



# PROVERBS

A 12-WEEK STUDY

Lydia Brownback



**J. I. Packer**

THEOLOGICAL EDITOR

**Dane C. Ortlund**

SERIES EDITOR

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Lydia Brownback

 **CROSSWAY**  
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*Knowing the Bible: Proverbs, A 12-Week Study*

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## S E R I E S P R E F A C E

**KNOWING THE BIBLE**, as the series title indicates, was created to help readers know and understand the meaning, the message, and the God of the Bible. Each volume in the series consists of 12 units that progressively take the reader through a clear, concise study of that book of the Bible. In this way, any given volume can fruitfully be used in a 12-week format either in group study, such as in a church-based context, or in individual study. Of course, these 12 studies could be completed in fewer or more than 12 weeks, as convenient, depending on the context in which they are used.

Each study unit gives an overview of the text at hand before digging into it with a series of questions for reflection or discussion. The unit then concludes by highlighting the gospel of grace in each passage (“Gospel Glimpses”), identifying whole-Bible themes that occur in the passage (“Whole-Bible Connections”), and pinpointing Christian doctrines that are affirmed in the passage (“Theological Soundings”).

The final component to each unit is a section for reflecting on personal and practical implications from the passage at hand. The layout provides space for recording responses to the questions proposed, and we think readers need to do this to get the full benefit of the exercise. The series also includes definitions of key words. These definitions are indicated by a note number in the text and are found at the end of each chapter.

Lastly, to help understand the Bible in this deeper way, we would urge the reader to use the ESV Bible and the *ESV Study Bible*, which are available online at [www.esvbible.org](http://www.esvbible.org). The *Knowing the Bible* series is also available online. Additional 12-week studies covering each book of the Bible will be added as they become available.

May the Lord greatly bless your study as you seek to know him through knowing his Word.

J. I. Packer and  
Lane T. Dennis

# WEEK 3: A FATHER'S INVITATION TO WISDOM

Proverbs 1:8–7:27



## The Place of the Passage

In the first eight chapters of Proverbs we find a series of appeals from a father to his son, or sons, issuing a call to participate in the benefits of a life governed by wisdom. A young man can choose either the path of the wise, which is characterized by the fear of the Lord, or the path of folly, which entails a rejection of God's ways. The paternal appeals in chapters 1–8 set out in poetic form the themes that will appear in the proverbs proper in subsequent chapters.

## The Big Picture

In keeping with the mandate of covenant life for God's people, a father passes on to the next generation the truth that the fear of the Lord is the path to wisdom.



**Reflection and Discussion**

Read through the entire text for this study, Proverbs 1:8–7:27. Then interact with the following questions concerning this section of Proverbs and record your notes on them. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 1135–1147, or visit [www.esvbible.org](http://www.esvbible.org).)



Read Proverbs 1:8–19. This first paternal appeal is a warning against those who promise profit by taking sinful advantage of others. Such plots offer companionship and immediate gain, yet they lead down a path that ends in destruction. The force behind the temptation is greed, what the apostle Paul calls “the love of money” (1 Tim. 6:10). The father concludes his warning by pointing out that accumulating wealth through greed “takes away the life of its possessors” (Prov. 1:19). Considering the passage as a whole, what might this loss of life include?

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Proverbs 2:1–22 is one long conditional sentence: “If . . . , then . . .” The protasis, the if-clause, is set out in verses 1–4 and stresses the need to seek diligently after wisdom. Those who do will understand the fear of the Lord and thereby understand God’s ways (vv. 5–8). According to verses 6–8, what aspects of God’s character will be discovered by those who pursue wisdom? In verses 9–22, how does wisdom benefit those who find it?

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The third paternal appeal, Proverbs 3:1–12, provides instruction on how to act in wisdom and teaches that obeying the instruction results in blessing. Verses 3–4 are a call to safeguard covenant life; verses 5–8 teach the necessity

of humility, which is firmly anchored here to trusting the Lord; verses 9–10 guide the hearer or reader to acknowledge in practical ways that everything comes from God’s hand; and verses 11–12 are a call to submit to God’s discipline. Rewards of success, health, and prosperity are held forth for obeying the instruction in this passage. Are these rewards always experienced in tangible ways? How should we best understand them?

