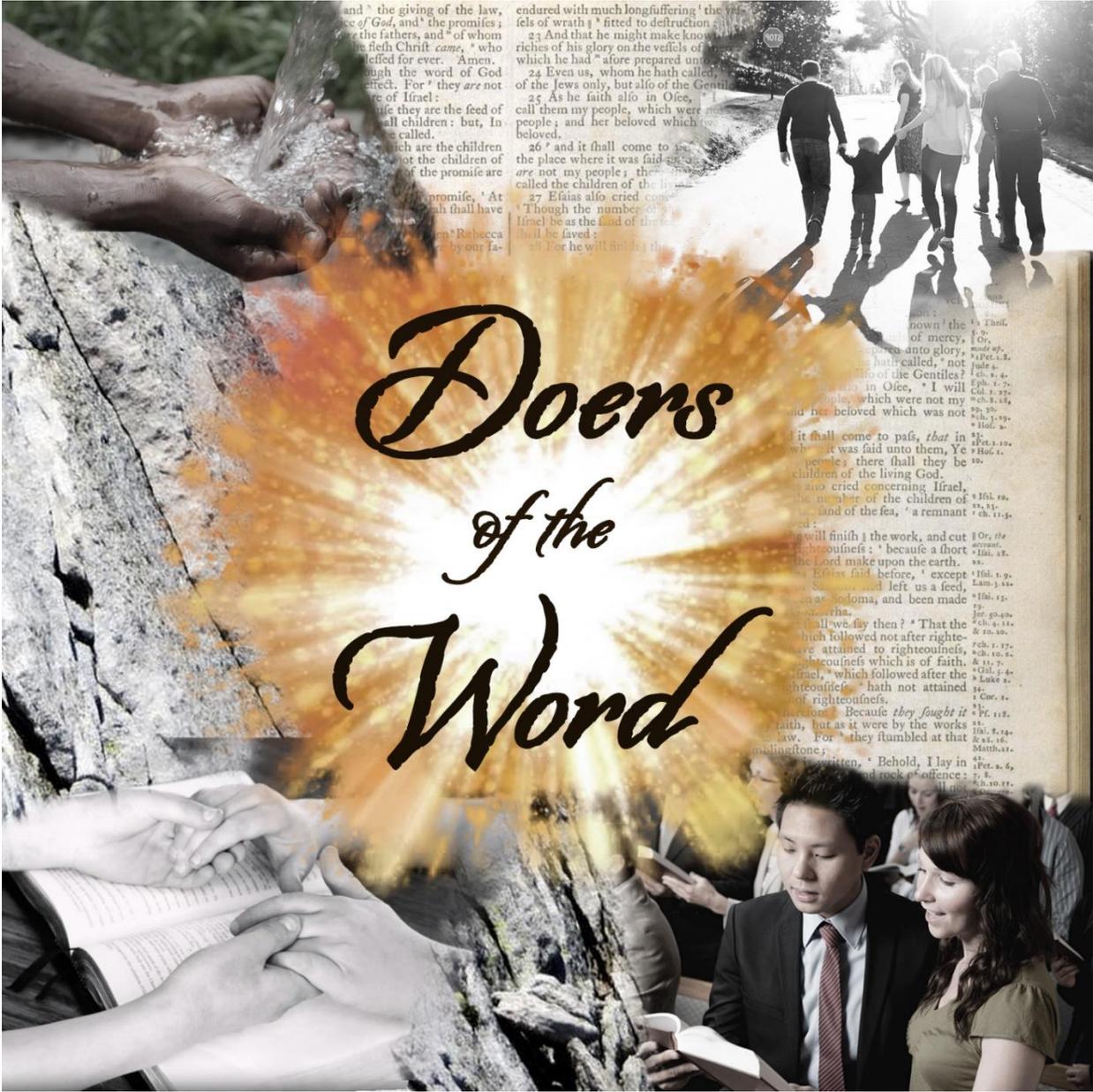


PROVERBS: GOD'S INSTRUCTION MANUAL

Becoming Wise Servants of the Word



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3rd Quarter 2020
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INTRODUCTION

The book of Proverbs is all about life—real life. It addresses everyday situations and decisions that must be made. It is a practical book (similar to the epistle of James) and we would do well to spend time with it. It is always beneficial when the owner/maker/designer of a product gives you a manual on how to use it. We should thank God for the book of Proverbs – it is a manual on life. And we can use this manual to be better servants of God and one another.

