

WISDOM  
FOR  
LIVING WELL  
WITH  
OTHERS

Levy Church of Christ  
Adult Studies, Fall 2019

## Table of Contents

Proverbs 1:1-33  
Wisdom's Call to Security and Safety, pg. 3

Proverbs 6:6-19  
The Ant, the Worthless, and Seven Abominations,  
pg. 5

Proverbs 10:1-12  
The First Dozen Proverb, pg. 8

Proverbs 11:20-31  
There was a Crooked Man, pg. 10

Proverbs 14:20-35  
Money and Community Matters, pg. 12

Proverbs 16:1-19  
Making Plans & Delighting Leaders, pg. 14

Proverbs 16:20-33  
Watch Your Words, pg. 17

Proverbs 23:19-35  
Drink the Wine of Wisdom, pg. 20

Proverbs 25:11-20  
Wisdom Word Pictures, pg. 23

## Proverbs 1:1-33

### Wisdom's Call to Security and Safety

To live with a sense of security is an attractive prospect for life and eternity. Wisdom call us to live in fearless confidence personally and in community. Note that verse 33, the last verse in chapter one, says it is possible to “dwell secure and...be at ease, without dread of disaster.” Chapter one reveals four steps to present and future security.

#### Step 1

vs. 7 “The fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of knowledge.” There will be no security in life or eternity without this first, essential step.

#### Step 2

vs. 8-9 “Hear, my child, your father’s instruction and forsake not your mother’s teaching.” Listen to the people who love us and who only want what is good for us. Their counsel will be wise.

Step 3

vs. 10-19 “If sinners entice you, do not consent.” The warning is to avoid the evil companions who would corrupt good morals.

Step 4

vs. 20-33 “Wisdom cries aloud (vs. 20) ...whoever listens to me will dwell secure” (vs. 33). This step has us listening to divine wisdom. The most frightening statement about step four is that if we ignore the call of wisdom long enough, she may cease calling. At that point, we are bound for the disaster, “Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord” (vs. 29; cf. 1:7).

For discussion and additional enlightenment:

What is the function/goal of Proverbs? See 1:1-6.

What is “fear of the Lord?”

Who in your life has helped steer you from disaster or guided you well with advice?

How do 1 Cor. 15:33 and James 4:7-8 relate to Prov. 1?

Proverbs 6:6-19  
The Ant, the Worthless, and  
Seven Abominations

Proverbs 6:6-11

Industry and a good work ethic are upheld in many of the biblical proverbs, often contrasted with the lazy and the sluggard. See 10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30-34; 26:13-16.

Proverbs 6:12-15

Some people are consumed with evil. In this description of a worthless, wicked person note references to the tongue (crooked speech), winking eye, shifty feet, pointing fingers, and perverted heart. The wise will learn to recognize and avoid such a person.

### Proverbs 6:16-19

\*Six, no seven things the Lord hates (notice body parts – here and in the previous section):

Haughty eyes - pride

A lying tongue - dishonesty

Hands that shed innocent blood – violence

Hearts that devise wicked plans-Micah 2:1

Feet that run to evil – Prov. 1:16

The false witness – Ex. 20:16

The sower of discord – Rom. 16:17-18

*\*When we read across Proverbs, we find numerical sayings of “x, x+1” and it seems so strange to us. Indeed, as Westerners, it is strange, but like everything in Scripture, there are reasons for it. Unfortunately, most of the meaning of this one is lost to antiquity. In the time of the writing of Proverbs, this type of expression was common—in all wisdom literature both inside and outside of the Bible. One thing commentators and scholars are fairly certain of is this: the final item listed (the “+1”) functions as the apex of the expression.*

*What are the things the Lord hates? Six things are listed that roll up into one grand expression: “a person who stirs up conflict in the community.” This is the pinnacle of what the Lords hates: divisiveness.*

*Joel Dorman on [Life Meets Theology](#) blog*

For discussion and additional enlightenment:

Given our recent church study/discussion of justice issues for the poor, what disclaimers might be appropriate for blaming poverty on laziness?

What lessons from animals are addressed in Prov. 30:24-31?

Can someone be morally or spiritually broken beyond healing?

What does it mean to say that God “hates” a thing?

## Proverbs 10:1-12

### The First Dozen Proverbs

Read and discuss each of the proverbs in 10:1-12. Note the subjects these early proverbs address.

