



Bible Studies for Ashfield Presbyterian Church

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1. the Beginning of wisdom

Visit any bookshop and you'll see that self improvement books are selling like hot cakes: racks of books with titles like 'The Secrets of Success; 60 Ways to Make Your Life Amazing'; 'How to control your Time and your Life'; and even 'How to Be Sane, Sexy and Solvent.' The newer the book, the faster it sells. But why not start with God's own guide to a better way of living? The Book of Proverbs is ancient wisdom that is extraordinarily relevant for modern living. It's God's instruction manual in how to live wisely -- how not just to survive, but have a life that's stable, good, coherent and effective.

1. **Read Proverbs 1:1-7.** According to 1:2-4, who can benefit from studying the book of Proverbs, and how?
2. Among other things, Proverbs is going to offer the keys to wisdom, discipline, prudence, insight and guidance. But how would you actually define...
 - a. wisdom?
 - b. A disciplined and prudent life?

Can you think of people you know who exhibit these qualities?

Wisdom is related to the idea of being 'intelligent' – but it's more. And while it's got something to do with learning facts, you'll know from experience that with some people, it seems the more 'stuff' they know, the less they are able to negotiate life. On the other hand, sometimes the people we admire the most in these areas don't have any formal education at all. Proverbs offers practical knowledge of God's world – applied in a way that works. That's what wisdom looks like.

3. It's important to notice that the sort of wise life God is seeking from his people goes further than just 'doing what works'. There's an underlying 'type of life' that God wants to see. How is it described (1:3)?
4. It's often considered 'smart' to get ahead by ignoring what is right and just and fair. Can you think of examples from your own experience?

Proverbs is going to introduce a lifestyle that really works – but is also morally right and proper and good. It's a life of integrity and honour, that puts the right price-tags in the right places. In summary, it's the sort of life you know in your heart you should be living...

5. According to verses 5 and 6, proverbs can come in all shapes and sizes. What can we expect to encounter?

Sometimes Proverbs can be perplexing. Sometimes a proverb is like a riddle... other times like a memorable saying. Sometimes (just like "Many hands make light work" and "Too many cooks spoil the broth") they can be contradictory. Sometimes Proverbs will be pithy statements that 'capture a moment'; at other times, they are simple observations of ironic circumstances. Some proverbs will state an obvious truth about life – 'a rich man has many friends, and nobody likes a poor man' – without either affirming or disapproving. At other times, God's judgment on a matter is very clear. Real wisdom lies in knowing which proverb applies to which situation. Proverbs are like boiled lollies – you need to take your time with them. Roll them around in your mouth, think about them for a

while and you will get more benefit from them. In a sense, Proverbs are meant to be used as TOOLS rather than as RULES. As a builder knows when to select the hammer and when to use the saw, the person of wisdom will know which tool to use, and when to use it. Careful – sometimes they're sharp!

***Like a thornbush in a drunkard's hand
is a proverb in the mouth of a fool. (Prov 26:9)***

6. Read the following proverbs and, in the space below, note the ways in which the wise and fools are characterised.

10:23 14:8 14:15	14:16 15:7 15:21	17:12 17:16 17:21	17:24 18:15 20:5	22:3 26:1-12 27:22 28:26
The Wise		The Foolish		

the Beginning of wisdom

The problem with proverbs is that on their own, they can't actually make a person wise. There's more to wisdom than simply mouthing clever statements. So where does real wisdom begin? Proverbs – along with the rest of the Bible – is absolutely clear about this.

Proverb 9:10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

7. **Read Proverbs 9:10.** It's really the 'theme verse' of the book. What do you think it means to have a 'fear of the Lord'?

8. In what ways (if any) is a 'fear of the Lord' different to 'being scared of the Lord.'

What is there about God to be fearful of?

9. How does Proverbs describe those who refuse to 'fear God'? See the following verses: (*It might be efficient to answer q10 at the same time!)

