

STUDY GUIDE

Proverbs

ANCIENT WISDOM FOR MODERN LIFE



Proverbs

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Welcome to our guidebook on Proverbs!

Here's a truth we can all agree on – life's complicated! It's full of decisions and responsibilities where the answers are rarely straightforward. So what's the best way I can live my life? How do I become the best version of me? There's hardly a more current question asked by both Christians and non-Christians. From the reality TV shows to the self-help section of your local bookstore, we want to know how to do life well in the midst of all its challenges and complications. We find ourselves asking questions like “What job should I take?”, “How do I parent my rebellious child?”, “Who do I vote for?”, “How do I deal with conflict in my relationship?”, “How should I invest my money?” and so on.

We often go looking for answers from experts, books or googling the internet. But there is also a kind of wisdom that gets passed from parents to their children, senior colleagues to their interns, Mums to other Mums, and people seeking and giving advice on social media. Wisdom on how to do life well comes in many forms. We are all familiar with old proverbs like “Too many cooks spoil the broth” that find their way passed from generation to generation.

However, when it comes to doing life well in the big and small things, the book of Proverbs provides some of the best advice one can find, 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).

STUDY 1

The Beginning of Wisdom

Did you grow up with a proverb or common saying that was used commonly in your household? When would it get used?

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🔍 EXPLORING TOGETHER

In our Growth Groups, we've been using what's known as the 'Swedish Method'. It's a way of giving us time to process what's there in the passage and to get discussion going on what we've observed. Follow the directions below and note down some of your own observations and thoughts. Then we'll discuss what you've found!

Light Bulb. Write down any interesting observations you get from the passage. This includes things that stand out, repeated ideas/words or something you found unusual.

Question Mark. Any questions from the text or an issue or point that doesn't make sense from the passage. Questions are great! They encourage us to think a bit harder about the passage and its implications. They also give us a chance to help each other understand Scripture better.

Arrow. Note down any reflections on things you found challenging or applicable to you. The bible addresses our heads, hearts and hands, or if you like, our thoughts, attitudes and actions so reflect on whether the passage addresses any of these.

READ PROVERBS 1:1-19

Take some time to fill out the sections below and discuss it together.



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DIGGING DEEPER

1. The introduction to Proverbs more or less outlines the intended goal of the book. So what exactly is wisdom according to Proverbs? And what do you think are the differences between some of the words used in the first 7 verses? Feel free to look them up in a dictionary or google it! (note: the words used may differ between translation versions):

Wisdom (v2)

Insight (v2)

Prudence (v4)

Discretion (v4)

Which of those do you think you need more of?

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2. Who is the intended audience for Proverbs?

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3. The motif of the entire book of Proverbs could be summarised with 1:7. What do you think this verse actually means?

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Look up Chapter 2:1-15 and discuss what you find to get a better picture of this phrase.

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It's clear from Proverbs that true wisdom comes from God (2:6). This shouldn't surprise us because He is the creator and designer of our world. Indeed, Proverbs highlights God's work as creator and attributes it as a work of wisdom (8:22-31). He also continues to sovereignly direct the steps of people (16:9, 20:24) and sees all that humans do.

Human observation and experience have taught the wise that a certain order is in place in God's creation. To honour it leads to known positive effects; to defy it leads only to unhappy consequences. All of life should be lived in conscious awareness of the unfailing scrutiny of the Lord of creation and in reliance on his generous providence. Wisdom in this context, then, is basically following the benevolent King's design for human thriving within the creation order.

James makes this reflection on wisdom in the New Testament:

James 3:13-17

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

Option: If you have time, discuss these questions on 1:8-19.

4. Thinking about 1:8-19, how valuable is gaining wisdom?

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5. What are the consequences of turning from wisdom and following the 'sinners' of v10?

Proverbs is a book about gaining wisdom. However, Proverbs also acknowledges that there will always be another 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. We'll look a bit more at folly next week.

VIDEO

Watch the Bible Project's video on Proverbs to get an overview of the book and where we're headed in coming weeks!

The first three weeks of this series will cover the first section of Proverbs chapters 1-9. Then we'll tackle chapters 10-31 in a series of topics covering things like friendship, money, our speech and work ethic. It's not often the Bible addresses us on such down to earth topics as these so there's something to look forward to!

PRAYER

Break into smaller groups and discuss an area of life that you'd like to ask God for wisdom on.

