

# ANCIENT WISDOM, EVERYDAY WORSHIP

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## Re-discovering Proverbs

*12-Week Group Devotional*

VOLUME 1: PROVERBS 1-4





# ANCIENT WISDOM, EVERYDAY WORSHIP: Re-discovering Proverbs

WEEK 1 - PROVERBS 1:1-7

## IT'S NOT *WHAT* YOU KNOW...

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. (PROVERBS 1:7)*

It all begins with God. It all ends with God. And it's all about God. Wisdom can only establish a firm foundation in our lives when we "put God in His place," so to speak; when we fully understand who He is, and especially when we understand that we're not Him!

The book of Proverbs falls very nearly in the center of our Bible, and that's appropriate. As a central focus for daily living, and a starting point for righteous behavior, we can hardly do better than to be certain our existence revolves around and is guided by these timeless truths.

But it all begins with God. Merely aligning ourselves with the latest personal enhancement technique, or the most current professional business model, or the savviest financial strategy isn't where real knowledge or wisdom originate. It all begins with God.

Solomon, whom most scholars agree was the composer of most of these practical instructions we call the Book of Proverbs, knew this. Or maybe we should say, *came to know this*. You're probably familiar with his story – his lavish lifestyle and his hedonistic inclinations. Yet, he admitted in his later years that it was all meaningless (see Eccl. 1 and 2). Even the pursuit of knowledge, gained for its own sake, was futile outside a direct relationship to the Source of wisdom and the Fount of knowledge.

There are two key words in verse 7 of Proverbs 1 that are worth noting. Most Bible translations mention the "fear" of the Lord, and that word (*yirah* in Hebrew) indicates a deep reverence or respect. The word "beginning" – as in, "the beginning of knowledge" – is *reshiyth*, first in order or rank; the principal thing. It's related to *rosh*, a word that implies something set apart, at the forefront.

And there you have it – our main focus, our driving passion is to be a deep reverence for God Himself ... who He is, what He says and what He expects. Everything else is just data.

## DISCUSS

What would you honestly say is the driving passion of your life?  
How is that evidenced in your daily life and in your worship?

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WEEK 2 - PROVERBS 1:8-19

## YOUR "PARENTAL" INFLUENCE

*Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.*  
(PROVERBS 1:8)

I'm so grateful for my upbringing. I'm incredibly blessed to have been raised by godly parents who not only taught me basic biblical truths, but who demonstrated a love for God's word and how to live out those principles. Even today, my mother – now in her 80's – spends her first waking moments in prayer and the study of scripture. It's an inheritance I'm blessed to receive, and one I want desperately to live up to.

There's also a huge challenge in trying to impart this worldview to my children. They face an incredible assault on their thinking, their morals and their values, all to a degree of intensity I could never have imagined at their age. I'm praying daily for the wisdom to guide them where I can, share my experience when it's needed, and ultimately to point them to the Source of all knowledge.

Maybe, like me, you're called to provide leadership within your family, and also within a circle of friends or colleagues. Perhaps your sphere of influence involves others engaged in ministry at your church. You may be a full-time, paid staff member, or hold a part-time ministry position, or you may serve on a volunteer basis. Nevertheless, your leadership is defined and the challenges associated with that are always present, aren't they?

Those who have gone before us are valuable teachers. The insight they've gained and the lessons they've learned are invaluable to us. Why? Because they've *lived it!* The methods may have changed, and the technology employed has advanced, but the lure of the world's way and the challenge involved in seeing things through God's way remain the same.

Are you feeling the pressure between the world's requirements and God's expectations? Go back and read again the accounts of those listed in the 11th chapter of Hebrews. Look at how they did it. Remind yourself of how they stuck to it. That'll bring a shot of energy to your spirit!

## DISCUSS

Do you consider yourself mostly conformed to the world or transformed by God's word?  
How can you best communicate your deepest values to your family or those you minister with?

# ANCIENT WISDOM, EVERYDAY WORSHIP: Re-discovering Proverbs

WEEK 3 - PROVERBS 1:20-33

## WHEN WILL WE LEARN?

*But whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.*  
(PROVERBS 1:33)

This last section of Proverbs 1 employs the poetic device, personification, and gives the concept of wisdom some human traits and characteristics. It was common among ancient literary writers (see Isaiah 55:12 and 59:14) to give inanimate objects or even ideas the qualities of human life, and so drive home their point with vivid imagery. We still do that today.

How often God's word has "shouted" to me in the busy-ness of my day. How often His precepts have "called aloud" to my own selfish plans. How often have the mandates of the One who created me and loves me most spoken into the direction I've chosen for my life. And to my shame, how often I have refused to listen.

Sometimes, it's our own stubbornness that leads to us ignoring the voice of truth, isn't it? However, if you're at all like me, there are other times when it's not quite so intentional. It's just that our frantic pace keeps us so preoccupied with the immediate screaming at us, we fail to hear the eternal gently whispering to us.

I've learned (through trial and many an error) that I really can't afford not to intentionally listen for God's speaking into my daily existence. Just as a symphony conductor can hear one violin in a group of twenty playing slightly out of tune, we have to "train our ears" to hear His word in the cacophony that can be our life. It's a discipline; it requires practice; it demands constant attention.

But if we ignore it, the result can be disastrous! When will we learn?

## DISCUSS

Are you a disciplined listener to the voice of God?  
What can you do to cultivate your "inner ear"?

# ANCIENT WISDOM, EVERYDAY WORSHIP: Re-discovering Proverbs

WEEK 4 - PROVERBS 2:1-8

## IF ONLY

*He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless.*  
(PROVERBS 2:7)

How many times have you said to yourself: *If only I had done...*? Or, *if only I had said...*? And more likely, *if only I had NOT said...*? I'm guessing we've all got a few "if only" experiences in our history. Regret over missed or blundered opportunities is a common element in the human saga.

The opening portion of Proverbs 2 offers us a unique "if" and "then" scenario. Only here, it's pro-active; a road map to read *before* starting the journey; a pre-emptive strike against foolishness:

- *if you accept my wisdom...* (vs. 1)
- *if you call out for insight...* (vs. 3)
- *if you look for it [insight] as for silver...* (vs. 4)

*Then, says the writer, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.* (vs. 5)

The knowledge of God – I'm convinced that Solomon is talking not only about the sort of knowledge **about** things or **about** God, but also knowledge **of** Him. An intimate, up-close, personal knowledge of Him. And who among us wouldn't desire that?

I wonder if we don't get caught up sometimes in the techniques we use to help people encounter God – the "art" of worship," you might say – that we've lost our passion for the pursuit of God Himself. We know **about** Him and we do our best to tell others what He's like. To be sure, there's a dramatic energy that develops from all this and it's contagious ... infectious. And not all together a bad thing.

But, oh, how much better to concentrate on **knowing** Him. To commit ourselves to presenting the Sovereign Creator not as a far-off Deity, but as a close-up Presence. To lead others by responding not to the song, or the style, or the leader's personality, but to God Himself; calling out for insight, turning our ear to wisdom and applying our heart to understanding.

Then, we just might find the knowledge of God. If only.

## DISCUSS

How is knowing God different from simply knowing about God?

How do you most often respond to the joy of knowing God?