

A PROVERBS JOURNAL FOR THE NEXT GENERATION



pass it on

CHAMP THORNTON

presented to

from

date



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A PROVERBS JOURNAL FOR THE NEXT
GENERATION

Champ Thornton



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*For my fathers, in family and in faith,
who still teach me about life and about God:
George Thornton and Eric Sipe*

How to Use This Journal

My wife and I have the joy and responsibility to prepare our three children for life in the real world. Since our children were little, I have desired to teach them the godly wisdom found in Proverbs. But I knew that I needed to grow in my own understanding of Proverbs before I could pass it on to my family. That need led to years of study, which led in turn to this book: my attempt to capture Proverb's wisdom for the benefit of the next generation. Proverbs-filled children come from Proverbs-filled parents.

Learn and Share

Using this journal will help you to learn and apply this wisdom-saturated portion of God's Word to your daily life. Once you finish filling its pages with your notes, insights, and memories, you can share it by giving your journal away—perhaps to a child, grandchild, nephew, niece, or a young friend. By doing this you will be passing on a legacy of wisdom to be treasured for generations.

In this journal you'll find plenty of space for you to add your own notes both on Proverbs and on the wisdom you've gained from life experiences. While the first is inspired and the second is not, both are, to differing degrees, valuable. So, write down your observations, prayers, encouragements, and counsel for the next generation. Let the words of Proverbs prompt you to retell your story, recounting how God has been faithful to you through your life.

There are thirty-two sections to complete, so if you use the journal for ten minutes each day, your personalized book will be ready to give away in just a few months. But don't get too worried about how much time it takes. The main thing is to just keep going, bit by bit, learning and sharing something each day.

Start by asking God to help you as you read and journal. Pray that he will open your eyes to the beauty and truth of what he has written, so that you can *pass it on* to the next generation (Psalm 119:18).

Here is a quick overview of what you will find in the journal and how to use each section.

1. **Read “A Bird’s-Eye View of Proverbs” before you start the journal.**
This will give you an overview of Proverbs and help to orient and inform your reading.
2. **Read the Guided Tour before you begin each chapter of Proverbs.**
These notes will help you understand the chapter you’re studying. Mark the text of Proverbs accordingly (e.g., if the Guided Tour states that 3:13–20 describe the benefits of wisdom, you could mark those verses, labeling them as “Benefits”).
3. **Study one chapter of Proverbs per week (or take longer).** As short, memorable encapsulations of wisdom, individual proverbs were meant to be savored piece by piece, not all devoured in one sitting. So prayerfully read and think about one chapter at a time.

The fresh and careful translation provided comes from Dr. Bruce Waltke, who, now in his eighties, has devoted his life to a humble and Christ-focused study of God’s Word, and especially the book of Proverbs. His two-volume work on Proverbs is considered by many as the premier commentary in the English language. As you study the translation of individual chapters, add your own comments in the margins. And feel free to circle, underline, and connect key words or phrases as you see them in the chapter for the day.

4. **Complete the “Reflections” section.** This section gives you the opportunity to write down your thoughts and observations about the proverbs you are studying and also to share your own insights and experiences with the next generation. Each section contains the following:

Identifying a Verse – Record your thoughts about a verse that stood out to you.

Going Deeper – Reflect on portions of each chapter by answering the questions provided.

Connecting the Gospel – Consider how the wisdom of Proverbs relates to the grace and gospel of Jesus Christ.

Personalizing a Prayer – Transform the truth and encouragement that you have learned from Proverbs into a personalized prayer for

the journal's final owner. If you are not sure how to begin, here's a classic four-part pattern that you could use:

- **The Person** (What do you learn about God in that chapter of Proverbs that helps shape your prayer? E.g., “Father, you are all-wise . . .”)
- **The Petition** (Based on something from Proverbs, what is a prayer request you're making for the final owner of this journal?)
- **The Purpose** (Using some desirable outcome expressed in Proverbs, what are you hoping that your request may accomplish?)
- **The Plea** (All Christian prayer is offered “in Jesus's name”: on the basis of Christ's merits, not our own.)¹

Sharing Your Story – Here is your chance to answer questions about yourself and share your faith story with the next generation. You can also record your observations of how and where you see the final owner of this journal already living out some portion of the chapter you just read in Proverbs. Use concrete examples and be generous with your words of encouragement. If you want, you can be even more creative in this section—think about drawing a picture (it's worth a thousand words!), sketching a diagram, or even writing a poem. Whoever receives this journal will treasure whatever you do.

5. **Give this Proverbs journal to its final owner.**²

A Bird's-Eye View of Proverbs

Proverbs is a treasure chest of wisdom that sits unlocked right in the middle of the Bible. The book you're holding presents an invitation to open the lid, scoop out its wealth, and pass it on to the next generation—a legacy of wisdom.

