

Proverbs

IGNATIUS CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE QUESTIONS

Welcome

“You are approaching the ‘word of God’. But for thousands of years, ... the Word of God has been approaching you.”

The following guide is provided to enhance your reading of the Book of Proverbs using the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*. If you are new to this resource or to reading the Bible, we recommend you read the general Introduction before you begin. It explains what it means that Scripture is the Word of God as well as how we understand and interpret it as Catholics. It also introduces the special features of the Study Bible and tells how they can enrich your reading and study. Additionally, the *Introduction to the Psalms and Wisdom Literature* will provide valuable context for your reading.

A simple rhythm of prayer followed by reading and reflection is offered below to guide you through the book one chapter at a time. Questions draw attention to key footnotes and word studies to lead you into a deeper understanding of what you read and then prompt you to consider how to apply what you have learned. For a deeper dive, take advantage of additional features as you go: not just the other footnotes but also cross-references to Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* that are provided above the footnotes as well as any maps, charts, or essays that are not touched on in the questions.

Don't miss these helpful icons as you read! They highlight footnotes that pertain to the Church's criteria for interpreting Scripture (see CCC 112–14):



Be attentive to the content and unity of Scripture

Notes marked with a Bible icon connect Old Testament passages and New Testament mysteries, fostering appreciation for God's unified plan.



Read Scripture in light of the Church's living tradition

This icon marks notes drawn from the Holy Spirit's guidance of Church teaching and the spiritual senses of scripture. Here you'll find official teaching as well as interpretations from Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church.



Be attentive to the “analogy of faith”

Explore notes marked with an icon of keys to learn how the mysteries of faith, revealed in Scripture and defined by the Church, clarify and connect with one another in a unified, coherent way.

May God bless you as you read his word!

of God,* did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself,[†] taking the form of a servant,[‡] being born in the likeness of men.[§] And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.[¶] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,^{||} that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,^{|||} and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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12 Therefore, obeyed, so now much more in salvation with f work in you, bo pleasure.
14 Do all thi tioning,¹⁵ that y children of God crooked and per

2:9–11: Rom 10:9; 14:9; Eph 1:20–21. 2:13: 1 Cor 15:10. 2

2:7 emptied himself: The Greek verb *kenōō* means “empty out” or “render void”. The idea is, not that Christ divested himself of divinity when he united himself with humanity, but that he restricted his rightful exercise of certain divine abilities during his earthly life and accepted certain limitations of the human condition. In effect, the Son of God made himself poor in order to make us rich with his grace (2 Cor 8:9) (CCC 472). • Christ emptied himself by compressing the glory of his Godhead within our smallness. What he always was remained perfect and incomprehensible, but what he assumed was in proportion to the measure of our nature (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinarius*).

2:8 death on a cross: The ultimate indignity. Death by crucifixion was the most awful and degrading form of criminal execution in the ancient world. The Romans reserved it for slaves and insurrectionists. See note on Mk 15:24.

2:9 exalted him: By raising him from the dead, enthroning him in heaven, and clothing his humanity with divine glory. A similar destiny awaits all who humble themselves as Jesus did (3:21; Lk 14:11).

2:10 every knee should bow: An allusion to the divine oath in Is 45:23. • Yahweh swore that all peoples, to the very end of the earth, would acknowledge his Lordship and bow before him in homage. Paul moves Christ into the center of this prophecy as the divine Lord destined to be revered by all. **heaven ... earth ... under the earth:** The three principal realms in the world view of ancient Israel (Ex 20:4). Homage will come from all creatures great and small—the angels and saints above, the family of man and beasts spread over the earth, and the dead and the demons of the underworld.

2:11 confess: I.e., acknowledge. Included in this open dec

serious that we pur sense of awe at ser the prospect of sinn Encouragement con readers that God's g desire (intention) at 21; CCC 308) (CC “work”, he address and trembling”, he good deeds were th not boast of your g within you (St. Augu **2:15 pervers** • Deuterono poetic lawsuit that and ingratitude du

A Thing to Harpagmos (G in the Greek O Occurrences of “robbery”. Its considerable d the leading vi **(1)** Some, like “something sel

Prepare

Read the Introduction to Proverbs, paying particular attention to the *Themes and Characteristics* of the book and the *Christian Perspective* on it. What one thing stands out to you, that you would like to remember?

Read the Outline of Proverbs to get an overview of the book. What are its major divisions?

Pray

Use the following questions to guide your reading of Proverbs, going at a pace that is comfortable to you. Before you begin each new section, pray simply for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit, open my heart to hear and receive these words as what they truly are, the Word of God. Enlighten my understanding and give me grace to put what I read into practice in my life. Amen.

Read and Reflect

Read and reflect on Proverbs as follows:

- Pray before you read
- Read a section of biblical text by itself
- Read the text again, referring to the notes that accompany the text
- For deeper understanding and to aid in applying what you read, answer the questions that follow. The references at the top of each numbered question correspond to particular notes.

At the end of each chapter, review what you have written and linger where you feel drawn, asking the Lord to speak to your heart and into your life. What do you hear? Respond in prayer and ask his help to live what you hear in your attitudes and actions this week.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 1

For understanding

1. **Word Study: Proverb.** What kinds of literary forms does the Hebrew word *mashal* encompass? What negative connotation does it sometimes have? What does it most commonly denote? As observations, on what are proverbs based?
2. **1:7.** What does Proverbs teach about the fear of the Lord? In practical terms, what does fear of the Lord mean? According to St. John Chrysostom, where does sin have its beginning? What kinds of fear does St. Bede describe in his *Commentary on Proverbs*?
3. **1:8.** Where was the primary setting for moral and religious instruction in biblical Israel? When does direct evidence for Jewish schools materialize in Palestine? What other societies present fathers instructing their sons in proper behavior?
4. **1:15.** As an overarching metaphor in Proverbs, for what does “the way” stand? How many roads may one travel in life, and where do they lead?