1. Wise homes
2. Work Ethic: Honesty
3. Hunger & Fulfillment
4. Work Ethic: Diligence
5. Work Ethic: Early & Often
6. Two Paths: Righteous vs. Wicked
7. Righteous vs. Wicked: Leaving a Legacy
8. Wise vs. Foolish: Listening vs. Talking
9. Integrity vs. Crookedness
10. The Tongue: Deceit
11. The Tongue: Righteous vs. Wicked
12. Hatred vs. Love



For discussion and additional enlightenment:

What are some reoccurring subjects among these first twelve proverbs?

How is righteousness connected to wisdom and wickedness connected to foolishness?

Do the subjects addressed in these first twelve proverbs have current relevance?

Which lessons need to be heard and applied the most?

How are these proverbs beneficially applied personally, in family, and in community?

Is there significance to these proverbs/subjects being mentioned first or are they just random?

Proverbs 11:20-31  
There was a Crooked Man

Vs. 20, His crooked heart is an abomination to the Lord.

Vs. 21, He will not go unpunished.

Vs. 22, Females can be crooked, too.

Vs. 23, His crooked path ends at wrath.

Vs. 24, He hoards his crooked gain, but still suffers want.

Vs. 25, In his crooked selfishness he misses out on the benefits of sharing.

Vs. 26, He is disliked in his community for his crooked business reputation and practices.

Vs. 27, In his crooked thinking he can never understand why he finds no favor with man or God.

Vs. 28, Without a friend in the world and apart from God, he has only his riches to trust, and they will fail him.

Vs. 29, His crooked ways make him a failure at home, so he ends up with no one and nothing.

Vs. 30, The righteous, wisely walking the straight path, enjoy all the wonderful fruit of life, but...

Vs. 31, As surely as the wise are rewarded for their generosity, kindness, and goodness, the crooked man is rewarded in kind for his crooked ways.

For discussion and additional enlightenment:

How do verses 20 and 31 serve as bookends that make these verses in Proverbs a somewhat cohesive section?

Review these verses for a positive descriptions of the one in whom the Lord delights.

Count the references to agriculture in this run of verses. Why are they there?

In the context of Proverbs, what does it mean to “win souls?” (vs. 30).

## Proverbs 14:20-35

### Money and Community Matters

Sometimes Proverbs do not make a judgment – just an observation. How does verse 20 do that?

We may have the impression that the Bible takes a dim view of money and those who have money. How do verses 20-24 bring some balance to that impression?

When is wealth a blessing (vs. 21) and a crown (vs. 24)?

The “fear of the Lord” is a major theme in Proverbs (see 1:7). How is living in the fear of the Lord a benefit as observed in verses 26 and 27?

How are the proverbs about truth (vs. 25), generosity to the poor (vs. 31), and righteousness (vs. 34) applied to a community context?

How does one control anger (v. 29)? Envy (30)? Why is it wise to learn to control them and what virtues replace them?

How does our path of life change the perspective on the end of life? (vs. 32).

What does verse 28 reveal about the relationship between leaders and followers? If we see this verse in the real life context of Solomon and his sons, how did this nugget of wisdom play out in the king/princes/ people dynamic of their day? See 1 Kings 12.

The NIV Study Bible says this about Proverbs: “Acquiring wisdom and knowing how to avoid the pitfalls of folly lead to 1)personal well-being, 2)happy family relationships, 3)fruitful labors and 4)good standing in the community.” How are each of those four goals addressed in this section of Proverbs?

## Proverbs 16:1-19

### Making Plans and Delighting Leaders

#### 16:1-9, Control versus Trust

Multiple times, this section observes that while humans like to lay plans in order to control outcomes, the Lord claims sovereignty over both the path taken and the eventual outcome. That basic message is related in several sayings, but there is also a distinctive nuance to each proverb that relates to that subject.

Verse one and verse nine, with slightly different wording, state that we make plans in our hearts, but the actual execution of those plans is in the hands of the Lord. All is subject to the will of the Lord. See James 4:13-15.

Between verses one and nine, the sovereignty of the Lord is acknowledged in some special circumstances.

Vs. 2 – The Lord is considering more than our plans and actions. Our intentions and motives carry great weight. See Hebrews 4:12.

Vs. 3 – The Lord desires to be included in the planning process as we “inquire of the Lord.” See David’s success in 1 Sam. 23:1-5 and Ahaz’s failure in Isaiah 7:10-17. See also Colossians 3:17.

