



Full product can be ordered by calling
1-800-333-8300 or by visiting
www.FaithAliveResources.org

show me 

sample

Faith Alive Christian Resources

Property of Faith Alive Christian Resources. All rights reserved.

infuse

Proverbs

just so you know



infuse

Proverbs

just so you know



by Marilyn A. McGinnis


FAITH
ALIVE®
Christian Resources

Grand Rapids, Michigan

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and instruction. . . .*

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

—Proverbs 1:7; 9:10

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations in this publication are from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Cover photo: Istock

Infuse Bible Studies. *Proverbs: Just So You Know*, © 2012 by Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560. All rights reserved. With the exception of brief excerpts for review purposes, no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission from the publisher. For information about use of copyrighted material, please contact Permissions, Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560; phone: 1-800-333-8300; fax: 616-726-1164; email: permissions@faithaliveresources.org.

Printed in the United States of America.

We welcome your comments. Call us at 1-800-333-8300 or email us at editors@faithaliveresources.org.

ISBN 978-1-59255-735-6

5 4 3 2 1

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Glossary | 4 |
| How to Use This Study | 6 |
| Introduction | 7 |
| Lesson 1 | |
| To Whom It May Concern | 8 |
| Lesson 2 | |
| Fools, Sluggards, Mockers | 20 |
| Lesson 3 | |
| Family Matters | 32 |
| Lesson 4 | |
| Words That Injure, Words That Heal | 42 |
| Lesson 5 | |
| Let Justice Roll Down | 52 |
| Lesson 6 | |
| Prayer and Some Wise Advice for All | 62 |
| An Invitation and Prayer of Commitment | 73 |
| Bibliography | 75 |
| Evaluation Questionnaire | |

Glossary

Agur—a writer of wise sayings who was apparently not an Israelite but may have been a descendant of Ishmaelites (see Prov. 30).

covenant—a mutually binding agreement between two parties. In the Old Testament God made covenants with his chosen people Israel in which he promised to be their God, and they pledged to be faithful to him. These agreements form the basis of their relationship with God.

faith—defined in Hebrews 11:1 as “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Can be defined in simple terms as “belief and trust.” True saving faith is a gift that consists of knowledge and confidence—a sure knowledge by which we accept as true all that God has revealed in his Word, and confidence that all our sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake.

fear of the Lord—this phrase refers to standing in awe of God’s power and holiness, combined with love for God and obedience to his will, showing the Lord respect and honor in all we think, say, and do.

fool, foolishness (folly)—see **wicked, wickedness**.

Hezekiah—a king of Judah (c. 715-686 B.C.) who instituted a great revival of “fear of the

Lord” and godly living among God’s people (see 2 Kings 18-20).

holy—pure; set apart to bring glory to God.

Holy One—the Lord, Almighty God

hope—this means looking ahead in solid trust to the fulfillment of all God’s promises (see Heb. 7:19; 11:1).

Israel—God’s chosen people, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whom God blessed in order to bless all the nations of the earth (Gen. 12:1-3; 2 Sam. 7; Ps. 72:17; Matt. 1:20-25).

justice—the results of righteous leadership and living, by which everyone is treated with righteousness and valued with dignity as an imagebearer of God.

law (of the LORD)—(the law of God given to Moses) In the Old Testament this refers to the Ten Commandments and hundreds of ceremonial and social laws given by God to the nation of Israel and prescribed in Genesis through Deuteronomy.

Lemuel—this king whose sayings are included in Proverbs 31 was a non-Israelite king whose teachings on wisdom focus on ruling in godly justice and righteousness.

mercy—this term is often used to describe showing kindness to someone in distress. To be more precise, it refers to showing leniency by holding back punishment even if justice calls for it.

parable—a brief story that imparts godly wisdom for daily living.

proverb—usually a brief saying that provides instruction on how to live wisely and successfully. Most Hebrew proverbs consist of two lines that introduce a parallel, a contrast, or a teaching in which the second line completes the point introduced in the first line.

righteous—considered right with God. “The righteous” (Ps. 1:6) are often described as those who believe and obey God and earnestly seek to follow God’s ways. They are also credited as righteous by faith (see Gen. 5:21-24; 6:9, 22; 15:6; Ps. 1:1-3, 6; Hab. 2:4). As God’s people, we are called to be righteous, and today we know we are credited with Christ’s righteousness: we are made right with God through Jesus’ death and given the ability to live in right relationships with others through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 3:21-4:25).

sin—disobedience to God; refers to breaking God’s law (1 John 3:4).

