

REAL MAN: 31 Days in Proverbs

Week 1 — Wisdom Speaks · Days 1–7

Adam Johns · Free sample. Full 31-day series is live at usmcmmin.org/proverbs/1.html. Not a paid edition. Checkout is not set up yet.

Seven letters. Seven days. One chapter of Proverbs each morning. This is Week 1 of REAL MAN — the sample you can actually use. The full 31-day series is already live and free on the ministry site. There is no checkout yet. When a paid edition exists, it will have to be better than this, not just locked behind a button.

Reject passivity. Engage intentionally. Accept responsibility. Lead courageously. Manage faithfully. Account accurately. Never quit.

Read the whole chapter, not just the key verse. The application is not optional. James 1:22 — be doers of the word, not hearers only.

DAY 1 · PROVERBS 1

R: Reject Passivity

FOCUS

Passivity is the quiet killer of men. It doesn't announce itself — it just slowly hands your life over to whatever is easiest, loudest, or most comfortable. Proverbs opens with a direct challenge to every man who's been coasting: the fear of the LORD is where knowledge begins, and if you haven't started there, you haven't started at all.

Read Proverbs 1 in full. Then work the day. Open the chapter: usmcmmin.org/proverbs/1.html

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

v.7

OBSERVATION

Solomon doesn't ease you in with encouragement. He opens Proverbs with a command structure — these proverbs exist "for gaining wisdom and instruction, for understanding words of insight, for receiving instruction in prudent behavior" (vv.2-3). That's a mission brief. There is a purpose, a target, and an expected outcome. A passive man reads that and thinks it sounds nice. A man who rejects passivity reads it and asks himself: *am I actually pursuing this, or am I just assuming wisdom will show up?*

The middle section of this chapter (vv.10-19) is Solomon talking to his son about a specific scenario: a gang of men inviting him to join a scheme that will get people hurt for profit. The enticement is brotherhood and easy money — "cast in your lot with us, we'll all share the plunder" (v.14). That's not ancient history, that's every generation's version of the same trap. The passive man goes along because he wants to belong and he hasn't decided who he is yet. The man who has rejected passivity already has his answer ready before the invitation arrives, because he's done the internal work.

Chapter 1 closes with Wisdom herself speaking — and she's not whispering. She's calling out in the streets, in the public squares, at the city gate (vv.20-21). Wisdom isn't hiding from you. She's shouting. The passive man never hears her because he's too busy being comfortable. The man who rejects passivity is listening, actively, for what God is saying — in Scripture, in counsel, in the outcomes of his decisions. The fear of the LORD is not a passive emotion. It's an active orientation of your entire life.

APPLICATION

Identify one area of your life where you've been passive — a conversation you've been avoiding, a discipline you've been putting off, a decision you've been sitting on. Write it down, put a deadline on it, and take one concrete step toward it today. Not "think about it" — an actual step.

PRAYER

God, I don't want to be the man who had access to wisdom and was too lazy or too comfortable to pursue it. Show me where I've been passive in my own house, my own faith, my own growth. I'm asking for the fear of the LORD — not dread, but the kind of reverence that keeps me honest and moving. I don't want to be a fool who despises instruction. Teach me. Amen.

E: Engage Intentionally

FOCUS

Intentionality means you don't drift through relationships, decisions, or your own faith — you bring deliberate effort and attention to what matters. Proverbs 2 lays out the most direct case in all of Scripture for the kind of aggressive pursuit that wisdom actually requires from a man.

Read Proverbs 2 in full. Then work the day. Open the chapter: usmcmmin.org/proverbs/2.html

If you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.

vv.4-5

OBSERVATION

Read the first eleven verses of this chapter carefully and notice the verbs. Accept. Store up. Turn your ear. Apply your heart. Call out. Cry aloud. Look for. Search. That's not a passive list — that's an assault plan for acquiring wisdom. Solomon is telling his son that wisdom isn't something that will fall in his lap if he's a decent enough guy. It requires the kind of focused effort you'd give to hunting for something genuinely valuable. If you want treasure, you dig. If you want wisdom, you pursue it the same way.

The payoff described in verses 6 through 11 is significant: God gives wisdom, understanding, and knowledge — and out of that comes protection, a guard for your course, a preserved path (vv.7-8). That's not just spiritual comfort, that's operational advantage. The man who engages intentionally with God's word and God's wisdom has better judgment, better discernment, more clarity in hard situations than the man who shows up to church twice a year and calls himself covered. The protection isn't magical — it comes through the formation that happens when you actually engage.

