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A NavPress Bible study on the book of  
**PROVERBS**

NAVPRESS 

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The LIFECHANGE series has been produced through the coordinated efforts of a team of Navigator Bible study developers and NavPress editorial staff, along with a nationwide network of fieldtesters.

*AUTHOR: RON RHODES*  
*SERIES EDITOR: KAREN LEE-THORP*

# HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

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## Objectives

Most guides in the LIFECHANGE series of Bible studies cover one book of the Bible. Although the LIFECHANGE guides vary with the books they explore, they share some common goals:

1. To provide you with a firm foundation of understanding and a thirst to return to the book;
2. To teach you by example how to study a book of the Bible without structured guides;
3. To give you all the historical background, word definitions, and explanatory notes you need, so that your only other reference is the Bible;
4. To help you grasp the message of the book as a whole;
5. To teach you how to let God's Word transform you into Christ's image.

Each lesson in this study is designed to take 60 to 90 minutes to complete on your own. The guide is based on the assumption that you are completing one lesson per week, but if time is limited you can do half a lesson per week or whatever amount allows you to be thorough.

## Flexibility

LIFECHANGE guides are flexible, allowing you to adjust the quantity and depth of your study to meet your individual needs. The guide offers many optional questions in addition to the regular numbered questions. The optional questions, which appear in the margins of the study pages, include the following:

*Optional Application.* Nearly all application questions are optional; we hope you will do as many as you can without overcommitting yourself.

*For Thought and Discussion.* Beginning Bible students should be able to handle these, but even advanced students need to think about them. These questions frequently deal with ethical issues and other biblical principles. They often offer cross-references to spark thought, but the references do not give

obvious answers. They are good for group discussions.

**For Further Study.** These include: a) cross-references that shed light on a topic the book discusses, and b) questions that delve deeper into the passage. You can omit them to shorten a lesson without missing a major point of the passage.

If you are meeting in a group, decide together which optional questions to prepare for each lesson, and how much of the lesson you will cover at the next meeting. Normally, the group leader should make this decision, but you might let each member choose his or her own application questions.

As you grow in your walk with God, you will find the LIFECHANGE guide growing with you—a helpful reference on a topic, a continuing challenge for application, a source of questions for many levels of growth.

## Overview and Details

The study begins with an overview of the book of Proverbs. The key to interpretation is context—what is the whole passage or book *about*?—and the key to context is purpose—what is the author’s *aim* for the whole work? In lesson one you will lay the foundation for your study of Proverbs by asking yourself, “Why did the author (and God) write the book? What did they want to accomplish? What is the book about?”

In lessons one through fourteen you will analyze passages of Proverbs in detail.

In lesson fifteen you will review Proverbs, returning to the big picture to see whether your view of it has changed after closer study. Review will also strengthen your grasp of major issues and give you an idea of how you have grown from your study.

## Kinds of Questions

Bible study on your own—without a structured guide—follows a progression. First you observe: What does the passage *say*? Then you interpret: What does the passage *mean*? Lastly you apply: How does this truth *affect* my life?

Some of the “how” and “why” questions will take some creative thinking, even prayer, to answer. Some are opinion questions without clear-cut right answers; these will lend themselves to discussions and side studies.

Don’t let your study become an exercise of knowledge alone. Treat the passage as God’s Word, and stay in dialogue with Him as you study. Pray, “Lord, what do You want me to see here?” “Father, why is this true?” “Lord, how does this apply to my life?”

It is important that you write down your answers. The act of writing clarifies your thinking and helps you to remember.

## Study Aids

A list of reference materials, including a few notes of explanation to help you make good use of them, begins on page 145. This guide is designed to include enough background to let you interpret with just your Bible and the guide. Still, if you want more information on a subject or want to study a book on your own, try the references listed.

## Scripture Versions

Unless otherwise indicated, the Bible quotations in this guide are from the New International Version of the Bible. Other versions cited are the New American Standard Bible (NASB) and the King James Version (KJV).

Use any translation you like for study, preferably more than one. A paraphrase such as The Living Bible is not accurate enough for study, but it can be helpful for comparison or devotional reading.

## Memorizing and Meditating

A psalmist wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). If you write down a verse or passage that challenges or encourages you, and reflect on it often for a week or more, you will find it beginning to affect your motives and actions. We forget quickly what we read once; we remember what we ponder.

When you find a significant verse or passage, you might copy it onto a card to keep with you. Set aside five minutes during each day just to think about what the passage might mean in your life. Recite it over to yourself, exploring its meaning. Then, return to your passage as often as you can during your day, for a brief review. You will soon find it coming to mind spontaneously.

## For Group Study

A group of four to ten people allows the richest discussions, but you can adapt this guide for other sized groups. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, youth groups, and businessmen’s studies. Both new and experienced Bible students, and new and mature Christians, will benefit from the guide. You can omit or leave for later years any questions you find too easy or too hard.

The guide is intended to lead a group through one lesson per week. However, feel free to split lessons if you want to discuss them more thoroughly. Or, omit some questions in a lesson if preparation or discussion time is limited. You can always return to this guide for personal study later. You will be able to discuss only a few questions at length, so choose some for discussion and others for background. Make time at each discussion for

members to ask about anything they didn't understand.

Each lesson in the guide ends with a section called "For the group." These sections give advice on how to focus a discussion, how you might apply the lesson in your group, how you might shorten a lesson, and so on. The group leader should read each "For the group" at least a week ahead so that he or she can tell the group how to prepare for the next lesson.

Each member should prepare for a meeting by writing answers for all of the background and discussion questions to be covered. If the group decides not to take an hour per week for private preparation, then expect to take at least two meetings per lesson to work through the questions. Application will be very difficult, however, without private thought and prayer.

Two reasons for studying in a group are accountability and support. When each member commits in front of the rest to seek growth in an area of life, you can pray with one another, listen jointly for God's guidance, help one another to resist temptation, assure each other that the other's growth matters to you, use the group to practice spiritual principles, and so on. Pray about one another's commitments and needs at most meetings. Spend the first few minutes of each meeting sharing any results from applications prompted by previous lessons. Then discuss new applications toward the end of the meeting. Follow such sharing with prayer for these and other needs.

If you write down each other's applications and prayer requests, you are more likely to remember to pray for them during the week, ask about them at the next meeting, and notice answered prayers. You might want to get a notebook for prayer requests and discussion notes.

Notes taken during discussion will help you to remember, follow up on ideas, stay on the subject, and clarify a total view of an issue. But don't let note-taking keep you from participating. Some groups choose one member at each meeting to take notes. Then someone copies the notes and distributes them at the next meeting. Rotating these tasks can help include people. Some groups have someone take notes on a large pad of paper or erasable marker board (preformed shower wallboard works well), so that everyone can see what has been recorded.

Pages 148-149 list some good sources of counsel for leading group studies. The *Small Group Letter*, published by NavPress, is unique, offering insights from experienced leaders every other month.

# INTRODUCTION

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## The Book of Proverbs

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As Psalms is the hymnbook of the Old Testament, so Proverbs is its teacher's manual. The moral maxims found there were used in ancient Israel to help the young acquire mental skills that promote wise living. Both the *content* of the proverbs and their *structure* contributed to the students' development.

The word *proverb* comes from a verb meaning "to be like, to be compared with, to be parallel, to be similar."<sup>1</sup> Hence, a proverb is simply a form of communicating truth by using comparisons or figures of speech. As brief maxims, the proverbs crystallize and condense the writers' experiences and observations. The concentrated sayings cause the reader to chew on them until the truth is extracted and digested. The reward for this effort is wisdom.

### Wisdom and skillful living

Wisdom is the theme that weaves through the book of Proverbs. The main Hebrew word for wisdom is *hokmah*. It was used commonly for the skill of craftsmen, sailors, singers, administrators, and counselors.<sup>2</sup> *Hokmah* pointed to the experience and efficiency of these various workers in using their skills.

Similarly, a person who possesses *hokmah* in his spiritual life and relationship to God is one who is both knowledgeable and experienced in following God's way. Biblical wisdom essentially involves skill in the art of godly living.

Jewish teachers realized that "wise living requires the ability to reach sound decisions and to make the right choices, and thus the *ability to discriminate* between what is right and what is wrong, wholesome and damaging, important and unimportant, wise and foolish."<sup>3</sup> The attainment of *hokmah* was accordingly a high priority (which in turn made the study of Proverbs a high priority).

## The wisdom of Solomon

Scholars agree that the majority of the proverbs were written by Solomon.<sup>4</sup> He was a man of outstanding wisdom (1 Kings 3), and his court became an international center for the exchange of wisdom and learning. First Kings 4:29-34 tells us,

God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than any other man . . . and his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered a thousand and five. . . . Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.

Solomon's great wisdom was given to him as a result of a request he made to God. While at Gibeon (where the Tabernacle stood), Solomon had sacrificed a thousand burnt offerings. Then God showed His pleasure by appearing to Solomon in a dream, inviting him to make a request. Solomon humbly requested wisdom to rule the Israelites. Here is how God responded to that request:

Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. (1 Kings 3:11-12)

To augment his own personal wisdom from God, Solomon also collected and edited many proverbs that he did not author himself. Ecclesiastes tells us that Solomon studied, weighed, and arranged proverbs (Ecclesiastes 12:9). Proverbs existed before Solomon's time (Numbers 21:27, 1 Samuel 24:13), and many have been discovered in the literature of countries surrounding Israel.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, as the author of three thousand proverbs, Solomon's wisdom was unparalleled. Truly, he was a master of *hokmah*, and as we study Proverbs, he is our mentor.

## Hebrew poetry

The book of Proverbs is written entirely in poetry. Since Hebrew poetry is constructed differently from English, it helps to know some of the ground rules.

English poetry is based on rhythm and rhyme. Hebrew poetry doesn't rhyme, and its rhythm is hard to imitate in translation. Instead, the main structural feature of Hebrew poetry is called *parallelism* or *intensification*. That is, the lines in each verse are parallel in some way, so that the second line somehow intensifies the meaning of the first. (If there are three lines, the third intensifies more, and so on.)

For example, in *synonymous parallelism*, the concepts in the first line are paralleled by similar concepts in the second line. Proverbs 2:11 says,

Discretion will protect you,  
and understanding will guard you.

This does not mean that discretion equals understanding. The two lines are not identical in meaning ("synonymous" is a somewhat misleading label). Rather, the lines look at different facets of a larger truth. They build on each other.

In *antithetical parallelism*, the second line is the opposite of (or in contrast with) the first. Proverbs 10:1 says,

A wise son brings joy to his father,  
but a foolish son grief to his mother.

This is not to say that a foolish son doesn't grieve his father. Rather, the second line looks at the truth of the first from another angle, thereby intensifying it and driving it home.

In *emblematic parallelism*, one line illustrates or clarifies the other with a word picture. Proverbs 10:26 reads,

As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes,  
so is a sluggard to those who send him.

Finally, in *synthetic parallelism*, the second line simply continues the same thought of the first. It may tell the result of what the first line mentions, as in Proverbs 3:6:

In all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make your paths straight.

Or, the second line may describe something mentioned in the first, as in Proverbs 15:3:

The eyes of the LORD are everywhere,  
keeping watch on the wicked and the good.

## Proverbs and daily life

The book of Proverbs adds an important dimension to the Old Testament. It is conceivable that a Jew could be in complete obedience to the Law of Moses, yet he still might not be leading a full life. The book of Proverbs meets this need by setting forth a skillful approach to daily living. It might be considered God's book on "how to wise up and live." It applies God's principles to the whole of life . . . to relationships, the home, work, justice, decisions, attitudes, reactions, everything a man says and even thinks.

Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner tells us that "the samples of behav-

ior which it [Proverbs] holds up to view are all assessed by one criterion, which could be summed up in the question, 'Is this wisdom or folly?'"<sup>6</sup> The answer to this question in each situation determines what action to take. "There is calculation in Proverbs," says Kidner, "for there is every encouragement to count the cost or reward of one's actions, and to study the ways of getting things done; but wisdom as taught here is God-centred, and even when it is most down-to-earth it consists in the shrewd and sound handling of one's affairs in *God's* world, in submission to *His* will."<sup>7</sup>

It is important to note that the proverbs are not intended to be *promises* that are invariably true without exception. They are *general principles or guidelines* that are usually but not always true. The books of Job and Ecclesiastes were written to correct people who believed that such teachings of wisdom as "the righteous will be healthy and wealthy, the wicked will die young" were iron-clad laws. The overall message of Scripture is that the proverbs are true enough to live your life by, and that God always has wise reasons when He makes exceptions.

## Modern relevance

The book of Proverbs is as relevant today as it was in 700 BC when it was completed. Though times have changed, people are essentially the same. They have the same needs and desires, the same fears, problems, temptations, and ultimate goals. Furthermore, since God inspired the authors of the book to record what they did, the wisdom they wrote is timeless. Any twentieth-century believer who wants to become skilled in the art of godly living (to gain *hokmah*) will find his desire fulfilled in studying Proverbs.

1. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, volume 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), page 533.
2. *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament*, edited by Merrill F. Unger and William White (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980), pages 473-475.
3. Kenneth T. Aitken, *Proverbs* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), page 11.
4. Sid S. Buzzell, "Proverbs," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1985), page 901.
5. Norman L. Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), page 205.
6. Derek Kidner, *The Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1964), page 13.
7. Kidner, pages 13-14.

# PART I

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## Foundations: Wisdom Versus Folly

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LESSON ONE

# PROVERBS 1:1-7, 1:20-2:10

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## Wisdom's Benefits

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The opening chapters of Proverbs are meant to motivate us to study the book and introduce what the proverbs are about. Ask God to give you understanding as you study these first passages.

### **The beginning of knowledge** (1:1-7)

Read 1:1-7.

1. Verse 1 identifies King Solomon as the primary author of the book. What do you learn from the following passages about the authors of some of the book's sections?

30:1 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

31:1 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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***Men of Hezekiah*** (25:1). These were scribes (secretaries) of King Hezekiah, who lived about 250 years after Solomon. (Solomon reigned 970-930 BC, and Hezekiah reigned 715-686 BC. Isaiah lived during Hezekiah's reign.) These scribes

compiled additional proverbs from Solomon's repertoire and listed them in chapters 25–29. These same scribes may also have added the proverbs of Agur and Lemuel at that time.

Proverbs 22:17 and 24:23 mention "the sayings of the wise," which Solomon or the scribes may have collected.

**Acquiring** (1:3). (NASB: "receive.") This word was used for plucking grapes and taking them for personal consumption.

**Prudence** (1:4). "Good judgment," "good sense."<sup>1</sup>

**Discretion** (1:4). The ability to plan ahead and plot a course of action with foresight.

**Simple** (1:4). A person who is "naive" (NASB) and untaught. "He is not an imbecile, one who cannot comprehend, or a fool who despises wisdom. Instead, he is one whose exposure to life and wisdom has been limited. Because of inexperience he is gullible and easily influenced."<sup>2</sup>

**Guidance** (1:5). (NASB: "counsel.") Literally, "steerings." The word has to do with moving one's life in the right direction.

2. What five purposes for Proverbs do you see in 1:2-6?

1:2a \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

1:2b \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

1:3 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

1:4-5 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

1:6 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Beginning** (1:7). The first and controlling principle, the essence. Possibly also the first step toward.

**Fools** (1:7). Unlike the simple, who are too inexperienced to understand wisdom, fools actively hate and avoid wisdom (1:22). The simple are on the fence, with the potential to become wise if they make the effort or fools if they choose not to.

3. Proverbs 1:7 states the theme of the book. How do people display "the fear of the LORD" in the following passages?

Exodus 20:18-21 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Joshua 2:1-14 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Job 1:1,4-5 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**For Thought and Discussion:** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (1:7) and of wisdom (9:10). Do you think knowledge and wisdom are essentially the same, or is there a distinction? Explain.

**Optional Application:**  
 a. Would you say your lifestyle shows that you really fear God in a healthy sense? Why or why not?  
 b. How can you grow in this area?

Psalms 112:1, 128:1 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. In light of these cross-references, how would you define “the fear of the LORD”?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Why do you suppose this is the essence of or first step toward true knowledge?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Warnings against rejecting wisdom (1:20-33)

#### Study Skill—Personification

Personification is “a rhetorical figure of speech in which inanimate objects or abstractions are endowed with human qualities or are represented as possessing human form.”<sup>3</sup> In Proverbs, wisdom is often personified as a woman.

**Gateways** (1:21). The city gateway was the normal place where the city’s leaders met to conduct official business.

6. Read 1:20-33. How accessible is wisdom for those who really seek it (1:20-21)?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Mockers** (1:22). (NASB: “scoffers.”) Proud, arrogant people who are self-opinionated and full of insults and contempt.

7. Observe how each of the three groups in 1:22 displays a lack of wisdom. What do they have in common?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Rebuke** (1:23). (NASB: “reproof.”) A helpful kind of verbal correction. Solomon uses this word often, and he doesn’t have in mind cutting remarks.

8. How are the ways of wisdom and folly contrasted in 1:32-33?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**For Thought and Discussion:** Why do you think Solomon chose to personify wisdom as a woman so often (3:16-18, 4:3-6, 8:1-21, 9:1-6, 14:33)?

**Optional Application:** Accepting rebuke is a major virtue in Proverbs (3:11, 9:8, etc.). How are you at accepting rebuke?

**For Thought and Discussion:** Proverbs 1:33 says those who heed wisdom will “live in safety.” What about those godly Christians who suffer car accidents, violent crimes, and so on? Do these events prove 1:33 is wrong?

**For Thought and Discussion:** Why is it wise to pray passionately for wisdom? (See also 2 Chronicles 1:10, Psalm 90:12, Ephesians 1:17, Colossians 1:9, James 1:6.)

**Optional Application:** Design a short prayer for wisdom and record it on a 3 x 5 card. You might want to begin the rest of your studies of Proverbs with this prayer.

**For Thought and Discussion:** What are the benefits of memorizing Scripture (2:1-5)?

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## The fear of the Lord (2:1-10)

### Study Skill—Paraphrasing

Restating a verse in your own words is often a good way to ensure that you understand what the author is saying. This is especially helpful for proverbs, which are pithy but concentrated and sometimes elusive. When in doubt, check other translations of the Bible or ask a mature Christian to check your paraphrase for accuracy.

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**Heart** (2:2). The Hebrew word refers to the core of us where we think, feel, choose, and believe basic beliefs. It is often translated “mind,” so we shouldn’t think of the heart just as the place of emotions.

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9. According to 2:1-5, how can one understand “the fear of the LORD”?

If (2:1-2) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If (2:3) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If (2:4) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Knowledge of God** (2:5). Knowing Him as a person, His character, His ways, and the truths He wants us to know.

**Victory** (2:7). (NASB: “sound wisdom.”) Elsewhere, this word is translated “sound judgment” (3:21, 8:14, 18:1). “In 2:7 it means success, the *result* of sound judgment.”<sup>4</sup>

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**Blameless** (2:7). Not sinlessness, but moral and spiritual integrity.

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10. Is the mere attainment of intellectual knowledge enough for wisdom, or does wisdom require that knowledge be acted upon in daily life (2:7-8)? Why?

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11. Many people ask, “How can I know God’s will?” According to 2:1-9, what are some concrete steps to take?

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12. From 1:20-33, summarize why you should not reject wisdom.

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**Optional Application:** God gives victory to those who walk in integrity (2:7). Is there any sin in your life that you need to deal with?

**For Thought and Discussion:** How does receiving God’s wisdom affect one’s sense of personal well-being (2:10)?

**Optional Application:** Do you take personal responsibility for how your life will end up? Consider memorizing 1:32-33.

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13. Now summarize the main message of 2:1-10.

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### Your response

14. What is the main way you would like to see your life change as a result of studying Proverbs?

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If you have not already done so, read the introduction on pages 9-12.

15. As you study, you may come across difficult concepts that you would like clarified or questions you would like answered. Jot them down at the end of the lesson you are working on, so that you can pursue answers later.

If you have any questions about Proverbs 1-2 or the introduction, write them here.

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### For the group

This “For the group” section and the ones in later lessons are intended to suggest ways of structuring your discussions. Feel free to select what suits your group and ignore the rest. The main goals of this lesson are to begin to see what Proverbs is about and begin to know the people with whom you are going to study it.

**Worship.** Some groups like to begin with prayer and/or singing. Some share requests for prayer at the beginning, but leave the actual prayer until after the study. Others prefer just to chat and have refreshments awhile and then move to the study, leaving worship until the end. It is a good idea to start with at least a brief prayer for the Holy Spirit’s guidance and some silence to help everyone change focus from the day’s busyness to the Scripture.

**Warm-up.** The beginning of a new study is a good time to lay a foundation for honest sharing of ideas, to get comfortable with each other, and to encourage a sense of common purpose. So, go around the room and let each person finish these two sentences:

“One piece of wisdom my parents really tried to teach me was . . . .”

“One thing I want to get out of studying Proverbs is . . . .”

**How to use this study.** If the group has never used a LIFECHANGE study guide before, you might take a whole meeting to get acquainted and go over the “How to Use This Study” section on pages 5-8. Then you can take a second meeting to discuss lesson one.

Go over the parts of the “How to Use This Study” section that you think the group should especially notice. For example, point out the optional questions in the margins. These are available as group discussion questions, ideas for application, and suggestions for further study. It is unlikely that anyone will have time or desire to answer all the optional questions. A person might do one “Optional Application” for any given lesson. You might choose one or two “For Thought and

Discussion” questions for your group discussion, or you might spend all your time on the numbered questions. If someone wants to write answers to the optional questions, suggest that he use a separate notebook. It will also be helpful for discussion notes, prayer requests, answers to prayer, application plans, and so on.