Proverbs is not *just* a collection of wise saying put together from a few smart people. It is mostly the product of the wisest man to ever live. Please read 1 Kings 3:3-14. Solomon’s divinely inspired wisdom has been passed down to us. But there is a lesson for us in considering Solomon. It is not enough for us to know the material of Proverbs; we must actually apply it to our lives. I have always struggled with the wisdom of Solomon since he made such foolish decisions in his life and reign. But we would be wise to learn from his negative example.

On Sunday mornings we will focus on Proverbs 1-9. These chapters are made up of discourses or lectures on wisdom. This study will be a verse-by-verse study. On Wednesday evenings we will focus on Proverbs 10-31. These chapters are made up of random proverbs addressing all sorts of topics. This will be a topical study, grouping all the proverbs related to certain subjects. You will notice that these lessons are different from past lessons. I have gone away from the typical question format to a more interactive format. I think this will help us better engage this book and its teaching.

Let’s spend this quarter learning how to better navigate life. In the process we will see more of how God advises us to live and treat one another. And that, after all, is our three year focus (***Doers of the Word***) and our 2020 focus (***Each Day I’ll Do a Golden Deed***). The more we integrate God’s wisdom into our lives, **the better we will be able to serve one another**. Think about how such a life might also appeal to those of the world. If we are hard workers, humble, good listeners, giving, etc., **not only might we help those around us, we might cause them to wonder how and why we live like we do and there is an opening to share the gospel**.

Jonathan Caldwell

Sunday Schedule of Lessons¹ – Proverbs 1-9

Sunday, July 5	1. Introduction	Proverbs 1-9
Sunday, July 12	3. The Purpose of the Book	Proverbs 1:1-7
Sunday, July 19	5. Avoid Evil Associations	Proverbs 1:8-19
Sunday, July 26	7. Do Not Resist Woman Wisdom	Proverbs 1:20-33
Sunday, August 2	9. The Benefits of Wisdom	Proverbs 2
Sunday, August 9	11. Trust in God	Proverbs 3:1-12
Sunday, August 16	13. Get Wisdom	Proverbs 3:13—4:9
Sunday, August 23	15. Stay on the Right Path	Proverbs 4:10-27
Sunday, August 30	17. Avoid Promiscuous Women	Proverbs 5, 6:20-35, & 7
Sunday, September 6	19. Wisdom's Admonitions	Proverbs 6:1-19
Sunday, September 13	21. Wisdom's Autobiography	Proverbs 8
Sunday, September 20	23. The Choice: Wisdom or Folly	Proverbs 9
Sunday, September 27	25. The Worthy Woman	Proverbs 31:10-31

Wednesday Schedule of Lessons – Topics in Proverbs 10-31

Wednesday, July 8	2. Speech
Wednesday, July 15	4. Anger
Wednesday, July 22	6. Hard Work and Laziness
Wednesday, July 29	8. Wealth and Poverty
Wednesday, August 5	10. Humility and Arrogance
Wednesday, August 12	12. Justice
Wednesday, August 19	14. Alcohol
Wednesday, August 26	16. Family: Parents and Children
Wednesday, September 2	18. Family: Marriage
Wednesday, September 9	20. Government
Wednesday, September 16	22. Personal Character
Wednesday, September 23	24. Friends, Neighbors, and Enemies
Wednesday, September 30	26. Review

¹ This breakdown and most of the titles come from Tremper Longman, *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Proverbs*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.

Introduction to Hebrew Poetry

When we think of poetry, we often think of lines of similar length which end with words which rhyme. “Roses are red, violets are blue. Sugar is sweet, and so are you.” I understand that this is not the defining characteristic of poetry, but it is a general quality which calls our attention to the poetic verse of what we are reading or singing.

One of the main characteristics of Hebrew poetry is parallelism. The Anchor Bible Dictionary says that parallelism is “the most prominent rhetorical figure in ancient Near Eastern poetry...it can be defined as the repetition of the same or related semantic content and/or grammatical structure in consecutive lines or verses.” While this may sound technical it is very simple and also very important to understand for interpreting Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and much of the prophets. There are two main forms of parallelism, with a third that is not as common, though we see it in scripture.

