

The logo features a stylized 'X' composed of four overlapping geometric shapes in shades of blue and grey.

Explore the Bible®

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE

A photograph of a modern cafe interior. In the foreground, a small, dark wooden square table is set with two salt and pepper shakers. Two light-colored, modern-style chairs with metal frames are tucked under the table. The background shows a large window with a view of a city street, and a person's legs in light-colored pants are visible sitting at a table behind the main table. The floor is made of dark wood planks.

Proverbs; Song of Songs

Summer 2020 > CSB

LifeWay | Adults



A LIFE WELL LIVED

Wisdom is a Person with whom we can have a relationship.

People want to succeed in life. In the workplace, relationships, finances—in every area of life—they crave success. This drive to thrive inevitably draws them to quick fixes and easy steps. They seek advice from TV talk shows, books, or the Internet to help them live life well.

What we know from the Bible, however, is that the wisdom needed for living life well comes not from quick tips and easy steps; true wisdom is a Person with whom we can have a relationship.

The Book of Proverbs is about becoming wise in everyday life. It reveals God's principles for successful living. The theme of the book is stated in this way: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). This means wisdom has a starting point. It begins with a personal relationship with God. The Bible speaks of Jesus as "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24). Thus, coming to a saving knowledge of God through the person of Jesus Christ is the beginning of a life well lived.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). He is waiting for you now.

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning away from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus Christ as God's Son and accept Jesus' gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: "Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In Jesus' name I pray, amen."

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

CONTENTS

Bible Reading Plan	6
Memory Verses	7
Introduction to Proverbs; Song of Songs	8
Using the Daily Discipleship Guide	10
Leader Helps	116
Visual Ideas	160
Coming Next Quarter	162



SESSIONS	SUGGESTED USE	TITLE	PAGE
1	June 7	Charted Waters* (Prov. 1:7-19)	12
		<i>Leader Helps on page 121</i>	
2	June 14	Direction Offered (Prov. 3:1-12)	20
		<i>Leader Helps on page 124</i>	
3	June 21	Compassion Demonstrated (Prov. 3:21-35)	28
		<i>Leader Helps on page 127</i>	
4	June 28	The Choice (Prov. 4:11-27).	36
		<i>Leader Helps on page 130</i>	
5	July 5	Following God’s Design (Prov. 5:3-11,15-18).	44
		<i>Leader Helps on page 133</i>	
6	July 12	Pursuing Wisdom (Prov. 8:6-21)	52
		<i>Leader Helps on page 136</i>	
7	July 19	Living Wisely (Prov. 14:8-15).	60
		<i>Leader Helps on page 139</i>	
8	July 26	Pleasing God (Prov. 15:33–16:11).	68
		<i>Leader Helps on page 142</i>	
9	August 2	Staying Sober (Prov. 23:17-21,29-35)	76
		<i>Leader Helps on page 145</i>	
10	August 9	Accepting Discipline (Prov. 29:1-3,12-20)	84
		<i>Leader Helps on page 148</i>	
11	August 16	Finding Honor (Prov. 31:10-16,23-31)	92
		<i>Leader Helps on page 151</i>	
12	August 23	Relational Foundations (Song of Sg. 2:15–3:5).	100
		<i>Leader Helps on page 154</i>	
13	August 30	Relational Investment (Song of Sg. 5:6-16)	108
		<i>Leader Helps on page 157</i>	

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Daily Discipleship Guide Summer 2020

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A WORD FROM THE TEAM LEADER



The decision was made to serve donuts on the shuttle vans. The church used off-campus parking and needed to encourage people to park there, so donuts seemed to be a simple solution. The only problem was that parents began dropping their kids off in the remote parking lot so the kids could grab a donut but the parents proceeded to follow the van in their cars and park in the crowded church parking lot. Someone observed what was happening and offered some wisdom—serve coffee on the shuttle van instead. Parents began dropping their kids off at the church and then enjoyed a few moments of peace and some coffee while riding the shuttle from the remote lot.

We live in a world that may seem simple at times, but the simple is often what makes it so complex. This is true in part because we live in a system where everything is connected. One decision has a ripple effect. Systems theory refers to this as simplicity, and simplicity points to our need for wisdom.

Some people seek out professional analysts to help them navigate this world while others turn to their trusted friends and mentors. Solomon discovered that the only place to go when trying to figure out this simplex world was to the One who created it in the first place. Solomon recorded the wisdom God revealed to him in Proverbs and Song of Songs. Learning from these Bible books helps us fulfill Paul's directive to live as wise people (Eph. 5:15).

As we study Proverbs and Song of Songs, we will discover the wisdom of God for living in ways that please our Creator. Not everything we discover will be easy nor will it be simple, but it will be right.

May God grant us a glimpse of His wisdom and give us courage to act on what we discover.

Dwayne McCrary

Team Leader, Adult Explore the Bible

BIBLE READING PLAN

JUNE

- 1. Proverbs 1:1-7
- 2. Proverbs 1:8-19
- 3. Proverbs 1:20-33
- 4. Proverbs 1:1-22
- 5. Proverbs 3:1-12
- 6. Proverbs 3:13-26
- 7. Proverbs 3:27-35
- 8. Proverbs 4:1-19
- 9. Proverbs 4:20-27
- 10. Proverbs 5:1-14
- 11. Proverbs 5:15-23
- 12. Proverbs 6:1-11
- 13. Proverbs 6:12-19
- 14. Proverbs 6:20-35
- 15. Proverbs 7:1-15
- 16. Proverbs 7:16-27
- 17. Proverbs 8:1-11
- 18. Proverbs 8:12-21
- 19. Proverbs 8:22-36
- 20. Proverbs 9:1-18
- 21. Proverbs 10:1-10
- 22. Proverbs 10:11-22
- 23. Proverbs 10:23-32
- 24. Proverbs 11:1-10
- 25. Proverbs 11:11-21
- 26. Proverbs 11:22-31
- 27. Proverbs 12:1-11
- 28. Proverbs 12:12-20
- 29. Proverbs 12:21-28
- 30. Proverbs 13:1-14

JULY

- 1. Proverbs 13:15-25
- 2. Proverbs 14:1-11
- 3. Proverbs 14:12-21
- 4. Proverbs 14:22-35
- 5. Proverbs 15:1-11
- 6. Proverbs 15:12-22
- 7. Proverbs 15:23-33
- 8. Proverbs 16:1-9
- 9. Proverbs 16:10-20
- 10. Proverbs 16:21-33
- 11. Proverbs 17:1-14
- 12. Proverbs 17:15-28
- 13. Proverbs 18:1-13
- 14. Proverbs 18:14-24
- 15. Proverbs 19:1-17
- 16. Proverbs 19:18-29
- 17. Proverbs 20:1-16
- 18. Proverbs 20:17-30
- 19. Proverbs 21:1-15
- 20. Proverbs 21:16-31
- 21. Proverbs 22:1-16
- 22. Proverbs 22:17-29
- 23. Proverbs 23:1-18
- 24. Proverbs 23:19-35
- 25. Proverbs 24:1-14
- 26. Proverbs 24:15-22
- 27. Proverbs 24:23-34
- 28. Proverbs 25:1-12
- 29. Proverbs 25:13-28
- 30. Proverbs 26:1-12
- 31. Proverbs 26:13-28

AUGUST

- 1. Proverbs 27:1-14
- 2. Proverbs 27:15-27
- 3. Proverbs 28:1-14
- 4. Proverbs 28:15-28
- 5. Proverbs 29:1-16
- 6. Proverbs 29:17-27
- 7. Proverbs 30:1-17
- 8. Proverbs 30:18-33
- 9. Proverbs 31:1-9
- 10. Proverbs 31:10-20
- 11. Proverbs 31:21-31
- 12. Song of Songs 1:1-7
- 13. Song of Songs 1:8-17
- 14. Song of Songs 2:1-7
- 15. Song of Songs 2:8-14
- 16. Song of Songs 2:15-17
- 17. Song of Songs 3:1-5
- 18. Song of Songs 3:6-11
- 19. Song of Songs 4:1-7
- 20. Song of Songs 4:8-11
- 21. Song of Songs 4:12-16
- 22. Song of Songs 5:1-2
- 23. Song of Songs 5:3-8
- 24. Song of Songs 5:9-16
- 25. Song of Songs 6:1-10
- 26. Song of Songs 6:11-13
- 27. Song of Songs 7:1-9
- 28. Song of Songs 7:10-13
- 29. Song of Songs 8:1-4
- 30. Song of Songs 8:5-9
- 31. Song of Songs 8:10-14

MEMORY VERSES

Session 1:

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and discipline. — Proverbs 1:7

Session 2:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight. — Proverbs 3:5-6

Session 3:

When it is in your power, don't withhold good from the one to whom it belongs. — Proverbs 3:27

Session 4:

Carefully consider the path for your feet, and all your ways will be established. — Proverbs 4:26

Session 5:

My son, keep your father's command, and don't reject your mother's teaching. — Proverbs 6:20

Session 6:

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. — Proverbs 9:10

Session 7:

Lying lips are detestable to the LORD, but faithful people are his delight. — Proverbs 12:22

Session 8:

The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, observing the wicked and the good. — Proverbs 15:3

Session 9:

Listen, my son, and be wise; keep your mind on the right course. — Proverbs 23:19

Session 10:

A wise son responds to his father's discipline, but a mocker doesn't listen to rebuke. — Proverbs 13:1

Session 11:

I have instructed you today—even you—so that your confidence may be in the LORD. — Proverbs 22:19

Session 12:

We love because he first loved us. — 1 John 4:19

Session 13:

Where has your love gone, most beautiful of women? Which way has he turned? We will seek him with you. — Song of Songs 6:1

INTRODUCTION TO PROVERBS; SONG OF SONGS

The Book of Proverbs provides us with wisdom that comes from God. At the beginning of this foundational guide for being wise in Him, we're led to understand that seeking God's wisdom means nurturing a close relationship with Him (Prov. 1:7). From there, Solomon provides us with an exhaustive assortment of proverbs to address almost every facet of our everyday lives.

Song of Songs is an extended poem that affirms the value of choosing to live according to God's wisdom when it comes to nurturing the love between a man and a woman. Throughout the poem, the portrayal of the authentic romance between two people in love is painted on the canvas of God's faithful love for His people. The story that's told in the poem includes scenes from a couple's courtship and their life together as husband and wife.

THEMES IN PROVERBS:

God's wisdom comes only through a personal relationship with Him.

The temptation to give into foolishness and the need to choose wisdom serves as an ongoing concern for God's people as we live for Him every day.

Being wise and overcoming menacing temptations means that we seek the Lord's wisdom and put it to work.

Seeking God's wisdom and applying it in our lives allows us to learn how He wants us to handle the issues that confront us in work, play, money, and relationships.

God wants us to enjoy the fulfillment that comes from being wise in Him.

THEMES IN SONG OF SONGS:

God affirms intimacy, but He expects His people to be wise in Him in the expression of romantic love between a man and a woman.

The relationship between a married man and woman provides the only healthy setting for Christians to express romantic love completely.

OUTLINES OF PROVERBS; SONG OF SONGS

OUTLINE OF PROVERBS

- I. Solomon's Exhortations and Warnings (1:1–9:18)
 - A. Contrast between wisdom and riches (1:1–3:20)
 - B. Praise of wisdom, love, and worthy conduct (3:21–4:27)
 - C. Warnings against lust, idleness, and deceit (5:1–7:27)
 - D. A portrayal of wisdom (8:1–9:18)
- II. Solomon's Proverbs (10:1–29:27)
 - A. Collected proverbs (10:1–22:16)
 - B. Thirty sayings of the wise (22:17–24:22)
 - C. More sayings of the wise (24:23–34)
 - D. Hezekiah's collection (25:1–29:27)
- III. Other Proverbs (30:1–31:31)
 - A. Words of Agur (30:1–33)
 - B. Words of Lemuel (31:1–9)
 - C. Praise of a capable wife (31:10–31)

OUTLINE OF SONG OF SONGS

- I. Their Story Begins (1:2–2:7)
- II. Invitation to Enjoy a Spring Day (2:6–17)
- III. Night of Separation Preceding Wedding (3:1–5)
- IV. Wedding Day and Night (3:6–5:1)
- V. Night of separation following wedding night (5:2–7:9)
- VI. Invitation to Enjoy a Spring Day (7:10–8:4)
- VII. Their Story Complete (8:3–14)

USING THE DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE

Follower. Adherent. Loyalist. Attached. Allegiant. Zealous. Disciple. Jesus' call is the same to all people: to follow Him as a disciple. He expects more than a courteous nod. He deserves more than intellectual agreement. He calls us to be disciples—growing disciples. How do we do that?

In Brad Waggoner's *Shape of Faith to Come* (2008), he identified the discipline of “daily Bible engagement” as the number-one predictor of a person's spiritual growth. *Daily* implies a discipline much like exercising, brushing teeth, or eating a certain number of calories EVERY day. Should we be any different when it comes to our spiritual training? The focus is the *Bible*, God's Word. There is nothing wrong with knowing the thoughts of great philosophers, leaders, or theologians, but they must not replace God's Word. *Engagement* implies participating in the act of reading, studying, and reflecting. Engagement is active, requiring us to do something.

Your *Daily Discipleship Guide* is full of tools to help you grow as a disciple. But like any tool, you have to use it to get the benefit.

Use this resource when studying with a group. The first five pages of each session help the group leader introduce a Bible passage and move you toward acting on the truths discovered.

Use the **Daily Exploration** pages to go deeper into God's Word, building on your group's study experience. Engage in daily Bible study, record your thoughts, reflect on the questions, and take action.

Use the **Talk It Out** section at the end of each session to hold yourself and others accountable by meeting in a smaller group of same-sex individuals (an accountability group). Share with the smaller group what God has been teaching you through the group time and your personal daily Bible study.

Use the resource every week even when you are unable to attend the group's Bible study. Missing a group Bible study does not excuse you from being engaged daily with God through His Word. Use the *Daily Discipleship Guide* to move forward in your spiritual growth.

Want this resource on your phone or tablet for when you are on the go? Purchase an eBook in the *Explore the Bible* APP (available through GooglePlay and the iTunes Store) or at LifeWay.com.

Getting the Most from TALK IT OUT

Talk It Out, found at the end of each session, supports groups of three or four people who come together weekly to encourage, share, build up, and sharpen each other. While other issues may be addressed, the Talk It Out section provides a few directed questions based on the previous group experience and daily Bible engagement suggestions to start the weekly conversation.

These groups are made up of three to four people...

- Participants should be of the same gender.
- These groups should be smaller on purpose.
- These groups can meet at almost any location.
- These groups can easily accommodate each other's schedules.

...Who meet weekly...

- Life happens weekly, so meeting weekly is important.
- There is nothing like sitting across from friends over coffee, a meal, or dessert.
- In some cases, your smaller group may need to meet using technology that allows for video chats (such as Skype or Google Hangouts).
- You may find it best to meet face-to-face every other week or once a month and use virtual tools the other weeks.

...To hold each other accountable and encourage each other in their spiritual growth.

- Review the questions in Talk It Out.
- You may focus on one question more than others.
- Include time to pray for each other.

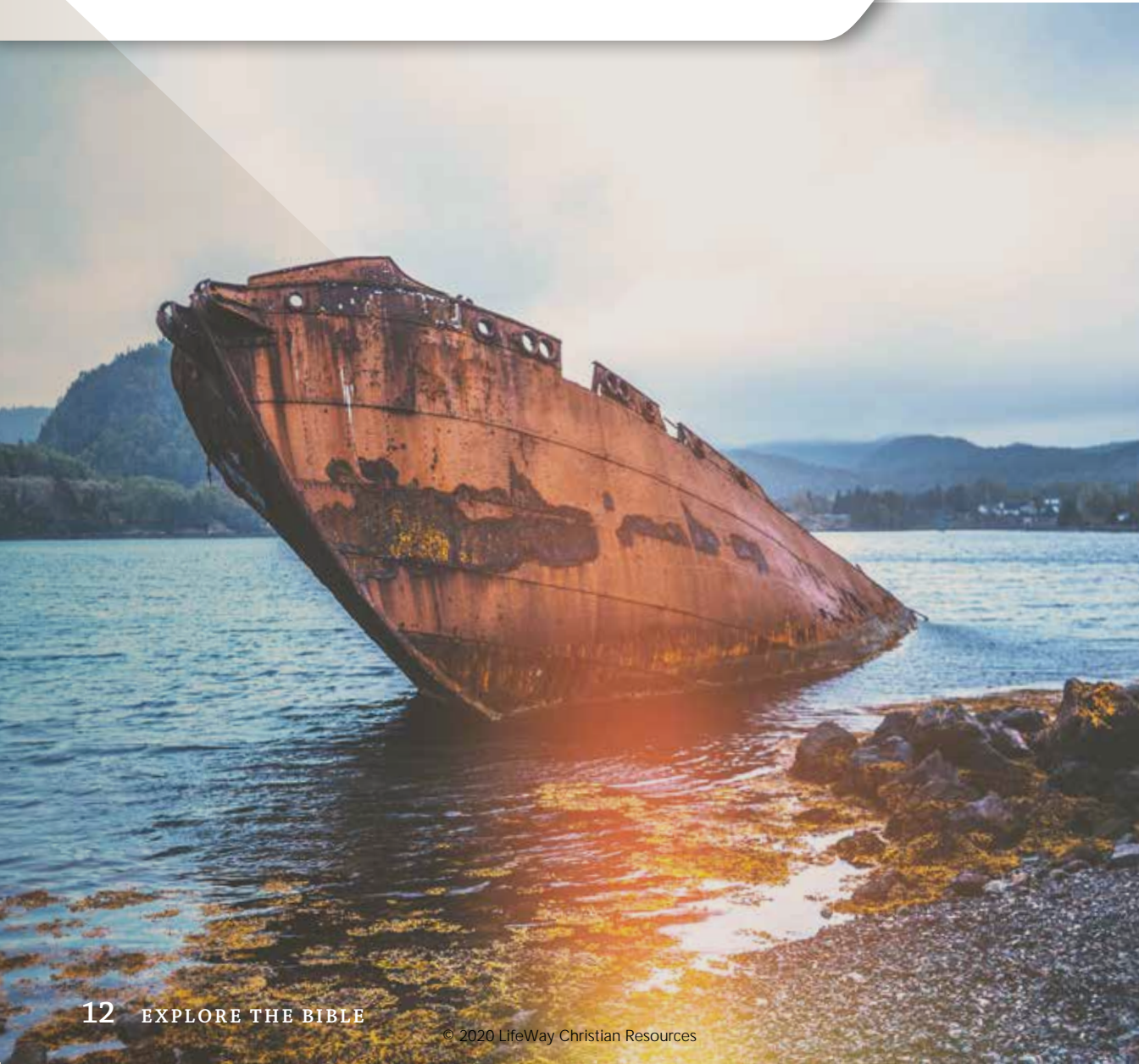


Session 1

Chartered Waters

God's Word warns us of the consequences of foolish choices.

Proverbs 1:7-19



**How would you describe the difference between knowledge and wisdom?
How should information lead to a change in behavior?**

The knowledge of God and the knowledge to live wisely are interrelated. Next to the knowledge of God in salvation, the knowledge to live wisely is the most important kind of knowledge. Godly knowledge is more than information; it is about transformation. You can be factually right but spiritually wrong. Solomon's argument in the Book of Proverbs is simple: godly wisdom is applied truth that leads to transformation and wise practical living.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The Book of Proverbs begins with an invitation and a warning. The invitation comes in the form of a call to be wise. Solomon urged anyone who would listen to hear and obey the call to walk in the path of God's wisdom. Wisdom is personified, as if she is a woman who calls out in the street, inviting all who will hear to come and embrace God's wisdom (1:20).

There's a warning here as well. Solomon warned of the trouble that awaits any who will not heed the call to live wisely. He turned his attention to his son (1:8-19). His son would need to make up his mind to walk in God's wisdom. Making that decision would not be easy since he would encounter evil people who would try to entice him to join them. They would try to persuade him that the road they took would be fun. It would involve violence, murder, and theft. Solomon warned that these gang members themselves would eventually have their lives stolen from them. The consequences of rejecting godly truth and wisdom are devastating.

Both of these great admonitions—the call to hear and obey the wisdom of God and the warning of what happens when true wisdom is rejected—are summed up in one of Solomon's most famous sayings, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and discipline" (1:7).

It is within this context that Solomon methodically and urgently began his book. Solomon's call—God's call—for the people of God to live within the safe boundaries of God's wise counsel is needed now just as it was needed then. It is the wise person who hears and obeys the call of God. It is the wise person who considers Solomon's warnings. It is the fool who rejects both.

PROVERBS 1:7-19

7 The **fear of the LORD** **A**

is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise **wisdom** **B** and discipline.

8 Listen, my son, to your father's instruction,
and don't reject your mother's **teaching** **C**,

9 for they will be a garland of favor on your head
and pendants around your neck.

10 My son, if sinners entice you,
don't be persuaded.

11 If they say—"Come with us!
Let's set an ambush and kill someone.
Let's attack some innocent person just for fun!

12 Let's swallow them alive, like Sheol,
whole, like those who go down to the Pit.

13 We'll find all kinds of valuable property
and fill our houses with plunder.

14 Throw in your lot with us,
and we'll all share the loot"—

15 my son, don't travel that road with them
or set foot on their path,

16 because their feet run toward evil
and they hurry to shed blood.

17 It is useless to spread a net
where any bird can see it,

18 but they set an ambush to kill themselves;
they attack their own lives.

19 Such are the paths of all who make profit
dishonestly;
it **takes the lives** **D** of those who receive it.

Passage Outline

Starting Point
(Prov. 1:7)

Path of Obedience
(Prov. 1:8-9)

Resist Sin
(Prov. 1:10-14)

Sin's Results
(Prov. 1:15-19)

Keywords

A. Includes awe, reverence, respect, worship, trust, commitment, obedience, submission, and love—all qualities of a right relationship with God. Lord refers to the personal name Yahweh, God of the covenant.

B. True wisdom comes from knowing God (Jas. 1:5), trusting Him, and turning from sin (Job 28:20-28).

C. "Law" (KJV). Torah in Hebrew. Here the word refers to parental teachings based on God's laws that provide children moral guidelines and direction.

D. In Mark 8:36, Jesus said, "For what does it benefit someone to gain the whole world and yet lose his life?"

EXPLORE THE TEXT

In verse 7 we find a summary of the whole Book of Proverbs. To *fear* the Lord involves reverencing, respecting, and trusting Him. Not everyone responds positively to God’s invitation. Some reject God’s wisdom.

KEY DOCTRINE: Man Only the grace of God can bring people into His holy fellowship and enable them to fulfill the creative purpose of God (1 Cor. 12:21-31).

How might a person be intelligent and unwise at the same time?

BIBLE SKILL: Dig deeper into the meaning of a key word or phrase. Take a closer look at the meaning of “the fear of the Lord” in Proverbs 1:7. Read the verse in different translations. Use a Bible concordance to look for other passages in which the phrase is used. Consult a Bible dictionary for more insight. Write in your own words the meaning of the phrase and how it relates to spiritual growth.

Wisdom is not gained through experience alone. Experience is important but not determinative. Instead, we come to know the wisdom of God through the means by which God reveals to us His wisdom. His Word (John 17:17), the person of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:30), the ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13), and general revelation (Ps. 19:1) are the sources of godly wisdom.

Verse 8 reminds all fathers and mothers of their responsibility to nurture their children in the faith with godly instruction. Paul wrote of this in Ephesians 6:4, “Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

How does listening to godly counsel lead to blessing?

The next piece of wisdom Solomon gave his son was to resist sin. He knew that the enticement and temptation could be difficult to reject—especially for a young person.

Sin affects more than the individual. It impacts those around us, sometimes in abusive ways. When God’s truth and wisdom are rejected, harmful and disturbing things will happen.

How might being mindful of the consequences impact how a person responds to temptation? Which has the greater impact: focusing on the consequences of disobedience or the rewards of obedience?

Solomon’s warnings were not angry prohibitions; they came from the heart of a loving father pleading with his son to stay true to God. One consequence of unwise, sinful living would be the harm and destruction of other people and their property; another consequence would be self-destruction.

How does sin lead to self-destructive behaviors? To what examples can you point?

APPLY THE TEXT

- True wisdom starts with a right relationship with God.
- Obedience to godly counsel leads to favor in life.
- Wise believers resist the pressure to engage in wicked activities.
- Ignoring godly wisdom leads to self-destruction.

Evaluate your obedience to God and His counsel on a scale of zero to ten. In what areas do you need to be more obedient to God and His Word?

Discuss with your Bible study group ways people provide godly counsel. Discuss the role the group has in providing godly counsel and fostering obedience.

Identify areas in which you face the greatest temptations. List potential consequences that might accompany that temptation and rewards for resisting. Ask God to help you remain faithful to Him and for His help when facing temptation.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Having a relationship with God makes you wise.

Read Proverbs 1:7, underlining the words fear and wisdom.

Wisdom has a starting point. It begins with a sincere relationship with the Lord. Coming to a saving knowledge of God through the person of Jesus Christ—who is our wisdom (1 Cor. 1:24)—is the beginning of a life well lived. Thus, wisdom is found in a Person with whom we can have a relationship. Our continued walk in godly wisdom—and our ability to make wise choices—will progress as we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. (See 2 Pet. 3:18.) Sadly, many Christians look everywhere except to God’s Word for guidance in making wise choices. The way to wisdom and understanding begins with seeking God.

Rather than beginning a life-long journey of knowing and loving God, the fool says in his heart that there is no God. (See Ps. 14:1.) The fool may be intelligent by worldly standards but cares little for the wisdom of God and refuses to accept God’s loving discipline and wise instruction. Verse 7 reminds us that the dividing line between the wise and foolish person is not intellect but a relationship with God.

When have you been intelligent and unwise at the same time?

Day 2: Pay attention to wise counsel.

Read Proverbs 1:8-9, considering how God dispenses His wisdom.

God uses several sources that reflect the truth of His Word. For example, the instruction of a godly parent can be used by God to illuminate and instruct us in the wisdom of God. Solomon called his *son* to listen to the instruction of his father and to the wise teaching of his mother. Listening means more than hearing; it means to pay attention, absorb, and apply what’s being said. Solomon may have had in mind here his own son, Rehoboam. Rehoboam would become the next king (1 Kings 14:21) and would need God’s wisdom to rule well. Solomon may also have been addressing any of his other sons or all young men in general. Certainly, these divinely inspired proverbs are useful for every young person who wishes to live wisely. To pay attention to God’s wise counsel through our parents is like receiving a *garland of favor on your head and pendants around your neck*. These are metaphors that speak of the blessings we can receive when we pay attention to wise counsel. The wise response to godly counsel is obedience.

How have your parents been used by God to dispense His wisdom to you? If you are a parent, are you open to God dispensing His wisdom through you?

Day 3: Wise people run from temptation.

Read Proverbs 1:10, noting the instruction to avoid negative peer pressure.

There is something luring about sin. Sinful temptations draw us, allure us, and entice us to go off the path God has set for us in His Word. Temptation is common to all people, yet God provides escape routes for those who have been tempted to sin (1 Cor. 10:12-13). The question is not if we will be tempted, but what we do when we are tempted. It is the wise person who runs from temptation. (See Gen. 39:10-12; 1 Cor. 6:18.)

How does Christ offer true riches and true community?

Day 4: Evil behavior is the way of life for an unwise man.

Read Proverbs 1:11-14, noting the evil behaviors these people wanted to have for fun.

Verse 11 addresses the peer pressure of evil people who attack and abuse the innocent just for fun. Abuse must never be excused at any level. These evil thugs claimed they could swallow people alive, like *Sheol*. The term *Sheol* was used to describe the place of the dead. The thugs boasted that they could swallow innocent people whole in the same way that the *Pit*—an open grave—would swallow a corpse.

If these evil people thought nothing of abusing and killing innocent people, then they certainly would think nothing of devaluing, taking, and destroying property that did not belong to them. The wrongful taking and plundering of property not only harms individuals and families, but also is a violation of at least two commandments—stealing and coveting.

Such evil and twisted behavior becomes a way of life for the ungodly and unwise person. Is it any wonder that Solomon warned his son against falling for the enticements of ungodly and unwise people? He called his son to resist and flee all temptation, and in the next section Solomon would point to the consequences of following the wrong crowd.

How does being mindful of the consequences impact how you respond to temptation? Which has the greater impact: focusing on the consequences of disobedience or the rewards of obedience?

Day 5: Sin leads to self-destruction.

Read Proverbs 1:15-19, highlighting verse 15.

The unwise person ends up on the path of self-destruction. Notice the phrases and images Solomon used in verses 17-19. The unwise and godless person is like a bird that cannot see the trap set by his own sin even though it's in plain sight. The *ambush* that ungodly people think they have set for others is actually set for themselves. They end up destroying their own lives.

Tragically, the unwise person is blind to what is happening. Self-destructive behavior is often hidden from the very person who is self-destructing. Too often, the unwise person has become so blinded to his own unwise behavior he thinks he is only experiencing a season of bad luck or a series of heartbreaks that have nothing to do with his ill-conceived and ill-advised choices. Godly wisdom will remove the blinders that cover the eyes of the unwise, helping them to see the connection between their unwise, ungodly choices and the tragic consequences those choices produce.

How does sin lead to self-destructive behaviors? To what examples can you point to in your own life?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Proverbs 1, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

What does it mean to fear the Lord?

How can these verses apply to spiritual children and spiritual parents in a church body?

Why can it be difficult for people to recognize the self-destructive nature of their sin? How can we avoid this trap?



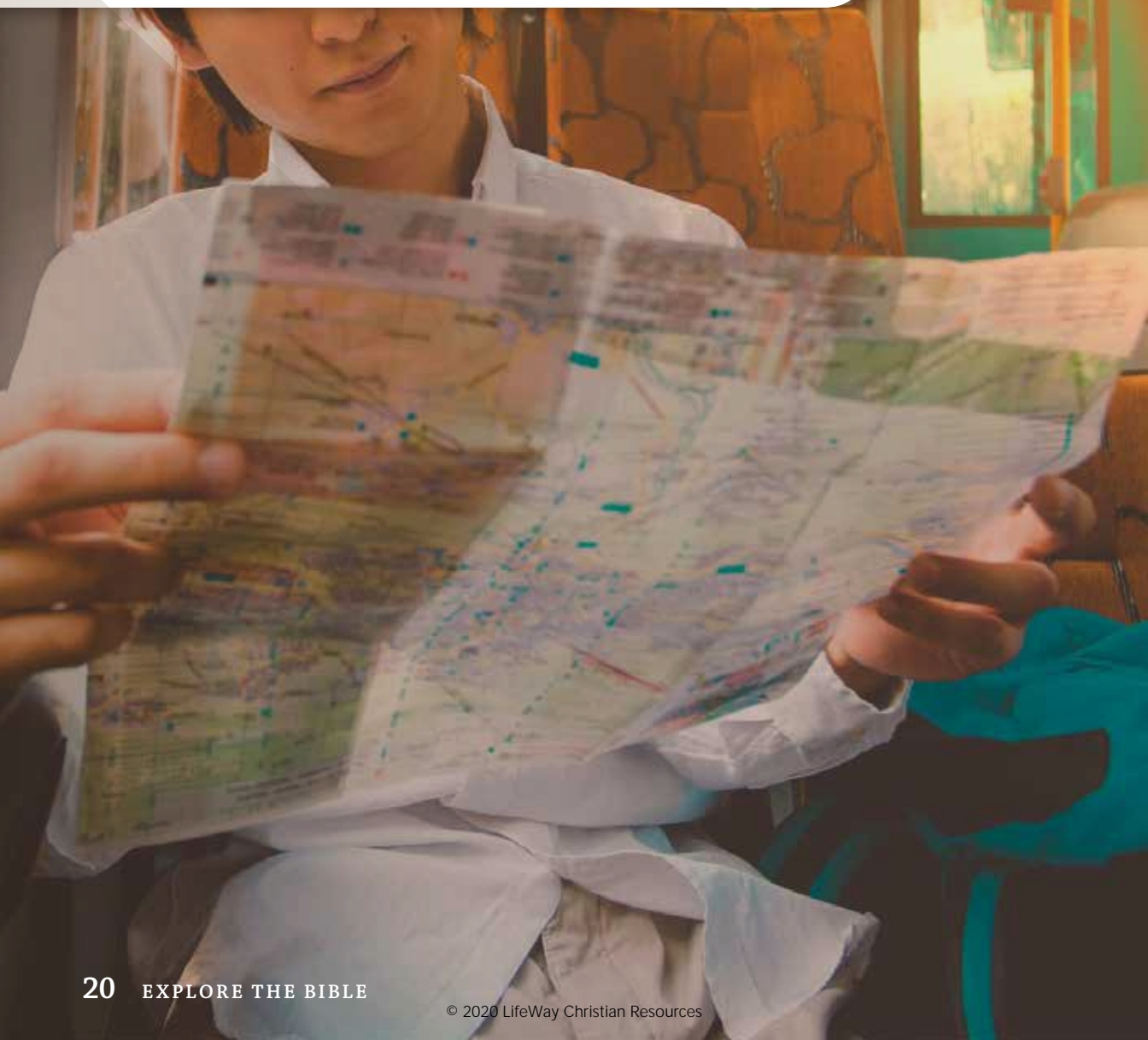
For additional context, read “Wisdom Literature in the Ancient Near East” and “Solomon: His Life and Times” in the Summer 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Session 2

Direction Offered

God provides direction to those who place their trust in Him.

