
Proverbs: Wisdom for Life

2023 Summer Devotional and Discussion Guide



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Booklet Intro

My earliest memory of reading the book of Proverbs was with my friends in youth group. We flicked through the church's Good News Bibles, laughing and remarking about the vivid imagery presented in the text: "Better to live on the roof than share the house with a nagging wife." "A fool doing some stupid thing a second time is like a dog going back to its vomit." "Lazy people turn over in bed. They get no farther than a door swinging on its hinges." These sayings felt a bit 'random' but at the same time we could see there was something there for us to learn.

David Pawson comments on the unexpected tone of these words,

Some of the proverbs seem more entertaining than edifying, and others seem downright immoral. For example: 'A bribe does wonders, it will bring you before men of importance'. ... The Book of Proverbs describes life as it really is—not life in church, but life in the street, the office, the shop, the home. The book covers all aspects of life—not just what you do on Sundays in church. It considers how you should live throughout the week in every situation.

The writers and editors of the Book of Proverbs were interested in everyday life lived well under God.

The word translated wisdom, appearing 39 times throughout the book, is in Hebrew *hokhmah*. *Hokhmah* is "an attribute of God that God used to create the world, and [it] has been woven into the fabric of things and how they work," Tim Mackie explains. This means that wherever people are making choices that are good or just or wise, "they are tapping into *hokhmah*." This word also refers to applied knowledge; another translation would be 'savvy'. *Hokhmah* includes street smarts, not just book-knowledge. It is knowing what to do in the situations you face and having the skilful ability to act well, in accordance to how God has made the world and how he intends it to be.

In the opening chapters of the book, we see its literary form: a father addresses his son, intent on passing on his accumulated wisdom so that his son may flourish in life.

"Maintain sound wisdom and discretion. My son, don't lose sight of them. They will be life for you and adornment for your neck. Then you will go safely on your way; your foot will not stumble. When you lie down, you will not be afraid; you will lie down, and your sleep will be pleasant"

Proverbs 3:21-24

The Book of Proverbs provides general truths to be applied in timely ways by those who receive them.

A counsellor once asked me and a group of fellow students, “where have you arrested in your life?” In other words, in what area of your development have you been coasting? How about you? What was formerly growing but is now at a standstill? You may have arrested in your interpersonal development, financial management, parenting skills, public speaking ability, self-discipline, marriage bond or mental/emotional habits—you name it. The Book of Proverbs speaks to a diverse range of areas like these, and its statements and instructions can highlight potential steps for growth. There is plenty to shape us as we meditate on its words!

In this booklet, we'll look at a set of readings within a different topic each week, over four weeks. We'll start with the call to take up wisdom, then move onto the power of our words, money and wealth, and the lessons of the sluggard respectively. Each session has several questions and reflective thoughts to follow on from the readings. You might like to ponder these privately, discuss with your spouse or another trusted believer, or share your thoughts with your life group. We will be utilising the booklet at our KBC January Sunday gatherings, with space for those who



have already gone through the material and those hearing it for the first time.

Before we continue, credit where credit is due. The material included in the booklet is an amalgamation of several sources (along with a few of my own thoughts and questions):

- William Mouser, *Proverbs: Learning to Live Wisely* (2001)
- Daniel L. Akin and Jonathan Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Proverbs* (2017)
- David Pawson, *Unlocking the Bible: A Unique Overview of the Whole Bible* (2015)
- BibleProject's video, 'The Book of Proverbs' (youtu.be/Gabo4dPs_uA)
- Justin Taylor, 'The Different Types of Characters in the Book of Proverbs' on thegospelcoalition.org

I pray this resource will help you to find new life and growth, for your good and for the glory to God.

Blessings

Gareth Davies

Co-Pastor, KBC



1: Choosing Wisdom

The competing calls that echo in the streets

Responding to Invitations

An invitation to dinner is great, until you get two invitations to different dinners, and they are on at the same time. How will you decide which to accept and which to decline? Is it easier to say ‘no’ to one and ‘yes’ to the other? You might weigh up your relationship with the host, the potential for a good time and your tastes in people and food.

A Question to Ponder

What difficulties do you have in facing choices? Is it ever a struggle for you to say ‘no’? Why or why not?