* 1:7

* 1:29

* 3:7

* 10:27

* 14:2

* 14:16

10. What sort of behaviour and attitudes will flow from "fearing God"?

* 3:7

* 8:13

* 14:2

* 15:33

11. According to Psalm 111:10, what practical connection is there between the fear of God, and the way a person lives?

Fear of God is the foundation for right living in God's world. If you aren't prepared to reverently stand in awe of the one who designed the world we're living in, and if that doesn't shape the way you're living, then everything will eventually crack and come down. No matter how smart you are, no matter how impressive your expertise... if there's no 'fear of the Lord,' then ultimately there's no real wisdom!

For the people of Israel, living under the protection of God's promises in the 'promised land,' their whole destiny depended on living in the 'fear of the Lord' (Deut 6:24). More than that, the people of Israel longed for the day when all the nations would bow down in fear of the Lord, under the rule of Israel's "Messiah" – a King who would himself "delight in the fear of the Lord." (See Isaiah 11:1-3)

12. **Read Luke 12:4-7.** Why does Jesus say that God should be feared?

Can you explain the interplay between 'fearing' and 'not fearing' in those verses?

13. **Read Acts 9:31.** How is the first Christian church described?

Can you explain the interplay between 'fearing' and 'not fearing' offered by this verse?

14. Think back to the way Israelites were called to shape the way they treated one another by their over-riding 'fear of God.' What will the life of someone who lives in the same kind of 'fear' of Jesus Christ look like to an observer?

15. What are some of the ways you're tempted to fear things and people other than Jesus Christ?

Meet The King: It's important to notice the identity of the key contributor to the book of Proverbs. For the ancient Israelites, nobody was better qualified to dispense God's wisdom and righteousness than their King. And no King was ever wiser than Solomon (Read I Kings 4:29-34). Sadly Solomon eventually stopped listening to his own advice. In fact, it's sometimes almost ironic to read his proverbs and think through the way this once-wise King abandoned wisdom... and abandoned God. It's a sobering warning.

16. Finally, though, another King arrived on the scene who not only 'knew wisdom' but 'lived wisdom' as well. **Read Matthew 12:38-42.** What does Jesus say about his own wisdom?

If Jesus is even wiser than Solomon, how can listening to him benefit the way we shape our lives? What outcomes should we expect?

The place to start in acquiring wisdom is in responding rightly to the rule of Jesus, God's King. There is wisdom in his every word. More than that, He is the one who pours out on his people the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, and the power to love and to do what is right, just and true. Solomon's wisdom in Proverbs is impressive – but as we come to Jesus, we'll find the true essence of the 'art of living.' Studying Proverbs will help shape us as growing followers of Jesus, who rightly 'fear God' in the way we live our lives.

prayer points

Ask God to fill you with such reverent fear of Him and His Son that it will lead you to truly wise living.

2. the way of wisdom

Someone said recently that people are no longer interested in living 'a good life' – their only concern is to live 'a good **lifestyle**.' Is it true?

The promise of Proverbs is to teach us the sort of wisdom that leads to “a prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair.” (Prov 1:3) But what does 'right' and 'just' and 'fair' look like? Can we just make up definitions to suit ourselves? Or is there a content and shape to 'the good life' that Proverbs can help us to understand?

As you read through proverbs, you'll meet two very different kinds of people -the **righteous**, and the **wicked**. One group 'fears God' and lives the good life, with character that the Lord delights in; the other wants nothing to do with God's wisdom, and the results are disastrous.