Proverbs 3:1-12



How often have you ignored the directions offered by a GPS because you wanted to take a different path? What dangers do you put yourself in by ignoring instruction?

A global positioning system, better known as GPS, is a handy tool for getting directions. Simply provide the address, and the GPS will have you on your way. It even tells you how long you'll have to travel before you reach your destination. The tool works well unless you decide you're going to ignore it and go in another direction. That's when we hear the rerouting announcement over and over again. Solomon gave clear instructions about how to live wisely. But these instructions are useless to the person who refuses to follow them.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

If chapter 1 of Proverbs was Solomon's call to be wise, then chapters 2–3 are his counsel about how wisdom works. Proverbs 2 speaks of the great value of wisdom. The value of godly wisdom is worth seeking, it is like silver and hidden treasure (2:4). The pursuit of wisdom “stores up success for the upright” (2:7), is a “shield for those who live with integrity” (2:7), and protects God's followers (2:8). Solomon argued that the wise person will “understand righteousness, justice, and integrity—every good path” (2:9).

Further, Solomon not only set forth wisdom as something worthy of being pursued, he stated that wisdom will “enter your heart, and knowledge will delight you” (2:10). True wisdom rescues the righteous from the path of evil (2:12-14), including from sexual temptations (2:16-19).

Solomon ended chapter 2 with a challenge and a comparative illustration. He urged his readers to “follow the way of the good, and keep to the paths of the righteous” (2:20). This was a clear challenge to follow and keep the patterns of wise and godly counsel.

Solomon used words like upright and integrity to characterize those who would enter or inhabit the land, an image used in Scripture to speak of God's rest and protection (2:21). He used words like wicked and treacherous to describe those who would not enter into God's rest and protection (2:22). His challenge and his comparison of the righteous with the wicked served as the basis from which he implored his readers to hear the call to be wise. Solomon's instruction in chapter 2 set the stage for his explanation of the basis of true wisdom—a heartfelt and continual trust in the Lord (Prov. 3:1-12). Ultimately, Jesus Christ is our wisdom, and it is through Him that we have both abundant and eternal life (1 Cor. 1:24).

PROVERBS 3:1-12

- 1** My son, don't forget my teaching,
but let your heart keep my commands;
- 2** for they will bring you
many days, a full life, and well-being.
- 3** Never let loyalty and faithfulness leave you.
Tie them around your neck **A**;
write them on the tablet of your heart.
- 4** Then you will find favor and high regard
with God and people.
- 5** **Trust** **B** in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not rely on **your own understanding** **C**;
- 6** in all your ways **know** **D** him,
and he will make your paths straight.
- 7** Don't be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD and turn away from evil.
- 8** This will be healing for your body
and strengthening for your bones.
- 9** **Honor** **E** the LORD with your possessions
and with the first produce of your entire harvest;
- 10** then your barns will be completely filled,
and your vats will overflow with new wine.
- 11** Do not **despise** **F** the LORD's instruction, my son,
and do not loathe his discipline;
- 12** for the LORD disciplines the one he loves,
just as a father disciplines the son in whom
he delights.

Passage Outline

Remember (Prov. 3:1-4)

Trust (Prov. 3:5-8)

Honor (Prov. 3:9-10)

Accept (Prov. 3:11-12)

Keywords

- A. Metaphors emphasizing that children should cultivate faithful love as a part of their nature, inwardly and outwardly.
- B. To rely on or have confidence in someone for help and protection, resulting in feeling safe and secure.
- C. "Insight" (NRSV). One's own intelligence and understanding of right and wrong are corrupted by sin.
- D. The person who knows God puts Him first, seeks His will, and submits to His authority in trust and obedience.
- E. Giving back to God some of the wealth He has given; an act of worship showing gratitude to and trust in God
- F. A warning not to reject or resent the Lord's discipline or correction (Gen. 25:33-34)

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Solomon urged his son: *don't forget my teaching*. This was a call to use the mind and intellect. Then he added, *let your heart keep my commands*. Added to the call to exercise the mind is this call to the heart (the will and emotion). Both the mind and the heart matter.

KEY DOCTRINE: Education The new birth opens all human faculties and creates a thirst for knowledge (Prov. 3:13-15).

The key point in verses 1-2 is that when we take God's commandments to heart, we won't regret it. Putting into practice the inspired teaching of Scripture will render a life of fulfillment and satisfaction. Such a life is described in verse 2 as *well-being*. Our days will be filled with what matters most in life. A devotion to loyalty and faithfulness describes those who hold in high esteem the wisdom of God. According to Solomon, a life of integrity *produces favor and high regard with God and people*.

Why is integrity in the life of a believer so important? How would you define integrity?

Knowing truth without a deep trust in and love for God can lead to arrogance. To disconnect the mind from the will is deadly. Our trust in God should impact our hearts, our understanding, and our paths in life. We are to trust God in every area of our lives.

Contrast those who trust in God with those who trust in themselves. How should this contrast encourage believers to live God-honoring lives?

Evidence of wise living is seen in daily moral and spiritual decisions. Giving demonstrates the true condition of the heart. (See 2 Cor. 8-9.) The wise will *honor the LORD* in their use of *material possessions*.

How is the way a person handles finances a way of measuring his or her spiritual maturity? What challenges might a person face in seeking to honor God with their financial management?

Solomon knew his son would struggle with the Lord's instruction at times. Perhaps that's the reason Solomon referred to God's instruction as *discipline*. Becoming a disciplined person who is devoted to the Lord can be a struggle. Being disciplined by the Lord may be confused with being punished. Solomon's son could have felt that God was punishing him. For that reason, he needed to remember that *the LORD disciplines the one he loves*, not to his detriment but for his development. (See Heb. 12:5-6.)

Why do we view God's discipline as unexpected, maybe even unfair? In what ways does God discipline us? How can we recognize God's discipline?

APPLY THE TEXT

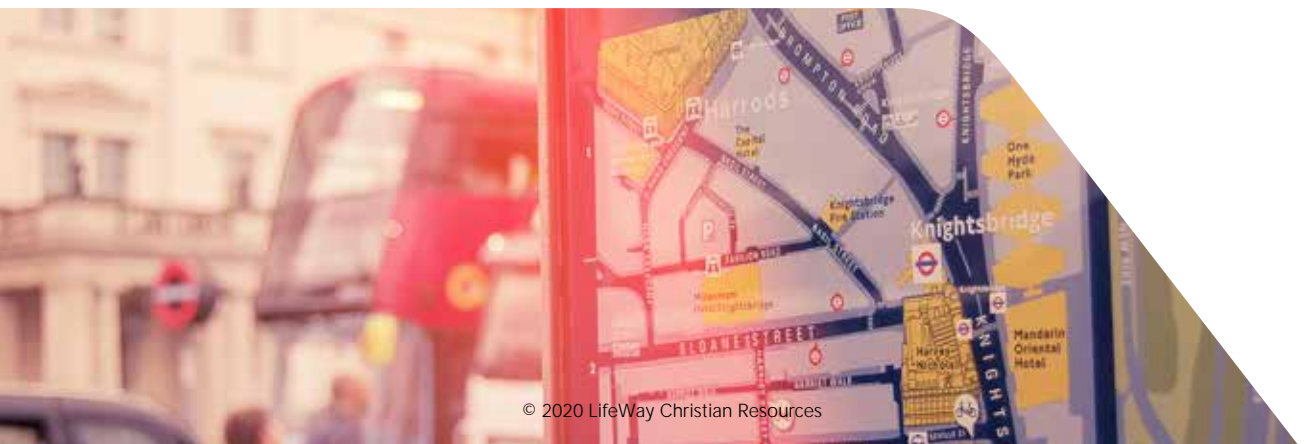
- The believer's life is characterized by integrity.
- Trusting in God leads to renewed life.
- God provides for those who honor Him.
- Learn from God's discipline, realizing that His discipline is an act of love.

Discuss with your Bible study group ways of helping each other live with integrity. How can the group remind each other of God's expectations?

List reasons you may struggle with trusting God. How are the reasons you listed connected? Ask God to help you trust Him with all areas of your life. Record your prayer.

In what areas of your life is God disciplining or sharpening you? What are you learning from that discipline or sharpening? How can you grow from this discipline or sharpening?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Nurturing God's wisdom provides blessings for believers.

Read Proverbs 3:1-2, considering the promise made to those who follow God.

Nurturing God's wisdom in our hearts comes with the promise of many days, a full life, and well-being. There is great blessing for the wise believer. But is it true that the wise person always lives a long, successful, and trouble-free life? Here we have to be careful. Proverbial sayings are just that—generally true statements about the way things ought to be and can be. In fact, they are true most of the time and should be embraced wholeheartedly. But proverbial sayings are a little different than the direct promises of God.

A direct promise is something you can take to the bank, a sure thing based on the character of God. A proverbial saying is a truism that is most often true but may not operate on the same level as a direct promise. For example, Romans 10:13 says, "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." That is a direct promise. Everyone who places faith in Jesus Christ can and will be saved.

Conversely, Proverbs 22:6 states, "Start a youth out on his way, even when he grows old he will not depart from it." Though this statement is generally true, we still see children who were raised in godly and loving homes depart from the faith. Why might this happen? Because there are other factors involved in the life of every child, namely, his or her own faith apart from the faith of those involved in the child's upbringing. The child must personally believe the gospel; one cannot and will not be saved based on the faith of the parents.

How do you explain this promise when your experience says otherwise?

Day 2: Believers should be people of integrity.

Read Proverbs 3:3-4, identifying the characteristics of integrity.

A devotion to loyalty and faithfulness describes those who hold in high esteem the wisdom of God. These godly characteristics are to be tied *around your neck* for everyone to see and written on the *tablet of your heart* where they shape our words and actions. When we put Solomon's counsel to work in our lives, we will become people of integrity. This means we will be the same person on the inside that we are on the outside. Wisdom brings both vertical blessings from our relationship with God and horizontal implications in the relationships we have with people.

Why is it important for you, as a believer, to have integrity? How would you define integrity?

Day 3: Believers are called to fully trust in the Lord.

Read Proverbs 3:5-8, underlining the phrase “Trust in the Lord with all your heart.”

These verses call us to three actions. First, we are called to *trust in the LORD* with complete and total confidence. Second, we are not to *rely on our own understanding* apart from having our minds shaped and conformed by godly wisdom. Third, as we trust God and reject ungodly thinking, we are to *know* or acknowledge God and His truth. No area of our thinking, feeling, and behavior is off-limits to God. As we trust God, avoid godless thinking, and acknowledge Him in every area of life, He will make our *paths straight*. God’s wisdom straightens out the paths so we can go in the right direction.

In verse 7, Solomon appealed to his son to avoid trusting in himself (see also v. 5). Instead of being wise in his own eyes, he was to *fear the LORD*, which is the beginning of true knowledge (see 1:7). Solomon also challenged his son to *turn away from evil*. Repentance—turning away from sin—is not a one-time event but the continual practice of a sincere believer. The consequences of obeying these commands are remarkable. In verse 8, Solomon identified the results of obeying these commands: health and strengthening of both body and soul. In summary, we are to remember the Lord in all that we do (3:1-4). The call remains for us to fully trust in the Lord (vv. 5-8), rejoicing in the good consequences of wise and godly living.

Contrast those who trust in God with those who trust in themselves. How should this contrast encourage you to live a God-honoring life?

Day 4: God provides for those who believe in Him.

Read Proverbs 3:9-10, noticing how believers should handle material possessions.

People in Solomon’s time counted on their fields and vineyards to produce what they needed. The wise person recognized that God owned all of the ground in which he planted crops (Lev. 25:23). He also recognized that God provided the seeds, the rain, and the sunshine so the crops could grow and the harvest could be plentiful. Because of God’s goodness, He deserved to be honored with the first produce of the harvest. Generous and sacrificial giving is an act of worship, a reflection of gratitude to God, and an expression of trust in Him. Solomon indicated in verse 10 the result of generous and faithful giving: *your barns will be completely filled, and your vats will overflow with new wine*. Again, we must be careful here. This verse can be misunderstood to mean that if you want to be rich, you simply need to give more of your possessions to God. The verse, however, doesn’t promote such a notion. It does teach that we can count on God to provide for us when we honor Him. This is not prosperity thinking but rather a deep trust in a promise-keeping God who may not provide all that we want, but He will provide what we need as we live for Him.

What challenges have you faced in seeking to honor God with your finances?

Day 5: Discipline is always purposeful.

Read Proverbs 3:11-12, noting who God disciplines.

God is not a cruel overseer who wants to make us suffer. He's a loving Father who cares enough about us to teach us so we can grow in our walk with Him. Learning well may require us to face some difficult circumstances. We're wise when we face them with the certainty that God loves us all the time. The discipline we experience from Him is not to be despised but embraced as part of our spiritual development. Discipline is never pleasant, but it is always purposeful.

BIBLE SKILL: Use other Scriptures to help understand a Bible passage. Read Hebrews 12:5-11.

Notice how the writer explained the anxiety and pain that can often accompany God's discipline of His children and the value of discipline in the spiritual growth of the believer. Next, read Job 5:17-18 for another way of describing the difficulties as well as the benefits of being disciplined by the Lord. How do these two passages shed light on God's disciplining His people (Prov. 3:11-12)?

How have you viewed God's discipline as unexpected, maybe even unfair? Why?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Proverbs 3, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

How are trusting in the Lord, fearing the Lord, and humility related?

Why does God want us to give Him our material goods?

Discuss the difference between discipline and punishment. How does this impact our understanding of these verses?



For additional context, read "The Wise and the Foolish in Proverbs," an archived *Biblical Illustrator* article provided via digital download in the Summer 2020 *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*.

Compassion Demonstrated

Following God's wisdom is demonstrated in how a person treats others.

Proverbs 3:21-35



What makes it so difficult to love other people, especially those with whom we disagree?

Love for God is purely academic if it's not expressed in real ways toward people. The cocoon we often make for ourselves keeps us from demonstrating the authenticity of our love for God by loving others. How we treat others is the acid test of our spiritual maturity. But loving people is not always easy. We need biblical wisdom to know how to relate to others, especially to those with whom we disagree.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Solomon was a parent. Like any parent, he wanted his son to be happy. That is why he urged his son to seek the wisdom of God.

Wisdom is not only essential and characteristic of the life of the believer, it also produces joy. In Proverbs 3:13-18, words like “happy” and “pleasant” describe the wise person. Further, wisdom is something that is acquired, pursued, embraced, and practiced. The wisdom that comes from God is more important than personal opinions or preferences. Wisdom is like a tree that gives life to those who live under its shade. Joy is the outcome of the person who values and seeks godly wisdom.

Where does the wisdom that produces lasting joy come from? True wisdom is grounded in the person and character of God. Before anything existed in creation, a wise, holy, and all-powerful God existed. It is in Him that all wisdom resides. In the end, wisdom from God produces the life that enables a person to have a clear conscience. It is within the context of God-centered wisdom that Solomon gave his son instructions on how to fairly and rightly treat others.

PROVERBS 3:21-35

- 21** Maintain sound wisdom and discretion.
My son, don't lose sight of them.
- 22** They will be life for you
and **adornment for your neck** **A**.
- 23** Then you will go safely on your way;
your foot will not stumble.
- 24** When you lie down, you will not be afraid;
you will lie down, and your sleep will be pleasant.
- 25** Don't fear sudden danger
or the ruin of the wicked when it comes,
26 for the Lord will be your confidence
and will keep your foot from a snare.
- 27** When it is in your power,
don't withhold **good** **B** from the one to whom
it belongs.
- 28** Don't say to your neighbor, "Go away! Come
back later.
I'll give it tomorrow"—when it is there with you.
- 29** Don't plan any harm against your neighbor,
for he trusts you and lives near you.
- 30** Don't accuse anyone without cause,
when he has done you no harm.
- 31** Don't envy a violent man
or choose any of his ways;
32 for the devious are **detestable** **C** to the Lord,
but he is a **friend to the upright** **D**.
- 33** The Lord's curse is on the household of
the wicked,
but he blesses the home of the righteous;
- 34** He **mocks those who mock** **E**,
but gives grace to the humble.
- 35** The wise will inherit honor,
but he holds up fools to dishonor.

Passage Outline

Confidence Gained
(Prov. 3:21-26)

Kindness Expressed
(Prov. 3:27-30)

Blessing Secured
(Prov. 3:31-35)

Keywords

- A. Metaphor suggesting that those who hold on to wisdom are charming and have favor with others. "Adornment" literally means "grace" (KJV).
- B. May refer to the pay earned by workers, the help the poor needs, the justice victims deserve, or the repayment owed to those who have loaned money
- C. God "detests" (NIV) or "hates" (NCV) the wicked—the reason one should not envy or follow violent persons.
- D. God takes "into his confidence" (NIV) "those who are honest" (AMP) and brings them into intimate relationship with Himself. (See Job 29:4.)
- E. The Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) translates these words as, "The Lord resists the proud." (See Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5.)

EXPLORE THE TEXT

The benefits of godly wisdom are many. Solomon explained that the person who trusts in God will find rest from fear. This is why Solomon defended the idea that the believer must maintain and embrace wise actions and humble discretion.

How does self-confidence differ from a confidence grounded in God's presence? How does confidence in God lead to peace?

BIBLE SKILL: Memorize a verse and apply it to a real-life situation. Commit Proverbs 3:27 to memory. Repeat the verse out loud. As you reflect on the verse, think about how it can render a positive “do” message. Next, consider situations in your life when you tend to ignore the needs of people around you. Ask the Lord to enable you so you can show His kindness.

In what ways do our lives show that we are following God's wisdom? One sure evidence is the way we treat others. In verses 27-30, Solomon gave four examples of ways the Lord expects His people to treat others with fairness and compassion.

Why might a person try to excuse himself from helping others?

What makes getting involved in community gossip so tempting? How does getting involved in gossip potentially impact a believer's witness?

With our confidence in God growing and our desire to demonstrate kindness to our neighbors developing, we can live in light of the blessings of God. Nothing is more rewarding than being faithful to God—even when others do not understand our humble service and even when it is not reciprocated. The point is to be faithful to God—not what we get in return.

KEY DOCTRINE: Stewardship God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him (Deut. 8:18).

Solomon had already warned his son about the temptation of taking the path of a violent man (see 2:12-15). Entrusting themselves to God's wisdom, wise people choose to ignore the example of the violent person. The gain of possessions and fair-weather friends is no comparison to God's presence and counsel in our lives. God's grace to the humble puts them on the path of honor. The Lord will make sure that those who embrace His wisdom will inherit a place of honor.

How does taking on the role of judge get in the way of a believer demonstrating trust in God?

APPLY THE TEXT

- God offers His peace to those who trust Him.
- God expects His people to treat others with kindness.
- God blesses those who know Him.

List areas in your life where you struggle to find peace. How are these areas connected to your trust in God? What steps can you take to trust Him more in these areas?

Discuss with the group challenges to being kind. What barriers must a person cross in order to demonstrate kindness? How can the group help each other overcome these barriers?

What actions might a person take to invest more deeply in his or her relationship with God? Of these actions, in which ones do you need to be more diligent? How will you do so?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: True confidence comes from knowing God.

Read Proverbs 3:21-26, considering the place of wisdom in a believer's life.

True wisdom provides a wall of safety around the wise, protecting the wise person from foolish decisions he might make and enabling him to lay his head down at night in peace as a result of having a clear conscience. The wisdom of God keeps us from stumbling over our own sins and the evil behavior of those who oppose God. Godly wisdom aids the believer in avoiding the traps that lead to danger and ruin.

The confidence we need to live out a wise and God-centered life does not come from avoiding those we may fear, especially those who oppose God. True confidence comes from knowing and loving God—for *the LORD will be your confidence*. God is with us, and it is His presence that produces our confidence.

Our confidence emanates from the awareness that nothing matters more than God's presence in our lives. We can face life's challenges and dangers confidently as long as we know that He is with us. (See Ps. 23:4). The path of foolish people is full of snares, but Solomon assured his son that following God's wisdom would render a sense of peace. The person who seeks God's wisdom can know for certain that he will not suffer the calamity intended for a foolish person.

When have you depended on yourself instead of God's presence? How does confidence in God lead you to have to peace?

Day 2: Don't make excuses for not helping others.

Read Proverbs 3:27-28, identifying how Solomon guides us to treat our neighbors.

In verses 27-30, Solomon gave four examples of ways the Lord expects His people to treat others with fairness and compassion. Today, we will look at the first two. First, *when it is in your power, don't withhold good from the one to whom it belongs*. This portrays us as employers who have the ability to pay this person for his work because we have the money in our hands. We agreed on the amount of money we would pay the worker before he started the job. When he completes the work, he should be paid because the money rightfully belongs to him. Second, *don't say to your neighbor, "Go away! Come back later. I'll give it tomorrow."* This neighbor could have been a neighbor who needed to be paid for a job that had been completed or a neighbor who simply had a need. Solomon directed his son to act immediately, without excuse. Too often we make excuses—I'm too busy; it's not the right time; I'll help later; I don't know how to help—that keep us from obeying God and helping others.

When have you tried to excuse yourself from helping others?

Day 3: Believers should not participate in gossip.

Read Proverbs 3:29-30, again considering how Solomon guides us to treat our neighbors.

Today we will examine the third and fourth examples of ways the Lord expects His people to treat others with fairness and compassion. Third, *Don't plan any harm against your neighbor*. The person who follows godly wisdom not only proactively acts to help his neighbor but will resist acting in ways that would bring harm to his neighbor. Solomon noted that your neighbor *trusts you and lives near you*. Through our godly behavior we have hopefully built a level of trust, but it easily can be destroyed and dismantled by our sinful actions. Fourth, *Don't accuse anyone without cause, when he has done you no harm*. While this may have been a reference to frivolous litigation in a court of law, it also reminds us that the wise believer will not participate in slander or community gossip.

What makes getting involved in community gossip so tempting? How does getting involved in gossip potentially impact your witness?

Day 4: Believers should leave judgment in the hands of God.

Read Proverbs 3:31:34, noting who holds the power of judgement.

Solomon presented three separate and distinct comparisons between the wise and the unwise, the righteous and the unrighteous. First, God pronounced a curse on the household of the wicked. God's curse involves the removal of God's presence. As God's people, we are called to love both friend and enemy. Judgment and divine wrath are God's and His alone (Ps. 94:1-2; Heb. 10:30). When we take vengeance into our own hands, it rarely goes well. The Bible warns believers to refrain from taking matters into their own hands. (See Rom. 12:19.) Instead, we can live with the confidence that God is able to act justly and will execute His justice in His time. As we live righteously and wisely before God and our neighbors, we leave the judgment of all things—people, places, and events—to Him. It is when we take matters into our own hands that we will suffer from our own sinful attitudes and actions.

Second, God not only curses wicked people, He also mocks them. With their behavior, they make a mockery of Him and His ways. In response to their unwillingness to give themselves to Him, He turns a deaf ear to them. In contrast to the mockers, God gives grace to the humble. Instead of turning a deaf ear, we can be confident that He takes care of the humble. The humble in Proverbs includes those who are poor because they have been oppressed or exploited (see 15:15; 22:22; 30:14).

How does taking on the role of judge get in the way of your ability to demonstrate trust in God?

Day 5: God shows grace to the humble.

Read Proverbs 3:35, noting the value in being wise.

Finally, Solomon used the concept of *honor* to illustrate the difference between the righteous and unrighteous. God's grace to the humble puts them on the path of honor. The Lord will make sure that those who embrace His wisdom will inherit a place of honor. Living with honor means enjoying the blessings that come from having an honorable reputation. Honor also suggests the contentment that comes from God's smile on us as we grow in our personal walk with Him.

Foolish people cannot expect to enjoy the promise of being honored by God. Instead, they will experience *dishonor*. The Lord will disgrace them. That's the certain fate of fools who ignore Him. In due time, they will pay the price of their foolish choice.

God's Word directs us in wise living. What about that is hard for you right now?



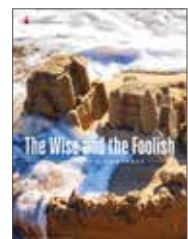
TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Proverbs 3, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

How might fear prevent us from loving our neighbors?

What's significant about Solomon emphasizing "neighbors" as opposed to people in general? What does this mean for how we treat strangers?

Why might people be tempted to envy a violent man or choose his ways?



For additional context, read "The Wise and the Foolish: A Contrast" in the Summer 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

The Choice

All people have a choice to make: follow God or reject Him.

Proverbs 4:11-27



**Have you gotten confused over a choice because you had so many options?
How did you make the choice?**

Life is filled with choices—maybe too many choices, but choices nonetheless. Hearing the truth demands a response as well, a choice to either embrace or reject the truth. There is no neutrality when it comes to the truth. Neutrality is a choice to reject the truth. Solomon’s plea in Proverbs 4 to hear, obey, and not turn away from the wisdom of God reminded God’s people of the choices that lay before them. To embrace God’s wisdom provides a way through life; to reject God’s wisdom is to ensure destruction.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

In chapters 1–3, Solomon laid out the dimensions of God’s wisdom. He then called God’s people to “listen” and “pay attention” (4:1). He knew that information does not necessarily mean transformation and facts do not always lead to obedient faith. Solomon urged God’s people to hear and apply God’s truth.

The path of wisdom is defined in 4:1-11. Solomon reminded God’s people to remember the wisdom of God as though they were remembering the wisdom of their fathers and mothers. He challenged them not to abandon God’s instruction but to obtain its wise counsel at all costs. No price is too high to obtain God’s truth. Further, Solomon called God’s people to embrace and cherish truth as if it were a precious commodity.

Then, as if to add layer upon layer of the choices God’s people must make to live according to God’s wisdom, Solomon described in striking terms two separate ways of living (vv. 11-27). One way leads to destruction and the other way leads to life. The decision to remain in one’s sin, devoid of the wisdom of God, is a choice set before all people. All people are already in the way of sin and destruction; God’s wisdom and grace in Jesus Christ is the only exit ramp off the way of the unwise.

PROVERBS 4:11-27

11 I am teaching you the way of wisdom;

I am guiding you on straight paths.

12 When you walk, your steps will not be hindered;

when you run, you will not stumble.

13 Hold on to instruction; don't let go.

Guard A it, for it is your life.

14 Keep off the path of the wicked;

don't proceed on the way of evil ones.

15 Avoid it; don't travel on it.

Turn away from it, and **pass it by B**.

16 For they **can't sleep C**

unless they have done what is evil;

they are robbed of sleep

unless they make someone stumble.

17 They eat the bread of wickedness

and drink the wine of violence.

18 The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,

shining brighter and brighter D until midday.

19 But the way of the wicked is like the **darkest gloom E**;

they don't know what makes them stumble.

20 My son, pay attention to my words;

listen closely to my sayings.

21 Don't lose sight of them;

keep them within your heart.

22 For they are life to those who find them,

and health to one's whole body.

23 Guard your heart above all else,

for it is the **source of life F**.

24 Don't let your mouth speak dishonestly,

and don't let your lips talk deviously.

25 Let your eyes look forward;

fix your gaze straight ahead.

26 Carefully consider the path for your feet,

and all your ways will **be established G**.

27 Don't turn to the right or to the left;

keep your feet away from evil.

Passage Outline

The Path to Take

(Prov. 4:11-13)

The Path to Avoid

(Prov. 4:14-19)

The Choice to Make

(Prov. 4:20-27)

Keywords

- A. The discipline of wisdom requires faithful obedience.
- B. A rapid series of commands that emphasize the urgency of rejecting the evil way of life
- C. Sin so enslaves evil people they can't sleep until they plot and carry out their wickedness.
- D. Describes the life of the righteous as full and certain
- E. Symbolizes moral failure, disaster, danger, and insecurity
- F. A person's heart (thinking, emotions, and will) is "where life starts" (The Message), determining the direction of one's life.
- G. Keeping fixed on God gives a sense of well-being, certainty, and rightness to people's lives as He directs their ways.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Godly wisdom is more than information to be obtained; it is a way of life to be lived. Verse 11 pictures life as a journey. It is vitally important to choose the right path on life's journey. God's wisdom will guide us *on straight paths*. Without God's wisdom to guide us, we'll run the risk of taking the wrong path, a crooked road that leads to destruction. Foolish people take that path. But wise believers seek God's guidance so we can choose the right path, the straight road that leads to a fulfilling life.

How does following God's wisdom lead to life? What happens to our ability to choose the way of wisdom when we do not take seriously the consequences of choosing the opposite of wisdom?

KEY DOCTRINE: Scripture The Holy Bible is a perfect treasure of divine instruction (Ps. 19:7-10).

There is, however, another path—the path of the wicked. Verses 14-15 consist of six commands related to the path of the wicked. This path to be avoided is jammed with people like a busy highway. The ones on this path are described as *the wicked* and *evil ones*.

How does wickedness lead to more wicked acts? What examples reinforce this teaching?

The path to avoid is the path of the wicked. The path to choose is the path of godly wisdom—a path that is entered through faith in Jesus Christ, “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

If the path of wisdom is so clear and beneficial, why do so many not choose it?

The benefits of living a godly and wise life are many. First, the godly instructions of the Word of God are *life to those who find them*. Secondly, they are *health to one's whole body*. Wisdom is beneficial and even life-giving to the wise, impacting both body and soul.

Why was Solomon so repetitive in reminding his son to remember his words?

Solomon knew that unless God's people were continually focused on God and His truth, they would easily stray off the path of righteousness.

What is so enticing about wickedness that it causes us to lose our focus on what is right and good?

BIBLE SKILL: Identify the imagery in a verse or passage and discover what it communicates. Reflect on Proverbs 4:11-27 and the implications of thinking about life as a journey. Write about what the picture of life as a journey teaches us about following the Lord or rejecting Him. For believers, what does it say to us about growing toward spiritual maturity in Christ? Give consideration to what Jesus communicated when He mentioned the wide gate and the narrow gate (Matt. 7:13-14).

APPLY THE TEXT

- Following godly instruction leads to life.
- Wicked living leads to more wickedness and dissatisfaction.
- Righteous living calls for disciplined living.

List the barriers that can keep you from choosing the way of wisdom. How can your awareness help you overcome those barriers?

Look for areas in your life where one step toward wickedness has caused another step. What actions can get you back on the right track?

In what areas of your life do you need to be more disciplined? Discuss with your Bible study group ways of helping each other be more disciplined in your spiritual walk.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Following God's wisdom leads to life.

Read Proverbs 4:11-13, understanding the instructions shared in verse 13.

Solomon used three images to make his point about staying on the straight path of wisdom. First, we are told to *hold on* to godly instruction. How do we hold on to godly instruction that helps us to be wise in the Lord? It needs to be used. God's truth can be useless to us if we tuck it away for safekeeping but never take time to consider it, listen to it, and follow it. The Bible offers us a wealth of godly wisdom and shows us how to be wise in Him. Too often, Bibles gather dust as they sit idly on tables, nightstands, and shelves. The treasure of God's Word makes a difference to us only when we place it in our hearts. That's how we hold on to godly instruction.

Second, *don't let go* of God's wisdom and truth. Like hanging on to the guardrails overlooking a steep ravine, Solomon encouraged God's people to cling to God and His wisdom.

Third, Solomon called on his son to *guard* the wisdom of God. Why was Solomon so impassioned about guarding godly instruction? He would answer this question with this singular truth: *for it* (the wisdom of God) *is your life*. God's wisdom is not optional equipment; it is life! Paul echoed this same idea when he declared Christ to be our very life. (See Col. 3:4.)

How does following God's wisdom lead to life? What happens to your ability to choose the way of wisdom when you do not take seriously the consequences of rejecting wisdom?

Day 2: Wickedness must be avoided.

Read Proverbs 4:14-17, considering why wickedness is a lifestyle to be avoided.

The life of the wicked is a sleepless one. Solomon argued that they can't sleep unless they have done what is evil or they make someone stumble. Wickedness can consume a person to the point of keeping him or her awake at night. Evil people may lie in bed with nothing on their minds except how they can hurt someone. They won't be able to sleep until they have brought despair, grief, or sorrow to the doorstep of some unsuspecting victim. Using the image of eating and drinking, Solomon shed light on how people behave when they follow the path of wickedness. They gorge themselves with dishes made with wickedness and violence. Solomon's point is that wickedness is the willful and deliberate activity of the wicked. It is this type of lifestyle that the righteous must avoid.

How have you seen wickedness lead to more wicked acts?

Day 3: Choose the path of godly wisdom.

Read Proverbs 4:18-19, identifying the differences in the paths.