For application

1. **1:7b–8.** When you were a child, how receptive were you to the formation and instruction of your parents or those who educated you? What were the main areas of resistance? How do you regard their instruction now?
2. **1:11–16.** When you were an adolescent, what influence did your peers have on your behavior, whether for good or ill? What influence did you have on the behavior of your peers? How did your peer relationships help or harm your faith in God?
3. **1:19.** Have you ever stolen anything, either openly or secretly? If you have stolen repeatedly, what were your motives? How do things gained that way take away the lives of their possessors, according to the proverb?
4. **1:29–32.** How deadly are the consequences of a serious sin, such as a sin against the fifth, sixth, seventh, or eighth commandment? How is the sinner killed by his sin, even if he remains physically alive?

Chapter 2

For Understanding

1. **2:1–22.** On what are these verses a discourse? Once possessed, what will wisdom give young men?
2. **2:6.** To whom is wisdom given? What, therefore, is essential in its pursuit besides study, reflection, and learning? Who provides living proof of this?
3. **2:16.** Who is the “loose woman” here? What does she betray? Why is it crucial to avoid her?
4. **2:17.** What was marriage considered to be in ancient Israel? What does adultery violate in addition to the covenant with one’s spouse?

For application

1. **2:3.** When you pray for wisdom, how do you recognize its arrival? Why is it better to pray for wisdom regularly than only at those moments when you especially need it?
2. **2:5–15.** Over the course of your life, has an “instinct” for right behavior ever preserved you from situations or people that might have proven dangerous even though you did not recognize the danger at the time? Did you gain wisdom as a result?
3. **2:7–8.** Read these verses carefully. What do they tell you about the character of the person who attains wisdom?
4. **2:20–22.** In an age when it seems that the wicked inherit the land and the treacherous gain all the wealth, what needs to change in the culture for the truth of these verses to become apparent?

Chapter 3

For understanding

1. **3:1–35.** What are the four main units of this chapter? What does each section propose?
2. **3:5.** What does wisdom urge one to recognize? What does the biblical notion of wisdom include?

3. **3:11–12.** How is divine discipline experienced as a form of fatherly training? For what purpose does the book of Hebrews quote these verses? What is the aim of such painful ordeals?
4. **3:18.** What does Proverbs intend to depict by evoking memories of the tree of life from Genesis 2:9? In effect, what do those who find wisdom receive? How does Origen of Alexandria apply the image of the tree of life to the Eucharist?
5. **3:34.** To whom is the Lord's favor shown in answered prayer? According to St. Jerome, why is pride evil and not "a trifling sin"?

For application

1. **3:5–7.** What does Proverbs typically call the person who is wise in his own eyes? If you have expertise in a certain area, is it possible both to use it and to trust in the Lord with all your heart at the same time?
2. **3:9–10.** Read the note for these verses. What percentage of your income do you contribute to the Church? Have you tried tithing—that is, giving 10 percent of your income? If not, why not? If so, what has been the fruit?
3. **3:11–12.** How has the discipline of the Lord shown itself in your life? What have you learned about yourself and your relationship with the Lord from it? Have you sought his discipline or tried to avoid it?
4. **3:27–28.** Related to the issue of tithing is that of almsgiving. Do you regularly give alms, particularly when someone in your parish community needs help that you can provide? In addition to donations of money, what other types of aid are you in a position to give?

Chapter 4

For understanding

1. **4:6–9.** How is wisdom personified in these verses? What is she doing?
2. **4:18.** What increases over time for the righteous?
3. **4:20–27.** For what is the father appealing in these verses? How are his words reinforced in a tangible way?
4. **4:27.** From what is the young man cautioned not to swerve? Using similar language, what do other biblical exhortations urge readers to observe?

For application

1. **4:1–4.** Describe your relationship with your father, guardian, or mentor. What kinds of things did he try to teach you? Regardless of a child's gender, how important is a father figure in his life? Why?
2. **4:14–15.** In your environment, what does "the path of the wicked" look like? For example, do you face an environment where experimentation with drugs, casual sex, aggressive partying, gang activity, and the like are prevalent? What enticements to this type of behavior present themselves to you? How do you avoid them?
3. **4:19.** If "the path of the wicked" is so much fun, why is *night* the time to take it? Why is daytime used to describe the "path of the righteous"?
4. **4:24.** Read CCC 2482–2487, about lying. Why is "crooked speech" and "devious talk" so harmful? Whom does it harm?

Chapter 5

For understanding

1. **5:1–23.** With what are the dangers of adultery contrasted? What does involvement with a "loose woman" bring? What does fidelity to one's wife bring? With what does the chapter combine practical advice?
2. **5:15–18.** For what is the *well* or *fountain* a poetic image? How does this image apply to the protection of one's wife? What does part of this protection involve?
3. **5:19.** What can fanning the flames of marital love do to a marriage?
4. **5:21.** If the prospect of shame and remorse are not enough to dissuade the young man from an adulterous affair, what will?

For application

1. **5:8.** What, besides direct personal contact, are some of the ways of going "near the house" of the "loose woman"? For example, what are some of the pornographic temptations that surround you? How do you avoid them? If you have children, how do you protect them?

