



Bible Study

PROVERBS 1-3



Canadian Lutheran
World Relief

CLWR BIBLE STUDIES

CLWR's Bible Studies have been designed to help congregations delve deeper into the challenges leading to injustices around the world, to explore related Bible stories, to discuss how these connect and how God calls us to act together.

These studies are meant to be adapted for your congregation's needs and are free to use. Each study includes discussion questions for children to adults, as well as suggestions to connect this discussion to action.

As CLWR continues to grow our resource collection, we would love to hear suggestions and insight from you. Please feel free to contact Heidi Van Schaik, our Church Relations Manager at heidi@clwr.org with ideas and feedback.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- The book of Proverbs is found in the third and final section of the Hebrew Bible.
- The book of Proverbs is believed to be a composite work with a number of unknown authors, however, some of the writings are often attributed to Solomon because of his legendary wisdom.
- The book contains poems, commands, and admonitions.
- The word “wisdom” in Hebrew (chokhmah) means more than simply a brain exercise, it’s more about practical or applied knowledge.
- “Fear” in the book of Proverbs doesn’t mean terror, rather it indicates a posture of humility or a reverence/awe for something/someone.

- Wisdom literature is a specific type of writing which has common languages, themes and genres as well as including elements of knowledge, imagination, discipline, piety, order and moral instruction.
- These writings were intended to pass on insights for ways to cope or live life.
- The teachings were gathered from various traditions of the elders and their experience.
- The teachings found in Proverbs emphasize values such as honesty, diligence, trustworthiness, self-restraint, and cultivate societies attitudes towards wealth and poverty.
- This type of writing flourished in the culture of the time it was written helping to share the ethical teachings of the synagogue and ultimately the church.
- Wisdom literature invites its hearers/readers to a position of open understanding, inviting engagement where we test, reformulate and negate its ideas and teachings.
- It is important to remember, when this book was compiled, Judaism is not a homogeneous society or religion. Post-exilic Judah and 2nd Temple Judaism include a variety of sects with differing opinions on many things. (One comparison might be similar to the multitude of Christian denominations, each with their own teachings and interpretations of the same scriptures.)

SITUATIONAL CONTEXT

- In chapters 1–9, divine wisdom is related to as ‘she.’
- Chapters 1–9 invite the reader into the pursuit of wisdom.
- We need to remember when reading Proverbs that this is literature that was considered moral instruction to the audience it was written for and while the teachings often align with ongoing moral teachings, they are not intended to be, or should not be taken to be ethical absolutes.
- During the time this work was compiled, religion had become a means of preserving the past.
- Chapters 1–9 are believed to have been written by sages from various groups who emerged from the people of Judah who returned from exile to Jerusalem.
- For more information on the Jewish Diaspora, check out this link:
www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-diaspora

Proverbs 1–3

1

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

2 For learning about wisdom and instruction,
for understanding words of insight,

3 for gaining instruction in wise dealing,
righteousness, justice, and equity;

4 to teach shrewdness to the simple,
knowledge and prudence to the young—

5 let the wise also hear and gain in learning,
and the discerning acquire skill,

6 to understand a proverb and a figure,
the words of the wise and their riddles.

7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

8 Hear, my child, your father's instruction,
and do not reject your mother's teaching;

9 for they are a fair garland for your head,
and pendants for your neck.

10 My child, if sinners entice you,
do not consent.

11 If they say, 'Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood;
let us wantonly ambush the innocent;

12 like Sheol let us swallow them alive
and whole, like those who go down to the Pit.

13 We shall find all kinds of costly things;
we shall fill our houses with booty.

14 Throw in your lot among us;
we will all have one purse' —
15 my child, do not walk in their way,
keep your foot from their paths;
16 for their feet run to evil,
and they hurry to shed blood.
17 For in vain is the net baited
while the bird is looking on;
18 yet they lie in wait—to kill themselves!
and set an ambush—for their own lives!
19 Such is the end of all who are greedy for gain;
it takes away the life of its possessors.
20 Wisdom cries out in the street;
in the squares she raises her voice.
21 At the busiest corner she cries out;
at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:
22 'How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?
How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing
and fools hate knowledge?
23 Give heed to my reproof;
I will pour out my thoughts to you;
I will make my words known to you.
24 Because I have called and you refused,
have stretched out my hand and no one heeded,
25 and because you have ignored all my counsel
and would have none of my reproof,
26 I also will laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when panic strikes you,

27 when panic strikes you like a storm,
and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish come upon you.
28 Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;
they will seek me diligently, but will not find me.
29 Because they hated knowledge
and did not choose the fear of the Lord,
30 would have none of my counsel,
and despised all my reproof,
31 therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way
and be sated with their own devices.
32 For waywardness kills the simple,
and the complacency of fools destroys them;
33 but those who listen to me will be secure
and will live at ease, without dread of disaster.'

