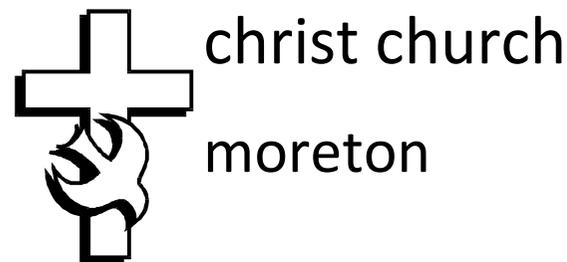


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making disciples

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# PROVERBS

## Wisdom to

## live by

CHRIST CHURCH  
HOME-GROUPS  
Autumn 2019

This term at our morning services on Sundays and in our home-groups, we will be studying the Old Testament book of Proverbs. IT is a book that was written to guide God's people in living wisely.

At the very start of the Bible we are told that God commissioned humans to take charge of the world (Genesis 1:26-27), and to do this we have to know and understand the world. From the start that understanding was meant to be in the light of God and his word. But the serpent tempted them to distrust God, and from then on people have had to decide whether to choose God-think or serpent-think.

The wisdom of the world around us leaves God out of the picture. But the wisdom found in Proverbs is rooted in a right relationship with God – what Proverbs calls 'The fear of the Lord.' Proverbs shows us that we must challenge every attempt to evaluate what is right and true, what is wise and good, which does not submit to the fear of the Lord."

But that won't necessarily come easily. Timothy Keller writes: 'Proverbs is not an "inspirational" book with statements that

immediately jump off the page at you. ... It comes through first with experience and then with deep honest reflection on that experience. It emerges only as we ask searching questions: When did I last see this illustrated in my life or someone else's? Where do I need to practice this? How would my life be different if I did? What wrong thinking and attitudes result when I forget this?"<sup>1</sup>

So this term is a time for taking time to ponder how these words apply to our lives, so that we can be people who live wisely.

## PROGRAMME FOR THE TERM

w/b Monday 9<sup>th</sup> September Home Group study 1  
Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> September Third Wednesday – 7.45 pm  
w/b Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> September Home Group study 2

Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> October Prayer Meeting – 11.00 am & 7.45 pm  
w/b Monday 7<sup>th</sup> October Home Group study 3  
Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> October Third Wednesday – 7.45 pm  
w/b Monday 21<sup>st</sup> October Home Group study 4  
Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> October Light Party

Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> November Prayer Meeting – 11.00 am & 7.45 pm  
w/b Monday 11<sup>th</sup> November Home Group study 5  
Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> November Third Wednesday – 7.45 pm  
w/b Monday 25<sup>th</sup> November Home Group study 6

# 1. THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Keller The Way of Wisdom p.20

## WELCOME

What is the best piece of advice you have ever been given?

## WORSHIP

Psalm 19 begins as a hymn of praise for the wonder of creation, and then goes on to say that actually God's word is even more wonderful, because it reveals God's ways to us. Starting with Psalm 19, praise God for the things you most appreciate in creation, and then praise him for the things he has told you through his word.

## WORD

Back in the 1980s the American author Buckminster Fuller came up with the "Knowledge Doubling Curve" – showing that the rate at which human knowledge is increasing is itself increasing rapidly. So – until 1900 human knowledge doubled approximately every century. By the end of World War II knowledge was doubling every 25 years. Today human knowledge is doubling every 12 months.

We know more and more, but as many have commented, that doesn't mean that we are becoming wiser. As Christians, that shouldn't surprise us, because as Graeme Goldsworthy writes: 'A true response to God is the only basis for a true understanding of all reality.'

That is the basis that Proverbs works from. In Matthew 7:13-14 Jesus describes the choice that every person needs to make

between a wide gate and broad road, and a small gate and narrow road.

In a similar way the book of Proverbs presents the choice of two paths:

*The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day. But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble.* Proverbs 4:18-19.

- Can you identify a time in your life when you made a deliberate choice about which path to follow? What factors influenced your decision?

### Read Proverbs 1:1-7

- According to verses 2-5, what is the purpose of the book of Proverbs?
- Do you think the things mentioned in verses 2-5 are popular or unpopular in today's world? Why?
- Verses 2-5 talk about:
  - Wisdom
  - Prudence
  - Discretion.
- What do each of these mean?
- Which of those would you like to have more of? Why?

- Proverbs 1:7 is the key theme of the book. What do you think it means to have the 'fear of the Lord'?

