

# LEARN GOD'S WISDOM

CORE PASSAGE: PROVERBS 4:10-19

## CONTEXT

Like Ecclesiastes, Proverbs is a Bible book in the genre of wisdom literature. Many of the proverbs were written by Solomon. A proverb is simply a short saying stating general truth or advice. The biblical proverbs teach the fear of the Lord and give advice for covenant living in everyday situations and relationships. Proverbs covers many topics and can feel random or disjointed, but it has a few major themes: God's will is practical, and following His will leads to happiness and usefulness, but living this way takes work, study, and discipline. There's no middle way or compromise when it comes to living faithfully in covenant with God.

## KEY CONCEPT

**Staying focused on God's path keeps us from stumbling.**

As you read Proverbs 4:10-19:

- Recognize that God's words are wisdom for the right path, leading to long life.
- Note that neglecting God's words leads us down a difficult and foolish path.



## TIMELINE

Solomon Becomes King upon  
David's Death (1 Kings 1–2)

**SESSION STUDY: Solomon Shares the  
Importance of Wisdom (Proverbs 4)**

Solomon's Foolish Idolatry Divides  
the Kingdom (1 Kings 11–12)

Solomon Asks the Lord for Wisdom  
(1 Kings 3)

The Queen of Sheba Visits Solomon  
to Observe His Wisdom (1 Kings 10)

## Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Proverbs 1–9
- ☐ **Day 2:** Proverbs 10–17
- ☐ **Day 3:** Proverbs 18–24

- ☐ **Day 4:** Proverbs 25–29
- ☐ **Day 5:** Proverbs 30–31
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 1



Scan this QR code to access  
this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

**Bonus Content**

Scan this QR code to see how proverbs compare to other genres of Scripture.

## ACCEPTING AND HOLDING ON TO GOD'S WORDS LEADS TO LIFE (PROVERBS 4:10-13).

**Circle the father's commands for his son in this passage. In the margin, draw a simple path with these commands to remind you of the way of wisdom.**

**10** Listen, my son. Accept my words, and you will live many years. **11** I am teaching you the way of wisdom; I am guiding you on straight paths.

**12** When you walk, your steps will not be hindered; when you run, you will not stumble. **13** Hold on to instruction; don't let go. Guard it, for it is your life.

In this passage from the book of Proverbs, a father, Solomon, opens with a plea for his son to take the good and right path that is the way of wisdom. If the reader will obey, then the father says he will "live many years" (v. 10). Does this mean literal, earthly longevity, or is it referring to eternal life? Perhaps both.

From Scripture and experience, we all know there is "a time to die" (Eccl. 3:2). Death is a physical certainty for all humanity due to the consequences of sin we inherited from Adam and Eve (1 Cor. 15:21-22; Heb. 9:27). But the way of the fool, who rejects wisdom in favor of wickedness and violence, may result in what some could consider an early, "untimely" death. Such a death could befall one who chooses the path of wisdom, of course, on account of sin in the world or the sinful actions of others. But generally, those who follow God's path of wisdom will keep themselves from harmful situations and consequences, and they will also find the reward of eternal life, since the path of wisdom corresponds to a life of faith in the One who is God's wisdom—Jesus Christ.

**LEADER NOTE:** It is important to keep genre in mind when reading the Bible's wisdom literature. For the book of Proverbs, we should recognize that proverbs are general rules for how to live rightly in the good world God created. For the most part, these are not concrete promises we can claim without exception because of the effects of the curse of sin in the world. We know that not every godly and wise person lives to old age, and there are wicked people who do have long lives. But those who are wise will listen to and obey God's Word nonetheless because this is His world and His way is best.

**How have you been taught and encouraged to follow the way of God's wisdom?**



Wisdom, living according to God's instruction, is portrayed as a straight, smooth path that leads to long life. Yet biblically we know this doesn't mean life will always be easy, especially for believers. Just look to passages like Genesis 3:16-19; Psalm 6; John 16:33; 2 Timothy 3:12; and Revelation 21:4. Death is a result of the original sin, but so too is suffering. While we all experience these consequences, suffering does not have the final say for believers because Christ, the perfect and literal embodiment of God's wisdom, suffered and died on our behalf to save us from sin and death.

#### GOSPEL CONNECTION

God's path is a path toward knowing and trusting in Jesus. He is the only path to follow for He is the only way to the Father. In Christ alone can we find salvation.

The father's commands to "hold on to" and "guard" instruction indicate that the way of wisdom takes discipline and work on our part. We don't passively live out God's wisdom. We must actively choose His paths. Being in Christian community is vital for these decisions. We all need fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters in the faith to encourage us to choose God's wisdom.

