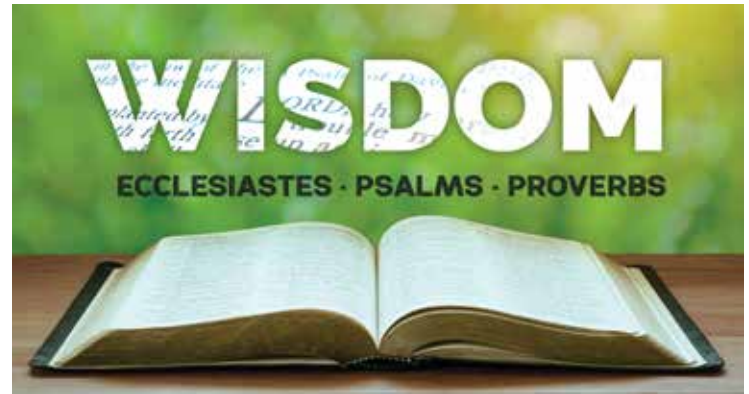


Month of August



An Introduction to Proverbs

Our guide this month is a little different than our usual devotional resources. Instead, we have given you an overview of several themes from the book of Proverbs. We encourage you to spend the month of August reading one chapter of Proverbs each day.

Proverbs is unlike any other book in the Bible. It is a collection of little bits of wisdom and advice, written by King Solomon and others. King Solomon, as we know, asked God for wisdom and was rewarded with being renowned for his wisdom.

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 people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone else, including Ethan the Ezrahite—wiser than Heman, Kalkol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish.
1 Kings 4:29–33

The introduction, in Chapters 1–9, lists 10 speeches written to a son from a father about wisdom and folly and living well. The introduction also includes poems of Lady Wisdom. Here, wisdom is personified as a woman.

Chapters 10–29 contain hundreds of bits of accumulated wisdom, on a wide range of topics.

The book ends with poems by a man named Agur, who learns his need for God's wisdom, and poems from a man named Lemuel, who passes on the wisdom that he learned from his wise mother. The book ends with well-known chapter 31, giving the example of a woman who personifies what a wise person looks like.

Proverbs reminds us that we all need wisdom, and that having wisdom and acting in wise ways is what God wants for us.

Fools

A couple of weeks ago, Fusion (our middle and high school ministry) had a night of fun called Water Wars. We had water bounce houses, water balloon fights, and slip-and-slide kickball. The night was fun for all of the teens, but my night went a bit different.

Early in the evening, I decided I was 18 again and starting spraying teens with water and running around. One of the students decided to protect his fellow teens and wet me. My plan was to run around the bounce house and spray him as he turned the corner. It didn't happen that way. I ran about 15 feet and my hamstring died. I pulled my hamstring, and the night was over for me. I felt like a fool as I limped over to the picnic tables.

When the Bible talks about the fool, it doesn't mean what I experienced, even though I would say I felt foolish. Proverbs talks about the fool living a selfish life, which leads to destruction and discord. When we read verses such as Proverbs 1:22, 1:25-26, and 6:6-11 we see, as Tim Keller puts it, "the ultimate foolishness is to make anything the center of our lives besides God."

Read the verses in the previous paragraph.

Where have you seen the bitter fruit of foolishness in your life or the lives of others?

Take some time to pray for yourself and others that God would teach us to walk wisely.

Justice in the Book of Proverbs

To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.
Proverbs 21:3

One of the major themes in the book of Proverbs is justice and acting in ways that are just. Not only is justice a major theme in Proverbs, but it is a major theme in scripture! God desires that we treat others in ways that are fair and just. We should not exploit others or take advantage of them. Additionally, we should work to not only be just people ourselves but ensure that all people are treating one another justly. God takes the issue of justice so seriously that justice is more important than sacrifice (Proverbs 21:3).

The Theology of Work project puts it this way: “To regard helping the needy as a matter of justice, not merely generosity, is no surprise if we remember that wisdom rests on the fear of the Lord. That is, wisdom consists of living in awe of our God so that we seek to do what he desires for the world. God is just. God desires that the poor be cared for and poverty be eliminated. If we truly love God, then we will care for those whom God loves. Therefore, to relieve the poor and to work to eliminate poverty are matters of justice.”

What about you? How are you doing with seeking justice for the poor and oppressed?

Justice is of great concern to God. How often are you concerned with justice for others?

Pray that God will reveal issues of injustice to you.



Friendships

In 2015, gospel artist Travis Greene released a song titled “Intentional.” The song exalts how intentional God is in our relationship with him. He’s never failing and always working all things out for our good.

In our lives, we all desire intentionality. Have you ever been in a relationship/friendship with a person who isn’t intentional? It hurts. You’re constantly wondering how they feel. You personally feel abandoned and lonely.

In Proverbs 18:24 we see these words: “One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” The wisdom we can draw from Proverbs is that there is a friend who can stick closer than a sibling. It is through intentionality that we can draw close to those around us. The people we spend most of our time with are the ones that form us. From this verse, we see that our circle can cause us turmoil and pain or create a bond that holds stronger than a family member.

In John 15:13-17, Jesus states that he no longer calls the disciples servants but friends. This rings true for us today as well. We don’t have to wonder what God thinks about us, what God feels toward us, or what he would do for us. It is written in his word how intentional he is.

Have you asked the Lord to help you choose your friends wisely?

Have you been an intentional friend?

Having a close friend can be hard to come by. No matter where you are in your friendships, take some time to sit and reflect on how intentional God has been in your life. Pray for solid friendships and ask God to make you a solid friend.

The Fear of the Lord

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. Proverbs 9:10

Another major theme in Proverbs is that the wise fear the Lord. At first glance, hearing a phrase like “fear of the Lord” can be a little bit confusing. Does God want us to be scared of him? Of course not! Fearing the Lord doesn’t mean that we are afraid of our loving God. However, it does mean that we understand our place in reference to God. Fearing God means living in awe of God.

Think about it this way. Have you ever seen an incredible natural sight like the Grand Canyon, or a beautiful mountaintop, or a storm coming in on a beach? Did it stop you in your tracks? Did it take your breath away? Did you feel a sense of awe? That can help us understand the fear of the Lord.



Fearing God simply means approaching God with the awe and reverence that he deserves. When we understand who God really is, we then act appropriately. It makes us want to obey him, to seek the justice that he wants in the world, and to live like his children. It’s understanding who we are in relation to who he is.

How do you feel about the word “fear” in relation to God? Is this language comfortable to you?

Do you have a wise and healthy awe of God? Why or why not?

Pray that you would continue to be in awe of God.