Solomon—the third king of Israel (970-930 B.C.), whose wise teachings and sayings make up most of the book Proverbs. (See 1 Kings 1-11.)

wicked, wickedness—Anything or anyone that ignores, rejects, mocks, or otherwise rebels against God is wicked or follows the way of wickedness (Ps. 1:1; Prov. 2:12-15, 21-22). In the Bible, wickedness is often described as

foolishness, the opposite of wisdom, which comes from honoring and following God. “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Ps. 14:1), so that person follows his own way or the way of the world, and heads toward everlasting destruction.

wisdom—In the Bible, wisdom refers to living the way God intends for us so that we can enjoy life to the full. Wisdom is a gift from God (1 Kings 3; James 1:5) and thus involves more than a combination of common sense and life experience in this world. It has to do with understanding the ways of God, revealed to us by God himself, and learning to live according to God’s way (the way of righteousness) in this world. The opposite of wisdom is foolishness (folly, wickedness), which involves rejecting God and going one’s own way toward destruction. (See also James 3:13-18.) In Proverbs, wisdom is often personified as a woman who wants everyone to walk in God’s ways and thus to find the best that life has to offer—that is, the full life that God (as our Creator) intends for us.

How to Use This Study

This Bible study aims to help people engage in lively discussion and Bible discovery without having studied the text before doing each lesson together.

Glossary

Near the front of this booklet is a glossary that can be useful for understanding the meanings of terms mentioned in Proverbs.

Questions for Discussion

The main questions for discussion are numbered and are in bold print. Along with these questions you'll find points "to think about as you discuss" to help spark ideas for responding to each main question. In addition, you'll see questions that help us connect the story to everyday life under the subheading "What does this mean to me?"

Please do not feel you have to answer every question in the lesson material. Our goal is to help make Bible study a creative, flexible, exploratory exercise in which you engage with your group and grow to know God and each other better.

Follow-up Ideas

At the end of each lesson are Explore! ideas that you might like to use for follow-up. These include activities that can help you learn more about items of interest related to the lesson and apply your learning to everyday life. There are also music and video suggestions.

Break Away (at-home readings)

After the study and follow-up material for each lesson you'll find inspirational readings for use at home. Take a break with God and do some thinking about the lesson material and how the Lord can use it to shape your life. If you like, clip these pages out and set them in places around your home or at work where they can remind you to spend time with God. You might also like to memorize some of the Scriptures used in these pieces.

An Invitation and Prayer of Commitment

If you're searching for a relationship with God, or studying with a friend who is searching, see An Invitation (to believe and commit to God) and a Prayer of Commitment provided at the back of this booklet. These can be helpful in talking one-to-one with God or with someone who is ready to make a faith commitment to God.

Leader's Notes

At the Faith Alive website page featuring this Bible study—see www.FaithAliveResources.org, search for "Proverbs: Just So You Know," and click on the link to "Leader's Notes"—you'll find tips for leading this small group study.

We wish you God's blessing as you participate in Bible study together. Have fun as you learn and grow closer to God and one another!

Introduction

A penny saved is a penny earned.

Don't count your chickens before they hatch.

Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

Many of us are familiar with these short, compact statements we call proverbs. They give us insight into human behavior and offer advice on how best to live our lives. Proverbs are found in every culture.

