

November

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ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Small Group Bible Study

Wisdom from Proverbs

SERIES INTRODUCTION

The Book of Proverbs is concerned about practical wisdom for practical living. It is not a book of doctrines or a standard of Biblical confessions. Its starting point and end point is summarized in Proverbs 1:7 – “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge...”.

The Book compares and contrasts two lives – that of a wise person and that of a foolish person. Their journeys are very different and their ends are on opposite poles. The wise lives toward light and life, while the foolish lives toward destruction and death. Furthermore, how one lives affects not only himself but also others around him. Godliness produces further godliness. Sin generates further degeneration. The end of life we will get to depends on the starting point that we choose. Do we fear God?

Chapters 1 – 9 provides a framework for the entire collection of Israelite wisdom contributed by various authors, primarily King Solomon. Yet for so wise a man like Solomon, endowed by God, he was not free from temptation and sin. How much more it is for us who lack wisdom that we ought to sit up and listen in the wisdom instructions found in this very Book.

2 Nov

Fear of the LORD Brings Wisdom

Proverbs 1

9 Nov

Many Blessings of Wisdom

Proverbs 2 & 3

16 Nov

Warnings Against Adultery

Proverbs 5 & 7

21 Nov

Warnings Against Foolishness

Proverbs 6

30 Nov

Choose Wisdom's Instructions

Proverbs 8

Fear of the Lord Brings Wisdom

PROVERBS 1

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC	KEY VERSE
MAIN PERSON/S	
KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS	

Introduction

The world calls out to us with voices of temptations and pseudo-wisdom. They leave us confuse about ourselves, about life itself, and how to live it. In our confusion, we look for guidance from many wrong places. Whoever shouts the loudest seems to draw the most attention. But whose voice are we hearing? Is it the Lord God himself? What is the source of all wisdom? If we hear from the wrong source, what will be the end of us?

For Study and Discussion

1. The Purpose of Proverbs (1:1-7)

The Book of Proverbs is like a treasure chest of practical wisdom for life. There is something for everyone who is willing to take guidance from it.

a. What benefits will a person gain by practising the Proverbs? Which of those benefits do you particularly seek? Why? (vv2-4)

b. How will an already wise person also benefit from practising the Proverbs? (vv5-6)

c. The quest for [spiritual] knowledge does not begin with a superior intellect, or resourcefulness, or ability. What is the vital starting point? Why is that so? (v7a; consider John 1:1&4; James 1:5)

d. What does it take for us to willingly accept [godly] advice and chastisement from another person? What do the Proverbs call those who reject wisdom and discipline?

2. Discipleship Pointers

Discipleship Pointers: God alone being the Creator of mankind and Giver of life is the source of all wisdom for living. Proverbs are divinely inspired wise sayings which God-fearing people have practised and so realised their benefits to life. To reject these proverbial instructions is as good as rejecting God himself to our own detriment.

2. The Protection of Proverbs (1:8-19)

a. Wise parental teachings and guidance are valuable and ought to be respected and embraced (vv8-9). Yet, why is this not often the case?

b. Verses 11-14 give us a sense of the sinfulness of sin (see 1 Corinthians 15:56a; Romans 6:23a). Describe the enticement of sinners in your own words. What do they look like around us every day?

- c. The parental exhortations against temptations are simple and sensible – “do not give in” (v10) and “do not set foot on their paths (i.e. do not follow)” (v15). What dangers await those who spurn these appeals? (vv16-19)

Discipleship Pointers: The sinfulness of sin cannot be underestimated. James 4:7 exhorts believers – “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” We must RESIST temptation and FLEE from it. Let us humble ourselves and be open to accept godly advice and chastisement from others. Let us practice divine wisdom so that our lives may be protected from the merciless destruction of sin.

- 3. The Proclamation of Proverbs (1:20-33)
 - a. Wisdom is personified as a town-crier calling out for listeners from various places. What strategic significance do those places offer? Where are those places in our everyday life that Wisdom continues to cry out to us? (vv20-21)
 - b. Wisdom calls out to three types of people. What are they? Why would they not listen? (vv22-23)
 - c. Wisdom is often rejected and spurned. We are all guilty as such from time to time.
 - i. Wisdom will have the last laugh at those who reject her and consequently get into overwhelming troubles (vv24-27).
 - ii. Wisdom will ignore those who reject her. She will not answer their calls for help (vv28-31).
 - iii. What changes should we make to our attitude so as to heed the above warnings?
 - d. Contrast the ways of a fool and the ways of the wise (vv32-33)? What major differences can you identify? Do we think twice about rejecting God's wisdom?