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The fourth appeal, Proverbs 3:21–35, encourages the one who finds wisdom to guard it, knowing that the Lord sustains and secures the path of the righteous. At the center of the appeal is a series of commands (vv. 27–31) prohibiting actions that violate love of neighbor and incur the Lord’s displeasure. The father expresses how God views the wicked: “Toward the scorners he is scornful” (v. 34). Read James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5–6; and Psalm 138:6. Taken together with Proverbs 3:34, what do these passages reveal about the folly of pride?

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The focus of the fifth appeal is the importance of passing down to each generation the nature of covenant life. In Proverbs 4:1–9 the father, after giving an opening encouragement, cites the appeal that his own father made to him. The son is therefore hearing wisdom garnered from the preceding two generations. The boy’s grandmother is also mentioned in the passage. How do Deuteronomy 6:4–8; Psalm 78:1–8; Matthew 19:13; and Ephesians 6:1–4 deepen your understanding of the significance of the theme of this passage?

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### WEEK 3: A FATHER'S INVITATION TO WISDOM

The sixth paternal appeal comes in Proverbs 4:10–19, and it asserts that everyone must make a choice between the way of wisdom and the way of folly. Trace the course of each path in verses 10–19 to its inevitable conclusion. Contrast the images the teacher uses to illuminate the two paths. What terms appear more than once in the passage, and what specifically does this repetition emphasize?

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Proverbs 4:20–27 holds the seventh appeal. The emphasis here is on safeguarding oneself on the path of wisdom. Staying on course involves disciplining the heart (v. 23), the tongue (v. 24), the eyes (v. 25), and the feet (vv. 26–27). Read Mark 7:21–23 and Luke 6:45. How do these two Gospel texts show that Proverbs 4:23 is the key verse in this paternal appeal?

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The eighth appeal, all of Proverbs 5, concerns matters of sexual morality. The message of the passage is given by illustrating the allure of an immoral woman and the consequences of following her into sin. The wise person is able to adapt the counsel inherent in the illustration wherever applicable to his or her life. What traits do you see in verses 3–6 that are blatantly antithetical to the traits of wisdom put forth in Proverbs thus far? What antidote to temptation is given in verses 15–20?

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Proverbs 6:1–19 gives instruction for dealing wisely with people who bear responsibility for their plight. We find a warning against putting up security for another (vv. 1–5), an exhortation of the sluggard to follow the example of the ant lest he come to ruin (vv. 6–11), and a description of the sort of characteristics that the Lord hates (vv. 12–19). This final section begins with a

numeric literary device, “There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him” (v. 16), which indicates that the list is representative rather than exhaustive. What shared aspects are found in the sinful traits listed in verses 17–19, and what negative impact is shared by all?

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The ninth and tenth paternal appeals continue the theme of sexual ethics and focus more specifically on adultery. In the ninth appeal, Proverbs 6:20–35, what particular consequence of adultery does the author emphasize? The tenth appeal, all of chapter 7, begins with a warning to keep away from an adulterous woman and then outlines what happens to someone who refuses to resist temptation. What, according to the teacher, is the way of wisdom in avoiding such a downfall? Read 2 Samuel 11. How might this sad incident in Israel’s history have shaped the book of Proverbs?

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Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.

**Gospel Glimpses**

**THE GIFT OF WISDOM.** “For the Lord gives wisdom” (Prov. 2:6a). The opening chapters of Proverbs issue a clear invitation to the reader to pursue, seek after, and obtain wisdom. In fact, it makes clear that seeking wisdom is the essence of wisdom! Yet no matter how diligently we apply ourselves, we are incapable of laying hold of the wisdom we so desperately need, and because that is true, God gives it to us. The gift of wisdom is held out to us by James in the New Testament as well: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” (James 1:5).

**DISCIPLINE.** God's discipline of his people is linked to his love for them, which is why a father instructs his son, "Do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights" (Prov. 3:11–12). This passage is cited in Hebrews 12, where it is introduced with a question: "Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?" (v. 5). Discipline from the Lord's hand is a sign of his favor and our status in his covenant family.

**STEADFAST LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS.** A young man is instructed, "Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you" (Prov. 3:3a). This is covenant language, used here as an encouragement to live faithfully with and among God's covenant people. The verse reflects God's self-revelation of his character to Moses: "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex. 34:6). The fullest picture of God's steadfast love was demonstrated in the life and death of his Son, Jesus.