Readings in Proverbs

Proverbs 9 presents the dilemma of deciding between two dinner invitations. But these are no ordinary dinners, and the invitations come from no ordinary hostesses. Wisdom and folly are personified as women each sending an invitation to come and join her dinner party. Which one you attend will largely determine your wellbeing, material success and happiness for the rest of your life. This choice is foundational to how you hear and absorb the wise sayings that follow in the Book of Proverbs (which we will explore in the coming weeks).

Read Proverbs 9:1-18, 13:20, 15:12, 15:31-32, and 18:2.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

1. How are the two feasts presented in this reading? What differences do you see?

2. Do Lady Wisdom and Woman Folly invite the same people or different people?

3. Do you see yourself as a recipient of Lady Wisdom's invitation? Why or why not?

5. What resources does each hostess have to offer her guests?

Clearly Lady Wisdom has vast resources—her maids and the seven-pillared house suggest substantial wealth, as does her menu. By contrast, Woman Folly must sit outside her house or travel to the crossroads of the city to make herself heard.

6. Which hostess appears to offer the most pleasure to her guests?

The answer here depends entirely on what one means by pleasure. Certainly, Woman Folly promises that the stolen water will be sweet and the secretly eaten bread will be

delicious. There's a warning, however, in that she implies that the water is sweet because it is stolen. The pleasures she offers, therefore, are illicit. By contrast, Lady Wisdom makes no explicit promise of pleasure in these verses (for these, see passages such as Prov. 3:13-26 and 4:8-13), but she does offer long life and the rewards that wisdom brings (9:11-12).

7. What do verses 7-12 tell us about how Lady Wisdom imparts benefits to her guests?

The verbs of these verses give the answer—to correct, to rebuke, to instruct, to teach. Lady Wisdom's food is hardly drivel! These verses show what these two women teach and produce in their followers progressively. The dinner party that you choose to go to determines how you act in daily life. Whether you act wickedly or wisely reveals which party you chose. Belief always determines behaviour, but behaviour reveals what you believe. This is a *worship* issue.

8. How do you respond after being confronted or corrected? What does that reveal about you?

If you are the kind of person who cannot accept correction, you are a mocker. If you get angry when someone confronts you, you are a mocker. Your reaction reveals your idolatry, perhaps an idolatry of self. On the other hand, if you can humbly accept correction because you know you have not arrived, then you are wise, and you will love the person who had the courage to confront you. Wise people keep relationships where others have the freedom to ask tough questions of them.

9. Proverbs 9 is, of course, an extended metaphor—an allegory. Wisdom is like a wealthy woman inviting guests to a feast, urging you to attend but leaving you free to choose. Who embodies the person of Lady Wisdom in their relationship to you?

Lady Wisdom appears in anyone (male or female) who relates to us as a reprover, corrector, instructor, protector, benefactor or patron. Parents are obvious examples. So are teachers of every kind. To these we can add physicians, dentists and other doctors; athletic coaches and other trainers; lifeguards at the beach; auto mechanics who warn us about our slack engine maintenance; a sales assistant knowledgeable in some product or service we wish to buy; any neighbour, friend, co-worker or family member experienced in things where we are not experienced.

10. How (in what situations or with which people) have you encountered Woman Folly?

Where the seven pillars of Lady Wisdom's house likened it to the Jerusalem Temple, Woman Folly's house is another kind of temple, located at the highest point of the city (9:14). She is a counterfeit, imitating but perverting Wisdom. Folly's temple identifies her with idolatry; when we turn away from Wisdom we exercise unfaithfulness to God (Prov. 1:32).

11. No matter which 'invitation' you accept, your decision will result in both pleasure and pain. How do the pleasure and pain from dining at Lady Wisdom's house differ from the pleasure and pain one finds at Woman Folly's abode?

12. What helps you to choose wisdom?

The fun from Woman Folly's feast comes, as said before, from the illicit pleasures of forbidden indulgence. The pain is protracted as long as death itself. In Lady Wisdom one meets the pain that invariably comes from reproof. But such pain is as fleeting as Woman Folly's pleasure, while the rewards are a long life to enjoy the fruits of wisdom. It may seem selfish, but our own well-being is the fundamental reason for choosing wisdom.

13. What is God saying to you from these readings and reflections, and what will you do about it?

Conclusion: Accepting Christ's Invitation

Proverbs 9 is the story of Lady Wisdom sending out her servants to invite us to a meal—a party—that brings life instead of death. Proverbs says that those who eat this meal will be made wise. The New Testament says that Jesus is the Wisdom of God, and he invites us to a meal as well. He invites us to feast on him. Those who eat this meal—those who welcome his life into the heart of their being as sustenance—will live and be a part of his kingdom.

