

A landscape painting of a dirt road in a valley with mountains in the background. The road is in the foreground, leading into the distance. The mountains are in the background, and the sky is a mix of blue and white. The overall tone is soft and natural.

PROVERBS

God's Wisdom

Small Groups

Home/Small groups within a church can be wonderfully encouraging and helpful. You can get to know 8 people far better than you can 80! I hope that within our groups we really enjoy reading God's word together, discussing what faith means for our everyday, sharing our lives (all the hopes and worries!) and supporting one another in prayer and practical ways.

These discussion questions are a starting point, but you may find that God's Word also leads you into additional avenues of thought. Likewise the prayer suggestions should be used in addition to regular prayer for each other. Groups work best when everyone feels free to contribute as much or as little as they would like, with no one person dominating or feeling over-awed!

Series Introduction

People who've never read the Bible may well imagine that it's full of little sentences of rules and instruction. We know that it's not, but within the range of genres in Scripture it's the book of Proverbs which is probably closest to this idea. It contains pithy sayings about God, wisdom, faith and the nitty-gritty of life. They are attributed to King Solomon (Son of King David) who was renowned for his wisdom and insight, at least during the early years of his reign.

Ray Ortlund introduces his commentary on Proverbs with these words: *"With the overwhelming flood of information and opinion in our times, much of it a mixture of spin, sound bites, and trivialities, it is a relief to turn back to the Bible. It is a relief to slow down and pay close attention to deep insights that have stood the test of time.*

As we come to the book of Proverbs, God does not intend to crush us with layer upon layer of demand. He intends to help us. The Book of Proverbs is practical help from God for people like us stumbling through daily life. It is his counsel for the perplexed, his strength for the defeated, his warning to the proud, his mercy for the broken. The book of Proverbs is the gospel - good news for the inept through the wisdom of Another. We have every reason to receive it with a whole heart." [R. Ortlund, Proverbs, 2012]

We will be reading through sections of Proverbs throughout Lent. In a season that is often useful for slowing down and taking stock of what's really important, God's words of Wisdom seem appropriate. I pray that we will grow not only in godly wisdom, but in love and trust of the God who guides his people.

God's Wisdom...

...begins with fear of the Lord. Week 1.

Some opening questions before you get into the Proverbs:

Who would you say is the wisest person you know?

What is it that makes them wise? Is it the same as being clever?

Read: Proverbs 1:1-7

Discuss

What do you know about Solomon's life - the highs and lows?

This opening gives an indication of what Solomon hoped his readers would gain from these Proverbs. What aims does he express in verses 2-4?

Is there something here for everyone, or are some already wise enough? (v5)

What does he mean by those who 'Fear' the Lord?

How does recognition of God then help us to gain his knowledge?

When are you most tempted to turn down wisdom and instruction? (v7)

What does Jesus say about coming to understand parables and proverbs? See Matthew 13:10-17

Respond

We won't learn from God's wisdom until we recognise that God is God and he knows best. Perhaps spend time (with music playing if you'd like) offering short prayers of praise to God.

Pray

As well as general prayers for one another, it would be good to pray for your time in this series - that all may gain wisdom from God's word.

...To Hold Back from Evil. Week 2.

Opening Discussion:

Have you any wisdom learnt from growing up which you still use today?

Read: Proverbs 1:8-19

Discuss

How important are parents and those who bring us up for setting us 'on the right track?'

How can we best support those who don't get a lot of help from wise guardians?

What are the modern equivalent temptations of the actions described in vv10-14? Is a warning against evil only relevant to the young, or can we all be tempted?

What is meant that these people seeking evil, 'ambush only themselves?' (v18)

How does ill-gotten gain deprive people of a fullness of life? (v19)

Are there times when you're tempted to 'bend the rules' to get or achieve something?

How might God's wisdom call us to walk a different path?

Can you think of examples from the Gospels of people following the path of the evil ones?

Respond

There may be people that you're each worried about and the path they've chosen. Perhaps there's a way you could reach respond by writing someone's name on something and asking God to lead them (back) to him

Pray

We would be naive to assume that we are each beyond any temptation. It would be good to pray that we would hear God's word calling us back from bad or ungodly courses of action.

...To Understand Righteousness. Week 3.

Intro

Do you think our society values wisdom?

And how would you explain the difference between wisdom and knowledge?

Read: Proverbs 2:1-10

Discuss

This passage talks of storing up, do you have a favourite, memorised verse of Scripture?

Do you feel that you value God's wisdom in the way pictured here? (v4)

What helps you to look to God's word for instruction in life, do you have practical suggestions for studying the Bible?

Does this passage agree with the idea 'Christians aren't saved by being right, but we are saved in order to do what is right?' (vv8-9)

Have you ever thought of knowledge as 'pleasant to the soul?' (v10)

How might we guard against pride as we grow in knowledge?

Does the source of our knowledge and wisdom help with that?

Is there a similar feeling in this passage to Jesus' story about finding 'hidden treasure?' (Matthew 13:44)

Respond

This Proverb speaks of 'storing up' God's word. Perhaps there's a verse we've covered that you could all try to memorise as a group?

Pray

Pray for us all to have that love for God's word and his instruction. To know the joy of God's wisdom influencing our lives.

...To Trust in the Lord. Week 4.

Intro

Have you ever gone with someone else's advice against your own better judgment?

Did it work out well or not?

Read: Proverbs 3:1-12

Discuss

What do you make of v2 - does this sound like the 'prosperity gospel'?

How do love and faithfulness win favour with God and with others?

(v4)

Do you find it easy to trust God rather than lean on your own understanding? (vv4-7)

Are they always different, or can our understanding come to reflect God's ways?

What's the general principle behind living God's way and its impact on our lives? (v8-10)

Vv11-12 Are quite hard, but can you identify with God disciplining those he loves for our own good?

In which areas of life do you find it hardest to put all your trust in the Lord?

How often does Jesus rebuke and discipline his disciples? Why does he do it?

Respond

Maybe there's a creative way that your group could write out a verse to help keep it in our hearts?

Pray

Pray for those facing particularly big decisions, and wondering what God's will is in difficult situations.

...To Walk without Stumbling. Week 5.

Intro

Is there anything that has really struck you as helpful as we've read through some of the Proverbs?

Read: Proverbs 3:19-26

Discuss

What is the connection between God's Wisdom and God's creation? (vv19-20)

What do you think it looks like in everyday life to keep God's wisdom in sight? (v21)

Do vv23-24 imply that following God's instruction means everything will always go perfectly?

If not, what do you think those verses are really teaching us?

How does v26 help answer that question of what it means to 'not stumble'?

Does it make more sense to think of stumbling as being about our walk with God?

Can you think of examples from Jesus' life when God's wisdom helped him not to stumble?

Respond & Pray

As we reach the end of our series, perhaps you could all read this week's passage again, all-together. Pray that you would all know the Lord at your side, and the safety of walking through life with him

Week 6 of Lent

Our series in Proverbs has finished, as we move on to the events of Palm Sunday on 25th March.

Perhaps your group would like to do something together for what's often known as Holy Week?

Do get in touch with me if you'd like any ideas or suggestions.

I hope you've enjoyed this series through Proverbs and that it's helped you to pause and think about what it means to live God's way as his forgiven and redeemed people.

Perhaps you can find time to read through the rest of Proverbs over Easter.

God bless

Tom