

I instruct you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths.

Proverbs 4:11





The Art of Living
Pathway Bible Guides: Proverbs

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ABOUT THIS GROWTH GROUP BOOKLET

The booklet you are now holding has been prepared and published by Matthias Media and slightly redressed for our current use. We are looking at the book of Proverbs for term 2 of 2016 and this material ought to serve us well. The studies do not line up directly with the sermon series but will work alongside the sermons over the same period to help delve into the book of Proverbs and know it better. Note that study 6 ought to be spread over three weeks.

I want to thank all those who provided feedback on the Acts 9-18 booklets and your advice will be used to create material for our term 3 studies. The format of the next book will return to something similar to our previous study in Acts.

I hope you enjoy your walk through the book of Proverbs together. It may prove useful for yourself and your group if you looked at the studies on your own before your group meets – a bit of prep work if you like.

In the middle of this booklet is a Proverbs reading plan that I hope you will use to be able to read through the entire book in the course of the term. You could do this as a daily devotion on your own, when meeting with a Christian friend, or for a family devotion. Each reading is short and I encourage you to pray over the content each day.

May you grow in your knowledge of God, in your faith in God and in your love for God and one another.

Your brother in Christ, Simon Twist

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

"How should I live my life?" This is a pertinent question not just for Christians but for non-Christians too, judging by the shelves and shelves of self-help books you see in your local bookstore, and the letters pages of certain magazines. There are people wanting advice about all sorts of things, like "Which job should I take?", "What should I say to my friend whose mother died recently?", "What's the best thing to do in this situation?", and so on. The answers come not just from self-help books and magazine columns, but from a variety of sources: your family, your friends, your colleagues, your minister and other people you respect. Some of it is common knowledge; some of it is folk wisdom. As the old sayings go, "Too many cooks spoil the broth", "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" and "Don't count your chickens before they hatch".

However, when it comes to the art of living, the book of Proverbs is really the best authority on how to live, because its wisdom is no less than the wisdom of God—the God who created it all and knows it all. Indeed, the most important lesson on wisdom that Proverbs has to teach can be found in the very first chapter: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov I:7).

The Art of Living Proverbs

Proverbs is filled with rich instruction on how to live—how to spend our money, how to work, what to say (and how to say it) and a whole host of other topics. Because of who God is, certain types of behaviour are good and certain types of behaviour are bad. Because of the way he established the world, we can observe certain patterns about the way it works, reflect on them and then act accordingly. Proverbs offers instruction that will enable us to live stable, good, coherent and effective lives.

But Proverbs also acknowledges that there will always be a voice—the voice of folly—competing for our attention and seeking to lead us astray. The voice of folly comes in many disguises—some of which may not be immediately obvious to us. We must learn to recognize it and reject it for what it is, for the result of heeding it is always death and destruction.

That the message of Proverbs is an unpopular one in our society should be no surprise, for its message ultimately concerns the Lord Jesus Christ. In fearing the Lord, we are not just to fear any old god but the one "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3). Jesus, as God's king, has been endowed with all wisdom and understanding, which makes him the pre-eminent authority on wisdom—the only truly wise man. In fearing him, we come to understand the real purpose of life, and therefore the real goal of wisdom.

In these studies, we'll examine what the book of Proverbs means by 'wisdom' and how that wisdom applies to our lives. It is my prayer that as you discover wisdom's immeasurable value, you'll hold it near and dear, and let it shape your life. To possess wisdom is to understand the true art of living.

Bryson Smith October 2007

1. THE GAINING OF WISDOM

Proverbs 1:1-6



Getting started

What are some examples of good advice you have received from others? What made their advice so helpful?



Light from the Word

Read Proverbs 1:1-6.

I. According to verses 2-5, what is the purpose of the book of Proverbs?

2.	2. Verses 2-5 mention lots of things. What do you think is meant by the following?		
	• wisdom		
	• prudence		
	• discretion		
3.	Do you think the things mentioned in verses 2-5 are popular or unpopular in today's world? Why?		
4.	Which of the things listed in question 2 would you like to have more of? Why?		

5.	Verse 6 alerts us to the fact that the book of Proverbs is going to contain a range of different types of expressions of wisdom (e.g. proverbs, sayings and riddles). How would you define each one?
	• proverb
	• saying (this is translated as 'parable' in the NIV)
	• riddle
6.	Who wrote this book, according to verse 1?
Re	rad 1 Kings 4:29-34.
7.	Why is Solomon a good person to learn about life from?

The connection between Solomon and wisdom is the start of an ongoing association in the Old Testament between wisdom and God's king. Read Isaiah 11:1-3.

8. These verses describe God's future king (i.e. Messiah or Christ)—the one who will rule Israel. What characteristics of this future king are similar to those in Proverbs 1:2-5?

The connection between wisdom and God's king reaches its most profound moment with the coming of Jesus Christ. Read Matthew 12:38-42.

9. If Jesus is even wiser than Solomon, how should we respond to what Jesus says?



Are there certain things about following Jesus which don't make sense to the world, and which seem a bit silly to do? How does this study strengthen our trust in what Jesus says?



Give thanks and pray

Thank God for the wonderful wisdom of our Lord Jesus. Ask him to give you the wisdom to be obedient to him.

2. THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

Proverbs 1:7



Getting started

Is it possible to be too flippant or too casual in the way we treat God? How would such an attitude show itself?



Light from the Word

Read Proverbs 1:7.

I. What do you think it means to have the "fear of the LORD"?

2. Is the "fear of the LORD" different to being *frightened* of the Lord? How?

3.	What is there about God to be fearful of?	
4.	What do you think the phrase "the beginning of knowledge" means?	
5.	Try to write out verse 7 in your own words.	
6.	Look up the following references as well: Proverbs 2:5, 3:7, 8:13, 9:10, 14:27, 15:16, 15:33, 16:6, 19:23, 22:4, 23:17, 24:21. (To save time, you might like to divide these verses between individuals, or groups of two or three, and have people report back to the group what they have discovered.) List some of the consequences of having the "fear of the LORD".	

7. It's important to note that when Proverbs urges us to fear the Lord, it's always in small capitals: 'Lord'. Whenever 'Lord' appears in small capitals in our Bibles, it stands for Yahweh, the personal name of the God of Israel—the God who revealed himself as Yahweh to Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3). In other words, when Proverbs tells us to fear God, it's not the fear of any old god you might happen to believe in; it's the fear of Yahweh, the God of Israel. This fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom. How is this lesson different to what the world tells us?

Read Psalm 2.

8. In this psalm, people are to fear not just the Lord, but his Son and chosen king. Why?

9. Describe the lifestyle of someone who lives in fear of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Try and be as specific as you can.



To finish

What are some of the ways in which you are tempted to 'fear' things and people other than Jesus Christ?



Give thanks and pray

Ask God to fill you with a reverent fear of him and his Son.

3. THE VOICE OF WISDOM

Proverbs 9



Getting started

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

It may seem a little strange to jump ahead to chapter 9, but this chapter gives us a good summary of 1:8-9:18. In our next study, we'll go back and look at some of the lessons from the earlier chapters.

The Art of Living Proverbs

Read Proverbs 9:1-12.

I. What image is used to describe Wisdom in verses 1-3?

2. What invitation does Wisdom give in verses 4-6?

3. What main piece of advice does Wisdom offer about life in verse 10?

4. What are the consequences of following Wisdom (vv. 6, 11)?

Read Proverbs 9:13-18.			
5.	What image is used to describe Folly in verses 13-15? How is this image both similar and different to the one used for Wisdom?		
6.	What invitation does Folly give in verse 16?		
7.	What main piece of advice does Folly offer about life in verse 17? How does this advice reflect a failure to fear the Lord?		
8.	What are the consequences of following Folly (v. 18)? How do these consequences contrast with what Folly actually offers?		

9. If you are feeling particularly creative, try drawing Wisdom and Folly as described in Proverbs 9.

Read Matthew 4:1-11.

To. We have seen that Folly (i.e. *not* living in the fear of the Lord) will eventually lead to destruction, even though it tempts us with sweet rewards. How is Jesus a good example of how to deal with the temptation of foolish living?



To finish

Folly often tempts us with short-term worldly gains and experiences at the expense of long-term spiritual blessings. What are some ways that we can keep our focus as Christians?



Give thanks and pray

Ask God for the insight and strength to recognize and resist the voice of Folly.

The Art of Living Proverbs

4. THE OPPOSITE OF WISDOM

Proverbs 1-8



Getting started

When do you find it hardest to live in the fear of the Lord?



Light from the Word

In our last study on Proverbs 9, we discovered that folly (i.e. *not* living in the fear of the Lord) will eventually lead to destruction, even though it tantalizes us with the prospect of sweet rewards. In this study, we will go back to some of the earlier chapters to think about some of the disguises that folly can try and tempt us with.

The Art of Living Proverbs

The voice of the sinner

Read Proverbs 1:10-19.

I. What is tempting about the voice of the sinner?

2. What are the consequences of behaving this way?

3. Are there particular areas of your life where you are tempted by the voice of the sinner? If so, how?

The voice of the adulteress

Read Proverbs 5.

4. What is tempting about the voice of the adulteress?

6. Are there particular areas of your life where you are tempted by the voice of the adulteress? If so, how?	
The voice of the sluggard Read Proverbs 6:6-II. 7. What is tempting about the voice of the sluggard?	
8. What are the consequences of behaving this way?	The Art of Living
	Proverbs Page 22

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5. What are the consequences of behaving this way?



Saturday 21st May from 7:45pm Church Hall

Genesis 1-2 The First Week of Life.

READ PROVERBS DAILY THIS TERM

START APRIL 25TH	
□ Prov 1:1–7	☐ Prov 8:1–11
□ Prov 1:8–19	☐ Prov 8:12–25
☐ Prov 1:20–33	☐ Prov 8:26–36
☐ Prov 2:1–10	☐ Prov 9:1–9
	☐ Prov 9:10–18
	☐ Prov 10:1–11
☐ Prov 3:1–8	☐ Prov 10:12−24
MAY	☐ Prov 10:25–32
П. р 2.0. 40	☐ Prov 11:1–13
☐ Prov 3:9–19	☐ Prov 11:14–23
□ Prov 3:20–35	☐ Prov 11:24–31
□ Prov 4:1–7	☐ Prov 12:1–16
☐ Prov 4:8–17	□ Prov 12:17–28
☐ Prov 4:18–27	□ Prov 13:1–8
□ Prov 5:1–9	☐ Prov 13:9–25
☐ Prov 5:10–23	
□ Prov 6:1–8	□ Prov 14:1–7
☐ Prov 6:9–19	☐ Prov 14:8–17
☐ Prov 6:20–35	☐ Prov 14:18–26
☐ Prov 7:1–7	JUNE
□ Prov 7:8–17	JONE
☐ Prov 7:18–27	☐ Prov 14:27–35
	☐ Prov 15:1–14

☐ Prov 15:15–24	☐ Prov 24:23–34
☐ Prov 15:25–33	☐ Prov 25:1–13
□ Prov 16:1–16	
☐ Prov 16:17–23	JULY
□ Prov 16:24–33	☐ Prov 25:14–28
□ Prov 17:1–10	☐ Prov 26:1–13
□ Prov 17:11–28	☐ Prov 26:14–28
□ Prov 18:1–6	☐ Prov 27:1–8
□ Prov 18:7–14	☐ Prov 27:9–16
□ Prov 18:15–24	☐ Prov 27:17–27
□ Prov 19:1–11	☐ Prov 28:1–13
□ Prov 19:12–29	☐ Prov 28:14–28
□ Prov 20:1–7	☐ Prov 29:1–8
□ Prov 20:8–17	□ Prov 29:9–16
□ Prov 20:18–30	☐ Prov 29:17–27
☐ Prov 21:1–9	□ Prov 30:1–10
□ Prov 21:10–19	□ Prov 30:11–20
□ Prov 21:20–31	☐ Prov 30:21–33
☐ Prov 22:1–8	☐ Prov 31:1–9
□ Prov 22:9–16	□ Prov 31:10–19
□ Prov 22:17–29	☐ Prov 31:20–31
□ Prov 23:1–10	
□ Prov 23:11–21	END JULY 17TH
☐ Prov 23:22–35	
□ Prov 24:1–10	
☐ Prov 24:11–22	

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9. Are there particular areas of your life where you are tempted by the voice of the sluggard? If so, how?



To finish

What are some other 'voices' or examples of how Folly is seeking to tempt you in your life? What are some practical ways that we can help each other to resist her?



Give thanks and pray

Look back at the 'Give thanks and pray' from the last study. Use it again as the basis for prayer, but this time try to be specific about the areas of your life in which Folly is presently tempting you.

5. THE PATTERNS OF WISDOM

Proverbs 16



Getting started

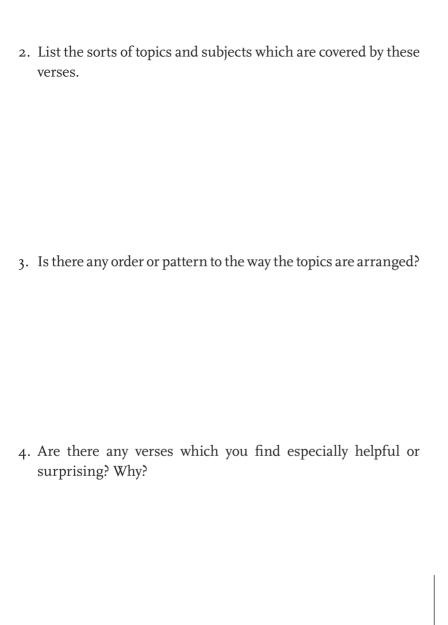
"There is no rhyme or reason to life. It's all just chaos and chance!" What would you say in response to this?



Light from the Word

In this study, Proverbs 16 is treated as a representative chapter of the entire section of chapters 10-29. Read Proverbs 16.

I. What is your overall impression of this chapter?



5. Many of the sayings in Proverbs stem from what the Lord is like—what he approves of, hates, commends, and so on. These sayings make a value judgement about what is the morally right or wrong way to live, based on who God is and his righteousness. What verses in chapter 16 (if any) lay down obligations about how we *must* live if we are to live in the fear of the Lord?

6. Many of the sayings in Proverbs are based on careful observations of what happens in life. These observations describe the way things usually happen in God's world without always making a value judgement on how right or wrong these regularities are. What verses in chapter 16 (if any) describe the way things *usually* happen without making any real value judgement?

7. It can be difficult sometimes to know whether a saying in Proverbs is a statement about what is always right and wrong (which we should therefore obey), or whether it is a wise observation about the way things usually go in our world (which we should therefore apply more carefully, depending on our circumstances). Some people find this a little disconcerting. However, it's helpful to remember that Proverbs wants us to think carefully about its sayings so that we might live wisely and well in the world as people who fear the Lord (Prov 1:4-6).

Are there any verses in Proverbs 16 where it's difficult to decide whether they are 'obligations' or 'observations'?

8. The many obligations and observations of life found in Proverbs 10-29 reflect the fact that this world is not completely chaotic. There are regularities and patterns in life. How does knowing Jesus help us to understand the pattern and purpose of this world even more (cf. Eph 1:9-10; Col 1:15-20, 2:2-3)?



When is it hardest to believe that life has a pattern and order to it? How is Proverbs helpful for us during those times?



Give thanks and pray

Thank God for creating this world with order and regularity.

6. THE LESSONS OF WISDOM

Proverbs 10-29



Getting started

What are some examples of modern-day proverbs which, in your opinion, give some helpful insights into life (e.g. "Haste makes waste")?



Light from the Word

In our last study, we discovered that the large middle section of Proverbs (chapters 10-29) provide us with many insights about how best to live this life. In this study, we will dip into these chapters to see what wisdom they offer on three important areas of life: wealth, words and work.

Spread this study out over 3 weeks and take time to discuss the implications of each topic. Finish by reading what Jesus says on each.

The Art of Living Proverbs

Wealth

- I. Read the following proverbs. What do you discover about how we should *earn* money?
 - Proverbs 12:11
 - Proverbs 13:11
 - Proverbs 28:20-22
- 2. Read the following proverbs. What do you discover about how we should *use* our money?
 - Proverbs 11:24-26
 - Proverbs 19:17
 - Proverbs 22:9
- 3. Read the following proverbs. What do you discover about how we should *think* about money?
 - Proverbs 11:4, 18, 28
 - Proverbs 16:8, 16

• Proverbs 23:4-5

Jesus says...

Read Matthew 6:19-34 and discuss the relationship between money and our heart.

The Art of Living Proverbs

Words

- 4. Read the following proverbs. What do you discover about the importance of our words? • Proverbs 11:9 • Proverbs 12:18 • Proverbs 15:4 5. Read the following proverbs. What do you discover about the way we should speak? • Proverbs 10:19 • Proverbs 15:1-2 • Proverbs 16:23-24 6. Read the following proverbs. What do you discover about the way we shouldn't speak?
 - Proverbs 16:28
 - Proverbs 17:4, 9

• Proverbs 26:28

Jesus says...

Read Matthew 12:33-37 and discuss the relationship between our mouths and our hearts.

The Art of Living Proverbs

Work

- 7. Read the following proverbs. What do you discover about the *dangers* of laziness?
 - Proverbs 14:23
 - Proverbs 19:15
 - Proverbs 20:4, 13
- 8. Read the following proverbs. What do you discover about the *benefits* of hard work?
 - Proverbs 10:5
 - Proverbs 20:13
 - Proverbs 27:18, 23-27
- 9. Read the following proverbs. What do you discover about the *manner* in which we should work?
 - Proverbs 10:9, 16

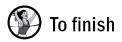
• Proverbs 11:1, 18

Jesus says...

Read Matthew 9:35-38 and discuss what type of work Jesus sees need for.

• Proverbs 15:27

The Art of Living Proverbs



How does knowing Jesus and following him as our king reinforce the lessons we have learned in these studies?