Synonymous Parallelism

The phrase “synonymous parallelism” is used when two lines express similar ideas with similar language. There is some debate over whether or not the second line adds to or builds upon the first. Some might refer to this as “synthetic parallelism” but it is just synonymous parallelism. For those who are more numerically inclined, we might express this as a math problem.

$$2+8=10$$

$$4+6=10$$

This is the basic structure of the proverbs:

- “Righteous lips are the delight of a king, and he loves him who speaks what is right.” Proverbs 16:13
- “Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger.” Proverbs 19:15
- “Plans are established by counsel; by wise guidance wage war.” Proverbs 20:18

You should be able to see how the second phrase is synonymous with the first. It might be helpful to separate the proverb into two lines. Consider Proverbs 23:12. I’ve divided it by phrase and emphasized the synonymous aspects of the proverb.

“Apply your heart to *instruction*
and your ear to words of *knowledge*.”

This proverb has an A-B-A-B pattern.

Sometimes the proverb might present itself as an inverse statement (A-B-B-A). Consider again Proverbs 16:13:

“Righteous lips are the *delight of a king*,
and *he loves him* who speaks what is **right**.”

Antithetical Parallelism

The phrase “antithetical parallelism” is used of two lines which express similar truths using oppositional language. Again, we can present this numerically:

4+4=8

12-4=8

The same point is being made, but the writer approaches it from both positive and negative sides. This is basically, the other half of the structure of the proverbs:

- “A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother.” Proverbs 10:1
- “The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly.”
Proverbs 15:2
- “The way of the guilty is crooked, but the conduct of the pure is upright.” Proverbs 21:8

We can do the same breakdown with these proverbs. Consider Proverbs 28:5

“Evil men do not understand justice,
but **those who seek the LORD understand it completely**.”

The evil men are contrasted with “those who seek the LORD.” What is the difference between the two? The first group does not understand justice. The second group does.

A subgroup of antithetical parallelism is the **“better than” statements** we read in Hebrew poetry. Typically, these proverbs pair some righteous or wise behavior with a poor setting and proclaim that condition superior to a sinful or foolish behavior with a prosperous setting.

- “Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble with it.” Proverbs 15:16
- “Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it.” Proverbs 15:17
- “It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud.”
Proverbs 16:19
- “It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife.”
Proverbs 21:9

Numerical Parallelism

Numerical parallelism follows an “X, X + 1” formula authors use to indicate that numerous examples could be provided but only a certain number will be. This is easier to understand with a biblical example:

- “There are ***six things*** that the LORD hates, ***seven*** that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.” Proverbs 6:16–19

Notice that seven things are listed. This device is also used to lists the sins of various nations in the prophets. Some argue that there is an emphasis on the final item in these types of lists. I am not sure that is always the case. Here are a few more examples:

- “Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a virgin.” Proverbs 30:18f
- “Three things are stately in their tread; four are stately in their stride: the lion, which is mightiest among beasts and does not turn back before any; the strutting rooster, the he-goat, and a king whose army is with him.” Proverbs 30:29–31

Acrostics

A final literary device that plays a role in the poetic sections of scripture are acrostics. This is a structure in which each line or section begins with a corresponding letter. Maybe you’ve seen this one before:

J – Jesus
 O – Others
 Y – Yourself

The original purpose of this feature seems to have been for memorization. This is seen in numerous Psalms, most famously Psalm 119. In most Bibles they will have the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet before each section. Each chapter of Lamentations is written as an acrostic. And in the book of Proverbs, the section on the “worthy woman” is an acrostic. This is a literary device which is typically lost in translation. However, it may help us see the author’s intended structure of the text.

Understanding the literary devices of Hebrew poetry is not essential to learn from the book of Proverbs but it can help us to understand better what the wise man of old had to say about living life. Any advantage we can get in understanding the word of God ought to be utilized and I hope to do some of this as we begin to explore the text of Proverbs together.

INTRODUCTION

Text: Proverbs 1-9

As we prepare ourselves to study the book of Proverbs, we want to think about some introductory things: author, structure, literary devices, and definitions. This will help us to better interpret the lectures in chapters 1-9 and the individual proverbs in chapters 10-31.