2. **5:11–12.** How likely is the threat of falling victim to a sexually transmitted disease to deter someone from sexual promiscuity or infidelity? Once sexual integrity has been lost, what can be done to restore it?
3. **5:18–19.** In your experience, why do spouses who have been married some years become dissatisfied with each other and begin to think of straying? If love in a marriage becomes stale, how can it be rejuvenated?
4. **5:23.** Is marital infidelity merely a lack of discipline? How should a spouse exercise sexual self-control when temptations against fidelity arise?

Chapter 6

For understanding

1. **6:1–35.** What are young men urged to avoid in this chapter?
2. **6:6.** Why should the young man pay attention to a tiny insect like the ant? According to St. Basil, how does wise Solomon praise labor? What will he who gave us the ability to work require?
3. **6:16–19.** What kind of proverb is here, and what does it do? What does this proverb catalogue? With what are most of these sins associated?
4. **6:30.** How are thievery and adultery associated in the biblical world? What is the difference in terms of making amends?

For application

1. **6:1–5.** If you co-sign on a loan, what happens if the primary borrower defaults? What kinds of precautions should you take before agreeing to co-sign?
2. **6:10–11.** If a relative or acquaintance repeatedly asks you for money or other support, how do you determine whether the requests arise from laziness instead of a genuine need? What are some charitable ways you can stop supporting a person who should be supporting himself?
3. **6:16–19.** What do these seven abominable attitudes have in common? What kind of person do they describe? How many of them do you see in yourself?
4. **6:25.** Compare Deut 5:21 with Mt 5:27–28. When does appreciation for the beauty of another's spouse become "adultery in the heart"? If *fighting* an adulterous desire is not an appropriate way to handle temptation, what is?

Chapter 7

For understanding

1. **7:1–27.** Against what do these verses warn? What does the father recount here?
2. **7:2.** What is the "apple" of the eye?
3. **7:4.** For whom is the epithet "my sister" sometimes used? Who should the most intimate companion in life be?
4. **7:14.** What might be the meaning of the harlot's statement about offering sacrifices? Either way, how does she try to appear and why?

For application

1. **7:1–5.** How can the eager pursuit of divine wisdom be an effective deterrent against sexual temptation? How might it help you when you face such temptation?
2. **7:6–9.** How might one, consciously or not, actually *court* sexual temptation?
3. **7:10.** Read the definition of modesty in CCC 2521. How do today's clothing fashions accord with that definition? How might clothing that is itself reasonably modest be worn so as to suggest an immodest attitude?
4. **7:13–27.** Seduction, especially sexual seduction, probes for weak points in a person's character, such as a need to be found attractive or a desire for power or adventure. What are some weak points where an effort to seduce might attract you? How should you protect yourself?

Chapter 8

For understanding

1. **8:1–36.** How does the woman Wisdom portray herself in these verses? To whom is she appealing, and what is she urging? In addition to her gifts, what other mention is made about her origin? How does the Church's tradition read these wisdom speeches in Proverbs?

2. **8:22–31.** Before the world and history came into being, where was Wisdom? How is she related to God? What is her role in creation? For what revelation does her personification in the OT prepare in the NT, and how does it relate to Jesus? According to St. Bede, why does the Lord possess Wisdom at the beginning of his ways?
3. **8:22.** What description of Wisdom suggests the alternative translation of the Lord “begetting” Wisdom? How is the Greek LXX wording reflected in Revelation? According to St. Ambrose, how is this verse a prophecy of the Incarnation?
4. **8:24.** What does Wisdom mean by saying that she was “brought forth” when there were no depths?

For application

1. **8:7.** Since Wisdom deals with practical *decisions*, what kind of *truth* does the mouth of Wisdom utter? How is this kind of truth opposed to wickedness?
2. **8:12.** Read CCC 1806 on the cardinal virtue of prudence. What is “practical reason”? According to the Catechism, how does the prudent person determine and direct his conduct?
3. **8:13.** What does “hatred” mean in this verse? Is it an intense dislike for or a rejection of evil?
4. **8:14.** Read CCC 1808 on the cardinal virtue of fortitude. Given the growing opposition to Christian moral teaching in our society, how necessary is this virtue for you? How might you grow in moral fortitude?

Chapter 9

For understanding

1. **9:1–18.** How does this chapter begin and end? How is the contrast between Wisdom and Folly brought out? What do their two banquets represent?
2. **9:1.** What are two ways to understand the metaphor of Wisdom’s house? According to St. Augustine, what sort of house has Wisdom built, and how has she set her table?
3. **9:2.** Why does Wisdom mix her wine? Of what does her banquet consist?
4. **9:17.** To what might the image of stolen water refer, and, in this case, what might be in view? With what prospect is the seductress luring the foolish man?

For application

1. **9:1–6.** Compare these verses with Jn 7:37–39. How should accepting the invitation of Wisdom to her banquet slake the kind of thirst about which Jesus is talking?
2. **9:10.** About what kind of knowledge does this verse talk? How does one come to know the Holy One?
3. **9:13–17.** Since both Wisdom and Folly in this chapter have their attractions and make similar appeals to the fool, to what does each appeal in order to win him over?

Chapter 10

For understanding

1. **10:1—22:16.** Of what does this second main collection of wisdom instructions consist? What does the number of sayings match? How are the several clusters of sayings in this section grouped? With what topics do they deal, and what do they imply about wisdom and foolishness?
2. **Essay: Wisdom Literature in the Bible.** Which books are included in the wisdom writings of the Old Testament? Expressed in didactic poetry, with what do they deal? What are some of the historical reasons for the existence of wisdom literature? What may be the evangelical reasons for the existence of wisdom literature? How do these considerations account for Solomon’s inspiration of the wisdom tradition in Israel?
3. **10:12.** What can a spirit of charity and mercy absorb? For what is the notion of “covering” sins and offenses an idiom? Where does a paraphrase of this verse appear in the New Testament?
4. **10:19.** What is meant by the warning against “many words”? What characterizes the speech of the wise man?

