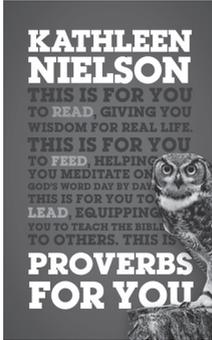




Proverbs

**Real wisdom
for real life**

by Kathleen B. Nielson
and Rachel Jones



Proverbs For You

These studies are adapted from *Proverbs For You*. If you are reading *Proverbs For You* alongside this Good Book Guide, here is how the studies in this booklet link to the chapters of *Proverbs For You*:

Study One → Ch 1	Study Five → Ch 7
Study Two → Ch 2-3	Study Six → Ch 10
Study Three → Ch 4	Study Seven → Ch 12
Study Four → Ch 5	Study Eight → Ch 13

Find out more about *Proverbs For You* at:
www.thegoodbook.com/for-you

Real wisdom for real life

The Good Book Guide to Proverbs

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Introduction: Good Book Guides

Every Bible-study group is different—yours may take place in a church building, in a home or in a cafe, on a train, over a leisurely mid-morning coffee or squashed into a 30-minute lunch break. Your group may include new Christians, mature Christians, non-Christians, moms and tots, students, businessmen or teens. That’s why we’ve designed these *Good Book Guides* to be flexible for use in many different situations.

Our aim in each session is to uncover the meaning of a passage, and see how it fits into the “big picture” of the Bible. But that can never be the end. We also need to appropriately apply what we have discovered to our lives. Let’s take a look at what is included:

- ↔ **Talkabout:** Most groups need to “break the ice” at the beginning of a session, and here’s the question that will do that. It’s designed to get people talking around a subject that will be covered in the course of the Bible study.
- ↓ **Investigate:** The Bible text for each session is broken up into manageable chunks, with questions that aim to help you understand what the passage is about. The **Leader’s Guide** contains **guidance for questions**, and sometimes ☑ additional “follow-up” questions.
- ⋮ **Explore more (optional):** These questions will help you connect what you have learned to other parts of the Bible, so you can begin to fit it all together like a jig-saw; or occasionally look at a part of the passage that’s not dealt with in detail in the main study.
- **Apply:** As you go through a Bible study, you’ll keep coming across **apply** sections. These are questions to get the group discussing what the Bible teaching means in practice for you and your church. ☑ **Getting personal** is an opportunity for you to think, plan and pray about the changes that you personally may need to make as a result of what you have learned.
- ↑ **Pray:** We want to encourage prayer that is rooted in God’s word—in line with his concerns, purposes and promises. So each session ends with an opportunity to review the truths and challenges highlighted by the Bible study, and turn them into prayers of request and thanksgiving.

The **Leader’s Guide** and introduction provide historical background information, explanations of the Bible texts for each session, ideas for **optional extra** activities, and guidance on how best to help people uncover the truths of God’s word.

Why study Proverbs?

Human beings are and always have been in need of wisdom. Wisdom helps us make decisions about what work to do; what to say (or not say); what person to marry (or avoid). Wisdom points us to habits that tend to make life smoother and happier. Wisdom gives shape and meaning to our cries of both suffering and delight. In general, wisdom offers insight into the concrete experiences of human life. That's the commonly understood sense of wisdom.

But Proverbs offers God-breathed wisdom. This wisdom is utterly recognizable in that (like popular wisdom) it offers insight into the concrete experiences of human life. But it's also utterly different because it offers godly insight into the concrete experiences of human life in a world created and ruled by the Lord God of the Scriptures.

Proverbs addresses the spectrum of human activities and concerns that make up daily life: from eating and drinking to the way we speak to one another, to family and social relationships, to sex, to business dealings, and on and on. Proverbs calls us to see all the experiences of our lives in relation to the Lord, who created and rules the world, who calls us first to fear him, and who himself shows us how to live wisely.

Rather than taking a more thematic approach, we'll approach the book of Proverbs as God has given it to us—a carefully shaped poetic book that holds together as a piece of literature from beginning to end.

In just eight studies we can only begin to take account of Proverbs' wealth of insights. But let's begin. Let's see how the first nine chapters establish a foundation for all that follows—a foundation that keeps reappearing and even deepening at crucial points in the book. Let's taste the flavors of the various proverb collections built on that foundation, and let's hear the themes develop and wind around one another—kind of as they do in a day of real life! And let's allow these proverbs to point us to the source of wisdom: Jesus Christ, in whom “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3).



BIBLE TIMELINE

Where does the book of Proverbs fit into the whole story of God's word?

