



# Riverwood-Punchbowl Anglican Church

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## Proverbs

**God's Wisdom  
puts on working  
clothes.**

## **God's Wisdom puts on working clothes.**

Proverbs is about the practical business of living appropriately in God's world. What makes for a good life? What destroys a good life for yourself and others?

Proverbs is very different from most other parts of the Bible. Here are some suggestions about how to get the most out of it.

### **Proverbs are *observations* about the world - not laws or promises.**

Proverbs is not a collection of laws, rules or promises. By-and-large it is a collection of observations about how things *usually* work out.

Consider the proverb, "*Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.*"(22:6). So then, if our child turns away from Jesus, does this *automatically* mean (i) we have been derelict parents, or (ii) God has broken his promise? No! The proverb is not a promise. It simply observes that how we raise our children usually does have profound and lasting effects on them.

This proverb records an obvious but easily forgotten truth. It ought to cause us to re-examine how we are bringing up our children or grandchildren.

### **Proverbs are often descriptions of the *ideal*, not the *actual*.**

At first reading, a number of proverbs seem like platitudes - trite observations that are out of touch with reality. "*The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry, but he thwarts the way of the wicked.*" (10:3) Looking at the world as it is, we may sometimes be tempted to ask, "On what planet was that written?" But such proverbs must refer to (1) how things *ought* to be, or perhaps (2) how things generally *were* in the time of King Solomon, when Israel largely accepted God's rule in public and private life, or perhaps (3) how things *could be now*, to the extent that our society acknowledges God's rule, or even (4) how things *will be* when God's kingdom does come.

In response to such proverbs we ought to focus on building a world where God's justice and mercy are recognised. Or they may encourage us to look below the surface, taking a longer term perspective, giving us hope for the future, when God's kingdom will be perfect - with no hunger, and the wicked thwarted.

## **Many proverbs have no immediate context; but they share a “world view”.**

A proverb is a general observation on life which applies one way or another in a great many situations. They often have no ‘specific context’, and so reading the surrounding verses may give little help in understanding a proverb; indeed neighbouring proverbs may be quite unrelated. That is why in several weeks we will not read a ‘passage’, but will focus on a small collection of isolated but related proverbs.

The context for understanding the proverbs is really this broad world view:

*There is one God, the LORD, who created the world such that the people who prosper are those who fear (trust) him and whose lives reflect his wisdom.*

You can feel this world view by reading Proverbs straight through (eg reading 4 chapters a week will cover the whole book during the 8 weeks of this series).

## **Proverbs are for reflection.**

Proverbs demand reflective reading. We need to ponder on how each proverb applies to life, particularly our own lives. A good way is to read the selected proverbs carefully at the start of the week. Then you can think about how they apply in the various situations which crop up throughout the week. That will be good fuel for discussion at your next Home Group meeting.

## **Proverbs are for the practical business of everyday life.**

Very few proverbs refer to “religious” things. Most relate to everyday life: family, friends, neighbours, business and civil justice. So it is best to come to the proverbs expecting them to speak to your everyday life. It is about God’s wisdom “wearing working clothes”.

## **Proverbs point to Jesus, the true “wisdom from God”.**

The proverbs reflect and point towards God’s wisdom, and how it works out in human life. But it is “Jesus who has become for us wisdom from God, that is our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1Cor 1:30). At various points in proverbs we will see clear anticipations of Jesus.

Max Gilbert, 2001

## Week 1

**THEME: Commitment to .... Faith**

### **Day 1 Proverbs 1:1-7. The purposes of the proverbs.**

What are some of the purposes of the book of Proverbs? (There are at least 10 purposes listed in v2-6)

### **Day 2 Proverbs 1:1-7. The beginning of Wisdom.**

What is the ‘beginning of wisdom’? (v7; Note: the ‘*beginning*’ of wisdom (v7), doesn’t mean a place to start, only to be left behind. Rather, it means the *foundation, central principle and goal* of all true wisdom.)

### **Day 3 Proverbs 1:1-7. The *fear* of the Lord.**

‘Fear’ (v7) does not imply ‘terror’ or something to be avoided. Try to get a feel for what ‘fear of the Lord’ means by reading some of Prov 2:4-6; 9:10-12; 15:29-33; Ps 111:10 in the context of the whole Psalm; Job 28:28.