Christ's meal is not for those who think they're wise; it is for those who know they are fools and want to grow in wisdom. Have you accepted Christ's invitation? Jesus lived a perfectly wise life, yet he took the punishment our foolishness deserved. He went into *Sheol*—the grave—and came back in victory three days later. He invites you to accept forgiveness from him. If you do, he will transform you into a wise person. The choice is

yours! If you are an unbeliever, recognise the foolishness in your life, repent for the first time, and come to Jesus for salvation. If you are a believer, ask the Lord to reveal your foolishness to you, then confess it to him, repent of it, run to Jesus, and ask to be made like him.



Closing Prayer

Reflect more on Proverbs 9:6. The simple (naïve or inexperienced in other translations) are those who are not firmly committed, either to wisdom or folly; they are easily misled (see Prov. 14:15). They have not applied themselves to the discipline needed to gain wisdom and grow in it.

Reflect on the attitudes or habits you have that might be classified as ‘simple,’ and make this a matter of prayer, asking God to direct you into his wisdom.



2: The Power *of our* Words

*Death and life are in the power of the tongue,
and those who love it will eat its fruit. Proverbs 18:21*

A Weapon in Your Mouth

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” The sentiment may be brave, but our experience tells us it’s simply not true. Words can hurt a lot, and physical wounds can heal long before emotional ones. You may have words that still haunt you, years after they were first spoken. Solomon’s proverbs speak straightforwardly of the harm that can come from words alone.

A Question to Ponder

All of us can think of times we were harmed by malicious taunts. Can you think of a time when you were harmed by words that were not aimed at you in particular?

Readings in Proverbs

The world is awash with harmful words. These are not just the curse words barred from children’s television; they are verbal morsels that bring ruin. The wise man and woman can spot them because they have characteristics that shrewd people can recognize. These proverbs reveal what harmful words are like and how they do their damage.

Read Proverbs 10:19, 17:4, 18:6-8, 26:18-19, 26:21, 26:23, 26:28, and 29:5.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

1. Imagine a plate of tasty morsels—sweet treats, tapas, canapés, or something similar (Proverbs 18:8). What do those exquisite bites have in common with the words of a gossip?

Gossip has a special power to entice: it whets your appetite and develops your taste for it. The more you consume, the more you desire. It appears attractive but, in the end, leads to death. Gossip spoils friendships and harmful speech ruins relationships.

2. Suppose you hear an inflammatory report about someone else. By hearing it, do you show yourself to be wicked or a liar (Proverbs 17:4)? Why or why not?

Of course, bad words are not magical; they have no power to transform your character as soon as you hear them. The verbs ‘listen to’ and ‘pay attention to’ suggest that when the hearer ‘has an ear’ for this kind of thing, it is correct to characterize such a person as wicked or a liar.

3. Do you think there’s any danger in ‘innocently’ overhearing the bad words that come from evil lips and malicious tongues? Why, or why not?

Once consumed, such gossip is nearly impossible to dislodge. Even if we think it malicious, false or destructive, it remains with us as something to cope with.

4. Proverbs 26:23 points to a vulnerability we all face when listening to others' words: no matter how impassioned they appear, they can hide something wicked underneath. Coloured or reactive glazes can be used to cover imperfections within the clay, so defects remain unseen. Do you think there is any way to test words like you would evaluate a shiny piece of pottery?



Smooth (or ardent) lips are compared to an attractive coating of glaze, and an evil heart is compared to worthless earthenware. The obvious threat that Proverbs 26:23 points out is this: that by their artfulness, their beauty or their sparkle (some obvious features of glaze on pottery) bad words may mask a dishonourable and worthless character (corresponding to the worthless clay beneath the glaze). They bend the truth to present a favourable—though false—portrayal of reality. A second threat: words have great power to deceive, and if this fact hardens a listener's ear with cynicism, he or she may not only reject the evil that words can do but also the great good that wholesome, truthful words can bring.

What protection can we utilise? Those knowledgeable about ceramics can spot the cheap ones, even if they have pretty glaze. To spot the evil heart covered with impassioned words requires a similar discernment about people.

5. Why does flattery threaten us in the same way that Proverbs 29:5 describes?



It takes authentic humility to admit our willingness to give or receive flattery, especially flattery which leads to harm. Flattery can be deception. Flattery can be exaggerating the truth to elicit a gratifying reaction. Flattery is a form of manipulation for self-advancement. We need to be cautious of this misuse of speech.