The proverbs and discourses in this book were written primarily by King Solomon in the tenth century B.C. Some are attributed to Agur son of Jakeh, some to a King Lemuel, and some others to a collection of “sayings of the wise.” At some point after Israel’s exile in Babylon, the proverbs of ancient Israel were gathered into several books that together have become known as *wisdom literature*. They are found in the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs, and in the apocryphal books known as the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus (Sirach). In the New Testament the book of James is also considered wisdom literature because its dominant theme is wisdom.

Although the book of Proverbs is similar to Mesopotamian and Egyptian writings of the same period, the wisdom in Proverbs is rooted in “the fear of the Lord.” The main purpose of Proverbs

is to teach God’s people the way of wisdom. The contents of this book admonish us to honor the Lord above all, enjoy a happy marriage, watch what we say, provide justice for the poor, and make wise decisions in all we do. They describe in sharp contrast the folly of the person who ignores God and the person who follows the way of wisdom. They teach us that God is the source of all wisdom. “The fear of the LORD,” says Solomon, “is the beginning of wisdom” (9:10). We are promised that God himself will give us the wisdom we need (2:6).

To understand the book of Proverbs, it’s important to know what a proverb *is not*. A proverb is not a law. It is not a promise or a guarantee that if you do what it says your life will *always* go well—or badly. “Absence makes the heart grow fonder” consoles the young couple who may have to be apart for a time, until someone reminds them of another proverb that warns, “Out of sight, out of mind”!

A proverb is a word of wisdom drawn from observing the way things are generally in everyday life. A proverb is a statement of *probabilities*. It tells what is *likely* to happen if we do—or don’t do—what the proverb says.

The book of Proverbs challenges us to live rightly and faithfully by pursuing the wisdom that comes from God.

Lesson 1

To Whom It May Concern

Proverbs 1-2; 8-9

Note: In our first lesson we'll focus on parts of Proverbs 1-9. This section at the beginning of the book serves as an introductory unit on the basics of godly wisdom.

The book of Proverbs speaks words of wisdom to us from a distance of about 3,000 years. Yet its message is as fresh as if it were written yesterday. In it King Solomon and others give practical advice on avoiding evil, treating our neighbors with fairness and justice, choosing our words carefully, enjoying a happy marriage, and many other issues that are part and parcel of everyday living.

Opener (optional)

Think of someone you know who is exceptionally wise. How does this wisdom show in the person's life? In what ways has he or she made an impact your life?

Purpose and Theme

Note: Read Proverbs 1:1-7 before doing questions 1-4.

Proverbs 1:2-3

1. What are the main purposes of the book of Proverbs?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the differences between the purposes mentioned
- how they work together to make a person wise
- how you would define wisdom



Where Did All These Proverbs Come From?

While proverbs are common to all cultures, the proverbs in this book lean strongly toward moral and ethical themes—the positive rewards of doing good and the negative rewards of doing wrong. Most of the book was written by Solomon, a son of David who ruled as king over Israel from around 970-930 B.C. He was well known as a man of great wisdom (1 Kings 4:29-34). Other parts of Proverbs are attributed to “the sayings of the wise” (Prov. 22:17-24:34) and to a couple of wise men recognized from outside of Israel: Agur (Prov. 30) and King Lemuel (Prov. 31). A note at the beginning of Proverbs 25 states that the following additional proverbs of Solomon (chap. 25-29) were “compiled by the men of Hezekiah king of Judah” (c. 715-686 B.C.), so the book was probably put into its present form at that time.

For a look inside Solomon's heart as a writer of proverbs, read 1 Kings 3. At the beginning of Solomon's reign as king, God tells him, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you" (1 Kings 3:5). Rather than asking for wealth, honor, power, or prestige, Solomon asks for a "discerning heart." God is pleased with this request and promises to give Solomon wisdom and discernment—as well as what he has not asked for: an abundance of "wealth and honor" (3:13). Solomon soon became well known for deciding a case between two women when each one claimed to be the mother of the same child. You may be surprised at the wise way he handled the situation (3:16-28).