Vs. 4 – Even those who are wicked and rebellious can be used by the Lord in their hardheartedness to accomplish the Lord’s purposes. This is the lesson of Pharaoh as explained in Romans 9:16ff. Proverbs 16:5-6 goes on to say that the proud will held in abomination by the Lord, but those who live in love, faith, and fear of the Lord will find honor in God’s sight.

Vs. 7 – When the primary objective of our plans and choices is to please God, we will find peace in even adverse circumstances.

#### 16:10-15, Kings Rule

One purpose of the collection of wisdom sayings that make up the book of Proverbs was to educate Israel’s leadership. When Solomon became king, he famously was blessed with great wisdom. (1 Kings 3:3-15). The book of Proverbs passed that wisdom on to succeeding leadership.

Leaders from all contexts and generations can benefit from Solomon's advice about leadership.

Vs. 10 – A leader's word carries much weight and consequence. Therefore, he must be careful and just with his words.

Vs. 12 – All authority emanates from the Lord (Rom. 13:1). Therefore, all in leadership should honor the Lord's character.

Vs. 13 – A leader relies on information and input he receives from those who serve under him. Therefore, a good leader is best served by those who speak truthfully.

Vs. 15 – A happy leader sets the tone for a happy atmosphere enjoyed by all.

#### 16:16-19, Better things

In Solomon's previously mentioned prayer request, he considered wisdom *better* than riches. That was a great beginning, but one must always guard against temptation and beware of pride, or leaders can lose their way, leading followers astray. It is *better* to be among the lowly than among the proud.



## Proverbs 16:20-33

### Watch Your Words

The book of Proverbs is full of sayings about the tongue and our choice of words. This section is especially rich in proverbs on that subject.

The first step to good speech is good listening, especially to the words of the Lord (16:20).

For definition and discussion, here are some positive descriptive words and phrases from 16:21-24 (ESV and NIV) for those who are wise in speech:

Discerning

Sweetness of speech, pleasant

Persuasive, promotes instruction

Fountain of Life

Judicious, a mouth guided by wisdom

Gracious

Sweet to the soul

Health to the body, healing to the bones

Likewise, here are some negative, descriptive phrases from 16:27-30:

Scorching fire

Whisperer

Entices

Winks

Dishonest

Purses his lips

How do these words and phrases relate to wise or foolish conversation?

As occurs in Proverbs, there are some proverbs of note in this section that seem randomly placed. However, we might also note some connective tissue.

Verse 25 connects to verse 20. We need to be listeners to the word of the Lord because we sometimes have the wrong idea about what is good and bad.

Verse 26 is not about speech, but it does involve the mouth. Hunger can be a good thing, because it motivates us to work in order to put food in our mouths.

Verse 31 praises those who in experience and age have discerned and found the good.

Verse 32 speaks of being slow to anger. When angry we tend to mouth off. We yell and say destructive things. This proverb reminds us that strength is evident when we can control our behavior, especially the tongue. (See James 3:8).

Verse 33 - “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.” This last verse of chapter 16 echoes and serves as a bookend with 16:1.

Given the “Watch Your Words” title for this section of Proverbs here is a suggestion for a study on speaking with wisdom. Begin with chapter 10 of Proverbs. Read each chapter to note the proverbs that concern our choice of words, tone, and the power of speech. You will find at least one verse, and frequently multiple verses in each chapter, offering guidance on how to watch our words.

## Proverbs 23:19-35

### Drink the Wine of Wisdom

*All of Proverbs 23 is a warning about gorging and gluttony whether the thing being consumed is food (vs. 1-2), riches (vs. 4-5), or land (vs. 10-11). Then, beginning in verse 19, a heartfelt appeal is made, as from a loving parent to a child, to not gorge or be a glutton of wine and strong drink. "Listen my child and be wise."*

People who love us want us to stay on a right path (vs. 19). Therefore, they genuinely warn us away from people and practices that portend trouble.

Vs. 20-21: The appeal from the wise person to those who would be wise is to stay away from the drunken party, with its excessive consuming of wine and food. The wise person has been observant of multiple stories of fortunes, families, and futures destroyed by alcohol and drugs.

Vs. 22-25, This passage is a strong parental appeal for a child to live a sober life. An appeal to love and respect for parents, along

with an appeal to the virtues of truth, wisdom, discipline, and understanding beg the loved one to heed this warning. Parents make a very personal appeal to be able to have joy and gladness in the blessing of right behavior by the children they brought into the world.