6. Why is flattery simple to offer and accept?

In a word, giving or receiving flattery is *easy*. The alternatives to flattery (silence or some very skillful and diplomatic truth-telling) is usually difficult. Most of us would rather say something nice than something critical, yet we sometimes lack skill to discern something authentically good to comment on. Further, researcher John Kinnell reports, “Likability is the greatest predictor of popularity and social acceptance in a group for adults, more important than wealth, status, or physical attractiveness.” Flattery can be an attractive tool considering our potential profit from pleasing another. As for *hearing* flattery, who can honestly say that they prefer criticism?

7. Thinking back over your previous answers, which is easier for you to produce: good words or bad words? Why?

8. How does the gospel help free you from using your tongue to indulge sin?

9. What is God saying to you from these readings and reflections, and what will you do about it?

Conclusion: Words to Tame the Tongue

Jesus never sinned with his mouth. He never harmed anyone with his words. He never let deceit slip from his lips (see 1 Peter 2:22). He fully lived out Proverbs' wisdom. And yet he took the final judgement for our harmful speech to provide us forgiveness in full. The one with no deceit in his mouth died for deceivers like us. The humble died for the bigmouth. The reconciler died for the quarreller.

To the degree that the truth of the gospel grips you, you will no longer need to lie, gossip, slander, or flatter. You will no longer need to applaud yourself with your words because Jesus gives grace to the humble. You will not need to be detractive and unforgiving because Jesus has forgiven you. You will not need to lie to get others' approval because you have the approval of Jesus.



Words are truly powerful. The tongue is difficult to tame. But there are words that overcome our sinful and uncontrolled tongues: words of God's forgiveness to us and words of grace for us. Only as we hear and receive God's words to us will our words towards others be transformed.

Closing Prayer

Pray about the way you use words as a servant of the Lord, concluding with the prayer of Psalm 19:14:

*May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight, O LORD,
my Rock and my Redeemer.*



3: Money *and* Wealth

The interplay between who we are and what we have

Reading into Resources

When others are obviously rich or poor, we draw conclusions about their talents, education, personality, tastes and personal influence. But from the perspective of the proverbs, wealth and poverty are poor standards to use in judging others. Furthermore, Proverbs tells us it is foolish to suppose that wealth is purely a blessing and that poverty is always a curse.

A Question to Ponder

Do you consider yourself materially rich or poor, or neither? Why?


Readings in Proverbs

In a world that views wealth and poverty imperfectly, we need the precise, pithy standards in the proverbs to guide our steps away from traps that lie on every side.

Read Proverbs 10:2-5, 10:15, 11:28, 13:8, 14:31, 17:1, 18:11, 19:4, and 19:6.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

1. Some of the proverbs you read speak about several advantages of wealth. Are they the ones you would have thought of?



2. Looking over the same proverbs, what do you see to be some of the disadvantages of wealth?



It's important to distinguish righteousness from wealthiness. Being rich doesn't mean you are automatically godly or ungodly, and it's the same with being poor. Wealth or poverty can intensify the expression of the righteousness or unrighteousness that is already at work within us. With this in mind, we need to continue to allow God to shape the desires and inclinations of our hearts so that, whatever we have, we can continue to faithfully serve and honour him.

3. What practical differences would you expect to see between someone who trusts and serves wealth as their god versus someone who trusts and serves God with their wealth?




If you are a greedy person, if you cheat the government, or if you cheat your employer, then that will not profit you like you think it will. You are an idolater. Sometimes idolatry is not worship of bad things. It can be the worship of good things that you have put in the place of God. The problem is that orienting our being around anything less than God puts us on a path towards death.

Look to the life of Jesus. Judas—who gets money in the wrong way—ends up dead; but the righteous one, Jesus, is delivered from death.

4. Can you think of a situation in your experience (or another's) where an increase in wealth was a disadvantage? What happened?




5. Consider the first line of Proverbs 13:8: “The ransom of a man's life is his wealth” (ESV). How might this statement refer to either an advantage or a disadvantage of wealth?