In these two verses, Solomon summarized in clear and concise terms the two paths set before God's people. *The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, shining brighter and brighter until midday.* Wisdom brings light and understanding. Those who live by God's wisdom are on a path that is righteous. This path is growing brighter and brighter; it is a path of growth and maturity.

Conversely, *the way of the wicked is like the darkest gloom; they don't know what makes them stumble.* The further the wicked venture into wickedness the less they are able to see. The path of the wicked is both dark and blinding. The apostle Paul wrote, "the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4).

The path to avoid is the path of the wicked. The path to choose is the path of godly wisdom—a path that is entered through faith in Jesus Christ, "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

If the path of wisdom is so clear and beneficial, why do so many not choose it?

Day 4: The choice to embrace wisdom is important.

Read Proverbs 4:20-22, noticing Solomon's urging for his son to pay attention.

Again, Solomon urged his son to pay attention to his words. He didn't want his sayings to go in one ear and out the other. He called his son to *listen closely ... don't lose sight of them; keep them within your heart.* The heart is the center of life.

The benefits of living a godly and wise life are many; Solomon listed two in verse 22. First, the godly instructions of the Word of God are *life to those who find them.* Secondly, they are *health to one's whole body.* Wisdom is beneficial and even life-giving to the wise, impacting both body and soul.

For Solomon the choice was clear: avoid all wickedness. It leads to blindness and death. Embrace God's wisdom that leads to light and life, brings glory to God, and results in a life of purpose and peace.

Why was Solomon so repetitive in reminding his son to remember his words?

Day 5: Be aware of God's purpose for your life.

Read Proverbs 4:23-27, noting where your gaze should be fixed.

Choosing the path of wisdom is a matter of the heart. Godly wisdom calls on believers to guard our hearts above all else. Our hearts serve as the physical, emotional, and spiritual source of our lives. What we put in our hearts determines how we live. We can guard our hearts by making sure we're wise about what we allow to dwell there. If we let our hearts be filled with foolish thoughts, we will pay a price in foolish actions. If we allow God's instruction to dwell in our hearts, we will reap the reward of a life lived wisely.

Choosing the path of wisdom is also a matter of vision and focus. We're challenged to be wise about what we do with our eyes. The writer of Hebrews called on his readers to lay aside all sins and distractions and to keep their eyes on Jesus. (See Heb. 12:1-2.) To look forward and fix your gaze straight ahead reminds us not to be distracted from God's purpose for our lives. From an awareness of God's purpose of our lives, we're able to make wise choices.

What is so enticing about wickedness that it causes us to lose our focus on what is right and good?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Proverbs 4, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

Solomon used the metaphor of traveling a path to describe our choices in life. Why is this metaphor appropriate?

What words or phrases did Solomon use to convey the urgency and seriousness of avoiding the path of the wicked?

What strategies have you found helpful in staying diligent and disciplined?



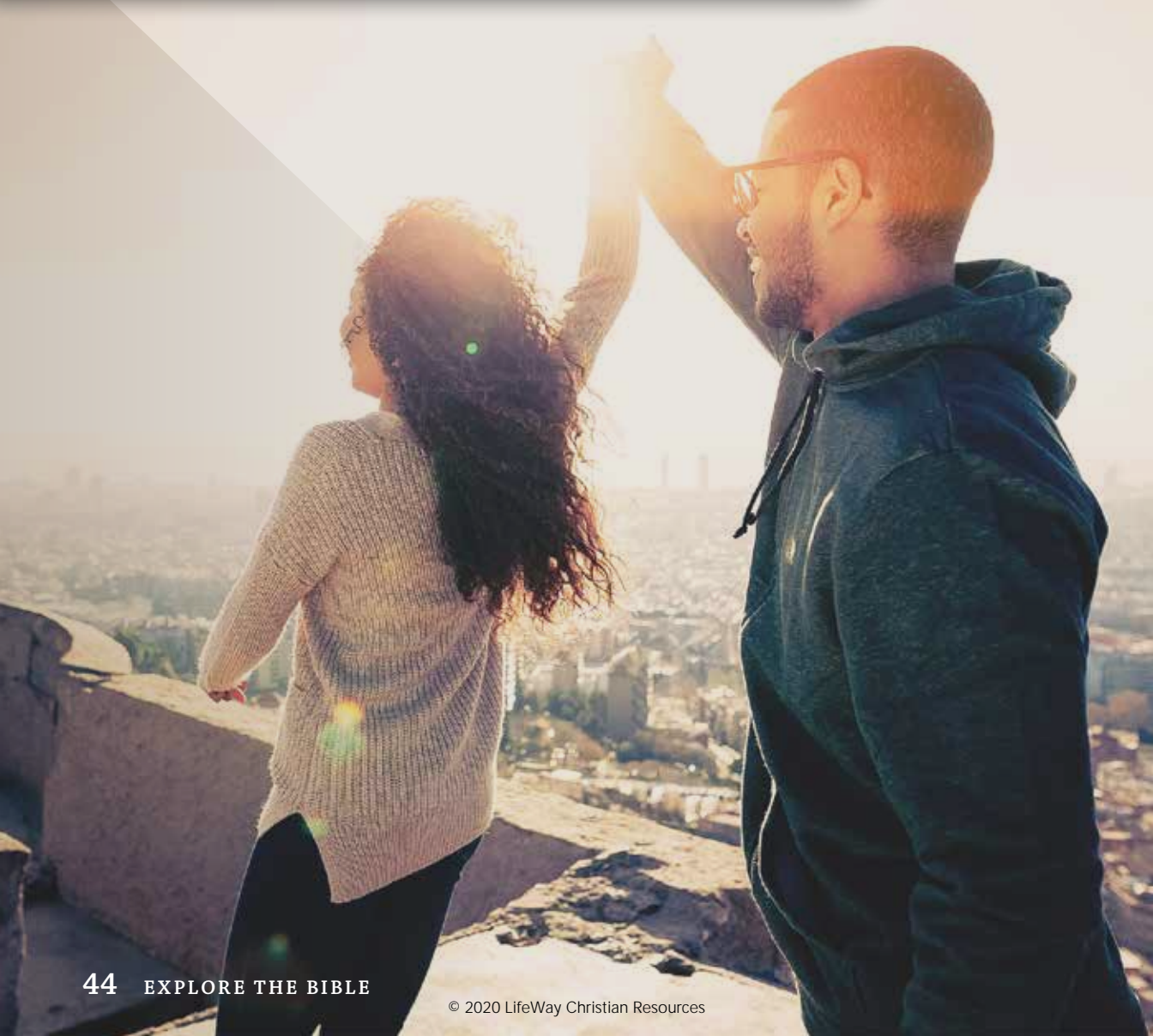
For additional context, read "Instruction: The Meaning" in the Summer 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Session 5

Following God's Design

God expects His people to show His wisdom through sexual purity.

Proverbs 5:3-11,15-18



**What if you ignored the blueprint and just followed your heart as you built a house?
How would your decision affect the construction process?**

We expect builders to follow blueprints. Failing to do so leads to problems down the road. The same is true when it comes to sex. God created humans as men and women; sex was part of His creative plan. Failing to follow His design for sex only leads to problems down the road. Solomon addressed the traps awaiting those who ignore God's design and the blessings awaiting those who follow God's design.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

In Proverbs 1–4, Solomon laid the foundation for obtaining and applying God's wisdom. He taught that true wisdom begins with the knowledge of God and is to be pursued at all costs. Conversely, Solomon gave warnings about why and how God's people should avoid the way of the wicked. The way of the wicked ultimately leads to death and destruction.

In chapters 5–7, Solomon applied the wisdom of God to one of the most combustible and often controversial subjects: sex. He contrasted the world's ways of dealing with human sexuality with God's way of dealing with sexuality.

Solomon addressed two mistakes people make regarding human sexuality. First, some give in to the cultural norms and notions of sexuality, compromising God's intentions. Compromise is the easy choice. Second, Solomon knew that God's people would be tempted to declare what God intended for good as something that was inherently evil and wicked. Solomon did not expect God's people to become callous to their sexual desires. Nor did he want them to compromise God's standards when it came to sexual expression.

Rather than compromise or callousness, the Spirit of God instructed Solomon regarding God's design for sex. God's people are to stay within the clear guidelines and boundaries God established for our good. Solomon affirmed that God created us for sexual intimacy; simultaneously, God set wise boundaries as to how this most sensitive gift should be enjoyed within a committed and monogamous marriage between a man and a woman.

PROVERBS 5:3-11,15-18

3 Though the lips of the forbidden woman drip honey
and her words are smoother than oil,

4 in the end she's as **bitter** **A** as wormwood
and as sharp as a **double-edged sword** **B**.

5 Her feet go down to death;
her steps head straight for Sheol.

6 She doesn't consider the path of life;
she doesn't know that her ways are unstable.

7 So now, sons, listen to me,
and don't turn away from the words
from my mouth.

8 Keep your way far from her.
Don't go near the door of her house.

9 Otherwise, you will give up your **vitality** **C**
to others

and your years to someone cruel;
10 strangers will drain your resources,
and your hard-earned pay will end up in a
foreigner's house.

11 At the end of your life, you will **lament** **D**
when your physical body has been consumed, ...

15 Drink water from your own **cistern** **E**,
water flowing from your own well.

16 Should your **springs** **F** flow in the streets,
streams **G** in the public squares?

17 They should be for you alone
and not for you to share with strangers.

18 Let your fountain be **blessed** **G**,
and take pleasure in the wife of your youth.

Passage Outline

See the Reality
(Prov. 5:3-6)

Think Long Term
(Prov. 5:7-11)

Enjoy God's Provision
(Prov. 5:15-18)

Keywords

- A. Naomi called herself "bitter" after the heart-crushing loss of her husband and sons (Ruth 1:20).
- B. Describes the adulteress as a deadly weapon
- C. The health and strength that belongs to the best years of life
- D. The anguished "groan" (ESV) of a sufferer in pain and distress from regret at sinful choices
- E. A man should find sexual fulfillment with his own wife.
- F. "Springs" and "streams" are metaphors for a husband's sexual affections.
- G. Use of this word indicates that God gives sexual pleasure in marriage. Blessing also includes the fruitfulness of children.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

In verse 2, Solomon reminded his son to use his lips to safeguard or to pass along God's wisdom. He then began to describe in verse 3 what comes from the lips of the *forbidden woman*. This woman was obviously someone other than the young man's wife. She used her lips and the words that passed through them as tools of seduction. Solomon's words remind us that those who commit sexual sin may be devoid of any true understanding of what meaningful life is all about. They do not understand that sexual perversion doesn't fulfill but instead creates instability and uncertainty.

Why are the consequences of the misuse and abuse of human sexuality so devastating?

KEY DOCTRINE: Family Marriage is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race (Gen. 2:18-24).

Solomon's reference to *sons* likely included all the young men in his royal court. It certainly also includes God's people in all places and in all generations. These verses challenge all God's people to resist sexual temptations and to avoid compromise.

What makes avoiding sexual temptations so difficult? How might a person rationalize flirting with sexual temptation?

Why was Solomon so adamant about God's people avoiding sexual temptation? He identified several consequences of giving in to sexual temptation.

BIBLE SKILL: Dig deeper into the background and usage of key words or phrases. From a Bible dictionary, read articles on "stranger" or "foreigner." You may be led to an article entitled "aliens." Identify characteristics that made a person a stranger or foreigner. Also, pay close attention to the way that they were viewed by Israelites in the days of the Old Testament. How does what you discovered help you better understand Solomon's use of the terms in Proverbs 5?

Solomon urged married men and women to enjoy sexual intimacy within the safe boundaries of an exclusive marriage relationship. He used a variety of descriptive images to make his point. Solomon wanted God's people to know and understand that sexual intimacy is a gift from God and is to be experienced between a man and a woman in a committed and loving marital relationship. Any other expression of sexuality is contrary to God's plan.

Who are your role models for marriage? Why?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Living for sexual gratification will lead to bitterness.
- Considering the consequences of unwise choices can help a person make a wise choice.
- God gave the gift of sexual intimacy to be enjoyed exclusively within the marriage relationship.

Discuss as a group ways of helping others who carry around bitterness and shame as a result of sexual sin. How can the group represent God's standard and be redemptive at the same time? Record insights from this discussion.

Consider ways of being mindful of the consequences of unwise decisions. What actions can you take to remind yourself of the consequences of ignoring God's design and the blessings of following God's design?

How can you lift up God's design for marriage including His design for sex? List actions you will take in the next week to do so.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Marital faithfulness is a life-enriching blessing.

Read Proverbs 5:3-6, identifying the danger the woman represents.

While the forbidden woman's words may have seemed sweet and smooth, bitterness flowed from her. *Wormwood* is a shrub that has a bitter flavor. A *double-edged sword* was a formidable weapon used in combat. These two items stand in direct contrast to the honey and oil the woman appeared to possess. Her flattery would likely build up the ego of an unsuspecting young man at the start but eventually would leave him wounded. He would be left with nothing but extreme bitterness and awful misery.

The young man may have thought that some sense of stability awaited him in the temptation, but the exact opposite was true. The woman was only concerned about herself, with sex being the ultimate act of selfishness. She was only living to please her own impulses with no interest in how this act impacted her victims.

Seeking to gratify our sexual impulses outside of God's plan doesn't end well. However, marital faithfulness and sexual intimacy between a husband and wife is one of the life-enriching blessings that come with following God's design for sexuality.

How have you been impacted by the misuse and abuse of human sexuality?

Day 2: Keep your distance from temptation.

Read Proverbs 5:7-8, recognizing the importance of the command to keep away.

Misguided and untamed sexual urges can keep us from thinking long-term and rationally about the consequences of our actions. Therefore, Solomon encouraged young men to think about the long-term consequences of sexual sin. They already had been warned about the seductive words of the forbidden woman and were being challenged once again to recognize and follow Solomon's wise words. Solomon urged young men to stay far away from sexual temptation. The *her* was the forbidden woman of verse 3. She was an adulteress, a mistress, or a prostitute. Her tempting ways would pull a man away from his commitment to the Lord. Her seductive words and ways would make him lose sight of the priority of honoring the Lord with a life that valued His wisdom. For that reason, Solomon gave the command to not even go near her door. Keeping your distance from temptation makes it easier to remain faithful to God and His designs for life.

What makes avoiding sexual temptations so difficult?

Day 3: Consider the consequences.

Read Proverbs 5:9-11, noticing the concerns that Solomon has.

Solomon identified several consequences of giving in to sexual temptation. First, he pointed to the young man giving up his *vitality to others*. Surrendering to sexual temptation places a person in danger of losing respect, honor, and dignity. The *others* in verse 9 are those who rob us of our strength once we give in to sexual sin. They may be other lovers of the forbidden woman, owners of a prostitute, or the husband of an unfaithful wife. A relationship with the promiscuous woman takes a toll on anyone who has a sexual encounter with her. Beyond this, financial hardships would come to the one who gave in to the adulterous woman. The *strangers* of verse 10 could have been relatives or owners of a foreign woman who made her way into Israel and lured men away from the Lord. They could have been the woman's other sexual partners. The man driven by lust for her may not have known them until after she had seduced him. Perhaps they would blackmail him, or maybe they would require him to support her financially. No matter how it happened, his resources would be taken from him and given to them. He would be destitute while someone else enjoyed his money. His heart would break as he watched his wealth end up in a foreigner's house. Finally, in verse 11 Solomon reminded the young men of the physical consequences of sexual immorality. There are numerous diseases that are common among those who abuse and misuse their sexuality, some of which can be terminal. Solomon wanted young men to think about the short- and long-term consequences of misguided sexual passions.

How can a long-term view of sin's consequences help you resist in the present moment?

Day 4: Enjoy sexual intimacy within marriage.

Read Proverbs 5:15-18, considering what these metaphors represent.

Solomon urged married men and women to enjoy sexual intimacy within the safe boundaries of an exclusive marriage relationship. He used a variety of descriptive images to make his point. When Solomon said to drink from your own cistern, he meant do not gratify your sexual urges in illicit relationships outside of your marriage relationship. *Should your springs flow in the streets, streams in the public squares?* Solomon wondered why a husband would want to become sexually involved with someone other than his wife. *They should be for you alone and not for you to share with strangers.* Not only is sexual intimacy to remain private, it is to be exclusive. God's Word is abundantly clear on this matter. (See Ex. 20:14; 1 Thess. 4:3.) *Let your fountain be blessed, and take pleasure in the wife of your youth.* Physical intimacy in marriage renders an ongoing blessing for a husband and wife as they share life together.

What do these verses teach about God's design for sexual intimacy?

Day 5: Through Christ, God can redeem all sinners.

Read Proverbs 5:3-11,15-18, reviewing what you've learned this week about what God desires for sexual intimacy.

The good news is that in Christ, God is able to redeem the repentant sinner who has violated God's original intent for sexual expression. The hope for all sinners is the gospel of Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 6:9-11 starts with a warning and ends with a promise of good news: "Don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or males who have sex with males ... And some of you used to be like this. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." The good news is that in Jesus Christ those who have violated God's purposes regarding sexuality become part of those who "used to be like this." In Jesus Christ the sinner is washed, sanctified, and justified. This is good news indeed!

Who do you know that needs to know that God forgives all sins, including sexual sins?

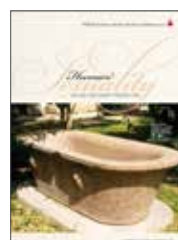
TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Proverbs 5, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

Who is responsible for sexual sin?

What are some long-term physical and economic consequences of sexual sin?

How can sexual purity demonstrate love for God and others?



For additional context, read "Human Sexuality: An Old Testament Perspective," available digitally in the Summer 2020 *Biblical Illustrator for Explore the Bible* at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Session 6

Pursuing Wisdom

God promises to provide His wisdom to those who search for Him.

Proverbs 8:6-21



If you were granted the opportunity to gain wisdom in one area of life, what would it be and why?

God offers wisdom by which to live life and glorify Him. He has revealed Himself in nature (Ps. 19:1), in His written Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17), and in Jesus (Heb. 1:1-4). Even though God has taken the step to reveal His wisdom, God's people cannot be passive when it comes to pursuing it. He reveals His wisdom, and simultaneously we must pursue the revealed wisdom of God. This pursuit is critical to spiritual maturity and growth.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Proverbs 8:1–9:18 concerns the necessity of pursuing the wisdom of God. Solomon emphasized several important truths in this passage. First, he taught that God's wisdom is valuable, powerful, and obtainable. God's wisdom is of infinite value because God is of infinite value. Second, Solomon proposed that as a result of its infinite value, the wisdom of God is to be pursued with great and sustained effort.

Solomon personified wisdom as a wise woman calling out to her neighbors: "People, I call out to you ... Learn to be shrewd, you who are inexperienced; develop common sense, you who are foolish" (8:4-5). Solomon pictured foolishness as a woman who is "gullible and knows nothing" (9:13). He contrasted a wise woman with a foolish woman in comparing the person who is pursuing the wisdom of God to a foolish and unwise person. Solomon contrasted the wisdom of God and the foolishness of worldly wisdom.

The choice between wisdom and folly is presented as two houses. Wisdom lived in one house, and she invited Solomon's son to a banquet that she had prepared (9:1-5). Folly lived in another house, and she also invited everyone to come to her house. There they could join her for a meal that consisted of nothing more than water and bread (9:13-18).

Solomon's persistence in calling God's people to pursue wisdom was reminiscent of his own pursuit of wisdom at the beginning of his administration. Rather than asking God for great wealth and notoriety at the beginning of his rule, Solomon asked for wisdom and discernment. (See 1 Kings 3:7-9.) God was pleased with Solomon's request and, as a result, gave him not only wisdom and discernment, but great wealth and notoriety.

PROVERBS 8:6-21

- 6** Listen, for **I** **A** speak of noble things,
and what my lips say is right.
- 7** For my mouth tells the truth,
and wickedness is detestable to my lips.
- 8** All the words from my mouth are **righteous** **B**;
none of them are deceptive or perverse.
- 9** All of them are **clear** **C** to the perceptive,
and right to those who discover knowledge.
- 10** Accept my instruction instead of silver,
and knowledge rather than pure gold.
- 11** For wisdom is better than jewels,
and **nothing desirable can equal it** **D**.
- 12** I, wisdom, share a home with shrewdness
and have knowledge and discretion.
- 13** To fear the Lord is to hate evil.
I **hate** **E** arrogant pride, evil conduct,
and perverse speech.
- 14** I possess good advice and sound wisdom;
I have understanding and strength.
- 15** It is by me that kings reign
and rulers **enact just law** **F**;
- 16** by me, princes lead,
as do **nobles** **G** and all righteous judges.
- 17** I love those who love me,
and those who **search** **H** for me find me.
- 18** With me are riches and honor,
lasting wealth **I** and righteousness.
- 19** My fruit is better than solid gold,
and my harvest than pure silver.
- 20** I walk in the ways of righteousness,
along the paths of justice,
- 21** giving wealth as an inheritance to those
who love me,
and filling their treasuries.

Passage Outline

- Valuable (Prov. 8:6-11)
Powerful (Prov. 8:12-16)
Obtainable (Prov. 8:17-21)

Keywords

- A. Solomon personified wisdom in chapter 8.
- B. Ethics and morals based on God's nature and will
- C. Wisdom's teachings are "plain" (KJV) and "straightforward" (NASB), not deceptive or perverse.
- D. Wisdom—not money—enables true happiness and protects those who follow the wise path.
- E. Opposing, detesting, despising, and rejecting something—to have nothing to do with it
- F. The Messiah will use wisdom to reign in this way (Isa. 11:1-4).
- G. Powerful, respected persons who serve as companions or advisors to the king
- H. God gives wisdom to those who ask (Jas. 1:5).
- I. Primarily spiritual rather than physical, as "honor" and "righteousness" indicate. (See Prov. 8:35.)

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Solomon was focused on calling God's people to pay attention because sinful man's attention span is short. We need continual reminders to pursue the things of God. Further, Solomon's instructions were right because they were from God.

What might a person pursue instead of God's wisdom in an effort to find truth?

What are the limits of each thing you listed?

BIBLE SKILL: Notice repeated words or phrases in a Bible passage. Read Proverbs 8:6-21 out loud and notice the number of times in which the pronoun "I" is repeated. How does the voice of wisdom speaking directly to God's people make the appeal to be wise more compelling? Jot down the ways in which Solomon's approach in the passage has a positive effect on the appeal. Also, make note of the ways that the appeal can be misunderstood.

Solomon portrayed God's wisdom as more valuable than any earthly acclaim. He declared that godly wisdom is more valuable than silver or gold and *is better than jewels*. In fact, *nothing desirable can equal it*.

Why might someone not consider God's wisdom to be a priceless treasure?

Fearing God puts a person on the path to being wise (see 1:7). To *fear the LORD* means to revere, respect, trust, and submit to God. Fearing God in this way is the difference between growing wise or becoming foolish.

How does fearing God lead to gaining wisdom? Can we gain true wisdom without a fear of God? Explain.

Some people might perceive that God's wisdom is only for the already wise, the educated, the intellectual, or the high and mighty, and not for the humble or the average person. Solomon promised that the person seeking God's wisdom would find it no matter his or her background. Further, Solomon asserted that the person who lives by God's wisdom will experience God's blessings, including the avoidance of self-destructive patterns of living.

How does knowing that God shares His wisdom motivate us to pursue it?

KEY DOCTRINE: The Scriptures All Scripture is totally true and trustworthy (Ps. 119:140).

If the wisdom of God is valuable, powerful, and obtainable, then what is gained when the believer pursues and embraces God's wisdom above everything else? In verses 18-21, Solomon outlined the rewards and benefits of pursuing God's wisdom.

APPLY THE TEXT

- God's wisdom can be trusted as true.
- God's wisdom comes through fearing Him.
- God's wisdom can be found and acted upon.

What roadblocks keep you from seeking true, godly wisdom? What actions do you need to take to remove these roadblocks?

Discuss as a group the characteristics of a wise person based on Proverbs 8. How can the group foster these characteristics within the group?

What are you doing to better place yourself in a position to discover and act upon God's wisdom? Who can hold you accountable for taking action and how?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Believers must pursue wisdom.

Read Proverbs 8:6-9, identifying what Solomon wanted for the listeners.

Solomon repeatedly called his students to sit up and take notice, to listen, and to adhere to what he was saying.

Solomon encouraged the pursuit of the wisdom of God by reminding God's people that His instructions were righteous—*none of them are deceptive or perverse*. In other words, Solomon was not attempting to deceive anyone but was passing along the great principles and precepts of God's truth as the most valuable things in all the world. Sin obscures the obvious, the true, and what is truly beautiful. Wisdom removes the fog of ignorance. Solomon reminded God's people that God's teachings of wisdom *are clear to the perceptive, and right to those who discover knowledge*.

**What have you pursued instead of God's wisdom in an effort to find truth?
What are the limits of each thing you listed?**

Day 2: Wisdom must be pursued with great passion.

Read Proverbs 8:10-11, considering the true value of wisdom.

More than wealth, power, or notoriety, the pursuit of the wisdom of God is the most valuable commodity in an otherwise materialistic world. Solomon turned things on their head by placing the value of the pursuit of God's wisdom above all other pursuits. Solomon's admonition to pursue first God's wisdom was a foreshadowing of Jesus' call for His followers to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). Because wisdom is valuable, it must be pursued with great passion and persistence. When God's wisdom is pursued first, the other issues of life tend to become more manageable and understandable.

**Why might someone not consider God's wisdom to be a priceless treasure?
What do you cherish about it most of all?**

Day 3: Believers are strengthened by God's wisdom.

Read Proverbs 8:12-16, underlining verse 14.

Having the wisdom of God means loving what He loves and detesting what He detests. For that reason, everyone who values His wisdom will *hate evil*. To hate evil is to hate *arrogant pride, evil conduct, and perverse speech*. God's wisdom gives believers an option that goes against the evil we see in the world.

God will give us His wisdom when we study His Word, go to Him in prayer, and seek the advice of mature believers in Christ. The understanding we gain can enable us to make sound judgments. Strengthened by His wisdom, we won't be overwhelmed when faced with circumstances that seem daunting for us.

There is no greater power in the world than the knowledge of God. God's wisdom equips His people with sound reason, clear thinking, sufficient knowledge, endurance, patient strength, and faith.

How does fearing God lead to gaining wisdom? Can you gain true wisdom without a fear of God? Explain.

Day 4: As believers seek God, He blesses them with wisdom.

Read Proverbs 8:17, highlighting the words love, search, and find.

The wisdom of God is found in the Word of God; to pursue the wisdom of God is to pursue God's written Word. In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul stated: "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness." To pursue God's wisdom requires the knowledge of God's Word. The degree to which a believer knows and embraces God's Word is the degree to which that believer is advancing in his or her pursuit of the wisdom of God.

In verse 17 Solomon outlined a clear promise for the seeker of God's wisdom: *I (wisdom) love those who love me, and those who search for me find me*. The wisdom of God loves the seeker who pursues her. As we seek God in His Word, He blesses us with wisdom. Further, Solomon promised that those who seek wisdom will find it. God does not play cat and mouse with His wisdom. He gladly rewards the seeker with the knowledge of Himself.

How does knowing that God shares His wisdom motivate you to pursue it?

Day 5: God's wisdom is comprehensive.

Read Proverbs 8:18-21, noting the promise in verse 21.

What is remarkable about the wisdom of God is that it is comprehensive in its impact:

- God's wisdom makes people rich in the things of God.
- God's wisdom enables people to live with *honor*. (In contrast, pursuing riches leads to dishonor and ruin; Jer. 17:11; 1 Tim. 6:10.)
- God's wisdom gives people *lasting wealth* that does not fade.
- God's wisdom offers people His *righteousness*.
- God's wisdom is better than *solid gold*.
- God's wisdom is more valuable than *pure silver*.
- God's wisdom enables people to *walk in the ways of righteousness*.
- God's wisdom calls people to move along the *paths of justice*.
- God's wisdom provides an *inheritance* to the godly.

How might these verses be helpful when we encounter something in Scripture that seems counter-intuitive?

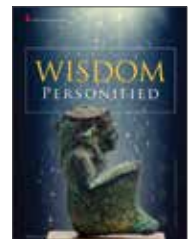
TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Proverbs 8, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

What are some good things we desire? How do we keep a proper perspective on their value?

What characterizes a person who fears God?

How do we acquire God's wisdom?



For additional context, read "Wisdom Personified" in the Summer 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Living Wisely

Following God's wisdom leads to joy, while failing to do so leads to grief.

Proverbs 14:8-15



Tell about a time when you failed to follow a recipe, and it ended in a kitchen disaster.

Making a soufflé requires following the instructions precisely. The egg whites must be beaten until they hold soft peaks and look glossy. The eggs need to be at room temperature if you want them fluffy. Following the recipe exactly will lead to a great soufflé; failing to follow the recipe will lead to a messy kitchen and disappointed dinner guests. Something similar is true when it comes to God's wisdom. Solomon contrasted following God's wisdom with the foolishness of failing to do so.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

In Proverbs 14 Solomon used a literary device known as a chiasmus. This term refers to an arrangement of ideas that is then repeated in reverse order. The purpose behind this type of literary feature was for repetitive and comparative emphasis. Below is the chiastic form of Proverbs 14:8-15.

A: The prudent and the fools (v. 8)

B: Making amends for sin (v. 9)

C: Secrets of the heart (v. 10)

D: Destruction of the wicked (v. 11)

D: The way to death (v. 12)

C: Secrets of the heart (v. 13)

B: Being repaid for sin (v. 14)

A: The simple and the prudent (v. 15)

Notice that Solomon began by comparing the prudent with the foolish (v. 8). He then addressed the subject of cause and effect in regard to the outcomes of foolish living as opposed to wise living (v. 9). In verse 10 Solomon wanted God's people to understand that wisdom is a matter of the heart. He then noted that foolishness always leads to destruction (v. 11). Then Solomon repeated these themes in reverse order so that God's people would understand the contrast between wise and foolish living.

In these verses Solomon put side by side two very distinct ways of thinking and living. His point was clear: the end of foolishness is destruction and the end of wisdom of godliness and peace.

PROVERBS 14:8-15

8 The **sensible** **A** person's wisdom is to consider his way, but the stupidity of fools deceives them.

9 Fools **mock** **B** at **making reparation** **C**, but there is goodwill among the upright.

10 The heart knows its own **bitterness** **D**, and no outsider shares in its joy.

11 The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the **tent** **E** of the upright will **flourish** **F**.

12 There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death.

13 Even in laughter a heart may be sad, and joy may end in **grief** **G**.

14 The **disloyal** **H** one will get what his conduct deserves, and a good one, what his deeds deserve.

15 The inexperienced one believes anything, but the sensible one watches his steps.

Passage Outline

Prudent (Prov. 14:8,15)

Content (Prov. 14:9,14)

Joyful (Prov. 14:10,13)

Thriving (Prov. 14:11-12)

Keywords

A. Translated "shrewdness" in Proverbs 1:4; 8:12.

B. Fools have no concern for the harm they do.

C. Fools ridicule the need to make things right or recompense.

D. Emotional response to a hurtful, heart-crushing situation. Hannah (1 Sam. 1:10) and Peter (Matt. 26:75) experienced this.

E. Initially referred to a dwelling made by nomadic people and shepherds; later referred to more permanent dwellings; may refer to families

F. Refers to an increase in children or influence

G. Anxiety resulting from great suffering

H. A "backslider in heart" (ESV) who turns away from God and the path of righteousness

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Solomon contrasted the wise and the foolish, characterizing the wise as sensible and the foolish as gullible. Solomon desired for God's people to consider their decisions and actions in light of the precepts and principles of God's Word.

When you think about a sensible Christian, who comes to mind? How does that person's example help others live prudently?

KEY DOCTRINE: The Scriptures Scripture is the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried (Acts 17:11).

Solomon contrasted *fools* who mock at *making reparation* with the *upright*. The Hebrew word rendered *making reparation* can have different nuances of meaning, but the primary usage is as a designation for the guilt or trespass offering. (See Lev. 5:14–6:7; 7:1–10.) The *upright* demonstrate a willingness to make a peace offering or to make reparation with others when needed.

The Hebrew word translated *disloyal one* is related to the concept of backsliding. It suggests someone who begins as a follower of the Lord and then turns back. It is the person who takes steps on the path of God's wisdom but returns to a lifestyle guided by his own desires.

How does pursuing God's wisdom lead to contentment regardless of the circumstances?

Because appearances can be deceiving, no one really knows what another person is feeling in his or her heart. Solomon declared that the person who appears to be happy may actually be bitter. We also know that laughter is not to be confused with joy. The Hebrew word translated *sad* can also mean "pain." A person's laughter can mask his pain. Solomon noted that *even in laughter a heart may be sad, and joy may end in grief*.

What if someone asked us about the joy that's abiding in our hearts? How would we describe it?

In verse 11 Solomon contrasted the path of the wicked with that of the righteous. Notice that the wicked have what seems to be a more permanent dwelling place—a house. The righteous, on the other hand, have only what appears to be a temporary dwelling place—a tent. Again, in verse 12 Solomon makes a contrast. Godly wisdom and joy do not always line up with what the world thinks is wise or with how the world thinks true happiness is obtained.

