

Fool Proof: A Study in Proverbs

Week 8 | Marriage

We're finishing out our survey of Proverbs by focusing on marriage. See what Bruce has to say about his upcoming sermon in the video below:

<https://vimeo.com/575783135>

Read

Husbands

Proverbs 6:34

³⁴ For jealousy arouses a husband's fury,
and he will show no mercy when he takes revenge.

Proverbs 7:19

¹⁹ My husband is not at home;
he has gone on a long journey.

Proverbs 12:4

⁴ A wife of noble character is her husband's crown,
but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones.

Proverbs 31:11

¹¹ Her husband has full confidence in her
and lacks nothing of value.

Proverbs 31:23

²³ Her husband is respected at the city gate,
where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.

Proverbs 31:28

²⁸ Her children arise and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:

Wives

Proverbs 5:18

¹⁸ May your fountain be blessed,
and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.

Proverbs 5:20

²⁰ Why, my son, be intoxicated with another man's wife?
Why embrace the bosom of a wayward woman?

Proverbs 6:24

²⁴ keeping you from your neighbor's wife,
from the smooth talk of a wayward woman.

Proverbs 6:26

²⁶ For a prostitute can be had for a loaf of bread,
but another man's wife preys on your very life.

Proverbs 6:29

²⁹ So is he who sleeps with another man's wife;
no one who touches her will go unpunished.

Proverbs 12:4

⁴ A wife of noble character is her husband's crown,
but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones.

Proverbs 18:22

²² He who finds a wife finds what is good
and receives favor from the Lord.

Proverbs 19:13

¹³ A foolish child is a father's ruin,
and a quarrelsome wife is like
the constant dripping of a leaky roof.

Proverbs 19:14

¹⁴ Houses and wealth are inherited from parents,
but a prudent wife is from the Lord.

Proverbs 21:9

⁹ Better to live on a corner of the roof
than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.

Proverbs 21:19

¹⁹ Better to live in a desert
than with a quarrelsome and nagging wife.

Proverbs 23:27

²⁷ for an adulterous woman is a deep pit,
and a wayward wife is a narrow well.

Proverbs 25:24

²⁴ Better to live on a corner of the roof
than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.

Proverbs 27:15-16

¹⁵ A quarrelsome wife is like the dripping
of a leaky roof in a rainstorm;
¹⁶ restraining her is like restraining the wind
or grasping oil with the hand.

Proverbs 31:10

¹⁰ A wife of noble character who can find?
She is worth far more than rubies.

Pray

Almighty God, from whom all our blessings flow.

Thank you for the gift of marriage and family. As a community, we recognize our responsibility to support marriages and help families flourish. Show us how. Those of us who are husbands and wives commit to loving our spouses and encouraging them to grow in faith. May the married couples in our church be unified in their pursuit of you.

Thank you for the gift of singleness and friendship. As a community, we recognize our responsibility to support those who are single and help their families flourish. Show us how. Those of us who are single commit to encouraging others to grow in faith. May we be fully devoted to pursuing you.

*Thank you for the redemption found in Jesus and the hope we have in him.
Amen.*

Talk about it

The Book of Proverbs was meant to be discussed. Think through the “talk about it” questions on your own and then discuss them with someone and see what you can learn together.

- This week, we’re going to focus on husbands and wives, but all of the subjects we’ve looked at in our study of Proverbs — the fear of the Lord, honoring fathers, friendship, meaningful conversations, controlling our anger and our use of alcohol, living with sexual integrity — apply to forming and sustaining a healthy marriage. Discuss how.
- In the family of God, we need to love, support, and encourage one another whatever their “relationship status.” Discuss how unmarried people can support the marriages of people around them. How can married people support the singles in their lives?

Day 2

All our human relationships require wisdom to flourish. This is especially true of marriage relationships. When two individuals pledge to walk through life as one, affection alone isn’t enough. Their commitment to each other is strengthened by their commitment to follow Jesus and the way of wisdom.