**LEADER NOTE:** We need other believers in our churches to help us run the race of faith well, but we must be careful to weigh the encouragement and counsel of other believers against Scripture. Even the wisest believers are still human and therefore fallible. It's easy to read our own biases or desires into what Scripture says. So it is important to seek a variety of perspectives from different believers on certain topics, being careful not to live in an echo chamber (which the internet and social media make even easier).

**What are some ways you can actively "hold on to" and "guard" the instruction of God's Word in your life?**

## THE WAY OF THE WICKED LEADS TO GLOOM AND DEATH (PROVERBS 4:14-19).

**Underline the father's commands in these verses. In the margin, sketch what the path of the wicked might look like.**

**14** Keep off the path of the wicked; don't proceed on the way of evil ones.

**15** Avoid it; don't travel on it. Turn away from it, and pass it by. **16** For they can't sleep unless they have done what is evil; they are robbed of sleep unless they make someone stumble. **17** They eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. **18** The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, shining brighter and brighter until midday. **19** But the way of the wicked is like the darkest gloom; they don't know what makes them stumble.

In these verses, Solomon contrasted righteousness and wickedness as he warned his son against taking the path of the wicked (vv. 14-17). The comparison between light and dark that Solomon used here is a common metaphor throughout the Old and New Testaments to convey the stark differences between righteousness and rebellion, or wisdom and folly.

We all do what is evil at times because we're still humans living in a broken world and are not yet perfected in the presence of God, where sin cannot exist. This passage isn't saying that all who sin are on the path of wickedness, but those who remain on that path are considered the "evil ones."

Take note of the father's commands to his son. In verse 14, he says not only "keep off" but then "don't proceed." Choosing to proceed reflects knowingly taking the path of rebellion. "Avoid it" and "don't travel on it" in verse 15 are parallel commands saying the same thing in a different way for emphasis. In the second part of verse 15, "turn away from it, and pass it by" means actively moving away from the path of wickedness.

**Why is it wise to avoid the path of wickedness?**

### VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

"The wise path is lit so you can see where you are walking, and the foolish path is dark so you stumble. Wisdom is a lamp—Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12)—so you can see the right path to take."<sup>1</sup>

—Jonathan Akin

The path of the wicked is dark, which causes its travelers to stumble (v. 19). See God's heart for us in this father's words of warning. He doesn't want us to stumble around in the mysterious and violent darkness of sin. He wants us to walk in the light of His wisdom, seeing life as clearly as we can while on earth.

**LEADER NOTE:** The wisdom of God in Solomon is heard through Jesus as well. In John 16:1, Jesus told His disciples, His spiritual children, "I have told you these things to keep you from stumbling." And Jesus's disciples took what they heard from Jesus and the Holy Spirit to pass them on to new generations of believers. John used the imagery of light versus darkness in 1 John 1–2 to teach that walking according to Christ's commands will keep one from stumbling (1 John 2:10). The way of wisdom proceeds from and leads to Jesus.

How do we avoid traveling "the path of the wicked" without falling into legalism, or a mind-set of works-based righteousness? According to Deuteronomy 6, infusing every aspect of our lives with God's Word helps us to remember Him and pushes us to obey His commands in love, even passing on His wisdom to our children as Solomon was doing in Proverbs.

**LEADER NOTE:** Legalism and licentiousness are opposing concepts, but both fall short of living according to godly wisdom. Legalism over-emphasizes works and under-emphasizes God's grace, while licentiousness does the opposite. Through the gospel, we can dismiss the feigned self-righteousness of legalism because our faith rests in what Christ alone has done for us, and we can reject licentiousness, which ignores the price Christ paid for our salvation. God's grace should compel us to walk freely in His wisdom by obeying His commands in keeping with our faith and repentance in Jesus Christ.

**Why should we resist the urge to look down on the wicked?**

#### THEOLOGY CONNECTION

**DISCIPLESHIP:** Discipleship is both a formal and informal process to effect spiritual maturity as people follow Jesus. Informal discipleship, as passages like Deuteronomy 6:4-9 suggest, happens in every arena of life. Growing in our faith and deepening our walk with Christ require our whole life, not just the mind. Formal discipleship refers to periods of instruction. We make disciples through our words and actions, providing verbal instruction from God's Word and non-verbal examples through our lives (Acts 20:17-24).

## Notes

SOLOMON'S WISDOM				
WISDOM LITERATURE	WISDOM	PROVERBS	WISDOM LITERATURE	PROVERBS TO GO
Proverbs	Discovers the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of the world. Proverbs 1:1-7	Proverbs 1:1-7	Proverbs 1:1-7	Proverbs 1:1-7
Ecclesiastes	Discovers the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of the world. Ecclesiastes 1:1-2	Ecclesiastes 1:1-2	Ecclesiastes 1:1-2	Ecclesiastes 1:1-2
Song of Songs	Discovers the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of the world. Song of Songs 1:1-2	Song of Songs 1:1-2	Song of Songs 1:1-2	Song of Songs 1:1-2

## ARRIVAL

**RECORD:** As the group arrives, invite them to record on a board a word to the wise, whether original or copied, in a short, pithy phrase. As an example, kick off the brainstorming with something like: “An apple a day keeps the doctor away.”