Proverbs 1:4-6

2. To what groups of people are these proverbs directed?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- examples of each type of person
- which of these groups you might find yourself in today
- what each group needs to learn in particular

3. What do we need to understand in order to be wise?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the purpose of each principle here
- how Jesus used parables in his teachings (Matt. 13:34-35)

Proverbs 1:7

4. This verse presents the theme of the book. What is it?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the difference between God's wisdom and human wisdom
- why some people reject wisdom
- the source of all wisdom (compare with Prov. 9:10)
- what "the fear of the LORD" means (see glossary)

Parallels, Completions, and Contrasts

As many of us know, proverbs in our North American culture often consist of just one line. One of the most common types of Hebrew proverbs consists of two lines, with each line fulfilling a function, such as parallelism, completion, or contrast. For example, some proverbs say the same thing two different ways (see Prov. 11:25); others present both positive and negative thoughts on a subject (see 14:30); and in yet others the second line completes the thought started in the first line (see 13:14) or contrasts sharply with it (see 1:7).

More to Think About

- The first-century Roman statesman Seneca said, “No one was ever wise by chance.” What part does choice play in becoming wise? Or, more accurately, what part does obedience play in living wisely for the Lord and growing in wisdom?
- How might a study of Proverbs help me better understand the teachings of Jesus? (For example, see Matt. 13:44-52.)

An Invitation—and a Warning Proverbs 1:8-19

As we noticed in verses 4-5, the book of Proverbs is directed to all of us—the simple, the young, the wise, and the discerning. As a sort of preface to what will follow, the writer (speaking as a father to his son) urges his readers to cling to the teachings of their parents and to avoid making friends with people who will drag them down into trouble.

5. According to these verses, what kinds of things might sinful people do?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the downhill progression of sin and evil
- the type of life that is taken away
- why so much violence is described so early in this book
- how this relates to the “wisdom” theme of the book (1:7)

Listen, my son . . . my daughter . . .

You will soon notice that the book of Proverbs was written in the context of a male-dominated society. Instructions are directed to the writer’s *son*, as was the custom of the day. Yet throughout Scripture it is clear that the teachings of the Bible are of course for all people—women as well as men. So if it helps you apply the message more personally, you may wish to substitute phrases such as “Listen, my son . . .” with “Listen, my daughter . . .”

The Broad Range of the Hebrew “Proverb”

Proverbs 1-9, the section we focus on in this lesson, presents a long series of teachings on the basics of godly wisdom. Reading through these chapters, we might wonder why its contents don't always resemble proverbs as we tend to think of them in our culture (short, punchy sayings). It can help to know, as the *NIV Study Bible* suggests, that the Hebrew word for “proverb” is also translated in other Scriptures as “message” (Num. 23:7, 18), “taunt” (Isa. 14:4), and “parable” (Ezek. 17:2), “so its meaning is considerably broader than [that of] the English term. Most proverbs are short, compact statements that express truths about human behavior,” while others look more like a parable (see Prov. 1:20-33; 7:6-27; 9:1-18). Notice also that wisdom is portrayed as a woman teacher, and that folly (foolishness, wickedness) is portrayed as an alluring adulteress.

Proverbs 1:20-33

6. How is wisdom portrayed in these verses? Why? What does wisdom do and say?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- how the writer pictures situations in which wisdom is needed
- the benefits of choosing wisdom
- the results of ignoring wisdom

It's not uncommon for abstract or inanimate things to be referred to as women. Ships and boats are often referred to that way, and justice and liberty are portrayed in sculpture and other art as women. In addition, the Hebrew word for *wisdom* is feminine in gender.

Proverbs 2

7. How does a person go about obtaining wisdom? Why? How does wisdom help a person?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the kinds of action one must take
- the results of not taking action
- how Proverbs 1:20-2:22 follows up on earlier advice in Proverbs 1
- a negative experience that made you a wiser person
- an experience that turned out well because of your wisdom



“ . . . if you look for it as for silver . . . ”

Two Kinds of Wisdom

James 3:13-18 explains that there are two kinds of wisdom: worldly wisdom fueled by envy and selfish ambition, and godly wisdom that is humble, “peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” Read Proverbs 3 and 4 at home and compare this practical advice for godly living with the teaching in James. What part do trust and discipline play in becoming wise?