***The Lord detests men of perverse heart...
but he delights in those whose ways are blameless. Prov 11:20***

We're going to flick through Proverbs and get a feel for the kind of things God has a heart for... that should shape our hearts as well.

the character of god

1. Some Proverbs describe the kinds of actions, behaviours and motives that God loves; some describe things that God hates. Take note of these: Proverbs 11:1,20; 12:22; 15:25,29; 16:5,11; 17:15; 21:3

Loves	Hates

2. **Pause and Reflect:** God is interested both the state of your heart, and the honesty of your scales. In more general terms, that means the fairness you trade with, your integrity in business, and the way you advertise your second-hand car. How much do you think these character traits are valued in today's society?

the character of man

The great thing about Proverbs is that it doesn't just tell us what the character of God is - it gives us examples of what the character of man should and shouldn't be like, and what things will lead to the Good life.

3. Work through these Proverbs and compile a character sheet of those who God would consider Righteous, and those who God would consider Unrighteous.

	Righteous	Unrighteous
11:3		
13:5		
14:2		
14:21		
14:31		
15:28		
17: 5		
19:17		
22:22-23		
29:7		
31:8-9		

4. What are the characteristics and concerns that keep surfacing in these Proverbs?

These characteristics aren't only in Proverbs – they're echoed through the whole Bible. The prophet Micah, summarises for Israel what it is that God requires.

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8

5. ***Pause and Reflect:*** Which of these issues do you personally struggle with? Do you find it easy to cut corners and stretch the truth? Do you find it easier to manipulate people than to be open and honest? Do you find it easier to ignore the poor than to be generous? Do you act justly? Do you love mercy? Do you walk humbly with your God?

the security of the righteous

Sometimes it seems costly to be honest, just and generous. If you're 'lifestyle driven,' you'll always opt for whatever is best for the financial bottom line rather than whatever is most honest and just. The nation of Israel was the same.

6. From the very beginning of their history as a nation, the Israelites were warned that their place in the promised land was contingent. In other words, it always depended on them fearing God, and living in righteousness under God's rule. How does **Proverbs 2:21-22** summarise this?
7. As time went on and Israel prospered financially, their hearts went way off track. According to Amos 2:6-16, what is Israel guilty of, and what will happen as a result?
8. How should Israel have been guided by the following proverbs: 10:2; 11:4; 12:28; 12:3; 19:23; 20:7; 28:1,18,27; 29:18,25

feeling thirsty?

Jesus came to Israel preaching a similar message – and holding out a remarkable promise... “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” And the promise extended far beyond the borders of Israel. If you realise you don't really measure up to God's definition of righteousness, but you're thirsty for it, when you come to Jesus you've come to the right place! By the Spirit, he transforms ordinary unrighteous people into exactly the kind of people God delights in.

Read Galatians 5:19-26.

9. What are the 'fruit of the Spirit' that characterise a righteous life?

Are these the characteristics you long to have? What is it that gets in the way?

10. Do you consider righteousness a benefit in your life? Why or why not? Is it something you strive for, or something that holds you back from achieving your potential?

If you're a follower of Jesus, a righteous life isn't something that we can either choose to pursue or not – it's what we've been called to. But this doesn't mean that it's easy, or that we won't fall short from time to time. And it's this reason that God has given us his Spirit and his Word, so that we might know what a righteous life looks like, and that we might have the strength to live out what we have been called to – the Good Life.

prayer points

Pick 2 or 3 of the Proverbs we looked at this week, write them out, and memorise them. Pray that God might produce the fruit of the Spirit in your life.

3. *wise in society*

Proverbs has much to say about how society can work well: from the big picture of good government, to personal relationships, to individual virtue.

wise government

Although some of the wisdom of Proverbs can seem odd to us in the modern day, we can learn a lot about what good government looks like from its teaching about the king and his responsibilities.

***“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice;
but when the wicked rule, the people groan.” (29:2)***

1. What are the benefits to society of justice and righteousness? Can you think of modern examples of these principles?
11:10
14:34
28:13
29:4
21:15
2. What are characteristics of wise rule?
16:12
18:5
20:18
20:28
24:23-25
25:2
25:4-5
28:3
29:14
31:4-7
31:8-9
3. What are the outcomes of foolish rule?
28:15-16
28:28
29:2
29:12
4. Sometimes human authority can seem absolute. What is a wiser perspective? 21:1

5. What are the characteristics of a king's subject who is wise?
14:35
16:13
20:26
22:11
24:21-22
6. **Read Romans 13:1-7.** How does the apostle Paul's description of good government parallel the teaching of Proverbs?
7. **Read I Peter 2:13-17.** What does it mean to submit to earthly authority "for the Lord's sake"?