Proverbs is full of positive encouragements toward good things, warnings against wicked things, proddings toward wisdom, nudges away from foolishness, praise for all that is right, and reproof of all that is unhealthy for the body, the soul and the community. Yet, there are no stronger, loving, personal appeals than this appeal against excessive drink recorded in this passage and in the mother's cry of Proverbs 31:4-7. Nor do the wise wax more poetic than in this appeal to stay away from the danger of alcohol.

*Who has woe? Who has sorrow?*

*Who has strife? Who has complaining?*

*Who has wounds without cause?*

*Who has bloodshot eyes?*

*Those who linger over wine, who go to  
sample mixed wine.*

*Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it*

*sparkles in the cup, when it goes down  
smoothly!*

*In the end it bites like a snake and poisons  
like a viper.*

*Your eyes will see strange sights and your  
mind imagine confusing things.*

*You will be like one sleeping on the high  
seas, lying on top of the rigging.*

*“They hit me,” you will say, “but I am not  
hurt!” They beat me, but I don’t feel it!*

*When will I wake so I can find another  
drink?”*

Those last lines about the hallucinations, sickly imbalance, and bruising black outs brought on by excessive drinking, yet with a desire to do it again illustrate the words of another Proverb, “Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise.” (20:1).

Note: Psalm 104:14-15, John 2:1-11, and 1Timothy 5:23 may have other perspectives on wine. Even so, whenever a defense of wine is made, the dangers of alcohol should not be neglected.

## Proverbs 25:11-20

### Word Pictures

A *simile* is a word picture that uses comparison to show similarities between two different things. In the word picture, likenesses between the two things are emphasized; that is, how one thing is “like” another. Proverbs 25:11-20 contains series of similes.

Vs. 11: The right word spoken in the right way at the right time brings beauty to that place, like a still life painting, framed and placed on a wall adds beauty to a room.

Vs. 12: We may not like to a reproof, but a word of loving correction in our ear is a valuable thing, like a golden earring.

Vs. 13: Receiving a good message from someone we trust is refreshing, like the first snow of winter.

Vs. 14: Some people brag when they have nothing to brag about, like a cloud that blows over but does not rain.

Verses 15-17 drop the simile form, but still draw word pictures.

Picture a soft tongue breaking a bone. In that way, patience, tactful, diplomatic words are useful in persuasion.

Picture getting sick on eating too much honey, and learn that too much of even a good thing can be bad for us.

Picture being so full of something good you ate that you feel sick. Now picture how your neighbor feels when you have worn out your welcome.

Verse 18-20 return to the simile form.

Vs. 18: Spreading a vicious lie about your neighbor wounds them like attacking with a war weapon.

Vs. 19: When we rely on unreliable people, it is like taking a step with a lame foot that may collapse.

Vs. 20: Pay attention to other's circumstances, because singing a song to the sorrowful is like putting vinegar and soda together, or taking someone's coat away on a cold day.

Note, as often occurs, the final proverb in a



given section is very similar to the first proverb in that section. With verse 20, remember the fitting, appropriate words called for in verse 11.

### Appendix: An Introduction to Proverbs

When you turn to the book of Proverbs and read the opening line, “The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel” (1:1), you expect to start reading proverbs—short, clever sayings that pack a punch and offer you some kind of wisdom on the good life. But, that’s not what you get. Instead, you get ten long, cohesive speeches from a father to a son interwoven with four poems from “Lady Wisdom” to humanity. It’s not until chapter 10, when the heading is repeated, that you begin reading the proverbs themselves.

This structure feels a little odd. Why does the collection of “the proverbs of Solomon” begin with an elaborate introduction (nine chapters!) that is fundamentally different from the rest of the book? What’s going on here?

To understand Proverbs 1-9 and how it sets you up for reading the rest of the book, we need to first consider the basis of religious authority in wisdom literature. It’s intriguingly different from other parts of the Bible. Proverbs exist in almost all human cultures, and they are typically passed down to us from previous generations. By definition, proverbs come from wise, thoughtful

people who have condensed their observations on life into short, clever sayings that ring true to our own life experience. Many people have paid attention to how life works and the patterns of cause and effect that flow from our daily decisions. In this sense, proverbs come from our elders, from previous generations who are passing on their wisdom. So, simply put, proverbs have a generational authority of human wisdom based on human observations. And, a whole book of the Bible is made up of this kind of wisdom.

