



**Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

## Week 1: Choices in the New Year

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? In what ways did it stretch your thinking?
2. We often treat knowledge and wisdom as synonyms. However, they are two distinct forms of understanding. What's the difference between knowledge and wisdom? (See Isaiah 40:28, 55:8-9; Ecclesiastes 7:23)
3. Miles Kington humorously said, "Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit; wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad." What does this quote teach us about the insufficiency of knowledge? How have you experienced this in your life?
4. Read Genesis 1:1 and Proverbs 9:10. Notice that the word "beginning" appears in both verses.
  - What do these passages teach us about the beginning of creation and the beginning of wisdom?
  - Notice that in Proverbs 9:10 gaining wisdom does not begin with seeking it. Instead, what does Proverbs 9:10 teach as the first step to gaining wisdom? What does this mean? (Note: This concept will be explored further in this series.)
  - Read Proverbs 8:22-31. What do these verses teach us about wisdom's origins?
5. Read Genesis 3:1-7.
  - What motivated Adam and Eve to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?
  - What do these verses teach us about the nature of human knowledge and wisdom? How can the pursuit of them produce unhealthy desires?
  - Given that the ability to gain knowledge is a human characteristic, how does God intend for us to use it?
6. Read Genesis 11:1-9.
  - What motivated the people to build the tower? How does this go against God's will for humanity?
  - What do these verses teach us about human knowledge? How is knowledge used in this story to pursue unhealthy desires?
  - What connection do you see between the motivation of the people in Genesis 11:1-9 and Adam and Eve's motivation in Genesis 3?
7. Take some time to pray. If you are reflecting on these questions alone or in a group use this as an opportunity to express your dependence on God for wisdom and understanding.

### Practice for the week: Postured to Receive Wisdom

Find a quiet place where you can still your mind. Sit or stand in a comfortable posture. Then, lift your hands so that they are at a 90-degree angle with your torso. Turn your hands upward like you are receiving something. Spend 5-10 minutes a day in this posture with your eyes closed your eyes or an

unfixed gaze. Repeat several times: "God, I am open to receiving whatever you want to teach me this day." Then, write down whatever God is teaching you during these moments of stillness.

## Week 2: An Introduction to Proverbs

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything which made you uncomfortable, or with which you disagreed?
2. Proverbs are an ancient literary form found all over the world.<sup>1</sup> What's your favorite proverb and why? Have you heard any unusual proverbs?
3. Read Proverbs 1:1-9.
  - Are you typically someone who remembers and follows words of advice, or do you tend to need to learn things the hard way? Why do you think you are this way inclined?
  - What do you think the authors meant by "the fear of the Lord"?
  - In what ways do you think the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom?
  - What wisdom did your parents pass on to you that you have found helpful in life?
4. Read Proverbs 3:3-10. Which of these four topics—love and faithfulness, trust in God, humility, and the use of material wealth—is an area in which you feel you need more wisdom? If none of these resonate with you, is there another area in which you feel the need for more wisdom?
5. Read Proverbs 8:1-36.
  - How does this chapter challenge the common understanding of wisdom?
  - In what ways do you find the personification of Divine Wisdom helpful, and in what ways do you find it unhelpful?
  - How does the concept of Wisdom's presence during creation, and her delight in it, shape your understanding of the world and of humanity?
  - What light does this passage shed on the moral dimension of wisdom?
6. The text of Proverbs 8:30 is disputed and can be translated in at least three different ways. During creation...
  - ...Wisdom was an architect or master builder rejoicing at God's side.
  - ...Wisdom was a little child playing at God's side.
  - ...Wisdom was constantly at God's side—either rejoicing or playing!Which of these translations appeals to you, and why?
7. Read Proverbs 9:7-12. What does it mean to be a mocker (NIV) or scoffer (NRSV), and why is this attitude or behavior so destructive?
8. Think about your own life: is there a situation or relationship where you need wisdom, or about which you feel cynical? Break into groups of 2-3 and share about this, and then take some time to pray for one another. If you are reflecting on these questions alone take a moment to express your thoughts and needs to God. Then breathe in God's love and grace, and sit quietly in the comfort of God's presence with you and in you.

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<sup>1</sup> A collection of proverbs that may have influenced the writing of Proverbs 22:17 – 24:22 is "The Instruction of Amenemope," written somewhere around the 11<sup>th</sup> century BCE. For those who are interested, you can find a translation of that document here: [www.crcc.org/the-instruction-of-amenemope](http://www.crcc.org/the-instruction-of-amenemope)

### **Practice for the week: Love and faithfulness**

Given that Proverbs contains approximately 900 different instructions and sayings, it can feel an overwhelming book to read. When asked by an expert of the Jewish law, Jesus said the greatest commandment—and the foundation for all the writings in Scripture—was to love God, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Read the verse from Proverbs below slowly and prayerfully each morning and ask God to bring it to mind throughout your day. How can you show love and faithfulness to the people you encounter today?