### **Day 4 Proverbs 1:1-7. The fear of the LORD.**

What is unusual about the typeface used for ‘LORD’? This typeface is used throughout the OT for the personal name of God (Yahweh in Hebrew). It refers to the one true God who revealed himself to Israel, *not* to some vague notion of a ‘higher power’, or a god of my own choosing.

### **Day 5 Prov 1:1-7 The fear of the LORD.**

I am writing this on the day the World Trade Centre was destroyed by terrorist attack. On TV a Catholic Cardinal said, “People should find comfort in whatever religious belief system they hold.” Why is this not ‘fear of the LORD’?

## STUDY PASSAGE Proverbs 3:1-12

### To Discuss:

1. What are the most important things that you as parents are teaching your children? (Or, what were the most important things that your parents taught you?)
  
2. Here in 3:1-12 we have a father teaching his son. What does the father encourage his son to put at the centre of his life? (V3,5a,6a,7b,9) Discuss what these things would mean in practical terms in your own life. In what ways is this the same or different from putting your trust in Jesus as the central thing in your life?
  
3. What are the benefits of committing ourselves in faith to the LORD? (V2, 4, 6b, 8,10).
  
4. The father is explaining how his son may enjoy God's blessings fully. Discuss the extent to which each of the following describes what he means:
  - (a) these blessings always immediately follow our trust, faith and obedience;
  - (b) these blessings normally happen, but not always;
  - (c) these blessings would normally happen in his Israelite society where most people trust God, but not necessarily in societies which reject God; or
  - (d) what is described as material blessings (eg v2 and v10) is really meant to refer to spiritual blessings, or refer to future life in heaven.
  
5. Describe your own experience of faith in Jesus and the blessings which flow from it.

**PRAY** for someone else in your group, that he/she might really 'trust the LORD with all his/her heart'. Are you willing to let someone pray likewise for you?

## **Week 2**

**THEME: Commitment to .... Hope.**

### **Day 1 Prov 10:1-22:16. The proverbs of Solomon**

To whom are the proverbs in 10:1-22:16 attributed? He may have composed them, or collected them, or been founder of a school which compiled them over a period. Note that 22:17 introduces the “Thirty sayings of the Wise”.

### **Day 2 Prov 10:2. The form of the proverbs.**

Many of the proverbs consist of only one verse, and have two lines, using this form:

*A* is or leads to *B*,  
but *C* is or leads to *D*.

The second line often says the reverse of the first line.

Read 10:2 and identify A, B, C and D.

### **Day 3 Prov 10:3-6. Hope in this life.**

What hopes for this life are described in Prov 10:3 - 6?

### **Day 4 Various refs. Hope for the future.**

Though the focus in Proverbs is on this life, there are quite a few glimpses of life after death. Read Prov 10:25; 11:4, 7; 12:28; 14:32 (for the last two, see NIV rather than RSV). What do they say about the future?

### **Day 5 Various refs. The basis for our hope.**

The proverbs often speak of the consequences which follow wise or foolish human actions. But what (or rather who) really determines our destiny? Read Prov 21:31; 16:9; 20:22.

## STUDY PASSAGE Proverbs 10:1-32

### To Discuss:

1. Verse 23 compares the fool with the person of understanding: to the fool it is *sport* to do wrong; but wise conduct is *pleasure* to the person of understanding. Describe an example that you know of either such a fool or such a wise person.

2. **Hope in this life.** Describe some of the hopes which a wise person ideally or ‘normally’ has in this life, as described in these verses. What is required to achieve these hopes (eg v1, 2, 3, 11, 12, 24, 27). Pick one of these proverbs and explain how you would like it to apply more in your life.

3. **Hope in the life to come.** What hints or glimpses are given here which point to a hope which goes beyond death (eg v2, 7, 16-17, 25, 28, 30). In what ways do hopes for the life to come affect what is most important in life.

4. **Hope in the present moment.** Verse 23 is intriguing because it indicates that wise conduct is “pleasure” in itself, not just for what it leads to either in this life or the next. Discuss whether you think this is true, and how you have experienced this.

5. If our hope is to be found in wisdom and righteousness, where is wisdom and righteousness to be found? (1 Cor 1:30; Prov 10:27)

**PRAY** That we might set our hope on the Lord (v27), that he might establish us forever (v25), and that wise conduct might be our pleasure (v23).

## **Week 3**

**THEME: Commitment to .... Generosity.**

**Day 1 Prov 6:6-11. The diligent ant.**

What can we learn from the ant about work, laziness and preparing in advance for our material needs?