What do you do if God's commands contradict earthly commands?

What is the purpose of living within the law (v15)?

What balance is commanded in v16? When is this a difficult balance to keep?

8. From all this, what things do you think we should consider in deciding how to vote?

Living well

"One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and one whose temper is controlled than one who captures a city." (16:32)

The world says the way to get ahead, to live a rich, fulfilled life, is to trample on all those who stand in your way. But the wisdom of Proverbs says differently

9. What advice does Proverbs give about being a good friend?
12:16
17:9
17:17
20:6
24:26
27:5-6
27:9
27:14
27:17

10. What benefits are there to living a life of love according to 3:3-4 and 10:12 (see also 1 Peter 4:8)

11. What example are we to follow in living a life of love according to Ephesians 5:1-2? What does this look like?

12. Survivor, The Apprentice and other TV shows say that ruthless ambition, greed and jealousy are required to get ahead. What, in contrast, does Proverbs teach are the benefits of contentment and similar virtues?

11:16

14:30

27:4

28:20

28:25

13. Recognising that God is sovereign means we can be patient and calm in disputes. What benefits come from such an attitude?

15:18

17:13

17:14; 20:3

19:11

20:22

25:28

14. People lie, bribe and deceive in an attempt to get ahead. Instead, what are the benefits of living with integrity and truth

10:9

11:3

12:19

15. Standing up for yourself and having a positive self-image are seen as positive character traits and the way to get ahead. Instead, what are the benefits of humility instead of pride?

16:18, 18:12

25:27

27:21

29:1

29:23

16. In Proverbs, wise people are righteous; that is, they have a godly character, and live rightly in relationship with God and others. What benefits do the righteous bring to society?

10:21

12:10

14:9

20:7

21:25-26

23:24

28:1

28:12; 29:2

28:18

29:7

17. According to 1 Peter 2:11-12 and 1 Peter 3:8-16, what benefits come from righteous living?

prayer points

Pray for each other, that you would demonstrate righteous living so that the world might give honour to Jesus.

4. *wise at work*

The God of Proverbs is a big God. He's interested in every area of life, not just our "Sunday religion". The way we work, and our attitudes to people and money are an expression of our worship of him.

***The rich and the poor have this in common:
the Lord is the maker of them all. (Proverbs 22:2)***

wealth

1. What are the characteristics of someone who is wise in regard to money and work?

10:22:

19:4, 6-7

Is it good or bad that wealth brings friends, or is it just an observation?

10:15:

How does 18:11 add a note of uncertainty to the security of riches?
3. What is a wise approach to wealth?
12:9, 13:7

13:11

15:16-17; 17:1

16:8

21:17

28:11
4. In fact, sometimes poverty can have its advantages. What do these proverbs teach?
13:8

30:7-9
5. Proverbs also has much to say that corrects the view that having riches is always good. What do these proverbs teach?
18:23

23:1-5

28:8
6. According to wisdom what matters more to God than riches?
11:28

16:8

16:11

22:1

28:6

28:20

7. What is God's attitude to the poor? What does this mean for how we should use our wealth?

14:31

22:2

29:13

8. What is God's attitude to those rich who oppress the poor?

15:25

17:5

21:13

22:16

22:22-23

9. How does a wise use of wealth produces benefits?

19:17

22:4

22:9

28:25

28:27

work and Laziness

10. What lessons for work can we learn from the ant (6:6-8)?

11. What are the results of laziness

6:9-11

10:26

12:27

19:24

20:4

24:30-34

12. Can you think of modern examples of the foolishness of the approaches to work described in:
 12:11
 12:27
 15:19
13. What temptations are there for the fool in his work?
 14:23
 22:13
 26:13-16

wise work

Proverbs doesn't say there is anything inherently wrong with wealth. In fact, it gives lots of advice about shrewd business – how to be successful wisely.