Proverbs 8

8. How does wisdom describe herself in this chapter? What does she do? What are her qualifications? Where did she come from? What experience does she have with God and God’s ways?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- why Jesus is called the “wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:14)

Proverbs 9

9. Why does wisdom’s invitation in chapter 9 require a response?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- why the invitation to a delicious meal is like a call to be wise
- why wisdom is so insistent that people should come to eat
- your own response to following Jesus and his wisdom

10. Notice that the invitations of Wisdom and Folly are identical (9:4, 16). Why do they call out to the same people?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the end result of responding favorably to Wisdom (9:6)
- the end result of following Folly (9:18)

When Wisdom Is Foolishness

The apostle Paul tells us that Jesus is “the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24). He was God’s secret wisdom “that God destined for our glory before time began” (2:7). But when Jesus died on the cross, most people thought that was utter foolishness, not wisdom. It seemed totally absurd for one who claimed to be God to let himself be killed. But Jesus’ followers, guided by the Spirit of God, saw it as a demonstration of “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1:24). “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing” but “the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom” (1:18, 25). Read and reflect on 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16.

11. Proverbs 1-9 is like the first unit in a course on wisdom. What have you learned about wisdom in this lesson, and how does that affect your understanding of the book of Proverbs and its purpose for God's people?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the variety of ways wisdom is described
- the contrast between wisdom and folly
- how God calls us to live
- how we can grow in discerning right from wrong



"Wisdom . . . has also set her table."

What does this mean to me?

- In what way is the call to follow Christ also a call to become wise? Have you personally accepted that call?

- What is the connection between wisdom and spiritual maturity?
(See 2 Tim. 3:14-17.)

More to Think About

- Read Ephesians 1:17. What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and wisdom?
- Jesus taught that "wisdom is proved right by her deeds" (Matt. 11:19). James echoes this teaching when he insists that "faith without deeds is dead" (James 2:26). Read James 3:13-18. How does he describe people who are wise?



Explore!

- Read Proverbs in a variety of Bible translations and paraphrases for additional insight on the meanings of words and phrases. For example, Proverbs 1:7, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction,” reads this way in *The Message*: “Start with GOD—the first step in learning is bowing down to GOD; only fools thumb their noses at such wisdom and learning.”
- Study some of the Bible’s stories about people who were in situations that required a lot of wisdom (examples below). How did they show wisdom? What was the result? Does using wisdom guarantee that a situation will have a positive outcome? What might produce a negative outcome, at least for the short term?
 - Joseph, when Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him (Gen. 39)
 - Joseph’s dealings with his brothers who had betrayed him (Gen. 42-50; especially 45:5 and 50:20)
 - Abigail, in dealing with a mean, evil husband, and urging David not to take vengeance with his own hands (1 Sam. 25; see Deut. 32:25)
 - Solomon, in finding out who was the rightful mother of a baby (1 Kings 3:16-28)
 - Daniel, in his obedience to God while in exile, and his use of godly wisdom in a worldly culture (Dan. 1-6)
 - Esther, in risking her life to save lives (Esther 3-7)
 - James, in deciding with others to remove Jewish restrictions from Gentiles who wanted to become Christians (Acts 15)
- Learning songs based on the Bible can help build your faith and can be a great way for God’s children of all ages to memorize Scripture texts. Search out Scripture songs based on Proverbs, such as “Trust in the Lord” (based on Prov. 3:5-6) and “Path of the Righteous” (Prov. 4:18-19) at sites like www.youtube.com and www.Godtube.com.



