
THE GOSPEL-CENTERED LIFE IN THE BIBLE

• STUDY GUIDE •
WITH LEADER'S NOTES

PROVERBS

WALKING IN THE WAY OF CHRIST

— SAMUEL LEVI BIERIG —

**PROVERBS:
WALKING IN THE WAY
OF CHRIST**

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Samuel Levi Bierig

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OUTLINE

OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

Proverbs 1:1–9:18	Solomon's Ten Wisdom Addresses to His Sons
Proverbs 10–15:33	Solomon's Proverbs Showing Contrast
Proverbs 16–22:16	Solomon's Proverbs Showing Parallelism and Contrast
Proverbs 22:17–24:34	Solomon's Collected Sayings of the Wise
Proverbs 25:1–29:27	Solomon's Collected Proverbs Arranged by Hezekiah's Scribes
Proverbs 30:1–33	Solomon's Collected Sayings of Agur
Proverbs 31:1–31	Solomon's Collected Sayings of Lemuel

INTRODUCTION

We all face decisions on the path of life. You might be anticipating a significant fork in the road—which way should you choose? Or you might be overwhelmed by the constant choices before you—how do you navigate all the decisions?

We live in an age when we are bombarded with messages and have access to information that would previously have been unfathomable. But all this information hasn't solved our problems. We still need real wisdom for real life.

In the book of Proverbs, God gives us wisdom for life's choices. This wisdom is practical and personal. While it doesn't necessarily provide us with easy answers to life's questions, it does chart out for us a path of wisdom. Ultimately, this wisdom points us to Jesus, the Wisdom of God.

This study of Proverbs is gospel-centered. That is good news for those who have not walked in the path of wisdom. In fact, we can assume that we've all made foolish choices and haven't lived faithfully as described by the book of Proverbs, or all of Scripture. This is true of our lives both in the big picture and recently.

We can't save ourselves, but in the life, death, and resurrection of his Son, God has provided the Savior we need. In Christ, we receive forgiveness for sins, honor for shame, a new identity, help for our struggles, and new mercies each day.

We keep living in the same way that we came to Christ. "Repent and believe" is the call of the gospel both when we first believe and each and every day. The life of faith has a constant pull away from our foolish ways and toward the wisdom of God. Throughout Proverbs,

as with the other studies in this series, you will be encouraged to look to Jesus and trust him.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This study guide is designed to help you learn from Proverbs within a small group. As your group considers the topic of wisdom, you will find that everyone comes with different life experiences and in need of different things. Pray for the Holy Spirit to work in your group. Make your gathering a place where people can ask honest questions without getting pat answers. Allow attendees to bring their struggles to the Lord. Be patient with each other, as we all walk at a different pace. These attitudes reflect the kind and gracious Savior that you'll encounter in your study.

Each participant should have this study guide in order to join in reading and be able to work through the exercises. The study leader should read through both the lesson and the leader's notes in the back of this book before each lesson. No other preparation or homework is required.

There are eleven lessons in this study guide. Each one will take about an hour to complete, perhaps a bit more if your group is large. Each lesson will include the following elements:

BIG IDEA. This is a summary of the main point of the lesson.

BIBLE CONVERSATION. You will read selections from Proverbs and discuss what you've read. Each lesson will be a little different, but instructions will walk you through what to do. As the heading suggests, the Bible conversation questions are intended to spark a conversation rather than generate correct answers. The leader's notes at the back of this book provide some insights, but don't just turn there for the "right answer." At times you may want

to see what the notes say, but always try to answer for yourself first by thinking about the Bible passage.

ARTICLE. This is the main teaching section of the lesson.

DISCUSSION. The discussion questions following the article will help you apply the teaching to your life.

EXERCISE. You will complete the exercise section on your own during group time. You can write in the book if that helps you. Then you will share some of what you have learned with the group. If the group is large, it may help to split into smaller groups to share the results of the exercise and to pray so that everyone has a better opportunity to participate.

WRAP-UP AND PRAYER. Prayer is a critical part of the lesson because your spiritual growth will happen through God's work in you, not by your own self-effort. Wisdom, as Proverbs defines it, is not just knowing about something, but it is knowing Someone. Prayer is a time for your group to engage directly with God, who draws near to us and gives us wisdom when we ask for it.

MORE READING. Your group will not read the entirety of the book of Proverbs in your times together. If you'd like to read through the entire book on your own, you will want to complete the additional reading noted here before your next meeting.

CHEW ON THIS. Each lesson will end with a couple of sayings from Proverbs for you to continue mulling over, thinking about, and chewing on until the next lesson.

Lesson

1

ONLY TWO WAYS

PROVERBS 1-3

BIG IDEA

Proverbs presents life as a series of consecutive decisions constantly offering choices between two paths. These are the “two ways” of Proverbs: We can choose to love and fear the Lord, or we can choose to love ourselves and fear others. Choosing to love and fear God leads to wisdom and life. Choosing our own way leads to foolish living and death.