What are some "wrong ways" we see people following today?

APPLY THE TEXT

- The wise person seeks to understand knowledge.
- Following God's wisdom leads to contentment.
- God's wisdom produces joy even when there is grief.
- God's wisdom leads to His blessings.

As a group, make a list of the biblical criteria by which a believer can make wise and prudent decisions. How can you implement this criteria in your own life?

List the causes and cures for the lack of contentment and joy people may experience. With whom do you need to share the cures you identified?

What blessings have you experienced as a result of following God's wisdom? How do these received blessings encourage you to continue to follow His wisdom?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: The wise person seeks to know and understand God.

Read Proverbs 14:8,15, underlining both uses of the word sensible.

Some translations use the word *prudent* in place of the word *sensible*. Solomon was urging God's people to be prudent in their thoughts and actions. The word *prudent* often conjures up notions of being a killjoy, unloving, and unconcerned. Too often it is wrongly used with a negative connotation. In reality, prudence involves thinking through an opportunity or a challenge carefully before drawing a conclusion and coming to a decision. A person who practices prudence would be referred to as sensible.

Solomon desired for God's people to consider their decisions and actions in light of the precepts and principles of God's Word. Experience can be a great teacher if coupled with the wise counsel of God. But experience without God's wisdom can cause a person to be gullible and spiritually duped by the many allurements of the world. The wise person seeks to know, understand, and apply the knowledge of God to every life decision.

When you think about a sensible Christian, who comes to mind? How does that person's example help you to be prudent?

Day 2: A wise person finds contentment in Christ.

Read Proverbs 14:9, considering how contentment relates to making reparations.

Making reparation recalls Old Testament law, which was exceedingly clear regarding the need to make restitution for sin. For example, a man who cheated, stole, or lied had to make restitution to the individual who had been victimized by his sinful actions. Further, he had to present a guilt or trespass offering to the priest. (See Lev. 6:1-7.) The amount of the restitution had been established in the law, and God's people had been instructed to regard the matter of restitution as something holy. (See Lev. 7:1.) The contrast Solomon was making in verse 9 was actually the contrast between contentment and discontentment. Foolishness will lead to discontentment, but wise living leads to contentment. This was Paul's point in Philippians 4:10-14, where he spoke of being content in Christ. Paul insisted that contentment is something that can be learned and applied. Paul applied this contented knowledge of God in times when there was plenty and in times when he lacked even the basic necessities of life. Contentment in Christ means that we can be content in our circumstances without being content with the circumstances. Paul was used of God to be an agent of change within undesirable circumstances.

What is a situation in your life that keeps you from being content? How might God demonstrate His character in this situation?

Day 3: Living out God's wisdom brings contentment.

Read Proverbs 14:14, contrasting the disloyal one and the good one.

The Hebrew word translated *disloyal one* refers to the person who takes steps on the path of God's wisdom but returns to a lifestyle guided by his own desires. He will get what his conduct deserves. On the other hand, a good one (a person who walks in God's wisdom) will get what his deeds deserve.

This is similar to what Paul said about sowing and reaping. (See Gal. 6:7-10.) The apostle wrote that true contentment is not only found in God, but there is a deep sense of peace that comes from a clear conscience. A clear conscience comes from avoiding what is sinful and embracing what is righteous. When a person's conscience is clear, that person can be at peace with God. In other words, contentment not only comes from being right with God but from being on the right side of wise decision-making. Living out God's wisdom brings the true reward of lasting contentment.

How does pursuing God's wisdom lead you to contentment regardless of your current life circumstances?

Day 4: Lasting joy comes from knowing and doing the will of God.

Read Proverbs 14:10,13, contemplating the state of your own heart.

Pursuing godly wisdom results in joy—a genuine joy that comes from an intimate relationship with God. Such joy holds up under the trials of life. Consequently, as believers, we don't need to wear masks to conceal our pain and grief. Instead, we can count on the joy that comes in our walk with God to sustain us even when our hearts ache. Grief awaits all of us, but our joy in Christ will hold us up in the times of grief.

The desire to be happy is common to all people. But how a person defines happiness makes all the difference in the world. Real, lasting joy comes from knowing and doing the will of God; it comes from being in the center of God's purposes for one's life even when that purpose may take a person through the valley of the shadow of death. (See Ps. 23:4.)

What if someone asked you about the joy that's abiding in your heart? How would you describe it?

Day 5: Doing God's will is always right.

Read Proverbs 14:11-12, noting the finality of verse 12.

Some people depend on their own ingenuity or shrewdness to guide them as they choose the way they want to live. But without the wisdom that comes from God, they will not have the wisdom they need to make the best choices with their lives. What matters most is knowing and doing the will of God. At times following God's will leads to days of peaceful tranquility. At other times knowing and doing the will of God can lead to great sacrifice and difficulty. But what matters is knowing and doing what is right by the Lord as revealed in His Word—not by what we think is right.

BIBLE SKILL: Dig deeper into the background and usage of key words or phrases. Reflect on Proverbs 14:12. Read Judges 1–2 and identify the number of times the Israelites ignored God's direction and set out on their own path. Then read Judges 17:6 and 21:25. How do these verses give you deeper understanding into Solomon's statement in Proverbs 14:12?

Consider if there is anywhere in your life you are following a “wrong way.” Where do you think that path will end?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Proverbs 14, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

Contrast how the foolish person and the wise person think about the future.

Where does true joy come from? How can we share this joy with others?

How do these verses in Proverbs encourage us to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7)?



For additional context, read “Death in the Old Testament,” available digitally in the Summer 2020 *Biblical Illustrator for Explore the Bible* at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Session 8

Pleasing God

God's people should seek to please Him in their attitudes and actions.

Proverbs 15:33–16:11



**When you were a child, how did you try to please the people you loved?
What difference did it make to you?**

Children enjoy pleasing the people they love. They know no boundaries when it comes to showing their affection to their parents, grandparents, teachers at school, or neighbors across the street. Their love prompts them to give a hug, a kiss, or a smile. It also causes them to look for ways to please. They'll try to fix breakfast for their parents, sing a new song that they learned for their grandparents, and take gifts to their teachers.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

In Proverbs 10–22, Solomon gave precept after precept of wise counsel—truth rooted in the very nature of God. Some have called this section “Solomon’s Proper Proverbs,” given in a series of singular truth statements wrapped in maxims, observations, and poetic reflections. The wisdom of God is both particular and general. Particular in that it addresses the issues of life often in detail; general in that God’s wisdom is comprehensive in addressing a whole host of the challenges of daily living. God’s wisdom supersedes all other sources of wisdom.

The wisdom Solomon called God’s people to pursue was fully revealed and embodied in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The gospel of Jesus is “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24). To know Jesus is to know the wisdom of God that changes how we think and act.

We respond to God’s pursuit of us by pursuing Jesus. Solomon wasn’t calling God’s people to pursue something extrinsic to God. One of the mistakes we often make when thinking about the wisdom of God is to separate the pursuit of wisdom from God Himself, as if the wisdom of God was distinct from the Person of God. To pursue God’s wisdom means to pursue God Himself. This one truth changes everything.

PROVERBS 15:33–16:11

15:33 The fear of the LORD is what wisdom teaches, and humility comes before **honor A**.

6:1 The reflections of the heart belong to mankind, but the **answer B** of the tongue is from the LORD.

2 All a person's ways seem right to him, but the LORD weighs motives.

3 Commit your activities to the LORD, and your plans will be established.

4 The LORD has prepared everything for his purpose— even the wicked for the **day of disaster C**.

5 Everyone with a proud heart is detestable to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished.

6 Iniquity is atoned for by **loyalty and faithfulness D**, and one turns from evil by the fear of the LORD.

7 When a person's ways please the LORD, he makes even **his enemies to be at peace E** with him.

8 Better a little with righteousness than great income with injustice.

9 A person's heart plans his way, but the LORD **determines F** his steps.

10 God's verdict is on the lips of a king; his mouth should not give an unfair judgment.

11 **Honest balances and scales G** are the LORD's; all the weights in the bag are his concern.

Passage Outline

Wisdom Demonstrated
(Prov. 15:33; 16:8)

Accountability Established
(Prov. 16:1,4-5,9)

Motives Matter
(Prov. 16:2,10-11)

Blessing Assured
(Prov. 16:3,6-7)

Keywords

- A. Humility and fearing God are necessities for obtaining wisdom and honor (Prov. 16:18).
- B. The Lord enables individuals to state and carry out their plans according to His sovereign will.
- C. God will judge all people, and all will receive their appropriate reward or punishment (Rom. 2:5-11).
- D. Genuine signs of repentance, resulting in forgiveness of sin
- E. A life that pleases God restores relationships.
- F. God has sovereign control over life.
- G. God required accurate and fair balances and scales (Lev. 19:36; Deut. 25:13).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Solomon called his readers to please God by pursuing and applying wisdom, coupled with two basic reminders. First, the basis of the pursuit of God's wisdom is the fear of the Lord. (See Prov. 1:7.) Secondly, the pursuit of God's wise counsel humbles the believer.

What is easier to maintain—humility or a reverent fear of God? Explain.

KEY DOCTRINE: God God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures (Ex. 15:11-27).

All things—both good and evil—are under the sovereign control of God. Some may think that if God creates and orders everything according to His purpose, then humanity is free from any responsibility. Solomon addressed this when he declared that all people with a proud heart will be punished. In the end, all people are accountable for their responses to God.

It is in a *person's heart* that *plans* take shape. Therefore, we decide the way we'll go based on what's in our hearts. But with our decision comes accountability to God. The Hebrew word translated *plans* can refer either to evil schemes or good plans. Proverbs reminds us that even our best-made plans are established by the Lord, who *determines* our *steps*.

What does living with the reality that we will face God one day look like?

Why do people resist being held accountable?

BIBLE SKILL: Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.

Read 2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 51:16-17; Isaiah 2:11-17; Micah 6:8; Philippians 2:5-11; James 4:6-10; and 1 Peter 5:5-6, noting the role humility plays in each passage. How would you define humility based on these passages? What critical actions increase true humility? How do these passages help you better understand Proverbs 16?

Pleasing God involves right motives as well as right actions. The two cannot be separated. Even a right deed can be done out of the wrong motivation. Our love for God is the only true motivation.

Why are our motives so important? To what degree might our motives be more important than our actions?

Great blessings await those who live within the contours of the wise counsel of God. Solomon codified this truth in verse 3. The constant surrender of our choices and decisions to the wise counsel of God establishes the way of the righteous. God bestows His blessings among His people in several ways: the forgiveness of sins; His faithful love that challenges us to turn from evil; peace with others.

How does each promise given in this passage give assurance to a believer?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers demonstrate wisdom by seeking to please God in all they do.
- All people are accountable to the sovereign God.
- Pleasing God is borne out of a right relationship with Him and is seen in right attitudes and actions.
- God's blessing on those who please Him are seen in Him giving stability, rescuing from sin, and peaceful relationships with others.

As a group, discuss the spiritual benefits and cost of following or not following God. What insights did you gain as a result of this discussion?

Ask God to reveal areas in your life that are dominated by pride. Confess your pride and ask Him to help you grow in humility toward Him.

Evaluate your life in light of stability, God's forgiveness, and peaceful relationships with others. How can you grow in each of these areas?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: The wisdom of God is demonstrated in fearing the Lord.

Read Proverbs 15:33; 16:8, considering the place of humility.

Solomon declared that humbly revering God is more valuable than great wealth. He contrasted ill-gotten wealth with the value of true righteousness. Material wealth is neutral. How a person obtains and uses wealth is another matter. Solomon reminds us of the danger of confusing the pursuit of God with the pursuit of wealth. God Himself is valuable above all worldly riches. The wisdom of God, then, is demonstrated in fearing the Lord, trusting Him, and pursuing Him as the greatest treasure of life out of which all other treasures and blessings of God come.

What is easier for you to maintain—humility or a reverent fear of God? Give examples.

Day 2: He determines our steps.

Read Proverbs 16:1,4-5,9, identifying how the heart plays into the way we follow God.

True wisdom calls for accountability. God is sovereign and will hold all people accountable. As an example, God's people are accountable for what they speak even as God orders their words.

The convergence of God's sovereign rule over all things and our accountability is one of the great mysteries of Scripture. Whether or not we understand how both can co-exist together, God is sovereign and we are accountable.

When these truths are applied to the work of God in Christ we are reminded of Acts 2:23: "Though he [Jesus] was delivered up according to God's determined plan and foreknowledge, you used lawless people to nail him to a cross and kill him." God had already determined to offer up Jesus as the sacrifice for sinners before time began. Yet, those who killed Jesus—all of us—will be held accountable. This means that the cross was not 'Plan B.' His plan from before the foundation of the world was to save repentant sinners from the penalty of sin by means of the cross.

This truth of verse 9 is repeated in Proverbs 19:21, "Many plans are in a person's heart, but the Lord's decree will prevail." Again, in Proverbs 20:24: "Even a courageous person's steps are determined by the Lord, so how can anyone understand his own way?" He determines our steps because He alone can see the path from beginning to end, yet He does so without infringing on our liberty or erasing our responsibility for the steps we choose.

**What does living with the reality that we will face God one day look like?
How does this reality impact your daily life?**

Day 3: Love for God should be our motivation.

Read Proverbs 16:2, contemplating your own motives.

Romans 14:23 states that “everything that is not from faith is sin,” even if it is a good thing. Solomon challenged God’s people to always check their motivations—even if the deed they were doing was right and good.

It is easy to think that because we do the right thing that God will bless us, even if our reason for doing the right thing is wrongly motivated. It is obvious when evil deeds are done out of a sinful heart. What is not so obvious to us is when our motivations for doing what is good are not God-honoring.

Why are your motives so important? To what degree might your motives be more important than your actions?

Day 4: Our actions should please God.

Read Proverbs 16:10-11, identifying what is important to God.

Two examples of God-pleasing, properly motivated actions are a king’s delivery of decisions and a merchant’s use of honest measures in dealing with his customers. Before customers used coins, they weighed pieces of gold or silver to make their purchases. Merchants would use balances and scales to weigh the precious metals. Dishonest merchants sometimes manipulated the balances and scales so they could collect a little more from the customer. A merchant’s honesty said something about his motive. The Lord nourished honesty in the merchant’s heart. He would be the reason the weights in the bag of the merchant would be correct. Anyone who wanted to please the Lord would share God’s concern for honesty. When merchants practiced deceptive methods to steal from their customers, they verified that they had rejected God’s wisdom. Proper motivation for right actions comes out of a heart that has been saturated with the wisdom of God.

How do verses 10-11 offer examples of God-pleasing actions? What are some ways you see this type of God-pleasing behavior today?

Day 5: God assures His people.

Read Proverbs 16:3,6-7, noting God's promises.

Living for God does not mean things always turn out the way the world defines success. Yet to live within the safety of God's wise counsel is to know that God is at work among His people in all things to bring about their good for His glory (Rom. 8:28). Deliverance from evil is found only in our deliverance from sin through Jesus Christ.

To live within the safety of the wise counsel of the all-sovereign God is foundational to the Christian life. The believer demonstrates his or her commitment to God by pleasing Him, responding to the calling of God in Jesus Christ, by managing and monitoring his or her motivations, and by resting assured that God blesses His people in manifold ways.

How does each promise given in this passage give you assurance?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Proverbs 15 and 16, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

In the world, when does humility come before honor? How does this differ from the humility Christians are called to and the honor Christians are promised?

What do these verses reveal about God's sovereignty?

How do we practically demonstrate trust in God?



For additional context, read "It's an Abomination!" in the Summer 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Session 9

Staying Sober

God expects believers to be good stewards of the bodies He has given them.

Proverbs 23:17-21,29-35



What factors contribute most to alcohol and drug abuse? Can someone be a social or recreational user and not be an abuser? Explain.

Alcoholism and drug abuse have become a prominent feature of our cultural landscape. Lives have been destroyed, marriages ruined, families wounded, and communities disrupted because of its destructive influence. Some of us worry that our children or grandchildren will be caught in its grip. Others of us worry that someone we love will never be set free from his or her addiction.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Proverbs 22:17–24:22 has been called by some Bible teachers “The Thirty Wise Sayings of Solomon.” In staccato fashion, Solomon poured out precept after precept layered on top of the foundational truths he set forth in the previous chapters, especially chapters 1–9. Solomon’s inspired words are wise counsel upon which God’s people can build a sound and fruitful life.

Four things are remarkable about Solomon’s counsel in this section of Proverbs. First, the wisdom of God revealed in His Word covers a wide variety of issues. Solomon left no stone unturned in giving wise instruction to God’s people about many issues of life.

Second, the wisdom of God is soul-searching. That is, Solomon’s counsel to God’s people was personal and spiritual. He was not interested in surface issues but rather matters of the heart.

Third, Solomon’s counsel is intensely practical. He was interested in making God’s wisdom livable and not just theoretical.

Fourth, Solomon’s counsel is relational in that he desired relationships with God to grow deeper and more mature, and relationships with others to grow more mature and loving. Comprehensive, soul-searching, practical, and personal, Solomon was used by God to distill the wisdom of God into understandable and applicable counsel.

PROVERBS 23:17-21,29-35

17 Don't let your heart envy sinners;
instead, always **fear** **A** the Lord.

18 For then you will have a future,
and your **hope** **B** will not be dashed.

19 Listen, my **son** **C**, and be wise;
keep your mind on the right course.

20 Don't associate with those who drink
too much wine
or with those who gorge themselves on meat.

21 For the drunkard and the **glutton** **D** will
become poor,
and grogginess will clothe them in rags. ...

29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow?
Who has conflicts? Who has complaints?
Who has wounds for no reason?
Who has **red eyes** **E**?

30 Those who linger over wine;
those who go looking for mixed wine.

31 Don't gaze at wine because it is red,
because it gleams in the cup
and goes down smoothly.

32 In the end it **bites like a snake** **F**
and stings like a viper.

33 Your eyes will see strange things,
and you will say absurd things.

34 You'll be like someone sleeping out at sea
or lying down on the top of a ship's mast.

35 "They struck me, but I feel no pain!
They beat me, but I didn't know it!
When will I wake up?
I'll **look for** **G** another drink."

Passage Outline

The Promise (Prov. 23:17-18)

The Petition (Prov. 23:19-21)

The Portrait (Prov. 23:29-32)

The Problem (Prov. 23:33-35)

Keywords

- A. The correct envy is zeal for the fear of the Lord.
- B. Hope comes from God (Ps. 62:5). God promises His people "a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11).
- C. The context doesn't limit these instructions to males.
- D. Jesus' enemies wrongly called Him a drunkard and glutton (Matt. 11:19).
- E. This could mean "bloodshot" eyes (NIV), blackened eyes from beatings (23:35), or dull eyes from blurred vision—all the results of heavy drinking.
- F. These images could refer to the effects of too much alcohol or to the scary hallucinations of alcoholics.
- G. "Must have" (ESV)—points to danger of addiction and the poor choices of an alcoholic

EXPLORE THE TEXT

KEY DOCTRINE: God the Father – God the Father is fatherly in His attitude toward all men (Deut. 32:6).

Those who *fear* the Lord and trust in Him can count on a secure and hopeful future. To help God's people know and understand this promise, Solomon gave two pieces of wise counsel. First, it is the fear and reverent awe of the Lord that is the basis of wisdom. Second, the promise of God's presence assures a future hope.

How is hope dashed when trusting in something other than God? How does trusting God lead to a secure and hopeful future?

BIBLE SKILL: Memorize a verse and apply it in a real-life situation. Memorize Proverbs 23:19. Reflect on how this verse can guide you in giving your body to the Lord. Write out a prayer to God. Ask Him to show you any pattern of behavior in your life that needs to be brought under His control, to strengthen you so you can be released from its grip, and He alone can have complete control over you.

When Solomon referred to the *mind* in verse 19 he meant the thinking process of God's people. How and what a person thinks when it comes to the critical junctures of life makes all the difference. A sound mind filled with the wisdom of God will be better able to make the right choices and avoid the bad choices that can derail us.

What are the similarities between alcohol abuse and gluttony? In what ways are alcoholism and gluttony two approaches for dealing with the same issues?

Solomon portrayed the abuse of alcohol in vivid terms. He described the appeal and enticements of alcohol—*it gleams in the cup and goes down smoothly—but in the end it bites like a snake*. On the front end things seem good and acceptable; on the back end the ramifications of alcohol abuse are horrible.

Why is drinking alcohol so enticing? How does alcohol mirror the characteristics of a deadly snake? What actions might a person need to take so they don't find themselves in the picture painted by addiction?

In these verses the description of the consequences of alcohol's abuse continue in vivid and stark terms. Solomon pictured the abuser of alcohol as someone who experiences the loss of mental reasoning and will say all kinds of abusive or absurd things to others. People who abuse alcohol lose their mental capacities and the ability to demonstrate self-control.

How is Solomon's portrait of addiction seen in real life? Which image in the description makes the greatest impact? Explain.

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers are to fear God alone, finding their security and hope in Him.
- Believers are to associate with those pursuing a godly lifestyle.
- The initial allure of intoxicating drinks is replaced by abuse and heartache.
- Addiction leads to perpetual danger.

When you face a challenge or difficulty, to what or whom do you turn to first? What does your answer reveal about what or who you trust in life? What changes do you need to make in light of today's study?

Evaluate your relationships in terms of the degree to which each relationship helps you pursue godliness. How can you foster relationships that encourage you to pursue godliness?

As a group, discuss ways of using this passage to help a person who is addicted. How can you approach them with love and compassion? With whom can you share these insights?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: God promises a hopeful future.

Read Proverbs 23:17-18, underlining verse 18.

To help God's people know and understand God's promise of a hopeful future, Solomon gave two pieces of wise counsel. First, he returned to the principle initially laid down in Proverbs 1:7. The fear and reverent awe of the Lord is the basis of wisdom. Rather than developing a jealousy toward the worldly wisdom of the sinful and secular, Solomon directed God's people to stay grounded in loving and fearing the Lord. The fear of God tethers us to ultimate reality and unchanging truth.

The promise of God's presence assures a future hope. This was the second great truth of which Solomon reminded God's people so they might continually embrace the wisdom of God. Solomon combined two great themes of life—hope and wisdom. Walking in God's wisdom keeps alive the promise of a future with purpose and hope; to neglect the wisdom of God will cut short or stunt a future with purpose and hope.

How is hope dashed when trusting in something other than God? How does trusting God lead to a secure and hopeful future?

Day 2: Trust the Lord to get you through trials.

Read Proverbs 23:19-21, considering Solomon's counsel on drunkenness and gluttony.

Solomon's wise counsel to God's people was for them to stay the course set by the wisdom of God. His instruction was for God's people to remain clear-headed. Alcohol and substance abuse can cut short a person's potential and hope-filled future. Solomon petitioned God's people to not associate with those who drink too much wine or with those who gorge themselves on meat. Both drunkenness and gluttony can lead to poverty of body and soul. Both alcohol and food sometimes function as medicines that numb us to the difficulties and pains of life. God's people are to trust God in difficult times, not turning to vices such as alcohol or overeating for comfort in the process. The numbing effects of drunkenness and overeating are only short-term fixes for what may be a set of long-term problems. When the effects of self-medication and gluttony are gone, the problems will remain. In our culture, we tend to abhor drunkenness, but we don't usually have the same attitude about gluttony. However, God's wisdom at work in us prompts us to treat both of them in the same way. Instead of giving in to them, we handle our difficult trials by trusting the Lord to help us to get through the challenges of life.

In what ways are alcoholism and gluttony two approaches for dealing with the same issues? To what examples can you point?

Day 3: God's people should avoid self-medication.

Read Proverbs 23:19-21, contemplating again what the Bible says about alcohol.

The consequences of alcohol abuse and gluttony are clear and stark. The consequences are physical, mental, financial, relational, and spiritual. How many lives have been wasted by alcohol and cut short by the effects of unhealthy habits? How many families have been ripped apart? God's people need to stay sharp, focused, and fully engaged in life—living within the guidelines of God's wisdom. Alcohol and food abuse diminish this possibility. Therefore, Solomon petitioned God's people to demonstrate wisdom and accountability in these two areas of life.

What The Bible Says About Gluttony and Alcohol

- Warnings against gluttony: Prov. 23:1-3,20-21; 28:7
- Warnings against alcohol: Prov. 23:29-35; 1 Cor. 5:11; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:18
- The physical effects of alcohol: Job 12:25; Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35
- The mental effects of alcohol: Hosea 4:11
- The spiritual effects of alcohol (deadens one's self to God): Isa. 5:11-12
- Cases of drunkenness in the Bible: Noah (Gen. 9:21); Lot (Gen. 19:33); Nabal (1 Sam. 25:36); Uriah the Hethite (2 Sam. 11:13); Elah, king of Israel (1 Kings 16:9); Ben-Hadad (1 Kings 20:16)
- The alternative to drunkenness: Be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18)
- God gave us our bodies and wants us to honor Him with our bodies (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Why are drunkenness and gluttony displeasing to God?

Day 4: Addiction is painful for individuals and families.

Read Proverbs 23:29-32, identifying the affects of alcohol abuse.

The thought of escaping from the troubles of life by indulging in self-medication only adds to the initial allure, but the temptations offered by the abuse of alcohol will not meet expectations. The consequences of alcohol abuse are many and varied: the loss of reason, abusive and belligerent behavior, and even the open demonstration of the physical signs of alcohol abuse. The culture in which we live today is inundated with all kinds of advertisements about consumption of alcohol. What is missing is the downside. Those who abuse alcohol are portrayed as the people who are living the good life. What needs to be talked about are the ravaging effects of alcohol and other addictive substances on both individuals and families.

What actions might a person need to take so they don't find themselves in the picture painted by addiction?

Day 5: Give control of your body to the Lord.

Read Proverbs 23:33-35, noting the experience Solomon describes.

Only one thing matters for a person suffering from addiction. Not even being struck or beaten would be of greater concern. The pressing problem has to do with getting another drink. That need alone would prompt someone who's drunk to wake up from the stupor brought on by the alcohol. Waking up would be difficult because the influence of alcohol would be potent. However, a person in search of another drink would work hard to get out of bed and look for another drink.

With this description, the problem of alcohol and drug abuse has been underscored for believers. Without question, the addictive behaviors and the consequences of alcohol and substance abuse can be devastating. Solomon's description in these verses of alcohol's effects challenge us to give the control of our bodies to the Lord alone.

Which image in the description makes the greatest impact on you? Explain.



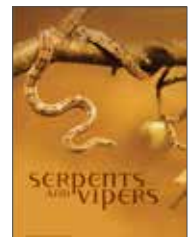
TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Proverbs 23, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

What are the dangers of looking to things other than God for our hope and security?

Why did Solomon warn against associating with heavy drinkers and gluttons? How is this reconciled with Jesus' example of eating with sinners?

How can we take these warnings seriously while also loving those people who struggle with addiction?



For additional context, read "Serpents and Vipers," available digitally in the Summer 2020 *Biblical Illustrator for Explore the Bible* at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Accepting Discipline

God uses discipline from society, family, and others to shape His people.

Proverbs 29:1-3,12-20



Is discipline essential for the spiritual growth and development of God's people? Explain.

Mention the word discipline and people give you all kinds of reactions. To many, discipline connotes drudgery. But few things happen in life that are fruitful and meaningful that do not involve discipline. The athlete, the scientist, the theologian, and the businessman must be disciplined and focused if they are to succeed. In the same way, believers should welcome discipline for the purpose of holiness.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Apparently, some of the wise sayings of Solomon were collected under the reign of King Hezekiah (Prov. 25:1). Hezekiah ruled Judah from 715-686 BC, over 200 years after the reign of Solomon. He is credited with reviving Judah's spiritual and religious life (see 2 Kings 18:3-7). It has been suggested that Hezekiah used the wisdom of Solomon as a part of the spiritual renewal of Judah.

Hezekiah's collection of Solomon's proverbs (chaps. 25-29) gives us insights from God's wisdom that enable us to make right decisions. It also provides us with the description of a fool, a sluggard, a busybody, and a liar. A fool is someone who rejects God's wisdom (Prov. 26:1-12). A sluggard is a person who personifies laziness (26:13-16). A busybody is an individual who meddles in the quarrels of others, spreads rumors, and loves to gossip (26:17-22). A liar is portrayed as a phony who will eventually be trapped in the snare that his or her lies have set (26:23-28).

The collection also includes a series of proverbs that shed light on how to deal with difficult people (27:3-4), how to identify and maintain authentic friendships (27:5-10), and the value of discipline (29:15-18). Discipline is the focus of this week's study from the Book of Proverbs.

PROVERBS 29:1-3,12-20

- 1** One who becomes stiff-necked, after many reprimands will be **shattered** **A** instantly—beyond recovery.
- 2** When the righteous flourish, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, people groan.
- 3** A man who loves wisdom brings joy to his father, but one who consorts with prostitutes **destroys his wealth** **B**. ...

- 12** If a ruler listens to lies, all his **officials** **C** will be wicked.
- 13** The poor and the oppressor have this in common: the Lord gives **light to the eyes** **D** of both.
- 14** A king who judges the poor with fairness—his throne will be **established forever** **E**.
- 15** A **rod of correction** **F** imparts wisdom, but a youth left to himself is a disgrace to his mother.
- 16** When the wicked increase, rebellion increases, but the righteous will see their downfall.
- 17** Discipline your child, and it will bring you peace of mind and give you delight.
- 18** Without revelation people run wild, but one who follows divine instruction will be happy.
- 19** A servant cannot be disciplined by words; though he understands, he doesn't respond.
- 20** Do you see someone who speaks too soon? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Passage Outline

- The Goal
(Prov. 29:1-3)
- The Availability
(Prov. 29:12-14)
- The Responsibility
(Prov. 29:15-17)
- The Source
(Prov. 29:18-20)

Keywords

- A. The consequence of persisting in sin and refusing to repent.
- B. Wasting wealth shamefully betrays one's family and risks respectable standing in the community.
- C. Those who give personal service, often to a person of high rank (Gen. 39:4; Josh. 1:1)
- D. God gives life to all people regardless of their status or situations (Job 33:30).
- E. The security and duration of an administration depends on their obedience to God's standards.
- F. Refers to the process of corrective discipline. "Correction" is translated "reprimand" in 29:1.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Solomon began with a solemn warning, alerting God's people that if they developed an attitude of stubbornness and rebellion they would be *shattered*. Just as something brittle can be easily broken, Solomon warned that God's judgment of *stiff-necked* people would be sudden and shattering. Yet God is gracious in that He will give *many reprimands* prior to His judgment. He shows His grace by breaking down our stubbornness through His loving but firm discipline. The outcome for a person who rejects God's wisdom stands in stark contrast to the future for God's people who have placed their trust in Him.

How does knowing the results of a disciplined lifestyle help a person continue in that lifestyle?

Wisdom (*light*) is available to all people. Biblical theologians speak of general revelation. This is God's revelation of Himself in general through His creation, reason, or other means that are common to all humans. (See Rom. 1:20.) There is no excuse for foolish living or leading.

How does knowing that God's wisdom is available to all people bring encouragement?

KEY DOCTRINE: Family Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth (Deut. 6:4-9).

Solomon reminded parents of their responsibility to discipline their children. Failing to do so creates a selfish and wicked generation that will be outlived by the righteous.

How are societal norms a gauge of the type of parenting taking place within that society?

To what level do you agree that the lack of parental discipline of a child is a reflection of the lack of discipline in the parent's personal life? Explain.

BIBLE SKILL: Use a compare/contrast chart to study a passage. Develop a compare/contrast chart. On one side of a vertical line, write the words and phrases in Proverbs 29:1-3,12-20 that provide instructions for parents about disciplining their children. On the other side, note the words and phrases in Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21 in which Paul instructed parents on how to bring up their children in the Lord. What insights did you gain from this comparison?

Solomon pointed to God's revelation as the standard for discipline. He reminded his readers that words alone do not constitute wisdom, but acting on those words is required. The person who heeds instruction avoids the folly of acting with haste.

How does a commitment to God's Word help a person avoid acting in haste?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers are to grow in righteousness, learning from any discipline received in the past.
- God’s wisdom is available to all people.
- Parents are to discipline their children, teaching them God’s wisdom.
- God’s Word provides a basis for determining wise action.

What role does discipline play in your development as a believer and in righteousness? Who has God used to help instill that discipline in you? Thank God for the people you identified.

As a group, discuss ways people can disguise and cloak God’s wisdom. What can the group do to help God’s wisdom be revealed and accessible to all people?

Evaluate your commitment to studying God’s Word and applying the wisdom you discover. What actions do you need to take to more fully interact with God’s Word and put what you discover into practice?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Living with discipline allows us to flourish.

Read Proverbs 29:1-3, identifying the differences in the one who is “stiff-necked” and the one who loves wisdom.

Those who walk with God will *flourish* as the Lord works in them. As a result, their families and their communities will *rejoice*. When the righteous walk in God’s wisdom, everyone benefits.