- What is a proverb?
- Who wrote the book of Proverbs?
- What is parallelism?
- How does the book of Proverbs change from chapters 1-9 and chapters 10-31?
- How is wisdom different from knowledge?
- Who seems to be the main audience of the wiseman?
- Why does the wiseman describe wisdom and folly as women?
- What are the benefits of wisdom?

SPEECH

Text: Proverbs 10:14; 11:12, 13; 12:18; 13:3, 16; 15:1, 28; 17:27, 28; 19:1; 20:25; 26:4, 5

The wise man had much to say about our speech. How we speak tells others a great deal about us. Further, our tongue is one of the hardest things in the world to control. Read the above verses and put them into the category you think they belong.

The Wisdom of Keeping Silent

Sins in Speaking

Foolish Talking Leads to Trouble

Dealing with Foolish Speech

What proverbs did you grow up hearing about your speech?

More biblical teaching on speech: Ecclesiastes 3:7; Matthew 12:36-37; James 1:19; 3:1-12

THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

Text: Proverbs 1:1-7

I said in the introduction that I want this book to be more interactive. That will become apparent in this lesson. I am designing these lessons to help us work with the text. So we are going to do some things that are more closely related to study than just asking questions. I will print the text we will be studying and ask you to work through it with various instructions. I would advise getting some highlighters, color pencils, or markers to note the parallels in the text. You can use the space to the right of the text to take notes. The text provided is from the ESV. Read the text in other versions and make notes of the differences.

<p>“The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”</p>	<hr/>
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Use a Bible dictionary to define the following words:

Wisdom: _____

Insight: _____

Prudence: _____

Enigma: _____

ANGER

Text: Proverbs 12:16; 14:29; 15:1, 18; 16:14, 32; 19:11, 12, 19; 21:19; 22:24-25; 27:4 29:8; 29:11, 22; 30:33

Not everyone has a problem with anger. But for those who do, it is very real and extremely dangerous. The wise man knew this and instructed his son to keep his anger in check. Read the above verses and put them into the category you think they belong.

The Wisdom of Controlling Your Anger

Anger Causes Strife

The Danger of Anger

What are some modern-day proverbs concerning anger?

More biblical teaching on anger: Matthew 5:21-26; Psalm 4:4 and Ephesians 4:26; Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:8; James 1:19-20

HARD WORK AND LAZINESS

Text: Proverbs 10:4, 5, 26; 12:11, 14, 27; 13:4; 14:23; 16:26; 18:9; 19:15; 20:4, 13; 24:27; 24:30-34; 28:19

To make a generalization, the last couple of generations to come to adulthood do not appreciate the value of hard work. Maybe this comes from parents doing too much for their children? Maybe it comes from the “everyone gets a trophy” mentality? Either way, the wise man is clear: if you are lazy, then you will go hungry. If you work hard, you can feed your family. Read the above verses and put them into the category you think they belong.

Laziness leads to hunger

Laziness affects others

The danger of too much sleep

- Man was not created to be idle. The plan from the beginning was that man would work. However, because of sin, that work became harder. Where is this principle taught?
- What is the regular refrain of the author of Ecclesiastes when it comes to work? See Ecclesiastes 3:13, 22; 5:18; 8:15
- More biblical teaching on hard work and laziness: Ecclesiastes 4:5; 5:12; 9:10; Romans 12:11; Colossians 3:23; 1 Thessalonians 4:11-1f; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12; 2 Timothy 2:6

WEALTH AND POVERTY

Text: Proverbs 10:2, 15; 11:4, 18, 25, 28; 13:7, 8, 11, 18, 22; 14:21, 31; 15:27; 16:16; 19:4, 14, 17; 21:17; 22:1, 7, 9; 23:4-6, 21; 28:6, 8, 27; 30:7-9

We all understand the necessity of money. We all understand the fear of poverty and the desire for wealth. An obsession with money can ruin our relationships—especially with God. But poverty can lead to neediness, hunger, and pain. How do we balance our attitude towards money? Read the above verses and put them into the category you think they belong.

General Statements about Wealth

Negative Statements about Wealth

Poverty

Giving

Ill-gotten Gains

Things Better than Money

What are some modern-day proverbs concerning money?