Having a wise spouse of good character is a tremendous blessing. In the culture of the ancient near east, a wife of strong and virtuous character added to the honor of her husband. We may not think as much in those terms today, but we do realize that the way our spouse thinks and behaves has a direct and profound impact on us.

Think about how these proverbs could be used to counsel young people on what to look for in a potential spouse.

Read

Proverbs 20:6

⁶ Many claim to have unfailing love,
but a faithful person who can find?

Proverbs 21:21

²¹ Whoever pursues righteousness and love
finds life, prosperity and honor.

Proverbs 12:4

⁴A wife of noble character is her husband's crown,
but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones.

Proverbs 18:22

²²He who finds a wife finds what is good
and receives favor from the LORD.

Ask yourself

- What kind of character should you look for in a future spouse?
- Proverbs 12:4 presents us with a strong metaphor. Why would a disgraceful wife (or husband) be like a rot in the bones?
- How does verse 18:22 characterize marriage? What does God think of good marriages?

Read what others say

From Tremper Longman:

This proverb (Proverbs 12:4) makes an observation, presumably based on experience, and we may speculate that its purpose was to motivate its hearers to avoid a bad marital choice. A noble woman enhances the godly man's life and is a reward for his wise behavior, whereas a disgraceful wife brings suffering to his life. Such a wife brings shame to the husband. The fact that such a wife is likened to rot in the bones shows just how deeply a bad marital choice affects a husband's life.

Precisely how a woman acts to bring the label "disgraceful" on herself is not made explicit because it may happen in a variety of ways. Perhaps she acts in a sexually promiscuous fashion or mismanages the household or the children; whatever the cause, it brings the husband pain, and such a choice should be avoided at all costs.

Van Leeuwen suggests that Paul reflects the teaching of this proverb in 1 Cor. 11:7 when he calls the woman the "glory" of the man, since " 'crown' and 'glory' are closely associated (Prov. 4:9; 16:31; Isa. 28:1, 5; Jer. 13:18)."¹

Pray

A good marriage is a gift from God. If you are not married, but hope to be one day, pray for God's wisdom as you seek a spouse. Ask the Spirit to shape and guide you to be more like Jesus so that if he sends you a spouse, you'll be a blessing to him or her.

¹ Tremper Longman III, [*Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Proverbs*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 271.

If you are already married, pray for your spouse. Pray that they would more and more experience the love and grace of Christ. As you move through the week, ask the Spirit to show you how you can grow in Christlike character, so you'll be an even greater blessing to your husband or wife.

Talk about it

- Think about people you know who are hoping to get married one day. Discuss how you could counsel them based on these verses.

Day 3

This week, we're looking at what Proverbs has to say about husbands and wives. One of our passages for the week is the subject of many women's Bible studies on the "Proverbs 31 woman."

In the context of the whole book of Proverbs, this chapter is the final speech. According to Longman:

"This poem reminds us of the role that women play in this book, which is explicitly addressed to young men. Most pointedly, we read here of a woman who is the human reflex of Woman Wisdom herself. She is to be contrasted with the strange and foreign woman (chaps. 5–7), who is the reflex of Woman Folly."²

While we'll find a lot for women to aspire to in this passage, we'll also find some inspiration for men as well.

Read

Proverbs 31:9–31

- ¹⁰ A wife of noble character who can find?
She is worth far more than rubies.
- ¹¹ Her husband has full confidence in her
and lacks nothing of value.
- ¹² She brings him good, not harm,
all the days of her life.
- ¹³ She selects wool and flax
and works with eager hands.
- ¹⁴ She is like the merchant ships,
bringing her food from afar.
- ¹⁵ She gets up while it is still night;

² Tremper Longman III, [*Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Proverbs*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 540.