BIBLE CONVERSATION *20 MINUTES*

Solomon, the writer of the majority of the book of Proverbs, charts out the book’s literary journey in chapter 1, verses 1–7. He establishes his audience (1:4–5), names his purpose and intended aim for writing (1:2–6), flashes his credentials (1:1), and describes the type of writing (“sayings”) the reader should expect to encounter along the way (1:6).

Who is Solomon writing this to? You’ll notice many places in Proverbs where he addresses “my son” (or occasionally “sons”). This is the son of the king—the one who would be expected to rule the kingdom someday. When we refer to this first audience for much of the book, we will call him the “Solomonic son.”

But the audience for Proverbs is really much wider. Solomon's words here are ancient wisdom, but they are also timeless. *You* are the audience, and *your* heart is the aim every bit as much as the hearts of the Solomonic son and the first readers.

How do you get on the path to wisdom and life? The whole book of Proverbs is summarized in this one verse: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction" (1:7). Solomon divides people into two contrasting categories: those who fear the Lord and those who are fools. To fear the Lord means to love God the most, to think and care about him more than anything else.

It is hard to overstate the significance of Proverbs 1:7 in setting the stage for understanding the remainder of the book. The idea of the two ways will serve like a vehicle to navigate you through the book.

Now have someone read **Proverbs 1:1–7** aloud, or have a few readers take turns reading the passage. Then discuss the following questions:

Which groups does Solomon identify as his target audience? (See vv. 4–5.) Which audience do you most identify with and why?

What is Solomon's purpose for assembling Proverbs? (See vv. 2–6.) In what one area of your life would you like to grow in wisdom during the course of this study?

* * * *

Now read the following article aloud, switching readers at each paragraph break. Then discuss the questions that follow the article.

Lesson

1
ARTICLE

THE RIVER OF WISDOM

5 MINUTES

Every day the Mississippi River pours forth a confounding 7.7 billion gallons of water into the Gulf of Mexico. It boasts a stunning array of seven thousand tributaries comprised of all manner of rivers, creeks, and waterways that fan out like fingers and tentacles across the continental United States. From an aerial vantage point, the Mississippi stretches in every direction. It reaches into thirty-one states and holds significant ecological sway on approximately 40 percent of the United States.*

Proverbs, as a literary composition, is a bit like the mighty Mississippi River. Proverbs stretches in every direction with one all-encompassing theme—*the two ways theme*. This theme works through Proverbs much like the Mississippi River branches out into minor rivers and streams. All the medium and small themes feed into the larger theme of the two ways.

The *two ways* theme teaches us that life comes at us as a series of decisions between two ways: the fear of the Lord or the fear of man or

* Stephen E. Ambrose and Douglas G. Brinkley, *The Mississippi and the Making of a Nation: From the Louisiana Purchase to Today* (National Geographic Books, 2002), 9.

self. All day long we are choosing between fearing the Lord (honoring God as our Creator and choosing to listen to him and follow him) or preferring our own way (disregarding and ignoring God and doing what we think will be best for us). Every person to ever walk the planet follows one or the other of these contrasting paths.

During the coming lessons, you will encounter important subthemes in Proverbs. We'll look at the heart as decision center, wisdom versus foolishness, and the fear of the Lord versus the fear of man/self. These are important tributaries, and all flow into the main river of the two ways theme.

Stemming from those subthemes are smaller streams of wisdom. These include the many and various individual proverbs found in Proverbs 10–29 and the sayings and poems found in Proverbs 30–31. To stick with the Mississippi River analogy, every word, saying, and proverb has a place; they all come in intentional sequence and surge forth as the cumulative equivalent of 7.7 billion gallons of wisdom and fear of the Lord—all there for the drinking!

God is good to us in giving us the gift of Proverbs. He wants to save us from going our own way and wasting our lives. Proverbs helps us by reminding us to take life one decision at a time—a thought here, a purchase there, a word spoken today. These decisions all present a fork in the road.

Every decision we make, every penny spent or saved, every relationship cultivated or shattered, all sexual encounters whether righteous or evil, and every single thought pondered is a decision between two ways. Proverbs tells us that nothing is neutral. We are revealing whether we fear and love the Lord or fear people and live for ourselves.

The two ways are diverging paths that end in different locations. One fork leads toward life and light and pleasures forevermore, while the other fork leads toward pain, loneliness, death, and alienation from

God and people. Praise God that we do not have to make these choices all by ourselves. As redeemed Christians, the Holy Spirit indwells us and serves as our guide to carry us into all truth (John 16:13). Because the Holy Spirit has given us new life and works actively in our lives, we can rely on him to both know the right thing to do and to empower us to be able to do it. Since we have been born again, both the once-for-all choice to follow Jesus (conversion) and each individual choice (sanctification) are empowered by God's own Spirit.

If you are at all reflective, thinking of your life as a series of choices that leads toward either life or death can be discouraging. We can remember from our past, and even yesterday, times when we chose to go our own way and not God's way. But the gospel brings us hope.