14. When deciding which business opportunity to take up, what advice does 22:29 give?
15. What advice does 14:4 give about the importance of capital investment when setting up your business?
16. What type of products are the wise ones to focus on according to 24:27 and 27:23-27?
17. What business practices will generally lead to success according to 11:26 and 3:27-28?
18. What practices will generally lead to trouble? 15:27; 17:23; 20:17

What about 17:8; 20:14 and 21:14? Are these practices being encouraged or discouraged?

19. What business ethics does God approve of? (11:1; 16:11, 20:10) What might this principle look like today?
20. What business principle is being encouraged in these proverbs? 11:15 and 17:18
- What reason is given in 22:26-27?
21. **Read Luke 12:13-21.** How does this parable strike you after all we've been reading? What is the same and what is different? What, according to Jesus, is the great danger with wealth?
22. **Read Proverbs 3:9-10.** How can we be people who "honour the Lord with the first fruits of all our produce?"

prayer points

5. WISE WORDS

One aspect of personal relationships is addressed in Proverbs so often, it deserves treatment on its own: **our speech**. A wise man once said, “We have two ears and one mouth so we should listen twice as much as we speak.” (Apparently, it was the Greek philosopher Epictetus, who was born around 55AD.) It’s catchy, and it’s probably true – and it’s the theme of a large proportion of Solomon’s wise proverbs.

Proverbs has a lot to say about how and when to speak and when to hold our tongue, the richness of a timely word and the destructiveness of a mistimed comment, and the way our words reflect what’s in our hearts. In summary:

***The tongue has the power of life and death,
and those who love it will eat its fruit. Prov 18:21***

Proverbs also has a lot to say about the way we listen – whether we’re prepared to take heed of timely words of rebuke and correction.

Do you ever have a problem with taming your tongue? Or with humbly accepting to correction? Then this quick tour of Proverbs is for you.

speaking the truth

We hear it all the time, “It’s just a little white lie, nobody cares!” Is that true? Proverbs says plenty about what God’s view is of telling the truth.

1. Summarise what the following Proverbs say about lying - Prov 6:16-19, 12:22

2. In contrast, how does “wisdom” speak? See Prov 8:7-9.

Pause and Reflect: Do you think there are circumstances in which it is acceptable to lie, or at least bend the truth? What are those, and why? What (if any) would be another option?

more tongue trouble...

3. Lying is not the only way we can misuse our tongues. Summarise these: Then in the right hand column, list the reverse of these misuses, describing the good things the tongue can do

	Misuses	Positive Uses
12:6		
12:18		
13:3		
16:28		
17:7		

19:28		
28:23		

***He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.
Proverbs 21:v23***

4. There's a huge list of proverbs about chattering fools, mouths that invite ruin, lying lips that conceal hatred, lips that gossip or mock. What are the situations in these proverbs where foolish words bring poor outcomes?

18:13

22:10

25:20

26:17

26:21

5. Sometimes the advice of Proverbs on when to speak seems contradictory. Consider how 26:4 and 26:5 might work together.
6. According to Proverbs 10:19, what's the best way to prevent tongue-trauma? What wisdom does 17:28 add?

a deeper problem...

We might not want to admit it, but Proverbs says our words say more about us than we imagine.

7. How do these proverbs describe the connection between a person's words and the state of their heart?

16:23

18:4

26:23

26:24-26

In Matthew 15:19, Jesus says something very similar: "...out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." We Christians are people with changed hearts. And if that's not reflected in the words of our lips, there's something very wrong!