she provides food for her family
and portions for her female servants.
16 She considers a field and buys it;
out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.
17 She sets about her work vigorously;
her arms are strong for her tasks.
18 She sees that her trading is profitable,
and her lamp does not go out at night.
19 In her hand she holds the distaff
and grasps the spindle with her fingers.
20 She opens her arms to the poor
and extends her hands to the needy.
21 When it snows, she has no fear for her household;
for all of them are clothed in scarlet.
22 She makes coverings for her bed;
she is clothed in fine linen and purple.
23 Her husband is respected at the city gate,
where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.
24 She makes linen garments and sells them,
and supplies the merchants with sashes.
25 She is clothed with strength and dignity;
she can laugh at the days to come.
26 She speaks with wisdom,
and faithful instruction is on her tongue.
27 She watches over the affairs of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.
28 Her children arise and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:
29 “Many women do noble things,
but you surpass them all.”
30 Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.
31 Honor her for all that her hands have done,
and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

Ask Yourself

- According to verse 30, what is praiseworthy in a woman? How is this encouraging for women?
- We get a few glimpses in this poem of what the husband is like. How is he regarded in his community? How does the husband of this woman show his trust and appreciation?

Read what others say

From Ellen Davis:

The poem is an alphabetic acrostic: the first verse begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the second verse with the second letter, and so on. Therefore the logical order is somewhat loose; the point is to sing the lady's praises "from A to Z." Nonetheless, the language makes it clear that this woman is the human counterpart to Lady Wisdom. This is especially clear in the affirmation that her price is far beyond jewels (v. 10; compare 3:15; 8:11). When the woman opens her mouth, the voice of wisdom becomes audible (v. 26). Moreover, the ultimate aim of the poem is that the woman's praises should be publicly sung "in the gates" (v. 31; see also v. 23). This is just where Lady Wisdom takes her stand to speak of her own deeds (8:3).

The Hebrew word *hayil*, (translated here as "noble") elsewhere denotes physical strength, valiant military action (Num. 24:18), strong moral character (Exod. 18:21; Ruth 3:11), even material wealth (Ruth 2:1). "Valorous" better captures the tone of the extravagant poem of praise that follows. This is a public tribute to a local hero! Second, the first line is better rendered as a statement than a question, since the latter suggests that such a wife is virtually impossible to find. The intended sense of the Hebrew is probably as follows: "Whoever finds a valorous wife [knows that] her price is beyond jewels."³

From Lisa TerKeurst, "But I'm Nothing Like the Proverbs 31 Woman...":

What if I told you that the heart behind Proverbs 31:10-31 is one of celebration, not condemnation?

The first thing I want us to take note of is that this isn't just a chapter about a wife of noble character, despite how your Bible titles verses 10-31. It's a chapter about a woman of *valor*. A *courageous* woman. A woman of *strength and dignity*.

In Jewish culture, these verses are read out loud on the Sabbath as a celebration over the women. This is in no way condemning what they aren't but celebrating how they are, in their own unique expressions, living out the virtues detailed in this chapter. These aren't words meant to tell a woman she is supposed to be more. They are a celebration of *who she is...*

I also love how Proverbs 31:30 reminds us of what's truly worth celebrating: "*Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.*"

Notice it's *not* a woman with a spotless house who is to be praised. It's *not* the mom with perfectly behaved children wearing matching, designer outfits. Honestly, it's *not* even the woman who's married and has children.

A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. This isn't an "I'm afraid of God" kind of fear. This type of fear refers to having a heart completely in awe of God. It describes a woman who

³ 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), 151–152.

honors God by seeking Him in everything she does and trusting Him wholeheartedly with her life. She has a heart of reverence that overflows into a life of spiritual maturity and wisdom.⁴

Pray

Whether you are married or single, a woman or a man, the character of the “Proverbs 31 Woman” is worth emulating. Look back over the poem one more time. Ask the Spirit to bring to your attention an attribute he desires to cultivate in you. Pray for wisdom in seeking a strong and dignified character, knowing that you are already fully known and loved by your Heavenly Father.