2

My child, if you accept my words
and treasure up my commandments within you,
2 making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to understanding;
3 if you indeed cry out for insight,
and raise your voice for understanding;
4 if you seek it like silver,
and search for it as for hidden treasures—
5 then you will understand the fear of the Lord
and find the knowledge of God.

6 For the Lord gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;
7 he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
he is a shield to those who walk blamelessly,
8 guarding the paths of justice
and preserving the way of his faithful ones.
9 Then you will understand righteousness and justice
and equity, every good path;
10 for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
11 prudence will watch over you;
and understanding will guard you.
12 It will save you from the way of evil,
from those who speak perversely,
13 who forsake the paths of uprightness
to walk in the ways of darkness,
14 who rejoice in doing evil
and delight in the perverseness of evil;
15 those whose paths are crooked,
and who are devious in their ways.
16 You will be saved from the loose woman,
from the adulteress with her smooth words,
17 who forsakes the partner of her youth
and forgets her sacred covenant;
18 for her way leads down to death,
and her paths to the shades;
19 those who go to her never come back,
nor do they regain the paths of life.

20 Therefore walk in the way of the good,
and keep to the paths of the just.
21 For the upright will abide in the land,
and the innocent will remain in it;
22 but the wicked will be cut off from the land,
and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.

3

My child, do not forget my teaching,
but let your heart keep my commandments;
2 for length of days and years of life
and abundant welfare they will give you.
3 Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you;
bind them round your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.
4 So you will find favour and good repute
in the sight of God and of people.
5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.
6 In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
7 Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.
8 It will be a healing for your flesh
and a refreshment for your body.
9 Honour the Lord with your substance
and with the first fruits of all your produce;

- 10 then your barns will be filled with plenty,
and your vats will be bursting with wine.
- 11 My child, do not despise the Lord's discipline
or be weary of his reproof,
- 12 for the Lord reproves the one he loves,
as a father the son in whom he delights.
- 13 Happy are those who find wisdom,
and those who get understanding,
- 14 for her income is better than silver,
and her revenue better than gold.
- 15 She is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare with her.
- 16 Long life is in her right hand;
in her left hand are riches and honour.
- 17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all her paths are peace.
- 18 She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her;
those who hold her fast are called happy.
- 19 The Lord by wisdom founded the earth;
by understanding he established the heavens;
- 20 by his knowledge the deeps broke open,
and the clouds drop down the dew.
- 21 My child, do not let these escape from your sight:
keep sound wisdom and prudence,
- 22 and they will be life for your soul
and adornment for your neck.
- 23 Then you will walk on your way securely
and your foot will not stumble.

- 24 If you sit down, you will not be afraid;
when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.
- 25 Do not be afraid of sudden panic,
or of the storm that strikes the wicked;
- 26 for the Lord will be your confidence
and will keep your foot from being caught.
- 27 Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due,
when it is in your power to do it.
- 28 Do not say to your neighbour, 'Go, and come again;
tomorrow I will give it' —when you have it with you.
- 29 Do not plan harm against your neighbour
who lives trustingly beside you.
- 30 Do not quarrel with anyone without cause,
when no harm has been done to you.
- 31 Do not envy the violent
and do not choose any of their ways;
- 32 for the perverse are an abomination to the Lord,
but the upright are in his confidence.
- 33 The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked,
but he blesses the abode of the righteous.
- 34 Towards the scorners he is scornful,
but to the humble he shows favour.
- 35 The wise will inherit honour,
but stubborn fools, disgrace.

STUDY

Read Proverbs 1

Read Proverbs 1:7 again.

Understanding the meaning of the word “fear” as it’s used in Proverbs, why might you think that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge?

- Fear = awe, humility

How might a position of humbleness or awe help us to learn?

Read Proverbs 1:8.

How might you explain this to someone who does not have a good/healthy relationship with one or both of their parents?

What lessons/wisdom do you think Proverbs 1 is hoping to impart?