**Day 2 Prov 18:11. The illusion of wealth.**

What is the advantage of wealth described here? What is the danger of wealth?

**Day 3 Prov 19:4. Friends and wealth?**

How does our wealth or poverty affect our friendships?

**Day 4 Prov 11:24-28; 22:9; 22:16; 28:27. Blessing of generosity.**

What do these proverbs say are the end results of (a) generosity, and (b) meanness with our money?

**Day 5 2 Cor 8:9. Jesus' attitude to riches.**

How did Jesus make use of the riches that were his?

## STUDY PROVERBS Prov 30:8-9; 14:21; 14:31; 19:17; 21:13

### To Discuss:

1. How do you react to TV adds and mail requests for money for the starving in overseas lands (eg World Vision)? What about requests for money for the poor in Australia, via the Salvation Army or the Smith Family? Why do you react that way?

2. Read Prov 30:8-9. What is the most desirable amount of income and wealth? Compared to your current income and wealth, do you think it would be better for you to have more or less? How did you decide on your answer?

3. Read Prov 14:31. Discuss how and why we show contempt for our maker by oppressing the poor. How do we honour our maker by being kind to the poor?

4. Read Prov 19:17. Why is kindness to the poor like lending to the Lord? Discuss the idea that this image suggests that God was going to help the poor (eg 10:3), and we used *our* resources for *his* purposes? How does this proverb affect your decisions about to whom you will be generous, and by how much?

5. Read 14:21; 21:13. Suppose I receive a request in the mail to make a donation to the poor. Suppose I discard this letter into the bin. Explain whether you think I have sinned (14:21), and whether my prayers will no longer be answered (21:13). As a group or as individuals, consider how you could honour God by being 'kind to the needy' (14:31).

**PRAY** that God may grant us generous hearts, and the opportunities to be blessed by being generous in our giving.

## **Week 4**

**THEME: Commitment to .... Love.**

**Day 1 Prov 15:1. Getting along with people - gentle words.**

How would you react if harsh words were spoken to you?

**Day 2 Prov 17:14; 20:3. Getting along with people - avoiding quarrels.**

Think of a quarrel that you would have been better to avoid.

**Day 3 Prov 17:17; 25:21. Friends, family and enemies.**

What makes a really good friend?

**Day 4 Prov 25:20. A riddle.**

Can you solve this riddle? Have you ever had such a reaction when you ‘sang a song to a heavy heart’?

**Day 5 John 13:1; 15:12-17. Jesus’ love.**

What is the greatest love? Jesus loved his disciples (and us) this way. He also said they were his friends. What is it that distinguishes a servant from a friend (15:15)?

**STUDY PROVERBS: Prov 3:3; 14:22; 17:17; 20:6; 18:24; 11:12-13; 14:25**

**To Discuss:**

1. Share a situation where someone showed great love to you (or to someone you know). What made this really special?

2. **Love and faithfulness** (Prov 3:3; 14:22; 17:17; 20:6). Discuss how these verses illustrate the type of love which endures regardless of circumstances, rather than the type of love which is fickle or goes up and down with emotions. (Note RSV uses 'loyalty' rather than 'love' as in NIV).

3. **Love and Friendship.** What characterises a true friend? (Consider Prov 18:24; 17:17; 11:12-13; 14:25.) Do people sometimes show glimpses of this towards you? In specific ways, how can you be more like a true friend to someone?

4. **What is most important in a person?** (Prov 19:22-23 - again note that RSV uses 'loyalty' meaning love which is faithful, enduring and committed, involving the will, not only the emotions.) How does Jesus say the same thing in Mark 12:28-34?

**PRAY** that we might be enabled to show to other people a love which is faithful (committed) and generous, as well as showing and accepting true friendship.

## **Week 5**

**THEME: Two dinner invitations.**

**Day 1 Prov 1:8-19                      A Warning against enticement to sin.**

Here a father is teaching his son to be wise. What is the first specific piece of wisdom he gives (v10)? Why can sin be attractive (v11-14)?

**Day 2 Prov 1:8-19                      The consequences of ill-gotten gain.**

What is the end result of trying to gain at the expense of others (v15-19)?

**Day 3 Prov 1:20-33.                      A Warning against rejecting wisdom.**

Note that this passage is a direct speech given by “Wisdom”. It is a literary device in which God’s wisdom is pictured as a Lady. What are some of the consequences of rejecting Wisdom’s call? (v24-32)

**Day 4 Prov 1:20-33.                      The benefits of heeding wisdom’s call.**

What are some of the benefits of heeding Wisdom’s call? (v23,33)

**Day 5 Prov 3:13-18.                      Blessed is the person who finds wisdom.**

This is a poem in praise of Lady Wisdom. What blessings does she give to those who embrace her?