Talk about it

- What are the virtuous traits that the woman in this passage possesses? Together, list them. What would a modern-day Proverbs 31 woman look like?
- Do you think it’s easier, harder, or equally challenging to cultivate noble character today than it was at the time Proverbs was written? Discuss your answer.

Day 4

Lisa Scheffler, author

What’s the key to a successful marriage? How have couples who’ve been together for 20, 40, or even 60 years made their marriage work? If you surveyed them, good communication would probably be one of the top-five factors.

Frustrations and disagreements are inevitable, even if both spouses are committed followers of Christ. Proverbs gives us wise instruction on how to handle conflict.

Read

Proverbs 20:3

³ It is to one’s honor to avoid strife,
but every fool is quick to quarrel.

Proverbs 21:19

¹⁹ Better to live in a desert
than with a quarrelsome and nagging wife.

Proverbs 27:4

⁴ Lisa TerKeurst, “But I’m Nothing Like the Proverbs 31 Woman...” Proverbs 31 Ministries.
<https://proverbs31.org/read/devotions/full-post/2019/04/25/but-im-nothing-like-the-proverbs-31-woman>

⁴ Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming,
but who can stand before jealousy?

Proverbs 29:11

¹¹ Fools give full vent to their rage,
but the wise bring calm in the end.

Proverbs 12:18

¹⁸ The words of the reckless pierce like swords,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Proverbs 10:19

¹⁹ Sin is not ended by multiplying words,
but the prudent hold their tongues.

Proverbs 18:13

¹³ To answer before listening—
that is folly and shame.

Proverbs 12:16

¹⁶ Fools show their annoyance at once,
but the prudent overlook an insult.

Proverbs 19:11

¹¹ A person's wisdom yields patience;
it is to one's glory to overlook an offense.

Ask Yourself

- What traits are these proverbs cultivating?
- How could you benefit personally from these proverbs, whether in marriage or some other relationship? Which ones are speaking loudly to you?

Read what others say

From John Hutchinson

I recently asked one of the elders of our church this question, “If you were choosing one factor that is most crucial in strengthening a marriage, what would it be?” He and his wife regularly do “crisis” marriage counseling with couples seeking help and on the verge of divorce. The response: “Bear one another’s burdens—learn to be a good listener, pray for your spouse, and

communicate that you really care.” Sounds simple, doesn’t it? But even with the best of intentions, practicing this requires good communication skills.

Ephesians 4:29 (NASB) says :

“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.”

The power of our words to destroy. The word translated “unwholesome” in the passage above means “rotting, decaying,” reminding us that our words may spread poison to those around us. This is corroborated in the wisdom of Proverbs, where we find our speech is one of the most frequent areas of warning: “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” (Prov 18:21) Proverbs speaks of “life” and “death” as two choices of lifestyle that have inevitable consequences in this life and the next.

Proverbs’ stern warnings about our speech are also echoed in the warnings of James 3: “Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell . . . no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison!” (James 3:6, 8)

It has happened to all of us. Something bugs you about your spouse or a friend . . . time goes on, you hold your tongue, and then . . . out come the words. Words emerge that were really not needed, and for the moment give us a sense of release. *But*, those words cannot be taken back, and often will never be forgotten.

The power of our words to build up. God gives us this wisdom about our speech—BE CAREFUL . . . BEWARE . . . so that we will have a healthy respect for the tongue’s destructive power. But our speech can also be redemptive and full of grace: “. . . such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.” (Eph 4:29). Mark Twain once said, “I can live for two months on a good compliment.” His folksy wisdom is echoed in the biblical teaching about our words:

“An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up.” (Prov 12:25)
“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” (Prov 15:1)

Advice about our speech not only emphasizes its content, but timing as well.