PROVERBS

BIBLICAL WISDOM LITERATURE

- LEARNERS NEED TO LIVE OUT IN GOD'S LAND
- WISDOM IS NOT...
 - TALK (THAT'S THE TRICK)
 - TRICK (THAT'S THE TRICK)
 - PROMISE (THAT'S THE TRICK)
- WISDOM IS... THE RECOGNIZED MIGHT OF GOD THAT COMES THROUGH REASONING.

ROYAL LIBRARY
 WISDOM IN THE ANCIENT WORLD (1-27-33)

SOLUTION
 FATHER OF JEREMAS' CASUALTY INDICTION

QUESTIONS IN THE ANCIENT WORLD (1-27-33)

1-9 AN INTRODUCTION TO PROVERBS (1-7)

POWERS OF SOLOMON

FOR GIVING WISDOM

THE TEAR OF THE LORD

- EXERCISES I AM
- I FEEL THE PAIN
- MYSELF ONLY BEFORE GOD

WILL LETTED WISDOM (1-27-33)

TEN SPEECHES FROM A FATHER TO A SON

THE MORAL LOGIC OF PROVERBS

WISDOM & INTELLIGENCE OF THE LORD	WISDOM & INTELLIGENCE AND DISCRETION	WISDOM & INTELLIGENCE AND DISCRETION	WISDOM & INTELLIGENCE AND DISCRETION
WISDOM & INTELLIGENCE	WISDOM & INTELLIGENCE	WISDOM & INTELLIGENCE	WISDOM & INTELLIGENCE

WISDOM & INTELLIGENCE OF THE LORD

WISDOM & INTELLIGENCE AND DISCRETION

WISDOM & INTELLIGENCE AND DISCRETION

WISDOM & INTELLIGENCE AND DISCRETION

FOUR POEMS OF LADY WISDOM (1-20-33) (1-20-33) (1-20-33) (1-20-33)

THE MOTHER OF WISDOM

THE MOTHER OF WISDOM

THE MOTHER OF WISDOM

THE MOTHER OF WISDOM

PROVERBS = GODS INVITATION TO LEARN WISDOM FROM PREVIOUS GENERATIONS

10-29 HUNDREDS OF ANCIENT PROVERBS

MARRIAGE JUSTICE SPEECH CHARACTER FAMILY

DEBT WORK

GENEROSITY

FORGIVENESS

THE FEAR OF THE LORD PROVIDES THEM LIFE, BUT THE FEARS OF THE LORD ARE OF SWEET FRUIT (10-27)

THE FEAR OF THE LORD PROVIDES THEM LIFE, BUT THE FEARS OF THE LORD ARE OF SWEET FRUIT (10-27)

PROVERBS = PROMISES

THE GENERAL RULE OF PROVERBS

PROVERBS FOCUS ON

THE GENERAL RULE OF PROVERBS

LET US BE GODS COURTESY FROM PROVERBS, LET THEM ALL THE CAPTION ABOUT TOGETHER

PROVERBS = PROBABILITIES

FEARS OF GODS WISDOM

THINGS WILL GO GREAT

NO FEARS OF GODS WISDOM

THINGS WILL GO POORLY

GUARANTEES

30 AGUR

1 FOR A POOR MAN WHO HAS NO WISDOM (30-1-3)

GOD'S WISDOM

TRIALS OF THE WISDOM

31 LEMUEL

LET US BE GODS COURTESY FROM PROVERBS, LET THEM ALL THE CAPTION ABOUT TOGETHER

LET US BE GODS COURTESY FROM PROVERBS, LET THEM ALL THE CAPTION ABOUT TOGETHER

STUDY 2

Lady Wisdom and Madam Folly

Are there times when you find doing the foolish thing quite attractive?

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One of the striking things about Proverbs is its description of Wisdom as a woman. Even in Chapter 1, wisdom is described as a woman calling out to the fools and scoffers:

Proverbs 1:20-23

²⁰ *Out in the open wisdom calls aloud,
she raises her voice in the public square;*

²¹ *on top of the wall she cries out,
at the city gate she makes her speech:*

²² *"How long will you who are simple love your simple ways?
How long will mockers delight in mockery
and fools hate knowledge?"*

²³ *Repent at my rebuke!
Then I will pour out my thoughts to you,
I will make known to you my teachings.*

But she is not the only woman calling out to the young and simple. Woman Folly also calls to gain the attention of the young man. So along with the metaphor of the path of life, we have the metaphor of having to choose between two women, Lady Wisdom and Madam Folly.