More biblical teaching on wealth and poverty: Ecclesiastes 4:6, 13; 5:10-11; Matthew 6:19-21; 19:24; Luke 12:24; 2 Corinthians 9:6; 1 Timothy 6:17-19

HUMILITY AND ARROGANCE

Text: Proverbs 11:2; 15:25, 33; 16:5, 18, 19; 18:12; 21:4, 24; 22:4; 25:6-7; 26:12; 29:23; 30:13

In my opinion, humility is one of the most difficult characteristics to achieve because we want to be praised and recognized for our talents and successes. We often feel the need to lift ourselves up, pat ourselves on the back, and toot our own horns. Yet the wise man denounces such behavior. Read these passages and consider these questions:

- What is it about pride/arrogance that is so dangerous?
- What is the connection between humility and wisdom?
- What are the benefits of humility?
- Why is arrogance so repulsive to God?
- **Consider Proverbs 25:6-7:** What similar statement did Jesus make?
- What are some modern-day proverbs concerning pride and humility?
- More biblical teaching on pride and humility: 1 Kings 20:11; Isaiah 5:21; Matthew 5:3-5; Romans 12:10, 16; 1 Corinthians 10:12; James 4:6, 10

JUSTICE

Text: Proverbs 13:23; 14:31; 16:8; 17:5, 15, 23, 26; 18:5; 20:10, 23; 21:7, 28; 22:8, 16, 22-23, 28; 23:10-11; 24:23-25; 28:3, 8, 15, 16, 21; 29:27; 30:14; 31:8-9

We are living through a time of much injustice. We often equate justice and fairness. We may teach our kids to be fair, but at the same time we want them to understand that life is not always fair. Where this really rubs us the wrong way is when those in power are unjust. Read the above verses and put them into the category you think they belong.

Justice in personal relationships

Justice in business relationships

Justice in the court

Justice in leadership

- Individually, what can we do about injustice?
- To what extent are we to accept personal injustice against ourselves?
- Consider Jeremiah 22:3. Search the Law to see how often God commands the people to aid the orphan, widow, and sojourner.
- More biblical teaching on justice: Ecclesiastes 8:14; Hosea 12:6; Amos 5:7, 12-15, 21-24; Micah 6:8; Isaiah 1:16-17; James 1:27; Luke 10:29-37

ALCOHOL

Text: Proverbs 20:1; 21:17; 23:29-35; 31:4-6

What the Bible says about alcohol is not as black and white as we might like it to be. Many passages frown upon drinking while other passages use wine as a symbol of God's blessings. Some passages seem to condemn it outright, but then Paul tells Timothy to drink a little for his stomach's sake (1 Timothy 5:23). Let's note a few historical facts before we begin. "Wine" does not always mean fermented and, therefore, alcoholic. The water that the ancients drank was highly contaminated (this is why Timothy was told to use a little wine) and when mixed with alcohol it was safer to drink. Finally, the alcoholic content of ancient "wine" and our modern alcohol is not comparable. It appears that the real issue is less on the drink and more on the effect of the drink.

- According to these proverbs, what are the dangers of wine and strong drink?
- Why is "wine" a symbol of God's blessings?
- List the stories of the Bible involving drunkenness.
- What groups of people were forbidden from drinking?
- Other than alcohol, what might take away our sobriety? (i.e. power, money)
- What is the modern-day attitude towards alcohol and why is it so dangerous?
- More biblical teaching on alcohol and sobriety: Isaiah 5:11, 22; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8; 1 Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8

FAMILY: PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Text: Proverbs 10:1; 13:1, 22, 24; 15:5, 20; 17:6, 21, 25; 19:13, 18, 26; 20:7, 11, 20; 22:6, 15; 23:13-14, 15-16, 22-25; 27:11; 28:8, 24; 29:3, 15, 17

You will not see much of what Proverbs advises on the Parenting shelf at the bookstore. But we would be wise to heed the information given to us from our creator when it comes to our children. Read the above verses and put them into the category you think they belong.

The dangers of not disciplining your children

The need to listen to your parents

The blessing of wise children

- We should not immediately equate discipline with spanking. What is discipline? What are various ways to discipline your children?
- Notice the number of proverbs about this subject. Might that speak to the need for consistency in discipline?
- How does our heavenly father discipline His children?
- More biblical teaching on parents and children: Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:7; Psalm 78:4; 103:13; 127:3; Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:20-21; Hebrews 12:7-11

AVOID PROMISCUOUS WOMEN

Text: Proverbs 5; 6:20-35; 7

There is a lot of text for this lesson, but one main thought: avoid promiscuous women. The desire (especially for young men) is strong, but, the writer says, direct that energy towards your wife alone. For this lesson we will have some questions due to the length of the text.