The second half of the chapter (vv.12-22) describes what wisdom saves you *from* — the ways of wicked men and the seductive woman who flatters with her words. Both traps work the same way: they're designed for men who are not paying attention. The man who walks into a morally compromised situation with his eyes open and his guard down isn't unlucky — he's undisciplined. Intentional engagement with wisdom means you've thought through your vulnerabilities before you're standing in front of them.

APPLICATION

Spend 20 minutes today — not scrolling, not passive listening — actively studying one passage of Scripture. Write down what you observe, what it means, and what you're going to do about it. Make it a hunt, not a stroll.

PRAYER

God, I've coasted too much. I've treated your word like ambient noise instead of a detailed map. Today I'm asking you to give me the hunger to actually search — to dig into what you've said like it's treasure, because it is. Give me understanding that leads somewhere real. Amen.

A: Accept Responsibility

FOCUS

Responsibility means ownership — not just of the things that go right, but of your direction, your decisions, your dependence on God, and your treatment of the people around you. Proverbs 3 is one of the most well-known chapters in the Bible, but most men only know the first six verses. The whole chapter is a masterclass in what it looks like to own your life before God and others.

Read Proverbs 3 in full. Then work the day. Open the chapter: usmcmmin.org/proverbs/3.html

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

vv.5-6

OBSERVATION

The famous opening of this chapter — love and faithfulness, trust in the LORD, don't lean on your own understanding — is not a passive surrender. It's the hardest kind of responsibility a man can accept: the responsibility of acknowledging that his own wisdom has a ceiling. Every man who's wrecked his marriage, torched a business, or wounded his kids while "trusting his gut" knows exactly what it means to lean on his own understanding and pay for it. Accepting responsibility starts with accepting that you don't have it all figured out and choosing to seek a higher intelligence than your own instincts.

What follows in verses 9 through 12 is about financial and material responsibility — honor God with your firstfruits, not your leftovers (v.9). That's a statement about priorities. Where your money goes first tells you what you actually believe about who owns your life. A man who claims to trust God but gives him the table scraps at the end of the month after every other obligation is handled hasn't accepted responsibility for his stewardship — he's just decorated his self-management with religious language.

The chapter closes with a section on how to treat people: don't withhold good from those who deserve it when it's in your power to help them (v.27), don't say "come back tomorrow" when you can act now (v.28), don't plot against your neighbor, don't pick fights you don't need to pick (vv.29-30). This is the horizontal dimension of accepting responsibility — you are responsible for how you treat the people in your orbit. The dismissive husband, the checked-out father, the friend who always has an excuse — these men have abdicated responsibility and dressed it up as personality. A real man owns his impact on the people around him.

APPLICATION

Identify one relationship where you've been withholding what you could give — attention, honesty, time, support. Take one concrete action today to change that. Don't "plan to do better" — do something today.

PRAYER

God, I confess that I lean on my own understanding more than I lean on you, and I've got the results to prove it. Today I want to actually trust you — with my finances, my relationships, my decisions. Help me see where I've been avoiding responsibility and giving you the leftovers. I want to honor you with the firstfruits. Amen.

L: Lead Courageously

FOCUS

Courageous leadership starts inside — with the choices you make about what gets into your heart and mind before it ever shows up in your actions. Proverbs 4 is a father passing the most important thing he knows to his son, and the core of it is this: guard what's in you, because everything flows from there.

Read Proverbs 4 in full. Then work the day. Open the chapter: usmcmmin.org/proverbs/4.html

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

v.23

OBSERVATION

Solomon opens this chapter by describing how wisdom was passed to him — his father taught him, held him, and said, essentially, *don't let go of this* (vv.3-4). That's not just nice family sentiment. That's a picture of what courageous leadership actually requires: it demands that someone, at some point, had the courage to speak hard truth into a young man's life and that the young man had enough sense to receive it. If you want to lead courageously, start by asking whether you have anyone in your life speaking into you, and whether you're doing that for anyone else.

The chapter frames life as two paths — the path of the righteous and the path of the wicked — and it doesn't soften the difference. The path of the wicked is darkness; people stumble on it and don't even know what they tripped over (v.19). The path of the righteous is like dawn, growing brighter and brighter (v.18). Courageous leadership means choosing the harder, brighter path and then bringing people with you. But here's what most men miss: you can't bring anyone somewhere you haven't decided to go yourself. Leadership isn't managing people — it's being the kind of man worth following, which requires decisions about your own direction first.