## CONTEXT

**NOTE:** Recall the handout **Pack Item 12: Solomon's Wisdom**. Point out that the book of Proverbs was written in large part by Solomon and is regarded as one of the Bible's books of wisdom literature, along with Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. State that in writing it, Solomon was trying to share his godly wisdom and help others grow into spiritual maturity. In directing his son on multiple occasions to pay attention to his teachings, Solomon, like any good father, was trying to impart wisdom that would save his son from stumbles that could cause damage, stress, or grief, and perhaps even death.

**TRANSITION:** Invite a volunteer to read aloud the short collection of sayings the group compiled above. Say: “While some of these sayings are interesting or amusing, to communicate true spiritual wisdom and therefore have the significant impact of truth, the wisdom we share must reflect the truth of God's Word and point others to Him.”

## RECAP

**DRAW:** Return to the board and sketch some blocks to illustrate stepping stones. Create two separate paths, one straight and one winding, ensuring that they intersect at some point. Encourage the group to identify take-aways from their personal preparation with Proverbs 4:10-19 and to assign each either to the straight or crooked path by inscribing it on one of the stepping stones. As an example, mark the first step in the straight path with: “Accept the teachings = long life.”

**TRANSITION:** Point out how the paths intersect, noting that as an opportunity to choose which path to take. Then say: “Solomon's wisdom for life's journey as recorded in Proverbs matches up with what Jesus and other early church leaders had to say. Through all of these biblical teachings, we have the opportunity to choose to walk the path of God's wisdom or to reject it for the darkness and death that accompany the way of the wicked.”



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## GROUP ACTIVITY

**CHART:** Direct the group to page 128 in the Personal Study Guide (PSG) for the activity titled "The Road Map," and follow the instructions below for its use during your group experience.

### The Road Map

Read the passages below, and write out or illustrate the steps toward wisdom in the road map from each passage.

MATTHEW 5:14-16

MATTHEW 7:13-14

JOHN 14:6

EPHESIANS 6:1-3

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-7:1

**READ:** Call on a volunteer to read Proverbs 4:10-13 aloud.

**DISCUSS:** Call attention to the imagery and commands of the passage that convey life as a journey with choices on which way to go, whether taking straight or crooked paths. Ask: "How should this passage impact our reading and study of the rest of Scripture? How might this passage connect us to the significance of Christ in Scripture?" Highlight that this passage tells us to guard instruction. Ask: "What are some guardrails we could set up to defend or preserve the wisdom of God that we have been taught?"

**READ:** Enlist another volunteer to read Proverbs 4:14-19.

**PROBE:** Invite the group to point out the imagery and phrases that signal a person is on the wrong life path. Ask: "Based on your personal experience or understanding of human nature, is it difficult or easy to heed Solomon's warning against the depravities and dangers of the wicked path? Why?"



## Notes

**INTERACT:** Encourage the group to share real-life scenarios of when they have been confronted by the evidence or experience of wickedness. Note that the wicked do not understand what makes them stumble because the darkness hides it even from themselves. This is why we often need others to help us recognize what path we are walking.

**ANALYZE:** Assign each of the Scripture references in “The Road Map” chart for volunteers to read aloud. Decide as a group how each New Testament passage aligns with the words in the Proverbs 4 passage. Encourage your group to write out or illustrate the steps toward wisdom that each passage puts forth. Emphasize that the words in Proverbs and in the New Testament, communicated centuries apart, are in sync because they reveal universal truths discerned from God.

## DEBRIEF

**(PSG p. 128) What are the obvious, less obvious, and hidden rewards of taking the narrow way of wisdom? How can the promise of a long life be something more than just an earthly reward?**

**What are some of the paths today that we should avoid as roads leading to destruction?**

## SUMMARIZE

We’ve come full circle in this unit of study, which started with David urging his son Solomon to lean on God and to keep His commands and ends with Solomon sharing similar wisdom with his son. This illustrates the effect of God’s wisdom in our lives: God calls us to His light and life, which we then share with others by pointing them to Jesus, who is God’s wisdom.

## HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 129). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Head** section in this week’s study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



**HEAD:** Adam and Eve, seeking a worldly wisdom, foolishly sinned and plunged the world into futility. The wisdom of this world is opposed to God’s wisdom. Paul wrote: “The Jews ask for signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. Yet to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:22-24).