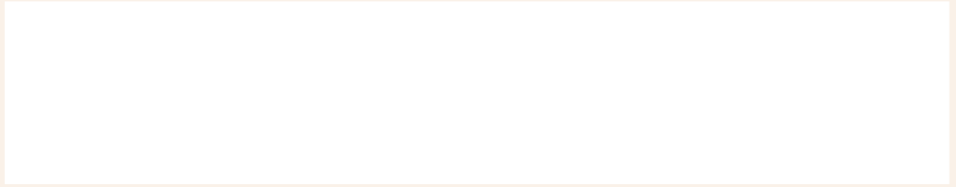


Wealth is a disadvantage insofar as it becomes a pretext for holding a wealthy man's life ransom (i.e., poor people don't attract kidnappers seeking monetary ransoms). This idea reads ransom in a concrete sense. If we read ransom in a more figurative sense—that wealth is like a ransom for one's life—then the proverb claims that wealth has power to preserve or prolong life, as when wealthy people can afford expensive, lifesaving medical care or even a more healthy diet than those who are utterly impoverished.

6. After the second line of Proverbs 13:8 is considered, would you say the first line is speaking of an advantage or a disadvantage of wealth? Why?



7. Proverbs 10:15 and 18:11 have the same first line. In each case, is the line expressing an advantage or disadvantage of wealth? Why?



The first line of Proverbs 10:15 expresses an advantage of wealth, which is contrasted with a corresponding disadvantage of poverty in the second line. In Proverbs 18:11, however, the sense of the first line is more ironic. While not denying the security of wealth, that security may be more imaginary than real and thus more liability than an asset.

8. A 2020 Treasury report* states that the top 12 percent of NZ wage earners pay 48 percent of the income taxes collected each year. Are these facts consistent or inconsistent with statements in Proverbs? Why or why not?



A popular myth says that rich people have options available to them to avoid taxation that people of lesser incomes do not have. Like all really good myths, this one has a few roots in reality, mostly in the fact that wealth brings not only more options for investment and acquisition but also exposes one to a greater variety of taxation (and corresponding strategies to reduce taxation). Governments take money from those who have it.

9. Consider the disadvantages of poverty mentioned in the sampling of proverbs for this study. Do any of them surprise you? Why?



*<https://www.treasury.govt.nz/information-and-services/financial-management-and-advice/revenue-expenditure/revenue-effects-tax-changes/who-pays-income-tax>

10. What advantages of poverty can you find in the proverbs for this study?

Consider how poverty can lead to ruin beyond poverty, reduce a person to utter dependence on another for mercy, diminish the circle of one's friends and lead to sin. Conversely, the poor are free from threats that wealth attracts, avoid the deceptions of wealth and escape the character corruption that can result from wealth.

11. Can you think of a situation where your poverty (actual or perceived) proved to be an advantage to you? What happened?

This might be a hard one to answer! Do you (or someone you know) own a beat-up car and notice that it is never stolen or broken into?

12. It's easy to know if we're extravagantly rich or pitifully poor. But between these extremes, the boundaries between poverty and wealth are hard to see. How does Proverbs 30:8-9 help us know when we are becoming perilously rich or poor?

We become too rich when we are tempted to depend on our wealth more than on God. We become too poor at the point where our poverty tempts us to transgress God's law. Wealth or poverty tests one's character and reveals what it really is.

13. What is God saying to you from these readings and reflections, and what will you do about it?

Conclusion: The Secret of Contentment

The wise person seeks, among other things, to avoid extremes because they often present moral dangers. There are traps we need to guard against in poverty and in wealth.

Consider Paul's words to the believers in Philippi. Paul was supported by the churches he planted, so their generosity or tightfistedness had a direct effect on his ability to live.

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly because once again you renewed your care for me [by your financial gift]. You were, in fact, concerned about me but lacked the opportunity to show it. I don't say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself. I know how to make do with little, and I know how to make do with a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need.

Philippians 4:10-12

What is Paul's secret to contentment through any material standing? Rather than focussing on how much he has, he focusses on how much Christ has *him*: "I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Closing Prayer

Pray to avoid extremes or poverty or wealth, so that neither will lead you into temptation. Pray for God's provision and your trust, that he would supply your daily bread. You might like to include the prayer of Proverbs 30:8-9 below:

*Keep falsehood and deceitful words far from me.
Give me neither poverty nor wealth;
feed me with the food I need.
Otherwise, I might have too much
and deny you, saying, "Who is the LORD?"
or I might have nothing and steal,
profaning the name of my God.*





4: Learning *from the* Slacker

The constant temptation to avoid our work

An Internal Battle

You've felt the urge before; you've heard the soft voice that says, "the untidy wardrobe will still be there tomorrow. Leave that weed-filled garden until the weekend. If you wash the car now, it'll rain, and then where will you be?" This is the voice, not of exhaustion, but laziness. While some of us need to hear God's call to sabbath rest, many yet need to learn from the slacker. As January's end draws near, let's consider how we will tackle the responsibilities we each have ahead of us, even as the temptation to laziness crouches at our door.