This is no small task as the sheer size of this treasure (thirty-one chapters—915 verses!) makes clear. The difficulty mounts when you realize that about two-thirds of the book seem to be individual, stand-alone pieces of advice: 600-something pearls of wisdom rolling around unstrung. Yet isn't this how life unfolds? A never-ending cascade of unrelated events tumbling toward us. Proverbs mirrors the seemingly random arrangement of life. Real-life wisdom for real-life situations.

The challenge is to make every part of this treasure our own. Then we can live in wisdom and help our children do the same. For this bounty exists not for hoarding but sharing. Such a treasure trove of wisdom makes a priceless inheritance for any generation to pass down to the next.

Riches await. But where to start digging?

Let's start with an overview of Proverbs—a bird's-eye look at how it's put together and how all those small gems of wisdom hang together on common threads of truth. Don't skip this part! Using a wide-angle lens will prove invaluable to you as you examine the details of the book of Proverbs.

The Structure of Proverbs

Proverbs contains the following six collections of short, usually two-line proverbs. These six main sections are framed by two bookends: a long prologue on the need for wisdom (1:1–9:18) and an epilogue on an example of wisdom (31:10–31).

Proverbs of Solomon I	(10:1—22:16)
Sayings of the Wise I	(22:17—24:22)
Sayings of the Wise II	(24:23–34)
Proverbs of Solomon II	(25:1—29:27)
Sayings of Agur	(30:1–33)
Sayings of Lemuel	(31:1–31)

Organized according to its content, the book of Proverbs divides neatly into two sections: chapters 1–9 and chapters 10–31. Both these divisions encourage wise living but differ in their purpose and format.

SEEK WISDOM (CHAPTERS 1–9)

The first section (chapters 1–9), encourages the pursuit of wisdom, preparing the reader for the second section (chapters 10–31). In summary, chapters 1–9 aim to motivate the reader to seek wisdom, while also avoiding foolish men and forbidden women.

Fifteen times, the older generation speaks directly to the younger—calling, imploring, enticing. Here’s a sampling: “Hear, my son” (Proverbs 1:8); “My son, do not forget my teaching” (3:1); “My son, be attentive to my words” (4:20); “Then do this, my son, and save yourself” (6:3); “My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments” (7:1).³

When, in these examples, Proverbs records a father’s wisdom being passed on to his son, the historic “father” in view is Solomon (or one of the other inspired authors listed in endnote 12). And since Proverbs is part of God’s Word, this collected wisdom may also apply as God-given parental advice to sons in any generation. However, Hebrews 12:5–7 further broadens those addressed in Proverbs as “sons” to include all of God’s “sons” (and daughters) and also identifies the father who speaks as God himself. So in Proverbs we should hear more than the advice of good fathers; we should also hear the voice of God the Father. Proverbs is God’s wise instruction to all his children.

Not surprisingly, then, the first nine chapters contain numerous statements of fatherly advice. Yet instead of immediately beginning to teach wisdom itself, chapters 1–9 primarily feature incentives for becoming wise: reminders to pursue wisdom, blessings for gaining wisdom, and

warnings about refusing wisdom. Here's a sampling of these elements from each of the first nine chapters.

Reminders	Blessings	Warnings
1:8	1:9	1:19
2:1	2:10–11	2:22
3:1	3:13–14	3:32–35
4:1–2	4:8–9	4:19
5:1	5:2	5:23
6:20–21	6:22–24	6:26–35
7:1–4	7:5	7:26–27
8:5–7	8:18–21	8:36
9:4–6	9:11	9:12

The first nine chapters lay out argument after argument and reason after reason, to convince the reader that the path of wisdom is the best road to travel. In this way, the first section (chapters 1–9) serves to introduce the second section (chapters 10–31). To change the metaphor from a treasure to a feast, chapters 1–9 whet the appetite and set the table. Chapters 10–31 serve the food.

FIND WISDOM (CHAPTERS 10–31)

The second and largest section of Proverbs features concise observations about how life works best. This section features wise words wisely written.

Most commonly in this section, these short proverbs come in the form of a two-line poem or couplet.⁴ They are gems of wisdom, often sparkling with vivid wording and striking imagery which make them both beautiful and memorable.

Sometimes these proverbs *commend*. Functionally, they prescribe a wise direction: they tell what you should do. Here are some examples of these prescriptive proverbs.

Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established. (16:3)

Do not exploit the poor because they are poor, and do not crush the needy in court. (22:22 NIV)

Other times, individual proverbs *observe*. Functionally, they describe God's wise design: they tell what is true. Consider these examples of descriptive proverbs:

The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble. (16:4)

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD. (16:33)

Nearly every one of the 659 verses in chapters 10–31 nicely fits one of these two functions: prescriptive or descriptive. Yet beyond these two categories, the order and arrangement of proverbs initially seem somewhat random, following no orderly pattern. The topics addressed are diverse: anger, laziness, planning, gossip, friendship, love, self-control, eating, politics, family, and money. Again, the apparent disorder of the structure mimics the unpredictable rush of everyday life.

However, on closer observation of chapters 10–31, particular topics seem to cluster loosely together. For example, about one-third of the verses in chapter 21 deals with money; over 60% of the verses in chapter 18 talk about words; and the first half of chapter 10 alternates between the topics of words and wealth, while the last half mentions, in nearly every verse, the consequences of one's actions.

Then, like short strands of pearls, there are other passages that seem united even more closely along a single idea. Here are some samples of these topically arranged blocks of verses.

10:2–5 addresses wealth and poverty

15:1–4 deals mostly with speech

15:33–16:9 features repeated references to the Lord

16:10–15 focuses attention on the king

16:20–23 specifically discusses wisdom

- 18:4–8 gives advice about communication
- 23:29–35 explains the problems with drunkenness
- 24:30–34 gives teaching on laziness
- 25:1–15 seems to describe wise living in a king’s court
- 26:3–12 repeatedly speaks of the nature of fools
- 26:13–16 warns against sluggards
- 27:23–27 gives wise counsel about caring for “flocks of sheep”
- 31:1–9 provides advice for being a noble king
- 31:10–31 paints the portrait of an ideal wife

You can find additional details about the arrangement of themes within Proverbs, in the “Guided Tour” before each chapter. You will read and understand Proverbs better by knowing its structure. But what about the actual content of Proverbs?

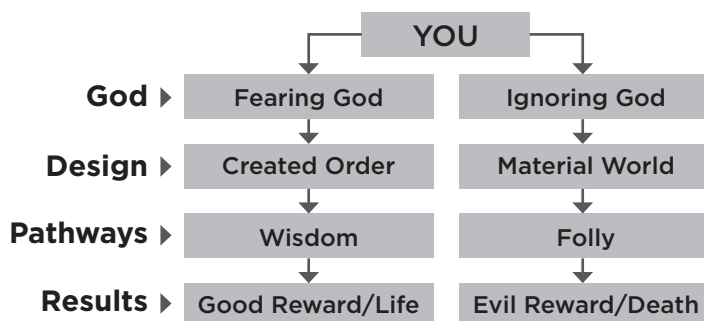
WORLDVIEW OF PROVERBS

Although the structure of Proverbs follows a generally loose arrangement, its overall message is tight and cohesive. This unified outlook is its “worldview.”⁵ A worldview has been described as “a set of presuppositions . . . that we hold (consciously or unconsciously) about the basic constitution of reality.”

So, while presenting dozens of different topics, the perspective of Proverbs never changes—just as a bird watcher, who sits in one spot, may observe an entire forest of color, sound, smells, and motion. This unchanging “spot” or worldview of Proverbs reveals a unified view of life.

This means that for Proverbs the “wise person” doesn’t just memorize and execute a tidy collection of good advice.⁶ True wisdom is living in light of what’s real, in awareness of the actual make-up of our world.⁷ The major realities of Proverb’s worldview are (1) a wise and powerful God, (2) a wisely designed and orderly creation, (3) the divergent pathways of wise and foolish humans, and (4) the consequences of their respective choices.

PROVERBS WORLDVIEW



GOD

The foremost reality in the universe is God himself. Proverbs reminds us that living wisely in God’s world starts with living in “the fear of the LORD” (1:7; 9:10). Living in the fear of the LORD means that you are constantly aware that he is God and you are not; that he is BIG and you are small.⁸ Who is this God?

The “LORD” referred to in these verses (and eighty-six additional times within the book of Proverbs) is different than the generic designation: “God” (five times in Proverbs). Instead, “LORD” is the English translation of Yahweh (or Jehovah), referring to the faithful, covenant-keeping God who has lovingly committed himself to his people. When God signs an agreement with his people (and when he speaks to them words of fatherly wisdom), “LORD” is the name he uses (Exodus 3:14–15; 6:2–3, 6–8).

Additionally, this LORD created everything (Proverbs 3:19–20; 8:26–31; 22:2, 12), provides everything (2:6–8, 3:11; 8:22; 10:22; 18:22; 21:31), knows everything (5:21; 16:2; 21:2; 24:18), judges everything (3:11–12; 5:21; 6:16–19), and rules everything (16:1–9; 19:21; 20:24; 21:1, 31; 29:26).

