

God's  
Answers for  
Today's  
Problems

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## **GOD'S ANSWERS FOR TODAY'S PROBLEMS**

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# HOW TO GET STARTED...



Reading directions is sometimes difficult and hardly ever enjoyable! Most often you just want to get started. Only if all else fails will you read the instructions. We understand, but please don't approach this study that way. These brief instructions are a vital part of getting started on the right foot! These few pages will help you immensely.

## FIRST

As you study Proverbs, you will need four things in addition to this book:

1. A Bible that you are willing to mark in. The marking is essential. An ideal Bible for this purpose is *The New Inductive Study Bible (NISB)*. The *NISB* is in a single-column text format with large, easy-to-read type, which is ideal for marking. The margins of the text are wide and blank for note taking.

The *NISB* also has instructions for studying each book of the Bible, but it does not contain any commentary on the text, nor is it compiled from any theological stance. Its purpose is to teach you how to discern truth for yourself through the inductive method of study. (The various charts and maps that you will find in this study guide are taken from the *NISB*.)

Whichever Bible you use, just know you will need to mark in it, which brings us to the second item you will need...

2. A fine-point, four-color ballpoint pen or various colored fine-point pens that you can use to write in your Bible. Office supply stores should have those.

3. Colored pencils or an eight-color leaded Pentel pencil.

4. A composition book or a notebook for working on your assignments or recording your insights.

## SECOND

1. As you study Proverbs, you will be given specific instructions for each day's study. These should take you between 20 and 30 minutes a day, but if you spend more time than this, you will increase your intimacy with the Word of God and the God of the Word.

If you are doing this study in a class and you find the lessons too heavy, simply do what you can. To do a little is better than to do nothing. Don't be an all-or-nothing person when it comes to Bible study.

Remember, anytime you get into the Word of God, you enter into more intensive warfare with the devil (our enemy). Why? Every piece of the Christian's armor is related to the Word of God. And our one and only offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. The enemy wants you to have a dull sword. Don't cooperate! You don't have to!

2. As you read each chapter, train yourself to ask the "5 W's and an H": who, what, when, where, why, and how. Asking questions like these helps you see exactly what the Word of God is saying. When you interrogate the text with the 5 W's and an H, you ask questions like these:


- a. **What** is the chapter about?
- b. **Who** are the main characters?

- c. **When** does this event or teaching take place?
- d. **Where** does this happen?
- e. **Why** is this being done or said?
- f. **How** did it happen?

3. In most of the books in the New Inductive Study Series, we recommend that you mark biblical references to chronology (time) and geography (location) so that you can determine the context of each passage. However, these are not critical for understanding the book of Proverbs, so we won't ask you to mark these in this study.

4. You will be given certain key words to mark throughout Proverbs. This is the purpose of the colored pencils and the colored pens. If you will develop the habit of marking your Bible in this way, you will find it will make a significant difference in the effectiveness of your study and in how much you remember.

A **key word** is an important word that the author uses repeatedly in order to convey his message to his reader. Certain key words will show up throughout each book; others will be concentrated in specific chapters or segments of a book. When you mark a key word, you should also mark its synonyms (words that mean the same thing in the context) and any pronouns (*he, his, she, her, it, we, they, us, our, you, their, them*) in the same way you have marked the key word. We will give you suggestions for ways to mark key words in your daily assignments.

You can use colors or symbols or a combination of colors and symbols to mark words for easy identification. However, colors are easier to distinguish than symbols. When we use symbols, we keep them very simple. For example, you could draw a purple cloud around the word *wisdom* and lightly shade the inside of the cloud like this:  .

When marking key words, mark them in a way that is easy for you to remember.

If you devise a color-coding system for marking key words throughout your Bible, then when you look at the pages of your Bible, you will see instantly where a key word is used.

You might want to make yourself a bookmark listing the words you want to mark along with their colors and/or symbols. We will mention some specific key words to watch for in each chapter of Proverbs, but you might consider watching out for these and marking them from the beginning:

adulteress, harlot, woman of folly

commandment, instruction, knowledge,  
teaching, understanding

evil, iniquity, sin, wicked, wickedness, abomination

fool, evil

humble, humility

lazy, laziness, sluggard

mouth, words, lips, tongue, gentle answer,  
harsh word, speech

poor, poverty

pride, proud, arrogant, wise in his own eyes

righteous

wealth, riches

wine, strong drink

wise, wisdom

5. A PROVERBS AT A GLANCE chart is included on page 107. As you complete your study of each chapter,



record the main theme of that chapter under the appropriate chapter number. The main theme of a chapter is what the chapter deals with the most. It may be a particular subject or teaching.

