	<i>This group of people seem to be proud and self-conceited. Self-righteousness looks dangerously carnal. They may not even know or want to know that they lack wisdom and can benefit from it. Additionally, they have no regard for the deeds that they do.</i>

V15-16	<i>The 4 things indicate a sense of emptiness that can never be satisfied. That is why they each crave something within their own context. Such is the life of those whose pursuits go against God because they lack purpose and the wisdom to live meaningfully.</i>
V17	<i>This warning seems to link back to V11-14 where the hopeless child gets punished for his pride and pointless living. This verse seems to sum up V11-16 as a bigger section.</i>
V18-20	<i>In each of the four instances, there are movements that can be observed but can never be traced. Such is our perception of the world around us - limited. This sets the premise for V20 where again, it is clear that there is sin but it is hard to trace. These things are hard for man to understand but God knows.</i>
V21-23	<i>These four situations seem to place four individuals into circumstances that conflict with who they are. In one sense, old habits die hard. Just because you promote a servant to be a king, it doesn't mean he was ever fit to be king.</i>
V24-28	<i>What is considered weak, feeble and to a certain extent foolish is wiser than people might think. They did not need to rely on human wisdom or their own because they behave the way they were created to do.</i>
V29-31	<i>Wisdom and power can be clearly seen in creation. In essence, God has shown his authority and wisdom throughout creation. Why do we ignore it?</i>
V32-33	<i>Final words of instruction to the reader: It's better to not speak than speak foolishly. It is foolish to test others with foolishness. The result is folly when the other party gets physical.</i>
V1-9	<i>A wise mother instructs her son to make wise decisions as a king lest there be consequences that affect other people. Sin is relational.</i>

3. What is the difference between how Agur starts his proverbs compared to Solomon? (cf. Proverbs 1:8, 2:1, 3:1-2, 4:1-2)

The earlier chapters by Solomon focuses on getting wisdom and so he tells the reader to hear him and not forget his commandments. In chapter 4, Solomon even points out that he has good precepts to offer. Here in Pro 31, Agur is the opposite in the sense where he acknowledges he lacks wisdom and has nothing to offer. He sees how small he is and compares himself to the Almighty. In that comparison, he praises God for the many things that God did but does not understand them. He is fearing the LORD which almost seems like Agur read Proverbs and understood what it was really saying. He who is wise knows his foolishness.

4. Verse 5-6 says that God's Word which is true in nature protects those who rely on it. What will God's word protect you from and how? (cf. Ephesians 4:11-14, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Deuteronomy 8:1-3)

From Ephesians 4, we see that God's provision of people with the gifts of Word teaching ministry equips us to maturity in Christ so that we know God and do not stray from His truth. In 2 Timothy 3, God's Word helps us understand our convictions, what to repent of and how, and it prepares us for ministry. Lastly, Deuteronomy 8 highlights the reliability of God's Word which reflects His faithfulness. Everything He promised always comes to pass as He has entered a covenant with His people which He will keep. That is why in Deuteronomy 8:3, the point is made that Israel does not need to rely on food for survival because it was not food that kept them alive but God's faithfulness shown through His spoken Word by Moses.

5. Why is Agur so fussy with his prayer request? What does it show about Agur's relationship with God?

It is interesting that Agur has such specific requests when he brings his petitions to God. He understands that the underlying issue of humanity in this life is sin. It may seem self-righteous of Agur to want to be kept away from falsehood and lying but it's not because he thinks he is better than other people. We have already seen how lowly he sees himself in V1-2 and we have seen his stance on lying in V5-6 which is essentially speaking against God. Hence, he is actually aware of his potential to sin through lying and falsehood which he wants to avoid desperately. Moreover, good circumstances and wealth do not guarantee that a person will praise God or thank Him, even though that is the appropriate response. Likewise, the lack of material wealth and what we might consider to be unfavourable circumstances do not guarantee a higher form of spirituality. We tend to think that having less possessions to distract us will allow us to hear God more clearly but that is not the case. In fact, putting ourselves in a state of misery and poverty is setting ourselves up to sin through profane God's name and stealing. Agur knows all of this because he recognises his sin. That is why he petitions with God for the sake of staying faithful to Him in good times and bad. "Deny them not to me before I die" shows us how hungry he is to be right with God and how dependent he is on Him. In our relationship with God, it is not only OK but great that we are the needy one. God is faithful to keep us faithful.