Q EXPLORING TOGETHER

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The comparison of Lady Wisdom and Madam Folly covers several chapters in Proverbs. So break into two groups and allocate each group to look at one of these groups of passages. Then take some time to fill out this table and discuss together what you've learnt about Lady Wisdom and Madam Folly:

GROUP 1: Proverbs 8:1-36, 9:13-18

GROUP 2: Proverbs 7:1-5, 9:1-18



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DIGGING DEEPER

1. What should our relationship with Lady Wisdom be like?

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2. What is the value of following Lady Wisdom?

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3. What is Madam Folly like? How does she entice people into relationship with her?

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4. In what ways is sin and foolishness attractive like that?

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Interestingly, both Lady Wisdom and Madam Folly have their house up in the heights overlooking the city. In Ancient times, the city heights represented the presence of God (think Mount Sinai) and pagan temples are often to be found there. It's clear that the metaphor of the choice between the two women, represents the choice between the God of Israel (Yahweh) and the pagan gods of the surrounding nations. In Israel's history, they were repeatedly found desiring the gods and idols of the nations around them, falling for the seduction of the Baal and Asherah gods – the gods of fertility.

But tracking even further back, one could even draw the parallels with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Indeed, wisdom is described as a tree of life for those that embrace her:

Proverbs 3:18

*¹⁸ She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her;
those who hold her fast will be blessed.*

5. Of all the flurry of activity that happens in our lives, how do you go at setting up protections against the temptations to sin and folly?

 **PRAYER**

Break into smaller groups and discuss an area of folly in your life that you'd like to ask God for wisdom on.

STUDY 3

A Parents Wisdom

When you read this ancient book of Proverbs which was originally written to the nation of Israel, you discover it's surprisingly relevant for the activities of our modern lives. You'll find instructions about work, spending, justice, marriage, friendship, food and alcohol, and even the care of animals! But one practical aspect of life goes to the heart of the message of this book, and that is parenting. And it's relevant for all of us since we're all either parents or children of them!

The book of Proverbs is framed as words of wisdom offered to the younger generation. So often encouragement is there for the child to listen their parents, but also there's teaching for the Mum and Dad in terms of the pivotal role they have as parents. Here's just one example:

Proverbs 6:20-22

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.

For those who are parents, parenting is a very personal thing and it can bring much pleasure. But also it can be extremely painful. Parenting isn't like we often project on social media! For those who are parents, if you are able, share with your group about a time when parenting has been particularly challenging and hard for you. Was there resolution? How did you go about it? Is it something still ongoing?

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For those who would like to speak from the perspective of being children to your parents, how would you describe this current season of relating to your parents? Where are the joys, hardships or frustrations for you?

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JESUS AND PARENTING

Before we look at specific Proverbs on parenting, we need to remember that this book isn't one more parenting book trying to give you a formula on how to raise happy and healthy kids and making you feel guilty in the process! It's a book ultimately about godly Spirit-given wisdom that grows in us as we know God in Christ. As we've seen, 'fear of the Lord is beginning of knowledge' (Proverbs 1:7) and so children and parents are called on to know this Lord so that we might have his wisdom for life.

In his incarnation, Jesus the Son of God grew in wisdom. We're told in **Luke 2:40** *'The child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him'*. What an incredible and mysterious thing to realise - Jesus grew in wisdom as he grew from a baby, to a child, to a young man. But Jesus is also 'wisdom from God' (1 Corinthians 1:30) and Jesus displayed perfect wisdom in his sinlessness and his obedience as went to the cross for our sin. **Hebrews 1:7-10** speaks of Jesus the Son who responded to his Father in this way - *'During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.*

As we approach the topic of children and parenting, what comfort and help is given to us when we realise that in wisdom and obedience Jesus went to the cross for the sake of our foolishness and disobedience?

INSTRUCTION AND DISCIPLINE

A way to think about Proverbs' words about parents and children is that it speaks about giving and receiving instruction (positive and proactive) and also giving and receiving discipline (negative and reactive). Let's look at both of these areas.

INSTRUCTION - Read Proverbs 1:8-9 & 6:20-22

1. For parents, for the age and stage of your children what does teaching and instruction look like for you?

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2. Do you think you're taking the opportunities that are there? Why/Why not?

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3. What pressures and temptations do you think we face to not be proactive in giving instruction to our kids?

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4. For children, what's it like for you right now to receive teaching and instruction from your parents? What makes it hard for you?