“A man finds joy in giving an apt reply; and how good is a timely word” (Prov 15:23)
“He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame.” (Prov 18:13)

Edifying words are important in all relationships, but how much more significant they are in marriage. Begin with careful listening . . . as you allow time for your spouse to share his/her dreams and interests and fears. Ask questions, and use what you learn in creative ways to

encourage your spouse . . . compliments . . . words of affirmation . . . in the tough areas bearing burdens by praying for your spouse.⁵

Pray

If you are married, for the next several days take note of what you say to your spouse and how you say it. Notice times when you are impatient, sarcastic, cutting, or dismissive. Ask yourself, “Am I really listening before I answer?” If you have an argument, think about what’s at the root of it — sometimes we overreact during a disagreement with our spouse because we’re stressed about work, frustrated with the kids, or because we’ve let resentment build up. How do you respond in moments of tension or conflict? Talk to the Lord about what you discover about yourself. Confess any bad relational habits and also seek your spouse’s forgiveness.

Ask the Spirit to give you the patience, prudence, and wisdom to respond with greater care to your spouse. Ask for life-giving words that show understanding. Pray before you speak. Seek to listen, love, and understand your spouse.

All of the proverbs we read can be applied to any relationship where we experience conflict. If you’re single, pray about how to apply them too!

Talk about it

- Look back at the proverbs we read today. Together, summarize their instructions on how to handle conflict. Turn them into a list of “do’s” and “don’ts.” If you’re married, discuss them with your spouse.

Day 5

We’ve arrived at the end of our study through Proverbs! Today, let’s look back on key verses from this series and invite the Spirit to speak to us through the Word. Can you remember the sermon topic for each verse?

Read

Proverbs 1:7

⁷The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

⁵ John Hutchinson, “Marriage: The Power of Communication.” *Talbot School of Theology Blog*.
<https://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2011/marriage-the-power-of-communication>

Proverbs 15:20

²⁰ A wise son brings joy to his father,
but a foolish man despises his mother.

Proverbs 17:17

¹⁷ A friend loves at all times,
and a brother is born for a time of adversity.

Proverbs 16:24

²⁴ Gracious words are a honeycomb,
sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

Proverbs 15:1

A gentle answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Proverbs 20:1

Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler;
whoever is led astray by them is not wise.

Proverbs 6:28–29

²⁸ Can a man walk on hot coals
without his feet being scorched?
²⁹ So is he who sleeps with another man's wife;
no one who touches her will go unpunished.

Proverbs 12:4

⁴ A wife of noble character is her husband's crown,
but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones.

Reflect

- Reflect back on our time in Proverbs. In which of the areas that we covered did you feel the most conviction? How has the Spirit given you a desire to change? Write down your thoughts in a journal (paper or online).
- What proverbs has God used in your life? Which ones are sticking with you? Record those proverbs in your journal so you can refer back to them.
- Remember that in Christ, you are fully forgiven and completely loved. Don't let conviction turn into shame. Confess, receive forgiveness, and ask the Spirit for help in making a change!

- Which proverbs have prompted you to pray for others? Record their names in your journal and pray for those people now. Pray for opportunities to have meaningful conversations with them where you can share the love of Christ.

Pray

Heavenly Father, thank you for showing me who you are by sharing your wisdom. Thank you for the perfect representation of wisdom that I see in Jesus.

I want to reflect your wisdom in my daily life. Teach me to be wise in my relationships with family and friends, neighbors and strangers. Spirit, help me become more loving, prudent, patient, and gracious. I want to be less self-indulgent and more giving. Less focused on myself and more focused on you and on sharing your grace with others.

Thank you, Father, for your great and unending love. Thank you that even when I fail to live wisely, you forgive and restore me. Thank you, Jesus for making my redemption possible. I love you so much. Amen.

Talk about it

- What are three big things you learned from our Proverbs series? Discuss those with someone.
- Our goal in this series was to become more “fool proof.” We want to grow in wisdom, which means we’ll also be growing to be more like Jesus. Now that this series is over, how will you continue to grow in wisdom? Discuss some ideas and hold each other accountable.

Coming next week

We’re kicking off a new series next week, and you don’t want to miss it! We’re going to smash the idols in our lives so we can live for Jesus with undivided hearts. You’ll want to be a part of this life-changing series, Smashing our Idols!