If, in contrast to fearing the LORD, you minimize him—if you act like there is no God—then you’re going to live foolishly. You will be ignoring the most massive and prevalent reality in the universe—to your own peril. To live on planet earth while acting as if there were no God is like

walking around with your eyes shut. You can certainly do it, but you're going to get pretty banged up.⁹

The wisdom of Proverbs may illuminate the right path you should walk, but only a pervasive awareness of God ("fear of the LORD") will actually keep you on that road. God himself is the starting place for men and women wanting to be wise in their view of the world.

DESIGN

The second reality underlying Proverbs is that God made the world in a wise way, according to a wise design (3:19–20). A quick read through the first few chapters of Genesis will show that God didn't just slap dash the universe together. Instead, there is order and wisdom in all that he made. Proverbs agrees:

I [wisdom] was the architect at his side. I was his constant delight, rejoicing always in his presence. (Proverbs 8:30 NLT)

God made the world wisely. His own wisdom guided his creating. The word translated "architect" has also been rendered "craftsman," or even "blueprint." This is "divine wisdom, God's plan or order, 'wrought into the constitution of the universe.'"¹⁰

An Orderly Design

This means that God designed his created world to operate according to certain consistent and orderly patterns. For example, there is a physical order—if you jump off a cliff, it will likely be the last unwise decision you make. And there is a moral order—if you gossip, you will probably lose friends.

These patterns don't change. They are constants, applying to all people, cultures, and eras of history. God's order is hardwired into the world, woven into the fabric of creation. So, when we live in harmony with his original design, we mirror God's wisdom. That is, we ourselves are being wise.

An Observable Design

The universe God made is not only orderly (people can set their watches by it), but it is also knowable (people have learned how to set their watches

by it). We can appreciate the structures and designs of God's world by observing what he created.

God expects us to notice patterns and traits in the world around us. This is wisdom acquired by us firsthand. We are supposed to notice and learn from broken-down walls (25:28), industrious ants (6:6), table arrangements (23:1), fast-talking fools (29:20), and exemplary parents (23:26).¹¹ And throughout this journal, you will have space to pass on this kind of wisdom—personal observations gained over the course of your life.

Additionally, we should also become wise through listening to the sage observation of others. This is secondhand wisdom. Proverbs repeatedly insists we take heed to our teachers (5:13), to our parents (23:22), and to the divinely inspired authors of Proverbs themselves (1:1–6; 23:12).¹²

Whether learning from observations or from others, wise men and women must seek to rightly understand and rightly relate to God's orderly world. The only alternative is foolishness: to ignore God and invent a self-customized plan for living. Pursuing either folly or wisdom, all human beings must walk one path or the other.

PATHWAYS

Turn to any portion of Proverbs and you will be confronted with a fork in the road: Will you take the pathway of wisdom or the pathway of folly? Though Proverbs addresses dozens of topics, its thirty-one chapters actually present every reader with only two routes through life: the wise way or the foolish way.

The Pathway of Folly

Proverbs employs a rich vocabulary to set forth both the value of wisdom in all her beauty and also the horror of folly in all her lunacy. This variety reminds us that not all fools are the same. The simple immaturity of a three-year-old doesn't compare to the selfish recklessness of a twenty-one-year-old—and each kind of person deserves his own fool-appropriate response. Proverbs wisely recognizes these differences (1:22). It distinguishes progressive stages along the downhill path of folly, identifying three different kinds of people: the Immature, the Fool, and the Mocker.

1. The Immature—an experientially naïve person

The first steps along the path of folly belong to the simpleton. This person is irresponsible and untrained. Loving his immaturity, this person has no experiences in life to warn him of the dangers that lie along the path ahead (Proverbs 27:12). If this person is left undirected, the magnetic pull of rebellion against God will draw him ever closer toward destruction (22:3). He or she is vulnerable and uncommitted regarding wisdom (neither for nor against it), and is therefore still teachable (19:25; 21:11). When addressing these kinds of “rookie fools,” teachers should seek both to educate them about God’s orderly ways in this world (1:4) and also to warn them about ignoring his ways . . . lest they become an outright fool.

2. The Fool—a spiritually thickheaded person

The next downward phase is the most common: a garden-variety fool. He is not simply stupid or naïve but actually refuses to listen to the wisdom of parents and counselors (Proverbs 12:15). This disobedient person has whipped up his own home-cooked version of what he supposes to be “wisdom” (1:29). Unwilling to learn, this person may, however, be turned toward wisdom when consequences are enforced (8:5; 19:29; 26:5). Humanly speaking, painful correction may be the only thing that gets through his thick skull . . . and keeps him from the worst stage of all.