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DISCIPLINE - Read Proverbs 12:1 13:24; 15:5; 23:13-14

5. In a couple of instances, discipline is described in terms of using a rod – applying physical punishment and pain. It was another time and culture (and corporal punishment today eg. smacking for small children, is a debated parenting approach) but what's a general principal and understanding of discipline we can apply?

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6. For parents, for the age and stage of your children, what does discipline look like?

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7. Do you think you're taking the opportunities that are there? Why/Why not?

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8. What pressure and temptations do you think we face to not apply right discipline?

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9. For children, how do you feel about warnings in the Proverbs about not accepting correction or discipline? What makes it hard for you?

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THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF FAMILY

In the New Testament, Ephesians is the book that unpacks the wonders of the salvation that Jesus brings eg. *'But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved'* (Ephesians 1:4-5). But it's also the book that unpacks how the Christian life should be lived out in family life. It says, *'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honour your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—"so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.* (Ephesians 6:1-4).

10. Why do you think Christian fathers are particularly warned against exasperating/irritating/antagonizing their children?

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11. What makes Christian parenting and Christian 'childing'! unique and purposeful?

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PRAYER

Every Christian needs help to be the child or the parent that God calls us to be. We all need support and counsel. Proverbs itself says, *'A fool's way is right in his own eyes, but whoever listens to counsel is wise'* (Proverbs 12:15). Break up into smaller groups and share a parenting or 'childing' struggle you're facing at the moment. Listen to counsel that might be offered in response and pray for each other.

STUDY 4

Wise Spending

What kind of attitude towards money did you grow up with? Often families fall on two sides – valuing money for what it buys (thus spending rather than saving) and valuing money for the security it brings (thus saving and generally being stingy).

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*"Money, money, money, must be funny, in the rich man's world
Money, money, money, always sunny, in the rich man's world
Aha.....a.....ha
All the things I could do, if I had a little money
It's a rich man's world. It's a rich man's world"*

So goes the famous words from Abba's song, Money, Money, Money. There are few things that humans have obsessed over more than money. Earning it, spending it, saving it, growing it – it's hard to imagine a part of life that doesn't involve money. We love money – what money can do for us and what the feeling of having money itself. We also hate the burden of money and material possessions and dealing with it can be complicated and difficult.

In this study, we're going to examine what Proverbs has to say about money. Let's allow God's wisdom to guide us and give us clarity on this important topic.

JESUS AND MONEY

Before we get to Proverbs, let's again look at Jesus' attitude towards money. Jesus devoted much of his teaching to the idolatry of money and material possessions.

Matthew 6:24

"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Luke 12:32

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Jesus knows that money has a strong pull on our hearts – to the extent that it can even compete with our love for God.

In Philippians 2, Paul describes Jesus giving up his place of equality with God for the sake of serving others and bringing them to God. Jesus himself both models a right relationship with riches and dies to set us free from our bondage to it.

So as we approach Proverbs, let's remember the background we have as Christians that it might inspire us to learn from the wisdom of Proverbs on this topic.

WEALTH AND POVERTY

Proverbs has plenty to say about wealth – both acquiring it and what to do with it.

Read Proverbs 6:6-11, 10:4, 13:11, 21:17, 28:19, 30:7-9.

1. What did you learn about money from these Proverbs? Are the positive attitudes about money surprising for you?

2. How do you go at building wealth, little by little?

3. What's the relationship between wisdom and wealth, sin and poverty?

It's important to remember that Proverbs deals only with probabilities, not promises or certainties. Living a wise and upright life may well lead to growing wealth and laziness and foolishness to poverty but it is not the final word. Proverbs operates in conversation with the other wisdom literature and Job and Ecclesiastes have much to say about this topic too. Job's life shows that even a God fearing man can see disaster ruin his life. Ecclesiastes shows that the pursuit of wealth is a dead end because of death.

If you only read Proverbs, you might become like one of Job's friends, who believed good people always have good lives. But if you only read Ecclesiastes, you might think it virtually impossible to enjoy wellbeing and satisfaction within the confines of this world, "under the sun." But we are to read *all* of Scripture, lest we get a distorted view (just as we'd get a distorted view if we read just the Old Testament or even just the New Testament.)

THE LIMITATIONS AND DISTRACTIONS OF WEALTH

Proverbs also teaches on the limitations and distractions of wealth.

Read Proverbs 11:4, 11:28, 15:16, 23:4-5, 30:7-9

4. How do these Proverbs help to round out our understanding of money?

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5. How might fear of the LORD modify our pursuit of wealth?

