

Unconventional • Ancient Wisdom for a Modern World

Introduction:

Knowledge has changed dramatically in the past 3000 years. What is taught in the average elementary school class today would most likely dumbfound the intellectuals of old. While knowledge is learned and lost, there is timeless ancient wisdom that spans the ages. This series will mine the ancient wisdom writings from the book of Proverbs to help us rediscover these ancient truths which might seem unconventional but have the power to shape the lives of modern people of God.

WEEK 1: Wisdom**Proverbs 1:1-7**

1. What have you been taught about the meaning of the fear of God? How relevant is the fear of God to you in your daily walk with Him? Why fear God?
2. Consider what it looks like to fear people. What does a person do when he or she fears people?
3. How might the way many of us tend to fear people translate to an application of fearing God? What would it look like if we feared God as much as we can tend to fear humans?
4. In our culture, there is increasing animosity to Christian beliefs. We may be tempted to fear the cultural backlash of standing firm in our convictions from God's Word. How can the fear of God inspire us to live boldly for Him?
5. In verse 7 of this week's passage, the fear of the Lord is connected to the *beginning of wisdom*. Throughout Scripture, the fear of God is mentioned, and associated with an action, state of the heart, command, or movement of God. Read each verse below; pause after each one and share what is shown about the fear of God:

Abraham	Genesis 22:12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you <u>fear God</u> , seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."
Moses	Exodus 20:20 Moses said to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the <u>fear of Him</u> may be before you, that you may not sin.
The Law	Deuteronomy 10:12 And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to <u>fear the Lord</u> your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul
Wisdom Literature	Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 The end of the matter; all has been heard. <u>Fear God</u> and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.
The Prophets	Isaiah 11:2-3 And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the <u>fear of the Lord</u> . And his delight shall be in the <u>fear of the Lord</u> ...
The Gospels	Matthew 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather <u>fear Him</u> who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Luke 1:50 And His mercy is for those who <u>fear Him</u> from generation to generation.
The Early Church	Acts 9:31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the <u>fear of the Lord</u> and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.
The Letters	Philippians 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with <u>fear and trembling</u> . 2 Corinthians 7:1 Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the <u>fear of God</u> .
Prophecy	Revelation 14:6-7 I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, " <u>Fear God</u> and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

6. Which of these verses speaks to you most and how can you carry the fear of God into your week? How might something from this study impact your life? Is there something new you gleaned about fearing God from this discussion?

WEEK 2: Money

In the hustle and grind of the Bay Area, making a living is a constant stressor for many of us. How do we earn money in ways that are wise and godly? In a world of limited resources, is it possible to acquire resources without taking advantage of others? This study will dive into the ancient wisdom and direction of proverbs to discover godly ways to earn and manage money.

1. The book of Proverbs is a book of practical wisdom. Before digging into the Bible, in your opinion, what does it mean to be wise concerning money? Can you think of popular stories or folktales that center upon the wise or foolish use of money?
2. **Read Proverbs 13:11.** In your experience, does this proverb hold true? Can you describe a real-life example that illustrates this proverb? Are there times, however, when it seems as if “dishonest wealth” is more reliable than an honest income?
3. **Read Proverbs 10:2 and 15:27.** In the 1987 Oliver Stone film, “Wall Street,” fictional character Gordon Gekko proclaims, “Greed is good!” A variety of modern-era economic thinkers have made similar arguments. How does this idea square with biblical teaching? In what ways can one’s greed lead to one’s ruin or the ruin of their family? Under what circumstances might “ill-gotten gains” become a matter of life or death?
4. **Read Proverbs 20:21.** What do you think it means to “claim one’s inheritance too soon,” especially within a communal, family-oriented culture like that of the ancient Near East? If we consider when a person typically receives an inheritance, what does it communicate to ask for one’s inheritance in advance? Is this just a proverb about money, or is it ultimately about interpersonal and inter-communal relationships? (cf. the Parable of the Prodigal Son in **Luke 15:11-32.**)
5. **Read Proverbs 3:9-10, 11:24-25, 23:4-12.** Why are concepts of generosity, honesty, and justice such important concepts when it comes to discussing and obtaining wealth?
6. Jesus often spoke of money. One of his most important teachings is found within the Sermon on the Mount in **Matthew 6:19-34.** In what ways are the teachings of Jesus about wealth similar to and/or different from the book of Proverbs? What does it look like, in practice, for you to seek first the Kingdom of God?

WEEK 3: Work**Proverbs 6:6-15**

In the hustle and grind of the Bay Area, making a living is a constant stressor for many of us. How do we earn money in ways that are wise and godly? In a world of limited resources, is it possible to acquire resources without taking advantage of others? This study will dive into the ancient wisdom and direction of proverbs to discover godly ways to earn and manage money.

1. How does a lack of wisdom regarding work affect our ability to fulfill our obligations to be good stewards of the resources and opportunities given to us by God?
2. How does the lack of a strong work ethic impact our relationships with God and others? Does it affect our ability to love and serve others?
3. In this Proverb, the ant is described as hardworking and self-directed. In the high-pressure Silicon Valley, how do you maintain work-life balance with demands of work and other aspects of life, such as family, relationships, and spiritual growth? How can we ensure that our pursuit of hard work does not impair our relationship with God?
4. Verses 12-15 depict the breakdown of integrity that can accompany poor work ethic. What is the role of integrity in our approach to hard work? How can we ensure our striving for excellence is in alignment that brings glory to God?
5. How can we use our skills and abilities to serve and bless those around us through our work?
6. This week, how can you embrace a wiser perspective of work in a way that strengthens your faith in God?

WEEK 4: Planning**Proverbs 16:1-9**

The idea of aligning with God's will or following his path is something many believers long for, but how do we identify God's will for our lives? Scripture might not offer us a detailed life plan, but it does offer us guiding principles to live a life that honors God.

1. Where do you fall on the continuum of being a planner who likes to work out all the details ahead of time, and someone who is comfortable "going with the flow" without advance planning?
2. What does Proverbs 16:1-9 tell us to consider regarding our internal motivations to determine whether our plans are consistent with His plan?
3. Think of some wise or godly people in your life. What characteristics of their words or behaviors make you look up to them? How do they reflect the internal motivations you identified in the previous question?
4. According to the passage, what happens when you surrender your plans to God?
5. Does making your own plans dishonor God (Proverbs 15:22, Proverbs 21:5)? Why or why not?
6. Take a moment to remember and share a time when God has shown you that the wisdom of his plans is greater than yours. Pray for your plans to be a part of His plan.

WEEK 5: Marriage

Proverbs 5:15-23

God created marriage as beautiful. The sexual relationship between a married couple has the power to bring joy, connection, and procreation. Yet, we live in a highly sexualized culture, with constant temptation to broaden the boundaries of our sexual activity. Pornography, lust, hook up culture, sexual exploration all provides a quick fix to a deeper human need. This proverb of wisdom will encourage us to keep the boundaries of our sexual desires narrow and to shepherd our sexuality towards our marriage partner.

1. What is your understanding of God’s design for our sexuality? Where did you learn the concepts regarding sexuality that have had the greatest impact on you (i.e parents, movies, mentors, Bible passages)?
2. Read this week’s passage: Proverbs 5: 15-23. Focus on verses 15-19 and discuss the following:
 - a. These few verses use imagery of a fountain or spring. What was the significance of a spring in ancient times and what benefits would come from it? What would the implications be of one’s literal spring being “scattered... in the streets”?
 - b. How does the imagery in these verses point us to benefits and boundaries in a marriage relationship?
3. Re-read verses 20-23 and discuss:
 - a. Does anything stand out to you about these few verses?
 - b. Verse 20 asks a question: *Why would you commit adultery?* Rarely does it happen out of the blue; almost always it is a process in which one gradually crosses boundaries in thought and deed. What habits and boundaries would help a person steer clear of this “destruction” (verses 22-23)?
 - c. How can spouses delight in one another? What actions would fuel greater joy in one’s spouse?
4. In our culture, there is an overwhelming emphasis on sex existing exclusively to meet physical needs (consider Tinder, pornography, a greater concern with *feeling* good than *being* good). How does the cultural view of sex belittle the reality of God’s desire for sex to be an expression of intimacy, trust, and genuine love between a husband and wife in a covenant marriage?
5. Consider some other verses in the New Testament and discuss conclusions we can draw from what Jesus and Paul say about our bodies and marriage: Matthew 19:4-6; 1 Corinthians 6: 15-20. How does becoming “one flesh” and being “temples of the Holy Spirit” impact our view of sexuality?
6. When you consider examples of those who have given in to sexual temptation and the damage caused by it, how is God’s wisdom proved when contrasting those situations with marriages built on sacrificial love, respect, and rejoicing in the gift of one another?
7. What is one truth from this study that you’d like to take into your week? How does God guide you?

WEEK 6: Parenting**Proverbs 4:1-12**

What is the greatest legacy we can leave to the next generation? Every parent wants to give their kids more opportunities, better health, better education, and greater prosperity. This proverb invites us to see wisdom as the greatest gift that can be passed on from generation to generation.

