

PROVERBS VOL. 1



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DISCOVER TOGETHER

BIBLE STUDY

PROVERBS VOL. 1

*Discovering Ancient Wisdom
for a Postmodern World*

Sue Edwards



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How to Get the Most Out of a Discover Together Bible Study

Women today need Bible study to keep balanced, focused, and Christ-centered in their busy worlds. The tiered questions in *Proverbs: Discovering Ancient Wisdom for a Postmodern World, Volume 1* allow you to choose a depth of study that fits your lifestyle, which may even vary from week to week, depending on your schedule.

Just completing the basic questions will require about one and a half hours per lesson, and will provide a basic overview of the text. For busy women, this level offers in-depth Bible study with a minimum time commitment.

“Digging Deeper” questions are for those who want to, and make time to, probe the text even more deeply. Answering these questions may require outside resources such as an atlas, Bible dictionary, or concordance; you may be asked to look up parallel passages for additional insight; or you may be encouraged to investigate the passage using an interlinear Greek-English text or *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*. This deeper study will challenge you to learn more about the history, culture, and geography related to the Bible, and to grapple with complex theological issues and differing views. Some with teaching gifts and an interest in advanced academics will enjoy exploring the depths of a passage, and might even find themselves creating outlines and charts and writing essays worthy of seminarians!

This inductive Bible study is designed for both individual and group discovery. You will benefit most if you tackle each week’s lesson on your own, and then meet with other women to share insights, struggles, and aha moments. Bible study leaders will find free, downloadable leader’s guides for each study, along with general tips for leading small groups, at www.discovertogetherseries.com.

Through short video clips, Sue Edwards shares personal insights to enrich your Bible study experience. You can watch these as you work through each lesson on your own, or your Bible study leader may want your whole study group to view them when you meet together. For ease of individual

viewing, a QR code, which you can simply scan with your smartphone, is provided in each lesson. Or you can go to www.discovertogetherseries.com and easily navigate until you find the corresponding video title. Woman-to-woman, these clips are meant to bless, encourage, and challenge you in your daily walk.

Choose a realistic level of Bible study that fits your schedule. You may want to finish the basic questions first, and then “dig deeper” as time permits. Take time to savor the questions, and don’t rush through the application. Watch the videos. Read the sidebars for additional insight to enrich the experience. Note the optional passage to memorize and determine if this discipline would be helpful for you. Do not allow yourself to be intimidated by women who have more time or who are gifted differently.

Make your Bible study—whatever level you choose—top priority. Consider spacing your study throughout the week so that you can take time to ponder and meditate on what the Holy Spirit is teaching you. Do not make other appointments during the group Bible study. Ask God to enable you to attend faithfully. Come with an excitement to learn from others and a desire to share yourself and your journey. Give it your best, and God promises to join you on this adventure that can change your life.



Why Study Proverbs?

A proverb is a short, pithy couplet that teaches truth in a memorable way. Here are two examples:

Anxiety weighs down the heart,
but a kind word cheers it up. (Proverbs 12:25)

If anyone loudly blesses their neighbor early in the morning,
it will be taken as a curse. (Proverbs 27:14)

These short, pithy sayings begin in chapter 10 and end in chapter 29. The book of Proverbs is structured like a sandwich: these brief, memorable sayings are sandwiched between discourses at the beginning and at the end.

Here's another way to look at the organization:

Chapters 1–9	Incentives to seek wisdom from King Solomon
Chapters 10–29	Proverbs
Chapters 30–31	Insight on wisdom from Agur and King Lemuel's mother



Introduction to Studying Proverbs (8:38 minutes).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PROVERBS

Proverbs are *principles* that are true in general terms. They show us the way the world works and how to live wisely in it. If we live by wisdom

principles, we will not bring calamity on our heads by our own foolish actions and attitudes. Foolishness is the source of many people's problems. When we are our own worst enemies, we bring problems upon ourselves either by being unaware of how the world works or by ignoring what we know.

Proverbs are not *promises*. If we interpret proverbs as promises made to individuals, we're guilty of saying that God promises us something that he has not promised at all, and we confuse people regarding the Bible. It is crucial that we interpret the Bible in the way that the author intended.