3. The Mockers—a willfully independent person

This arrogant person doesn’t just refuse to listen; he actually despises the wisdom of God. He hates any attempts to correct his actions or thinking (Proverbs 9:7–18; 13:1; 15:12). The gullibility of the Immature and the resistance of the Fool are gone. What remains is outright antagonism toward God’s ways and sheer delight in that rebellion (1:22). This settled and arrogant independence makes movement back toward wisdom practically, though not entirely, impossible (14:6). He receives no benefit from discipline (9:7), rebuke (9:8; 15:12), or instruction (13:1). Unless he turns from his own “wisdom” and submits to God’s wisdom, the Mockers will find, all too late, that the pathway of folly dead-ends in destruction. But there is another way.

The Pathway of Wisdom

What is the biblical concept of wisdom? A wise person knows how God has made the world to work and skillfully shapes his life to go with (not

against) the grain of God's creation.¹³ Proverbs views wisdom as skill in relationships—living in right relationship with the realities of God's good and orderly, but fallen and chaotic universe.¹⁴ This includes properly relating to God, other people, the created world, and one's self.

Of course, thriving in these relationships doesn't happen overnight. The pathway of wisdom is walked, not sprinted. So it shouldn't be a surprise that the process of learning God's ways in his orderly world has a definite beginning, a desired ending, and many steps in between. Thankfully, God has described these stages for us. Proverbs 2:1–10, one of the most orderly and structured passages in the entire book, maps out this march toward wisdom.

1. Accept the Wisdom You Have (2:1–2)

According to Proverbs 2, the naïve or untrained person must first willingly receive the wisdom of his instructors (parents, teachers, etc.). Notice how in these first two verses, he simply welcomes wisdom from others: “accept,” “store up,” “make your ear attentive,” “apply your heart toward understanding.”

This first phase implies active teaching by the mentor and active listening by the learner. If you are a parent, don't forget that God has already provided your child with his first building block to be wise: you! This requires that you must be wise yourself—knowing and living in harmony with God's created and moral order. And to then impart this wisdom to your child, you must talk, talk, talk, teach, teach, teach. The next generation takes their first steps on the road toward wisdom by accepting the wise instruction of others.

2. Seek the Wisdom You Lack (2:3–4)

According to Solomon, the next piece of wise instruction a child must accept is this: “Start seeking wisdom yourself.” Those who accept the wisdom of others should not become content to be spoon-fed by others. They must also start praying that God would give them the wisdom they don't yet have. This kind of prayer plays a vital role in the treasure hunt for wisdom, whose value exceeds gold or silver (Proverbs 3:14).

As a parent, you should encourage your child to ask God for the skill needed to make wise choices. You can also provide a model of asking by

praying with your child for the wisdom he or she needs. If someone lacks wisdom, he should expectantly ask God to meet that need (James 1:5). For he is the Source of true wisdom, and he generously gives wisdom to those who seek it.

3. Gain the Wisdom You Need (2:5–8)

The next two verses lay out the next step toward wisdom. What is sought and requested in Proverbs 2:3–4, is found in 2:5–6 and enjoyed in 2:7–8. When the Lord hears requests for wisdom, he answers by giving the elements required to get wisdom. He gives “the fear of the LORD,” which is the prerequisite for living wisely, and he also begins to give out some beginner’s skills in wise living (2:5–6).

A child living in the “fear of the LORD” begins to factor the reality of God into his own perceptions of life. His eyes start to open to a new reality of life: God himself. Alongside the fear of God, also comes some initial wisdom from God. And any who gain this wisdom will begin to benefit from this wisdom (2:7–8).¹⁵

4. Internalize the Wisdom You Know (2:9–10)

Retracing the flow of thought begun in Proverbs 2:1, the first step away from folly requires simply accepting the wisdom of others (Proverbs 2:1–2). The next step starts one’s own personal quest to seek wisdom from God (2:3–4). The third step (2:5–8) gains the ingredients required for wisdom: the fear of the LORD and wise teaching from his mouth. And now the fourth step goes even further.

Proverbs 2:9 says that after you’ve received God’s wisdom, you will understand “every good track [or path].” The reason for such comprehensive and mature insight is that wisdom has now come to reside deep inside you, in your heart. And this internalized wisdom not only guides but also changes you, so that you actually enjoy God’s wise ways (2:10).

In the first three steps outlined in Proverbs 2:1–8, wisdom mainly exists outside the learner or child: in the wisdom of teachers, parents, or even God himself. But a child reaches the height of wisdom when the skill learned from others actually becomes her own. A wise person is not one who has merely mastered wisdom, but who has been mastered by it.