8. **Pause and Reflect:** Think back to the last hard conversation you had with someone at work, church or even in your Home Group. During that conversation, what were you hoping would be the outcome of that conversation? Was the motivation for their good or yours?

a listening ear

We've seen the way wisdom should affect the way we **speak**... so what about the way we **listen**? Proverbs has got a lot to say about taking heed of wise advice. In fact, chapters 1 to 7 are almost completely shaped as a 'father to son' chat, with a constant refrain – "Listen, my son, to your Father's instruction." (See 1:8, 2:1, 3:1-2, 4:1, 4:10, 4:20, 5:7...)

In fact, the Book of Proverbs says that listening to wise advice and gracious rebuke is the key way we grow in wisdom. You'll only grow in wisdom if you're teachable: in other words, if you're ready to listen to instruction, correction and rebuke. Are you?

The wisdom of listening

9. Read Proverbs 2:1-10. What sequence of good events is promised here?

10. What do Proverbs 12:1,15, 13:1,13,18; say about 'listening to advice'?

When is it difficult for you to listen to advice?

The benefits of listening

11. Read Proverbs 12:18. What is the difference between reckless words and wise ones?

12. In the famous business book "A Complaint is a Gift," Janelle Barlow says that customers who take the trouble to complain are doing any business a huge favour. According to Proverbs 25:11-13, how valuable is the right rebuke at the right time?

When was the last time you actually treasured a rebuke?

Listening well

13. Some people can only learn from the school of hard knocks. According to Prov 17:10 and 19:25, what will be the mark of true discernment?

What does Proverbs 27:21 add to the wisdom of listening well?

Strange, isn't it. We tend to think highly of those who don't seem to need advice from anyone... and yet Proverbs says that the wise man is the one who seeks out advice, and loves it! **Read Proverbs 15:22**. If a wise person is making plans, they'll seek the counsel of as many advisers as they can. Perhaps that's one of the biggest advantages of being part of a church family.

It's a simple enough formula... the wiser you are, the more easily you'll listen to correction and advice.

the wounds of a friend

Sometimes we hesitate to give advice or rebuke because we're afraid it will hurt the other person, and damage the relationship. And we're wise if we remember that we should listen twice as much as we speak! But often, the right word at the right time – even though it's hard to deliver – is a wonderful gift. And the hurt that results when the friend continues down the path to disaster causes much more lasting damage.

14. How do Prov 27:6,9,17 and 28:23 encourage you to speak the truth in love to a friend who is acting unwisely?

15. **Reflect:** Can your home group become a circle of true friends? What could help this to happen?

What could stop it happening?

What ground rules should a group adopt to encourage true and honest friendship?

It's one thing to dish up homespun advice and folksy wisdom. But when Christians are called to speak a word of instruction or rebuke, we have a much better source. **Read 2 Timothy 3:16-4:4.**

16. As a pastor-teacher, what is Timothy told to do, and how does he do it? (4:2)

Correcting, rebuking and encouraging one another from God's word is what ministry to one another is all about. Presumably, in home groups and one to one, wise members will be keen to both give and receive this kind of help. In fact, the wiser you are, the keener you'll be to be corrected! Why not commit yourself as a group to being "open to correction" as you meet together to encourage one another?

prayer points

Pick 2 or 3 of the Proverbs we looked at this week, write them out, and memorise them.

Ask God to give both the wisdom and the opportunities to give and receive correction from each other.

6. *wise at home*

There has probably never been greater pressure on the stability of the family. We need to hear Proverb's ancient wisdom more than ever.

marriage

1. What are the characteristics of a wife chosen with wisdom? What are the consequences of a foolish choice?

11:22

12:4

14:1

18:22

19:13-14

21:9; 21:19;

25:24; 27:15-16

A number of these sayings highlight the challenges a "contentious" wife can pose. What adjective might you emphasise if you were writing proverbs about difficult husbands, e.g. "disconnected" or "indifferent" or "passive"?