Verse 23 is the hinge of the whole chapter and one of the most operationally important verses in Scripture for men who lead. Everything flows from the heart — your parenting, your marriage, your integrity at work, your consistency in faith, your response under pressure. Courageous leadership is not first about bold external action. It's about the ruthless internal discipline to guard what's going in — what you watch, what you dwell on, what you agree with in the quiet of your mind. The man who can't lead his own heart can't lead anyone. Lead yourself first. Everything else follows.

APPLICATION

Audit your inputs for one week — starting today. What are you watching, listening to, and dwelling on? Write down three things you're putting into your mind regularly and honestly evaluate whether they're making you a sharper, more courageous leader or dulling you. Cut one thing this week that isn't building you up.

PRAYER

God, I want to lead my family, my team, and myself with actual courage — not a performance of it. But I know that starts with what I'm feeding my heart. Show me where I've let the wrong things in and what I need to cut. Help me guard what you've given me and lead from a clean place. Amen.

M: Manage Faithfully

FOCUS

Faithful management means treating everything God entrusted to you — including your sexuality and your marriage — with the seriousness it deserves. Proverbs 5 is one of the most direct conversations in the Bible about a man's sexual stewardship, and it doesn't pull any punches about the cost of getting it wrong.

Read Proverbs 5 in full. Then work the day. Open the chapter: usmcmmin.org/proverbs/5.html

Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well.

v.15

OBSERVATION

Solomon spends the first half of this chapter describing the seductive woman in detail that would feel at home in any modern context — she's smooth with her words, her lips drip honey, but her end is bitter as gall and her feet go down to death (vv.3-5). He's not being dramatic. He's being precise. Every man who's ever been lured by something that looked like satisfaction and found devastation on the other side of it knows exactly what Solomon is describing. The warning isn't "this might be unpleasant." The warning is "this will cost you everything" — your honor, your years, your strength, your wealth (vv.9-10). Sexual unfaithfulness isn't just a moral failure; it's strategic self-destruction.

The pivot in verse 15 is one of the most beautiful instructions in Proverbs, and it's often overlooked because men are too busy focusing on the warning to hear the invitation. "Drink water from your own cistern" — meaning, your marriage is not a consolation prize or a fallback option. It is the designated source. The imagery builds through verses 15 to 19: a spring, flowing water, rejoicing in the wife of your youth, being intoxicated with her love. That's not a compromise — that's a celebration. Faithful management of your sexuality is not about white-knuckling your way past temptation. It's about genuinely investing in what you have until it becomes so real and so good that the counterfeit loses its appeal.

The chapter closes with a sobering reminder in verses 21 to 23: a man's ways are in full view of the LORD, and the cords of his sins hold him fast. Men who stumble into sexual sin rarely fall off a cliff — they get tangled slowly, a little at a time, until they can't move. Faithful management means you deal with entanglement early, before the cords tighten. That requires honesty — with God, with yourself, and probably with at least one other man who's going to tell you the truth.

APPLICATION

Have an honest conversation with your wife today — not a performance of affection, a real one. Ask her what she needs from you that she hasn't been getting. Listen without defending yourself. If you're not married, do an honest inventory of your sexual integrity this week: where are you vulnerable, and who knows about it?

PRAYER

God, I want to be a faithful steward of everything you've given me — including my body and my marriage. Forgive me for the ways I've treated either of them as less than sacred. Help me invest in what you've given me until it's genuinely satisfying, and give me the courage to be honest about where I've been cutting corners. Amen.

A: Account Accurately

FOCUS

Accurate accounting means your life matches your claims — your work ethic matches your ambition, your finances match your values, your word matches your follow-through. Proverbs 6 is a chapter about accountability across multiple dimensions of a man's life, and it's uncomfortably specific.

Read Proverbs 6 in full. Then work the day. Open the chapter: usmcmmin.org/proverbs/6.html

Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.

vv.6-8

OBSERVATION

The chapter opens with a warning about financial entanglement — specifically, being trapped by a pledge you made rashly for someone else (vv.1-5). The advice is blunt: if you've done this, don't sleep until you've worked your way out of it. "Go quickly, do not rest" (v.4). That's the antithesis of passive financial management. A man who accounts accurately knows what he owes, what he's promised, and what the exit path is. He doesn't roll over and hope it works out; he moves.

