

HOW TO BE SMART

A STUDY OF PROVERBS



Discussion Guide Week 3 “Wisdom and the Good Life”

1. Have you noticed a change in the way that parents look after their children? Many people remember their parents letting them leave the house in the morning to only return much later in the day. Many of today’s parents often don’t let their children out of their sight at any time during the day. Are we standing in the way of our children growing up? Are we being “chains about our children’s necks”? Do we need to trust our children more? When children grow up and move out of the house, do parents continue to give too much direction? Do we continue to be chains?
2. Someone once said, “Parents don’t raise children, they raise adults.” What is meant by that? What do you suppose is the intended difference between raising children and raising adults? Do you think that is a wise statement?
3. Read Proverbs 1:8-9. Reflect on your own “growing-up” years. Were you a good listener to your parents or other mentors as you were progressing into adulthood? Did your parents impart wise instruction to you? How did they do this? If you are a parent or grandparent, how are you instructing and teaching your children or grandchildren? Are you mindful of these words of Proverbs as you do this? As an adult, are you still receiving instruction from your parents?
4. Read Proverbs 3:1-24. In this passage there are at least 7 action—consequence statements (e.g. *action*: do not forget my teaching, keep my commands in your heart; *consequence*: they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity). List them all and discuss them. Are these actions—consequences God-given certainties or likelihoods? What do your own life experiences suggest?
5. Proverbs 3:3 asks us to bind mercy and truth around our necks and to write them upon our heart. Proverbs 3:5 adds, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.” What is more important, faith or truth? Is it more important that we, as Christians, follow truth wherever it leads or is it more important that we follow faith? Do you think that they will ever lead to different conclusions? Does the world think that faith and intellect lead to different places?
6. The world believes that Christian faith is a “blind faith”, i.e., it is a faith based on ignorance or ignoring the truth. Read 1 Corinthians 1:20-25. These verses identify three ways to be foolish: (1) to misapprehend, misunderstand or fail to grasp, (2) to be ignorant, to fail to know or discover, and (3) to be illogical, fail to prove or discover. Do these verses seem to be a call to “blind faith”? Would you agree that what the world identifies as “blind faith” would be considered folly in light of the 1 Corinthians verses? Do you regularly think about your faith?
7. In this week’s sermon Aaron talked about the personification of wisdom and folly. Read Proverbs 9:13-18. How is folly described and personified? Note the poetic reference to instant gratification as a weapon in

folly's arsenal in vs. 17 and 18. How do you (and our culture at large) struggle with instant gratification and the resultant longer-term "death" that may result from following the path of instant gratification?

8. Read Proverbs 8:13. Do you "hate" evil, pride and arrogance, evil behavior, and perverse speech? How is your hatred expressed? Is this a philosophical hatred or a tangible, active hatred? Consider your exposure to the popular media, do you "hate" perverse speech enough to turn off or walk out of a movie filled with perverse speech or do you tolerate it in hatred?
9. Aaron made reference to our experiencing "the good life" as we listen to and adopt the many instructions in Proverbs. How would you define "the good life"? How would your friend or neighbor who is not a follower of Christ define it? Are your aspirations for the "good life" similar or different?
10. Read Proverbs 4:23-27. Why the emphasis on guarding your heart? What does your heart need to be protected from? Are the threats to your heart internal or external or both? List and consider the practical suggestions for how to go about guarding your heart in the verses following vs. 23. How are you implementing these actions in your life?
11. Consider the life of Joseph as a case study in the development and expression of God-given wisdom. He was given dreams, betrayed and sold into slavery by brothers (Gen 37); falsely accused, imprisoned; granted favor in prison (Gen 39); released from prison, and enlisted as a Pharaoh-appointed leader (Gen 41); and ultimately reunited with his family (Gen 45). Would you say Joseph lives a "good" life? Would you say that Joseph's life paths were crooked or straight? How did others assess Joseph's life? (See Gen 39:2, Gen 39:21, Gen 41:39) How did Joseph assess his own life? (See Gen 41:50-52, Gen 45:4-8.) What wisdom is to be gleaned from Joseph's life story that can benefit your life?