Read Proverbs 2

Interesting note: This chapter is an acrostic poem using the 22 letters of the Hebrew Alphabet.

What does Proverbs 2 compare wisdom to?

Read Proverbs 2:9-11

Why might the author suggest that wisdom comes into the heart?

- *The heart is the center of our being*

STUDY (CONTINUED)

Read Proverbs 3


Note that this chapter includes lots of symbolism.

What Gospel story does this chapter remind you of? (vv.13–20)

- *The Beatitudes*

What is wisdom compared to in Proverbs 3:16?

What contemporary symbol does this verse remind you of?

<i>The Scales of Justice</i>	<i>The Egyptian goddess of Truth and Justice – Ma'at is portrayed with symbols of life in one hand and wealth/dignity in the other</i>	<i>The Greek goddess, Themis offers a similar symbol (as shown in the painting by Marcello Bacciarelli below)</i>
		

Read Proverbs 3:18

What is wisdom compared to in Proverbs 3:18?

- *The tree of life in many Near Eastern culture is a symbol of longevity and well-being.*



After reading Proverbs 1–3, what do you think is recommended for learning?

- *Humble heart*
- *Willing spirit*
- *A teacher*

Do you think these things are needed for learning today?

Is there anything else you would add to this list for learning today?

Did You Know:

- What people eat can directly affect their mental capacities? [i]
- Research has shown that students are able to learn better when they're well nourished, and eating healthy meals has been linked to higher grades, better memory and alertness, and faster information processing. [ii]
- Around the world, poverty remains one of the most challenging barriers to attaining education.
- A significant portion of Nicaragua's population lives below the poverty line. Despite efforts to improve things, education remains inadequate, particularly in rural areas, limiting children's development. School can be hard for children, even at the best of times, so imagine how difficult it must be for those who are going hungry and are deprived of the most essential provisions and resources.[iii]

1. <https://abclifelifiteracy.ca/news/the-relationship-between-nutrition-and-learning/>

2. <https://ofy.org/blog/the-importance-of-eating-healthy-for-students/>

3. <https://www.clwr.org/product/A-2024-03S/summer-appeal-nicaragua>

WONDERINGS

Consider your local community, who might be challenged to attain their best education because of hunger in your community?

Consider Canada, who might be challenged to attain their best education because of hunger in this country?

Consider the world, what factors might contribute to challenging someone to attain their best education, because of hunger?

ACTION BRAINSTORM

How can you/your parish support healthy eating for learning locally?

How can you/your parish support healthy eating for learning nationally?

How can you/your parish support healthy eating for learning globally?

ACTION SUGGESTIONS

Read and learn more. One suggestion is *The End of Hunger: Renewed Hope for Feeding the World* by Jenny Eaton Dyer, Cathleen Falsani – Available on Amazon.ca

Read Lucio's story to learn more about education in Nicaragua:
www.clwr.org/lucios-story

Have a blessing of the bags (backpacks, lunch bags, work bags) service. All ages need to be encouraged to learn and grow every day, include the adults!

Host a food drive to supply a local school food program with necessities – be sure to be in relationship with the school to determine what they need.

Host an event or event series to offer local students a meal. It could be a high school free lunch, or a post secondary institution class or program a free meal.

Investigate what your community offers to students and help out with an existing meal program for students.

Host an event to teach parents how to pack affordable healthy lunches, or how to make affordable meals.

Host an event to help parents/caregivers prepare freezer meals to help feed their student.

Host a fundraiser to support the CLWR initiative to support healthy school lunches to young learners in Nicaragua.

Ask children:

- *Have you ever been at school and you couldn't wait for the lunch bell?*
- *Were you able to learn anything while you were distracted about having lunch?*

Talk to them about how sometimes people are hungry and distracted and it's not their fault, but because of other things, like they can't afford food, or food isn't available to them.

Talk to them about how we need good healthy food to be the best we can be at learning and how we need to look out for people who don't always have access to what they need.

Remind the children that with Jesus helping us, we can all share what we have and have enough for everyone so that everyone can have the best chance to learn all they can.

PRAYER

Eternal provider,

Thank you for abundantly providing us everything we need.

Help us to share out of our abundance
with those who are in need.

Help us to overturn structures of greed
and replace them with generosity.

Work through us to offer nourishment
and your saving grace to those who hunger.

We pray this in the name of your Son,
our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen.