

Welcome to Fool Proof:

A Study in Proverbs

No one wants to be called a fool. Fools lack good judgment or common sense. They act on impulse, or from selfish, silly, or suspect motives. You dangle something shiny in front of a fool, and they'll lunge for it, even if lunging causes them to fall. It's not hard to trick a fool into believing or valuing the wrong thing, because they are just that gullible. No one wants to be a fool.

Yet, we all do foolish things. We don't always think before we act. We can trust the wrong person, or follow the wrong path. We can indulge the wrong desires. And foolish choices not only make a mess of our lives, but hurt those around us.

So, is there a way we can be fool proof? Can we avoid the traps foolish people blithely walk into? And if so, how? We don't just need Googleable facts and information, but to develop the skill of living. We need wisdom so we can make good choices, trust the right people, follow the right path, and indulge the right desires.

God has a gift for people wanting to be wise — for people who want to walk in his ways and share his goodness with the world. It's the book of Proverbs, and that's where we're going to focus our attention this summer.

For the next eight weeks, we'll reflect on wisdom from Proverbs on different areas of life. We'll consider how we can be wise in our relationships — from our relationship with God, to our relationships with family and friends. We'll also look to God's wisdom to keep us from the traps of anxiety, anger, and addiction. Together, we'll listen to the voice of wisdom who calls out to us from the book of Proverbs.

The Engage God Daily will have a new format for summer. Each Monday, in a short video, our Sunday speaker will introduce the week and share from his own study of Proverbs. The rest of the week, you'll read from Proverbs, consider quotes from great Bible teachers, and discover some additional resources to explore on your own. You'll also be challenged to prayerfully meditate on what Proverbs is teaching you, and to have some meaningful conversations with others about what you're learning.

This will be an immensely practical series, and you won't want to miss a week. Invite someone to follow the Engage God Daily with you. Each day you'll be given some questions to talk over with another person. Proverbs are meant to be discussed and applied in community. Let's become fool proof together!

Fool Proof: A Study in Proverbs

Week 1 | The Beginning of Wisdom

Welcome to our Fool Proof series!

Today we'll hear from Pastor Bruce Miller who'll be kicking off our sermon series this Sunday. Watch as he gives us an introduction to Proverbs and explains one of its key concepts, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.



A transcript of this video is available [here](#).

Ask yourself

- How does a proverb differ from a law or promise?
- What does the Hebrew word, *ḥokmâḥ* mean?
- How does Bruce explain “the fear of the LORD”?

Pray

*Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth,
in whom all wisdom and knowledge resides:*

*Grant us wisdom, the skill of living. Teach us your ways, so that we might bring honor to your name, and blessings to others.
We ask this in the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord.
Amen.*

Talk about it

- What is the danger in turning a proverb such as, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (22:6) into a law or a promise? How could doing so warp your view of God or damage your faith? What is a better way to understand proverbs?
- Discuss your reaction to hearing that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” What does it mean to have a healthy fear of God? What happens when we don’t? When we’re either afraid of God or have no appropriate reverence for him?

Day 2

Today we’re going to meet Proverbs on its own terms and read through the first seven verses, the introduction to the book.

Proverbs 1:1–7 (NIV)

¹ The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

² for gaining wisdom and instruction;

for understanding words of insight;

³ for receiving instruction in prudent behavior,

doing what is right and just and fair;

⁴ for giving prudence to those who are simple,

knowledge and discretion to the young—

⁵ let the wise listen and add to their learning,

and let the discerning get guidance—

⁶ for understanding proverbs and parables,

the sayings and riddles of the wise.

⁷ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,

but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Ask yourself

- What does Proverbs tell us about itself? What is its purpose?
- Who is this book for?
- What is the beginning of knowledge?

Read what others say

What is Wisdom?

From Tremper Longman:

“Wisdom is a rich concept and is not easily summarized...However, since we have to start somewhere, we will begin with the basic idea that *wisdom is the skill of living*. It is a practical knowledge that helps one know how to act and how to speak in different situations. Wisdom entails the ability to avoid problems, and the skill to handle them when they present themselves. Wisdom also includes the ability to interpret other people’s speech and writing in order to react correctly to what they are saying to us.”¹

From John Goldingay

“The opening paragraph of Proverbs thus comes to a climax by declaring that the *first principle of knowledge is awe for Yahweh*, whereas stupid people despise wisdom and discipline; the opening chapter of Proverbs refers to knowing or knowledge six times. But the knowing isn’t expressed merely in achieving a high IQ or a high score in the Standardized Admissions Test (SAT). The point runs through the opening paragraph, which introduces many of Proverbs’ key words. *The connection between what goes on in the head and what goes on in the life immediately appears in the link between wisdom and discipline*. Increasing in wisdom is tied up with increasing in discipline...Getting hold of wisdom involves action.”²

Why should we read Proverbs?

From Tim Keller:

“Some commentators argue that the book of Proverbs was originally written as a manual to be studied by a community of young men under the mentorship of older men—for a number of years. Each proverb was to be discussed and considered and compared to the others. Examples from life were to be shared. *In other words, Proverbs may have been written to be the basis for deep, comprehensive personal growth through mentoring in community. It touches on every area of life.*”³

From Ellen Davis:

“A careful reading of Proverbs reveals a paradox...age-old wisdom occasions radically new thought in each generation. Yet, of course this must be so. For we human beings are learners, not creatures of instinct. *Living a morally responsible life requires that we participate in a lifelong process of deep learning*, and further, that we share in the most important task of

¹ Tremper Longman III, [*How to Read Proverbs*](#) (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 14–15.

² John Goldingay, [*Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*](#), Old Testament for Everyone (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press; Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2014), 8–9.

³ Tim Keller, “Proverbs, Community, and the Culture” *The Gospel Coalition*, (May 1, 2010) <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/proverbs-community-and-the-culture/>

each generation of adults: namely, guiding the young in the path of ‘wisdom,’ of profound reflection on what is good. The sages of ancient Israel are of inestimable help to us in meeting that responsibility.”⁴

Explore on your own

Watch this short five minute Bible Project [video on the Book of Proverbs](#). It discusses book’s genre and purpose, and gives some insight on “*ḥokmâḥ*” (wisdom) and the “fear of the LORD.”

Pray

Acknowledge God as the source of all wisdom, who lovingly shares his ways with humanity for their good.

Confess ways that you desire to go your own way and rebel against God’s guidance. Accept his forgiveness. Ask the Spirit to guide and empower your faithful obedience.

Also, invite the Spirit to prepare your heart to receive wisdom from Proverbs over the course of this series. Commit to learning. Be open and ready for the Spirit to change you.

Talk about it

Have you found at least one person to discuss this study with? It can be a someone in your family or Life Group, or a friend or neighbor You can do it in person, on the phone, or even via text message. Having at least one other person to talk with and encourage you will help you get more out of Proverbs.

That being said, the “Talk about it” questions are still good to think through on your own.

- In your own life, how have you seen a link between wisdom and discipline?
- What do you think of the original way that Proverbs may have been used? Why would studying it in community with the intention of applying its wisdom be helpful?
- Although the primary responsibility for discipling children should reside with their parents, how can other adults help guide them in the path of wisdom?

Day 3

Yesterday we considered the purpose of Proverbs and defined what the book means by “*ḥokmâḥ*” or “wisdom.” In Proverbs 1:7 we saw that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” Today we’ll look at another section of Proverbs where that phrase is used. We’ll also meet an impressive figure, Woman Wisdom.

⁴ Ellen F. Davis, [Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs](#), ed. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 24.

In the first nine chapters of Proverbs, four major characters emerge. We have the good and wise Father who is instructing his son (1:8, 2:1, 3:1, 4:1, 5:1), and Woman Wisdom (1:20, 3:13, 8:1) who boldly speaks truth and life to those who will hear. They are contrasted with another male/female pair, wicked men (1:10, 1:12) and the “alien” woman (1:16, 5:3, 7:5) who entice people into making sinful choices that lead to destruction.

Woman Wisdom remind us of the fear of the Lord in the passage we’ll look at today.

Read

Proverbs 1:20–31

*²⁰Out in the open wisdom calls aloud, she raises her voice in the public square;
²¹on top of the wall she cries out, at the city gate she makes her speech:*

²²“How long will you who are simple love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge?

²³Repent at my rebuke! Then I will pour out my thoughts to you, I will make known to you my teachings.

²⁴But since you refuse to listen when I call and no one pays attention when I stretch out my hand, ²⁵since you disregard all my advice and do not accept my rebuke,

²⁶I in turn will laugh when disaster strikes you; I will mock when calamity overtakes you— ²⁷when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you.

²⁸“Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me, ²⁹since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD.

³⁰Since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, ³¹they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.

Ask Yourself

- What is Woman Wisdom’s plea? What is she asking people to do?
- To repent means to turn and go a different direction. Wisdom is calling out to people to change course. If they repent, what will Woman Wisdom do? What will she do if they don’t?
- What does it mean to “fear the LORD” in the context of these verses?

Read what others say

Understanding “woman wisdom.”

From Tremper Longman:

“We begin with Woman Wisdom. She is bold. We find her in the streets, the squares, the city gates (1:20–21). She shouts out from the hilltop near the road and at the crossroads (8:1–2). These are public places where crowds gather. She is not afraid of strangers. As we will see later, she carries an important message for them.”

“We know people by the company they keep and the people they avoid. Wisdom is closely associated with righteousness (8:6), truth (8:7), wholesome behavior (8:8) and good judgment (8:12); with common sense, success, insight and strength (8:14–15). On the other hand, she tells us that she stays as far away as possible from deception, evil, pride and arrogance (8:7–8, 13). Wisdom, then, is not just an intellectual category but is closely entwined with ethical behavior.”⁵

From Amy Pauw

“The reward and punishment Woman Wisdom promises are not arbitrary or capricious but rather the expectable result of human actions that either respect or defy the justice and order of God’s world. The disaster that awaits those who hated knowledge and would have none of Wisdom’s reproof (vv. 29–30) is one they have brought on themselves: ‘They shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own devices’ (v. 31). By contrast, to those who listen to her teaching, Woman Wisdom promises security and ease.”⁶

Explore on your own

The Bible project has a [video](#) that explores Woman Wisdom in Proverbs 8. See what you think.

If you didn’t have time yesterday, be sure to take a look at the Bible Project’s five minute [Book of Proverbs video](#).

Pray

Part of what it means to have a healthy fear of God is that we are willing to confess our wrongdoing, repent, and receive the forgiveness that is available to us through Christ. Confession, repentance and forgiveness are an ongoing part of our relationship with God. They are also part of our relationships with others.

In prayer, ask for the Spirit’s gentle but firm conviction of sin. Confess to your Father. He’s ready to forgive you. If there is someone you need to seek forgiveness from, do so. Ask the Spirit how you need to repent with your words and actions.

Talk about it

⁵ Longman, 30.

⁶ Pauw, 23.

- Discuss the role of repentance in the passage we read today. Why would repentance be evidence of someone’s fear of the Lord? Repentance is not just an internal process. Although it starts with confession to God, it must be lived out. How does that fit with our understanding of wisdom as “skill in living.”
- Share a time in your life when you responded to Woman Wisdom’s call and took her outstretched hand (1:24). What was the result? What about a time when you didn’t respond? Did you end up in a “storm of calamity”? What saved you?

Day 4

This week we are settling into our study in Proverbs by orienting ourselves in the book, and also seeking to understand one of its key concepts — the fear of the Lord. God is the source of all wisdom and knowledge. As our Creator, he knows how we will best flourish and thrive. If we don’t ground our understanding of wisdom in our relationship with God, Proverbs won’t be of much use to us.

Knowing and fearing God involves a reorientation of one’s whole life. It requires confidence in God’s goodness and love, and also full allegiance to him. It requires faith, which means saying both, “I have faith *in* God” and “I will keep faith *with* God.”⁷

Today we’re going to look at several proverbs that use the phrase “the fear of the LORD.” Make note of how these pithy, two line proverbs help expand your understanding of the concept.

Also, this is the first time in our study to read these short sayings that make up much of the book of Proverbs. Because we’ll be reading a lot of these as we move through the series, let’s get some guidance on how we should approach them.

Scholar Tremper Longman helps us become better readers of proverbs. Keep the following explanation in mind as you read through the verses below.

“With a proverb, we are immediately confronted with the brevity of the saying. A proverb wastes no words. Proverbs are written in poetic form, and poetry in general is compact language. That is, poetry says a lot using a very few words... But what makes a proverb different from any other type of poetry? A proverb expresses an insight, observation, or advice that has been popularly accepted as a general truth. Indeed, a proverb can be so universally accepted as true that simply citing it is enough to end a conversation.”⁸

“The poetry of the Old Testament is largely constructed of parallel lines. Parallelism refers to the correspondence that occurs between the phrases of a poetic line... The implication of our understanding of parallelism for reading the poetry of Proverbs and other portions of the Bible is to read slowly and reflectively.”

⁷ Pauw, 20.

⁸ Longman, 38.

“As we do so, we should ask, how does the second part of the parallel line contribute to the idea of the first part? If nothing else, such reading will get us to really concentrate on the meaning of the words. We may have a tendency to skim, but this does not work well, especially when we come to that compact language that we call poetry.”⁹

Read

Proverbs 3:7

*⁷Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD and shun evil.*

Proverbs 14:16

*¹⁶The wise fear the LORD and shun evil,
but a fool is hotheaded and yet feels secure.*

Proverbs 16:6

*⁶Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for;
through the fear of the LORD evil is avoided.*

Proverbs 10:27

*²⁷The fear of the LORD adds length to life,
but the years of the wicked are cut short.*

Proverbs 14:2, 26–27

*²Whoever fears the LORD walks uprightly,
but those who despise him are devious in their ways.*

*²⁶Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress,
and for their children it will be a refuge.*

*²⁷The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,
turning a person from the snares of death.*

Proverbs 19:23

*²³The fear of the LORD leads to life;
then one rests content, untouched by trouble.*

Proverbs 15:33

*³³Wisdom’s instruction is to fear the LORD,
and humility comes before honor.*

Proverbs 22:4

*⁴Humility is the fear of the LORD;
its wages are riches and honor and life.*

⁹ Tremper Longman III, [How to Read Proverbs](#) (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 40.

Ask yourself

- What connection do you see between the “fear of the LORD” and our posture toward evil? What about between the fear of the LORD and life? Are there any other connections you see?
- Make note of your own reaction. Do any of these Proverbs strike you, surprise you, or stand out to you in a special way? Why?

Read what others say

Understanding the Fear of the LORD

From Amy Pauw:

On Proverbs 3:7: “If he [the son] thinks he is wise, then he will try to do things with his own resources, which will not be sufficient. The opposite of being wise in one’s own eyes is to fear Yahweh. The fear of Yahweh puts one’s own abilities and resources in proper perspective. It also naturally leads to an aversion to evil.¹⁰”

On Proverbs 14:2, 27–28: “The connection between divine and human wisdom is also reflected in proverbs that link one’s moral path and one’s attitude to God. ‘Fear of the LORD’ is a healthy cognizance of human vulnerability and accountability in the face of God’s loving and sovereign wisdom. It is reflected in dispositions of reverence and humility before God, in kindness toward fellow creatures, and in hatred of evil.

“Proverbs recognizes that fear is a constant in creaturely life. Fear of God is a ‘strong confidence’ (v. 26a) that drives out other fears that are endemic to human existence, culminating in the fear of death (v. 27b). As Christine Roy Yoder notes, ‘without ‘fear of the LORD,’ all other fears, including the fears of scarcity, ineptitude, irrelevance, and insecurity, run rampant.’”¹¹

Pray

Day by day we’re gaining a deeper understanding of what it means to “fear the LORD.” Let’s take Tremper Longman’s advice and read our proverbs for today one more time, slowly. As you meditate on them, turn them into prayers. For example, ask the Spirit to give you strength to shun evil, and the discernment to recognize it, even in its subtler forms.

Talk about it

- Earlier this week, we saw that the fear of the Lord is 1) the beginning of wisdom and 2) that it is connected to a willingness to repent. Talk it over. What would you add to our understanding of the fear of the Lord based on the proverbs we’ve read today.

