

gods or God's

money · sex · power

# gods or God's

## money • sex • power

Suppose you are cleaning out a basement, and you discover an ancient, oil lamp. There is an engraving on the side, years of grit and grime make it illegible, so you grab your shirt-tail and begin to rub the lamp. Pyrotechnics! Poof, a genie with a voice resembling that of Robin Williams, appears and exclaims, "I am granting you one wish—anything—what do you want?"

One wish. Anything you want! What do you wish for? If we are honest, most of us would wish for some variant of money, sex, or power:

- 10 million dollars
- A Lamborghini
- To have sex with \_\_\_\_
- To marry \_\_\_\_
- To become President
- To have the power to fly
- To have the power to be invisible
- To have the powers of flight and invisibility while being President with 10 million dollars

If money, sex, or power doesn't show up as a first wish, they would make your Top 3! Sure, you might wish to usher in world peace, which sounds noble, but remember, it still requires the power to do so!

We learn in Scripture that King Solomon, David's son and the second King of Israel, was granted one wish. God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you" (1 Kings 3:5). Solomon asked for wisdom. We pick up the story in verse ten: "The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, 'Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have you asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart...'" (1 Kings 3:10-12).

And yet, even Solomon, with all the wisdom of the world in his heart, ultimately couldn't resist the sirens of money, sex, and power. These would vie for inordinate space in his life. Money, Sex, and Power would function as **gods**.

In myriad ways and to varying degrees, we experience these gods beckoning for our devotion, attention, time, and resources. And this trio of money, sex, and power is sophisticated and sneaky: They offer counterfeit and empty promises of what they may bring to us if we attain them: status, security, comfort, relief, pleasure, acceptance, approval, accolades, satisfaction, and happiness.

And yet, it doesn't have to be this way. What if money, sex, and power weren't **gods**, but instead, were **God's**? God's belongings; God's possessions, given to us as gifts. Gifts serving as conduits and vehicles for properly

ordered worship of the Gift-giver rather than the disordered worship of the gifts themselves. Indeed, money, sex, and power are *wonderful gifts* yet they can be *terrible gods*!

Each Fall, WCPC embarks on a Stewardship Series, highlighting Scripture's reminder we are not owners of anything, but stewards of everything. In God's economy, nothing we have is earned; everything we have is gifted. In this light, our minds, bodies, and souls, and with them our time, talents, and treasures, are used to glorify God and serve others rather than to glorify and serve the self. This year, we will spend six weeks exploring the proper stewardship of money, sex, and power, investigating our temptation to make them **gods** while leaning into their redemption as **God's** gifts to us...

## gods or God's

**My Money**  
(week 1)

**Thy Money**  
(week 2)

**Distortions of Sex**  
(week 3)

**Designs of Sex**  
(week 4)

**Abuses of Power**  
(week 5)

**Uses of Power**  
(week 6)

# The Book of Proverbs

We will explore our relationship to money, sex, and power by delving into the Book of Proverbs. Proverbs is a collection of Wisdom Literature, and many of the proverbs are attributed to King Solomon. While Solomon struggled to apply his God-given wisdom to his relationship with money, sex, and power, the battles waged in his soul became fertile ground for his penning of these proverbs, and today, we are the beneficiaries. These proverbs were passed down as oral tradition before they were written down and edited sometime after 700 BC and completed before 400 BC.

Typically, in Ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature, the recipient of the writings is a favored son mentioned by name. However, in this case, The Proverbs were intended for the entire nation of Israel, a community of faith. The Book of Proverbs was read in community; read aloud by parents, mentors, rabbis, and pastors in the contexts of synagogues and churches. After the collective reading, various Proverbs were then ruminated over and discussed in small group settings, around campfires, and at tables.

Proverbs are aphorisms, or “salty sayings.” Proverbs are not promises, but true-isms. They describe how life usually works. They draw comparisons, similitudes, and

likenesses to reality. They are often simple illustrations exposing fundamental realities about life. Pithy sayings that pack memorable truths. For example, “A stitch in time saves nine,” first recorded in Thomas Fuller’s Proverbs in 1732, essentially means: If something is wrong, repair it immediately lest the wrong worsens. This rings true with blue jeans and friendships.

It is also worth noting that no one proverb paints the entire picture of any given subject. In fact, some proverbs are intentional contradictions. For example, in Proverbs 26:4,5 we read two contradictory proverbs placed side-by-side: “Don’t answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.” Then, “Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will think he is wise in his own eyes.” Proverbs are designed to be turned over in the mind and heart over and over again. Coupling these two proverbs together, we may wisely discern that sometimes it is foolish to answer a fool because you will be the worse for it, and sometimes a fool will heed your correction and will be the better for it.

Mulling over the proverbs for weeks, months, or years at a time is like working a 10,000-piece jigsaw puzzle—slowly, parts of the whole become visible and clear and the participant eventually and hopefully becomes wise.

# The Introduction to the Book of Proverbs

<sup>1</sup> The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: <sup>2</sup> for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight; <sup>3</sup> for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair; <sup>4</sup> for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young—<sup>5</sup> let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance—<sup>6</sup> for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise. <sup>7</sup> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

## Proverbs 1:1-7

The first six verses are essentially one run-on sentence, each phrase saying the same thing differently. This introduction is designed to cascade over you, creating the cumulative effect necessary for knowledge, discretion, instruction, and understanding to eventually make you wise.

The sentiment of verse seven shows up a couple of times in the Book of Proverbs. In Proverbs 9:10, the second line in the couplet shifts: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” Astute students of Scripture and Life will recognize both our stunted capacity to know God and our stilted ability to pursue wisdom. These are the results of breaking away from the relationship with God we were designed to enjoy. Our quest for the exhaustive knowledge of God (“the knowledge of good and evil”), a knowledge we aren’t equipped to handle, left us disconnected from God and dissociated from wisdom. But the Proverbs, like every book in Scripture, paint a picture of God’s pursuit, a narrative of His reclamation project for humanity.

In fact, in Proverbs 8, wisdom, *Sophia*, is personified, perhaps even deified. We learn she was with God before creation, she was the master worker through whom God created all things, and the redeemer

through whom God will restore all things. While the reference in Proverbs 8 is rudimentary and without tidy one-to-one coherence, Christians will recognize *Sophia* as a pre-figured Christ. Paul would later call Jesus “the wisdom of God,” (1 Corinthians 1:24), and Jesus himself would say, “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet, wisdom is justified by her deeds” (Matthew 11:19).

Jesus invites a bunch of rascals like us to once again “fear the LORD” (1:7; 9:10) by obtaining knowledge (and this word in Hebrew means “*intimate, personal knowledge*”) of the Holy One, and this intimate knowing only happens through the redemptive deeds of Christ, God incarnate. Knowing God through Jesus invokes a *fear* that is best described as a jaw-dropping, spine-shivering, knee-knocking awe and reverence. This fear replaces a shaking-in-your-boots, guilt-induced and shame-based fear that causes you to question if you’ve ever done enough to receive God’s forgiveness and grace. You haven’t! You won’t! But Jesus did!

It might be worth pausing here and asking one of life’s most profound questions: Of what am I afraid? Pain? Insecurity? Death? Of not getting what I want? Of losing what I have? Sickness? The death of a close friend, parent, or child? Do these fears cause dread, paralysis, anxiety, depression? One of the rhythms a Christian should cultivate is the meditative practice of allowing your biggest fears to be melted by and then replaced with the fear of the LORD! The amazement and wonder found in the fear of the LORD elicits you to kneel before a King who has all of the power, who summons your conception and fashions you in the womb, who holds your destiny in his hands, and to say: “He is my God! He is my King.” And with the Psalmist: “Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases” (Psalm 115:3). This is not a trite truism, but an affront to pagan deities who are limited to their primitive matter—a god of fire, a god of wind, a god of water. No, this is the fear of *the* God who is God over all other gods!



# Our Theme Verse

With our weekly readings in Proverbs, we will keep a theme verse front and center. We hope you'll memorize and meditate on this verse as you consider the proper re-ordering of money, sex, and power. Here is the verse:

How much better to get wisdom than gold, to get insight rather than silver!

## Proverbs 16:16

Today, our search for wisdom may mostly include insights from beloved family members, trusted friends, and some amalgamation of Google, YouTube, chatGPT, social media, and our newsfeed of choice. However, the inevitable reality is that all of these sources are constrained by our cultural moment, entrapped in an echo chamber of thoughts, feelings, and perspectives similar to our own.

The invitation of our theme verse is to explore an ancient text not entombed in our moment, but transcendent enough to speak across the grain of every cultural moment and societal trapping. Even if you don't consider yourself a "person of faith," perhaps the *counter-cultural dissonance* of the Proverbs will speak into your life with some *ironically-relevant resonance*.

Consider the axioms surrounding money, sex, and power in our culture today:

### Money

Everything is often reducible to monetary value. (e.g. "Time is money." "Everyone has a price." "It takes money to make money.")

### Sex

Sex is often reducible to physical transactions or elevated to celestial romantic experiences. (e.g. "You and me babe, we ain't nothing but mammals, so let's do it like they do it on Discovery Channel" (Bloodhound Gang); "You complete me" (Jerry Maguire).)

### Power

Power is often avoided, denied, or ignored (e.g. "Me? I don't have privilege. I don't have any power."), or reducible to grievance (e.g. "I've suffered more than you, therefore, I now deserve the power.")

Our theme verse runs counter to these maxims, not affirming the bald pursuit of money, sex, and power as ends in themselves, but the pursuit of God's wisdom, which can grant us the capacity to steward money, sex, and power as gifts.

# Some Further Thoughts on Wisdom

Often when defining something it is easiest to start with what that something is not. Firstly, wisdom is not *moral rectitude*. Ancient cultures had more consensus about morality than we do today, but that does not mean that wisdom means doing what is “right” rather than what is “wrong.” Most situations you face are not covered by the “facts”; or the “rules” of “right and wrong.” If five doors open in a decision you are making, four of them might be morally permissible. Wisdom does not merely mean choosing between what is moral and immoral.

Secondly, wisdom is not solely *knowledge acquisition*. Wisdom does not often involve the falsification and verification of scientific experimentation. Wisdom does not mean having a high IQ or a PhD. Achieving and succeeding does not make one wise. Being an executive, an entrepreneur, or a beauty queen does not make one wise. We know this intuitively because every day we watch the lives of people who are smarter, more successful, and more beautiful than we are, unravel.

Instead, wisdom is more desirable than silver or gold because wisdom is “the knack for living life with grace, beauty, and skill” (the definition given by my mentor and Wisdom Literature scholar, Dr. Bruce Waltke). Some decisions might require moral goodness and other decisions might require knowledge, but every meaningful and substantial decision requires moral rectitude, knowledge acquisition, *and* the experience and skill of living life well: Should I get married? To whom? Should I confront this person? Or hold back? Should I take the risk? Or play it safe? Wisdom, as a professor friend of mine tells her students, “is not living to learn, but learning to live.”



# Introductory Quotes on Money, Sex, and Power

I could have offered a thousand quotes on these important topics. Instead, I am offering a handful of quotes that meant much to me as I was preparing this series. Might they prime the pump and be grist for the mill as we talk about God's design for the roles of money, sex, and power in our lives...

"When a society loses faith in its gods, or God, lesser powers arise to take their place. Blocked longings seek new routes. Every man who knocks on the door of a brothel is looking for God."

-G.K. Chesterton,  
*Orthodoxy*

"Perfect are the good desires you have given me. Be their End as you have been their Beginning."

-Blaise Pascal,  
*Pensees*

"It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased."

-C.S. Lewis,  
*The Weight of Glory*

*[In Screwtape, the "Enemy" is God because the perspective is from two demons in conversation with one another.]*

"Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the Enemy's ground. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is His invention, not ours. He made the pleasures: all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which he has forbidden. Hence we always try to work away from the natural condition of any pleasure to that in which it is least natural, least redolent of its Maker, and least pleasurable. An ever-increasing craving for an ever-diminishing pleasure is the formula. It is more certain; and it's better style. To get the man's soul and give him nothing in return—that is what really gladdens our Father's heart."

-C. S. Lewis,  
*Screwtape Letters, No. 9*

"[The wisdom literature] has an immediate bearing on—at one extreme—the exclusive pietism which is a recurrent tendency within Christianity; and at another extreme, on the absolute autonomy which secularists claim for human culture—two opposite reactions against the crown rights of a Deity, yet not dissimilar in their effects. The former would shut God in to the narrow circle of worship, ethics, evangelism and eschatology; the latter would shut God out of nine-tenths of the human scene, allowing him no voice in sociology, education, arts or science, and allowing these realms no benefit of the Creator's mind and judgment."

-Derek Kidner,  
*An Introduction to Wisdom Literature*

"They share their table with all, but not their bed with all. They are poor and make many rich; they are short of everything and yet have plenty of things."

-Letter to Diognetus (observing Christians),  
Written 100-150 A.D.

"It was said that the early Christian community was the exact opposite of their culture: Incredibly stingy with sex, but unbelievably promiscuous with their money! So should we be!"

-Tim Keller,  
Pastor and Author

"Every idol makes two simple and extravagant promises. 'You shall not surely die.' 'You shall be like God.'"

-Andy Crouch,  
*Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power*

"It is precisely because of the eternity outside time that everything in time becomes valuable and important and meaningful. Therefore, Christianity... makes it of urgent importance that everything we do here should be rightly related to what we eternally are. 'Eternal life' is the sole sanction for the values of this life."

-Dorothy Sayers,  
*Her Life and Soul*

“We can’t be human without God. That’s what Christians believe. We believe that this human life is a great gift, that every part of it is designed by God and therefore means something, that every part of it is blessed by God and therefore to be enjoyed, that every part of it is accompanied by God and therefore workable. We can’t get away from God; he’s there whether we like it or not, whether we know it or not. We can refuse to participate in God; we can act as if God weren’t our designer, provider, and covenant presence. But when we refuse, we’re less; our essential humanity is less. Our lives are diminished and impoverished. And it’s just this sense of lessness that gives us an important clue to understanding ourselves. We’re aware of something we need or lack most of the time. We’re not complete. We’re not fully human. This sense of being unfinished is pervasive and accounts for a great deal that’s distinctive in us humans. We then attempt to complete ourselves by getting more education or more money, going to another place or buying different clothes, searching out new experiences. The Christian gospel tells us that in and under and around all of these incompletions is God: God is who we need; the God-hunger, the God-thirst is the most powerful drive in us. It’s far stronger than all the drives of sex, power, security, and fame put together.”

-Eugene Peterson,  
*Leap Over a Wall*

# Some Reflection Questions to Consider

We will spend six weeks exploring the ins and outs of the *counterfeit ownership* vs. the *God-given stewardship* of money, sex, and power. As scary as conversations on this subject matter might be, we encourage you to step into community groups to traverse the content. Community group leaders will facilitate discussions on each of the sermons and Scripture passages. Below are some bundled sets of questions to get the conversations started.

## Week 1

- How does money function as a *god* in your life?
- What does your worship of money look like?
- What does it cause you to feel?
- What sorts of needs do you expect it to meet?
- What sorts of longings do you assume it will salve?

### Selected Proverbs

**1:1-7** **16:6**

**28:19-20** **13:11**

**22:26-27**

**28:22,25-27** **19:4**

**11:4** **11:24-28**

## Week 2

- How does money serve as *God's* gift in your life?
- What does your worship of God look like when money is properly placed as a tool or resource?
- How does a proper perspective on money solicit gratitude and generosity?

### Selected Proverbs

**1:1-7** **16:6** **3:9-18**

**13:22** **14:24** **15:16**

**19:17**

## Week 3

- How has sex functioned as a *god* in your life?
- What distortions have crept into your life that should be addressed?
- What lies do you believe about sex?
- How has guilt over “what you have done” and shame over “who you think you are” eroded your ability to be whole?
- What have guilt and shame taken from you?
- What would need to happen in your life for healing to take place?

### Selected Proverbs

**1:1-7** **16:6** **2:16-22**

**6:20-35**

## Week 4

- What is *God's* proper design for sex?
- What role does it play in your life?
- What desires should sex evoke?
- What does it look like to be faithful in singleness?
- What does it look like to be faithful in marriage?

### Selected Proverbs

**1:1-7** **16:6**

**5:1-23**

## Week 5

- How has power operated as a *god* in your life?
- How have you abused power or been abused by it?
- Do you ever deny, avoid, or ignore the power you have in your own life?
- Or, how have you lusted and thirsted after power?
- In these circumstances and situations, what has power brought upon you?

### Selected Proverbs

**1:1-7** **16:6** **1:10-19**

**3:27-35** **11:1-3**

**15:25** **17:5,23**

**20:10,17** **21:4,13,24**

**23:1-3,10-11**

## Week 6

- What does *God's* power in your life look like?
- What does it mean to use power in a way that brings God glory?
- If power is a gift from God, then how can we be accountable for its proper use?
- Accountable to God and one another?
- What would it look like for you to share power? To empower others by giving your power away?

### Selected Proverbs

**1:1-7** **16:6**

**3:3-6** **14:3,21,31**

**22:4,8,16,22-23**

**24:23-25** **25:6,7**

**28:14-16** **29:2,7,23**

# 2024

## pledge campaign

This year, in our Annual Stewardship Series, we will explore the Book of Proverbs and what God has to say about stewarding our Time, Talent, and Treasure toward God's purposes and good pleasure. This Series is in conjunction with our Stewardship Pledge Campaign. We invite all who consider WCPC to be their home church to work through the pledge campaign pre-work and to make a pledge of intent toward 2024.





WCPC