Conversely, the individual who lives an undisciplined life and makes foolish choices depletes the family of its resources. That person can expect a heartbreaking fate. Self-indulgence puts people on a path of living that is focused on satisfying their lusts. The expression of lust in verse 3 happens to be prostitutes, but lust takes many forms. Whatever its form, the outcome takes the shape of destruction.

Too often we view discipline as a penalty rather than a benefit. But when we say no to one thing we are saying yes to something else. The athlete says no to unhealthy food so he can say yes to finishing a marathon. The farmer says no to prolonged naps at harvest time so he can say yes to ingathering the harvest. Living with discipline puts us in the position to flourish spiritually and relationally.

How does knowing the results of a disciplined lifestyle help you continue to live a disciplined lifestyle?

Day 2: God’s wisdom is available to all people.

Read Proverbs 29:12-14, highlighting verse 14.

These verses remind us of the influence of leadership. A ruler in the days of Solomon had the power to influence the lives of everyone under his reign. Citizens didn’t have a voice in their government. They had no other choice but to submit to their ruler’s authority. In such a setting, the integrity of the ruler made a huge difference in whether the people under his authority would be treated well or mistreated. Accordingly, if he listened to godly advice, he would be encouraged to make decisions that would be marked by a commitment to be upright. However, if he brought corrupt advisers into his administration who told him lies, he would be prone to making bad choices.

How does knowing that God’s wisdom is available to all people bring you encouragement?

Day 3: Boundaries are necessary to mature.

Read Proverbs 29:15-17, considering the advice on discipline given to parents.

Disciplining a child does not warrant abusing a child. The two are not the same. To discipline a child is to find age-appropriate ways, both positive and negative, to correct bad behavior and to reward good behavior. Discipline is nurturing, instructive, corrective, and boundary setting. Sadly, too many parents raise undisciplined children who bring dishonor to their families. Gracious but firm discipline may be the most loving posture parents can take toward their children. Solomon added that the disciplining of a child is not only good for the child, it gives the parent peace of mind and brings delight to the soul of a parent.

This reminds us that discipline benefits both the child and the parent. Parents are responsible to raise their children with loving but firm discipline. The child's responsibility is to respond to that discipline with respect and obedience. Notice the domino effect of failing to discipline a child: (1) the wicked increase, (2) rebellion against the law of God then multiplies, which (3) ends in the downfall of the wicked. This is true of society as a whole, and it is true in the family where loving discipline is absent. Children, whether they want to admit it or not, need and want loving discipline. Security is found in discipline. Setting boundaries can be unpleasant for both the parent and the child, but boundaries and discipline are necessary for the maturing of a child into an adult.

How are societal norms a gauge of the type of parenting taking place within our society? What correcting actions can you facilitate?

Day 4: Faith in God is demonstrated through obedience.

Read Proverbs 29:18-19, noticing the benefits of discipline.

Notice the logical progression of thought in these verses. First of all, true wisdom and discipline begin with the *revelation* of God's truth. The revelation of God keeps His people from running wild and enables them to live with joy. The Bible is the true and trustworthy revelation of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It is the all-sufficient source of wisdom that reveals the principles by which God judges us. The Word of God is the standard by which all human conduct and opinions should be tried.

Second, God's revealed truth must be put into action. Words alone do not produce wise or disciplined living; obedience does. Faith and trust in God's Word is demonstrated through obedient action, as verse 19 points out. Faith in God's Word is meaningless without obedience to God's Word. Sinners are saved by faith alone in Christ alone, but faith is more than mere words and is never void of actions.

How would you explain the importance of obedience that results from faith?

Day 5: Listening to God requires quietness.

Read Proverbs 29:20, noting the benefit of not acting hastily.

Verse 20 points to an obstacle that prevents us from receiving God's Word. We can't listen to God when we're unable to be quiet. A person who *speaks too soon* is someone who is too hasty when it comes to talking.

When we think about our conversations with God, we're foolish if we don't learn the discipline of being quiet and listening to Him. In fact, we're worse than fools. Foolish people listen, but they listen to the wrong voices. However, they have the potential for listening to God and turning to Him. A person who can't be quiet doesn't have that possibility. *Hope* is squandered by an unwillingness to be quiet long enough to listen.

How does a commitment to God's Word help you avoid acting in haste?



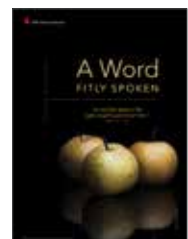
TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Proverbs 29, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

What happens when we ignore discipline? What can make it difficult to accept discipline?

How does the morality of leaders affect those serving under them?

How is discipline connected to a child's relationship to God?



For additional context, read "A Word Fitly Spoken" in the Summer 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Session 11

Finding Honor

God recognizes those who faithfully demonstrate His wisdom in their lives.

Proverbs 31:10-16,23-31



**Share about a time when you became aware that someone was watching you.
How did you respond when you realized they were doing so?**

Most of us go through our days and carry out our tasks without thinking somebody may be watching us. We would be surprised if we found out somebody had been watching us while we go through the day. We would be even more shocked if our observer addressed how we managed our time and the specific challenges we faced.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Chapters 30 and 31 of Proverbs appear to be in contrast but related to each other. The sayings of Proverbs 30 are identified as the sayings of Agur, son of Jakeh (Prov. 30:1). Some scholars have suggested Agur was a nickname for King Solomon. Others have suggested Agur was a close confidante of Solomon, a type of ancient secretary who recorded the sayings of Solomon. Still others have argued that Agur was a man of the Massa tribe located in the northwestern section of Arabia, again a wise sage associated with Solomon's administration. Agur seems to have been an associate of Solomon and influenced by Solomon's wisdom.

Proverbs 31 records the wisdom of King Lemuel (and his mother; 31:1) in clear terms. It is not clear who Lemuel was or where he ruled as a king. Again, what matters is that Lemuel's wisdom is associated with Solomon.

Proverbs 30 and 31 give evidence of Solomon's wisdom in surrounding himself with men of wisdom. What can also be seen in both chapters is the kind of wisdom that leads to nobility, dignity, integrity, and honor. The wisdom of Agur and Lemuel, associates of Solomon, is laid out in clear terms—men and women of God not only understand the wisdom of God, they apply the wisdom of God to daily living.

PROVERBS 31:10-16,23-31

10 Who can find a wife of noble character?
She is far more precious than jewels.

11 The heart of her husband trusts in her,
and he **will not lack** **A** anything **good** **B**.

12 She rewards him with good, not evil,
all the days of her life.

13 She selects wool and flax
and works with willing hands.

14 She is like the **merchant ships** **C**,
bringing her food from far away.

15 She rises while it is still night
and provides food for her household
and **portions for her female servants** **D**.

16 She evaluates a field and buys it;
she plants a vineyard with her earnings. ...

23 Her husband is known at the city gates,
where he sits among the elders of the land.

24 She makes and sells linen garments;
she delivers belts to the merchants.

25 Strength and honor are her clothing,
and she can laugh at the time to come.

26 Her mouth speaks wisdom,
and loving instruction is on her tongue.

27 She watches over the activities of her household
and is never idle.

28 Her children rise up and call her blessed;
her husband also praises her:

29 “Many women have done noble deeds,
but you surpass them all!”

30 Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting,
but a woman who **fears the LORD** **E** will be praised.

Passage Outline

Commitment to Her
Husband (Prov. 31:10-12)

Wise in Her Work
(Prov. 31:13-16)

Sure in Her Reputation
(Prov. 31:23-27)

Honored through Fearing
God (Prov. 31:28-31)

Keywords

A. The verb conveys the adequacy of God’s grace in meeting His people’s needs. Here the husband’s abundance from God comes through his God-fearing wife.

B. “Spoil” (KJV). The husband’s gain from his wife’s labors parallels the bounty of the spoils of war.

C. Simile meaning the wife goes wherever she needs to go to gather abundant food for her household

D. Either the wife sees that the servant girls have a fair share of breakfast, or she gives them their assigned tasks for the day.

E. Sons should look for this quality in a wife: “[reverently worshiping, obeying, serving, and trusting Him with awe-filled respect]” (AMP).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Lemuel characterized an excellent wife as one who has gained the trust of her husband. This kind of familial and relational trust begins with recognizing the inestimable value of a godly woman. The character of a noble wife enables her husband to trust her with the most intimate details of life. The kind of commitment that should exist between a husband and wife is a matter of the heart. Godly wisdom is a matter of both the mind and the heart, as we have seen previously in Proverbs (see 3:1).

How does the keeping of the marriage commitment bring honor to God? To the family?

We must not devalue the quality and quantity of work required to administer a successful home where everyone flourishes. Lemuel pointed to the savvy and prudence of the wife who wisely provides for her family's needs. The business acumen, entrepreneurial spirit, and wise decision-making of the woman in Proverbs 31 is breathtaking. Lemuel does not picture a woman who dutifully remains quiet and disengaged.

What characteristic identified by Lemuel most demonstrates godly wisdom? Explain. How does the portrait of a godly woman painted in this passage compare to how society defines a successful woman today?

Verses 23-27 emphasize the character of a godly woman. It is this kind of woman who builds up her husband, blesses her children, benefits all with whom she is associated, even benefiting the whole of God's people. Conduct is one thing, but character is quite another. Lemuel's description of a godly woman is grounded in the truth that right conduct comes out of right character.

What happens when character is disconnected from conduct, even if the conduct is right?

Lemuel noted that an excellent wife will be honored in a variety of ways. First, she is honored by *her children*. Second, she is praised by *her husband*. Third, she is honored when others recognize her work as valuable. Fourth, she is honored by the recognition of the nature of true *beauty*. Fifth, she is honored when she is praised because she *fears the LORD*. Finally, she is honored by both private and public recognition of her wise behavior.

What are some appropriate ways of honoring women in society?

KEY DOCTRINE: Man The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created humans in His own image, and in that Christ died for humans; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love (Gen. 1:26-30).

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers are to honor their marriage commitments.
- Believers are to wisely provide for the needs of their families.
- Believers are to use their influence for the kingdom.
- Believers are to honor God with their lives.

As a group, discuss ways of encouraging all married couples to live out their marriage vows. What can the group do to help husbands and wives honor God in their marriages?

List the needs of your family, including spiritual needs. What actions can you take to help meet the needs you identified?

As you go through the week, note people you influence. How are you influencing the people you listed to honor God? What needs to change for you to have a greater influence on others for God's honor?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: A wife with noble character is critical to marriage success.

Read Proverbs 31:10, underlining the phrase “noble character.”

Lemuel’s question—*Who can find a wife of noble character?*—implied that finding a wife of noble character was a rarity. Further, Lemuel argued that finding a woman of noble character is *far more precious than jewels*. Recognizing the inestimable value of a godly woman is critical to the success of a marriage built on mutual love and respect. Just as a successful, God-glorifying marriage requires the humble, servant leadership of a godly husband, so too it requires the character and commitment of a godly woman.

BIBLE SKILL: Read, reflect on, and respond emotionally to a Bible verse. As you read Proverbs 31:10, notice the descriptive details that distinguish a woman of noble character, and spend time reflecting on how those traits would be displayed by a Christian woman who lives in today’s world. Make notes of your reflections. Take the time to “find” the woman in your life who has exhibited in the most complete way the character traits described in the Bible passage. Be sure to thank the Lord for her.

Consider the women in your life. Who would you describe as being of noble character? Why?

Day 2: A godly marriage serves as a strong testimony to the power of God.

Read Proverbs 31:11-12, identifying the characteristics of a godly marriage.

The wisdom of God works on the heart to align it with God’s great purposes for the benefit of others. Lemuel explained that a noble wife enriches her husband’s life in more ways than he could ever imagine. Because of her commitment to her marriage and to him, he will not lack anything good. The value of a godly woman is not measured in terms of worldly success but in terms of her godly character. The elevated role God has given to her is to partner with her husband in building a home where all who are associated with that home are blessed, supported, and encouraged. A good and godly marriage serves as a strong testimony to the power of God. The wisdom of God teaches that (1) the most important person in a home ought to be Jesus Christ; (2) the most important earthly relationship in the home is that of the husband and wife; and (3) the most important responsibility in the home is the raising of godly children, if God blesses that home with children. A godly home is a reflection of the person and work of Jesus Christ among His people (Eph. 5:22-33).

How does the keeping of the marriage commitment bring honor to God? To the family?

Day 3: A godly woman is worthy of honor for her work.

Read Proverbs 31:13-16, considering the work of the woman.

The productivity of a godly woman is remarkable:

- *She selects wool and flax.* The woman was engaged in the economy as she selected and purchased the commodities and items for her family. She knew what these commodities cost and how they benefited her family.
- *She works with willing hands.* She works willingly, not begrudgingly as if what she is doing for her family must be tolerated and endured so she can get to the really important stuff according to the world.
- *She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from far away.* Lemuel pictured a godly woman as one seeking out the resources necessary for her family.
- A godly woman is not idle or lazy. *She rises while it is still night and provides food for her household and portions for her female servants.* In other words, a Proverbs 31 woman rises early, works hard, and manages other people besides herself.
- Further, she bought and purchased land and commodities and invested in those things that produced food and provided for her family.
- She earned money, wisely investing what she made in things that benefited her family.

How does the portrait of a godly woman painted in this passage compare to how you define a successful woman today?

Day 4: A godly woman is a benefit to her husband.

Read Proverbs 31:23-27, recognizing characteristics of the wife's character.

Because of his wife, the husband would be considered one of the wise elders of the city whom everyone respected. A godly woman is a benefit to her husband. As a godly woman, she is known in the marketplace as she *makes and sells linen garments*. She engages in commerce with integrity. The foundation of her behavior is identified in verse 25: *Strength and honor are her clothing*. Rather than being defined by the beauty of her clothing (though she may dress in style) she is clothed with things that never go out of style—strength, honor, and dignity. A godly woman is ready for the future because she has planned for it, and so *she can laugh at the time to come*. Lemuel also recognized that a godly woman was a teacher, speaking wisdom and giving instruction to all within her sphere of influence. Finally, she carefully watched over *the activities of her household*; she was *never idle*.

How does the excellent wife gain influence and honor in the community?

Day 5: God honors the life of a God-fearing woman.

Read Proverbs 31:28-31, noting how the wife is honored.

How is such a woman to be honored? Lemuel noted that an excellent wife will be honored in a variety of ways. First, she is honored by her children. Nothing satisfies a mother more than when her children love and appreciate her. Second, she is praised by her husband. A husband honors his wife as he loves, covers, protects, appreciates, and applauds her work. Third, she is honored when others recognize her work as valuable. Fourth, she is honored by the recognition of the nature of true beauty. Physical appearance and good health is valuable, but godliness is better and more lasting. Fifth, she is honored when she is praised because she fears the Lord. If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of true wisdom (Prov. 1:7), then a woman who fears the Lord will not only live wisely but will gain the approval of other wise and godly people. Finally, she is honored by both private and public recognition of her wise behavior. Lemuel was wise enough to know that many people honor all the wrong things. God honors the godly, honorable, and dignified way of living that is exhibited in the life of a God-fearing woman. We are to honor what God honors—a godly woman who fears the Lord.

What are appropriate ways of honoring women in your life?



TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Proverbs 31, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

How do these verses describe a healthy marriage commitment?

How can we view the call to provide for others as a good gift?

How do these verses serve as a celebration of the impact of women in society?



For additional context, read “Food Storage and Preservation in the Ancient Near East,” available digitally in the Summer 2020 *Biblical Illustrator for Explore the Bible* at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Session 12

Relational Foundations

God created humans to be relational, with the greatest relationship being between Him and His people.

Song of Songs 2:15–3:5



How would you describe to a child God's purposes in making people? What would you point to when explaining the difference between humans and animals?

Children are told that God made their hands for holding crayons, not hitting their siblings. Children may also be reminded that He made their teeth for chewing, not biting. Furthermore, they may be taught that He made their hearts for loving others, not hating them. When we give ourselves to Christ, we become God's children. In His wisdom, He tells us that He made our lives for sharing with others, not hoarding for ourselves. That's why healthy relationships matter.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The Song of Songs (sometimes called the Song of Solomon) is God's wise counsel regarding love and relational intimacy. The book is a poetic chronicle of Solomon's romantic relationship with the woman in the poem. Solomon speaks as the man. The poem includes four other voices: the woman, the young women, the narrator, and the brothers. The five voices blend together to produce rich insights into God's wisdom regarding relationships, love, romance, and marriage.

The Song of Songs reminds the reader that sexual intimacy is not the creation of the evil one, but the sweet and intimate gift of God between a husband and wife. It is to be cherished and protected. Hebrews 13:4 states, "Marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers." Marriage, and the sexual fidelity required of a successful marriage, must be developed and protected at all costs.

Solomon challenged God's people to embrace a sexual ethic that is grounded in fidelity and discretion. He was not bashful in describing the range of emotions experienced within marriage. The Song of Songs can make a person blush. However, Solomon made it clear to God's people as to what would happen when sexual intimacy is misused. Just as rightly expressed sexual passions can build a relationship, so too can the misuse and misguided use of sexual passions tear down and destroy a marital relationship.

SONG OF SONGS 2:15–3:5

2:15 Catch the **foxes** **A** for us—
the little foxes that ruin the **vineyards** **B**—
for our vineyards are in **bloom** **C**.

16 My love is mine and I am his;
he **feeds among the lilies** **D**.

17 Until the day breaks
and the shadows flee,
turn around, my love, and be like **a gazelle**
or a young stag **E** on the divided mountains.

3:1 In my **bed at night** **F**
I sought the one I love;
I sought him, but did not find him.

2 I will arise now and go about the city,
through the streets and the plazas.
I will seek the one I love.

I sought him, but did not find him.

3 The guards who go about the city found me.
I asked them, “Have you seen the one I love?”

4 I had just passed them
when I found the one I love.

I held on to him and would not let him go
until I brought him to my mother’s house—
to the chamber of the one who conceived me.

5 Young women of Jerusalem, I charge you
by the gazelles and the wild does of the field,
do not stir up or awaken love
until the appropriate time.

Passage Outline

Preventative Care
(Song of Sg. 2:15)

Build Trust
(Song of Sg. 2:16-17)

Restraint Required
(Song of Sg. 3:1-5)

Keywords

- A. Figuratively represents anything that might separate the lovers and harm their love
- B. A metaphor for the woman’s own body in 1:6; in the plural, it could refer to their physical attraction
- C. Implies figuratively both the initial stages of the romantic love relationship and the beauty of the two lovers when they’re most attracted to each other
- D. “Delighting in the flowers” (The Message); figuratively means the bride is ready for the groom to enjoy the pleasures she, the lily (2:1-2), offers him
- E. Word pictures for the groom (2:9), emphasizing his vigor, agility, beauty, and grace
- F. Suggests the woman is having a dream—or a nightmare—in which she can’t find her beloved

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Solomon's love poem tells the story about his romantic relationship with the Shulammitte woman (6:13), the love of his life who would become his wife. Like other love poems, it's written with a rich blend of literal and figurative language. Interpreting parts of the poem that have been written using figurative language can be challenging at times.

Despite a variety of interpretations of verse 15, the term *vineyards* refers to marriage. *In bloom* refers to the beauty before the harvest, referencing the beauty of two lovers anticipating marriage. The term *foxes* or *little foxes* hints at anything that could be harmful to the marriage. Just as a fox must be caught before it ruins a vineyard, so too must a marriage be protected from those things that can wreck and ruin a marriage relationship.

What kinds of things might be considered “little foxes” that can harm a marriage? What are some ways of “catching” those foxes?

KEY DOCTRINE: Man God created humans male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation (Gen 1:26-27).

Trust is needed to sustain marriage. Notice how dedicated this soon-to-be husband and wife were to each other. Marriage requires a mutual commitment to each other.

How are mutual trust and submission related? Can you have one without the other? Explain.

The trust called for between a man and a woman creates oneness. Oneness refers to the mental, spiritual, physical, emotional, and relational unity that is reserved for marriage alone.

What can married couples do to build trust?

The woman continues to speak in these verses. She expressed her longing to be with her future husband. In doing so, she included a reminder that one must be careful to avoid sexual temptation outside of the marriage relationship (v. 5).

How does a person rationalize or justify sexual infidelity? What do these efforts to justify infidelity reveal about the person and about our world in general?

Solomon understood that sexual passions can be strong, almost overwhelming. Thus he warned God's people to *not stir up or awaken love until the appropriate time*.

What are the dangers of living an undisciplined life as far as sexual desires are concerned? What's the best way to teach the valuable lesson about sexual restraint so other believers put it into practice?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers are to be careful to protect marriages.
- Marriages grow through mutual submission.
- God created sex to be enjoyed exclusively with the marriage relationship.

Discuss actions the group could take to protect marriage. What actions may need to be taken as a result of the group discussion?

How would you rate the level of godly character and respect you demonstrate toward your spouse (if married) and toward people of the opposite sex? What actions do you need to take to increase your level of godly character and respect demonstrated?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Guarding your marriage is high priority.

Read Song of Songs 2:15, considering the imagery.

Verse 15 happens to be one of those passages that can be difficult to interpret properly. Solomon used the image of a fox ruining a vineyard. What does this verse mean in relationship to marriage and romance? The figurative language makes it full of possible implications for God's people. Bible teachers have offered a variety of possible interpretations. The wisest approach to interpreting this verse starts with an understanding that God's people who live according to His wisdom protect their relationships with each other. Guarding relationships becomes necessary when we realize that predators abound. They can destroy a relationship without anyone knowing the damage they have done until it's too late. The relationship between a husband and wife can be particularly susceptible to predators that can gnaw at a couple's devotion to each other. For that reason, a wise Christian couple makes guarding their marriage a high priority.

What "little foxes" have you seen harm a marriage? What are some ways of "catching" those foxes?

Day 2: God intends a married couple to share deep intimacy.

Read Song of Songs 2:16-17, recognizing the commitment shared.

The woman is the speaker in verses 16-17. In verse 17 she looks forward to how their intimacy would be expressed after they married. *Until the day breaks* anticipates that day. Her description reveals both anticipation and trust. The *gazelle* or *young stag* portrays the man who's passionate about the intimacy that he anticipates sharing with the woman. In turn, she reflects her desire for intimacy with the man by referring to him as her *love*. An anticipation of intimacy flourished in the couple's relationship. Trust, giving way to honor, cultivated a mutual desire for intimacy that remained reserved in their hearts for now.

Trust and respect renders the perfect setting for the depth of intimacy that God intends for a married couple. Trust is the bedrock of true love and marriage fidelity. Once trust is broken it is very difficult to recover.

How are mutual trust and submission related? Can you have one without the other? Explain.

Day 3: A godly marriage is based on oneness.

Read Song of Songs 2:16-17, recalling yesterday's study on the importance of intimacy.

Too often, even in marriage, husbands and wives live separate lives. The husband does his thing, and the wife does her thing. While it is perfectly okay to have separate interests, when a husband and wife become so divided and different in their interests they can grow apart in unhealthy ways. This can be true relationally, physically, and spiritually.

BIBLE SKILL: Use a concordance and/or a Bible dictionary to learn more about a feature of Israel's religious life. Consult a Bible dictionary for articles on the following: marriage, weddings, betrothal, and submission. Make notes on your findings. What were the expectations of the bride and the groom? How does the cultural framework in which Song of Songs was written give insight into sexual purity and marriage commitments?

What can married couples do to build trust?

Day 4: Avoid sexual temptation outside of marriage.

Read Song of Songs 3:1-5, contemplating the woman's search.

These verses tell the story of the woman searching for the one she loved, but she was unable to find him. Again, she referred to him as *the one I love*. (See also 2:17.) She was devoted to him exclusively, and she was eager to give herself to him. When she found him (3:4), she had to make an important decision. She didn't want to be foolish, but she didn't want to lose him again either. She decided she would never let him go away from her. Not having him in her life would not be an option. But pay close attention to the fact that she didn't take him back to her bedroom. Quite the opposite, she took him to the room in her mother's house in which she was born (v. 4). By bringing him there instead of her bedroom, she registered her determination to practice restraint. She was not going to give in to her eagerness to be sexually intimate with him. That kind of intimacy is reserved for marriage.

The pursuit of the bride for her soon-to-be-husband is noble, but her desires for him would only come after their marriage commitment. Avoiding sexual temptation means that natural sexual desires must be directed exclusively toward one's marriage partner, and those same desires must not be fulfilled until a marriage has taken place.

How have you seen a person rationalize or justify sexual infidelity? What do these efforts to justify infidelity reveal about the person and about our world in general?

Day 5: **Protect marriage against sexual temptation.**

Read Song of Songs 3:1-5, noting her charge to protect the marriage relationship.

How can a marriage be protected from the kinds of sexual temptations that can lead to the demise of a marriage? Solomon understood that sexual passions can be strong, almost overwhelming. Thus he warned God's people to not stir up or awaken love until the appropriate time. Sexual desires must be brought and kept under control.

Like the virgin seeking her future husband prior to marriage, so too should the husband and wife continue to desire and pursue each other after they have been married. Doing so will help to protect the marriage against sexual temptation outside of the marital relationship.

What are the dangers of living an undisciplined life as far as sexual desires are concerned?



TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Song of Songs 2 and 3, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

How might God's wisdom guide us in protecting marriages?

How can we heal when trust is broken?

What encouragement is there for those who have given into sexual temptation outside of marriage?



For additional context, read "Marriage in the Ancient Near East" in the Summer 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Relational Investment

Just as a couple must invest in their relationship, believers must also invest in their relationship with God.

Song of Songs 5:6-16



How might a person's investments reveal their stage in life? What might a person's investments reveal about their priorities?

When we're young, we tend to invest in diplomas, careers, and cars. If we have enough resources, we might make investments in fitness center memberships or golf clubs. As we get older, we make different kinds of investments. We're inclined to invest in mutual funds or retirement plans. Our needs change across time and so do our perspectives on what matters most. Whether we're young or old, however, we're wise when we see the value of investing in relationships, beginning with our relationship with God.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Chapters 5–8 of the Song of Songs bring to mind God's directive about marriage, in which He declared that the two—husband and wife—would become one (Gen. 2:24). The man and the woman in the poem got married, and now they're learning how to live as one as they grow in their relationship. Some readers of Song of Songs might ask why Solomon was so expressive about God's gift of sexual intimacy. Solomon reclaimed the truth about sex. Sexual expression and intimacy between a husband and wife is a gift from God. Rather than something to be discarded as a creation of a sinful world, Solomon wanted God's people to know that sexual intimacy was God's gift to humanity from the very beginning of time.

God's people also need to know that the ultimate goal of sexual intimacy is not the sexual expression itself. Rather, the ultimate goal is to build a true and lasting relationship that brings glory to God and leads to family and human flourishing. When the gift of sexual intimacy is properly enjoyed and protected, everyone benefits: husbands and wives benefit as their relationship with each other deepens; children benefit as their moms and dads are secure, happy, and fulfilled in their marriage; the church and society benefit from homes that are stable. God desires for us to invest in building strong marriage relationships.

SONG OF SONGS 5:6-16

6 I opened to my love,
but my love had turned and gone away.
My heart sank because he had left.
I sought him, but did not find him.
I called him, but he did not answer.

7 The guards who go about the city found me.
They **beat and wounded me** **A**;
they took my cloak from me—
the guardians of the walls.

8 Young women of Jerusalem, I charge you,
if you find my love,
tell him that I am lovesick.

9 What makes the one you love better than another,
most beautiful of women?
What makes him better than another,
that you would give us this charge?

10 My love is fit and strong,
notable among **ten thousand** **B**.

11 His head is purest gold.
His hair is wavy and black as a raven.

12 His eyes are like doves beside flowing streams,
washed in milk and set like jewels.

13 His cheeks are like beds of spice,
mounds of perfume.
His lips are lilies,
dripping with flowing myrrh.

14 His arms are **rods of gold set with beryl** **C**.
His body is an ivory panel
covered with lapis lazuli.

15 His legs are alabaster pillars
set on pedestals of pure gold.
His presence is like **Lebanon** **D**,
as majestic as the cedars.

16 His mouth is sweetness.
He is absolutely desirable.
This is my love, and this is my **friend** **E**,
young women of Jerusalem.

Passage Outline

The Cry for Companionship
(Song of Sg. 5:6-8)

The Call for Remembering
(Song of Sg. 5:9)

The Crux for Celebrating
(Song of Sg. 5:10-16)

Keywords

- A. Literally, the watchmen might have thought the wife was a prostitute since she was wandering alone in the night. Figuratively, the words reflect the woman's own sense of failure and guilt for not responding quickly to her husband's knock (5:2).
- B. A number used in Hebrew poetry to make comparisons; refers to an indefinite, large number of people (Gen. 24:60; Ps. 91:7); implies no other man could compare to the husband
- C. A metaphor describing how the wife values her husband's touch.
- D. The cedars of Lebanon symbolize beauty and majesty.
- E. The relationship between the wife and her husband isn't merely physical. It includes commitment and trust, as well as delight in each other.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

The bride arose to open the door for her husband to enter, only to find he was not there.

How might the failure of a spouse to meet the emotional needs of the other lead to greater issues?

What happened when the new bride could not find her husband? Unmet needs and desires in a marriage can end in tragedy. The bride, seeking her husband, was met with abuse.

KEY DOCTRINE: The Christian and Social Order In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography (1 Cor. 6:18-20).

So desperate was this young bride for the companionship of her husband that she sent out a “missing person’s report” across the city.

How might the spouse’s search for companionship be compared to a person’s search for God and meaning?

The young women’s response to the bride challenged her to remember why she was attracted to her husband in the first place. Why did she choose her husband over all the other men in town? What made him stand out? What caused her to love him above all others? These kinds of questions led her to charge the women of the city to inform her absentee husband that she was still lovesick over him.

What is the value of retelling stories when it comes to building and maintaining relationships?

The bride recounted the admirable characteristics of her husband. In so doing, she is seen as reaffirming her love for him. Love between a husband and wife will take the form of encouragement.

What are some appropriate ways for husbands and wives to express their admiration for each other?

BIBLE SKILL: Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.

Reflect on Genesis 2:24 and God’s intention for marriages to be characterized by lasting devotion. Jot down impressions about investment in marriage that come to mind from this verse. Look at occasions when Genesis 2:24 was quoted, including Matthew 19:5 and Ephesians 5:31. Be sure to read the passages around these verses. What insights do you gain about marriage and the purposes of marriage from these passages? How do these verses give you insight into Song of Songs 5?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Godly marriages should be characterized by mutual moral and emotional support.
- Godly marriages are founded on a commitment to remain faithful to each other throughout life.
- Godly marriages include mutual affirmation of one's spouse.

Discuss as a group ways of responding to abuse. How can the group provide support to people experiencing abuse or who have experienced abuse?

List reasons for being involved in a relationship. What role does God play in the reasons you listed? What adjustments do you need to make to this list in light of today's study?

If you are married, determine one action you will take this week to affirm your husband or wife. If you are single, determine one way of affirming others in their marriage relationships.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Spouses must seek to meet each other's needs.

Read Song of Songs 5:6, noting the wife's distress.

This tragic scene pictures a bride seeking her husband, and he was nowhere to be found. It describes the longing of a woman for the partnership and companionship of her husband. Solomon used vivid terms to address the hurt and harm this bride experienced by her husband's absence. He had *turned and gone away*. Her *heart sank ... he did not answer*. How tragic it is when a husband neglects the call to meet the needs of his wife. How equally sad is it when a wife fails to meet the needs of her husband.

How might the failure of a spouse to meet the emotional needs of the other lead to greater issues?

Day 2: Unmet needs in marriage can end in tragedy.

Read Song of Songs 5:7, considering the tragedy she faced.

What happened when the new bride could not find her husband? Unmet needs and desires in a marriage can end in tragedy. The bride, seeking her husband, was met with abuse. Song of Songs 5:7 has been viewed by some as a reference to abuse—maybe even rape—as the city guards *beat and wounded* her and took her *cloak* from her. There is never any excuse for any form of physical or sexual abuse, and any form of other kinds of abuse must never be overlooked or ignored.

That being said, the episode described in these verses could quite possibly reflect a dream. Earlier, the woman talked about a dream in which she searched for the man, the love of her life (3:1-5). Now she recalled another dream in which she looked for her love, who now was her husband. In fact, the description of what happened to the woman in verse 7 strongly gives the impression that she was dreaming. In reality, she married Solomon, the king of Israel. For that reason, she likely would not have been mistreated by the guards. In her dream, however, they wounded her and then disgraced her.

How can miscommunication lead to conflict in marriage?

Day 3: The garden of marriage must be tended every day.

Read Song of Songs 5:8, underlining the word lovesick.

Six times in this chapter the woman referred to her husband as her love. He was the centerpiece of her life, and nothing or nobody could compare to him. She had given herself completely to him, and her deep affection for him would not disintegrate. She was *lovesick*, and she would only be cured by the return of her husband.

The lonely cry of the woman sheds light on the need for married couples to work at their relationship by being present for each other. Marriages get into trouble when spouses are distant emotionally even though they're present physically. Emotional distance stunts the growth of the marital relationship. However, being intentional about being there for each other makes a marriage stronger. To use a Solomon-like metaphor, the garden of marriage must be tended every day.

How might the spouse's search for companionship be compared to a person's search for God and meaning? How does her search help you understand your need for companionship?

Day 4: Remember the reasons that led you to marriage.

Read Song of Songs 5:9, identifying the purpose of the questions.

Relational amnesia can impact a marriage. The numerous reasons a wife or a husband had for entering into a marriage covenant can be forgotten over time. People change, our minds develop in different ways, and our bodies age as the years pass. Unless there is a diligence to remember and guard all the reasons that led a person into a marriage in the first place, the possibilities of the demise of that relationship only increase. By choosing to continually retell their story, a husband and wife can continue to build a successful and long-term marriage.

Love must not be assumed but continually developed and expressed. Remembering why you got into a relationship in the first place can actually help keep you in that relationship.

How has retelling stories help build and maintain your relationships?

Day 5: Spiritual depth is crucial in marriage.

Read Song of Songs 5:10-16, listing the husband's positive attributes.

First, the bride complimented her husband's physical attributes. She complimented his strength (v. 10), hair (v. 11), eyes (v. 12), face and lips (v. 13), arms and body (v. 14), physique and even his physical presence (v. 15), and the sweetness of his kisses (v. 16).

Second, the bride identified her husband as *my friend* (v. 16). This is remarkable. For as much emphasis as the Song of Songs puts on the importance of sexual intimacy between a husband and wife, it is vital for God's people to understand there is more to a successful marriage than sexual intimacy. Friendship, partnership, and companionship are equally important.

Third, the bride's effusive support of her husband and her desire for a true partnership with him speaks of an emotional and spiritual depth that is crucial in a successful marriage. A successful marriage encompasses intimacy, fidelity, and emotional connection.

What are some appropriate ways for husbands and wives to express their admiration for each other?

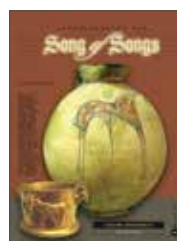
TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Song of Songs 5, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

What types of support do husbands and wives need in marriage?
How can selfishness impact the relationship?

How can we remind each other of God's faithfulness in the past in order to stay committed to God in the present?

Why is it important for spouses to verbalize their feelings?



For additional context, read "Understanding the Song of Songs," an archived *Biblical Illustrator* article provided via digital download in the Summer 2020 *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*.

LEADER HELPS

Using the Daily Discipleship Guide to Lead a Bible Study Group

The *Daily Discipleship Guide* was created for the purpose of building disciples. As the leader of the group, you play a major role. You can build disciples through the group Bible study time, encouraging daily Bible engagement, facilitating smaller groups, and apprenticing future leaders.

Building Disciples through the Group Time

Leading the group Bible study time is the most direct way you will build disciples. Each week, you will introduce the group to the Bible passage, examine the key message in that passage, and challenge the group to act on that passage. Doing so requires preparation. Here is a way to prepare that gives you adequate time to study the lesson and will make the session fresh in your own life.

Early in the Week (Sunday or Monday)

- Ask God to open your mind and heart to His Word as you study.
- Study the Bible passage.
 - Read the passage in your Bible, listing key words, phrases, places, and people.
 - Review the first five pages of the *Daily Discipleship Guide* for that session and the commentary provided in the Leader Helps for that session. On your list, add information discovered about the words, phrases, places, and people listed.
 - Consult the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* for additional insight.
 - Consult *Biblical Illustrator* for articles that give biblical backgrounds to the passage.
 - Listen to the weekly podcast at goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderTraining.
- Pay careful attention to the Apply the Text section for that session, looking for ways you need to apply the Bible in your own life.



Through the Week

- Ask God to direct your creation of the group plan.
- Create a group plan.
 - Review the group plan in the back of the *Daily Discipleship Guide*.
 - Adjust the plan to fit the needs of your group.
 - Consult *QuickSource* for additional ideas.
 - Review the weekly Adult Extra idea on the Explore the Bible blog (goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderHelps).
 - Note: You can create custom plans using the DOC file provided in the digital download file included with the *Leader Pack*—it's the same content printed in the Leader Helps.
- Complete the Daily Exploration activities in the days leading up to the group time.
- Meet with a group of three to four other teachers to share and pray for each other. Use Talk It Out to start your conversation.
- Start gathering items you plan to use in the group time.
- Pull needed posters from the *Explore the Bible: Leader Pack* (or create your own using Visual Ideas on pages 160–161).

The Day before Group Study Time

- Pray for specific group members and their needs.
- Review your group plan, making any additional adjustments.
- Make sure you have all your resources gathered.

The Day of the Group Study Time

- Arrive early.
- Pray for the study and the group members.
- Lead the study, adjusting as you go.

Continued on next page

After the Group Study Time

- Consider the After the Session idea at the end of the group plans.
- Contact all group members, encouraging them to complete the Daily Exploration section and sharing gathered prayer requests and other appropriate information.
- Record insights gained about teaching, group members, and Scripture.
- Do it all again.

Building Disciples by Encouraging Daily Bible Engagement

As teachers, we have taken on the responsibility of encouraging everyone on our ministry list (class roll, membership list, etc.) to engage daily in Bible study. We can't make them do it, but we can provide them with a tool and encourage them to use it.

Here are some ways to encourage your group to engage with the Bible daily.

- **Ask them.** That seems simple, but the simple is not always easy. Learn to comfortably ask if group members are studying the Bible. You may want to use a statement instead of a question, such as, "I hope you took a look at the Day 3 activity for this week." It's a question disguised as a statement, so it's not as threatening.
- **Tell them.** Let them know that you are using the Daily Exploration section as well. Set the standard.
- **Show them.** Point to the Daily Exploration section at the conclusion of the group study. From time to time, demonstrate how to use the section, guiding them through Day 1 as a group.
- **Invite them.** Call on pre-enlisted volunteers to share with the group what they are learning and how they are using the Daily Exploration section.

Building Disciples through Smaller Groups

Peter became the spokesman for the early church, preaching a sermon that registered three thousand decisions in one day. John, the youngest disciple, would live the longest of the Twelve and would be used to write a Gospel and to give us a glimpse into eternity through the Book of Revelation. James, John's older brother, was the first of the Twelve to be martyred. These three men were the three people that Jesus seemed to invest in the most. They were the three taken up to the mountain to see His transfiguration. They were the three called on to go further into the garden as He prayed awaiting His betrayal. The lives and deaths of Peter, James, and John remind us of the importance of smaller groups of three to four meeting to hold each other accountable for spiritual growth.

At the end of every session, you will find a section entitled Talk It Out. This section is designed for smaller groups of three to four people to meet weekly. The goal of the smaller groups is simple: holding ourselves and others accountable for living a Christ-honoring life.

Create smaller groups:

- Explain the importance of the smaller groups, emphasizing the goal.
- Allow group members to form their own initial groups of three by gender (men's smaller groups and women's smaller groups). This tends to work better than assigning groups.
- Allow groups to add one person from the names on the ministry list of people who are not present.
- You may want to encourage the groups to form based on neighborhoods or proximity to work.
- Make sure some of the groups have extra space for new group members and guests.
- As the Bible study group grows, you may need to reorganize the smaller groups, but try not to regroup too often so that trust can be built within each smaller group.

Support the smaller groups:

- Provide opportunities for the members of the smaller groups to pray with each other during the group time.
- Make study assignments in the weekly group time based on the smaller groups.
- Pre-enlist a volunteer to share with the larger group how participation in the smaller group is impacting his or her life.
- Periodically organize fellowship events built around the smaller groups. The smaller groups could be the basis for teams during the event.

Be in a smaller group:

- Meet with two or three other Bible study leaders as part of your weekly preparation.
- Be part of a smaller group within your class.
- Host a smaller group for guests and new group members.

Continued on next page

Building Disciples by Apprenticing Other Leaders

Starting new groups is critical to the life of your church and the lives of the individuals in your group. There are people in your group who need to be challenged to take on a greater role in your church. Providing the opportunity to do so helps them grow and removes the largest barrier to starting new Bible study groups—finding a leader for a new group. You can make a difference in the growth of individual group members and in the future growth of your church by apprenticing potential group leaders. Here's how you can use the *Daily Discipleship Guide* to make this happen.

- **Step 1:** Ask a group member to follow along in the Leader Helps for that session as you lead the group. Tell him or her to note what you did and what you adjusted. You are not providing a different book; you're just encouraging your apprentice to use the book he or she has in a different way. Ask this person to do this before arriving for the weekly group time.
- **Step 2:** After that group experience, spend time with the group member going over what you did and how you adjusted the leader material for the group.
- **Step 3:** Invite him or her to do this again in a few weeks.
- **Step 4:** Ask him or her to lead a group time or part of one using the suggestions in the Leader Helps for that session. You may be away that week, or you can simply observe as a group member. Offer to help him or her prepare if needed.
- **Step 5:** As your apprentice gains confidence, allow him or her to teach more in the near future.
- **Step 6:** As a need for a new group surfaces, prepare to move on to lead the new group, with the apprentice becoming the leader of the current group (which tends to work best), or commission the apprentice and a few others from the group to start a new group. Either way, the apprentice will be using the book he or she already uses, just in a different way.
- **Step 7:** Do it all again.

Not everyone in the group will become a Bible study leader. For those who do, you can become a mentor to potential leaders, extending your teaching ministry and demonstrating discipleship.

CHARTED WATERS

Proverbs 1:7-19

FOCUS ATTENTION

PREPARE: On a board or chart paper, write the following words in bold print: wisdom, knowledge, information, fool, understanding, and fear. On slips of paper write the following verses: Job 28:28; Psalm 14:1; and Proverbs 9:10. Prior to the session, ask three different people to be prepared to read the verse on their slip of paper when directed.

ASK: *When you see these words displayed, what book of the Old Testament comes to your mind? Why?*

TRANSITION: *Today we begin a new study of the Book of Proverbs. Throughout this study, we will be refining our understanding of these words.*

GUIDE: Lead the group to signal with a thumbs up or a thumbs down whether they agree or disagree with the following statements: *People are bombarded with information daily. Most sources provide accurate, unbiased information. Information and knowledge lead to wise decisions.*

INQUIRE: *How would you describe the difference between knowledge and wisdom? How should information lead to a change in behavior? (p. 13)*

EXPLAIN: *As we delve into Proverbs, we will discover the foundation for wise decisions and how our knowledge and the information we receive applies in everyday life.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

MINI-LECTURE: Using Understand the Content (p. 13) **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Solomon's Economic Enterprises*), **Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Proverbs and Song of Songs*), and **Pack Item 7** (*Handout: Solomon Time Line*), provide an overview of the study of Proverbs. Be certain to highlight that Proverbs begins with an invitation and a warning. Emphasize God's Word as foundational for wisdom and that foolish choices have consequences.

READ: **Direct a volunteer to read aloud Proverbs 1:7**, as the group focuses on the key words of the verse. Point to **Pack Item 6** (*Key Verse: Proverbs 1:7a*) displayed in the room.

- **(1:7)** Another word for *knowledge* could be discernment. In the Old Testament world, knowledge bore a striking similarity to *wisdom*. Wise believers see things God's way so they can do things His way. By contrast, *fools* have no use for God. They don't cherish the *wisdom* He can give. Foolish people pass on the possibility of a fulfilling relationship with Him, and they turn their backs on His *discipline*. As a result, their foolish choices leave them unprepared to face challenges.

ASK: *How might a person be intelligent and unwise at the same time? (p. 15)*

DIRECT: Lead the previously enlisted individuals to read the verses on their slips of paper while the group listens for how they might be connected to verse 7.

EXPLAIN: *We come to know God through the person of Jesus Christ.* Read 1 Corinthians 1:24-25 to support a New Testament connection.

READ: **Call on someone to read aloud Proverbs 1:8-9**, instructing the group to listen for one way we can receive wise instruction and the result of accepting wise counsel.

- **(1:8)** Solomon may have been talking to Rehoboam, the son who would become the next king (1 Kings 14:21). He would need God's wisdom to rule well. However, Solomon may have been referring to any of his other sons or to young men in general.
- **(1:9)** Solomon focused on the reward that awaited God's people who put it into practice. He highlighted the reward by comparing it to two items of clothing that signified victory and honor.

STATE: *In Proverbs 1:5 we find the word listen, and again in verse 8 we see the word listen.*

ASK: *How might a parent be used by God to dispense His wisdom? How does listening to godly counsel lead to blessing? (p. 15)*

TRANSITION: *Solomon moved from the positive consequences of godly counsel to the devastating consequences of following the wrong counsel.*

READ: **Call on a volunteer to read Proverbs 1:10-14**, as the group listens for the wisdom provided by Solomon on resisting sin.

- **(1:10-12)** In Solomon's appeal to his son, he described these gang members as *sinner*s. They had rejected God's ways and had embraced a life aimed only at pleasing themselves. Their recruiting efforts could be extremely persuasive. Their invitation would be brimming with the promise of excitement and adventure.
- **(1:13-14)** Solomon addressed another persuasive element in the gang's invitation. They would say that murdering an innocent person would be a way to gain wealth. Any young person who pondered the possibilities of getting rich would have a tough time turning down such an invitation.

STATE: *We know that temptation is common to all humans, but the person on the wise path rejects temptation and resists sin.* Read aloud 1 Corinthians 10:12-13.

EXAMINE: Highlight Proverbs 1:11, and direct the group to turn to a neighbor and paraphrase the verse in their own words.

REFLECT: *How might being mindful of the consequences impact how a person responds to temptation? Which has the greater impact: focusing on the consequences of disobedience or the rewards of obedience? (p. 15)*

READ: Invite someone to read aloud **Proverbs 1:15-19**, as the group listens for the end result of giving into temptation.

- **(1:17-18)** The saying about the *bird* and the *net* might be a little difficult to interpret at first. Some Bible students interpret it to mean that a bird may be watching the person who's trying to *spread* a net. The bird that sees the net being spread would stay away from the grain that's lying on the ground inside it. Other Bible scholars point to the fact that birds get trapped because they can only see the grain, but they don't notice the net. Taken either way, the picture of the bird and the net point to the outcome for individuals who ignore God.

HIGHLIGHT: In Proverbs 1:18 it says that "they attack their own lives."

ASK: *How does sin lead to self-destructive behaviors? To what examples can you point?* (p. 15)

TRANSITION: *Solomon made it clear that humans have the choice to listen to godly wisdom or be enticed by sin. He also laid the foundation that wisdom starts with a right relationship with God and an application of God's Word.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

HIGHLIGHT: Lead the group to locate the four bulleted statements under Apply The Text (p. 16), and read the statements aloud.

DISCUSS: Guide the group in a discussion of the second question set on page 16: *Discuss with your Bible study group ways people provide godly counsel. Discuss the role the group has in providing godly counsel and fostering obedience.*

EVALUATE: Direct the group to evaluate their own obedience to God and His counsel.
Ask: In what areas do you need to be more obedient to God and His Word? (p. 16)

READ: Return to Proverbs 1:7, and read it together in unison, reminding the group that this verse reflects the heart of the Book of Proverbs.

EMPHASIZE: Highlight that verse 7 is this session's memory verse. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*).

PRAY: Thank God for providing a source for wisdom that aids people in avoiding foolish decisions and devastating consequences. Thank Him for His Son, Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives to illuminate God's Word and resist temptation.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text each person individually during the week to let them know that you're praying for them. Be specific if you're aware of a special need.

DIRECTION OFFERED

Proverbs 3:1-12

FOCUS ATTENTION

WELCOME: As the group arrives, call for discussion of times when someone became lost on a trip or refused to ask for directions.

ASK: *How often have you ignored the directions offered by a GPS because you wanted to take a different path? What dangers do you put yourself in by ignoring instruction? (p. 21)*

STATE: *On occasion we go our own way and it appears a better choice, but our GPS reminds us that rerouting is needed. We are given a second opportunity to follow instructions, and again we must make a choice.*

TRANSITION: *Much like the GPS, we're faced with decisions daily. We have the choice to follow God's instructions. In Proverbs 2–3, Solomon examined the process of making wise choices.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CONTEXTUALIZE: Utilizing Understand the Context (p. 21) and **Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Proverbs and Song of Songs*), relate that in Proverbs 1, Solomon wrote Proverbs as a call to be wise and understand instruction in order to make wise choices. In Proverbs 2, the focus is on the value of godly wisdom and the process of how wisdom works. Review the last session by using **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Key Words in Proverbs*).

STATE: *In today's session we will examine Proverbs 3 to determine how God provides direction to those who place their trust in Him.*

READ: **Invite a volunteer to read Proverbs 3:1-4**, as the group listens for the commands given in these verses.

- **(3:1-2)** For generations, God's people had been directed to honor their parents. This directive was one of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:12). Solomon echoed the significance of the commandment as he urged his son to remember his instruction. However, Solomon didn't intend for his son merely to memorize the words he heard as his father tried to teach him about wisdom. Solomon wanted this teaching to be embedded in his son's heart.
- **(3:3)** We're encouraged to nurture God's wisdom in our hearts by devoting ourselves to *loyalty*. We're loyal to God because we love Him, and we express our loyal love to Him by the way we love others.

WRITE: On a board, write the word *Commands*. Lead the group to identify the commands and record them on the board.

ASK: *What is significant about Solomon continually calling God's people to remember God's commandments and also His goodness and grace?*

REREAD: Read aloud Proverbs 3:1-4 again, as the group considers whether the verses are directed at the mind, the heart, or both. Direct the group to turn to a neighbor and briefly discuss how the verses are related to the heart and/or the mind.

EXPLAIN: *Verses 1 and 3 share ways to grow in wisdom while verses 2 and 4 offer a blessing and peace for the wise believer. There's no guarantee that life will go smoothly, but faith and obedience provide a foundation for peace regardless of the circumstances. There are many factors that can corrupt the way of wise living.*

ASK: *Why is integrity in the life of a believer so important? How would you define integrity?* (p. 23)

READ: Direct the group to read silently Proverbs 3:5-8 to determine if there are additional commands in these verses. Record any new commands on the board.

- **(3:5-6)** Foolish people place their faith in themselves and bank on their own wisdom (Prov. 28:26). Wise individuals know the value of placing their wholehearted trust in God alone. They depend on the wisdom that He gives them. When faced with tough challenges, they refuse to depend on unreliable resources of wisdom and understanding.
- **(3:7-8)** On our journey, pride can set in and make us arrogant. Selfish pride can result from having been successful in the journey thus far. Having some measure of success can make us arrogant and persuade us to think we can be wise without God.

STATE: *Proverbs 3:5-8 lets us know that our own thinking can result in poor decisions. If we disconnect knowledge from trust and love for God, we may get drawn into relying on self rather than being obedient to God's plan.*

COMPARE: Lead the group to contrast the lives of people who trust God with those who trust themselves. Ask: *How should this contrast encourage believers to live God-honoring lives?* (p. 23)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Proverbs 3:9-10, as the group listens for a relationship between wise living and giving.

- **(3:9-10)** At first glance, Solomon may appear to promote the notion that God makes His people prosperous in keeping with the lavishness of the gifts presented to Him. The notion can give the impression that if you want to be rich, you simply need to give more of your possessions to God. A careful study of the verse, however, simply drives home a crucial reality about growing wise in the Lord. We can count on Him to provide for our needs when we honor Him.

WRITE: Add the additional command found in these verses to the board.

READ: Read aloud 2 Corinthians 9:1-15, and relate that we must be careful not to assume that there's a strong correlation between generosity and the accumulation of wealth.

SHARE: *For the believer, generosity is a result of wise living. This verse teaches that we can count on God to provide for us when we choose to honor Him. Stress from the Day 4 Daily Exploration (p. 26): This is not prosperity thinking but rather a deep trust in a promise-keeping God who may not provide all that we want, but He will provide what we need as we live for Him.* Secure reactions to this quote.

DISCUSS: *How is the way a person handles finances a way of measuring his or her spiritual maturity? What challenges might a person face in seeking to honor God with their financial management?* (p. 23)

READ: **Read aloud Proverbs 3:11-12**, directing the group to identify a key word in these verses. Add the command to the board.

- **(3:12)** Because of God's love for us, we can compare Him to a father who adores His children. God is not a cruel overseer who wants to make us hurt. Neither is He a cold-hearted torturer who is eager to punish us by making suffer. He's like a loving parent who cares enough about us to teach us so we can be stronger in our walk with Him.

DISCUSS: *When you hear the word discipline does it have a positive or negative connotation? Why?*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Hebrews 12:5-6 to give perspective on God's discipline.

STATE: *It's critical that we recognize God's discipline as an act of love. Ask: How do you see discipline as an act of God's love?*

TRANSITION: *Review the commands on the board, leading the group to reread Proverbs 3:12, and consider the benefits of being obedient to the commands.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

DISCUSS: Guide the group to discuss ways of helping each other to live with integrity. Ask: *How can the group remind each other of God's expectations?* (p. 24)

HIGHLIGHT: Read aloud Proverbs 2:20 for the specific direction to "follow the way of the good, and keep to the path of the righteous." Reread Proverbs 3:5-6 to reinforce the focus on God not self. Encourage the group to memorize these verses so that they can recall them when faced with daily choices.

PRAY: Thank God for instruction in how to make wise decisions. Pray for the group to be faithful in following God's direction and in accepting God's discipline. Ask God to help each person to trust God in all areas of life rather than choosing their own way.

AFTER THE SESSION

Prayerfully evaluate your own life in how faithfully you are relying on God's direction to make wise decisions.

COMPASSION DEMONSTRATED

Proverbs 3:21-35

FOCUS ATTENTION

STATE: As the groups settle in, display the word cocooning on the board. Once most have arrived, explain that cocooning is a term coined by Faith Popcorn in 1982. *It now has become a part of many standard English dictionaries. Cocooning is staying inside one's home, protected from perceived danger, instead of going out. Today, restaurant meals and groceries may be delivered, movies can be seen at home, texts replace phone calls, church services can be viewed online, and people can minimize contact with the "outside world."*

SAY: *As believers, it's important that we don't isolate ourselves and miss opportunities to show God's love to others.*

READ: Read aloud Matthew 22:34-40, as the group listens for Jesus' response to the Pharisees regarding which commandment in the law is the greatest.

QUERY: *What makes it so difficult to love other people, especially those with whom we disagree? (p. 29)*

TRANSITION: *In today's study in Proverbs 3, we see that following God's wisdom is demonstrated in how a person treats others.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

REVIEW: Distribute **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Themes of Proverbs*). Read aloud Proverbs 1:2-3 and direct attention to the first few paragraphs of the handout regarding the purpose and themes of Proverbs. Encourage the group to keep the handout in their Bibles for future reference. Utilizing **Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Proverbs and Song of Songs*), **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Key Words in Proverbs*) and *Understand the Context* (p. 29), remind the group that the last session focused on how God provides direction for those who trust Him.

INTRODUCE: *In Proverbs 3:13-35, Solomon related that wisdom brings happiness and that it's demonstrated in how a person treats others.*

ILLUSTRATE: On a board, draw one arrow pointing upward and another arrow pointing to the side. Under the arrows in a row write the following words *physical, spiritual, and relationship*.

READ: **Invite a volunteer to read aloud Proverbs 3:21-26**, as the group listens for the results of wise living.

- **(3:21)** Solomon taught his son to give his attention to the twin treasures of *wisdom* and *discretion*. Wisdom would give him useful insight about God’s way to live. Discretion would nourish good sense and sound judgment.
- **(3:26)** When we seek and apply wisdom that comes from *the LORD*, we can enjoy the sweet blessings of a wholesome life, a sense of safety, the absence of anxiety, and the removal of fear. As we walk with Him and trust Him to guide us, we will grow more aware of the reality that these blessings come from Him. Our *confidence* in Him emanates from the awareness that nothing matters more than His presence.

HIGHLIGHT: Note for the group that Proverbs 3:13-18 appears to be a poem or hymn about the value of wisdom and highlight that the verses begin and end with the word *happy*.

GUIDE: Lead the group to discuss the impact of wise living on a person’s relationship with God and with others. Record responses under the three words on the board as appropriate.

READ: Reread Proverbs 3:21-26, while the group considers how confidence is built by obeying godly wisdom.

ASK: *How does self-confidence differ from a confidence grounded in God’s presence? How does confidence in God lead to peace?* (p. 31)

DIRECT: On the board, highlight the arrow pointing upward and explain that our relationship with God through Jesus Christ allows us to trust Him for wise living rather than ourselves.

TRANSITION: *A natural result of a strong faith relationship with God is an increased awareness of others.* Point to the arrows and relate that a vertical relationship with God leads to stronger horizontal relationships with others.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Proverbs 3:27-30, as the group listens for two actions to take and two actions to avoid in dealing with others.

- **(3:27-30)** Notice that these four pictures involve neighbors. When we think about neighbors, we tend to have in mind people we know. But putting the focus on neighbors doesn’t allow us to draw the conclusion that we have permission to mistreat strangers. Jesus redefined “neighbor” in Luke 10:25-37. God intends for His people to be kind to everyone as an expression of our trust in Him.

DISCUSS: Direct the group to turn to a neighbor and share the actions to take and avoid that they discovered in the verses. Then guide pairs to complete the Bible Skill activity on page 31.

ASK: *Why might a person try to excuse himself from helping others?* (p. 31)

READ: Direct the group to read silently Proverbs 3:31-35 to discover some of the benefits of godly wisdom.

- **(3:34-35)** *Humble* believers can expect a completely different response. Instead of turning a deaf ear to us, we can be confident that God takes care of us. His lavish kindness to us is the result of

the *grace* He extends to us. Instead of being prideful, we embrace the reality that we're nothing without Him. Our humility in our walk with Him opens the door for His grace to be at work in us. (See Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5.) God's grace to the humble puts them on the path of *honor*. The Lord will make sure that His people *inherit* a place of honor because they have chosen to be wise. Of course, being *wise* means trusting the Lord to give us His wisdom so we can apply it in our lives. Living with honor means enjoying the blessings that come from having an honorable reputation. It also suggests the contentment that comes from God's smile on us as we grow in our walk with Him.

STATE: *As confidence in God grows, so should the desire to demonstrate kindness to others and leave judgment of others to God.*

CONNECT: Read aloud Romans 12:19-21 to discover Paul's words and how they compare to the verses in Proverbs.

QUERY: *How does taking on the role of judge get in the way of a believer demonstrating trust in God? (p. 31)*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Use the information on the board developed during the session to recap the key points.

IDENTIFY: Lead the group to list actions a person could take to invest more deeply in their relationship with God. Encourage the group to complete the Daily Explorations as a way to invest more deeply.

REFLECT: *As you consider the list of actions, in which areas do you need to be more diligent? How will you make changes?*

ASK: Discuss with the group challenges to being kind. *What barriers must a person cross in order to demonstrate kindness? How can the group help each other overcome these barriers? (p. 32)*

REREAD: Invite the group to read chorally Proverbs 3:27. Then guide them to paraphrase this verse in their own words and share it with the group.

PRAY: Thank God for giving believers confidence to trust Him daily. Pray that each person will look for ways to demonstrate their love of God by helping others. Ask God to help each person to be more diligent in investing in their relationship with God and demonstrating kindness.

AFTER THE SESSION

Follow up with individuals who have visited the group and invite them to attend the next session. Be prepared to address any questions they may have regarding the group.

THE CHOICE

Proverbs 4:11-27

FOCUS ATTENTION

DISPLAY: Hold up a map with two routes to the same destination highlighted. Ask: *When planning a vacation, how many of you check out different routes, evaluate the type of road and attractions along each route, and then make a choice of how you want to travel?*

STATE: *We're required to make choices daily. Some choices seem to have little impact on our lives, while others might change the whole direction.*

DISCUSS: Direct the group to turn to a neighbor and address the following questions: *Have you gotten confused over a choice because you had so many options? How did you make the choice?* (p. 37)

TRANSITION: *In our study of Proverbs 4, we see that all people have a choice to make: follow God or reject Him. Solomon related that there is only one choice that puts the believer on the route to righteousness, while the other route ends in destruction.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CONTEXTUALIZE: Utilizing Understand the Context (p. 37) and **Pack Item 2** (*Outline of Proverbs and Song of Songs*), briefly review past sessions, noting on the outline that this is the last session praising wisdom, love, and worthy conduct.

DISTRIBUTE: Provide each person in the group a piece of paper for note-taking and a pencil.

STATE: *In Proverbs 4, Solomon once again personified wisdom as a woman. He put himself in the position of father or sage. He delineated two different paths of life—that of following wisdom or abandoning wisdom. While the Old Testament understanding of wisdom was fulfilled through the law, the New Testament fulfillment is found in a relationship with Jesus Christ.*

DIRECT: Lead the group to fold their note-taking sheet in half and then to write *Destruction* on one side and *Life* on the other side.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Proverbs 4:11-13, reflecting on how Solomon described wisdom.

- **(4:11)** When we describe wisdom as seeing things God's way so we can do things His way, we can grasp the value of putting His instruction into practice. He gives us His wisdom and expects us to apply it in our circumstances. As we put His wisdom to work, we see for ourselves that His wisdom makes sense. Trusting Him to make us wise, we confidently rely on Him to put us on straight paths.

ASK: How are information and transformation connected to wisdom? Does one always lead to the other? Emphasize that knowing doesn't always lead to obedience. Reference 2 Timothy 3:7, and say: *There is a difference in head knowledge and heart knowledge.*

WRITE: Lead the group to circle the three admonitions in verse 13 and then record them on their note-taking paper under *Life*.

ASK: How does following God's wisdom lead to life? What happens to our ability to choose the way of wisdom when we do not take seriously the consequences of choosing the opposite of wisdom? (p. 39)

READ: Lead the group to read silently **Proverbs 4:14-15** to discover Solomon's directions for staying on the right path.

- **(4:14-15)** Like a police officer who stands in the middle of a busy street and holds up a STOP sign for everyone to see and obey, Solomon's words of warning bring us to a sudden halt. His warning not to *proceed* implies that we should not take a single step toward the path of the wicked. Likewise, telling us to avoid the path gives us an unmistakable directive about refusing to come near it. The order to *pass it by* leaves us with no doubt that we're wise when we take a detour around it and go in another direction altogether.

RECORD: Lead the group to record those directions under *Destruction* on the note-taking sheet.

READ: Read aloud **Proverbs 4:16-17**, guiding the group to highlight characteristics of the life of the wicked.

- **(4:16-17)** Solomon's warning drives home the harsh reality that wickedness can consume a person. It can keep him or her awake at night. Evil people lie in bed with nothing on their minds except how they can hurt somebody. They won't be able to *sleep* until they have brought despair, grief, or sorrow to the doorstep of some unsuspecting victim.

ASK: How does wickedness lead to more wicked acts? What examples reinforce this teaching? (p. 39)

NOTE: On the note-taking sheet, direct the group to write two characteristics of the wicked under *Destruction*.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read **Proverbs 4:18-19** to see how Solomon contrasts the two paths. Allow time for the group to make notes.

- **(4:18-19)** People who give themselves to the Lord and follow His instruction can count on a bright future. Solomon described their future with the phrase *the light of dawn*. The outcome of the wicked will be anything but bright. Solomon described the future of wicked people as *the darkest gloom*. Darkness covers their way so they cannot see what lies ahead of them. Furthermore, the darkness promises to become more intense the longer they follow the way of evil.

CONNECT: Read aloud 2 Corinthians 4:4 and John 14:6 to highlight how the same paths are described in the New Testament.

ASK: *If the path of wisdom is so clear and beneficial, why do so many not choose it? (p. 39)*

STATE: *Seeking wisdom is a continuous process that requires integrating knowledge and lifestyle.*

READ: **Read aloud Proverbs 4:20-27** for directions on how to stay on the path of wisdom.

- **(4:24-25)** Solomon counseled his son to be disciplined regarding what came out of his *mouth*. The words that came through his *lips* would reveal what had been placed in his heart. Along with controlling our words, we're challenged to be wise about what we do with our eyes. The call to look *forward* urges us to move forward with a sense of purpose.

LIST: Lead the group to list ways to stay on the path of wisdom. Add notes to the *Life* side of the note-taking sheet. Direct the group to draw a heart around the *Life* side of the note-taking sheet to affirm that actions without a heart change don't last.

ASK: *What is so enticing about wickedness that it causes us to lose our focus on what is right and good? (p. 39)*

TRANSITION: *Staying on the path of wisdom by keeping our eyes focused on Christ is a constant challenge.*

GUIDE: Note that Proverbs contains many kinds of wisdom teachings to help believers understand the importance of seeking God's wisdom for daily living. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 4** (*Wisdom Teaching in Proverbs*), reviewing the different types of teaching and working together to identify the category for today's passages.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Lead teams of two or three to summarize the information on their notes.

AFFIRM: *Wisdom is progressive; it's the small, daily decisions that reveal our path. Proverbs 4 reveals two paths: the wise path and the foolish path. Changing our behavior without changing the heart doesn't lead to lifestyle change.*

EVALUATE: Guide the group to reflect on their own lives by examining everyday decisions where one step toward wickedness has led to another step off the path. Ask: *What actions can get you back on the right track? (p. 40)*

PRAY: Thank God for His Word that gives us guidance and instruction on how to stay on the right path. Pray that each person will evaluate their own decisions, utilizing God's Word as the standard. Ask the Lord to sanctify our hearts and draw us closer to Him.

AFTER THE SESSION

As the group leader, reflect on Proverbs 4:11-27 to evaluate if you're staying on the path of righteousness in all areas of your life.

FOLLOWING GOD'S DESIGN

Proverbs 5:3-11,15-18

FOCUS ATTENTION

VISUALIZE: Direct the group to picture themselves sitting on the beach while reading a good book or sitting beside a campfire, roasting marshmallows for s'mores.

EXPLAIN: *Fire provides warmth and pleasure when in control, but it's horribly destructive when out of control in a forest or a home. Similarly, sexual pleasure within God's design provides great joy, but sexual pleasure outside of the marriage covenant between a man and a woman leads to destruction of families and relationships. Ask: How does our world today make sexual sins appealing?*

TRANSITION: *In our study in Proverbs we see Solomon once again sharing the value of wisdom and obedience, but in chapter 5 he addresses the specific dangers of sexual disobedience and the blessings of sexual pleasure and intimacy within God's creative design.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

REVIEW: Prior to the session distribute **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: Wisdom in Proverbs*) and enlist volunteers to read the following verses: Proverbs 1:7; 3:5-7; 4:6-8; 5:1-2; Matthew 7:24-27, and James 1:5. Direct the group to save the handout for use in a later session. Using *Understand the Context* (p. 45) and **Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Proverbs and Song of Songs*) briefly reinforce the verses read and review past sessions, noting on the outline that today's session focuses on how God expects His people to show His wisdom through sexual purity.

TRANSITION: *Solomon addressed two mistakes people make regarding human sexuality. First, some give in to the cultural norms and notions of sexuality, compromising God's intentions. Compromise is the easy choice. Second, Solomon knew that God's people would be tempted to declare what God intended for good as something that was inherently evil and wicked.*

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read **Proverbs 5:3-6**, as the group listens for the description of a forbidden woman.

- **(5:3)** This would have been a woman who wanted to lure a young man into a web of immorality. She was someone other than the young man's wife, and she used her lips and the words that passed through them as tools of seduction. In ancient Israel, nothing could have been sweeter than *honey*. Likewise, nothing could have compared with her sweet, seductive speech. In Solomon's day, nothing could have been smoother than olive oil. It flowed smoothly out of its container. So did the flattering words of a woman who wanted to use them to seduce someone. Her flattery would make her quite difficult for a young man to resist.

- **(5:6)** Solomon took a closer look at the forbidden woman herself. He described her as a person who had rejected God’s wisdom. As a result, she took no thought about the disaster she would make of her life. She never gave a moment’s consideration to the destination of the path she had chosen for herself. Obviously, she didn’t have true compassion for the person she tried to seduce. She pretended to show compassion for him so she could lure him closer to her and get him within her reach. But sadly, she showed that she didn’t care about herself either.

CLARIFY: Identify the descriptors “honey,” “wormwood,” and “double-edged sword.” Using a Bible dictionary, explain the meaning of each of these descriptors or invite previously enlisted volunteers to read or summarize each definition.

ASK: *Why are the consequences of the misuse and abuse of human sexuality so devastating?* (p. 47)

READ: Direct someone to read aloud Proverbs 5:7-11, as the group discovers the instructions for dealing with sexual temptations.

- **(5:9-11)** What would happen to a person who chose to do *otherwise*? Solomon’s answer to that question leaves us with a grim warning that deserves to be taken seriously. Giving in to sexual immorality places a person in danger of losing respect, honor, and dignity. Our *vitality* eventually fails us. Who are the *others* who rob us of our strength? They may be other lovers of the forbidden woman, owners of a prostitute, or the husband of an unfaithful wife. They’re described as *cruel*, and their relationship with the promiscuous woman takes a toll on anyone who has a sexual encounter with her.

IDENTIFY: Lead the group to reread and note specific parts of the verses that reveal the consequences of giving in to sexual temptation.

ASK: *What makes avoiding sexual temptations so difficult? How might a person rationalize flirting with sexual temptation?* (p. 47)

COMPARE: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Fool in Proverbs*) to the group. Guide them to compare and contrast the fool with the wise. Discuss how a person can stay on the path to wisdom despite our human emotions and temptations.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Proverbs 5:15-18, as the group notes instructions on God’s design for human sexuality.

- **(5:16-17)** God made His commandment about adultery perfectly clear (Ex. 20:14). Adultery is a sin, and God prohibited His people from engaging in it. He also spoke through His prophets to tell His people about the consequences of the sin of adultery (Jer. 13:27). Solomon underscored another reason God’s people should not engage in sexual immorality: it’s a foolish choice. It’s as foolish as wasting life-sustaining water by pouring it into the street.

GUIDE: Direct the group to review the verses and share specific words or phrases that reveal God’s design for a monogamous marriage relationship between a man and a woman. Emphasize that Solomon’s instructions indicate that sexual intimacy is a life-giving blessing.

HIGHLIGHT: Despite the risks of putting themselves in danger of “losing it all,” many people continue misusing and abusing their sexuality. It’s important to establish safeguards in a marriage. Use comments from Verses 15-18 in the Day 4 Daily Exploration (p. 50) to support establishing and maintaining relational boundaries.

ASK: *Who are your role models for marriage? Why?* (p. 47)

TRANSITION: *Today’s world depicts sexual pleasure as acceptable in many contexts, but Proverbs describes sexual intimacy as a gift given by God to be expressed in the context of a committed marriage between a man and a woman.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REMINDE: *In Session 3, we discovered that our relationship with God through Jesus Christ directly affects our relationship with others. This remains true as we deal with the topic of human sexuality. Giving in to sexual temptations damages our walk with Christ and many times leads to undesired consequences.*

READ: Read Proverbs 6:20, noting that this is the memory verse for the week. Direct individuals in the group to turn to a neighbor and paraphrase the verse in their own words and relate why this would be an important verse to memorize. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*) to those who need one.

EXPLAIN: *The phrase “used to be like this” (1 Cor. 6:11) provides hope that through Jesus Christ sinners can be “washed [and] sanctified.”*

REVIEW: Read the session’s main points by reviewing the bulleted summary statements under Apply The Text (p. 48). Encourage the group to modify or add to the statements.

CHALLENGE: Invite volunteers to share their responses to the first question set under Apply The Text (p. 48): *Discuss as a group ways of helping others who carry around bitterness and shame as a result of sexual sin. How can the group represent God’s standard and be redemptive at the same time? Record insights from this discussion.*

PRAY: Thank God for a relationship with Jesus Christ that provides guidance and instruction on God’s perfect creation of human sexuality and how it’s to be experienced within the context of a committed relationship between a husband and a wife. Thank God for the intimacy of the marriage relationship. Pray for any who may have given in to sexual temptations, that they would recognize their need for forgiveness to strengthen their relationship with God and others.

AFTER THE SESSION

Pray specifically for individuals in the group who may be struggling with sexual issues.

PURSuing WISDOM

Proverbs 8:6-21

FOCUS ATTENTION

DISPLAY: Hold up a long piece of rope, and invite volunteers to share any stories they have about playing a game of tug of war. Enlist two volunteers to hold each end of the rope and demonstrate the game.

EXPLAIN: *Our study in Proverbs consistently has Wisdom tugging one direction and Folly the other. Wisdom personifies our relationship with Christ while Folly represented by the immoral woman in our last session is pulling against the path of following Jesus Christ. Ask: How does temptation seem like a game of tug of war?*

TRANSITION: *Both believers and non-believers face life-changing decisions daily. In today's study, we will see how God promises to provide His wisdom to those who search for Him.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CONTEXTUALIZE: *In Proverbs 5–7, we discovered that sexual sin can have severe consequences. In Proverbs 8–9, we see that we must be in an ongoing relationship with wisdom found in following Christ, not just in our sexual intimacy but also in every area of our daily lives.*

REFERENCE: Using **Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Proverbs and Song of Songs*), note that today we're looking at a portrayal of wisdom. Using *Understand the Context* (p. 53), provide a brief overview of Proverbs 8:1–9:18. Summarize Proverbs 8:1-5 encouraging the group to visualize wisdom standing at a crossroad calling out to people.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read **Proverbs 8:6-11**, as the group listens for action words that point to the value of wisdom.

- **(8:6)** Solomon directed his son to *listen* carefully to what he was about to say. Then he allowed the wisdom of God to speak through the voice of a virtuous woman. She referred to herself by using the personal pronoun *I* as she spoke to him. She identified herself by asserting that she devoted herself to talking about *noble things*. As she talked with Solomon's son, she gave her attention to matters of utmost importance that would lead him to take the path of excellence.
- **(8:7)** Wisdom noted that she wouldn't have anything to do with lies. For that reason, she refused to give *wickedness* a voice. She utterly despised evil, and she would not allow anything other than the truth to pass through her *lips*. With her bold assertions, she gave Solomon's son the opportunity to trust what she told him. The same opportunity has been extended to God's people everywhere.

- **(8:10-11)** God's people who have come to love His Word testify that His wisdom means more to us than *silver* and *gold*. Precious metals may produce resources that will give us financial security, but they cannot give us the assurance of His presence and the certainty of His direction.

ASK: *Why might someone not consider God's wisdom to be a priceless treasure? What do you cherish about it most of all?* (p. 55)

TRANSITION: *Now let's take the passage and examine the verses again, continuing to broaden our understanding of the value of wisdom.*

READ: As you reread aloud Proverbs 8:6-11, guide the group to look for parallelism where the second line of the verse enhances the first line.

DISCUSS: Place the group into three smaller teams. Assign each team two verses from the passage: Proverbs 8:6-7; Proverbs 8:8-9; and Proverbs 8:10-11, and direct each team to discuss their assigned verses and be prepared to share a paraphrase of the verses in their own words. Point them to the comments in the Day 1 and Day 2 Daily Explorations for additional insight (p. 57). Ask: *How would you describe the value of God's truth when compared to the teachings of others?*

READ: Direct the group to read silently Proverbs 8:12-16, reflecting on the attributes of wisdom and what wisdom hates.

- **(8:12)** Reflecting her devotion to godly virtues, she shared her house with *shrewdness*. The Hebrew word for *shrewdness* could evoke notions of craftiness. In the setting of this verse, however, the word suggests the virtue of prudence or foresight. This important virtue would have been essential for developing a plan for successful living. In addition, she wanted Solomon's son to know she had *knowledge*. She didn't intend to imply by this that she had read widely and developed a vast knowledge of an assortment of topics and issues. Instead, she conveyed the certainty that she had a deep and abiding knowledge of truth.
- **(8:13)** To *fear* God meant to love Him in a way that nourished a healthy respect for Him. Fearing God in this way made the difference between growing wise or becoming foolish. Likewise, being wise in the Lord meant loving what He loves and detesting what He detests. For that reason, those who valued His wisdom would hate *evil*. They would also detest the expressions of evil. *Arrogant pride* is at the top of the list. Such sinful pride could prompt people to put themselves on a throne that is rightly occupied only by the Lord. Eventually, self-serving behavior would give way to moral corruption and *evil conduct*. That's when individuals turned to lying and other forms of *perverse speech*. With their words, they shrouded the corruption that would ruin them in due time.

DISTRIBUTE: Provide each person in the group with **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: Fear of God*) and allow time for the group to scan the handout. Call for volunteers to explain any new insights they learned.

ASK: *How does fearing God lead to gaining wisdom? Can you gain true wisdom without a fear of God? Explain.* (p. 55)

TRANSITION: *In verses 15-16, Solomon recognized how obeying God's wisdom influences all aspects of his reign as king. He reflected that it was God's power and wisdom that led to his success.*

ASK: *Why might we fail to speak about the power of sound thinking and wise counsel?*

READ: **Enlist someone to read Proverbs 8:17-21**, as the group listens for the availability of wisdom and the benefits described in these verses.

- **(8:21)** Wisdom gave the assurance that the prosperity she offered would be provided as an *inheritance*. If she said that wealth came as wages, she would have implied that God's people had to work so they could earn the blessing of wisdom. Because they inherited it, however, they received it because of their trust in His wisdom. When they found God's wisdom, they could act on it with the complete assurance that they were making the right choice.

REVIEW: Use **Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Wisdom Teaching in Proverbs*) to summarize the different ways Solomon presented wisdom. Then query: *How does knowing that God shares His wisdom motivate you to pursue it?* (p. 55) Emphasize the Key Doctrine (The Scriptures) on page 55.

DIRECT: Lead the group to examine the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:33 and Matthew 7:7-8, and discuss how these verses connect and confirm the verses in Proverbs.

ASK: *What are the dangers of discovering God's wisdom and failing to act on it?*

TRANSITION: *In Proverbs 8, Solomon revealed that wisdom is valuable, powerful, and obtainable only if we seek the Lord and obey.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

IDENTIFY: As a group, discuss the characteristics of a wise person based on Proverbs 8. Record the characteristics on a board as they are identified. Ask: *How can the group foster these characteristics within the group?* (p. 56)

REFLECT: Guide the group to determine at least two actions each person could take immediately to aid in their seeking of God's wisdom.

CHALLENGE: *God's wisdom found through a relationship with Jesus Christ is the most valuable possession a person can have, but God's Word is clear that we must seek His wisdom and obey His instructions. Like the tug of war demonstrated at the beginning of the session, we must be holding onto the rope and moving toward total obedience as we seek His wisdom.*

PRAY: Close in prayer, thanking God for being available to us. Pray that the group would seek Him and pursue wisdom through prayer and studying His Word.

AFTER THE SESSION

As the group leader, reflect on who is holding you accountable for trusting and obeying God's wisdom.



LIVING WISELY

Proverbs 14:8-15

FOCUS ATTENTION

INTRODUCE: To begin the session, wear or display a baseball cap while you relate that on the baseball diamond, whether Little League® or Major League®, you find a coach at first base and at third base when their team is up to bat. The player's responsibility is to focus on the coach's instruction rather than watch the ball or make running decisions on their own. When the coaches' signals are ignored, on many occasions, the base runner is called out.

ASK: *How might the coaches on the field connect to believers' needs to keep their eyes on Christ?*

EXPLAIN: *Our study in Proverbs reveals the importance of following wisdom. We have examined some of the benefits of obedience and the consequences of disobedience. In today's session, we'll see how living wisely leads to joy, while failing to do so leads to grief.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INTRODUCE: Summarize Proverbs 10–13, highlighting key verses. Using **Pack Item 2** (*Outline of Proverbs and Song of Songs*), indicate that this session will focus on Solomon's collected proverbs. Explain that in this session the verses will be studied non-sequentially.

EXPLAIN: Using Understand the Context (p. 61), explain the chiasmic form of Proverbs 14 as a literary device in which a sequence of ideas is presented and then repeated in reverse order. *This form of writing was for repetitive and comparative emphasis. It offers a mirror reflection. In our study today we will examine the first and last verses of our focal passage and move by pairs of verses to the center two verses. Chiasm comes from the Greek word chi, which looks like our letter X. The middle two verses where the X crosses provide a summary emphasis of the other verses.*

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Proverbs 14:8,15 as the group listens for how the wise and foolish are characterized.

- **(14:8)** Notice how Solomon set the wisdom of a sensible person in stark contrast to actions taken by *fools*. In their foolishness, foolish people don't take the time to think through the situation facing them. Instead, they make their decisions quickly and dive headlong into their choices. Before long, the *stupidity* of their actions becomes obvious.
- **(14:15)** Foolish individuals tend to be *inexperienced* when it comes to handling life's challenges and opportunities well. They haven't learned yet about the necessity of nourishing a relationship with the Lord in which love for Him moves them to respect Him and His wisdom. Consequently,

they're left only with their own insights. Their inexperience with handling life with God's wisdom can prompt them to believe *anything*.

STUDY: Create smaller teams. Give half the teams copies of **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: Wisdom in Proverbs*) and the other half copies of **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Fool in Proverbs*). Guide the teams to review their handouts and identify key words used to define the *wise* and the *fool*. After allowing time for team discussion, call on volunteers to report what they discussed to the larger group.

DRAW: On a board, draw the shape of a baseball field. In the first base position write *Proverbs 8:15*.

ASK: *When you think about a sensible Christian, who comes to mind? How does that person's example help you to be prudent? (p. 63) Why is a person being thoughtful, measured, circumspect, and methodical so valued but so difficult?*

WRITE: Beside the Proverbs reference on first base, lead the group to select a word that summarizes the two verses (*Prudent* or *Sensible*, for example).

READ: **Direct the group to read silently Proverbs 14:9,14**, contemplating how the two verses are connected.

- **(14:9)** Solomon said that fools wouldn't take the law of restitution seriously; they would detest it. Their disdain for making restitution emerged from their misguided notion about accountability. They didn't think anyone would make them accountable for their sinful behavior, not even God.
- **(14:14)** This verse doesn't suggest that people can become good by their own efforts. Goodness comes from the Lord. Their walk with Him produces goodness in them that shows in their actions. Their actions render deeds that others around them will see as good.

GUIDE: Lead the group to examine Philippians 4:11 and Galatians 6:7-10. Direct the group to locate a partner and address the following questions: *How are the verses in Proverbs connected to the New Testament passages? From page 63: How does pursuing God's wisdom lead to contentment regardless of the circumstances?*

WRITE: On the second base position add *Proverbs 14:9,14*, and again lead the group to select a summary word (*Contentment*).

READ: **Direct someone to read aloud Proverbs 14:10,13**, as the group listens for the contrast between joy and grief.

- **(14:13)** A heart full of joy comes from an intimate relationship with God. Believers don't need to develop a ruse, a blanket that covers our sorrow. Instead, we count on the joy that comes in our walk with God to sustain us even when our hearts ache. Grief awaits all of us, but our joy will hold us up as we endure it.

ASK: *How does following God lead to contentment regardless of the circumstances? How does the joy of God transcend even the worst of situations? From page 63: What if someone asked you about the joy that's abiding in your heart? How would you describe it?*

WRITE: In the third base position add *Proverbs 14:10,13*, and lead the group to select one word as a summary (*Joyful*).

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Proverbs 14:11-12. Remind the group that this is the center or crux of the passage as they listen for the result of failing to follow God's plan.

- **(14:11)** Spiritually speaking, wicked people have built a *house* on a foundation of personal thoughts, preferences, philosophies, and prejudices. That kind of faulty foundation cannot stand the challenges that come with life. Because of the flimsy foundation, the house will eventually *be destroyed*. That's the outcome awaiting anyone who decides to ignore God's wisdom.

IDENTIFY: Guide the group to identify key words in the verses.

QUERY: *How can one differentiate between what seems to be the safe life and a God-honoring life? From page 63: What is a "wrong way" someone you know is following? Where will that person end if he or she continues on that path? Pray now for that person.*

WRITE: In the home base position write *Proverbs 14:11-12*, and a summary word (*Thriving*).

TRANSITION: *Any eager baseball player wants to make it all the way around the bases to home plate, but to get there he must stay focused on hitting the ball, follow the directions of the coach, and run hard. In today's session we see how sensible living, contentment with our circumstances, and joy in our relationship with God will lead our lives to thrive.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

ASK: *If contentment is one of the key traits of a born-again believer, why do so many believers fail to exhibit contentment? Lead the group: List the causes and cures for the lack of contentment and joy people may experience. With whom do you need to share the cures you identified? (p. 64)*

EVALUATE: Lead the group to reflect on the following: *How do you think others would see you in the areas of making sensible decisions, being content with your circumstances, and exhibiting joy regardless of your life situations? Guide them to brainstorm ways to do these things more consistently in our lives.*

SUMMARIZE: Focusing attention on the drawing developed throughout the session, review the key words at each base. Then ask rhetorically, *Do you see yourself successfully crossing home plate?*

PRAY: Thank God for providing direction for our lives. Ask that He will lead us to be obedient to His instructions, and as a testimony to others, help us to exhibit joy in all of our life circumstances.

AFTER THE SESSION

Contact individuals in the group who are struggling with difficult circumstances to encourage them and assure them of your prayers.

PLEASING GOD

Proverbs 15:33–16:11

FOCUS ATTENTION

INTRODUCE: To begin the session, lead the group to visualize a child whose mother has been out of town for a week. The mother steps into sight at the airport, and the child takes off running as the mother holds her arms open wide.

EXPLAIN: *Just as a child runs to his mother, so we should run to our heavenly Father with our eyes totally focused on Him and His open arms.*

ASK: *When you were a child, how did you try to please the people you loved? What difference did it make to you? (p. 69) Why did you want to please them?*

TRANSITION: *Today's session will lead us to understand that God's people should seek to please Him in their attitudes and actions.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

REVIEW: Utilizing **Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Proverbs and Song of Songs*) and *Understand the Context* (p. 69), set the stage for the session. Remind the group that Proverbs 1–9 set the foundation or heart of the collected Proverbs in chapters 10–29 and that the wisdom described by Solomon is fully revealed through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Highlight the words *delight* and *wisdom* on **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Key Words in Proverbs*).

ILLUSTRATE: In the center of a board draw a heart. In the center of the heart write: *Fear the Lord, Trust the Lord, Hold onto Instruction, and Stay on the Path.*

EXPLAIN: *In today's session, rather than focusing on the verses in a linear way, we'll examine the verses linked by themes.*

READ: **Call for a volunteer to read Proverbs 15:33 and 16:8**, as the group listens for a connection between the phrases written inside the heart and the verses.

- **(15:33)** In this portion of Proverbs, we're given the answer to the question: If we're truly wise in the Lord, how will we know it? With plenty of alternative sources of so-called wisdom, Christians could be left a little confused about whether we've actually been given God's wisdom. According to this verse, we know we're receiving true wisdom if it causes us to *fear* the Lord.
- **(16:8)** In the same way true wisdom prompts us to fear the Lord, true prosperity causes us to make righteousness our priority. Left to ourselves, we may cultivate the notion that His provision looks

like lots of money and possessions. When we're wise in Him, however, we consider being right with Him and living according to His ways a priceless treasure in itself.

ILLUSTRATE: Draw an arrow from the heart and write *Wisdom Demonstrated*.

ASK: *What is easier to maintain—humility or a reverent fear of God? Explain.* (p. 71)

TRANSITION: The *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* defines the sovereignty of God as the "biblical teaching that God possesses all power and is the ruler of all things. God rules and works according to His eternal purpose."¹ Enlist a volunteer to read Isaiah 45:5-6.

GUIDE: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: Fear of God*) to those who didn't receive one during the previous session. Allow the group time to review the handout, and then lead them to discuss the relationship between fearing the Lord and wisdom.

READ: Lead the group to read silently **Proverbs 16:1,4-5,9**, identifying words that reveal God's sovereignty and our accountability. Then draw another arrow from the heart and write *Accountability Established*.

- **(16:4-5)** The Lord gives us His direction in keeping with His *purpose*. Accordingly, we do well to acknowledge Him in whatever task we undertake. He's *prepared everything* in our world so His purpose can be accomplished. Therefore, we're foolish when we ignore Him and His purpose. We're foolish when we don't take His purpose in consideration. Our foolishness drives us to develop plans for ourselves that center on our purposes instead of His.

DISCUSS: Create groups of two to four to discuss the following question: *How does Solomon's picture of human thinking while God directs the heart illustrate the relationship between personal responsibility and God's sovereignty?* Guide the group to examine the commentary on Proverbs 16:4 in the Day 2 Daily Exploration (p. 73) for insight.

ASK: *What does living with the reality that we will face God one day look like? Why do people resist being held accountable?* (p. 71) *How has your understanding of being accountable to God changed as a result of this study?*

EMPHASIZE: *There are things we can't completely understand about the connection between God's sovereignty and our free will. It remains one of the mysteries of Scripture.*

TRANSITION: *Have you ever done something because you thought you had to, but inside you were groaning and complaining or thinking it was silly?*

ILLUSTRATE: Draw another arrow from the heart and write the words *Motives Matter*.

READ: Read aloud **Proverbs 16:2**, listening for how our actions and our hearts are known by God.

- **(16:2)** He alone knows what's in our hearts. He examines what's there and judges the purity of our reasons for what we're doing.

ASK: *Why are our motives so important? To what degree might our motives be more important than our actions?* (p. 71)

READ: **Enlist a volunteer to read Proverbs 16:10-11**, as the group listens for two examples of how God is pleased with the right motivation.

- **(16:11)** The example in verse 11 pointed to merchants who tried to squeeze money from their customers. It highlights the dishonesty unscrupulous merchants hid in their hearts. Before customers used coins, they weighed pieces of gold or silver to make their purchases. The merchants who sold items to them would use balances and scales to weigh the gold and silver. Dishonest merchants would manipulate the balances and scales so they could collect a little more from the customer.

HIGHLIGHT: *These verses reveal that honesty and dependency on God in leadership and in relationship with others is the proper motivation.*

REMINDE: *The collected Proverbs of Solomon are short, pithy principles—not promises—that reveal typically true generalities. There are many variables in life that point to no guarantees.*

ILLUSTRATE: Draw another arrow from the heart and write *Blessing Assured*.

READ: **Invite someone to read Proverbs 16:3,6-7**, as the group looks for the results of trusting the Lord as revealed in Jesus Christ.

- **(16:6-7)** God's people experience the joy that accompanies forgiveness of their sins. Their sinful behavior is atoned for in the sense that their sins are covered and pardoned, never to be brought up again. Solomon referred to sins against the Lord's standard of righteousness as iniquity. Because of God's loyalty and faithfulness to His people, He can be counted on to cleanse us of our sin.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

TRANSITION: Using the completed drawing and the bulleted points under Apply The Text (p. 72), summarize the truths gained in studying Proverbs 15:33–16:11.

REFLECTION: Lead the group to examine the second set of questions on page 72. Say: *Ask God to reveal areas in your life that are dominated by pride. Confess your pride and ask Him to help you grow in humility toward Him.*

PRAY: Close in prayer, thanking God for being sovereign. Thank Him for providing guidance in how to live in an ever-changing world. Ask Him to cleanse our hearts and let our actions reflect a motivation of true love for Him. Pray that He will help us demonstrate wisdom in all that we do.

1. "Sovereignty of God," *The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 1494.

AFTER THE SESSION

Consider how you would explain God's sovereignty to others. Reflect on how knowing God is sovereign affects your everyday decisions.

STAYING SOBER

Proverbs 23:17-21, 29-35

FOCUS ATTENTION

PREPARE: Prior to the session write randomly on a board the following: *Designated Driver, MADD®, DUI, Addiction, Abuse, Pleasure, Social, Relationships, and High.*

INTRODUCE: After most have arrived, direct attention to the written words and ask how they are related.

EXPLAIN: *Throughout Proverbs and specifically during the previous session, we focused on the foundation of wisdom as the fear of the Lord. Repeatedly Solomon calls for following God's instructions and staying on the path. In today's session, he moves into the more specific area of the impact of misusing or abusing alcohol on our lives and relationships.*

ASK: *How is the use of alcohol and drugs glamorized in our culture today?*

STATE: *Unfortunately for some, alcohol is like stepping off a cliff into a deep trap that then turns into a tragedy that impacts all areas of life.*

QUERY: *What factors contribute most to alcohol and drug abuse? Can someone be a social or recreational user and not be an abuser? Explain. (p. 77)*

TRANSITION: *Solomon, in the section of Scriptures called the "thirty wise sayings of Solomon," provides counsel in how to live as God's people.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CONTEXTUALIZE: Today's session is set within the larger context of Proverbs 22:17–24:22. Using *Understand the Context* (p. 77) and **Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Proverbs and Song of Songs*), note specifically how the truths shared in this session build on the first nine chapters of Proverbs and connect to the sovereignty of God in the last session.

READ: **Direct a volunteer to read aloud Proverbs 23:17-18**, as the group listens for the source of hope found in these verses.

- **(23:18)** Aware of the potential temptation of a sinful lifestyle, Solomon reminded his son of the promise associated with living in the fear of the Lord. Fearing the Lord would prompt him to follow Him, to take His path of wisdom, and to trust God with his future. Solomon assured his son that a promising *future* rested in his willingness to entrust his life to the Lord. Therefore, instead of wandering away from the Lord and drifting into a lifestyle dominated by foolishness, his son would

be better served if he placed his *hope* in the Lord. Hope is much more than wishful thinking; it is extreme confidence in God. Hope in Him will never be dashed.

EXPLAIN: *In Proverbs 1:7, we learn that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” This admonition is repeated in Proverbs 9:10. In Proverbs 23:17, we’re again instructed to always fear the Lord.*

ASK: *How does fearing the Lord provide hope?*

GUIDE: Direct the group to turn to a neighbor and explain their answer. Provide a copy of **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: Fear of God*) for each person and review their findings.

TRANSITION: *In previous sessions, we confirmed that wisdom comes through a relationship with Jesus Christ. In Christ, we find promise for a secure future. Enlist a volunteer to read aloud Colossians 1:27 and Hebrews 10:23 to the group. Ask: Describe a time when you found yourself reassured in the hope Christ gives believers.*

READ: **Enlist a volunteer to read Proverbs 23:19-21**, while the group identifies the warning provided by Solomon.

- **(23:19)** Pay close attention to the challenge to *listen*. The challenge comes on the heels of a severe warning about envying sinful behavior (v. 17). It’s a stern challenge. Shifting our priority away from walking with the Lord will take a huge toll on us. For that reason, resisting the temptation to shift our focus away from Him has to be taken seriously. By controlling our thoughts, we follow the Lord’s wisdom because we’re certain it’s *the right course* for us to take. Staying on course shows that we’re devoted to Him and His direction for our lives. It also means we trust Him to take us through troubling situations.

HIGHLIGHT: Lead the group to highlight key words in the verses. Identify both positive and negative words.

ASK: *What are the similarities between alcohol abuse and gluttony? In what ways are alcoholism and gluttony two approaches for dealing with the same issues? (p. 79)*

EXPLAIN: *Solomon wanted God’s people to know that the abuse of alcohol and food often leads to a loss of relationships and financial resources as well as spiritual distress.*

READ: **Lead the group to read silently Proverbs 23:29-32**, looking for the characteristics of the person misusing or abusing alcohol. Call for the group to name what they noted in the verses.

- **(23:29)** Although Solomon’s warning deals with the addition to alcohol, the wisdom of his counsel could also be applied to any substance to which a person could become addicted. He warns us that problems related to emotional fatigue or depression could result from addiction. Emotional fatigue can be marked by *woe* and *sorrow*. Problems with interpersonal relationships can be connected to addiction as well. It could account for someone’s *conflicts* with other people or *complaints* about them. Of course, physical clues like *wounds for no reason* and bloodshot eyes may be warning signs of addictive behavior too.

ASK: *What actions might a person need to take so they don't find themselves in the picture painted by addiction? (p. 79)*

READ: **Enlist a volunteer to read Proverbs 23:33-35**, while the group listens for the consequences of abusive drinking.

- **(23:33)** Drug abuse and alcoholism present serious problems for addicts as well as for the people who love them. The seriousness of the problem becomes more obvious when folks suffering with addiction display strange behavior. Their minds begin to play tricks on them, and so do their eyes. They see what's not actually there, or they can't see what's really right in front of them. The problem becomes more complicated when the abuse of alcohol or drugs makes its victims lose control of their speech. That's when they have difficulty with what they think as their minds can't seem to hold on to a thought.

ASK: *How is Solomon's portrait of addiction seen in real life? Which image in the description makes the greatest impact? Explain. (p. 79)*

TRANSITION: *Solomon's words are clear that we're to keep focused on the Lord and not on the actions of others. Temptations may abound, but we're warned of the consequences of not avoiding addictive behaviors.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Reread Proverbs 23:17-21,29-35, and lead the group to list on a board principles gained from these verses.

REFLECT: Lead the group to consider the relationships they have that encourage them to pursue a godly lifestyle. Ask: *When you face a challenge or difficulty, to what or whom do you turn to first? What does your answer reveal about what or who you trust in life? What changes do you need to make in light of today's study? (p. 80)*

CHALLENGE: *Our world frequently glamorizes alcohol and gluttony while minimizing the consequences. Our study in Proverbs reveals that God expects us to be good stewards of the bodies He has given us.*

PRAY: Close in prayer, thanking God for providing clear direction for godly living. Pray that He will help us to keep our eyes focused on Him and that we would lean on God's strength when we feel weak. Pray that God would lead us to walk in the path of holiness in all our relationships. Pray that the testimony of our relationship with Jesus Christ will encourage others to pursue godly living.

AFTER THE SESSION

Study the attendance patterns of the group, and make a special effort to encourage individuals who seem to be withdrawing from the group.

ACCEPTING DISCIPLINE

Proverbs 29:1-3,12-20

FOCUS ATTENTION

GUIDE: Lead the group to select the quote they most agree with: “Discipline is choosing between what you want now and what you want most” (Abraham Lincoln). “Discipline yourself and others won’t need to” (John Wooden). “Small disciplines repeated with consistency every day lead to great achievements gained slowly over time” (John Maxwell).