2. What perspectives are important to remember for a stable, healthy family?

15:16-17

15:27

16:31

17:1

17:6

20:29

30:21-23

Adultery and sexual temptation is all around us. Read the following passages, then answer the questions that follow.

5:15-23

6:20-35

7:1-27

20:7

23:26-28

27:8

30:20

3. What warnings do these passages repeatedly emphasise?
4. What are the benefits of faithfulness in marriage?
5. How do these passages describe the allure of illicit sex?

Why do you think these things are mentioned?

What do these passages commend as the wise path instead?

6. How might this teaching help us to give practical advice to a friend who was struggling with looking at pornography?

children

7. Those of us who are parents long for our children to grow up wise and godly. What wisdom does Proverbs bring to the relationship between children and their parents?

10:1; 15:20; 29:3

17:2

17:25; 28:7

19:26; 28:24

20:20

23:22-25

30:17

8. One significant theme in Proverbs is the importance of discipline of children. Read the following proverbs and then discuss the questions below. As you discuss, please bear in mind the sensitivity of this issue and the reality of differing opinions.

13:24 19:18 22:6 22:15 23:13-14 26:3 29:15 29:17 29:19
29:21

What wisdom does Proverbs give on raising wise and godly children?

Do you think these sayings are still relevant? Why, or why not?

Could other methods of discipline be equally wise?

two women: wisdom and folly

Almost all the way through Proverbs, Wisdom is pictured (or 'personified') as a woman. "Folly" is also a woman too – in fact, a death-dealing prostitute. These are vivid pictures that beautifully integrate the whole book.

Lady Wisdom speaks in detail through Chapter 8: her mouth speaks what is true and just (v7,8), and her words are worth more than silver or gold. Wisdom was there before the oceans were made; she was there when God made the boundaries of the sea; Wisdom was with God right from the very beginning. (8:22-31). Now, in chapter 9, Lady Wisdom is throwing a party – and you're invited. On the table is a feast of insight into how to live life to the full. You'd have to be crazy to turn down an invitation like that...

9. **Read Proverbs 9 v 1-12.** How is 'Wisdom' personified here? (ie what imagery is used to picture wisdom?)

What is on offer here – in terms of the imagery?

10. According to verses 4, 6-9 and 11-12, what does this banquet represent in real-life terms?

11. According to verse 10, where does true wisdom begin?

12. **Read verses 13 to 18.** There's another woman in town. Who is she?

13. What parallels are drawn between the two women? (Look for the identical verses!)

14. What's the i) appeal and ii) outcome of eating with this woman?

Ultimately, it's a life and death decision. Sit down at the banquet of Lady Wisdom, and live... or accept the invitation of seductive Lady Folly, and die. The invitations sound so much the same, and the forbidden fruit seems so sweet... yet real wisdom is grounded and founded on the Fear of the Lord.

an excellent wife

Proverbs closes with a poem written in the form of an acrostic – each verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. These final verses provide a summary of everything that has gone before them. It's literally an 'A to Z of Proverbs,' cast as a description of 'an excellent wife.'

15. **Read Proverbs 31:10-31.** In study 1, we saw that Proverbs would help us live a wise, righteous and disciplined life. How does the excellent wife exemplify each of these qualities?

wise

righteous

disciplined

16. In study 2, we saw that 'the fear of the Lord' is the beginning of wisdom. How does the excellent wife demonstrate this?

From the start, Proverbs has been set in the context of a father instructing his son... and any dad would be delighted for a son to find a wife like this! There is another voice, offering the quick fix and the forbidden fruit... but life with a wife like this is far richer and more satisfying. On one level, you can read back through these verses and replace the 'good wife' with 'wisdom.' When you do that, it's not just a chapter for Christian wives... but for everyone. Whatever you do, MARRY WISDOM. Hold it near and dear. Let it shape your life. Fear the Lord. Hold on to righteousness and kindness and truth.

prayer points