

1. Week 23: The Proverbs

2. Recap & Preparing for CG:

Daily Reading for Week:

- Proverbs 1-3, Psalm 148
- Proverbs 4-6, Psalm 149
- Proverbs 7-9, Psalm 150
- Proverbs 10-12, Psalm 1
- Proverbs 13-15, Psalm 2
- Proverbs 16-18, Psalm 3
- Proverbs 19-21, Psalm 4

Resources for Week:

- Read Scripture Video: Proverbs
- Read: Proverbs 1:1-7 and Proverbs 8-9

3. Focus of time together:

To get a proper understanding of the Book of Proverbs, notice the ways we have seen the general principles of the Book of Proverbs to be true or untrue in our lives, and reflect on how our community shares and receives wisdom.

4. Weekly ground rule / goal / value:

Ground rule: Our ground rule for the week is to not interrupt someone when they are speaking. Before jumping in with our thought or opinion, ask the person who was sharing if they have had the time and space to finish expressing their full thought.

5. Connection and Unity Exercise (Mutual Invitation, 15 minutes):

Share in one minute what you are bringing into the room from this week.

6. Opening Prayer:

Read the following prayer aloud slowly:

God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
And wisdom to know the difference.

7. Intro to Discussion:

This week, we continue our look at the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament in the Book of Proverbs.

The Book of Proverbs is often misinterpreted as either a set of exact prescriptions for how to act or a list of promises that will always be true. This leads to confusion when, for instance, two proverbs seem to contradict each other, like Proverbs 26:4-5:

*Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
or you yourself will be just like him.
Answer a fool according to his folly,
or he will be wise in his own eyes.*

What are we to make of this seeming contradiction? First, we must understand that the Book of Proverbs is not prescriptive for how to act in every circumstance or situation — nor are they promises for the rewards you will definitely receive if you act rightly. Rather, the Book of Proverbs is presenting observations of the world that are generally true but not always true. It is trying to form in the reader a level of understanding and wisdom to know when it is right and good to say or do a certain thing. In that sense, part of what the Book of Proverbs is trying to do is build emotional intelligence in the reader — the ability to say the right thing at the right time, do the right thing at the right time, and feel and express the right emotion as is appropriate to the situation.

The Book of Proverbs is one of the most universally accessible books in the Bible because much of its wisdom concerns the right, wise way to live in day-to-day life. The principles generally apply whether or not you are “religious” or a Christian. However, despite this universalism the aim of the Book of Proverbs moves deeper than simply good and wise living. The entire book is rooted in the claim of Proverbs 1:7: “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.*” Here, “fear” of the Lord does not refer to a type of terror or a constantly cowering for your life but rather a deep awe or reverence for the Creator God. This “fear” is an awareness that you are not the center of the universe, but God is; you are actually a rather small, insignificant being in the scheme of things. This the kind of “fear” in Proverbs 1:7 puts us in a proper mindset to hear God’s teachings and avoid the pride that causes us to reject good instruction. This fear, according to the Book of Proverbs, is the key to living a truly wise, God-centered life.

8. Questions for Large Group Discussion (45 minutes):

Questions for Basic Understanding:

These questions are to help us interpret and understand the text as it was intended to be interpreted and understood.

Proverbs are generally true, but they are not prescriptions or promises. They offer a perspective that, generally speaking, you reap what you sow. How have you seen this to be true? And how have you seen this to be false?

Questions for Listening to Scripture:

These questions are to help us be affected by Scripture in the way it was intended to affect us.

In Proverbs 8-9, we meet the figures of Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly. Wisdom is personified by a woman whose house is on the highest hill in the city, who has been with God since the creation of the universe. In these chapters, Woman Wisdom is associated with YHWH while Woman Folly is associated with idolatry. What the Book of Proverbs is suggesting is when we make choices that are foolish or wicked in a given situation, we are choosing the way of other gods/idols that oppose YHWH. Woman Folly's path is alluring but, like worship of anything other than the one true God, it ultimately leads to death and "the realm of the dead." In contrast, when one acts wisely in a given situation one is truly following the way of God. Woman Wisdom's path is one that leads to the good life full of the presence of YHWH.

Read Proverbs 8

What do you find compelling or off-putting about Woman Wisdom?

Questions for Interacting with Scripture:

These questions are to help us slow down to taste and notice Scripture, savor its richness, and meditate on its complexity of meaning.

Jesus is often associated with the figure of Woman Wisdom in the New Testament. Dallas Willard once called Jesus "the smartest man who ever lived." Often, we think of Jesus as fully God and fully Man. We recognize His miracles and His grace and love, but rarely do we reflect on the fact that he was the smartest and wisest man who ever lived. Throughout His entire life, including when He was a child (see Luke 2), Jesus acted in fullness of wisdom. In Proverbs' terms, Jesus acted in wisdom, in union with YHWH in every situation, conversation, relationship, circumstance, and moment in His life.

1. How can Jesus' life and teachings help show us the connection between faithfulness to God and wisdom for living well?
2. Are there any gospel stories, parables, or attributes of Jesus that reveal both His faithful reverence for God and His incredible wisdom?

Questions for Practicing Community:

These questions are to help us reflect thoughtfully on our felt experience together in light of our shared ground rules, goals, and values.

1. The Book of Proverbs is basically Israel's collection of wisdom sayings that takes the form of advice that a father would give to his son. Consider advice for a moment. What

kind of advice do you tend to take in, where do you consume advice, and how much of it do you consume?

2. Now consider the community group. It's important that we be careful to not prematurely give advice anytime someone offers their personal struggles. We must always try not to offer unsympathetic or insensitive solutions to others' concerns. However, we must never shy away from giving direct and honest feedback to one another in the form of good, sensitive advice. How can your group grow in its culture of advice-giving? Should you be giving each other less advice, more advice, or better advice? Be honest and give examples if possible.

9. Questions for Small Group Discussion (25 minutes):

Questions for Self Examination:

These questions are to help us look at ourselves, be aware and honest about who we are in light of our interaction with Scripture, and consider any appropriate action.

Having a right perspective on the Book of Proverbs is important because a proverb mistakenly read as a command can potentially lead to ways of living that are actually unwise. Take a proverb like 13:24: *"Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them."* This verse is not a prescription for spanking as the only acceptable form of discipline of a child, as some would suggest. Rather, it is an invitation to consider yourself, your child, the situation, and the kind of discipline that your child responds best to and how you can best invite and teach your child to see their wrongdoing while also learning what is right and good.

1. Have there been any proverbs that have been offered to you or that you have offered to others as a prescription that did not actually apply to the situation at hand? Or proverbs offered as a promise that did not come true?
2. Describe what you felt when you realized the proverb did not apply or did not come true?
3. What would have been a wiser way to approach the other person, or for the person to have approached you?

10. Closing (5 minutes):

End your time praying for one another in your small groups.