- What is so appealing about this forbidden woman?
- What happens to those who go to her?
- What does the discipline of v. 12 have to do with this discussion?
- Sexual desire and urges are not sinful. They were given to us by God. What did God provide as a channel for those desires?
- How could we further apply 6:27-28?
- What does the forbidden woman promise?
- What does fornication/adultery deliver?

FAMILY: MARRIAGE

Text: Proverbs 12:4; 18:22; 19:13, 14; 21:9, 19; 22:14; 23:26-28; 25:24; 27:15-16; 29:3

The main issue the wise man addresses about marriage is the choice of spouse. Remember, he is speaking to his son—presumably unmarried and waiting for one. Read the above verses and put them into the category you think they belong.

The trouble of a quarrelsome wife

A good wife is a gift from God

The danger of sexual immorality

- Why doesn't Proverbs address husbands?
- These proverbs are overwhelmingly about the troubles a wife can bring. Does Proverbs ever address the blessings a wife can bring?
- More biblical teaching on marriage: Genesis 2:24; The Song of Solomon; Matthew 5:27-30; 19:3-9; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 3:1-7

GOVERNMENT

Text: Proverbs 14:28, 34; 16:10, 12, 14, 15; 19:12; 20:2, 8, 26, 28; 21:1, 15; 24:21-22; 25:1-7; 28:2, 15, 16; 29:2, 4, 12, 14, 26; 31:1-5

This may be a timely topic for us as it is an election year and there are many things going on that have caused people to think about and question governmental policies. But Proverbs does not have a lot to say about submitting to the ruler. If anything, it says more to the ruler. Read the above verses and put them into the category you think they belong.

The danger of a bad king

The blessings of a good king

The king's role in justice

Approaching the king

- Consider the audience of this book. Why does the wise man say so much about how rulers should behave?
- More biblical teaching on government: Ecclesiastes 8:2-4; Matthew 22:15-22; John 19:11; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17

PERSONAL CHARACTER

I am going to let you write this lesson. There are so many passages we could look at that I thought this might be a good opportunity to use your concordance or biblegateway.com. Do a search of the following words in the book of Proverbs and list the corresponding verses.

Remember, we are looking for proverbs in chapters 10-31.

- **Righteousness** _____

- **Wicked** _____

- **Just** _____

- **Crooked** _____

- **Upright** _____

- **Purity** _____

- **Fool** _____

- **Wise** _____

- **Envy** _____

FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS, AND ENEMIES

Text: Proverbs 11:9, 12; 12:26; 13:20; 14:20, 21; 16:7, 28, 29; 17:9, 17; 18:24; 19:4, 6, 7; 21:10; 22:24-25; 24:17, 28-29; 25:8-10, 17, 18, 19, 21; 26:18-19; 27:5-6, 9, 10, 14, 17; 29:5

As you can see, many proverbs deal with our personal relationships. The majority of these deal with friends and neighbors. It is interesting, then, that Jesus takes this behavior to another level in how we treat our enemies. Read the above verses and put them into the category you think they belong.

Friends

Neighbors

Enemies

- How do friends behave?
- As neighbors, what do we want to avoid?
- Jesus is clear in when He says “Love your enemies.” It is not a new concept, though it is emphasized more. How does Proverbs teach us to treat our enemies?
- What does the New Testament say about how we are to treat our enemies?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. • She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. • Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: • “Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.” • Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. • Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates. 	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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What are the “distaff” and “spindle”?

On what is the praise of this woman based?

What are the connections between the “Worthy woman” and “woman wisdom” in the first part of the book?

What is the relationship between this husband and wife like?

What is your main take away from this description of the worthy woman?

REVIEW

- Why do we find Proverbs so appealing?
- What do you find difficult in Proverbs?
- Why are chapters 10-31 so random?
- Who is the main audience of Proverbs?
- What topics are not addressed in this book that you find surprising?
- How is Proverbs similar to the Epistle of James?
- What other topics could we have covered on Wednesdays?
- Do you prefer chapters 1-9 or chapters 10-31? Why?
- How does studying Proverbs help us to be doers of the word?