## STUDY PASSAGE Proverbs 9:1-18.

### To Discuss:

1. If you were invited to two different dinner parties on the same night, what factors would you take into account in deciding which one to go to?

2. Compare and contrast (i) the two hostesses (Lady Wisdom v1-6 and Madam Folly v13-18), (ii) the nature of their invitations, (iii) whom they invite, (iv) what food is prepared, (v) what is offered to the guests, and (vi) what the end result of accepting the invitation will be. What makes Madam Folly's invitation attractive, at least on the surface?

3. What is the fundamental ingredient of wisdom (v10)? Describe a situation in which you were invited to eat at Lady Wisdom's banquet (ie to act in a way which is pleasing to God, or even to adopt a whole life style which is in line with God's will). How was it like (or unlike) the invitation of Lady Wisdom in v1-6?

4. In what circumstances have you encountered Madam Folly?

5. Read Matt 7:13-14 in which Jesus similarly describes the two options which we all face. In what ways is Jesus' emphasis a little different? In the light of this passage and Prov 9, what is most important in life? Which dinner invitation have you accepted?

**PRAY**, thanking God that he does call us to share in his wisdom, and that we might have the discernment to seek that wisdom, and avoid Madam Folly.

## **Week 6**

### **THEME: God's Wisdom in creation.**

#### **Day 1 Prov 8:1-11. Wisdom's call.**

Who does wisdom cry out to (v4-5)? What words are used to describe Wisdom's message (v6-8)? How valuable and desirable is wisdom (v10-11)?

#### **Day 2 Prov 8:12-21. The benefits of Wisdom.**

What are some of the benefits described here?

#### **Day 3 Prov 8:22-31. Wisdom - delights in God's creation.**

Wisdom was present at the creation of the world, and actively involved in the process of creation. What things show that wisdom was excited to be there and doing that?

#### **Day 4 Prov 8:32-36. He who finds me finds life.**

Why should we seek God's wisdom?

#### **Day 5 Prov 3:19-20. By Wisdom, the Lord founded the earth.**

The world was founded by wisdom and established by understanding. If so, and whether or not you think the theory of evolution has any merit, could the creation of the world and human life be described as the result of *random* mutations or *mere chance*?

## STUDY PASSAGE Proverbs 8:22-31.

### To Discuss:

1. Tell about something you made, where only you could show other people how to make best use of the thing you made.

2. Where does wisdom come from (v22)? What does this passage say about Wisdom's role in creation? (Note: v22 may mean that God *brought forth* his own already existing wisdom (see NIV and its footnotes), so that it was not as if Wisdom was something *created* by God at some point in time (as RSV may imply)).

3. Prov 8:1-21 and 32-36 are a call from Wisdom, that we should heed her words, and benefit from her treasures. How does her role in creation (v22-31) support her claim that we should heed her?

4. Do you think that this passage presents Wisdom as (i) a *being* or *person* alongside God, or (ii) a poetic way of describing God himself acting in a wise way, or (iii) some combination of these? Why do you think that?

5. Whatever your answer to question 4, what are the parallels between how Wisdom is described here, and the way Jesus is described in John 1:1-4; Col 1:15-16; 1 Cor 8:6; Heb 1:1-3? What light does this throw on who Jesus is, and why we should seek God's wisdom in him?

**PRAY** Thanking God for the wonder of his creation, and the fact he himself rejoices in his creation, especially mankind (v31). Thank him that he loved this world he created so much that he sent Jesus to save us from perishing.

## Week 7

**THEME: The cultivation of good speech.**

**Day 1 Prov 6:12-15. A wink is as good as a nod to a blind horse.**

Think of a situation where someone publically made a gesture to mock another person, but did it so that the ‘target’ person was not aware. Is this more or less evil than an openly spoken nasty word?

**Day 2 Prov 17:4. “Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil.”**

If it is true that ‘a wicked man listens to evil lips’, in what ways is ‘innocently’ overhearing evil words likely to effect us for the worse?

**Day 3 Prov 29:5. Flattery will get you somewhere. (But where?)**

How can flattery be dangerous to the person who is flattered? Can it also be dangerous to the one who gives the flattery?