A proverb is a wise saying—a few words pregnant with meaning. We must examine each word carefully and then dig for the overall meaning. When Benjamin Franklin coined the secular proverb, “A stitch in time saves nine,” he was not promising that if you stitch up a hem before it unravels, it will never unravel again. He was explaining that if we attend to a situation early, we'll most likely encounter fewer problems later. Franklin was using figurative language to paint a picture of the way the world works. Solomon was his predecessor.

When mothers read the proverb, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6 KJV), it's tempting to insist that God promises all prodigals will return. And God may give a mother that assurance. But God never makes that promise on the basis of this particular proverb. To insist that he has is to use bad interpretive principles. Instead, this proverb tells us that parents who do their best to understand their children and raise them in a godly home are *more likely* to see prodigals return to the faith than are those parents who never instructed their children in the first place. But turning to God is ultimately the child's choice. God does not override free choice for anyone. That's a principle he set in place from the foundation of the world.

Our task is to decipher the proverbs in order to learn timeless lessons about life, and then to live in light of their truth.

Proverbs' purpose is to propel us into a relationship with God so we might live out the truths he shows us in this guidebook. They're valuable principles, but they are not promises. When we interpret proverbs as promises, we mishandle God's Word and mislead ourselves and others—and that gets us into trouble!

A NOTE ON BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

The 2011 New International Version (NIV) is the version used throughout this study. Because it uses gender neutral language where that fits with the intent of the original text, the author recommends this version for clarity. If you use another version, you'll need to keep in mind that the 1984 NIV and many other standard Bible translations use “man” and “sons” to represent the human race in general.



The Author, Purpose, and Power

LESSON 1

Are there timeless principles that govern life? Yes, they come from God the Creator, who alone knows how the world works. Has he revealed these principles to us? Yes, again. We find them tucked away in the Old Testament book of Proverbs—thirty-one chapters that promise to make us wise if we study them diligently and apply them wholeheartedly.

Do you want to make wise choices? Do you want to ward off danger for yourself and your loved ones? Do you want to be discerning, disciplined, and prudent? In short, do you want to be a woman who knows what to do in life's complex situations? If so, immerse yourself in the Lord's proverbs, and he will guide you through the maze of our postmodern world.

DISCOVER THE AUTHOR

1. Who wrote the book of Proverbs? What was his position? Who was his father? (Proverbs 1:1)

OPTIONAL

Memorize Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

4. What was the Lord's response (3:10–13)? What do you learn about God from his response?

5. What condition did the Lord place on Solomon in verse 14?

6. *Read 1 Kings 4:29–34.* Describe Solomon's wisdom and its impact upon his life.



In seminary, my professor grouped the attributes of God into two categories: incommunicable and communicable. The first were qualities that we cannot share with God, for example, his self-existence and his freedom from all limits of time and space. In the second category are qualities in which we can share, for example, goodness, creativity, truth, love, and wisdom. This is what the Bible means when it says that we were created in the image of God. These qualities were defaced in the fall, but God is now at work in Christians to repair his ruined image, as we cooperate with the process. —Sue

Wisdom is the God-given ability to see life with rare objectivity and to handle life with rare stability.

—Charles Swindoll
(*Living*, 208)



Solomon's Failure (4:28 minutes). All the wisdom in the world will not help you if you fail to apply it to your life. Learn from Solomon's mistakes!

7. What is the attitude of your heart as you begin this study? Are you willing to become like “a little child” in order to gain wisdom?

8. Why do you need wisdom? Are you feeling overwhelmed by some role or responsibility? Are you struggling with particular decisions or circumstances? How might a wise and discerning heart help?

9. Does it matter if you “walk in God’s ways”? What is the relationship between obedience and wisdom? In what areas of your life do you need to listen to God in order to gain wisdom?

DIGGING DEEPER

Solomon’s brothers tried to steal his crown, and if they had been successful, he and his mother would certainly have been murdered. For the cloak-and-dagger account, read and summarize 1 Kings 1 and 2.

DIGGING DEEPER

Early in his reign, Solomon exhibited his wisdom when he acted as judge between two women. Read the account in 1 Kings 3:16–28. What happened? Why did this story make Solomon famous?

DIGGING DEEPER

Research Solomon’s spiritual journey. How did his personal choices affect his relationship to God and his view of the world? What can you learn about his rule as king of Israel and his legacy (1 Kings 1–11; 2 Chronicles 1–9; Ecclesiastes)?



Read Proverbs 1:1–7.

Wisdom is, in fact, the practical side of moral goodness. As such, it is found in its fullness only in God. He alone is naturally and entirely and invariably wise. . . . Wisdom, as the old theologians used to say, is His *essence*, just as power, and truth, and goodness, are His *essence*—integral elements, that is, in His character.
—J. I. Packer (*Knowing God*, 80)

DISCOVER THE PURPOSE

10. In Proverbs 1:2–3, Solomon explains that he wrote the book of Proverbs so we each might attain wisdom. Then he lists words that describe various aspects of wisdom. What are they? How are they different? Use a dictionary if necessary.

11. In verses 4–7, Solomon introduces us to the characters in Proverbs. Who are they? Are they different? Again, use a dictionary if necessary.

DISCOVER THE POWER

12. Becoming wise will take more than self-disciplined human effort. In Proverbs 1:7, Solomon reveals wisdom's power source.

- Write out this theme. (Note that “fear” is not terror but a reverent awe and respect for God.)

- What do you think this verse means?

13. One of the most memorized proverbs is 3:5–6. What does it mean and how does it relate to discovering wisdom's power source?

Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.

—Daniel 2:20–22

DIGGING DEEPER

For additional insight about human versus spiritual wisdom, read Paul's complete message to the Corinthians concerning wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:17–2:16). What else do you learn?

14. The Bible speaks of two kinds of wisdom—human and spiritual. Read *1 Corinthians 2:6–16*. What does this passage reveal concerning the difference? What is the source of spiritual wisdom? How is it different from human wisdom?

SO WHAT?

15. On what kind of wisdom—human or spiritual—do you rely the most? How is your life affected by your choice?





Why Seek Wisdom?

LESSON 2

Why should we seek wisdom wholeheartedly? Solomon gives us many reasons by listing the benefits of a life devoted to wisdom. These are enticing incentives to take your Proverbs study seriously and make it a priority in your life!



Read Proverbs 1:8–19.

YOU WILL STAY OUT OF TROUBLE

1. How does Proverbs 1:8–19 apply to you? What do you think Solomon is trying to say in these figurative terms (1:8–9)?

OPTIONAL

Memorize Proverbs 3:13–14

Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold.

His wisdom is profound,
his power is vast. Who
has resisted him and
come out unscathed?

—Job 9:4

DIGGING DEEPER

People throughout biblical history have ignored wisdom principles and paid the price. Do a character study on one or all of the following women. What principles did each defy? What resulted? What are the lessons for us?

- Eve (Genesis 2–3)
- Rebekah (Genesis 27)
- Jezebel (1 Kings 16:29–21:24; 2 Kings 9:30–37)

2. Do you have friends who lure you away from what you know is good? What do they tempt you to do? How do they entice you? What is Solomon's advice (1:10)? What steps should you take to protect yourself?

3. Verses 11–19 give us a glimpse into the evil minds of criminals as they tempt the naive to join them.

- Describe their invitation (1:11–12).
- What do they promise (1:13–14)?
- Why is it foolish to trust them? What ultimately happens to them and those who go with them? In what sense are they dumber than birds? (1:15–19)

- How does someone end up in trouble—or worse, in jail or prison? What do you think draws so many people to violence and immorality? How can you protect yourself and loved ones from accepting this sometimes subtle invitation?



Read Proverbs 1:20–33.

YOU WILL STAY SAFE

Since God knows how the world works, he understands how you can put yourself in danger. You can protect yourself from consequences that put your life and loved ones at risk.

4. In 1:20–33, wisdom is personified as a woman calling out to fools in the streets. If you approached her, what might be her demeanor? Summarize her questions (1:22). What is her heart's desire (1:23)?

One of the most remarkable features of the wisdom literature is the sages' description of wisdom as a woman. In the *Meshalim*, or biblical Proverbs, Woman Wisdom is identified with God, present at Creation and infusing all. She seeks close engagement with the world and delights to be with humanity. Contrary to gender-stereotyped images of women, she is in no way passive but is portrayed as a liberator and an establisher of justice, a lover in pursuit of humanity who, in return, responds to those who love her.