Wisdom, then, is not just gaining familiarity with a list of proverbs but internalizing a versatile approach to life. Situations will arise in life that Proverbs never addresses. In these cases, the book of Proverbs serves as a starter kit, teaching a worldview that can adapt skillfully to new and unfamiliar challenges. You begin learning Proverbs like reading a map, exploring each square foot of its 915 verses. Yet, as you internalize its wisdom, the map becomes a compass, enabling you to navigate any terrain you encounter.¹⁶

Or to switch the metaphor, any orator may learn to speak by looking at the words on the teleprompter, but a skilled public speaker sees the words and looks through the teleprompter adapting to the audience before him. Similarly, our view of Proverbs changes as Proverbs changes us. The more you see the ways of God's world in it, the more you may see his world through it.¹⁷

This means that God intends that you not only learn the wisdom found in Proverbs, but also build on it by making your own observations. A friend of mine often expresses this truth with the helpful reminder: "Read your environment." Wise people learn to live skillfully despite the ever-changing situations encountered. That's why there is space in the "Reflections" sections throughout this journal where you can add your own words of wisdom.

RESULTS

Finally, the worldview of Proverbs includes the consequences of choices. Because we live in God's wisely ordered universe, the destinations of our path—the results of our choices—are somewhat predictable.

Like a reliable map, Proverbs lays out the connections, which in a God-ordered universe, exist between pathways and destinations, between choices and consequences. If you follow the map of wisdom, your wise choices usually lead to good results, while foolish choices typically lead to bad results. Deeds lead to destiny. Or you could say it this way: If you do good? You'll get good. Do evil? Get evil. Not uncommonly these outcomes are described in terms of either "life" (Proverbs 3:2, 16, 18,

22; 4:13, etc.) or “death” (2:18; 5:5; 8:36; 14:12; 16:25; etc.). Wise living, according to Proverbs, leads to life and blessing, while folly leads to death and disaster.¹⁸

Of course, Proverbs itself teaches that this kind of formulaic construction isn’t the entire story. Each individual proverb presents only part of God’s reality for this world, not its entirety. For example, in some cases the righteous experience poverty (Proverbs 15:16); while other scenarios find righteousness rewarded with prosperity (12:27).

Yet more than this, the Bible as a whole teaches that there are exceptions to the deed-destiny connections mapped out in Proverbs: uncharted areas beyond the ability of human beings to comprehend or predict. The Bible acknowledges that on this fallen planet, sometimes choices and results seem connected unjustly (cf. the book of Job) and sometimes choices and results seem related nonsensically (cf. the book of Ecclesiastes). These two books are the wild, wild west of God’s Word. They don’t present the neat and tidy, cause-and-effect patterns of God’s moral universe, which are so often affirmed throughout the book of Proverbs. Job and Ecclesiastes (and the life of Christ) show us that there is more to God’s plans than neat and tidy outcomes. You have probably experienced that in your life as well. But that doesn’t take away from the wisdom to be found in Proverbs. God’s world usually follows a pattern where wise choices result in blessing for those who make them.¹⁹ And, of course, the most amazing blessing is found in Christ (Ephesians 1:3): becoming a child of God, following the Savior, and bearing the fruit of his Spirit.

Given the realities of Job and Ecclesiastes, we shouldn’t interpret Proverbs as if it were making unwavering guarantees about the assured outcomes of your choices in every situation. As one specific example, consider Proverbs 22:6. When it says, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (KJV), don’t take this cause-and-effect statement as an ironclad promise with no exceptions ever. Sometimes good parenting results in good kids, but not always. Sometimes, the best parents have the worst kids. The problem with the dependability of this verse isn’t with God’s Word; it’s with this fallen world. In Proverbs certain stated results are generally true, but not always true.²⁰

Also, when we don't enjoy the expected benefits of wise living, these disappointing outcomes remind us that God uses more than mere reward to shape our lives to be more like Christ. Our Father's aim for his children goes beyond helping them escape poverty or illness. The Lord may wield the tool of blessing with his right hand and suffering with his left, but for the Christian both become the Great Physician's scalpel removing evil and promoting holiness and love.

When you read Proverbs, you are viewing reality through a God-given lens or worldview. For human beings, all of whom are born wrongly related to God, others, the world, and even themselves, the worldview of Proverbs throws open windows to see the way the universe truly is. But in the roughly 3,000 years since these proverbs were written, who has been able to fully absorb and apply its wisdom? How can someone possibly enter into a wise and proper relationship with God, his world, and its inhabitants?

The Climax of Proverbs

EXEMPLARY WISDOM

Every person who's ever lived knows something of the struggle that would be required for a consistent lifetime of wise thinking, wise living, and wise speaking. Ever since Adam and Eve rebelled against God (Genesis 3), no member of the human race has ever fully and rightly been related to God, others, this world, and his or her own person.

Except one. Jesus Christ personally embodied the fullest expression of wise living. Even as a child, he modeled true wisdom (Luke 2:40, 52), demonstrating proper priorities in the face of competing relationships (Luke 2:41–51). In his years of maturity and ministry, his actions continued to exude wisdom (Luke 11:29–32).