1. Think about a time you received valuable guidance from a parent, grandparent, or a mentor? What was the wise advice? How did it impact your life?
2. Solomon emphasizes the value of his teaching in 4:1-2. Look up different versions and write down the different translations of “my instructions” (NLT).
3. Compare 4:3-9 with Deuteronomy 6:1-9. What has been passed down to Solomon and what is the core wisdom that Solomon wants to pass down to his children?
4. 4:3-9 describe the benefits of wisdom, including having direction, protection, and a pleasant life. How can we illustrate these benefits to our children or circle of influence through everyday examples?
5. Read 4:10-11. These verses talk about correction leading to life. What is your disciplinary style? How can we approach correction in a way that encourages growth?
6. Read 4:12. The final verse describes the path of wisdom as being broad and secure. How can we help our children navigate challenges and make wise choices throughout their lives?
7. Read Proverbs 22:6. What are some ways you can be more intentional about passing on wisdom to your children (or those you influence)?
8. Share any challenge you face in your parenting or communicating to the next generation and pray together for God’s guidance as God is the ultimate source of wisdom.

WEEK 7: Pleasure**Proverbs 21:17, 23:20-34**

“Work hard, play hard, and party harder!” is a popular saying. In this study, we’ll look at the smart advice in Proverbs about pleasure. It might seem different, but it helps us enjoy life more.

- 1. Finding Joy:** What makes you happy? Tell us three things, like eating good food, listening to music, or being outside. How do these activities make you feel good?
- 2. Keeping Perspective:** Proverbs 14:13 warns that pleasure doesn’t last. How can we see pleasure in a balanced way, knowing it’s temporary yet still be thankful for it?
- 3. Learning from Proverbs:** Think about Proverbs 21:17 and 23:19–21. How do these verses challenge our culture, which often focuses on pleasure and money?
- 4. Choosing Fun Wisely:** Look at Proverbs 23:29–35. What can we learn from this to make good choices about what we do for fun, while still honoring God and staying safe?
- 5. Putting It into Practice:** How will you apply these teachings in your life? Tell us one choice you’ll make based on what you’ve learned.

WEEK 8: Wise Friends**Proverbs 22:24-25**

In our modern-day world with social media, global communication and digital lives it is relatively easy to form and maintain friendships. But what is the depth and quality of those relationships? How do we develop communities that encourage us towards wise living?

1. “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” Proverbs 17:17. Tell the group of a time when a friendship grew out of a difficult situation?
2. Read Proverbs 27:5-10, 17. What do these verses teach us about the importance of having a godly community in our lives? What attributes do you find most beneficial in a community?
3. How can we build and stay connected to a godly community? How do we pull ourselves away from that community?
4. Do you agree with the statement “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy”? Have you ever experienced a “wound of a friend” that in retrospect you are grateful for? Can you tell the group about that experience?
5. “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.” Proverbs 13:20. How does surrounding ourselves with wise people contribute to becoming wise? How can foolish people create harm in our lives? (Reference Proverbs 22:24-25)
6. The above proverbs have focus on surrounding ourselves with wise and godly people. How can we ensure that we are the kind of wise and godly friends that others would want to surround themselves with? What steps can you take this week to be the kind of positive friend exemplified in these proverbs?

WEEK 9: The Holistic Life**Proverbs 31:10-31**

Some commentators believe that the Book of Proverbs ends with King Solomon remembering the advice of his mother, Bathsheba. She offers him instruction for the kind of woman he should look for in a spouse. But this description is more than just a preference list. The woman described in Proverbs 31 is an example of what a person's life would look like if they followed the wisdom of the proverbs. She is an example of someone whose fear of the Lord has made them wise in all aspects of life. This person is both strong and gentle, entrepreneurial and generous, business-minded and committed to the well-being of their family. These verses remind us that godliness is holistic and multifaceted.

1. Imagine you were offering advice to a friend about the types of qualities to look for in a spouse. What sort of qualities might you list?
2. Read Proverbs 31:10-31, how do the qualities of this woman align with the qualities you listed in the question above?
3. Allow your mind to paint a picture of the various imagery described in these verses. What resonates with you? What is difficult to understand and picture? Is there anything that seems counterintuitive or that you disagree with?
4. Over the course of the last eight weeks, we have explored several different themes. How does this woman exemplify the wisdom we have learned from the different proverbs we covered?
5. In every aspect of this woman's life, she exhibited character, integrity and compassion. What areas of your life do you find exhibiting these characteristics most natural? How about the most difficult?
6. Read verse 30, what does this verse teach you?
7. In what ways does the Proverbs 31 woman serve as an example of virtuous living?