### Whole-Bible Connections

**TWO PATHS.** "The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter. . . . The way of the wicked is like deep darkness" (Prov. 4:18–19). The doctrine of the two ways, or paths, is found throughout Scripture, and it is the underlying message of Proverbs. There is the way of wisdom and the way of folly, the path of covenant life and relationship with God and the path of idolatry.<sup>1</sup> The two paths and their inevitable outcomes are portrayed in Psalm 1; the prophet Jeremiah called the good way the "ancient" path (Jer. 6:16). Later, Jesus made known that he himself is the good way, the path to eternal life, and he described it as "narrow" (Matt. 7:14). Following that, the apostle Paul sets out the opposing ways of law and grace: "Now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code" (Rom. 7:6). Ultimately, wisdom teaches us that through our submitting to God and trusting him, he will guide our feet along the right path (Prov. 3:5–6).

**ADULTERY.** Much space in Proverbs is devoted to the topic of sexual sin, most specifically adultery. The covenant of marriage was instituted by God at creation (Gen. 2:24–25) and serves as an earthly representative of God's covenant relationship with his people, most fully in believers' union with Christ. Given the sacred nature of marriage, the law prescribed death as the penalty for adultery (Lev. 20:10). Adultery is closely linked to idolatry in Scripture; to worship idols is to commit spiritual adultery against God and forsake one's covenant relationship with him (Jer. 3:9; 5:7; Ezek. 23:37; Hos. 4:13; Rev. 2:20–22).

**THE HEART.** "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Prov. 4:23). "Heart" in Proverbs regularly refers to the center of one's

inner life and orientation to God, from which persons do all their thinking, feeling, and choosing. Jesus echoed Moses when he told a scribe that the first and greatest commandment is to love God with all one’s heart (Mark 12:29–30; see Deut. 6:4–5), and there are many references, most especially in the Psalms, to offering to God wholehearted love. To be less than fully committed to the Lord is, according to James, to be double-minded: “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8).

## Theological Soundings

**JUDGMENT.**<sup>2</sup> “They shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices” (Prov. 1:31). The ultimate judgment for rejecting God and his ways and pursuing an unrepentant course of sin is to be given over to the sin itself. God eventually lifts his gracious restraints. We find a fuller picture of this hardening process in Romans 1, where Paul outlines the downward spiral of those “who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” (Rom. 1:18). Paul repeatedly declares that God gives them over in increasing degrees to a debased mind and the practice of evil (vv. 24–32).

**ELECTION.**<sup>3</sup> “For the LORD gives wisdom” (Prov. 2:6). Proverbs invites us to share in the blessings of wisdom, which is to enjoy fellowship with God and his people, yet apart from God’s intervention, we remain fools, scorners, scoffers, and haters of knowledge. That is why, for all the many appeals in Proverbs to seek after and acquire wisdom, ultimately we receive it only because God gives it to us. The same holds true of eternal salvation, as Paul writes: “By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8).

## Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Proverbs 1:8–7:27 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

### 1. Gospel Glimpses

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## 2. Whole-Bible Connections

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## 3. Theological Soundings

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## 4. Proverbs 1:8–7:27

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### As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Proverbs. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study and reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you.

### Definitions

<sup>1</sup> **Idolatry** – In the Bible, usually refers to the worship of a physical object. Paul's comments in Colossians 3:5, however, suggest that idolatry can include covetousness, since it is essentially equivalent to worshiping material things.

<sup>2</sup> **Judgment** – Any assessment of something or someone, especially moral assessment. The Bible also speaks of a final day of judgment when Christ returns, when all those who have refused to repent will be judged (Rev. 20:12–15).

<sup>3</sup> **Election** – In theology, God's sovereign choice of people for redemption and eternal life. Related to the doctrine of predestination.



**THE BOOK OF PROVERBS** uncovers the foundation of wisdom, marks out the paths that make us wise, and points us to the ultimate source of all true understanding: Jesus Christ.

Helping make sense of a unique book, this guide explains the biblical text with clarity and passion—revealing its wise instruction for godly living that glorifies God and leads to blessing for his people.

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**GRAEME L. GOLDSWORTHY,**  
author, *According to Plan*

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BIBLE STUDY