ASK: *If you were asked to define discipline, what would you say?*

EXPLAIN: *Our English word discipline comes from the Latin word discipulus, the word for pupil, and it’s also the source of the word disciple. The Greek word for disciple is mathetes, meaning a learner or apprentice.*

QUERY: *Is discipline essential for the spiritual growth and development of God’s people? Explain. (p. 85)*

TRANSITION: Today’s study of Proverbs 29 reveals how God uses discipline from society, family, and others to shape His people. Point out discipline as a key word in Proverbs using **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Key Words in Proverbs).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

MINI-LECTURE: Proverbs 29 includes sayings of Solomon collected during the reign of Hezekiah, King of Judah. Using Understand the Context (p. 85), explain how Hezekiah used Solomon’s sayings to build spiritual reform in Judah. For more information about Hezekiah, consult the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*.

STATE: *Whether during the time of Hezekiah or today, God’s people frequently need spiritual disciplining.* Read aloud Hebrews 12:11, and relate that as we study Proverbs 29, we need to remember that through our relationship with Jesus Christ we have the Holy Spirit and God’s Word to light our paths and discipline us when we go astray.

READ: **Enlist a volunteer to read Proverbs 29:1-3**, as the group listens for the contrast between the disciplined and the undisciplined.

- **(29:2)** The dismal outcome for a person who rejects God’s discipline stands in stark contrast to the optimistic future for God’s people who have been made *righteous* because they placed their trust in Him. They will *flourish*, and as a result, the people in their families and their communities *rejoice*. A person who genuinely loves the Lord shows it in the way he or she treats others.

- **(29:3)** Verse 3 continues to show the difference the Lord's discipline makes in a believer's life. The resolve to live in a way that pleases the Lord emanates from a genuine love for His *wisdom*. Becoming more disciplined involves giving more attention to seeking His wisdom and following its path. A person who takes such a wise path *brings joy* to his or her parents.

DRAW: On a board or chart paper draw a "t" chart with two columns. Label one column *Discipline* and the other *Undisciplined*. Lead the group to add words or phrases from the verses appropriate for each column.

ASK: *How does knowing the results of a disciplined lifestyle help a person continue in that lifestyle?* (p. 87)

TRANSITION: *In the next verses, Solomon reveals that God's wisdom is available to all.*

READ: **Read aloud Proverbs 29:12-14**, while the group highlights words or phrases that show that God's wisdom is available to all.

- **(29:13)** The influence of a king's advisers serves as a fitting backdrop for the wisdom offered in verse 13. The *poor* represent people who have no power. When a person who has no integrity gains power, that person can become an *oppressor* of the poor who can't defend themselves. On the surface, the poor and oppressor appear to have nothing *in common*. But in another way, they're alike. Poor people and their oppressors have the same potential to turn to *the LORD* and to trust Him enough to seek His wisdom.

STATE: *The words of Solomon reveal that there's no excuse for foolish, undisciplined living.*

WRITE: Record additional information gained about being disciplined or undisciplined on the chart.

REFLECT: *How does knowing that God's wisdom is available to all people bring encouragement?* (p. 87)

READ: **Enlist a volunteer to read Proverbs 29:15-17**, as the group listens for specific information regarding discipline and the role of parenting.

- **(29:15)** When we think about the *rod of correction*, we need unmistakable clarity about the difference between discipline and abuse. Parents who have the best interests of their child at heart won't hesitate to discipline when necessary. They want the child to grow in *wisdom*, and discipline helps their child to become a wise adult. On the other hand, abusive parents don't have a worthwhile reason for inflicting pain on a defenseless child. They may fall under the powerful control of dark, destructive urges that give them permission to be abusive. With their awful behavior, they leave physical and emotional scars on a child that can last a lifetime.

STUDY: Lead the group to write their own definition of discipline. Then highlight the definition of discipline in the Day 3 Daily Exploration on page 90. Compare the two definitions. Ask: *What is the value of loving discipline in parenting? In God's relationship with believers?*

RECORD: Continue adding words or phrases to the chart.

ASK: *How are societal norms a gauge of the type of parenting taking place within that society? To what level do you agree that the lack of parental discipline of the child is a reflection of the lack of discipline in the parent's personal life? Explain.* (p. 87)

DISCUSS: Call on a volunteer to read Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Ask: *How do these verses clarify Solomon's instructions in Proverbs 29:15-17?*

TRANSITION: *Whether as parents, leaders, or followers, God's revelation provides direction for living a disciplined life.*

EXPLAIN: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Themes of Proverbs*) to those who need one. Highlight the last paragraph beginning "Faith in God's promises ..." Note discipline's role in gaining wisdom.

READ: Read aloud Proverbs 29:18-20, as the group considers the connection between God's revelation through the law and discipline. Add words or phrases to the chart.

- **(29:18)** God's people grow more disciplined as they give their full attention to His *instruction*. They demonstrate that they take it seriously by obeying what He has taught in His Word. Spiritual insight from the Lord and instruction in His Word nourish a *happy* heart for believers.

ASK: *How does a commitment to God's Word help a person avoid acting in haste?* (p. 87)

TRANSITION: *If true discipleship is reflected in consistent obedience, we must examine our own lives to determine how we're providing discipline for those in our care and how we're growing ourselves through the discipline of God's Word.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Briefly review the chart developed during the session, summarizing the contrast between discipline and lack of discipline. Ask: *How might God discipline a believer to draw that person closer to Him?*

CHALLENGE: *Consider what role discipline plays in your development as a follower of Jesus Christ. Determine at least two actions that you're willing to take to more consistently apply God's Word. Ask one person close to you to help you be accountable for the action steps.*

PRAY: Close in prayer, thanking God for clear instructions on how to live a disciplined life. Pray that He will provide discipline for our children and those following our leadership. Pray that He will help us to obey His Word and honor Him in all that we do.

AFTER THE SESSION

Examine your own heart to determine how willingly you accept God's discipline to support your growth in discipleship.

FINDING HONOR

Proverbs 31:10-16,23-31

FOCUS ATTENTION

INTRODUCE: *In today's world it's easier to have someone watching you than in previous generations. We have cameras on intersections for traffic control or enforcement. Stores have security cameras to stop theft. Even homes have cameras for security. Doorbells even allow people to see remotely who is at their front door. Ask: In your home, do you have someone watching you?*

GUIDE: Lead the group to discuss with a neighbor a time when they became aware that someone was watching them and how they responded when they realized someone was watching.

TRANSITION: *In today's session we see a picture of an ideal woman who faithfully demonstrates God's wisdom in her life. The characteristics described in Proverbs 31 set a high standard of character and conduct. Only through our relationship with Jesus Christ are we able to achieve God's ideal.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

MINI-LECTURE: Proverbs 30 is identified as the sayings of Agur, and Proverbs 31 is credited to the wisdom of King Lemuel and his mother. Using Understand the Context (p. 93), **Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Proverbs and Song of Songs*), and **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: The Four Contributors*), provide background information for the group. In addition, explain that in the Hebrew language, Proverbs 31 is a skillfully-crafted acrostic where each verse begins with a successive letter in the Hebrew alphabet. This passage is also known as a wisdom poem.

EXPLAIN: *Regardless of what we know and don't know about Agur and King Lemuel, it's apparent that Solomon's wisdom extended to others and that Solomon associated with wise people. Proverbs 31 reinforces other sayings by Solomon in Proverbs. Reference Proverbs 12:24; 18:22; and 19:14.*

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Proverbs 31:10-12, as the group listens for the godly woman's commitment to her husband.

- **(31:11-12)** Because of her commitment to their marriage, he doesn't *lack* for anything. The Hebrew word for *anything good* brings to mind the plunder that a victorious army would bring home after a battle. Imagine the riches that would be gathered from the defeated army and the wealth to be taken from a fallen kingdom. Imagine too the joyful surprise on the faces of everyone back home when they beheld the plunder the victorious army brought to them. The husband of a noble woman enjoys that kind of surprise when he sees what she's able to bring into his life.

PARAPHRASE: Lead the group to express how they would state these verses in today's language.

ASK: *How does the keeping of the marriage commitment bring honor to God? To the family?* (p. 95)

READ: Read aloud **Proverbs 31:13-16**, while the group lists the actions of the godly woman.

- **(31:16)** Providing for the needs of her family would prompt a woman of excellence to engage in profitable business ventures. Her business savvy could be seen in the way that she carefully *evaluates* a piece of property that had been placed on the market. She would inspect it to see if purchasing it would be profitable. She didn't think about the purchase of the property in terms of personal luxury or self-indulgence. Instead, she thought only in terms of how the property would provide what her family needed. For that reason, she estimated the potential productivity of the land if she grew a *vineyard* on it. This verse sheds light on the industrious ways of God's people who trust Him and seek His wisdom. We're determined to provide for our families and others in need, and we're always looking for the most prudent way to do it.

RECORD: On a board, write the actions listed by the group.

DISCUSS: *How would each of these actions translate into today's world?* Use the commentary under Verses 13-16 in the Day 3 Daily Exploration (p. 98) for guidance. Record responses on the board.

STATE: *It's very evident that the godly woman works and is not lazy. Whether inside the home, outside the home, or caring for others, the godly woman is industrious and honors God both in her attitudes and actions.*

ASK: *How does the portrait of a godly woman painted in this passage compare to how society defines a successful woman today?* (p. 95)

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read **Proverbs 31:23-27**, while the group listens for descriptions of a godly woman's character.

- **(31:27)** Instead of wasting her days in self-indulgent luxury, she takes the initiative to manage her day wisely. Guiding others under her supervision as well as managing her own projects requires her to make the best use of her time. Therefore, she's *never idle*. She never takes a break when it comes to caring for her family or attending to her other responsibilities. Her industrious approach to each day serves as a worthwhile model for believers. A commitment to work coupled with good stewardship of time helps to nourish a good reputation that speaks well of our relationship with the Lord. In turn, our reputation serves as a way to have a positive impact on others for Christ.

IDENTIFY: Lead the group to identify the character qualities discovered in these verses. List the character qualities next to the actions previously recorded on the board.

DISCUSS: Guide the group to create teams of two to four to discuss the following question: *What happens when character is disconnected from right conduct, even if the conduct is right?* (p. 95) Call for volunteers to share their findings.

READ: Read aloud **Proverbs 31:28-31**, directing the group to listen for how God honors the faithful woman.

- **(31:31)** A life of devotion to the Lord renders a reputation that brings honor. Christian women who embrace the model provided in Proverbs 31 and take it to heart deserve to be honored. The *reward* of affirmation can encourage her as she strives to live out the model she's embraced. She is treasured because of her walk with the Lord and the way she expresses it in everything she does. Her *works* share the story of her devotion to God. Nothing more needs to be added.

ASK: *What are some appropriate ways of honoring women in society?* (p. 95)

EXPLAIN: *King Lemuel recognized that many people honor the wrong things, but that God honors a godly woman who "fears the Lord."*

TRANSITION: *Proverbs 31 paints a picture of the ideal woman in God's eyes. Each of us today can examine the actions and character portrayed and have a standard for godly living today.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Briefly review the actions and character qualities listed on the board. Then lead the group to discuss which actions and characteristics present the biggest challenge to most people.

STATE: *We began the session by recognizing that someone is always watching. Rhetorically ask: Will the person watching you see a model for godly living in your marriage, as you interact with your children or grandchildren, in your relationship with others outside the family?*

CHALLENGE: *As you reflect on people you influence, consider how you're influencing them to honor God. Ask: What needs to change for you to have a greater influence on others for God's honor?* (p. 96)

REFLECT: Lead the group to consider how they're honoring the people in their lives who provide them encouragement and support for godly living. Using page 96, ask: *List the needs of your family, including spiritual needs. What actions can you take to help meet the needs you identified?*

REVIEW: Point out that this session concludes our study of Proverbs. Direct attention to **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Key Words in Proverbs*) and **Pack Item 6** (*Key Verse: Proverbs 1:7a*) displayed in the room. Call for volunteers to express one thing they will take with them from this study on Proverbs.

PRAY: Close in prayer, thanking God for setting a high standard for character and actions that display to our families and others around us our relationship with Jesus Christ and our desire to honor Him. Pray that God would help us to remember others are watching to see how we respond so that we can be a positive influence in our families and communities.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email individuals in the group to let them know that you're praying for them and their families this week.

RELATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

Song of Songs 2:15–3:5

FOCUS ATTENTION

DISPLAY: Prior to the session, cut out a large paper heart and place it in a prominent place in the room. When most of the group has arrived, draw attention to the heart, and ask: *When you see a heart, what comes to your mind? In what ways can love be viewed as both positive and negative?*

GUIDE: On a board or chart paper, write a plus sign and a minus sign. Direct the group to give positive and negative examples of how the following are used: *teeth, exercise, diets, money, love, sexual intimacy.*

TRANSITION: *Healthy, positive relationships matter. As we begin our two-session study on Song of Songs, we need to remember that love is at the root of the entire book. Song of Songs portrays a picture of romantic love between a man and a woman, through poetic, lyrical language.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INTRODUCE: *The major theme of the Song of Songs celebrates the love and marriage of a man and woman. This love song reflects the ideal love described in Genesis 2:23-25. Use information from Understand the Context (p. 101) and **Pack Item 2** (Outlines of Proverbs and Song of Songs) to provide additional details.*

READ: **Enlist a volunteer to read Song of Songs 2:15**, directing the group to listen and paint a picture in their minds of what they hear.

- **(2:15)** Interpreting the parts of the poem that have been written using figurative language can be somewhat challenging. The figurative language makes it full of possible implications for God's people. The wisest approach to interpreting this verse starts with an understanding that God's people who live according to His wisdom protect their relationships with each other. Guarding relationships becomes necessary when we realize that predators abound. Those predators can destroy relationships. The relationship between a husband and wife is susceptible to predators that gnaw at a couple's devotion to each other. For that reason, a wise Christian couple makes guarding their marriage a high priority.

EXPLAIN: *This verse describes the beauty of two lovers anticipating marriage. Just as a garden needs tending to flourish, so does a relationship.*

ASK: *As you picture the foxes in the vineyard, do you see a positive or negative result? Why?*

WRITE: Record the first outline point of the session, *Preventative Care*, on the board.

EMPHASIZE: *The little foxes hint at something that could be harmful to a marriage.*

IDENTIFY: Guide the group to identify actions or things that might be considered a “little fox” that can harm a relationship or marriage (p. 103). Then ask: *What are some ways of “catching” those foxes?*

ASK: *How can negative actions that impact a marriage relationship be prevented? How can sexual expression outside of a marriage impact other relationships?*

TRANSITION: *Intimate relationships require attention and time to flourish.* Record the second outline point on the board or chart paper: *Build Trust.*

READ: Invite someone to read aloud **Song of Songs 2:16-17**, as the group listens for words that describe a mutual commitment.

- **(2:16)** The man and woman in this poem present a living snapshot of the way that love in a marriage expresses itself through mutual submission. However, this verse doesn’t provide instructions for believers on how to put the principle of mutual submission into practice in marriage. For that reason, we’re grateful for Paul’s instruction about nurturing a healthy marriage relationship that centers on Christ. His letter to the Colossian believers sheds valuable light on the need for Christ-centered marriages to grow stronger through mutual submission (Col. 3:18-19). His letter to the Ephesians contains instruction on this important part in marriage that goes into greater detail (Eph. 5:21-33). In the letter, he introduced the principle of mutual submission as a directive that should be taken seriously by believers in our relationships (5:21). From there, he went on to teach husbands and wives how to apply the principle in marriage (5:22-33).

COMPARE: Read aloud 1 Corinthians 7:1-7, and ask how these verses give insight into the verses in Song of Songs.

DISCUSS: Direct the group to turn to a neighbor and discuss the following questions: *How are mutual trust and submission related? Can you have one without the other? Explain.* (p. 103)

HIGHLIGHT: Remind the group that “my love is mine and I am his” (v. 16) reveals that sexual intimacy is a gift from God that must be developed and protected. Emphasize that trust and respect must be employed by both husband and wife for true intimacy to flourish.

ASK: *What can married couples do to build trust?* (p. 103)

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read **Song of Songs 3:1-5**, as the group listens for the desires of the bride as she longed to be with her groom.

- **(3:4)** Eventually she found the man for whom she had been searching. She is devoted to him exclusively and is eager to give herself to him. Now having found him, she had to make an important choice. She doesn’t want to be foolish, but she doesn’t want to lose him again either. Pay close attention to the fact that she doesn’t take him back to her bedroom. Quite the opposite, she brings him to the room in her mother’s house in which she was born. By bringing him there instead of

her bedroom, she registers her determination to practice restraint. She's not going to give in to her eagerness to be sexually intimate with him. That kind of intimacy is reserved for marriage.

RECORD: Write the third outline point on the board: *Restraint Required*.

REREAD: Read aloud again Song of Songs 3:5, and then read Song of Songs 2:7.

ASK: *How do these verses relate to restraint? Discuss from page 103: How does a person rationalize or justify sexual infidelity? What do these efforts to justify infidelity reveal about the person and about our world in general? What's the best way to teach the valuable lesson about sexual restraint so other believers put it into practice?*

EMPHASIZE: Point out that today's memory verse is 1 John 4:19. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*) to those who need one. Emphasize that sexuality is an expression of love that God gave to us, and this intimacy is a reflection of our relationship with God.

CONTEXTUALIZE: *Song of Songs 3:6–5:1 celebrates a wedding day. The groom describes the beauty of the woman soon to be his wife and the bride anticipates the intimacy of marriage with her beloved.* Distribute **Pack Item 14** (*Handout: Interpreting Song of Songs*). Allow time for the group to review the handout. Call for responses to their findings.

TRANSITION: *Sexual intimacy is a beautiful gift from God designed to be fulfilled through the marriage of a man and a woman, but when it's misused or abused it affects the marriage relationship as well as other relationships. God created humans to be relational, with the greatest relationship being between Him and His people.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Focus attention on the three outline points recorded on the board. Lead the group to review how the statements are supported in Song of Songs 2:15–3:5.

EVALUATE: *On a scale of one to five, with one being little attention and five being a lot of attention, review the outline points on page 103 and evaluate your relationship with your spouse (if married) and your relationship with Jesus Christ.*

CHALLENGE: *Based on your own evaluation, determine two actions you could take to strengthen your marriage relationship and/or your relationship with Christ.*

PRAY: Close in prayer, thanking God for the uniqueness of men and women and for creating us for relationships. Pray for His guidance in taking positive actions to strengthen our relationships.

AFTER THE SESSION

As you prepare, be sensitive to those you know who are struggling or have struggled in the past with a marriage relationship.

RELATIONAL INVESTMENT

Song of Songs 5:6-16

FOCUS ATTENTION

INTRODUCE: If available, call attention to a display of the board game “The Game of Life.” If you have the game, you might choose to display it. As the group arrives, share the following: “*The Game of Life*” was originally created in 1860, but a modern version was published 100 years later in 1960. Since 1960, the game has been revised multiple times. A recent revision in 2018 includes pegs and squares for acquiring pets. In the game, players travel along a track where, based on their spins, they get an education, a career, houses, marriage, children, and pets. The game has stood the test of time because just like in our lives, choices and experiences affect us as we move toward retirement.

ASK: How might a person’s investments reveal their stage in life? What might a person’s investments reveal about their priorities? (p. 109)

TRANSITION: In today’s session in *Song of Songs* we’ll see how our relationships require a continual investment on our parts to remain healthy.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

REVIEW: Provide the group with a brief review of **Pack Item 14** (*Handout: Interpreting Song of Songs*) that was distributed in the last session. Remind the group that the previous session focused on a love moving toward marriage. Today’s session focuses on the time after the wedding.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Song of Songs 5:6-8, as the group listens to identify the problems arising within the marriage.

- **(5:6)** The dream so far painted a picture of a spouse who felt as if she had been deserted. She was left by herself in the sense that he wasn’t physically there with her. She looked forward to being with him once more. His continued physical absence only added more pain to her broken heart. However, the picture also shows the pain that comes from being deserted emotionally. Their marriage needed one another’s physical presence, and it also required them to provide each other with emotional support. With it, they could look forward to growing together in a mutually fulfilling relationship. Without it, a spouse could be left to feel abandoned.

IDENTIFY: Lead the group to identify the problems they identified by referencing a specific word, phrase, or sentence from the text.

DRAW: On a board, draw a two-column chart labeling one side *Spouse* and one side *God*.

ASK: *How might the failure of a spouse to meet the emotional needs of the other lead to greater issues? (p. 111) How might the spouse's search for companionship be compared to a person's search for God and meaning? (p. 111)*

RECORD: As the group responds to the questions, record on the board problems that affect the relationship between spouses or with God. Write *Cry for Companionship* across both sides of the chart.

READ: Direct someone to read aloud Song of Songs 5:9, as the group considers how they would respond to the question of what makes the one you love better than another.

- **(5:9)** The young women of Jerusalem have appeared at strategic moments throughout the poem. Almost always, the young women of Jerusalem responded by listening or assisting the woman. In this verse alone, however, they responded differently. They replied by asking her a probing question that would prompt her to spend some time in reflection. The question raised by the young women of Jerusalem deserves to be taken seriously by believers today.

DISCUSS: Lead the group to turn to a neighbor and share how they would respond to one of the following questions: *Why were you attracted to your spouse in the beginning? How did your relationship with God begin?*

ASK: *What is the value of retelling stories when it comes to building and maintaining relationships? (p. 111)*

WRITE: Across the columns write *The Call for Remembering*.

READ: Identify someone to read Song of Songs 5:10-16, as the group listens for the woman's response to the question of what makes her love so special.

- **(5:10-16)** The woman declared to the young women of Jerusalem that she loved the man, and she demonstrated her love with her eagerness to find him. She went on to tell them what she saw in him. She started with the way he looked as he stood before her. She provided a number of rich details as she talked about his eyes. The details gave the impression she may have lost herself in them many times throughout their relationship. His eyes captivated her because she loved him so much. She considered her true love to be most charming and absolutely desirable. Just as important to her, he was her true friend. The two blessings—romance and friendship—resulted from their investment in each other. She honored their friendship as much as she relished their romance.

LIST: Lead the group to identify the characteristics expressed in the verses. Record the characteristics identified under the column labeled *Spouse*. Point to **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Cedars of Lebanon*) as an illustration for verse 15. Emphasize: *There will be seasons when the physical dimension of a marriage will be less important than the friendship dimension of marriage*. Solicit responses to the comment.

GUIDE: Lead the group to consider how they would respond to the question, *What makes your relationship with God special?* Record responses under the column labeled God.

ASK: *What are some appropriate ways for husbands and wives to express their admiration for each other? (p. 111) What are some appropriate ways for believers to express their love for God?*

WRITE: On the board across both columns write *The Crux for Celebrating*.

REREAD: Enlist a volunteer to reread Song of Songs 5:16, guiding the group to listen for key words and phrases.

ASK: *Why is being a friend important in any relationship? In a marital relationship? With God?*

TRANSITION: *Today, as we've examined the verses in Song of Songs, we see that each of us has a longing for relationships in our homes and with God. It's critical that we remember the beauty of a new relationship while celebrating our time-honored relationships.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

COMPARE: Say: *The session outline points written across the chart are true for marriage relationships and our relationship with God.* Discuss the similarities and differences between the two columns of the chart developed during the session.

EVALUATE: *List reasons for being involved in a relationship. What role does God play in the reasons you listed? What adjustments do you need to make to this list in light of today's study? (p. 112)*

CHALLENGE: Reread Song of Songs 5:16. Call for volunteers to paraphrase the verse to explain how they would describe their love for their spouse or their love for God. (Be prepared to share your own example.)

REFLECT: Point to **Pack Item 6** (*Key Verse: Proverbs 1:7a*). Stress that we need God's wisdom to make good decisions in all our relationships. Guide each person in the group to determine one action they will take to affirm and strengthen their relationship with their spouse or with God during the next week.

PRAY: Offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for creating us for relationship with others and with Him. Pray that God will lead us to protect our relationships in both word and action. Ask Him to help us consistently invest in building our relationships. Thank Him for the gift of love He provided through His Son, Jesus Christ.

AFTER THE SESSION

Begin to prepare for the next quarter of study by personally delivering copies of the Fall Daily Discipleship Guide to every person on your ministry list prior to next Sunday.

VISUAL IDEAS

These items are available in the **Explore the Bible: Leader Pack** (see goExploreTheBible.com) or you can use these descriptions to create your own..

Item 1: Sessions 1-13

Map: Solomon's Economic Enterprises

Use the map on page 155 or locate a map in a Bible atlas that shows the locations of Shunem and Jerusalem during the time of Solomon.



Explore the Bible: Leader Pack Sample

Item 2: Sessions 1-13

Outlines of Proverbs and Song of Songs

Refer to outlines for Proverbs and Song of Songs in the CSB Study Bible.

Item 3: Sessions 2,3,8,10,11

Poster: Key Words in Proverbs

Create a poster that lists the following keywords from the Book of Proverbs: Fear; Wisdom; Understanding; Foolish; Knowledge; Justice; Righteousness; Guard; Wicked; Discipline; Instruction; Delight.

Item 4: Sessions 4,6,11

Poster: Wisdom Teaching in Proverbs

Use the *Holman Illustrated Study Bible* to create a poster that explains the different kinds of wisdom teaching in Proverbs.

Item 5: Session 13

Poster: Cedars of Lebanon

Locate an image of cedar trees that could represent the cedars mentioned in Song of Songs 5:15b.

Item 6: Sessions 1,11,13

Key Verse: Proverbs 1:7a

Create a poster that lists Proverbs 1:7a: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge ..."

Item 7: Sessions 1,9

Handout: Solomon Time Line

Locate a study Bible with a time line of the major people and events leading up to and during Solomon's life (from 3000 BC–900 BC). Use it as a reference during this study.

Item 8: Sessions 1-13

Handout: *Memory Verses Bookmark*

Make a list of these suggested memory verses to distribute to your group: Proverbs 1:7; Proverbs 3:5-6; Proverbs 3:27; Proverbs 4:26; Proverbs 6:20; Proverbs 9:10; Proverbs 12:22; Proverbs 15:3; Proverbs 23:19; Proverbs 13:1; Proverbs 22:19; 1 John 4:19; Song of Songs 6:1.

Item 9: Sessions 3,10

Handout: *Themes of Proverbs*

Use a Bible dictionary or handbook to create a handout that discusses the major themes of Proverbs.

Item 10: Sessions 3,11

Handout: *The Four Contributors*

Use a Bible dictionary or commentary to create a chart that explains the four contributors to the Book of Proverbs (Solomon, Hezekiah's Men, Agur, and King Lemuel).

Item 11: Sessions 6,8,9

Handout: *Fear of God*

Create a handout for your group that explains the meaning behind fearing God.

Item 12: Sessions 5,7

Handout: *Wisdom in Proverbs*

Use a Bible dictionary or concordance to create a handout that shares various Old and New Testament verses that use the word wisdom.

Item 13: Sessions 5,7

Handout: *Fool in Proverbs*

Use a study Bible or a Hebrew dictionary to create a handout that defines the following key words from Proverbs: kesiyil; ewiyl; chakam; da'ath.



Explore the Bible:
Leader Pack Sample

Item 14: Sessions 12,13

Handout: *Interpreting Song of Songs*

Use a Bible commentary to create a handout that explains the various interpretations of Song of Songs. Note that the best interpretation is the most simple and obvious. Song of Songs is a love song in three parts—a man, a woman, and a chorus of women.

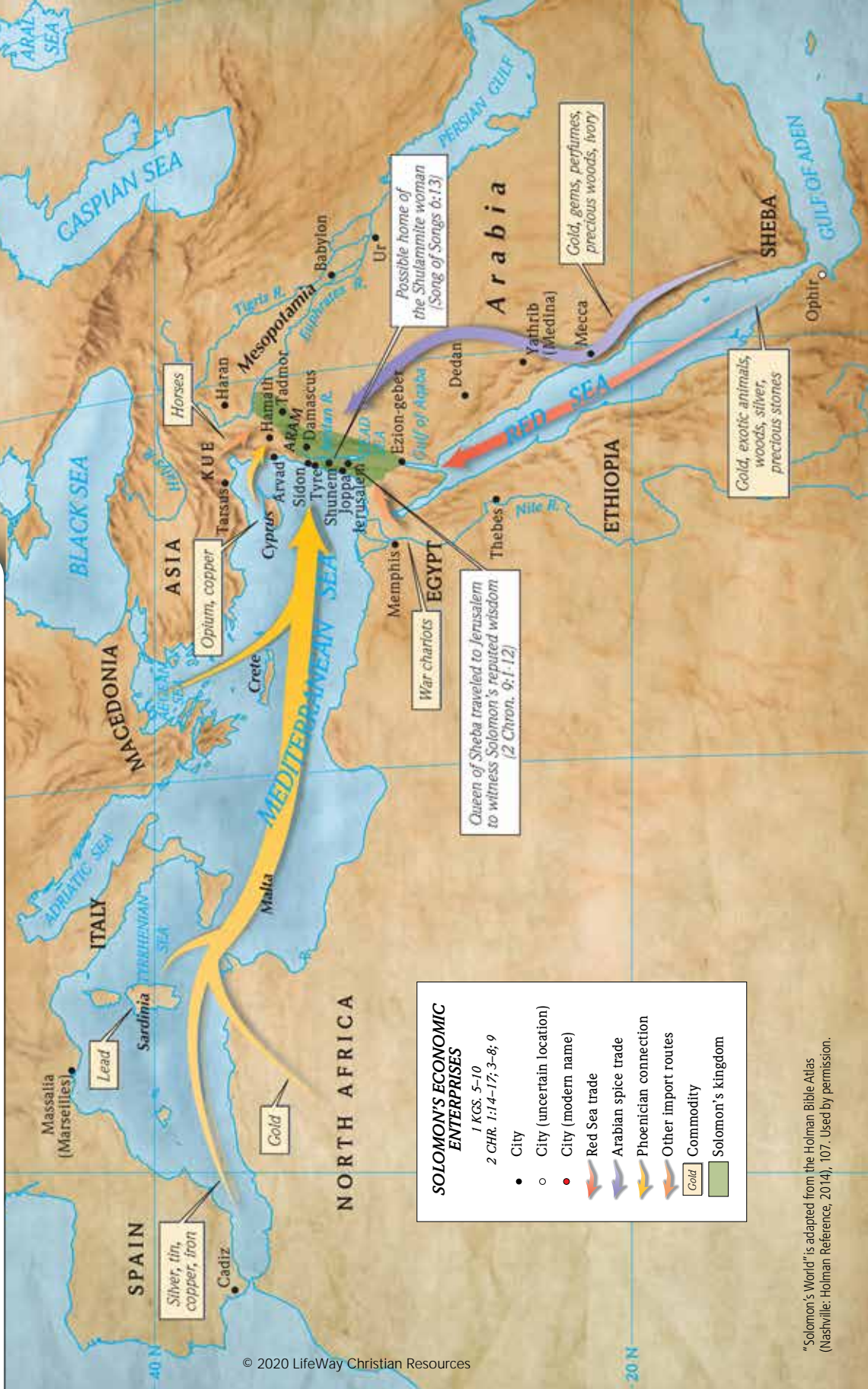
COMING NEXT QUARTER

Isaiah

- Session 1** **God Confronts** > *Isaiah 1:10-20*
- Session 2** **God Sends** > *Isaiah 6:1-13*
- Session 3** **God Promises** > *Isaiah 7:7-17*
- Session 4** **God Reigns** > *Isaiah 23:8-18*
- Session 5** **God Saves** > *Isaiah 25:1-10a*
- Session 6** **God Protects** > *Isaiah 31:1-9*
- Session 7** **God Listens** > *Isaiah 37:14-20,30-35*
- Session 8** **God Renews** > *Isaiah 40:18-21*
- Session 9** **God Acts** > *Isaiah 46:3-13*
- Session 10** **God Comforts** > *Isaiah 49:1-13*
- Session 11** **God Justifies** > *Isaiah 53:1-12*
- Session 12** **God Expects** > *Isaiah 58:1-12*
- Session 13** **God Restores** > *Isaiah 65:17-25*

Secure a preview of the first four lessons at goExploreTheBible.com.

Solomon's Economic Enterprises



Proverbs; Song of Songs

People want to succeed in life. Whether it's at work, relationships, or finances, the drive to thrive draws people to quick fixes and easy steps, often from TV talk shows, books, or the Internet. What we learn from the beginning of the Book of Proverbs, however, is that true wisdom comes from God, and the starting point of a life well lived is a relationship with Him. From there, Proverbs addresses a wide assortment of life issues—living with integrity, avoiding foolish choices, and resisting temptation receive serious consideration.

The Song of Songs shows us how to put God's wisdom to work nourishing relationships that will endure, with particular attention given to marriage relationships. In these two books you will find timely guidance for wise living.



Let the Word dwell in you.

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