Jesus also wisely taught God's wisdom. When he spoke, people heard nothing less than the Father's own wisdom (cf. Luke 11:49; Matthew 23:34ff). His teaching, including his many parables (the Old Testament Hebrew word for "proverb" is commonly translated "parable" in the

Greek Old Testament), often resembles the wisdom literature of the Old Testament.²¹ Jesus is the high-water mark of all such biblical wisdom (Matthew 11:13–19; 12:42). And all those who build their lives on his instruction, are found to be men and women of wisdom (Matthew 7:24ff). If ever someone fit the description, “Do good? Get good,” it was Jesus. His wisdom-saturated life rightly earned life and blessing.

However, when you compare his life with his death, Jesus’s crucifixion shouts the outrageous conclusion: “Do good? Get evil.” Yet under the cloak of this seeming madness, Jesus’s unjust death actually radiates God’s brilliant wisdom (Romans 11:30). To all human appearances his death signified weakness, folly, and failure, but in actuality the cross of Christ was nothing less than “the power of God and the wisdom of God” in accomplishing God’s plan of salvation graciously given to sinners (1 Corinthians 1:18–24).²²

GENEROUS WISDOM

Everything Jesus did, he did in wisdom. Despite hardship, opposition, and betrayal during his life and ministry, Jesus always rightly related to God, others, the world, and himself. Therefore, he duly earned the reward of wise living: life and blessing (Proverbs 8:35). And this blessing does not just belong to him, but also to all those who are united to him by faith (Colossians 2:9–12). For all who are *in him*, Jesus Christ has become “to us wisdom from God” (1 Corinthians 1:30). That is, all Christians have now been decisively set into a right relationship with God, Christ having forever delivered them from the destroyer of that relationship: the penalty, the power, and (one day) even the presence of sin (1 Corinthians 1:30).²³

This wisdom, which Christ has generously given to his people, entails that the blessing of God comes to us because of grace, not through our own efforts. Since no sinner could ever have lived in perfect wisdom, Christ’s wisdom has now reversed the sequence of blessing for his people. In Christ, wisdom ultimately no longer follows the pattern: “Do good? Get good.” For the believer, the order is now: “Get good? (from Christ) Do good” (for Christ).²⁴

This means that as we are now rightly related to Christ (who is perfectly related to the Father), we too are enabled by the Holy Spirit to rightly relate to the Father, and through him, to everything and everyone else.²⁵ Through Christ and the Spirit, believers may now, more than ever, properly relate to God, other people, and this universe, even as we face difficulties and pain in this fallen world.²⁶

Consequently, wise living should characterize the Christian's way (Colossians 4:5), for the storehouse of God's wisdom is located in the Lord Jesus Christ himself (Colossians 2:3). And from this bountiful treasury, believers may make regular, Spirit-enabled withdrawals as situations arise—both by asking for gifts of wisdom (James 1:5–6) and also by exercising God-given discernment of mind (2 Timothy 2:7; Ephesians 5:10).²⁷

And while this God-given wisdom will often bring blessing from God, these rewards aren't our deepest motivation. Nor do the promises of blessing exempt Christians from suffering and sacrifice for others. If Jesus embodied wisdom and still embraced suffering in his life and death, should we expect any less? For the Christian, living in wisdom isn't just the better calculation, the smooth road to prosperity. The path of understanding may be lined with roses but always leads to a cross.

For at this place of death, true wisdom came to full bloom in the person of Christ. And because of his life and death, he stands as our ultimate Example and Source of wisdom. Jesus modeled perfect wisdom, rightly relating to God and everything else. And now he has graciously passed on to his people, that same wisdom.

Thus, as the believing men and women of one generation have generously received the wisdom from God, so they must preserve this treasure for the next generation—and pass it on.



Proverbs One

Guided Tour

The first chapter begins by explaining the purpose of the entire book: to impart the wisdom (with its benefits) which springs from a healthy “fear of the LORD” (1:1–7). After this overarching introduction to the entire book, chapter 1 divides into two further sections: the first of many father-son talks (1:8–19); and the first place “Wisdom” actually speaks, as if a real person: Lady Wisdom (1:20–33). Here are some things to look for while you read. The first seven verses unpack the purpose of Proverbs in terms of what is learned (1:2–3), who may benefit (1:4–5), how it is communicated (1:6), and where to start (1:7). In 1:8–19, two opposing characters simultaneously demand your attention. To whose words will you listen—the wise words of a father or the foolish words of bad “friends”? Then in 1:20–33, wisdom, now personified as a Lady, calls out, summoning people to listen to her counsel. Notice the generous benefits awaiting those who listen to Lady Wisdom and the altogether different consequences for those who refuse her.