¹⁰ Longman133–134.

¹¹ Pauw, 81–82.

- Come up with a description of someone who fears the Lord. What would their relationship with God be like? What would their relationships with others be like? What would their life look like? What changes would you need to make to be like this person?

Day 5

Let's finish up our discussion of the "fear of the LORD" with a section of a speech that the wise Father gives in chapter 2. Notice his instructions that will lead to the fear of the Lord.

We'll also consider an exciting connection between the book of Proverbs and the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who will come centuries after these sayings were compiled.

Read

Proverbs 2:1–8 (NIV)

¹My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, ²turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding— ³indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, ⁴and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, ⁵then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.

⁶For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. ⁷He holds success in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, ⁸for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.

Colossians 2:2–3

² My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Ask Yourself

- Go back and look at Proverbs 2:1–5. These verses are set up as an "if – then" statement, meaning that if you meet the conditions following the "if," you'll get what follows the "then." What are the conditions? What will be the result?
- Now look at Proverbs 2:6–10. What does the Lord do for those who have a healthy fear of him?
- Finally, look at how Jesus is described in Colossians 2:3. What connections do you see between Jesus and God's wisdom and knowledge? (Amazing, isn't it?)

Read what others say

Wisdom is both hard-won and God-given (Proverbs 2:1–5)

From: Derek Kidner

“Wisdom is hard-won. This is the essential counterpart to chapter 1., where wisdom was clamouring to be heard. Here it is the pupil who must clamour (verse 3). Yet the search, strenuous as it must be, is not unguided. Its starting-point is revelation—specific (*words*) and practical (*commandments*); its method is not one of free speculation, but of treasuring and exploring received teachings so as to penetrate to their principles (see the verbs of 1–5); and its goal, far from being academic, is spiritual: *the fear of the LORD ... the knowledge of God* (verse 5). With these two phrases verse 5 encompasses the two classic Old Testament terms for true religion—the poles of awe and intimacy.”¹²

“Wisdom is God-given. What you *find*, then (verse 5), is what he *gives* (verse 6); discovery and revelation are inseparable. This paragraph goes on to show that to know the Lord is also to know how to live”¹³

From: Ellen Davis

“The figurative language suggests that acquiring wisdom is more like an adventure, a quest, than a homework assignment. First, you have to want understanding, and want it badly. ‘If you cry out ... and raise your voice ...’—these are the same verbs used of Wisdom’s urgent call in 1:20–21.”

“The image of the treasure hunt suggests both strong motivation and also the rigors of the search. ‘If you seek it like silver’—in the ancient world, miners were lowered by ropes into deep narrow shafts; it was an occupation that few would choose! Yet, perhaps anticipating that many will fall away at the outset, the sages of Proverbs assure us that sure knowledge of God is possible (v. 5)—not because we are so smart, but because, in response to our earnest desire, ‘the LORD gives wisdom’” (v. 6).¹⁴

Explore on your own

Explore the connection between Proverbs and Jesus by first reading [Proverbs 8](#), and then this article, [Where’s Jesus in Proverbs](#).

Talk about it

¹² Derek Kidner, [Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 17, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1964), 59.

¹³ Kidner, 59.

¹⁴ Davis, 35–36.

- The wise father in Proverbs has told us that in order to gain the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God, you're going to have to seek it out. Talk about how. How can you put yourself in a place to receive God's gift of wisdom and knowledge?
- We're at the end of our first week in Proverbs. Discuss what you're learning so far. How would you explain the "fear of the LORD" using the verses we've looked at this week? Come up with a one or two sentence explanation.

Pray

Father God, thank you for offering your wisdom to us. May we seek it! Holy Spirit, empower and encourage us on our treasure hunt for the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God. Teach us how to live as people of moral integrity who are excited to bless others. Draw us closer to Jesus, who is wisdom. May we look to his life as an example of "the skill of living."

Now pray over anything else the Spirit showed you this week.

Coming next week

Father's Day is coming up! Next week we'll let Proverbs show us how to make our dads happy. (Hint: it doesn't involve a tie.)