Break Away (at-home readings)

In today's fast-paced and noisy culture, reflection and meditation are becoming a lost art. But meditation on Scripture is an important part of our spiritual growth. Find a quiet spot that is free from distractions, and take a few minutes each day to read, meditate on what you have read, and pray (have a conversation with God). Once you establish the habit, you won't want to break it. Read one of the following devotional pieces each day or all in one sitting, asking the Spirit of God to fill your heart with understanding. You might also like to memorize some of the verses you have encountered in Proverbs during lesson 1, such as God's welcome to us in Proverbs 8:17: "I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me."

The Gift of Wisdom

If you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver, and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. —Proverbs 2:3-5

Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. . . . He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. —Daniel 2:20-21

In Daniel 2, the king of Babylon wants an explanation for a dream (actually a nightmare) he has just had. He won't tell anyone what the dream is about. He wants the interpreter to prove himself by first telling the king what he has dreamt. The king's astrologers (who acted as his wise men) complain, "There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks!" (Dan. 2:10). This answer does not satisfy the king, so he calls for "the execution of all the wise men of Babylon" (2:12).

Enter Daniel, who is known to have wisdom. But wisdom does not make a person a mind reader. So in this situation in which no human can read the king's mind, Daniel turns to God in prayer (asking his friends to do the same), and the Lord reveals the king's dream to Daniel (2:19). Then Daniel offers a prayer of praise and thanks to God (2:20-23).

There's a curious little line tucked into that prayer. After declaring that wisdom and power are God's, Daniel says, "He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning."

Why on earth, I used to ask myself, does God give wisdom to the wise, who already *are* wise? Why doesn't he give it to the simple, the young, the fool, and the scorner—who are often mentioned in Proverbs as sorely *in need of* wisdom? Gradually I came to realize that the reason God gives wisdom to the wise is that the wise person *seeks* wisdom. The foolish person does not. "Instruct the wise," says Proverbs 9:9, "and they will be wiser still."

Have you ever found yourself in a difficult situation and didn't know what to do? Did you ask God for wisdom in dealing with it? Or did you try to solve it on your own? How did things turn out? If you are facing such a situation now, consider the wisdom of Proverbs 3:5-7. How does this passage offer assurance and direction?

Thanks, Mom and Dad

"Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck."
—Proverbs 1:8-9

Tucked in my jewelry box is a heart-shaped pendant made of California redwood. My mother bought it for herself many years ago, and in her old age she gave it to me. This lovely heart reminds me of several things.

First of all, it reminds me that my parents and I did a lot of traveling when I was a child. My mother purchased this heart during one of our trips to northern California to see the giant redwood trees. She loved the outdoors.

This pendant on a necklace, worn round the neck, is also a reminder that my parents' influence is always with me. I was blessed with godly parents who brought me up in the church. The heart shape is a further reminder of their love for me—and their wisdom, which has helped to mold and shape my life.





Sometimes a parent's legacy is not one of wisdom. It may be an example of wrong choices rather than wise ones. In what ways have you learned from your parents' mistakes as well as their wisdom?

Sometimes God provides a "substitute parent" who helps us through tough times, in which our own parents might fail us. Is there someone who provided wise counsel for you in a way like that? Thank God for the influence of that person on your life.

Equality for All

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

—Galatians 3:28 (see also Col. 3:11)

When I was ten years old, my parents hired a carpenter to build a small house next door to our house for some relatives. The carpenter was the 19-year-old son of our former pastor. Because his parents had moved, he had nowhere to live while he worked on the house, so my parents invited him to live with us. Milton was nine years older than I, and, in my eyes, he became the wonderful big brother I never had.

At that time, girls my age had autograph books, and we twisted the arm of anyone we could to write us a personal note. I gave Milton my autograph book and begged him to write in it. Days went by.

"Milton, have you written in my autograph book?"

"No, not yet."

Then one day he returned the book to me, and I could hardly wait to see what he had written. What he wrote made an impact on me that I will never forget. On one of the pages he simply wrote out Psalm 1. But he changed the masculine words to feminine. "*Blessed is the man . . .*" (as it reads in many versions) became "*Blessed is the young woman . . .*". "*He*" became "*she*," and "*his*" became "*her*." For the first time in my young life it felt like that psalm (and, by extension, all of Scripture) was written to *me*. I had learned at an early age that "*man*" simply means "*humankind*," which

includes both men and women. But there was something about the use of feminine terms that made my young heart respond to God in a new way.