*Let love and faithfulness never leave you;  
bind them around your neck,  
write them on the tablet of your heart.  
(Proverbs 3:3)*

## Week 3: Proverbs to Live By

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything which made you uncomfortable, or with which you disagreed?
2. The Book of Proverbs is an ancient Hebrew form of wisdom literature. In many ways Jesus came in this tradition as a sage drawing on the depths of divine wisdom. Read John 3: 3-8 (NRSV) and James 3:13-18 (NRSV).
  - How does the author of John describe how we access divine consciousness?
  - What does being "born from above" mean to you?
  - How does the author of James describe this higher consciousness?
  - In what ways do being "born from above" in John and "wisdom from above" in James relate to each other?
  - How might this connection help us grow in divine wisdom?
3. In John 10:10 Jesus tells us that he came so that we might "have life to the full." Read James 1:5-8. How might the wisdom described here help us live full lives? What might this kind of wisdom look like in your own life, with all its varied circumstances right now?
4. Read about the Hebrew King Solomon in 1 Kings 3:1-15 and 1 Kings 11:1-6. What similarities and contrasts do you see in these two passages? What does this tell us about the acquisition, growth, and loss of wisdom in our own lives?
5. Compare Proverbs 10:4 with Proverbs 16:16. How are these proverbs similar and how are they different? How might this inform how we interpret the Book of Proverbs in general? How does the wisdom of Jesus his saying in Luke 6:20 inform this?
6. If you are discussing these questions as a group break up into smaller groups of 2 or 3 to discuss the following proverbs:
  - Proverbs 10:12
  - Proverbs 12:1
  - Proverbs 21:3For each one, spend a moment reflecting quietly and then share how they challenge, encourage, and could empower you in your own life right now. After sharing, spend some time praying for one another. If you are reflecting on these questions alone, take a moment to do the prayer practice below.

### Practice for the week: Letting proverbs read us

This week take some time to reflect on the three proverbs in the last question above. Set aside some protected time in silence and solitude to let these proverbs read you. Let go of any fear or defensiveness and remember that God is love and inviting you into "life to the full." Sink into God's love and the "wisdom from above" of these proverbs as they apply to you.

## Week 4: Models of Wisdom

1. Was there anything in the message on Sunday that stood out to you? What was most helpful for you? In what ways did it stretch your thinking?
2. Socrates said: "True wisdom comes to each of us when we realize how little we understand about life, ourselves, and the world around us."
  - How does that statement make you feel?
  - How does it compare with Agur's self-evaluation in Proverbs 30:1-4? Do you resonate with Agur's feelings?
  - In a society that values individualism and personal opinion and promotes self-aggrandizement, what can we learn from Agur's humble recognition of his own lack of wisdom?
3. Read Agur's prayer in Proverbs 30:8-10.
  - What stands out to you in Agur's prayer? How does it make you feel?
  - Material wealth is often seen as a measure of success in our modern world. How can we apply Agur's prayer to "give me neither poverty nor riches" (Proverbs 30:8)?
  - How can Proverbs 30 help shape our perspective on humility, contentment, and wisdom?
4. Proverbs 30:10-33 contains many of Agur's observations of the world around him.
  - Read Proverbs 30:24-28. In this verse, Agur points to four small creatures as examples of wisdom. What can we learn from these creatures, and how can we apply these lessons to our daily lives?
  - Read Proverbs 30:11-14. What do you think Agur means in Proverbs 30:14? How can we avoid being like the people he observes in this verse?
5. Proverbs 31:10-31 is a popular passage that has often been treated as a job description for a godly wife. However, Proverbs 31:10-31 was not intended to be a model for women but an example of how Godly wisdom can be translated into everyday practical decisions.
  - Read Proverbs 31:10-31. How have you heard this passage used? How did it make you feel?
  - The original audience of this passage was young men. How does that change the way you read this passage?
  - Consider how wisdom is personified earlier in Proverbs 1:20-27. Why is it fitting for Proverbs to end with wisdom exemplified in a woman?
  - What can we learn from Proverbs 30:10-31 about applying wisdom in our daily lives?

### Practice for the week: Observing the world around us

In Proverbs 30, Agur gleaned Godly wisdom by observing the world around him. This week, take some time to slow down and observe the world around you. Try to be mindful and present wherever you go. Notice the common everyday activities of people around you. Observe the way they interact with one another and the world around them. Consider the movement patterns of other living beings and observe the natural world. Maybe even take a short walk outside. Every day, take some time to write down your observations and consider what they teach us about God.