Jesus is the true and final Solomonic Son, the perfect Son who always listened and obeyed his Father's voice. Jesus is the Son who did *not* follow the paths of folly but heard and heeded his Father's voice. As a young boy, Jesus's frantic parents found him in the temple. When they demanded an explanation, he simply said, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49 CSB). As Jesus grew in favor with God and man, he always chose to follow his Father. Then he gave his life for all our wrong choices. When we put our faith in Jesus, his wisdom, kingdom, birthright, and Spirit are ours.

With this in mind, we can read Proverbs with hope. We can be confident that the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is alive in us and helping us to follow in Jesus's footsteps, listening to our heavenly Father and choosing life over death each day. And when we fail (as we will), we have an advocate with the Father who ever lives to intercede for us and who helps us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:14–16).

DISCUSSION *10 MINUTES*

How have you seen the two ways theme play out recently with your friends and family, or even in yourself?

How does knowing that Jesus was the perfect Solomonic Son give you hope for your friends, family, and yourself?

Lesson



THE FORK IN THE ROAD

20 MINUTES

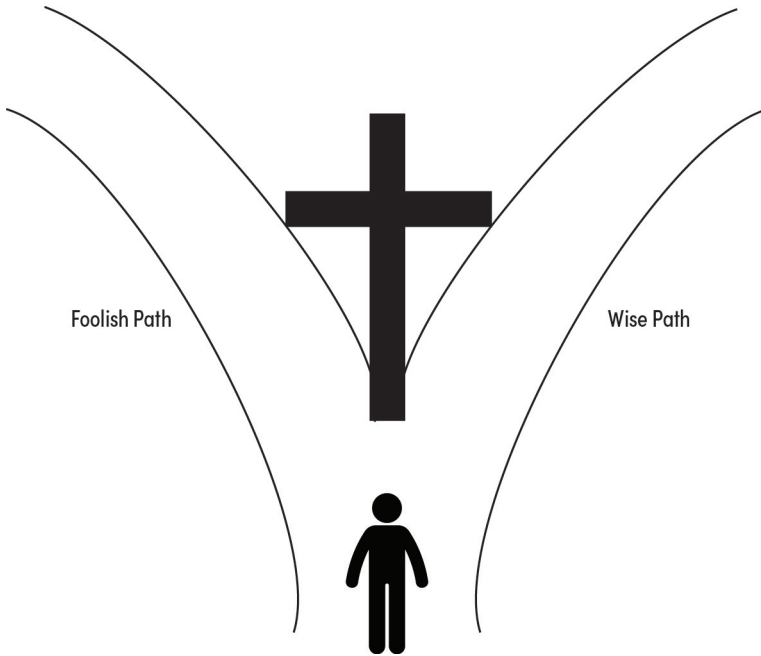
A big part of understanding the book of Proverbs is considering its primary theme of the two ways. This main metaphor will continue throughout the entire book of Proverbs. It shapes our interpretation and application.

For this exercise, you will work individually. First, you will look at a few verses from Proverbs to notice the contrast between the two ways. Then you'll look at a few New Testament verses to consider how the cross helps us on our journey. You will not be asked to share what you write, but you will regather with your group to pray after completing the exercise.

First, use the two paths image below to see the contrast between the two ways. Look up the following verses:

- Proverbs 1:7
- Proverbs 1:32–33
- Proverbs 2:21–22
- Proverbs 3:33–35

Make notes about what you learn about the foolish path on the left and the wise path on the right. Consider how people on that path are described, what they do, and the results of their choices.



After you've made your notes, circle an item or two that grabs your attention. Underline what you think most applies to your life.

The good news of the gospel is that God doesn't choose those who are already wise. Nobody is wise without God. He doesn't evaluate us on our track record of the two ways, as if walking in wisdom *enough* qualifies us or gets us in. Rather, we receive Jesus by walking through the doors of humility, weakness, and the realization that we can't boast in our own record. And to those of us who realize they have been (and are!) foolish, God gives his Son—his wisdom. God gives us Christ's righteousness in exchange for our foolishness. He gives us his Spirit so that we can daily choose wisdom. And he gives us his faithful work in our lives to write a story of redemption.

Next, look up these New Testament verses and consider how the cross helps us:

How does the cross help foolish people make wise choices? Read **1 Corinthians 1:26–31** and write your thoughts below.

How does the cross help with regrets over past foolish choices? Read **2 Corinthians 7:10** and write your thoughts below.

How does the cross give us hope for future choices? Read **Jude 24–25** and write your thoughts below.

How might you apply one of these cross truths in your life this week?

WRAP-UP AND PRAYER

As your group begins this study of Proverbs, the goal isn't simply to better understand the pithy sayings of the book, but instead to grow

in wisdom and ultimately to better know Christ Jesus, who is Wisdom incarnate. Pray that this study will help you grow in wisdom, bringing you closer to Jesus and each other.

MORE READING

If you wish to read through all of Proverbs as part of this study, read Proverbs 1:8–3:35 before the next lesson, which will highlight chapters 4–6.

CHEW ON THIS

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:7)

Blessed is the one who finds wisdom,
and the one who gets understanding,
for the gain from her is better than gain from silver
and her profit better than gold.

She is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare with her.
(Proverbs 3:13–15)