Discipleship Pointers: Wisdom from God is freely available to his people at all time and in all places. Unfortunately, wisdom is rejected because we do not fear God enough to seek him and listen out for him. The consequence of not listening to Wisdom's call is DESTRUCTION and DEATH for upon your own life and the lives of others. Beware. Be warned!

Family/Group Moment

Cultivating a consistent “fear of the LORD” involves a life-time of journeying with God, meditating on his word, submitting to his chastisement, growing in godliness, and prayerfully waiting upon his Spirit's leading in our decisions. Pray for one another (children, spouse, ministry co-workers, church leaders, etc.) to desire the LORD and fear him.

Many Blessings of Wisdom

PROVERBS 2 & 3

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC	KEY VERSE
MAIN PERSON/S	
KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS	

Introduction

Proverbs 2 and 3 respectively opens with an exhortation, "My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you..." (2:1); "My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart..." (3:1) Keeping and practicing of wisdom brings many blessings. However, all its blessings would be lost on us if one only listens to its wise sayings but put in no effort to do what it exhorts. Are you wise or foolish? Well, that will depend on your practical response to these proverbs

For Study and Discussion

1. If we really seek after wisdom as a thing of value (like looking for hidden treasure); if we work to get wisdom and understanding (2:1-4), then
 - a. We will receive God's gift of _____ (2:5-6)
 - b. We will receive God's victory and _____ (2:7-8, 11)
 - c. We will understand _____ (2:9)
 - d. Wisdom will be _____ (2:10)
 - e. Wisdom will save us from _____ (2:12-15) and _____ (2:16-19)
 - f. We will walk in the way of the _____ (2:20)

Discipleship Pointers: Wisdom, knowledge and understanding are all gifts from God. But they are gifts that require work on our part – we have to desire it – we have to seek for it! We cannot just sit down and wait for God to pour it out upon us. Do we desire the wisdom that comes from God? Since wisdom comes from God, a wise person is a godly person. A wicked/immoral person is foolish – no matter how much the world praise his wisdom!

2. In Proverbs 3, we have a set of actions and behaviours that (in some case) are associated with blessings. For each of these verses, list the action/behaviour and the resulting blessings (if any). Compare/contrast them with our own lives. How do we fare?
 - a. 3:1-2
 - b. 3:3-4
 - c. 3:5-6

- d. 3:7-8
- e. 3:9-10
- f. 3:11-12 – This verse is quoted by Hebrews 12:5-6. Hebrews 12:7-12 expands on this proverb. What is it say to us?
- g. 3:13-18
- h. 3:21-26
- i. 3:27-28
- j. 3:29-30

Discipleship Pointers: Are we living wise/godly lives? If we are, then our light will shine before men and they will see our good deeds and praise God (Matthew 5:14-16). We are called to be witnesses to the world by godly living. Are we witnesses to the world?

Wise, godly living will lead to blessings – all things been equal. But we need to remember that we live in a sinful, evil world – so all things are not always equal. So let us not fall into the trap where we simplistically link somebody (or our own) blessings/lack of blessing to their godliness. Wise action may not evidently lead to blessings, but wickedness can surely lead to major problems.

- 3. We often see wicked/violent people prosper and do well. We might even envy them. But Proverbs tell us to “not envy a wicked/violent person”. Why? (3:31-34)

Proverbs 3:34 is quoted by Peter and James. What are Peter and James saying to us?

- a. Peter (1 Peter 5:5-6)
- b. James (James 4:6-10)

Discipleship Pointers: Let us not envy the good life of a wicked/violent person. Instead, let us do what is right in the sight of God. Will we commit to this wise exhortation?