KING SOLOMON 970-931BC

The book's introduction notes King Solomon as the author or collector of most of its sayings, although certain sections are attributed to other wise men. 1 Kings 4:29 tells us that "God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure."

1

Proverbs 1:1-7

THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM



talkabout

1. In our culture, what different “voices” offer wisdom on how to live well?

- How do you decide who to listen to?



investigate

Whether it's books on business, podcasts on parenting, or articles on the art of home décor—we humans desperately reach out for wisdom.

Centuries ago, God's people living in the kingdom of Israel also knew this universal need for wisdom. The nations surrounding them—Egypt, Arabia, Babylon, Phoenicia—had their own voices offering insight into the concrete experiences of human life. Proverbs is similar in style and approach to this other wisdom literature, but fundamentally different in its nature and source—as the book's “prologue” (1:1-7) makes clear.



Read Proverbs 1:1

2. Who is the book of Proverbs attributed to? What made his wisdom different from that of the nations around him? (See 1 Kings 4:29.)

- What does verse 1 tell us about where Proverbs fits into the bigger story of God's people in the Old Testament?



explore more

optional

"Wisdom" in Solomon's day was not a new or foreign concept for the Israelites; in fact, wisdom had always been connected to God and to his revealed word.

▶ Read Deuteronomy 4:5-8

Deuteronomy is Moses' sermon to the Israelites as they prepared to enter the promised land (around 450 years before Solomon).

What does Moses say the people need to do in order to be wise?

Why did God intend for the Israelites to be wiser than the nations around them?

Think forward in Bible history through the Old Testament. Did Israel ultimately succeed or fail in this task, do you think?

Think forward in Bible history to the New Testament. How did Jesus fulfill what Israel failed to do?

▶ Read Proverbs 1:2-6

- Verses 2-4 lay out the book's aim. What will Proverbs equip the hearer to do?

- Verse 2

DICTIONARY

Righteousness (v 3): right judgements and actions.

Equity (v 3): fairness.

Prudence (v 4): carefulness.

Discretion (v 4): showing good judgement.



- Verse 3

- Verse 4

4. What do these different ideas tell you about the nature of wisdom?

It's helpful to think of wisdom in this book as a kaleidoscope of patterns. As Proverbs asks us to consider wisdom, it does not present a neat list of truths to learn and affirm. Rather, Proverbs points to wisdom that transforms all of life.

5. What do verses 5-6...

- call us to do?

- promise as a reward?



6. Who is the book's wisdom addressed to (v 4, 5)?



apply

It's thought that this book was originally used for Israel's leaders-in-training. Yet Proverbs' wisdom is continually needed by all of us, young and old, male and female. You are included in the ones who need to stop and listen (v 5)!

7. Proverbs warns against ever thinking we've outgrown the need to seek wisdom. How can we tell if we're in danger of having that attitude?

- What does it look like to continue to stop, listen, and learn as we grow in Christian maturity?



getting personal

Jesus likewise taught that wisdom lies in hearing and doing God's word: "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24). Is there an area of your life where you need to observe this challenge to "hear" and "do" this week?



investigate

- ▶ **Read Proverbs 1:7**

DICTIONARY

LORD (v 6): the personal covenant name for God.

8. What “opposites” does this verse set up?

9. What does it mean to fear the Lord, do you think?



getting personal

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” To what extent is your spiritual life marked with this kind of deep reverence? How, practically, can you seek to grow in this fear?

Proverbs’ wisdom is found in relationship with the Lord. Yet we read the book of Proverbs today knowing that the kingdom of Israel (Proverbs 1:1) flourished and then fell, as God’s people turned away from their Lord. Only a remnant faithfully believed God’s word and trusted God’s promises of forgiveness and redemption.

The fulfillment of God’s promises to them arrived in the deliverer who came from the line of King David—the Lord Jesus. He is the One in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3); he is the One who makes relationship with the Lord possible.

People choosing the path of folly don’t need just an argument; they need to meet a person.

10. **Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-25.** How does Jesus, “the wisdom of God” (v 24), bring about our salvation? What else strikes you from these verses?



apply

11. In what areas of your life do you most feel in need of wisdom? What would it look like to fear the Lord in these circumstances?

12. "People choosing the path of folly don't need just an argument; they need to meet a person." How have you seen that to be true in your own experience?

- How should that shape the way you seek to speak wisdom into the lives of others (both Christians and non-Christians)?

pray

Spend time praising God for Christ: the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Pray for his help to fear him rightly as you walk in reverent relationship with him day by day.

Then pray through Proverbs 1:2-6, asking that you would indeed grow in each of these qualities as you study the book of Proverbs.