This feels different from the Torah or the books of the prophets. The law, given by Moses on Mount Sinai, is God's revealed will for Israel. This is where you get the "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" commandments, that come directly from God. It's a divine, covenantal authority. The prophets also speak with this kind of authority. But, rather than giving commandments written by God's hand, they communicate the words, thoughts, and purposes of God in a "thus says the Lord" manner, a common phrase in prophetic literature. The point is, it's clear that both the law and the prophets derive their religious authority from God.

In comparison, the basis of authority in the wisdom literature is markedly different. Instead of God addressing Israel, you get a dad talking to his son: "Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching" (Prov 1:8). Basically, listen to your mom and dad. Before, God was saying "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" on Mount Sinai, and "thus says the Lord" through Jeremiah or Isaiah. Now, all of the sudden, we have "listen to your parents" through a series of speeches between a father and son. It seems so... human! And, it is! That's the nature of

authority in the Proverbs. It's human wisdom, observations about life from people who are older and wiser shared with the younger generation.

So, if that's the basis for its religious authority, does that mean it's only human wisdom?

No, the book of Proverbs isn't merely human wisdom. It's divine wisdom. Or, to be more precise, through human wisdom God's own wisdom is revealed. This is where that lengthy nine-chapter introduction comes into play. The claim of Proverbs 1-9 is that the wisdom you will read in Proverbs 10-31 isn't merely human wisdom, it's divine. The purpose of these introductory chapters is to help you see that God's words to his people have come through the human words of the elders.

Consider the interweaving of the ten father-son speeches and the four "Lady Wisdom" poems in Proverbs 1-9. First, let's think about the ten speeches from father to son. You can find these in Proverbs 1:8-19, 2:1-22, 3:1-12, 3:21-35, 4:1-9, 4:10-19, 4:20-27, 5:1-23, 6:20-35 and 7:1-27. The ten speeches from father to son all follow the same pattern: (1) exhortation, (2) lesson, and (3) conclusion. The dad exhorts his son to listen to him, to write his commands on his heart, and to do everything in his power not to forsake them. Then, the dad offers a lesson about virtue or wisdom or integrity that he wants his son to know. Finally, there's always a concluding line about how wisdom will keep you safe and give you abundant life. There are ten of these speeches explicitly from the father (sometimes representing both mom and dad), which offer human wisdom.

But, interwoven into the ten speeches of human wisdom from father to son are four poems from "Lady Wisdom,"

who symbolizes the perfect and transcendent universal wisdom (see Prov 1:20-33, 3:13-20, 8:1-36 and 9:1-18). Wisdom, personified as a lady, calls out to all humanity on behalf of God himself, beckoning them to live by and listen to her.

In Proverbs 8 she claims that she is like an eternal principle of the universe because she was the principle by which God wove the moral universe into existence; God used wisdom to architect the physical and moral fabric of creation. Therefore, anytime humans access this wisdom and live by it, they are living by a divine principle or a divine word. Thus, the "Lady Wisdom" poems elevate the human wisdom of the elders to a status of heavenly wisdom, offering you a filter through which to read the rest of the book. It's as if the four "Lady Wisdom" poems are commenting on the father-son speeches saying, "Dear reader, do you realize that when you listen to the wisdom of your elders, you are hearing a transcendent, divine wisdom about how to live in God's good world?"

When you appreciate the interweaving of these two voices (the human voice of the father and the transcendent voice of "Lady Wisdom"), you are primed and ready to read the wisdom of the elders in chapters 10-29 as Scripture. In his book "Proverbs 1-9," Michael Fox rightly states:

We carry this image of Lady Wisdom with us as we enter the proverb collections that hold the wisdom of Solomon and other ancient sages. The image informs us that the sundry, often homely, proverbs of the father-teacher, of Israel's anonymous sages, and even of

Solomon himself, speak with a single voice, and this is Wisdom's own (p. 359).

So Proverbs 1-9 really serves as a prelude to the proverb literature, preparing you to hear the wisdom of the elders as the divine Word. It's important to appreciate this as you read the book, so you know that human wisdom isn't pitted against divine wisdom. Rather, the human word or human wisdom is the vehicle for the divine Word. The two voices we hear in Proverbs 1-9 have been fused together to help us understand that in the observations and sayings of Israel's human elders, we will hear echoes of the divine, transcendental wisdom.

#### Special Thanks

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