If you will fill out the PROVERBS AT A GLANCE chart as you progress through the study, you will have a complete synopsis of Proverbs when you are finished. If you have a *New Inductive Study Bible*, you will find the same chart in your Bible (page 1061). If you record your chapter themes there, you will have them for a ready reference.

6. Always begin your study with prayer. As you do your part to handle the Word of God accurately, you must remember that the Bible is a divinely inspired book. The words that you are reading are truth, given to you by God so you can know Him and His ways more intimately. These truths are divinely revealed.

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-11).

Therefore ask God to reveal His truth to you as He leads and guides you into all truth. He will if you will ask.

7. Each day when you finish your lesson, meditate on what you saw. Ask your heavenly Father how you should live in light of the truths you have just studied. At times, depending on how God has spoken to you through His Word, you might even want to write LFL (“Lessons for Life”) in the margin of your Bible and then, as briefly as possible, record the lesson for life that you want to remember.

### THIRD

This study is set up so that you have an assignment for every day of the week—so that you are in the Word daily. If you work through your study in this way, you will find it more profitable than doing a week's study in one sitting. Pacing yourself this way allows time for thinking through what you learn on a daily basis!

The seventh day of each week differs from the other six days. The seventh day is designed to aid group discussion; however, it's also profitable if you are studying this book individually.

The “seventh” day is whatever day in the week you choose to finish your week's study. On this day, you will find a verse or two for you to memorize and **STORE IN YOUR HEART**. Then there is a passage to **READ AND DISCUSS**. This will help you focus on a major truth or major truths covered in your study that week.

To assist those using the material in a Sunday school class or a group Bible study, there are **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY**. Even if you are not doing this study with anyone else, answering these questions would be good for you.

If you are in a group, be sure every member of the class, including the teacher, supports his or her answers and insights from the Bible text itself. Then you will be handling the Word of God accurately. As you learn to see what the text says and compare Scripture with Scripture, the Bible explains itself.

Always examine your insights by carefully observing the text to see what it *says*. Then, before you decide what the passage of Scripture *means*, make sure that you interpret it in the light of its context. Scripture will never contradict Scripture. If it ever seems to contradict the rest of the Word of God, you can be certain that something is being taken

out of context. If you come to a passage that is difficult to understand, reserve your interpretations for a time when you can study the passage in greater depth.

The purpose of the **THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK** is to share with you what we consider to be an important element in your week of study. We have included it for your evaluation and, hopefully, for your edification. This section will help you see how to walk in light of what you learned.

Books in the New Inductive Study Series are survey courses. If you want to do a more in-depth study of a particular book of the Bible, we suggest you do a Precept Upon Precept Bible study course on that book. You may obtain more information on these courses by contacting Precept Ministries International at 800-763-8280, visiting our website at [www.precept.org](http://www.precept.org), or filling out and mailing the response card in the back of this book.

# *P*ROVERBS

# INTRODUCTION TO PROVERBS



The Bible is made up of 66 distinct books of varying lengths and styles, written by different authors over many years for different purposes. Yet in spite of this variety, the Bible itself says all of it is God-breathed and “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). That means it teaches us truth beginning to end, showing us how we’ve either fallen short of God’s ideals or just plain rebelled against His Law, how to get back to where we need to be, and then how to live in a right relationship to God.

The book of Proverbs will show you these things if you study it, carry it around with you in your heart, and live by it. In common usage, the word *proverb* means a saying; a popular, common idea that rings true to life over a range of circumstances. We use many proverbs in ordinary speech. They vary somewhat from culture to culture, and many are consistent with biblical teaching. For example, Benjamin Franklin published “a penny saved is a penny earned” in *Poor Richard’s Almanac*. “A rolling stone gathers no moss”

promotes activity instead of lethargy (compare Proverbs 6:9-11; 10:4; 13:4; 21:25). “A fool and his money are soon parted” warns us about excessive consumption (see Proverbs 13:18; 23:21). “A stitch in time saves nine” urges us to get a jump on things and avoid procrastination (as do Proverbs 20:13 and 28:19). “A rotten apple spoils the whole bunch” advises us to watch the company we keep (see Proverbs 22:24; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 15:33).