A Question to Ponder

What task are you most tempted to put off until later (generally or at the current time)?

Readings in Proverbs

The proverbs on the slacker (or sluggard) are almost comic. We might laugh, until we see ourselves in his characterisation, and realise his prospects are bleak. Following Solomon's proverbs will save us from his fate.

Read Proverbs 6:6-9, 10:26, 12:27, 13:4, 15:19, 19:24, 20:4, 21:25, 22:13, and 24:30-34.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

1. What does the character of a slacker look like, according to this collection of proverbs?

2. Do you see a tendency in yourself that matches one of the slacker's qualities mentioned in these proverbs?

If we're honest with ourselves, we all have areas we are less motivated in. Even the most achievement-oriented person might still have piles of washing they are slow to address, or a dripping tap that goes weeks without being repaired.

3. In these proverbs, what character qualities are contrasted with sluggardliness?

Your answer will depend on which proverbs you look at: self-directing (6:6-8), diligent (13:4), upright (15:19), and wise (26:16). Of course, meditating on an ant's ways will also suggest other characteristics, the most obvious being diligence, persistence and teamwork.

4. Proverbs 15:19 shows us a surprising thing—a slacker works harder than anyone else (when he or she works at all). Why is that?

Bill Gates famously said, “I choose a lazy person to do a hard job. Because a lazy person will find an easy way to do it.” This may be true, but the proverb is talking about a whole other level of laziness that avoids even the initial task of problem-solving. The ironic point is that lazy people, when they work at all, must work harder and with greater difficulties than the upright! By avoiding work, they avoid *efficient* work. So, when necessity forces them to work, they find their work to be difficult and inefficient. The reality is there are two paths that lead to two different destinations. One leads to life and the other to death, and laziness is the path to ruin (see also Prov. 18:9). Sloth is not just ridiculous; it is destructive.

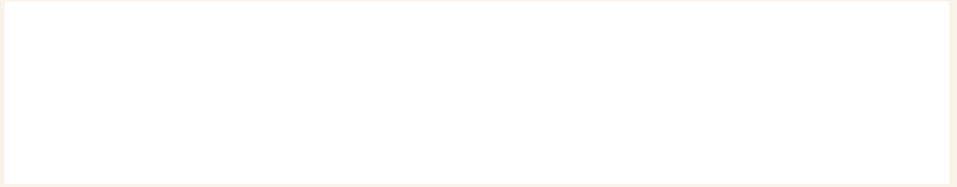
5. Describe one area of your life where a characteristic of a slacker is evident (e.g., paid work, housework, wardrobe, grooming, home maintenance). Be honest!

When we consider the most extreme examples of laziness, we don't see ourselves, and so we don't think we struggle with laziness. But it can be seen in myriad subtler forms: prioritising what we want to do over what we need to do, failing to see things through, entertaining diversions and fantasies, procrastination, neglecting to keep promises, and making up excuses to avoid work. Proverbs 26:16 says, “In his own eyes, a slacker is wiser than seven who can answer sensibly.” That is one of the keys about being lazy—you often don't know or think that you are! You think you are a hard worker when actually you are not. We need an honest self-assessment if we are to have any hope of growing beyond our present state.

6. How does the example of the ant in Proverbs 6:6-8 highlight one remedy for sluggardliness?

If one characteristic stands out in the ant, it is persistence. The work that any one ant does at any time is small in relation to the overall task. But the job gets done because every ant does its part faithfully. Persistent work is a virtue.

7. How would you apply the remedy above to the one area you mentioned in question 5?



Projects can be broken down into manageable segments, so that they don't grow so large through neglect that they must be done in a single Herculean effort. If you have a landscaping project to complete, for example, what are the steps involved? What one thing could you start with to get you on your way, and what will follow?

8. Proverbs 24:30-34 ends with a vivid image describing the final condition of the slacker—poverty. That poverty is compared to a thief and also to an armed bandit. What do you think is the point of this comparison? In other words, what does poverty have in common with a prowling thief or an armed bandit?