The ant passage (vv.6-11) is one of the most convicting sections in all of Proverbs for men who are underperforming and making excuses for it. The ant has no boss telling it what to do, no one standing over it, no external accountability structure — and it still does the work. The "little sleep, little slumber, little folding of the hands" sequence in verse 10 is surgical in its precision because the sluggard isn't wildly lazy — he's just a little bit lazy, repeatedly, consistently, until poverty arrives like an armed man (v.11). Small daily deficits compound into disaster. If your financial situation, your work output, or your physical condition doesn't match where you want to be, look honestly at your daily disciplines before blaming circumstances.

The second half of the chapter catalogs things God hates — including haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that rush into evil, a false witness, and someone who stirs up conflict (vv.16-19). These aren't exotic sins. These are daily management failures: arrogance, dishonesty, reactivity, manipulation, conflict-creation. The man who accounts accurately takes an honest look at his patterns and asks: am I doing any of these things? Not as a guilt exercise, but as a calibration. Accurate accounting requires the willingness to see what's actually there.

APPLICATION

Do a 15-minute financial audit today. Pull up your bank statement and look at the last 30 days of spending. Does it match your values and priorities? Write down one financial discipline you're going to start — or restart — this week. Assign it a specific dollar amount or time commitment so it's measurable.

PRAYER

God, I want my life to add up — my work ethic, my finances, my integrity. Show me where there's a gap between who I claim to be and how I actually live. Give me the discipline of the ant — no one watching, doing the right thing anyway. I don't want poverty to arrive like an armed man because I loved my sleep too much. Help me build what matters, one honest day at a time. Amen.

N: Never Quit

FOCUS

Endurance in purity isn't a one-time decision — it's a daily discipline that requires an active, engaged mind and a commitment to staying in the fight even when the pull is strong. Proverbs 7 is one of the most vivid and detailed warnings in Scripture about the anatomy of a moral collapse, and it's written specifically so that a man who reads it carefully will never be able to say he wasn't warned.

Read Proverbs 7 in full. Then work the day. Open the chapter: usmcmmin.org/proverbs/7.html

Keep my commands and you will live; guard my teachings as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.

vv.2-3

OBSERVATION

Solomon opens the chapter not with the warning, but with the prescription: keep his commands, guard his teachings, bind them to your fingers, write them on your heart (vv.2-3). This is the armor you put on before the battle, not after you're already wounded. The man who never quits in the area of purity isn't the man with the strongest willpower in the moment — he's the man who did the work before the moment arrived to embed God's word so deeply that it functions as instinct. You can't download conviction when you're standing in the seduction. It has to already be there.

Then Solomon describes a young man who lacks judgment — literally, "he lacks heart" in the Hebrew — walking near her corner, going down her street, in the twilight, as the day was fading, in the dark of the night (vv.7-9). Notice the progression. He's not ambushed. He put himself on her street, at the wrong hour, in the vulnerable dark. That sequence describes every man who's ever said "I don't know how it happened" — it happened one small step at a time, and each step was a decision. Never quitting doesn't mean you're never tempted; it means you don't casually wander toward what you know will destroy you.

The seduction scene that follows (vv.14-20) is detailed and specific because Solomon wants his son to see through it — the flattery, the prepared bed, the invitation to pleasure with the assurance that no one will know. And then verse 22: "all at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter." All at once. That's the lie of moral collapse — it feels sudden, but every step in that chapter happened before the fall. The closing image in verses 26-27 is not subtle: her house is a highway to the grave, and many strong men have been brought down by her. The endurance called for here is not weakness dressed up as virtue — it's the hardest kind of strength, the kind that says no when yes feels good and nobody's watching. That strength is built slowly, daily, over a long obedience. It doesn't quit.

APPLICATION

Map your vulnerabilities honestly — the times of day, the emotional states, the specific triggers that put you on "her street." Write them down. Then write one boundary you're going to put in place this week that removes or limits access to one of those vulnerabilities. Share it with one man who will hold you to it.

PRAYER

God, I don't want to be the young man who lacks judgment and wanders into a trap he saw coming. Write your word on my heart so deep it functions before my brain starts making excuses. Give me the endurance to stay in the fight — not because the pull isn't real, but because I know where that road ends. I want to finish well. Help me take this one day, one decision at a time. Amen.