Warnings Against Adultery

PROVERBS 5 & 7

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC	KEY VERSE
MAIN PERSON/S	
KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS	

Introduction

In the Book of Proverbs, there are 10 fatherly appeals or invitations to Wisdom. These fatherly appeals may be identified by the words "my son" – e.g. "Hear, my son" (1:8); "My son, if you receive my words..." (2:1); "My son, do not forget my teaching..." (3:1) Each of these salutations is then followed by a description of what the father desires the son to be wise in or about. The fact that three of these 10 fatherly appeals have something to do with sex should tell us just how important this topic is in the general scheme of things. This study of the three fatherly appeals will help us recognize the danger of ignoring, and the ultimate wisdom in heeding, the father's warnings against adultery.

For Study and Discussion

1. Sexual Morality and Ethics (5:1-23)
 - a. Verses 1-6 portray an immoral woman or adulteress (the same may be said of an immoral man or adulterer). Discuss this portrayal with reference to (i) thought, (ii) speech, and (iii) action, as found in these verses.
 - b. What would a wise man/woman do when put in a sexually or morally challenging situation? (vv7-8) If we fail, what would be the consequences? (vv9-14)
 - c. What do verses 15-20 teach us about virtues related to love and sex? Cf. Genesis 2:24-25.
2. Adultery will Only and Always Lead to Ruin (6:20-35)
 - a. In verses 20-24, what come across strongly as the most important and effective safeguard against falling into adultery or sexual sin?
 - b. Someone has said, "Adultery seldom just happens overnight, it is often a process". Can you describe the kind of "progression" which appears in verses 25 to 35? Give practical ways that we may avoid sliding into sexual sin.

- c. How does someone who commits adultery stand in contrast to a thief? List the adverse things which an adulterer can expect to face as suggested in verses 31-35.
3. Keep Away from Temptation to Adultery (7:1-27)
- Read verses 1-3. Which other part(s) of the Bible do verses 1-3 remind you of? Give passage(s) and verses.
 - What are the characteristics of the unwise/foolish young man in this passage? What are the characteristics of the seductress in this passage? What warnings can we personally take away from these characteristics?
 - How can we be wise or remain wise in the way we deal with members of the opposite sex? (vv21-23) Is there something which we need to do or change, in order to maintain sexual purity, e.g. attitudes, deliberate action?

Discipleship Pointers

- Sex is good but God's plan and design for sex is for it to be confined within the boundary of marriage.
- Sex can be a powerful force, or exert a strong influence, in our lives. We should not fall into the temptation of believing that we by ourselves would be able to handle or control it. Like the other parts of our lives, we need to submit it to the lordship of Christ. This applies whether we are single or married.
- Even if we have committed sexual sin, we can still come to God, through Jesus Christ, for forgiveness and cleansing.

Family/Group Moment

- Parents – have you carefully talked with each other how to educate your children about honouring God with their bodies and of sexual purity? If you have not, why not start talking to each other?
- Children – sex is not just a topic for adult conversation. Sexual education must come firstly from the Bible; not just what the school sexual education programme informs you. Talk to your parents or Christian adults regarding what the Bible teaches.

Warnings Against Foolishness

PROVERBS 6

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC	KEY VERSE
MAIN PERSON/S	
KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS	

Introduction

In Proverbs 6, we are cautioned not to be ensnared by our own words (vv1-5); not to be a sluggard or bum (vv6-11); not to have a perverse heart (vv12-15); not to be ensnared by sexual lust and temptation (vv20-35); but be mindful of what the Lord detests and to abstain from them (vv16-19). In other words, it's about our carelessness, our lazy inertia, our wickedness, carnal mind, and distancing from God.

Often we have difficulties hearing God speak. We don't listen to Him or refuse to seek Him (un)intentionally. We would rather delight in seeking riches or pleasures. Not mindful that such careless seeking often reaps a harvest of misery. Soon, we are not very different from unbelievers, as we turn a deaf ear to our Creator. Is this the kind of life that we want to live?