- The phrase recurs throughout the book. Look at the following verses:

- Proverbs 2:5
- Proverbs 3:7
- Proverbs 8:13
- Proverbs 9:10
- Proverbs 14:27
- Proverbs 15:16
- Proverbs 15:33
- Proverbs 16:6
- Proverbs 19:23
- Proverbs 22:4
- Proverbs 23:17

Which do they tell you about the benefits of 'the fear of the Lord'?

The book begins by telling us that they are *The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel*. 1 Kings 4:29-34 describes Solomon's wisdom, telling us that it was God given, and that Solomon was the wisest person who had lived. But the New Testament tells us that in Jesus someone greater than Solomon is here (Matthew 12:42).

### READ Isaiah 11:1-3

- In what ways is the description of God's coming Messiah a fulfilment of Proverbs 1:2-5?

So for us to fear the Lord means fearing God's Son, Jesus Christ.

- What are some of the ways in which you might be tempted to 'fear' other things and people rather than Jesus?

AND SO?

In what ways are you currently investing time and money and effort in gaining wisdom? What else could you do, individually or as a group, to help you in the pursuit of wisdom?

## 2. TWO WAYS TO LIVE

WELCOME

While travelling, have you ever realised you were on completely the wrong road? What happened?

WORSHIP

Read Psalm 25, then thank the Lord for the ways he has guided you in the past, and pray that he will be guiding you through the book of Proverbs.

WORD

Life is a complicated business. It is full of decisions – estimates vary from 5000 – 30000 a day. Most of them are pretty insignificant – what clothes shall I wear today? Shall I have a cup of coffee? Some are more significant – shall I go to church today? Some are very significant – where shall I live? Who shall I marry?

But there is an even more significant decision that all of us have to make every day. Who shall I listen to? We are surrounded by voices telling us what we should buy, and, more significantly, what we should believe. As Christians, one of the big challenges we face is to make sure we are listening to the right voices.

### READ PROVERBS 1:8-19

- What are some methods this passage highlights that evil people use to entice others to participate with them in sin?

- What is tempting about the voice of the sinner?
- What are the consequences of behaving in this way?
- What advice does Solomon give to help his son avoid temptation to evil?

### READ PROVERBS 1:20-33

- In what places does Wisdom call to people?
- What can we learn from this?
- What question does Wisdom ask in 1:22? How does the verse describe those who do not accept wisdom – in what sense do such people hate knowledge?
- What does Wisdom call on the people to do (v.23)? What promise does she make – 1:23?
- What are the consequences of refusing this call?

### READ PROVERBS 9:1-12

- Have you ever been insulted for trying to correct someone who is on the wrong path in life (v.7)?
- And how about if someone has had to challenge you about something you have done / are doing? Did your response show you to be wise or foolish (v.9)?

- In what way does wisdom reward you if you are wise (v.12)?

### READ PROVERBS 4:1-9

*The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost you all you have, get understanding. Proverbs 4:7*

Timothy Keller notes that wisdom comes not to the most fortunate or intelligent but to those most determined to find it.

Jesus said to his disciples, *'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.'* Matthew 16:24-25

- How does this help to understand what might it cost to get wisdom?

#### AND SO?

The book of James reminds us that God wants to give us wisdom: *If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.* James 1:5

In what areas of your life do you need to ask for wisdom? Are there areas where you need God's help not to listen to the voice of the sinners? Pray for one another about these things.

### 3. LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS

#### WELCOME

Who is the oldest friend you've got (oldest in terms of having known them for the longest time)? What makes your friendship with them work?

#### WORSHIP

Psalm 23 talks about God's constant care for us as his people. Use the psalm to praise him for his love and faithfulness.

#### WORD

Surveys over the last few years have shown that by and large, we struggle to trust. Trust in politicians has dropped to 17% – even lower than Journalists at 27%, which is the same as Estate Agents.

Those might not be that surprising, but what about Clergy? Surely we can trust them? Apparently not – only 65% trust clergy, a bit lower than police officers (74%). Only teachers (85%) and Doctors and nurses (91% & 94%) have the trust of over 80% of us.

And when it comes to trusting others around us – when asked if they trust the ordinary man or woman in the street, only 64% said they did.

We live in a society where trust has decayed. Many find it difficult to trust even their friends, their husband or wife. Sometimes we are not even consciously aware of it, but we build barriers – we don't easily trust ourselves to anyone else. We are so used to being let down.

So when the Proverbs says *Trust in the Lord with all your heart* it is saying something profoundly challenging.

#### READ PROVERBS 3:1-12

- Why does Proverbs single out love and faithfulness as the 2 most important things?
- Do you think that love and faithfulness are valued in our society? Are there other things which people think are more important?
- What leads people to trust their own wisdom instead of that of God?
- What is the benefit of fearing God? Have you seen this in your own life?

Timothy Keller says: "You can believe in God and yet still trust something else for your real significance and happiness – which is therefore your real god. Identify your idols."

- In what area do you find it most difficult to *trust in the Lord* and *submit to him*?

In our society people put their trust in many things, and it is easy for those things to slip into our lives as Christians. I am often surprised when a Christian says that they read their horoscope – which seems to me to be a clear case of trusting in something false rather than the Lord. But I suspect all of us have things which try to take that place in our lives.

- What is the best candidate in your life for an alternate "god"?

- In what ways does God discipline us (v.11)? Do you have experience of this?

Proverbs 3:11-12 is quoted in Hebrews 12:5-6

### READ HEBREWS 12:4-13

- How does this help us understand why and how God disciplines us?
- How should we respond to discipline?

### READ PROVERBS 4:20-27

- What does it mean to 'guard your heart' (v.23)
- What can you do practically to do this?

### AND SO?

How can you help each other in your group to 'trust in the Lord' more?

Pray about specific areas where you find this difficult.

## 4. KEEP ON THE NARROW PATH

### WELCOME

If you are on a journey, do you prefer to get to your destination as quickly as possible, or to travel slowly and take in the sights?

### WORSHIP

Psalm 130 reminds us that with the Lord there is forgiveness, which is one of the reasons we worship him.

Starting with Psalm 130, praise God for his love, his mercy, and his forgiveness. Take some time to remember that no matter what we might have done, with him is unfailing love and full redemption.

### WORD

When we go out walking, the biggest challenge is often deciding which path we are supposed to take. Recently on a walk our guide book said 'ignore the broad path on the right, instead turn left on the well worn path.' However, since the book was written the path to the left had become a lot less well worn – in fact it was hard to find it! We had to choose between an obvious broad path and one which seemed to lead straight into a bramble bush. But that was the right path – even if it looked very uninviting.

As we were reminded in study 1, Jesus spoke about the choice which we all have to make between travelling on the broad road and the narrow road (see Matthew 7:13-14). But that isn't just a one off decision we make, it is something that we have to continue with. Every day we will face temptations to turn onto the broad road,

because it is easier to travel on, and it is the one which most people are on, and they can't understand why we would want to take a much harder one.

### READ PROVERBS 5:1-23

- Why do you think the writer singles out adultery as a particular problem?

Our society is probably more dominated by sex than any in history. Whether it is internet pornography or alternate forms of sexuality, we are surrounded by temptation.

- What is so tempting about all of these 'voices of the adulteress'?
- What, according to Proverbs 5, are the consequences of behaving in this way?
- Are there particular areas of your life where you are tempted by the voice of the adulteress? If so, how?

### READ PROVERBS 6:6-11

- What is tempting about the voice of the sluggard?
- In what areas of your life are you most tempted to be lazy (it could be work, family, church, prayer etc.)?
- What other examples can you think of where the voice of folly is seeking to tempt you?

The book of Proverbs changes after chapter 9. From there on it is mostly made up of single verse proverbs, which are not obviously grouped together under particular themes.

One of the themes that comes out through the rest of the book is integrity:

*Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out.* Proverbs 10:9

*The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.* Proverbs 11:3

- Why is integrity so important to God?
- Would your friends describe you as a person of integrity?
- In what areas of your life is integrity particularly important to you?

### AND SO?

We saw in study 1 that Jesus is the one person who has perfectly lived out the life of wisdom described in Proverbs. So in seeking to learn from this book, we are seeking to become more like Jesus.

In what area of your life are you most aware of that need? Pray for one another about these.

# 5. WATCH YOUR TONGUE

## WELCOME

What is the nicest thing anyone has said to you or about you?

## WORSHIP

Psalm 33:4-4 says *For the word of the Lord is right and true; he is faithful in all he does. The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.* Praise God for his word, and ask him to help you to trust it.

## WORD

John Stott writes: 'Speech is a wonderful gift from God. ... God speaks, and like him we also speak. Cows can moo, dogs bark, donkeys bray, pigs grunt, lambs bleat, lions roar, monkeys squeal and birds sing, but only humans beings can speak.'

Speech in one way in which we are like God. But unlike him we all too often use words in a way which damages rather than blesses. The Apostle James says that *no human being can tame the tongue.* James 3:8, and I guess that we will have experienced what he means. It might be that you have said something and then immediately wished that you could un-say it. Or it might be that someone else has said something to you which has hurt or confused you.

So any attempt to learn wisdom must involve learning how we use words.