6. What is the real issue with this group of destructive people in V11-14?

They are self-conceited and self-righteous which causes them to behave in an extremely condescending manner. In other words, they are lying to themselves. How often we think that pride and lying are separate but they're not. We like to label people who exaggerate about their worth and abilities as egotistical and self-indulgent - that might be the case if and only if they weren't providing solid facts of themselves. If they were giving an accurate depiction of their skills and qualities, can we really say that they are proud? Thinking from this angle, humility is not being like everyone else but knowing that even though there are qualities that are unique to us, we have no ground for boasting because we are equally sinful and equally deserving of God's wrath. Also, we think that lies are destructive to relationships such that the person being lied to is being betrayed of trust. But from here, lies seem to have a huge impact on how we perceive ourselves. It is possible to live a lie and it

is dangerous because we would be living apart from God's true Word which protects. These lies will eventually be the death of us if we don't change (cf. v17).

7. Look at Agur's lists from V18-31. What do they have in common and what do they show us?

Verses	Similarities between the items on the list	Purpose of the list(s)
V18-20	<i>There is a form of movement mentioned but none of them leave traces.</i>	<i>To recognise the wonderful things of this world that are beyond our comprehension. At the same time, it sheds light on what can be known but is hidden - sin.</i>
V21-23	<i>Each individual experiences a progression in status that is sudden and abrupt. None of them are bearable.</i>	<i>An example of folly; this shows that no sudden progression in life makes you progress in wisdom or virtue. You may just be the same person with a more impressive exterior.</i>
V24-28	<i>All of them are considered weak by human standards yet more capable in many ways.</i>	<i>Creatures are meant to live the way they were designed to be by the Creator. Humans need not focus on their own philosophy for life.</i>
V29-31	<i>Each example appears intimidating, dangerous and majestic.</i>	<i>Through creation, we can perceive power and authority because it's so obvious. Shouldn't God's power and authority be even more obvious then?</i>

8. What is Agur's command to foolish people?

It's better to stay silent than say something foolish. The Chinese saying goes, "Even if you don't speak, no one will call you dumb or mute". If you know that you are a fool, withhold your foolishness from other people. As surely as pressing milk creates curds (cheese-making process), saying stupid things will offend people. The real question here is, what is Agur saying to you?

9. King Lemuel's mom seems to mean business. Why does she instruct him so strictly?

The author of the last chapter of Proverbs, King Lemuel, or as his mother calls him, Lemuel (one belonging to God), shows us the ideal king, a king who would not fail where many have. His mother gives him three restrictions to keep. The first is to keep his strength from women. I don't think this means that he is to celibate but rather not get involved in sexual promiscuity; notice that the word used here is "women" and not "woman". Next, she instructs him to stay away from those who destroy kings. Again, not sure if that necessarily means foreign nations or political enemies (although it would always be wise to stay away from people who threaten your life) but rather people who can influence you and lead you astray. Many kings have fallen because they had advisers with hidden agendas and malicious intent. Then, she also tells him to not get drunk on wine and remain sober-minded. Without

clarity of mind, he cannot rule wisely which means that those ruled will suffer from his folly. If he speaks, he is to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, people who are outcasts in society and mistreated. Lemuel's mom is not as restrictive as we might think. She is preparing him for what he was born to do; rule wisely and justly.

10. How does the instructions from Lemuel's mother relate to us?

We are not of royal birth but we are all kings (all of us, even women). We are God's representatives on earth to take care of His creation (Gen 1:28). We are to rule wisely in righteousness and justice. Follow-up question: was there anyone who matched up to Lemuel's mother's standard of a king?

Application

11. If we believe that God's word is true and protects us, how should we treat it?

*The idea here is not to get people to think about doing their daily devotions but to think about how they read, understand and apply it. Paul in Romans 2:13 says "For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified." We hear it every Sunday but do we listen? How seriously do we take God's Word? If this is the source of all wisdom, how do we use it in our lives? If the Bible teaches us not only how to understand matters that concern us but which matters **ought** to concern us, what are we most concerned with today?*

12. We've seen Agur's prayer. What do we pray for? Why?

Are we aligned with God like Agur? Do we see that our greatest issue is sin and that the goal is holiness? Do we see the need to trust God more and rely on his wisdom?