AT-A-GLANCE

1:1–7	The Purpose of Proverbs
1:8–19	Words of a Wise Father: Don’t follow the crowd
1:20–33	The Invitation of Lady Wisdom

¹The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

² to know wisdom and instruction,
to understand words of insight;

³ to accept instruction in prudent behavior,
[to do] what is right, and just, and fair;

⁴ to give to the gullible shrewdness,
to the young, knowledge and discretion—

⁵ let the wise hear and add to their learning,
and let the insightful acquire guidance—

- ⁶ to understand a proverb, namely, a parable,
the sayings of the wise, namely, their riddles.
- ⁷ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.
- ⁸ Listen, my son, to your father's instruction,
and do not let go of your mother's teaching,
⁹ for they are an attractive garland for your head,
and a necklace for your throat.
- ¹⁰ My son, if sinful men tempt you, do not yield.
- ¹¹ If they say, "Come with us;
let's set an ambush for blood,
let's lie in wait for the innocent with no reason at all;
¹² let's swallow them alive, like Sheol,
even whole, like those who go down to the Pit.
¹³ all kinds of precious wealth we will find,
we will fill our houses with plunder;
¹⁴ cast lots with us, all of us will divide up one purse" —
¹⁵ do not go on the way with them,
withhold your foot from their byway,
¹⁶ for their feet rush into evil,
and they hasten to shed blood.
- ¹⁷ Surely a net is spread out in vain
in the sight of any creature that flies,
¹⁸ but they set an ambush for their own blood;
they lie in wait for their own lives.
- ¹⁹ Such are the paths of everyone who is greedy for gain;
it takes away the life of the one who gets it.
- ²⁰ Wisdom cries aloud in the street,
in the public squares she raises her voice;
²¹ on the highest walls she calls out,
at the entrance of the gates to the city she makes her speech:
²² "How long, you gullible, will you love being gullible" —
and mockers delight themselves with mocking,
and fools hate knowledge?
- ²³ Turn back, [you gullible young people], to my rebuke;
then I will pour forth my thoughts to you,
I will make known to you my sayings.
- ²⁴ [But] since I cry out, and you refuse [to listen],

and when I stretch out my hand, none gives heed,
²⁵ and you flout all my counsel,
and to my rebuke you do not consent,
²⁶ I in turn will laugh when your disaster happens,
I will scoff when your calamity comes—
²⁷ when your calamity comes like a storm,
and like a whirlwind your disaster arrives,
when distress and anguish come upon you.
²⁸ Then they will call out to me, but I will not answer;
they will look diligently for me but will not find me,
²⁹ because they hated knowledge,
and the fear of the LORD they did not choose.
³⁰ They did not consent to my advice,
they spurned my every rebuke,
³¹ so they will eat from the fruit of their way,
and from their schemes they will be filled.
³² Surely the turning away of the gullible will kill them,
and the complacency of fools will destroy them;
³³ but the one who obeys will dwell in security,
even at ease, without fear of harm.”



Reflections

IDENTIFYING A VERSE

Write out the one verse that stood out to you from this chapter.

Why did it stand out to you?

GOING DEEPER

According to Proverbs 1:7; 29, and the comments from “A Bird’s-Eye View” (page 9), how would you describe what it means for someone to live in the “fear of the LORD”?

Over the course of your life, what person, thing, or experience (other than God) takes up most of your time, attention, and thoughts? (It may be what you most often think about, desire strongly, or fear to lose.)

What kinds of foolish (according to Proverbs’ definition of “the fool”) and deceitful lies might this “person, thing, or experience” tempt you to believe was true?

In your experience, describe how these lies have affected you in your life? What has helped you to see them as lies?

CONNECTING THE GOSPEL

Read Proverbs 1:7. When our fear of the LORD and even our wisest decisions are inadequate and weak, how does Isaiah 11:1–3 provide assurance and comfort by pointing to Christ our substitute?

PERSONALIZING A PRAYER

Write out a prayer for yourself and for _____ (fill in the name of the journal's recipient), using Proverbs 1. If you would like, use the pattern below or simply reword verses in Proverbs 1 into a prayer of help and thankfulness to God.

The Person (What do you learn about God in that chapter of Proverbs that helps shape your prayer? E.g., “Father, you are full of wisdom . . .”)

The Petition (Based on something from Proverbs, what is a prayer request you're making for the final owner of this journal?)

The Purpose (Using some desirable outcome expressed in Proverbs, what are you hoping that your request may accomplish?)

The Plea (All Christian prayer is offered “in Jesus’ name”: on the basis of Christ’s merits, not our own.)²⁸

SHARING YOUR STORY

Write out the most important piece of advice you have received in your life (see Proverbs 1:8).

Who gave you that advice?

Why has it proved to be so important?

In what ways do you see _____ already living out the advice you just gave?