—Lilian Calles Barger
(*Chasing Sophia*, 36)

Wisdom without power would be pathetic, a broken reed; power without wisdom would be merely frightening; but in God boundless wisdom and endless power are united, and this makes him utterly worthy of our fullest trust.
—J. I. Packer (*Knowing God*, 81)

5. What consequences do fools face? Is there a time when it's too late to turn to wisdom? (1:24–32)

6. What reward awaits those who listen to and heed wisdom (1:33)? In what ways does listening to wisdom guarantee these rewards? In what ways does it not?

7. Why does God allow trials into our lives? What is wisdom's relationship to these trials?



Read Proverbs 3:1-4.

YOU WILL LIVE LONGER

8. Can you shorten or lengthen your life (3:1-2)? If so, in what sense? Can you give some examples?

God's wisdom is not, and never was, pledged to keep a fallen world happy, or to make ungodliness comfortable. Not even to Christians has he promised a trouble-free life; rather the reverse. He has other ends in view for life in this world than simply to make it easy for everyone. What is he after then? . . . His ultimate objective is to bring them to a state in which they please him entirely and praise him adequately, a state in which he is all in all to them, and he and they rejoice continually in the knowledge of each other's love.
—J. I. Packer (*Knowing God*, 81)

DIGGING DEEPER

Do a character study on one or all of the following women. How did wisdom protect them? Glean principles for your life today.

- Rahab (Joshua 2; 6:22-25)
- Ruth (Ruth 1-4)
- Esther (Esther 1-10)
- The Widow at Zarephath (1 Kings 17:7-24)

9. In what sense are the number of your days set (see Psalm 139:16)?

DIGGING DEEPER

For a more in-depth study of believers abused for their faith, read 1 Peter 4:1–5. How do you think Christians should act toward fools and scoffers?

YOU WILL BE RESPECTED

10. According to Proverbs 3:3–4, can you generally enjoy a good reputation among your neighbors? If so, how? Is this a guarantee that everyone will like you (see 2 Corinthians 2:15–16)?

Science is finding that the brain's ability to do integrated thinking increases with age and has concluded that there appears to be a biological basis for the wisdom of old age.

—Lilian Calles Barger
(*Chasing Sophia*, 67)

DIGGING DEEPER

Prosperity theologians insist that every righteous believer is promised physical health and monetary wealth. They use verses like Proverbs 3:13–18 to substantiate their claims. Find verses to refute this false teaching. Examine the life of Jesus, Paul, and others for insight. Write an argument refuting prosperity theology.

13. List the blessings promised in 3:16–18.

14. Do these verses guarantee you will have a large bank account, own several Mercedes, and live in a mansion? If you're wise, in what sense can you expect to be rich and blessed?

WHAT'S STANDING IN YOUR WAY?

How will your life be different if you seek wisdom with all your heart? Do you want to stay out of trouble? Do you want to live longer? Do you want to be safe and blessed and enjoy a good name among the community?

15. In this lesson, we've seen the rewards and benefits for those who attain wisdom. Are they worth your attention and effort? Examine your life honestly. What specifically hinders you? Rank the obstacles in order of difficulty. What do you need to do to gain wisdom this year?

We have not even begun to live if we lack the wisdom God wants to give us. That wisdom is ours, simply for the asking, and it will bring us a whole new and exciting world! Like birth, it will take time and it may be a painful process. But when it comes, you'll be amazed how clearly things will come into focus. You'll begin to feel like a new creature. No wonder Jesus referred to it as being "born again."

—Charles Swindoll
(*Living*, 202)

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives.

—Paul's prayer for the Colossians (Colossians 1:9)

16. Identify at least one obstacle that you want to overcome and ask God to enable you to overcome it this year. Pray, journal, or create something that expresses your heart's desire. Remember you must cooperate with the Lord as he works in you to accomplish change.

Envision yourself as a wise woman, loving God and life while having an impact upon others for good. That's what God and the leaders of this study want for you. Together, let's make it happen!