



**PATHWAY BIBLE GUIDES**

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# The Art of Living

**PROVERBS**

**BY BRYSON SMITH**



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# BEFORE YOU BEGIN

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“How should I live my life?” This is a pertinent question not just for Christians but for non-Christians too, judging by the shelves and shelves of self-help books you see in your local bookstore, and the letters pages of certain magazines. There are people wanting advice about all sorts of things, like “Which job should I take?”, “What should I say to my friend whose mother died recently?”, “What’s the best thing to do in this situation?”, and so on. The answers come not just from self-help books and magazine columns, but from a variety of sources: your family, your friends, your colleagues, your minister and other people you respect. Some of it is common knowledge; some of it is folk wisdom. As the old sayings go, “Too many cooks spoil the broth”, “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush” and “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch”.

However, when it comes to the art of living, the book of Proverbs is really the best authority on how to live, because its wisdom is no less than the wisdom of God—the God who created it all and knows it all. Indeed, the most important lesson on wisdom that Proverbs has to teach can be found in the very first chapter: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov 1:7).

Proverbs is filled with rich instruction on how to live—how to spend our money, how to work, what to say (and how to say it) and a whole host of other topics. Because of who God is, certain types of behaviour are good and certain types of behaviour are bad. Because of the way he established the world, we can observe certain patterns about the way it works, reflect on them and then act accordingly. Proverbs offers instruction that will enable us to live stable, good, coherent and effective lives.

But Proverbs also acknowledges that there will always be a voice—the voice of folly—competing for our attention and seeking to lead us astray. The voice of folly comes in many disguises—some of which may not be immediately obvious to us. We must learn to recognize it and reject it for what it is, for the result of heeding it is always death and destruction.

That the message of Proverbs is an unpopular one in our society should be no surprise, for its message ultimately concerns the Lord Jesus Christ. In fearing the Lord, we are not just to fear any old god but the one “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). Jesus, as God’s king, has been endowed with all wisdom and understanding, which makes him the pre-eminent authority on wisdom—the only truly wise man. In fearing him, we come to understand the real purpose of life, and therefore the real goal of wisdom.

In these studies, we’ll examine what the book of Proverbs means by ‘wisdom’ and how that wisdom applies to our lives. It is my prayer that as you discover wisdom’s immeasurable value, you’ll hold it near and dear, and let it shape your life. To possess wisdom is to understand the true art of living.

*Bryson Smith*  
October 2007

# 1. THE GAINING OF WISDOM

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## Proverbs 1:1-6



### Getting started

What are some examples of good advice you have received from others? What made their advice so helpful?



### Light from the Word

Read Proverbs 1:1-6.

1. According to verses 2-5, what is the purpose of the book of Proverbs?
2. Verses 2-5 mention lots of things. What do you think is meant by the following?
  - wisdom
  - prudence
  - discretion
3. Do you think the things mentioned in verses 2-5 are popular or unpopular in today's world? Why?
4. Which of the things listed in question 2 would you like to have more of? Why?
5. Verse 6 alerts us to the fact that the book of Proverbs is going to contain a range of different types of expressions of wisdom (e.g. proverbs, sayings and riddles). How would you define each one?
  - proverb

- saying (this is translated as ‘parable’ in the NIV)
- riddle

6. Who wrote this book, according to verse 1?

Read 1 Kings 4:29-34.

7. Why is Solomon a good person to learn about life from?

The connection between Solomon and wisdom is the start of an ongoing association in the Old Testament between wisdom and God’s king. Read Isaiah 11:1-3.

8. These verses describe God’s future king (i.e. Messiah or Christ)—the one who will rule Israel. What characteristics of this future king are similar to those in Proverbs 1:2-5?

The connection between wisdom and God’s king reaches its most profound moment with the coming of Jesus Christ. Read Matthew 12:38-42.

9. If Jesus is even wiser than Solomon, how should we respond to what Jesus says?



## To finish

Are there certain things about following Jesus which don’t make sense to the world, and which seem a bit silly to do? How does this study strengthen our trust in what Jesus says?



## Give thanks and pray

Thank God for the wonderful wisdom of our Lord Jesus. Ask him to give you the wisdom to be obedient to him.