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6. What are the similarities here to what Jesus taught?

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GENEROSITY

Proverbs is certainly not shy from wealth and its possibilities. However, its also very strong on how wealth ought to be used for the good of others.

Read Proverbs 11:24-25, 21:13, 22:9

1. What are some of the benefits of being generous?

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8. What makes generosity easy or hard to enact?

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REFLECTING ON PROVERBS AND MONEY

Pick three Proverbs out of all that we've looked at that particularly speak to you and write down why they particularly challenge you.

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ii.

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THE CHRISTIAN WAY WITH MONEY

Have a look at some of these New Testament verses on money and note any similarities or differences to what we've seen in Proverbs already.

1 Timothy 6:9

Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

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1 Timothy 6:17

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

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James 1:10

But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. 11 For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

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Hebrews 13:5

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

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9. How does money really tug on your heart strings? Are you a spender or saver?

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10. What kind of financial decisions are weighing on your minds?

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11. How intentional are you with your money? How can you be a little more generous this year? At the back of your booklet are some ways we encourage giving at Christ Central

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 **PRAYER**

Spend some time praying for each other on what you have discussed together above.

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Giving at Christ Central

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*But since you excel in everything—
in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in
complete earnestness and in the love we
have kindled in you—see that you also
excel in this grace of giving.*

2 Corinthians 8:7



Our prayer at Christ Central is to see a flood of lifelong disciples across the north edge of Brisbane and beyond.

And with the vision, we realise that God uses us and calls us to be fellow-workers in gospel ministry. That means there's much we can all do to serve with our time, talents and treasure. Here's some things to help you in your thinking about giving financially to ministry that's happening at Christ Central.

Why You Should Give

There's certainly plenty of need at Christ Central for financial support. The bulk of financial giving goes to staff appointments and we support our staff to be gospel-centred servant leaders who will grow ministries. But we want you to give not simply because there's a need, but as part of your Christian discipleship. In 2 Corinthians the apostle Paul gives us some great giving principles:

- Christian giving is inspired by the cross of Jesus as an expression of God's grace – in Jesus we have been made rich (*2 Cor 8:9*).
- God values the generous heart (*2 Cor 9:7*).
- Generosity involves personal sacrifice (*2 Cor 8:1-5*).
- Give cheerfully. It doesn't matter how much we give. Just be generous! (*2 Cor 8:12*).
- Christian giving is for our spiritual good – it promotes thanksgiving to God (*2 Cor 9:12*).

How Much You Should Give

Following on from those giving principles, the New Testament doesn't command a specific amount. Giving regularly, giving joyfully, and giving sacrificially is what really matters.

How to Give

It's not our pattern at Christ Central to hand around a plate in the middle of our Sunday gathering. We do this for a reason – we don't want visitors to feel obliged to give, when financial support is for the members of the church who are committed to the ministry. So instead we have a locked green box at the back of the auditorium. But in fact, we encourage people to give via Regular Direct Deposit via your bank. The details for this are:

Account Name: Christ Central Presbyterian Church

BSB Number: 034083

Account Number: 229374

How are Church Finances Managed

Our Committee of Management provides oversight to our financial matters. The Committee ensures accountability in matters of expenditure and approving budget. At our Annual Meeting (usually in March), our audited financial statements are presented. The Committee of Management is elected every year and any formal member of Christ Central can be nominated.





At Christ Central our prayer is to see a flood of lifelong disciples across the north edge of Brisbane **and beyond**. So as well as encouraging members to give to their own church, we also want people to financially support other ministries. Here are three areas our church is committed to:



Compassion

Compassion is a Christian International child development organisation. Through child sponsorship children are released from poverty in Jesus' name. Compassion is Christ Centred, Child Focused and Church Based.

To sponsor a child, visit www.compassion.com.au



Keith & Marion Birchley

Papua New Guinea

The Birchley's are serving with the Church Missionary Society. CMS is dedicated to a vision of having a world that knows Jesus. They are committed to equip, send and support long term workers who share the gospel of Jesus across cultures.

To support the Birchleys, visit www.cms.org.au



Rachel Kotterer

Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students (AFES)

AFES staff such as Rachel encourages university students in their Christian growth and witness through a variety of activities, such as regular public Bible talks, smaller Bible studies, and outreach events. We want to see flourishing Christian ministry at the new Petrie Uni Campus, and we look forward to Rachel and other staff working there.

To support Rachel Kotterer, visit www.afes.org.au