**Day 4 Prov 26:23. You can’t judge a book by its cover.**

What does this proverb mean? Can you illustrate it with examples?

**Day 5 Eph 4:15. Speaking the truth in love.**

“Speaking the truth in love” is associated with “growing up in ... Christ”. How do the proverbs you have read in days 1-4 illustrate the opposite of “speaking the truth in love”.

**STUDY PROVERBS: Prov 18:8; 10:19; 16:24; 25:11; 24:26; 17:10.**

**To Discuss:**

1. Read Prov 18:8. Imagine a plate of choice morsels on the table in front of you. In what ways could they be like the words of a gossip? *Why* is it that gossip is often so attractive to the person who spreads it, and the person who hears it?

2. Read Prov 10:19. In what sort of situations do you tend to talk most? *When* and *why* is it unwise or even sinful to speak ‘many words’? What strategies can you think of to help you know when to ‘hold your tongue’?

3. Read Prov 16:24 and 25:11. Flattery (see Day 3) is of course also meant to be pleasant. So how do we distinguish flattery from the pleasant words mentioned here? Describe a time when you enjoyed receiving such pleasant words. Think of ways we can cultivate the ability to speak such pleasant words.

4. Read Prov 24:26 and 17:10. From whom would you appreciate a ‘kiss on the lips’ and from whom would it be intrusive and offensive? How do these proverbs help you to think about (i) speaking the truth even when it hurts, and (ii) receiving the truth even when it hurts? How can we cultivate these skills?

**PRAY.** Jesus spoke of the importance of our words in Matt 12:36-37. He himself always seemed to have just the right words to comfort, teach, challenge, silence or rebuke. **PRAY** that we might grow up into Christ, our head, speaking the truth in love.

## **Week 8**

**THEME: The Noble Wife: the embodiment of wisdom.**

**Day 1 Prov 30:1-9. Can a human find true wisdom?**

Augur acknowledges his own lack of wisdom. He also implies that wisdom is beyond the grasp of man. But how did Jesus answer Augur's question in John 3:13? If we cannot find wisdom by ourselves, where is wisdom to be found?

**Day 2 Prov 30:10-15a. Some are pure in their own eyes.**

How do the people described here show that they lack wisdom, even though they do not know it?

**Day 3 Prov 30:15b-17. Four things never satisfied.**

What do these proverbs mean?

**Day 4 Prov 30:18-23. Four amazing things; four troublesome things.**

Do these things amaze and/or trouble you? Why?

**Day 5 Prov 30:24-33. The small and wise.**

How do these proverbs in v24-28 urge us to look beyond superficial appearances?

## STUDY PASSAGE: Proverbs 31:10-31.

### To Discuss:

1. If you were on a mission to find the wisest person in the world, what sort of characteristics would you be looking for in the person?

*Comment: You can read this passage as praising either (i) the real wife of the author (but no doubt described in idealistic terms); or (ii) an imaginary person who has the characteristics of Wisdom - and so is a model for us all.*

2. How does the woman show wisdom in (i) the running of her household; (ii) her business activities; and (iii) how she relates to her husband? What benefits does her lifestyle produce for herself, her family and others?

3. How does her practical, every-day wisdom relate to her fear of the Lord? In what ways has this woman achieved what the book of Proverbs was intended to help people achieve? (Compare Prov 1:1-7)

4. Whether you are a woman, man, younger or older, what aspects of the character of this wise woman would you like to develop more in your own life? (Read also Col 3:17)

5. Verse 10 suggests that a person with these characteristics is very rare, perhaps unattainable. But for us, Jesus himself is our wisdom from God (1 Cor 1:24, 30). How does your relationship with Jesus relate to the *what*, *why* and *how* of developing the wise characteristics you thought about in Question 4?

**PRAY** thanking God that he has embodied his own wisdom in Jesus, and that he might increasingly conform us to the likeness of Jesus.

## **HOW TO USE THESE NOTES**

- 1.** Read the daily Bible readings on the left hand side of the double page, and think about the question for the day. Make a note of your answer and any difficulties you have.
- 2.** The questions on the right hand side of the double page are designed for group discussion. Think about these questions before you go to your discussion group.
- 3.** The study passages follow the morning and evening sermon series. You may find it helpful to take notes of the sermons.
- 4.** Please don't be frustrated if you can't understand or answer the questions: the important thing is that you read God's word.
- 5.** Use this guide for family or personal Bible reading, and if you would like to join a home group, please see one of the ministers.

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