## READ PROVERBS 12:13-23

- In what ways can we bring healing through our speech?
- Can you describe a situation when someone's words brought healing to you?
- What types of speech do the following Proverbs encourage?
  - Proverbs 12:25;
  - 16:24;
  - 17:9;
  - 25:11-12;
  - 27:9;

*The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy.* Proverbs 12:22

Many of the proverbs speak of the importance of honesty and integrity.

- Why does honesty matter?
- What are the dangers of dishonesty?
- Is there such a thing as a small white lie?
- Does it matter if you cheat on a parking meter?
- Does it matter if you misrepresent your expenses or your tax return?
- Does it matter if you lie to a friend about your plans?

- Why does honesty matter to God?

There is also a specific form of lying which Proverbs homes in on:

*A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin.* Proverbs 26:28

- What damage can come through flattering speech (see also Proverbs 28:23; 27:5-6)?

*Those who guard their mouths and their tongues keep themselves from calamity.* Proverbs 21:23

- What does it mean to guard our mouth and tongue? How can we do so?

Jesus himself is an example of speaking with wisdom and love. What can we do to learn to speak words that bring healing to others?

AND SO?

Is there someone you know who could benefit from your encouraging words this week?

## 6. MONEY MAKES THE WORLD GO ROUND

WELCOME

If you were given £100 to spend on yourself, what would you buy?

WORSHIP

‘Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights’ (James 1:17)

Thank God for all the good things he has given you.

WORD

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus had some penetrating things to say about what we rely on for our security. *No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.* Mathew 6:24

Up until around 50 years ago, the buildings that dominated the skylines of most towns and cities were churches and cathedrals. Today it is more likely to be financial institutions. I guess that is a reminder of what our society today treats as important. But what about us as Christians? We can't abandon money completely – so how should we relate to it? How can we use money whilst making sure that it doesn't become the master we serve?

This is obviously not a new problem, because the book of Proverbs contains over 100 references to money. In this study we look at a few of them.

- Read the following proverbs. What do you discover about how we should *earn* money?
  - Proverbs 12:11
  - Proverbs 13:11
  - Proverbs 28:20-22
  
- Read the following Proverbs. What do you discover about how we should *use* our money?
  - Proverbs 11:24-26
  - Proverbs 19:17
  - Proverbs 22:9
  
- Read the following Proverbs. What do you discover about how we should *think about* money?
  - Proverbs 11:4, 18, 28
  - Proverbs 16:8-16
  - Proverbs 23:4-5

*A kind hearted woman gains respect, but ruthless men gain only wealth. A kind man benefits himself, but a cruel man brings trouble on himself.* Proverbs 11:16-17

- How would you define kindness?
  
- How would you define generosity?

- Who do you particularly try to show kindness to in your life? Who benefits most from your generosity?

- In what way do we benefit from being kind and generous?

*He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God.*  
Proverbs 14:31

*If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.* Proverbs 25:21-22

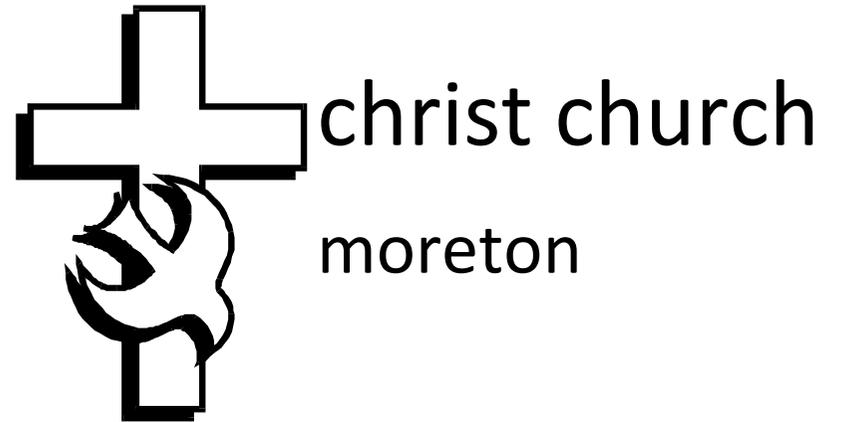
- Why do you think God wants us to show kindness to the poor and to our enemies?
  
- What impact does our kindness and generosity have on our relationship with God?

AND SO?

*Honour the Lord with your wealth, with the first-fruits of all your crops.* Proverbs 3:9

Tim Keller writes: "Inordinate love of money and confidence in its power blind us, and the best way to break money's power over us is through giving lots of it away. The first fruits of a crop were to be given to God and the poor, even though it wasn't certain how big the harvest would actually be."

Are there any changes you can make in your life to help you become more kind and generous? Who is there in your circle of friends (or enemies) that could benefit from your kindness or generosity?



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