For application

1. **10:1.** If you are a parent, what are some signs of emotional or moral maturity that you expect to see as your children grow? What character traits do you encourage in them?

2. **10:4–5.** How do you encourage children to mature in doing work consistently well? How do you assign chores, and how do you discipline children in regard to their performance?
3. **10:10.** What is the difference between a stern disciplinarian and a strict one? As someone who must occasionally discipline others through correction, which of these types are you? How do you think your corrections are received?
4. **10:18.** Read CCC 2477–79 and 2484. How would you evaluate the justice and charity of critical remarks you make about other people? Even when criticisms are justified, are you able to maintain charity in speech about others? How is it possible to accomplish this?

Chapter 11

For understanding

1. **11:1.** What is a “false balance”? How was it frequently used by sellers? What does Scripture demand, and what does it condemn?
2. **11:4.** What is the “day of wrath”?
3. **11:22.** What is the point of the proverb about a gold nose ring? What lesson about reading and memorizing Scripture does St. John Cassian derive from this proverb?
4. **11:30.** What does the “tree of life” symbolize here? What influence does it have? According to St. Hippolytus, who is the tree of life, and what does he bring forth?

For application

1. **11:1.** In a competitive business environment like ours, what challenges do Christian entrepreneurs face in conducting their business affairs honestly? What are some of the Christian goals of running a business?
2. **11:13.** When you have been entrusted with a secret, how well do you keep it? According to CCC 2491, when should a professional secret be kept, and when would it become necessary to reveal it?
3. **11:24–25.** On what basis do you determine how much to contribute to your parish’s financial needs? How do you regard your responsibility to support the Church financially? If finances are a concern, how else do you contribute (e.g., by volunteering)?
4. **11:30.** Read the note for this verse. How might your pursuit of holiness be an encouragement to others? By the same token, how might your failure to pursue it impede others’ pursuit of holiness?

Chapter 12

For understanding

1. **12:1.** To what does “discipline” refer here? In this connection, what is the difference between how the wise and the foolish man receive correction?
2. **12:10.** How does the wise man treat animals? How does that treatment differ from the treatment given by the wicked?
3. **12:23.** What does prudence recognize about silence? How does imprudence display itself?
4. **12:27.** Whom does this proverb appear to rebuke?

For application

1. **12:4.** How does a good marriage serve as a witness to an age that either denigrates or despises traditional marriage? How can the honor and respect of spouses for each other contribute to that witness, especially to their children?
2. **12:10.** Read CCC 2416–18. How does the attitude toward animals expressed in the Catechism compare or contrast with current attitudes toward animals, animal rights, and particularly toward pets?
3. **12:16.** How do you respond to an insult (real or imagined), especially from a family member? What is your responsibility to forgive? When is it important to forbear an insult in order to keep the lines of communication open, and when might it be prudent to cut communication off?
4. **12:25.** How have friends or considerate strangers helped you deal with your anxieties by their verbal or practical encouragement? Have you ever tried to encourage others who are anxious (e.g., by helping a mother anxious about the care of her first baby or a neighbor just dismissed from his job)?

Chapter 13

For understanding

1. **13:3.** How does the wise man guard his mouth? Who is the one who “opens wide his lips”?
2. **13:11.** What is the literal translation of riches “hastily gotten”? To what does it presumably refer? What are the benefits of diligence and industry?
3. **13:20.** What is this proverb about? What does the saying imply?
4. **13:24.** What does it mean to “spare the rod”? Why is neglect of a child’s formation a grave disservice? What is the rod of discipline said to do elsewhere in Proverbs? How do parents who lovingly discipline their children imitate God?

For application

1. **13:4.** How might this proverb apply to the problem of urban crime; for example, when someone with no money commits a crime to obtain a pair of designer sunglasses or shoes? How might “the diligent” prevent such crime?
2. **13:11.** What is the wisdom of prudent investing instead of relying on lotteries or gambling for wealth, even if one were to strike it rich? What are some of the dangers in gambling, both for the gambler, his family, and the society at large?
3. **13:20.** Of all the companions with whom you have associated in your life, which are the ones who were most beneficial and which were the most harmful? What did you learn about yourself from your association with those in each group?
4. **13:24.** What was the approach to corporal punishment taken by your parents? If you are a parent or guardian of minors, what is your approach to it? What should be the purpose of corporal punishment, and how can it be administered in a loving way?

Chapter 14

For understanding

1. **14:1.** To whom does “Wisdom” in this proverb refer? Whom does the saying appear to praise?
2. **14:12.** To what fact does this proverb point? What effect does sin have on the intellect in this case?
3. **14:17.** To what are persons who have quick tempers prone? What does the wise man do, and why? Why does St. Ambrose suggest becoming angry with oneself when easily roused?
4. **14:34.** On what does the welfare of a nation depend? How does Israel stand as a premier example of this in the Bible?

For application

1. **14:2.** What kinds of activity (such as credit card purchases) do you tend to hide from those nearest to you, such as a spouse or superior? What does devious behavior ultimately do to those relationships? What does it do to your relationship with the Lord?
2. **14:4.** What moral responsibility do you have for maintaining your personal resources, such as automobiles or other equipment or property, and for whose benefit? What is your moral responsibility for handling the resources belonging to others, such as your employer, that are provided for your use?
3. **14:12.** Read the note for this verse. Have you ever been aware of deceiving yourself about the rightness of a course of action? How did you convince yourself to take that course? What were the consequences? What did you learn about yourself?
4. **14:29–30.** How would you describe your temper? For example, are you quickly or slowly aroused and quick or slow to calm down? How do you treat others when you become angry? How quick are you to ask forgiveness if your temper gets out of hand?

Chapter 15

For understanding

1. **15:6.** How does God sometimes favor the upright? What ancient theory underlies this idea? What will additional revelation in the OT and the NT show?

2. **15:8.** To what does the Lord expect our worship to be joined? What does Scripture insist about the liturgical and ethical aspects of life? What type of man is the wise man?
3. **15:11.** To what do Sheol and Abaddon refer? If the realm of deceased souls is visible to the Lord, toward what does the proverb reason from that fact?
4. **15:24.** In what way might a prolonged life be one of the blessings of wise conduct? Once belief in an afterlife had clearly formed in Israel's theology, what did sayings like this suggest?

For application

1. **15:1.** In a heated argument, what is the most effective way to calm tensions? If someone pushes you with accusations or sarcasm, how can you pull back so as to disarm his attack? Have you ever tried such tactics in the past?
2. **15:3, 11.** How is your conduct affected by the knowledge that God sees your every move, hears your thoughts, and knows your intentions? Have you ever tried to hide your thoughts from him or avoid his eyes (e.g., as depicted on a statue or a painting) so that he would not see what you were doing?
3. **15:13.** Read 2 Cor 3:7–18. How might an experience of the closeness of God change one's countenance? What truth lies behind the idea that one's face begins eventually to resemble the image upon which he continually gazes?
4. **15:33.** How is humility related to fear of the Lord? As one grows in fear of the Lord, properly understood, how does one's view of himself change?

Chapter 16

For understanding

1. **16:1.** To what mystery does this proverb seem to refer?
2. **16:6.** To what do the terms "loyalty" and "faithfulness" refer here? If good works do not absolve the eternal guilt of our sins, how do they "atone for iniquity"? How does St. Cyprian apply the act of almsgiving to persons polluted after the grace of baptism?
3. **16:9.** What two things does Scripture affirm here? What is the theological mystery about how the two operate together?
4. **16:32.** What do the wise know how to control, and what virtue do they know how to exercise? How does St. Gregory the Great interpret this proverb?
5. **16:33.** To what does "the lot" perhaps allude here? What were Urim and Thummim, and how were they used?

For application

1. **16:2.** How easy is it for you to rationalize the purity of your motives? How often do you ask the Holy Spirit to purify them—even to convict you of sin so you can repent where needed?
2. **16:3.** As you commit your way to the Lord, how does your planning change direction? Compare your answer with the proverb in verse 9.
3. **16:18.** Have there been occasions when you presumed you knew what God's will in a situation was? Though in theory you may have been correct, what was the actual outcome? What did you learn about yourself from it?
4. **16:32.** Read the note for this verse. How do you understand the virtue of meekness? Assuming that one definition of it is "the attitude of a person who refuses to defend himself" (or of one who chooses God for his defender), how close do you come to that standard?

Chapter 17

For understanding

1. **17:3.** How does the Lord test the genuineness of our faith? What does a comparison between trials and the smelting of metals suggest? What else do we learn in Proverbs about what God does with the human heart?
2. **17:5.** Why is callous disdain for the needy an offense against God? How does this proverb differ from the one in 14:31? By contrast, what is honored by the Lord?
3. **17:14.** What are readers advised to do in a quarrel? How should one act if locked in a disagreement with another?
4. **17:24.** What does the proverb mean by saying that the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth? Where is the fool's attention directed?

For application

1. **17:3.** Certain sufferings are trials of character and the genuineness of one's spiritual life. Can *all* trials be used this way? When trials come, how do you typically respond to them? What would it take for you to respond in a better spirit?
2. **17:6.** In what way is one's father the glory of his child? What has your relationship with your father been like? If you do not relate well to your father, how can you relate well with your Heavenly Father?
3. **17:17.** What is one quality of a true friend? Do you have friends like that? How have you been a friend to others who are going through difficult times?
4. **17:22.** This proverb talks about a spirit that is *habitually* cheerful or downcast. If you are habitually depressed, what have you done to get help? What is the difference between psychological depression and spiritual dryness? What are some remedies for the latter?

Chapter 18

For understanding

1. **18:8.** Why is the spreading of rumors and gossip a dangerous activity?
2. **18:10–11.** What contrast is implied in the juxtaposition of these two verses about the Lord and about wealth? What does the proverb say about the value of riches?
3. **18:13.** What mark of a fool is described here? What should one do instead?
4. **18:22.** What about marriage is being affirmed here? What is the husband being called to do? On a theological level, to what is the value of “finding a wife” compared, and what does one obtain in both cases?

For application

1. **18:2.** Have you ever engaged in a conversation about spiritual things? What marks the skill of a good conversationalist, especially in such matters? On what should sound opinions about spiritual things be based?
2. **18:4.** Whom do you know who seems to have a good understanding of spiritual matters? What advantage do you take of that person's understanding? What opportunities do you have to share your own?
3. **18:14.** What ministries of spiritual healing are available in your parish? Have you ever taken advantage of them? Have you ever been able to help those whose spirits seem to be broken by death, illness, or misfortune?
4. **18:22.** Discussing the role of the woman as a “helpmate” in marriage, CCC 1605 says that she “represents God from whom comes our help”. How often have you seen husbands treat their wives that way? How would marriages change if both spouses treated each other as a representative of God?

Chapter 19

For understanding

1. **19:4.** How is poverty a burden twice over? What does wisdom counsel us to do?
2. **19:5.** Of what is giving false testimony a violation? If dishonesty like this goes undetected by others, what will the Lord do?
3. **19:17.** How does one who is kind to the poor lend to the Lord? How does the Lord promise to reward our works of mercy? How does St. Cyril of Alexandria explain the reward of lending to the Lord?
4. **19:24.** How does this proverb poke fun at laziness? On what custom is it based?

For application

1. **19:3.** Have you ever become angry at God? What were the circumstances? How did you resolve your anger? If you are still angry at God, what are you doing to reconcile with him?
2. **19:13.** What kind of damage does frequent or continual bickering do to a marriage? What does it say about the relationship between spouses? What does it teach the children?
3. **19:17.** What does it mean for the Church to exercise a “preferential option for the poor”? As a member of the Church, how do you exercise such a preferential option?
4. **19:21.** The Catechism, in paragraphs 303–14, discusses the workings of divine Providence, especially in situations of great physical and moral evil (e.g., natural disasters, wholesale massacres). What trust do you place in God's Providence for yourself? for others affected by such evils?

Chapter 20

For understanding

1. **20:9.** What does this rhetorical question mean to imply? What does only God have the power to do?
2. **20:10.** To what do the “weights” and the “measures” in this verse refer? How might sellers cheat the buyer of grain?
3. **20:22.** May one exact personal revenge? What should people do with their (non-criminal) grievances?
4. **20:25.** How could money or valuables be dedicated to the Lord’s sanctuary? Because items set apart for religious service became holy, what would have been preferable to making a vow and then changing one’s mind?
5. **20:30.** To what do the blows that cleanse away evil refer? To what two forms of discipline is this principle applicable? How should the term “wounding” be taken?

For application

1. **20:1.** Have you had any experience of your own with alcoholism or other forms of substance abuse? How has it affected yourself and your family? What kinds of treatment were available, and how effective have they been? How can intercessory prayer help?
2. **20:9.** How difficult is it for you to prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation? What makes it so hard to identify sins to confess? What does that difficulty reveal about one’s relationship with God?
3. **20:20.** What is the difference between an expletive spoken in anger and a curse? If someone truly intends to ask God to bring harm to another, how is God likely to respond?
4. **20:22.** In paragraph 2302, the Catechism describes anger as a desire for revenge. Why does Jesus teach that anyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to divine judgment (see Mt 5:22)? If vengeance belongs to God, who will repay (Rom 12:19)? What kind of vengeance does God ultimately desire the sinner to receive?

Chapter 21

For understanding

1. **21:1.** What does the stream of water in the king’s heart symbolize? What does it suggest about the political life of nations and their rulers?
2. **21:13.** For what is giving help to the poor and underprivileged a condition for receiving? What can the merciless expect? How does St. Cyril of Alexandria view almsgiving and charity?
3. **21:18.** What is the application of this saying? How might the Exodus event illustrate its meaning?
4. **21:22.** What does the wise man’s scaling of the stronghold of the mighty represent? How can those who are wise accomplish such a feat? In general terms, what is the lesson here?

For application

1. **21:1.** Read the note for this verse. How willing are you to acknowledge that the will of God is being worked out through the political life of our nation? Where do you see that will most active? Where do you see the need for intercessory prayer?
2. **12:3.** Because sacrifice is directed to the Lord and righteousness and justice are directed to the neighbor, what does this proverb say about God’s priorities? What should it say about your own?
3. **12:23.** How is it best to keep peace in a Christian community when issues arise where legitimate disagreement is possible? When should one avoid confrontation, and when should one seek it? How does one maintain love in the face of disagreement?
4. **12:26.** Why do some people steal when they have the means to pay? What change of heart is needed for the covetous?

Chapter 22

For understanding

1. **22:7.** Against what does this observational proverb warn? In the biblical world, what could happen to a debtor until the balance of a loan was paid off?
2. **22:17—24:34.** What have scholars detected about this section of Proverbs? What is the *Instruction of Amenemope*? How may it have influenced this section of Proverbs? Why is it no surprise that Israel should appropriate insights from other Near Eastern cultures?

3. **Word Study: Thirty Sayings.** What does the Hebrew adverb *shalishium* mean? Because of its unusual form and possible relationship to an Egyptian work that is divided into 30 sections, to what do many scholars propose the word should be changed? Why? How does the Greek Septuagint translate the word? Despite arguments in favor of emending the text, about what do scholars disagree?
4. **22:22.** What is the importance of the gate of a walled town?

For application

1. **22:6.** If you are a parent who has trained a child in the faith, how do you respond when the child departs from it? What hope is provided by the example of saints like St. Monica (St. Augustine's mother), who prayed for decades for her son's conversion?
2. **22:11.** What is purity of heart? To what areas of life besides sexual purity does it extend? How does it benefit relationships with others as well as with God?
3. **22:15.** How would you describe your approach to disciplining a child? If the expression "rod of discipline" need not refer to corporal punishment, how can discipline remain strict without being overbearing, on the one hand, or lax, on the other?
4. **22:19.** How do you encourage yourself to trust the Lord when times get difficult? For example, are there hymns that you sing, or Scripture passages that you recall? How do you "evangelize yourself"?

Chapter 23

For understanding

1. **23:2.** Why does this proverb recommend that a man given to appetite put a knife to his throat? What does the virtue of temperance promote in this case?
2. **23:13.** When it comes to physical discipline of children, what does Proverbs neither advocate nor endorse? What is in view here and elsewhere in the book?
3. **23:29–35.** What do these verses vividly depict? What are among its painful consequences? What happens when the drunkard recovers from his intoxication?
4. **23:31.** Why should the alcoholic not *look* at wine? How does the Greek Septuagint translate this verse? According to St. Caesarius of Arles, what happens when you become friends with someone who is displeasing to God?

For application

1. **23:1–3.** How often have you been in the company of important or influential people? How did you conduct yourself? Why, if you do not know them well, is it necessary to guard your conduct and your speech in their presence?
2. **23:13.** The administration of corporal punishment is a subject of controversy these days. What is your philosophy? How do you best train a child to recognize wrongdoing, repent of it, and seek forgiveness?
3. **23:17.** Read CCC 2538–40. In what ways do you envy the good fortune of others? Of all the capital sins, why is envy singled out as "diabolical" (CCC 2539)? How can one struggle against it?
4. **23:29–35.** To what are you addicted? What have been the consequences for you and for your relationship with God? What resources (including prayer) are available for you to use in order to become free of the addiction? How serious have you been in taking advantage of them?

Chapter 24

For understanding

1. **24:3.** Of what is a home under construction a concrete image? In Hebrew, to what can the term for "house" also refer? According to St. John Chrysostom, for what do the house and its storerooms stand?
2. **24:11.** What is this proverb a call to do? As implied in 24:12, when should this be done? If it is not done, what kind of sin is it?
3. **24:23.** Of what is showing favoritism in the courtroom a violation? According to what standard are human judges expected to act? In this regard, what two things does the Mosaic Law forbid?
4. **24:28–29.** What two things does this proverb prohibit? How, according to Scripture, can we restrain the impulse to exact revenge?

For application

1. **24:11–12.** Have you ever been aware of a wrong being done (such as spousal or child abuse) but either ignored it or claimed to know nothing about it? What type of sin might this be?
2. **24:16.** How often have you failed to overcome a significant temptation to sin? Despite occasional failure, how often have you resumed the battle? How have you dealt with the temptation to give up? What have you done to give the problem over to the Lord?
3. **24:17–18.** Why would the Lord be displeased at your pleasure over the fall of an enemy? What attitude should you take at the fall of an enemy? (Compare your answer with Mt 5:44–45.)
4. **24:23.** How might a parent or an employer show partiality in judging a child or an employee? What kind of example does this set for the person judged and for others who are aware of the partiality?

Chapter 25

For understanding

1. **25:1.** Who, presumably, are the “men of Hezekiah”? What did promoting the teachings of Solomon have to do with King Hezekiah?
2. **25:2.** How does this proverb say the glory of God is manifested? How is the glory of kings manifested?
3. **25:14.** Of what are clouds and wind without rain symbolic? How does the NT use this imagery?
4. **25:21–22.** What does this proverb promote? To what might the “coals of fire” refer? Either way, what actions are discouraged here? In what context does Paul quote this saying in Romans 12:20?

For application

1. **25:7b–10.** What is your opinion of lawsuits brought by one Christian against another? How would you respond to St. Paul’s statement in 1 Cor 6:1–7 that Christians ought to allow themselves to be cheated rather than bring suit against another Christian in a civil court?
2. **25:14.** Have you ever promised, either explicitly or implicitly, something you failed to deliver? How significant was the promise? What if any were the moral implications of the promise?
3. **25:21–22.** Read the note for this verse. What does Jesus say (e.g., in Mt 5:44) about our attitude toward enemies? What does the Lord’s Prayer imply about it? How have you fulfilled these injunctions?
4. **25:27.** According to CCC 2480, flattery can be a mortal or a venial sin, depending on the circumstances. What circumstances does the Catechism mention? When is it right to compliment others?

Chapter 26

For understanding

1. **26:4–5.** Though these two proverbs appear contradictory on the surface, to what do they apply? In certain contexts, how do the wise do well to avoid conversations with fools? In other contexts, such as when fools appear intelligent and sophisticated, what should the wise do? What does each saying aim to do?
2. **26:7.** Though the fool may be able to recite a proverb, why does it give him no benefit?
3. **26:11.** How is the fool’s behavior comparable to that of a dog returning to its vomit? What does 2 Pet 2:22 describe by quoting this proverb?
4. **26:12.** What temptation faces those who cultivate wisdom? What virtue is essential to the biblical concept of wisdom?

For application

1. **26:4.** When you find a conversation turning toward criticism of someone else, what should be your response? What do the cardinal virtues have to do with engaging in criticism of others?
2. **26:5.** When you find a conversation turning toward criticism of someone else and you believe that the speakers are wrong, what should be your response? Again, how do you apply the cardinal virtues in this situation?
3. **26:11.** When does foolish behavior (such as viewing pornography) turn into an addiction? What are some loving ways to deal with someone who is addicted to self-destructive behavior?

4. **26:18–19.** What is rationalization? When you are caught in a lie or in dishonest behavior, how do you tend to explain your conduct? What does a tendency to rationalize say about one's character?

Chapter 27

For understanding

1. **27:1–27.** Why are several proverbs in this chapter grouped in pairs? What about the final verses?
2. **27:5.** When is an open rebuke a sign of true affection? What is meant by “hidden love” here?
3. **27:6.** Why are words of correction or rebuke described as the wounds of a friend? How are kisses potentially deceptive signs of affection?
4. **27:23–27.** How does the practical wisdom in these verses benefit the herdsman with his flock?

For application

1. **27:5.** If fraternal correction is supposed to be part of the Christian life, why do so few Christians practice it? If we turn from evil out of a fear of others' anger, what does that say about ourselves? (Refer to CCC 1828–29.)
2. **27:8.** Read the note for this verse. What are some of the moral and spiritual dangers that young people face when they first leave home, e.g., for college? How can you prepare them?
3. **27:10.** If you need help, especially long-term help, on whom would you rely for it—your family or your friends? What resources do you have if you need care?
4. **27:17.** What are your friendships like? What are their strengths and limitations? How do they improve or hinder your relationship with the Lord (even if they are not particularly religious)?

Chapter 28

For understanding

1. **28:4.** How do interpreters differ over the precise meaning of “the law” in the context of this verse? In what two ways is legal language regularly used in Proverbs?
2. **28:8.** How does the Mosaic Law regard collecting interest on assistance loans? When was usury permitted for an Israelite? To what does “increase” (in addition to interest) most likely refer? What does the proverb seem to say that God will do with ill-gotten wealth?
3. **28:9.** What can render prayer ineffective? How does St. Bede recommend that one pray?
4. **28:13.** What can harboring unconfessed sin do to a person? What is the ordinary way of receiving God's forgiveness? In OT times, what were two ways in which this might take place?

For application

1. **28:5.** How does seeking the Lord increase one's understanding of justice? By calling St. Joseph a “just man” (Mt 1:19), what is Scripture saying about his relationship with the Lord? What would it say about yours?
2. **28:8.** What do you think Solomon would say about the modern practice of buying on credit and accumulating enormous debts? What is your own level of financial indebtedness, and what do you think God wants you to do about your own borrowing habits?
3. **28:9.** Although one's conscience can make mistakes, when can a person be held morally responsible for a mistaken judgment of conscience? How serious is the obligation to form one's conscience?
4. **28:13.** When you go to confession, how often do you find yourself confessing the same sins over and over again? If they are venial sins, how seriously do you take them? What have you done to correct habitual patterns of sin?

Chapter 29

For understanding

1. **29:3.** How is a father dishonored twice over by an undisciplined son? Which parable of Jesus describes this situation?
2. **29:20.** To what is one who is quick to speak susceptible? By contrast, what does one who is wise do?
3. **29:24.** In biblical times, on whom could a curse be called down? What did remaining silent mean if one had knowledge about a crime?

For application

1. **29:3.** How should Christian parents respond when they learn that one or more of their children have not only left the faith but have adopted ways of life opposed to the principles by which they were raised? What should such parents do with their own grief? How should they relate to their dissenting children?
2. **29:10.** What stories of Christian martyrs have you read? What effect do such stories have on your faith? Do you see yourself as a Christian witness in today's social and political environment? If so, in what way?
3. **29:11.** What most typically makes you angry, and how do you express anger? How do you try to control your anger? What does it mean to be angry without sinning (see Eph 4:26)?
4. **29:18.** If prophecy is not merely foretelling the future, what is it? On whose behalf does the prophet speak? Why does St. Paul recommend that Christians seek the spiritual gift of prophecy (1 Cor 14:1ff)?

Chapter 30

For understanding

1. **30:1.** Who is Agur? How is he like Job? Where is Massa, and after whom was that location named? How does the RSV understand the names Ithiel and Ucal? What makes some scholars believe that the text has suffered corruption?
2. **30:4.** What does the rhetorical question about ascending into heaven imply? Who can make the claim of having done it? Who is meant by the reference to "his son's name"? What hint can Christian readers rightly detect about God?
3. **30:9.** What can times of plenty make us do? How does theft profane the name of God?
4. **30:15–33.** How do these numerical proverbs work?
5. **30:21–23.** How does each of the four intolerable things in these verses turn the world upside down?

For application

1. **30:2–3.** If it is true that one who thinks he has acquired the virtue of humility has just lost it, how does one learn humility? What can the realization that one never completely grows up do to advance one's relationship with the Lord?
2. **30:5.** Paragraphs 109–14 of the Catechism provide principles for interpreting Scripture. How might these principles help you apply the word of God profitably to your life?
3. **30:8b–9a.** Why is prosperity dangerous to a living faith in God? Why are suffering and persecution often good for it?

Chapter 31

For understanding

1. **31:1.** Who is Lemuel? What people neighboring Israel were renowned for their wisdom in biblical times? From whom do the admonitions of Proverbs 31 come, and to whom are they addressed? About what does she caution him, what does she encourage him to do, and about what does she counsel him?
2. **31:10–31.** What does this epilogue to Proverbs praise? What kind of poem is this, and how does it work? Why would Hebrew writers create poems in this alphabetic format? As it unfolds the virtues of the praiseworthy wife (echoing several lines earlier in the book), at what does it hint regarding her?
3. **Word Study: The Good Wife.** Although translating *'eshet hayil* as "a woman of worth" or "a good wife" is not inaccurate, what does the word *hayil* generally convey? Where is the term often found? Given the military usage, how might one best render the expression in Proverbs 31:10? Which of her strengths are singled out for mention? What kind of character does she actually show?
4. **31:10.** To what is finding an excellent wife comparable? According to St. Caesarius of Arles, who is the "worthy wife"?
5. **31:30.** How is charm deceitful, and how are good looks vain? Should the husband disregard the physical attractiveness of his wife? What kind of wife is the good wife? What is the preeminent virtue of the wise?

For application

1. **31:2–3.** What cautions did your parents give you about relations with the opposite sex? About what were they concerned? What do daughters learn about men from their fathers, and what do sons learn about women from their mothers? What *should* they be learning from them?

Proverbs

2. **31:10.** In an era of soaring divorce, for what should one look in a prospective spouse? Even if divorce is part of the family history, how does one prevent it from determining the direction of one's own marriage?
3. **31:11.** How vital to a marriage is trust between the spouses? In what areas is trust likely to become an issue? If trust is once violated, how can it be repaired? How important is forgiveness for the spouse who has been wronged?
4. **31:28–29.** What benefits accrue to a marriage when a husband honors his wife? How are modest displays of affection between spouses beneficial to the children?