13. So, do you think you are wise?

Study 16: “The A-Z of Wisdom” (Proverbs 31:10-31)

Getting started

1. At first glance, what do you think Proverbs 31:10-31 is about?
 - 10 steps to becoming the Christian woman that every Christian man wants
 - Checklist of things to look for in your wife-to-be
 - Jesus
 - Description of what life could be like if the reader were to live out the book’s instructions
 - Summary of the whole of Proverbs

Because this is meant to be a summary; we’ll be doing a lot of Bible flipping to see the links between this “excellent wife” and the earlier parts of Proverbs that we’ve studied.

Digging in

2. Recall what we’ve seen in Proverbs 1:1-4 – what is the purpose of the whole of Proverbs? How is this exemplified in the Excellent Wife?

Proverbs teaches us to...	How it’s seen in the “Excellent Wife”
<i>1:2 - live wisely (i.e more than knowing facts, but making right use of the facts in life)</i>	<i>31:26 – she opens her mouth with wisdom.</i>
<i>1:4 - be prudent (i.e exercising care and good judgement in planning for the future)</i>	<i>31:15, 16, 21, 25 – the fact that she works hard and faces the future with confidence is an indicator of her prudence</i>
<i>1:4 - live in discretion (self-restraint and sensitivity so as not to cause offence or hurt to others)</i>	<i>31:11,28 – the good relationship that she shares with her children and her husband shows her discretion</i>

3. Proverbs 1:7 is the central message, the ‘thesis statement’ of the book of Proverbs on wisdom. Recall what being wise ultimately looks like; and compare how it’s observed in the Excellent Wife.

As we’ve seen throughout Proverbs; to be truly wise, we need to fear the LORD, the One who’s created the whole earth in His wisdom (Proverbs 8:22-31), the One who knows best. And to fear the LORD is to know and trust Him, to adhere to His definitions of right and wrong rather than our own.

In Proverbs 31:30, we see that rather than deriving value from what’s deceitful and fleeting (charm and beauty) – this excellent wife is praiseworthy because of her fear of the LORD.

4. In Proverbs 9:1-12, we were introduced to Lady Wisdom. How does the Excellent Wife compare to Lady Wisdom?

- *9:5 & 31:14-15 – Provision of food*
- *9:9 & 31:36 – Offer of wise instruction / teaching*
- *9:10 & 31:30 – Both center their lives on the fear of the LORD*

5. We've covered a few topics as we looked at Proverbs 10-31; work, wealth, pleasure, marriage, friendship, words and pride. What are we told about the Excellent Wife regarding these areas?
 - *The Excellent Wife obtains **wealth** by hard **work**, as we see in v13, v14, v16, v18, v19, v24; yet she does not hoard wealth – she is generous in her giving (v20).*
 - *Her **words** are words of wisdom and she teaches kindness (v26).*
 - *Regarding **marriage**, her husband trusts her (v11) and praises her (v28).*

6. Given all that we've seen today; do you think Proverbs 31:10-31 is meant for women only? Why or why not?

7. In what ways do you think you (as a man / woman) have fallen short of this standard of an Excellent Wife? How do you think you can work on these things?

8. In what ways do we see Jesus as the perfect fulfillment of these characteristics of the Excellent Wife?

Application

9. Given that we've covered almost the entire book of Proverbs; have you / how have you lived your life differently? What have you found to be particularly helpful for you?

Study 17: “Proverbs and the New Testament”

So, we’ve reached the final study of Proverbs! Together we have explored how the key to approaching Proverbs is to read it in light of the truth that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge; it is by looking at the world through the lens of treating God as God, that we gain true wisdom. But these Proverbs come from the accumulated knowledge of generations past – Proverbs is an Old Testament book. How then, do we view Proverbs in light of the New Testament, and more importantly, through the lens of Jesus Christ?

Getting started

1. Before we jump into the New Testament, let’s recap. How does Proverbs fit into the Old Testament (discuss the style of the book, the themes, why you think it was written)?

This question is just to have a summary of the book before we summarise the series. Key points: -

- *Proverbs is one of the three ‘wisdom books (the other two being Ecclesiastes and Job). As such, it holds general truths about living wisely, NOT laws (we see this one in the study later)*
 - *Proverbs speaks of ‘khokhmah’ – applied knowledge/skill. It is a collection of sayings from wise followers of God in the past, who became wise through observing the world and its condition.*
 - *Proverbs is then a book to guide believers of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob on how to live a godly life. As such, it has a simple moral logic – wisdom in the fear of the LORD results in virtuous living leading to success and peace, while folly and evil result in pride and selfishness leading to ruin and shame*
2. Having gone through the many topics Proverbs covers, think back to some of the consequences Proverbs gives for an act or way of living (exp: Proverbs 10:27 – “The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short”). Do you think Proverbs promises too much?

Proverbs makes a lot of bold claims. Of course, these are general truths, and sometimes things really do play out the way Proverbs puts it. Still, it may often feel like the book of Proverbs is just an optimistic book – very fluffy and nice to read, but reality is often disappointing. Let the group openly discuss about whether they think Proverbs is all talk and nothing more, or sometimes right about how the world is.

Wisdom in the New Testament

3. Look up these verses and see how Proverbs and Jesus are linked.

OT Passage	Jesus	Link
Proverbs 1:1	Luke 11:31	<i>The book of Proverbs was mostly written by Solomon, who was considered the wisest person in the Old Testament. Jesus is greater than Solomon. Simply put, Jesus is the wisest person who ever walked this Earth. He lived in obedience and light of Proverbs.</i>
Proverbs 2:3-5	Colossians 2:2-3	<i>Proverbs here says that if you search for insight and understanding, you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. It paints this wisdom like hidden treasures. Paul says that the knowledge of God’s mystery is Christ, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. Christ is</i>

		<i>the ultimate source of godly wisdom. Seek Christ and heed his teachings.</i>
Proverbs 3:1-4	Luke 2:40,52	<i>Proverbs says if you live in the wisdom of Proverbs, you will find favour and good success in the sight of God and man. Jesus is later described in the book of Luke as being filled with wisdom and having the favour of God upon him growing up. Verse 52 directly says Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man. Jesus was living a life of godly wisdom; he is the perfect model of the Proverbs life.</i>
Proverbs 8:22	Colossians 1:15-16	<i>In Proverbs 8:22, wisdom (personified as a woman) explains that she was present when God created everything. Wisdom is an attribute of God applied in creation. Paul points out that through Christ all things were created. Jesus is not equal to wisdom, but wisdom is most definitely an attribute of Jesus, who is God.</i>
Proverbs 10:24-25	Matthew 7:24-27	<i>Proverbs points out that the righteous (the wise) will be established forever. The wicked and foolish will be swept away, they will not last. Jesus in Matthew says that those who apply His words are like the wise man who built his house on a solid foundation, resistant to the rain, wind and flood. The parallels are striking. Proverbs talks about how the wicked will be 'no more' after the tempest (a violent and windy storm) passes. Likewise, Jesus says those who remain indifferent to His words are like a foolish man who built their house on sand; rain, wind and flood cause it to fall. Jesus words are just like the wisdom sayings in Proverbs; obeying them makes you wise.</i>

4. So, how should we as New Testament Christians view, read and apply Proverbs?

Proverbs is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is the embodiment of Proverbs. He created the world in wisdom, He is greater than Solomon, He lived a model Proverbs life and He holds wisdom in His teachings. While written by and for the Old Testament generation, Proverbs is best understood and viewed through the lens of Jesus and His mission, His finished work! More importantly, now that we have Jesus, we must study and apply His teachings. As we will see, while Proverbs promises the good life for those who apply its wisdom, Jesus promises the best possible, eternal life for those who heed his teachings.

5. New Testament authors have quoted or alluded to some parts of Proverbs when talking about the Christian life. Look at these verses in Proverbs and think about how you would apply them in your Christian life. Then look up the New Testament references and see how it is applied there (think of this as looking at the Proverb through the lens of Jesus). Finally, think about whether the consequence promised (if any) is applied 'Now', 'Not Yet' (will pass when Christ returns to judge) or 'Both' (Now and Not Yet).

This question requires a lot more page flipping. Perhaps split the group into smaller groups and assign different passages to each to speed things up, then get back together and discuss (there are 17 different proverbs to look at). Try to explore all of them. Be sure to leave about 35 minutes for the rest of the study and prayer.

Proverb	Application	NT Reference	Now	Not Yet	Both
2:3-6	<i>Pray for wisdom, read the Bible. We will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God, because He gives wisdom.</i>	James 1:5 <i>We too can ask for wisdom from God. God will give generously.</i>	/		
3:3-4	<i>Stay faithful to God. For us, that would be to stay faithful to the Jesus and the Bible. A faithful person is looked upon favourably by God and others.</i>	2 Corinthians 8:21, Hebrews 12:1-2 <i>We are reminded to live a life that is honourable to God and men. Together, we are called to be faithful to the gospel of Christ as we live.</i>	/		
3:34	<i>Be humble, for the LORD will give favour to the humble and scorn the scorners (show disdain).</i>	James 4:6,10, 1 Peter 5:5 <i>Here both James and Peter point out that God will give grace to the humble and oppose the proud. As such, be humble. God will oppose (punish) the proud when Jesus comes back to judge.</i>		/	
4:26	<i>Carefully weigh your choices so that in all your decisions, you walk on a path that will lead to further righteousness. Part of doing this is to study Scripture and pray, and to guard against falling away.</i>	Hebrews 12:13 <i>Here we are encouraged to persevere and not abandon the Christian walk, that what is 'lame' may be 'healed' (eternal goals). I feel this is a now and not yet thing, since being wise will inform our present decision making, to make our paths 'straight', but of course there is an eternal aspect presented in Hebrews.</i>			/
10:12	<i>Practice love. Love others for love covers all offenses.</i>	1 Peter 4:8 <i>Peter here also says love covers a multitude of sins. As we learn to live in love we learn to let go of past transgressions and to live in peace with each other.</i>	/		
11:24	<i>Be generous, for in our generosity we grow 'richer'. God blesses generosity.</i>	2 Corinthians 9:6 <i>Those who sow bountifully reap bountifully and vice versa. It's important not to fall into prosperity gospel territory, so you may note that the bountiful harvest here is in terms of bearing fruit for God's kingdom. This is 'both' since our ultimate prize for being faithful to</i>			/

		<i>gospel work is eternity with Christ in heaven.</i>			
15:29	<i>Live in righteousness, for the LORD hears the prayer of the righteous but is far from the wicked.</i>	James 5:16 <i>The prayer of a righteous person is again said to be power as it works. (Elijah is given as an example, and he was an OT prophet!)</i>	/		
17:3	<i>The LORD will test our hearts through trials and tribulations.</i>	1 Peter 1:7 <i>Our faiths will be tested by various trials (v6). Our genuine faith will result in a great reward of praise, honour and glory when Christ returns. Here the NT builds up on the OT Proverb.</i>		/	
19:17	<i>Be generous with the poor, for you are lending to the LORD; the LORD will repay you for your deed.</i>	Matthew 25:40 <i>The parable Jesus tells explains how on the day of judgement, when we helped our brothers and sisters in Christ when they were in need, we did so to God (might be worth pointing out that these are the ones who will inherit eternal life).</i>		/	
20:22, 25:21- 22	<i>Don't seek revenge, for the LORD will eventually deliver us from evil. Be instead kind to our enemies, for we will 'heap burning coals on his head' while the LORD rewards us.</i>	Romans 12:19-21 <i>Paul echoes what we see in Proverbs; don't seek revenge, leave it to God. Instead, do good to your enemy. 'Burning coals' in the OT represents punishment, so it is possible that Paul is repeating the thought of Romans 12:19, otherwise he may mean you pass shame that may lead to repentance on the enemy.</i>		/	
23:4, 28:22	<i>Do not be materialistic. Don't strive so hard for earthly riches. The greedy will soon be overcome with poverty.</i>	1 Timothy 6:9 <i>Those who strive for wealth fall into temptations. They will sin for wealth, and money is their God. Their ruin and destruction will be fully realised when they suffer eternally as a result of exchanging God for the idol of money. In a way, we see how greed can destroy a person in the now (gambling,</i>			/

		<i>law breaking that leads to worldly punishment, etc)</i>			
24:11-12	<i>Strive for justice. Always seek to help those who need it. If you play ignorance, be warned that the LORD knows your heart and will repay a man according to his work.</i>	Matthew 16:27, Revelations 22:12 <i>Jesus will return and judge justly, repaying all for their deeds. This punishment will only come when Jesus returns.</i>		/	
24:21	<i>Fear the LORD and the king. Do not join those who do otherwise.</i>	1 Peter 2:17 <i>Again, we are asked to honour all. Honour all people, but fear God.</i>	/		
26:11	<i>Learn from your foolishness. If you made a foolish mistake, avoid repeating it. That's foolishness through and through.</i>	2 Peter 2:21-22 <i>(2:1 might help with context). The false teachers are compared to the Proverb. The one who turned to salvation only to fall away is like the foolish dog that eats its own vomit.</i>	/		
27:1	<i>Don't boast about your prospects, for you do know have any certainty of what will happen after all.</i>	James 4:13-14 <i>The same sentiment is echoed here. Do not boast about your prospects, for you do not know what will be in store for you. (I feel this is a 'now and not yet', because in the now it is true, we don't know what will happen tomorrow, but in the broader sense, those who boast and act like there is no God fail to see the eternal punishment that awaits - not yet. They boast in vein.)</i>			/
29:23	<i>Be humble, for the humble will be honoured, while the prideful will be humiliated.</i>	Luke 14:11 <i>Just an echo of the same principle, whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.</i>		/	
30:8	<i>Ask that the LORD would provide all you need and nothing more, and to keep you from falsehood and lying.</i>	Matthew 6:11, 1 Timothy 6:8 <i>We too pray for God to supply our daily necessities by his grace. Always be content for God gives all we need.</i>	/		