**What are some ways you would distinguish between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of this world?**



**HEART:** In our us-versus-them culture, it’s almost second-nature to compare our lives to those we consider wicked. But when we judge by

our own standards and not Christ's teachings, we are actually practicing self-righteousness. If your heart leans toward exclusion or judgment, or if your words and actions promote division, then you aren't operating in biblical wisdom and truth, which must always incorporate love and promote godliness (1 Tim. 1:5; 6:3).

**How can you ensure your words, attitudes, and social media posts reflect Christ's wisdom with grace and truth?**



**HANDS:** Discipleship is a key part of living wisely, avoiding the path of wickedness, and drawing others toward Christ. As disciples, we hope to imitate Christ, who modeled perfect obedience to His Father for us and in our place to save us. This act of seeking God's wisdom—following Jesus in faith—will be a blessing both for us and for those we interact with throughout the week.

**How will you take the next step in your discipleship, particularly in church?**

### NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Do some self-evaluation with Scripture to determine if you are on the path of God's wisdom or the path of wickedness.
- Commit to studying God's Word regularly on the path of God's wisdom.
- Look for or create an opportunity to share the gospel with someone who needs to be steered in the right direction toward Jesus.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 129 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

### PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

### PRAYING SCRIPTURE

**CLOSE:** Pray with your group through Psalm 1, asking God to point out areas where you are straying from the path of wisdom.

#### References

1. Jonathan Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Proverbs*, eds. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 62.



# THE DISCIPLINE OF READING AND MEMORIZING SCRIPTURE

By Rachel Myrick



Invented by Johannes Gutenberg around AD 1436, the printing press led to the Renaissance and Reformation by mass circulation of literature—especially the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Today, the average American family owns about three Bibles.<sup>2</sup> Owning a Bible is one thing; reading Scripture, however, is a spiritual discipline that is woefully neglected. Christians today have more access to the Bible than any other generation, yet we are biblically illiterate.

## READING THE BIBLE IS NECESSARY

An often overlooked command in the exodus story is Moses's command for the Israelites—once they entered Canaan—to write on large plastered stones all of the words of the law (Deut. 27:1-8). Then the people could read it, know it, obey it, teach it, and by it live long in the land God had given them (30:11-20). Future kings were instructed to write a copy of the entire law and meditate on it day and night so they might rule according to the Lord's wisdom (17:14-20). Later, God instructed Joshua to "meditate on [the law] day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do" (Josh. 1:8). But obeying the Lord's commands wasn't just the job of the elders, judges, or king. The people themselves were supposed to carefully follow the words of the law for the prosperity of the kingdom (1 Sam. 12:14-15). Seeking the Lord's will through meditating on and memorizing Scripture is necessary not only for the ancient Israelites but for all Christians everywhere.

## READING THE BIBLE IS BENEFICIAL

Understanding that Scripture is necessary for the spiritual growth and prosperity of God's people, the next question might be: Which Scriptures do

we need to know? In short, all of them. Even the Scriptures that are difficult for modern readers to accept or understand are "profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). While we tend to skip Scriptures that do not appeal to current sensibilities, "whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that we may have hope through endurance and through the encouragement from the Scriptures" (Rom. 15:4). The more we read and memorize the Word, the more we should marvel at God's character, redemptive plan, and undeserved mercy for perpetual rebels like you and me.

## READING THE BIBLE IS DELIGHTFUL

Many Christians have been encouraged to memorize Scripture in case "you don't have a Bible," much like middle schoolers are encouraged to memorize times tables or area formulas. As Bible apps allow us to keep Scripture handy at all times, I argue memorizing Scripture should be done because God's Word is a source of pure delight. In Psalm 119, David wrote: "I will meditate on your precepts and think about your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word" (vv. 15-16). Reading and memorizing Scripture helps us view it rightly—as treasure, not a burden (Job 23:12; Ps. 119:11,162; Matt. 13:52; Col. 2:3).

As you grow in your walk with Christ, make reading and memorizing Scripture a daily discipline to find treasure beyond silver or gold (Ps. 119:72).

### References

1. James E. Reed and Ronnie Prevost, *A History of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018), 172.
2. Bob Smietana, "Americans Are Fond of the Bible, Don't Actually Read It," Lifeway Research, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://research.lifeway.com/2017/04/25/lifeway-research-americans-are-fond-of-the-bible-dont-actually-read-it>.



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## FOOLISHNESS AND WISDOM

After the period of the judges, the Israelites wanted a king to lead them, and God gave them what they wanted. Israel's kings were to lead the people in God's ways and not the ways of the pagans around them. But being human, these kings had their strengths and weaknesses, times of faithfulness and times of faithlessness. When they followed God's wisdom over man's, they excelled, but when they didn't, they revealed their foolishness. Through the example of their lives and their Spirit-inspired teachings, God continues to guide us in wisdom. Now, with Jesus, the true King intended for us from the beginning, the promised King from David's line, we can learn better what true wisdom is—trusting Christ, fearing God, and walking in His ways.

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