Invite everyone to ask questions about how to use this guide and how your discussions will go.

**Reading.** It is often helpful to refresh everyone’s memory by reading the passage aloud before discussing the questions. Reading all of this week’s passage is probably unreasonable. So, ask someone to read 1:1-7 and someone else to read 2:1-10.

**Introduction.** Ask a few questions about the background material, such as,

- What is a good, short definition of “wisdom”?
- What is a proverb?
- Why were the proverbs written?

Group members don’t need to memorize all of the information on pages 9-12, but that material should help them understand the background of Proverbs.

**Questions.** The central issues of this lesson are, “What is the fear of the Lord? Why is it essential? How is it attained?” Understanding 1:7 and 2:1-5 will lay a foundation for the rest of your study. So, concentrate your discussion around questions 3-5, 9, 12, and 13. Make sure the group leaves with a practical grasp of what a healthy fear of the Lord is. Most people have misconceptions about this idea.

**Wrap-up.** The group leader should have read lesson two and its “For the group” section. At this point, he or she might give a short summary of what members can expect in that lesson and the coming meeting. This is a chance to whet everyone’s appetite, assign any optional questions, omit any numbered questions, or forewarn members of possible difficulties.

Encourage any members who found the overview especially difficult. Some people are better at seeing the big picture than others. Some are best at analyzing a particular verse or paragraph, while

others are strongest at seeing how a passage applies to their lives. Urge members to give thanks for their own and others’ strengths, and to give and request help when needed. The group is a place to learn from each other. Later lessons will draw on the gifts of close analyzers as well as overviews and applicators, practical as well as theoretical thinkers.

**Prayer.** Many groups like to end with prayer. This can include prayers that respond to what you’ve learned in Proverbs or prayers for specific needs of group members. Some people are shy about sharing personal needs or praying aloud in groups, especially before they know the other people well. If this is true of your group, then a song and/or some silent prayer, and a short closing prayer spoken by the leader, might be an appropriate end. You could also share requests and pray in pairs.

Since 2:1-5 talks about crying out for wisdom, you might make this a focus of your prayer.

## My Son

The frequent occurrence of “my son” and “my sons” in Proverbs has raised a question about Solomon’s audience. There are two theories:

1. The verses in Proverbs were originally spoken orally to the *students* of Solomon’s royal court.
2. The verses were originally spoken by Solomon and others to their *sons* in home settings.

Buzzell writes, “Favoring the school environment is the fact that learners were sometimes called ‘sons’ of their teachers. Favoring the home environment is the fact that instruction was given by mothers (1:8; 6:20; also note 23:19,22-26) as well as by fathers.”<sup>5</sup>

1. *The NIV Study Bible*, edited by Kenneth Barker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corporation, 1985), page 946.
2. Buzzell, page 907.
3. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, edited by William Morris (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), page 979.
4. Buzzell, page 910.
5. Buzzell, page 902.

## Chart of Proverbs

Theme: The way to become skilled in godly living is to learn and put into practice the wisdom God provides.

Wisdom's Value	The Way of Wisdom Is Superior	1:1-7 Prologue: The purpose and theme of Proverbs is stated.
		1:8-19 Avoid bad company.
		1:20-33 Be careful not to reject wisdom.
		2 The way of wisdom has many moral benefits.
		3:1-20 Wisdom enhances every aspect of life.
		3:21-35 Wisdom involves kindness and righteousness.
		4 Wisdom is supreme.
		5 Wisdom warns against adultery.
		6:1-19 Wisdom warns about the futility of folly.
		6:20-35 Wisdom warns against sexual immorality.
		7 Wisdom warns against the enticing adulteress.
		8 Wisdom's call is issued to all mankind.
		9 Both wisdom and folly invite men to their "homes."
Solomon	Advice for Living	10-15 Solomon contrasts righteousness and wickedness.
		16-22:16 Solomon encourages godly living.
		22:17-23:35 Solomon gives advice on various practices.
		24 Solomon gives advice on various people.
		25-26 Solomon gives advice on relationships with others.
		27-29 Solomon gives advice on various activities in life.
Agur and Lemuel	Reflections	30 Agur gives observations about God and life.
		31:1-9 Lemuel speaks about God.
		31:10-31 The ideal wife is described.