After going through the exercise:

6. How does the New Testament apply the book of Proverbs to us today? How is this distinctly Christian?

In the New Testament we see that the Proverbs and the wise godly way of life it teaches, are at times of eternal value and importance. We see that the wisdom and fear of the LORD still holds up for us today. And we have a great model, Jesus Christ, who lived the perfect Proverbs life we all fail to live. The New Testament authors show us how Proverbs stays true in light of the gospel of Christ. They reveal to us how to continue living as a saved people. After all, if it's wise treating God as God, then it's certainly wise to live like a saved people, honouring Christ. Our wisdom is justified by Christ who is 'our wisdom'.

*The book of Proverbs is wise. This is something even some atheists may agree to. There are sayings in it that we must admit are right. So, what is distinctly Christian about Proverbs considering the New Testament? **Again, the answer is Jesus – the promises in Proverbs are only true because of what Jesus has done on the cross. Without Jesus we are all lost and deserve God's punishment regardless of our 'good deeds'. For the Christian, life has changed and our attitude towards God has changed. We now 'fear' him and live to bring him glory.***

Leaders, if your group is struggling, here are some supplementary questions to help them.

1. *How do we see the sayings of Proverbs handled in the NT?*
 2. *How would Proverbs be different if we didn't have the NT/Jesus?*
7. How do the last three columns (Now, Not Yet, Both) help us to understand why our world is the way it is?

This is straightforward and has already been explored a little in the previous question. Basically, the New Testament shows us how Proverbs makes promises that don't seem to hold up. The wicked get away with their corrupt acts, the righteous are taken advantage of and despised. But some of the promises given in Proverbs all hold true when we consider Christ who will return and make everything wrong right again. Some promises are true right now, some are only going to be fully realised in the future, and some are a foretaste of that fully realised future promise (future – Christ's return).

As Christians, the wisest decision we have ever been able to make is to follow Jesus. Our journey to eternal life begins as we live wisely in this creation under Christ. At Jesus' return, wisdom and folly will be unmistakable. We will experience the full consequences of wisdom in heaven, or the full consequences of folly in hell. Maybe Proverbs doesn't promise too much; maybe it promises too little.

Application

8. Assuming you wanted to reread Proverbs on your own, how would you attempt to rightly apply Proverbs?

*Always try to read Proverbs through the lens of Jesus Christ and the promises of the New Testament. That way, we can guard the right application of the book. We will avoid thinking wrongly about the promises provided, that could have disastrous consequences. **More importantly, instead of seeing Proverbs in a moralistic way, we should see that Jesus is the one who is righteous and faith in Him clothes us in his righteousness; it brings us into a relationship with God where all the truths of proverbs are now and/or not yet.***

9. How has this study informed your understanding and appreciation of Jesus?

For me, it reminded me that Jesus is the perfect model of wisdom. Solomon was wise, but he fell. Jesus is greater than Solomon. And we read that in Him we gain all the riches of wisdom. He is the wisdom and power of God. All the promises of Proverbs that may seem like a far cry from the real world are all very real in Jesus. In that I have a secure hope that I am not wasting my time in trying to understand and live by the book of Proverbs in light of Christ.

10. Based on what we studied today, how would you respond if a friend shared these statements with you?

a. *"I don't know whether God is really there. I pray and commit all my plans and troubles to God, and I strive to be obedient, but things keep turning bad."*

b. *"Don't you ever want to do the things non-Christians do? They're all happy with how things are for them. It's not wrong to enjoy life, right? I just feel like sometimes we miss out on what life has to offer."*

11. Is there someone at your school/workplace or in your family whom you could share what you have learned today? Write their name down and pray for them.