Maybe the word picture of Wisdom as a woman in Proverbs has made you feel the same way (Prov. 3:13-18; 4:6-9; 9:1-12). In some contexts of world culture, wisdom is also portrayed as a man.

On the flip side, when you read in Proverbs about foolish, adulterous women (Prov. 2:16-19; 9:13-18), remember there are just as many foolish, adulterous men. And when you read about men who are sinful and make stupid choices (Prov. 1:10-19; 2:12-15), remember there are just as many women who do the same.

We *all* need a whopping dose of God's wisdom.

Finding Wisdom in Unexpected Places

Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone. —Proverbs 25:15

Some of us live with what seems like an exhausting need for wisdom. We are confronted daily with situations over which we have little or no control. A spouse becomes arrogant, confrontational, even violent. A teenager flaunts his or her independence and ends up on drugs or worse. The daughter of friends of mine was so out of control that her parents took her to the police station and begged the police to take her because they were unable to control her behavior. To their dismay, they discovered that that's not how our system works. They had no choice but to take their daughter home.

In 1 Samuel 25, a wise woman by the name of Abigail had a husband who was wealthy, surly, and mean. Living with Nabal must have been a nightmare. When David asked a favor of him, Nabal's response was to refuse the request and hurl insults at David and his men, all of whom were seasoned warriors. David was ready to seek revenge until Abigail intervened. She was not able to change her husband's behavior, but she was able to influence David's. As a result, David thanked God for keeping him from doing wrong. And Nabal? When he learned what had happened, his heart failed him, and he died, struck by God, ten days later (1 Sam. 25:38).





It takes wisdom—and humility, which is a part of wisdom—to realize that we cannot handle some situations without outside help. God does not expect us to be doormats and let people run over us. But there are times when patience and a gentle tongue can accomplish more than we ever expected.

Nobody Said It Would Be Easy

“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard. . . .”
—Matthew 10:16-17

A Christian friend of mine has been making films for television for about twenty years. On a daily basis he is confronted with the secular viewpoint of the film industry. Christian themes are ridiculed and are utterly taboo. Yet he is committed to including in every film he makes some reference to Christian values. One film he produced was about a young girl who got pregnant out of wedlock. He told the writer he wanted the movie to end with the girl and her boyfriend getting married.

His writer thought that was a terrible idea. “That’s so old-fashioned. Nobody gets married now.” But he held his ground and got the ending he wanted.

Jesus warned his disciples long ago that being a Christian in a non-Christian world would require wisdom on our part, and he never said it would be easy. He even told his followers that when they were arrested because of him, they should “not worry about what to say or how to say it” (Matt. 10:19). He said to them, “At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (10:19-20).

Sometimes the best wisdom is to say or do nothing. At other times, God calls us to act and speak up, assuring us that he will guide us as we do. Even then there is no guarantee that the other person will be pleased with our response. Our only reward may be in knowing we did the right thing.

While proverbs are common to all cultures, the biblical book of Proverbs teaches the way of wisdom from God. In fact, God is the source of true wisdom—which has far more to it than a mixture of common sense and life experience. Discover together how God’s way offers peace, contentment, and blessing while guarding us from foolish pitfalls. Find wisdom for full living even as we engage with a drag-down world.



Infuse Bible Studies aim to help people discover where faith and life meet. With these studies you can engage in lively discussion and learning without having studied the Bible before doing each lesson, and you can use these effectively for small group or personal study.

The approach to Bible study in this series emphasizes discovery (the reader discovers what the Bible has to say by asking questions and seeking answers from the passage studied). Additional insights from history and other sources help to fill in details that connect this story to the larger story of God’s love and care for us all.

We hope this study stirs your heart to fully know God and the abundant life the Lord intends for us.