Get the picture? These sayings generally agree with our experience. Many use metaphors, like the rolling stone and the stitch. The saying is literally true—a single stitch early on will keep a tear from enlarging so much that it needs many—but the principle behind it is applicable to dozens of other situations. This is a general principle, not a universal one. It doesn’t promise that every single stitch now will save nine stitches later or that no stitching now will demand nine stitches later. Rather, it espouses the general principle that putting off repair now will likely require more repair later (possibly at more time and expense).

Biblical proverbs are the same—they are general principles and not universal promises. Understanding this will prevent much heartache when “promises” don’t come true. The proverbs in the book of Proverbs are timeless principles to follow. These guidelines for wise decision making will help you live God’s life for you to its fullest. In this foolish world, living wisely is a challenge; we all need help. What better help than God’s proverbs for life?

When observing these principles in Proverbs, we need to understand the kind of literature we’re reading. The Jews break up their *Tanakh* (Hebrew Bible) into *Torah* (Law), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Kethuvim* (Writings). The book of Proverbs falls within the *Kethuvim*—wise sayings.

Accordingly, Christian Bibles classify Proverbs as wisdom literature and poetry. The main characteristic of Hebrew

poetry is parallelism rather than rhyme or meter as in English poetry. Two lines in a verse address the same subject, sometimes comparing, sometimes contrasting. As you read, note the line that explains or amplifies the preceding, says it with a different description or metaphor, or shows its opposite.

# KNOWLEDGE, WISDOM, AND FOOLS



Those who lived before us passed down their wisdom to us in the form of short sayings called proverbs. Wisdom is knowledge rightly applied. Without wisdom, we're all fools—our decisions are foolish, and we live foolishly. Unlike the proverbs of men, which are accumulations of human experiences from the world's perspective on success, the book of Proverbs gives us God's wisdom for right living and eternal success...so we don't live like fools.



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## DAY ONE

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Read the first seven verses of Proverbs 1, identify the author, and list his purposes for writing proverbs. Then ask this question: Do I want this? Examine your heart. Do you want what these verses offer? If not, close the book and give it away to someone. You've admitted you're happy being a fool.

If you do want what Proverbs offers, then get ready to dig in and join all those who have sought God's wisdom to live wisely, righteously, justly, and prudently.

Now read the first seven verses again and mark references to *wise* or *wisdom* with a purple cloud shaded light purple. Put a red box around *fools* and shade the box in green.



Shade *instruction*, *knowledge*, and *understanding*<sup>1</sup> in purple, and marking references to *the LORD* with a purple triangle shaded yellow. What are the relationships among wisdom, fools, and the Lord?

You'll be marking these same words throughout Proverbs, so use a 3 x 5 card as a bookmark, and each week, lesson by lesson, write your key words on it and show how you plan to mark them. Do the same from chapter to chapter. This will help you mark consistently and save time.

How do *instruction*, *knowledge*, and *understanding* relate to wisdom?

Now, read verses 8-19 and underline the phrase *my son*. How do you think this phrase relates to the author and his purpose for writing?

Who are the adversaries of "my son"? What is their intent? What will be their end?




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DAY TWO

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Throughout Proverbs, *wisdom* and *fool* are personified. Personification is the literary device that treats inanimate objects as persons and gives them a voice. So pronouns such as *me*, *my*, *I*, and *you* are references to whatever is personified. With that in mind, read verses 20-33 and mark *wisdom* and *fools* as before, including any pronouns that refer to them.

What contrast do you find in this section?

Mark the reference to *the LORD* as before and note the truth in this section that parallels the truth in verse 7.

How does the person without wisdom end up? Why does he suffer this fate? List the characteristics that contribute to this end.




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 DAY THREE
 

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As you continue in this chapter and others, knowing some Hebrew terms might be helpful.


Three Hebrew words are translated *fool* in Proverbs. *Kesiyl* is the dull, closed, stubborn mind that rejects information from others. *Nabal* means no spiritual perception. David's wife Abigail was once married to a man named Nabal, and the name described him perfectly (1 Samuel 25). *Eviyl* (pronounced ev-eel) is an arrogant, flippant, mentally dull, coarse, and callous person.