The poverty which overcomes the slacker is like a thief in that it sneaks up unawares. Its onset is not sudden or shocking. We can see that the slacker grows poor in stages that match his own slowness to work. Work, or the lack of it, is a long-term investment that will mature in time. There is nothing the slacker can do to ward off poverty, as it came with laziness which cannot be counterbalanced by feverish, sudden activity.

9. The proverbs hold out little hope for reforming a committed fool. On the other hand, why might there be some hope for reforming a sluggard?



These proverbs seek to shake the slacker in their slumber: wake up and realise that avoiding work only postpones a problem. Doing work can address and eliminate the

problem. And of course the rewards for that work replace the penalties of avoiding it. Said another way, the man or woman who wants to work less will work smarter, not harder.

10. Think once more of that task or project which brings out a slothful impulse in yourself. What can you do to avoid falling into the same old ways when that task comes around again?

11. What is God saying to you from these readings and reflections, and what will you do about it?

Conclusion: Jesus Reshapes Our Work

One way to know whether you are walking with Jesus is to look at your work ethic (see 1 Tim. 5:8). The Wisdom of God on earth had a job as a carpenter. He learned and worked a trade! He also did the work his Father sent him to do (see John 17:4). In the beginning, God worked to create the world and provide for humanity. He worked six days and finished his task, and then he rested. Jesus also worked six days of Holy Week, said “It is finished” on day six when he completed the work of new creation, and then rested in the garden tomb on the seventh day. He did this to provide for us what we cannot provide for ourselves.



The proper response to laziness in our lives is to turn away from it and turn to Jesus, who perfectly imaged the Father by working. He died for all of us who fall short in our work ethic and offers us forgiveness and restoration. Then he transforms us by his Spirit into his image—the image of the one who labours! He regains what was lost in Eden, and one day his kingdom will cover the entire cosmos.

Jesus says that those who are faithful in the small things will be put in charge of many things (Matt. 25). We are presently in internship for the age to come, being prepared to be a king or queen of the universe, under Creation's King. We need to be made like him though the gospel—made into the image of the one who said, "It is finished!"



Closing Prayer

Even in a time of great personal need, Jesus acknowledged that 'the spirit is willing, but the body is weak' (Matthew 26:41). To 'just do it' sometimes feels like the hardest thing in the world!

Pray to God to grant you the strength of will to be diligent in all your work.

Booklet Conclusion

Do you hear wisdom calling? We have looked at the way godly wisdom is woven into the fabric of creation, how it is gifted by God for our good and how it culminates in the person of Jesus Christ. We've seen how it is evident in—and gives shape to—our speech, our relationships with money and with work. As you conclude this time meditating on the Scriptures and their touchpoints with your life in the current season, what sticks with you? What truths do you wish to store in your heart, and what action points will you take?

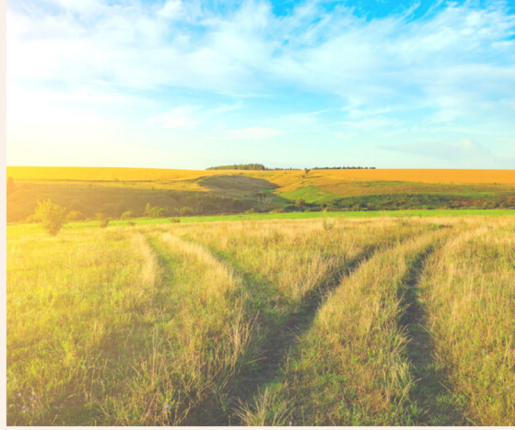


When King Solomon began his reign, the Lord appeared to him in a dream and told him to ask for anything he wanted. Solomon of course chose that for which he would become legendary—wisdom. “Give your servant a receptive heart to judge your people and to discern between good and evil” (1 Kings 3:9). He recognised he needed to receive the wisdom of God if he was to successfully fulfil what God had set before him. Do we see the same need for what God sets before us?

My prayer for you and me as we move into this new year is based on Luke 2:40, which describes Jesus' growth.

Lord God, source of all life and wisdom, thank you for your love for your creation. As your adopted sons and daughters, would you pour out your grace on us, and fill us with wisdom. Would you guard our steps and help us to rest in your refuge. We dedicate ourselves to you afresh now, that you would show the watching world more of who you are by what you do in and through us this year. Amen.

Personal Notes



**May the
presence
and power
of God's Spirit
be with you
as you trust
in the Lord.**



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