Give thanks and pray

Thank God for giving us his wisdom which shows us how we should live. Ask him to give you strength to live a life full of integrity, wisdom and diligence.

7. THE SEARCH FOR WISDOM

Proverbs 30



Getting started

Do you think that Christians are wiser than other people?



Light from the Word

Read Proverbs 30:1-4.

I. In this section, we meet a man searching for wisdom in life. What is his name and how does he describe himself?

The Art of Living Proverbs

2.	Possibly the best translation of verse I is the one mentioned in the footnotes of the ESV (and NIV). In other words, Agur is "of Massa", an Ishmaelite clan (cf. Gen 25:14). How does this make sense of verse 3? (Hint: look at what the Apostle Paul says about the predicament of Gentiles in Ephesians 2:II-I2.)
3.	In his search for wisdom, Agur calls out for help from a competent teacher. What characteristics does he think this teacher should have (v. 4)?
4.	Who would qualify to be Agur's teacher?
	ad Proverbs 30:5-9. How does Agur describe the word of God?

6.	Interestingly, verse 5 is a quote from Psalm 18:30, and verse 6 is a very strong echo of Deuteronomy 4:2. What does this show us about where Agur found answers to his search for wisdom?

7. From what you have discovered about Agur, do you think that he has the "fear of the LORD" (Prov 1:7)? What makes you think this?

Read Proverbs 30:7-33.

8. In the remainder of the chapter, Agur offers different insights he has gained from having come to see that the word of God proves true. In general terms, what sorts of topics does Agur cover? (Some of these sayings can seem a little obscure so don't worry too much if you can't follow absolutely everything that's said; you're in good company.)

9. What lessons (if any) are repeated from earlier chapters of Proverbs?



To finish

Proverbs 30 provides us with a wonderful case study of a person who has only been able to make sense of life by coming to know the true and living God. How has his experience been reflected in your own life?



Give thanks and pray

Thank God for lavishing his grace upon us "in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ" (Eph 1:8-9).

8. LADY WISDOM

Proverbs 31:10-31



Getting started

What do you think life would be like if you put into practice all the lessons we've discovered so far in Proverbs?

This final section of Proverbs is a poem written in the form of an acrostic. Each line of these verses in Hebrew begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet: the first word of verse 10 starts with the Hebrew equivalent of 'A', the first word of verse 11 starts with the Hebrew equivalent of 'B', and so on, all the way to verse 31 which begins with the Hebrew equivalent of 'Z'. This acrostic structure highlights that these final verses are a summary of everything that has gone before them: here at the end of the book, we quite literally have the A-Z of Proverbs. In our final study, we'll investigate how this vivid description of an "excellent wife" forms an effective summary for the whole of Proverbs.

The Art of Living Proverbs



Read Proverbs 31:10-31.

- I. In study I, we discovered that the book of Proverbs can help us live a wise, righteous and prudent life (I:2-4). How does the "excellent wife" of Proverbs 3I exemplify each of these qualities?
 - wisdom
 - prudence
 - discretion
- 2. In study 2, we learned that the "fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (1:7). How does the "excellent wife" demonstrate this?

3. In study 3, we saw wisdom described as a woman. What are the similarities between the description of wisdom in Proverbs 9:1-12 and the description of wisdom in Proverbs 31:10-31?

	• the sinner	
	• the adulteress	
	• the sluggard	
5.	In study 6, we were given life lessons about wealth, words and work. How does the "excellent wife" exemplify those lessons? (You might need to look back over study 6 to refresh your memory.)	
6.	"The description of the excellent wife has as much to say to men as it does to women." What do you think?	
7.	How does the "excellent wife" make you feel?	The Art of Living
		Proverbs Page 40
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4. In study 4, we were given advice about the foolishness of the sinner, the adulteress and the sluggard. How is the "excellent wife" the exact opposite of each of these three types of people?

8. Are there any areas of life where you would like to be more like the "excellent wife"? What can you do in order to make this happen?

9. What characteristics of the "excellent wife" do you see displayed in Jesus Christ?



To finish

Have a look back over the previous studies. Have there been any lessons which you have found especially helpful? What made them helpful? With God's assistance, what changes are you going to make in your life as a result?



Give thanks and pray

Thank our heavenly Father for promising that "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him" (Jas 1:5).

The Art of Living Proverbs



Saturday July 16th from 7:45pm Church Hall

UHERE DID THE BIBAS COME FROM?



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- pray constantly in Christ's name for the fruitfulness and growth of his gospel
- speak the Bible's life-changing word whenever and however they can—in the home, in the world and in the fellowship of his people.

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