Now, armed with this information, read Proverbs 1. The fool in verse 7 is *eviyl*, and the fool in verses 22 and 32 is *kesil*. How does this help you understand these texts?

Another enlightening Hebrew term is the one translated *naive* or *simpleminded*: *pethiy* means simple, foolish, open-minded to the point of naïveté.

If you have Bible study software or word study books, you can look these words up yourself as you study. Meanwhile, we'll point them out when we think they'll help you understand the text better.

Determine a theme for Proverbs 1 and record it on PROVERBS AT A GLANCE on page 107.




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 DAY FOUR
 

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Today read Proverbs 2:1-5, marking references to *wisdom* and *the LORD* (including *God*) as you have before. Continue to mark *knowledge* and *understanding*, and mark *commandment* the same way, noting how they relate to wisdom. Add them to your bookmark.

What do you learn from marking *LORD*? How does this fit with Proverbs 1:7?

Read verses 6-11, mark *wisdom*, *knowledge*, and *understanding* as before, and list the benefits of seeking wisdom as a treasure.




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DAY FIVE

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Read the rest of Proverbs 2 today, drawing a black cloud around *evil* and *wicked(ness)*. Now go back to see how these verses tie in to verses 10 and 11. Underline parallel words.

Now list what you learned about the way of evil. What is the value of wisdom?




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DAY SIX

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Read Proverbs 2:16-19 and list the characteristics of the strange (immoral) woman.

Now read verses 20-22 and look for conclusions. When do you think these things will happen?

Try outlining the flow of thought in chapter 2. What comes first? What results? What protection is available? How does the chapter conclude?

With these things in mind, determine a theme for Proverbs 2 and record it on PROVERBS AT A GLANCE.




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DAY SEVEN

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Store in your heart: Proverbs 1:7

Read and discuss: Proverbs 1-2

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

- ∞ What's the significance of wisdom and foolishness according to Proverbs 1–2?
- ∞ What kinds of people are discussed in these chapters? Discuss their goals, their kinds of life, and their futures.
- ∞ Discuss the idea of wisdom as treasure.
- ∞ What did you learn about the Lord in these two chapters?
- ∞ How does wisdom protect us?
- ∞ How do wisdom, understanding, knowledge, teaching, and commandments relate to one another?
- ∞ What application can you make to your own life? How does this week's study motivate you?

### THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

Two friends were walking along the shore of a pond. Suddenly one exclaimed, “Look at how deep those ducks are diving!” She went on to explain that most ducks dabble around in shallow water, feeding from its surface or just below, where food is easy to find. But these ducks plunged into deep waters to find the rich food there.

What an illustration of Proverbs 2:1–5! Most people study the Bible like dabbling ducks, paddling around in shallow water at the edge of the pond, content to feed on grasses and easy prey on the surface or just below, never daring to stray far from the shore. But what if we could be deep divers, venturing out into the deep waters of the Word, diving below the surface to search out the treasure that lies beneath? If we seek wisdom

as silver, search for her as for hidden treasure, we will be like ducks that dive deep. We'll "discern the fear of the LORD and discover the knowledge of God" (Proverbs 2:5).

Gaining wisdom takes effort because wisdom *is* deep, and so it needs the deep dive. We need to strive to observe, interpret, and apply God's truth. We won't get wisdom by paddling around in shallow waters, at the pond's edge, looking for effortless meals. We must first believe what God says about wisdom—that it is a treasure—and then desire to have *that* treasure as our most precious treasure. Only then will we be willing to dive deep into the waters.

The effort we're willing to expend to attain something is a measure of how much we value it. We may merely admire something and make no effort to attain it. We may say something is valuable to someone else but never attempt to acquire it for ourselves. We're content to live without it. This is the real measuring stick of our value system—what we're willing to live without and what we're willing to acquire through sacrifice.

Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal" (Matthew 6:19-20).

In affluent societies, most people amass great quantities of things that please them, things that moth and rust can destroy and thieves can steal. They don't naturally seek the eternal treasure no creature can take from them—knowledge of God and wisdom.

In poor, oppressed societies, people are forced to look for treasure somewhere else. They already live without most of the worldly goods many of us take for granted. They travel several days to attend Bible studies; we drive to a home group in a few minutes. They give up eating for a week to finance

their travel; we may spend the equivalent of our daily latte. Many of them have a better perspective on Matthew 6:19-20 than we have. They model the ducks that dive deep. We can learn a lot by watching them.