For Study and Discussion

1. Deliver Yourself (vv1-5)
 - a. While it is idiomatic to say that "words are cheap" (meaning, they are earlier said than done), yet words said are not without consequences. In courts, verbal agreement could be legal binding (i.e. "parol contract"). How might one be ensnared by his own words (v1)?
 - b. What advice is given him to do that he might free himself from his snare (vv3-4)?
2. Teach Yourself (vv6-11)
 - a. Contrast an ant with a sluggard (see also Pro 19:15; 21:24-26; 26:12-16). Why does a sluggard avoid his duties and responsibilities? What is the consequence to his attitude and behaviour?
 - b. What wisdom can an ant offer a sluggish person?
3. Guard Yourself (vv12-35)
 - a. Watch Out for the Scoundrel

Describe what scoundrel and villain are like (or "worthless person" or "wicked man" in the NAS Bible) (vv12-15). What will happen to such a man?

b. Hate the Seven Things Yahweh hates

List the seven things that God detests (vv16-19). Consider the significance of Matthew 5:30 and Proverbs 8:13.

c. Avoid the Way of Adultery (This portion was covered in the previous Bible study lesson. Please review.)

Discipleship Pointers

- How much do the principles/warnings mentioned in this study make real and practical sense to you? What practical steps would you take to free yourself from such sinful entanglements or temptations? Also consider 1 Corinthians 6:18-20.
- Is there any aspect that you find challenging personally and especially in our society? Why?
- How should you pray? Consider even Jesus was not spared of temptation (Matthew 4:1-11). Similarly, Joseph in Genesis 39:7-12. Consider 1 Corinthians 10:11-13; Ephesians 6:10-18.

Family/Group Moment

- Foolish decisions and behavior flow from a reckless heart that is not trained and tamed by the God's word. What decisions/choices have we made that were foolish? What have we learnt from this lesson concerning those decisions/choices?
- Which part of your "body" are you most vulnerable to temptation right now? Why? How should you guard it well?

Choose Wisdom's Instructions

PROVERBS 8

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

In Proverbs 8, wisdom is personified as a lady who sells her wares in a clear and loud fashion – she doesn't hide, she is not timid, she is yelling out to those who need it – the young and foolish. She knows she provides the way to life. She knows those who accept her words will find life, and those who reject her will find death. Wisdom is calling out to us even today. Are we listening?

For Study and Discussion

1. Wisdom's Call (8:1-11)
 - a. Wisdom calls out to the young men (v1). How different is her call compared to the harlot of Proverbs 7:5, 10-11, 21.
 - b. From where does Wisdom appeal to her listeners? Who does she target? Why does she target them? (vv2-5)
 - c. What will happen to those who listen to her? (v5)
 - d. Why is it that the messages which Wisdom gives are easy to the ears of the discerning? (vv6-9) Consider 1 Corinthians 2:10.
 - e. Why is Wisdom better than jewels? (vv10-11)
2. Wisdom's Qualities (8:12-21)
 - a. Wisdom seems to have friends – who are they? (v12)

- b. What does a God-fearing person hate? (v13)
 - c. What are the outcomes of befriending Wisdom? (vv14-16)
 - d. It seems like one who gains Wisdom gains wealth also (v21). This should not be read simplistically as lending prescriptive support to the “Prosperity Gospel”. However, it does suggest that godly living leads to godly blessings according to God’s will.
3. Wisdom’s Origin (8:22-31)
- a. When was Wisdom “born”? (vv22-23)
 - b. Read John 1:1 – How would you equate Word (in John) with Wisdom? What parallel do you see?
4. Wisdom’s Appeal (8:32-36)
- a. What promises await those who keep the way of Wisdom? What do you need to do? (vv32-34)
 - b. What will happen in the end to those who accept Wisdom and to those who reject Wisdom? (vv35-36)

Discipleship Pointers

- Wisdom yells out to us like an overseer of our lives; let us listen and take heed.
- Gaining Wisdom is better than gaining more silver and gold. Let us choose not to spend our time pursuing our career and dreams to the detriment of our path towards eternity. Think for a moment and reflect where our path is heading. Pray that it will be guided by wisdom herself.

Family/Group Moment

- Chasing security through having more titles, more education, more assets, etc. when one has no Wisdom does not sit well with God’s instructions. What wisdom do you need today? Ask God for it (James 1:5)
- As parents, some debate the merit of fortune versus education. Some think that leaving a fortune for their children is better than an education; others think otherwise. However, it seems that leaving a spiritual legacy would be eternally better than both. Do we need to reset our priorities?