

PROVERBS

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THE PURSUIT OF
GOD'S WISDOM

Proverbs

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PROVERBS

THE PURSUIT OF GOD'S WISDOM

WOODROW KROLL

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Proverbs: The Pursuit of God's Wisdom

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How to Use This Study

Your study of Proverbs will have maximum impact if you prayerfully read each day's Scripture passage. The relevant text of Proverbs from the English Standard Version is printed before each lesson's reading, so that everything you need is in one place. While we recommend reading the Scripture passage before you read the devotional, some have found it helpful to use the devotional as preparation for reading the Scripture. If you are unfamiliar with the English Standard Version (on which this series of studies is based), you might consider reading the devotional, followed by reading the passage again from a different Bible text. This will give you an excellent basis for considering the rest of the lesson.

After each devotional there are three sections designed to help you better understand and apply the lesson's Scripture passage.

Consider It—Several questions will help you unpack and reflect on the Scripture passage. These could be used for a small group discussion.

Express It—Suggestions for turning the insights from the lesson into prayer.

Go Deeper—The nature of this study makes it important to see the Book of Proverbs in the context of other passages and insights from Scripture. This brief section will allow you to consider some of the implications of the day's passage for the central theme of the study (The Pursuit of God's Wisdom) as well as the way it fits with the rest of Scripture.

Lesson

1

Wisdom and Fools

Every day we have hundreds of choices to make. But how do we make sure they're good ones? According to the Book of Proverbs, the best decisions are the ones based on God's Word—this is called wisdom. But the wisdom that comes from God and the wisdom we can get from the world are very different. As we begin our study of Proverbs, we'll see why God's wisdom is worth seeking.

Proverbs 1:1–33

The Beginning of Knowledge

1 The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:

2To know wisdom and instruction,
to understand words of insight,
3to receive instruction in wise dealing,

Key Verse

Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance (Prov. 1:5).

in righteousness, justice, and equity;
4to give prudence to the simple,
knowledge and discretion to the youth—
5Let the wise hear and increase in learning,
and the one who understands obtain guidance,
6to understand a proverb and a saying,
the words of the wise and their riddles.

7The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The Enticement of Sinners

8Hear, my son, your father's instruction,
and forsake not your mother's teaching,
9for they are a graceful garland for your head

and pendants for your neck.

10My son, if sinners entice you,
do not consent.

11If they say, “Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood;

let us ambush the innocent without reason;

12like Sheol let us swallow them alive,
and whole, like those who go down to the pit;

13we shall find all precious goods,
we shall fill our houses with plunder;

14throw in your lot among us;
we will all have one purse”—

15my son, do not walk in the way with them;

hold back your foot from their paths,

16for their feet run to evil,
and they make haste to shed blood.

17For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird,

18but these men lie in wait for their own blood;
they set an ambush for their own lives.

19Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain;
it takes away the life of its possessors.

The Call of Wisdom

20Wisdom cries aloud in the street,
in the markets she raises her voice;

21at the head of the noisy streets she cries out;

at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:

22“How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?

How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing
and fools hate knowledge?

²³If you turn at my reproof,
behold, I will pour out my spirit to you;
I will make my words known to you.

²⁴Because I have called and you refused to listen,
have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded,

²⁵because you have ignored all my counsel
and would have none of my reproof,

²⁶I also will laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when terror strikes you,

²⁷when terror strikes you like a storm
and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish come upon you.

²⁸Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;

they will seek me diligently but will not find me.

²⁹Because they hated knowledge
and did not choose the fear of the LORD,

³⁰would have none of my counsel
and despised all my reproof,
³¹therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way,

and have their fill of their own devices.
³²For the simple are killed by their turning away,
and the complacency of fools destroys them;

³³but whoever listens to me will dwell secure
and will be at ease, without dread of disaster."

Go Deeper

The word translated as “wisdom” in the Old Testament is *hokmah*. The first place this word is used is in Exodus 28:3 where God gives instructions to Moses concerning the crafting of the priestly garments. But in this instance, the word is translated as “skill.” “You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they make Aaron’s garments to consecrate him for my priesthood.”

The skill of a master craftsman and wisdom have a lot in common. The master sculptor, for instance, can make a

work of art out of a block of stone but must make many difficult decisions about where to strike his chisel. He must have a firm idea of the final shape of the statue before he begins and constantly work toward that goal.

Godly wisdom has the same goal for your life. It will help you make choices in order to better your life and to shape your future in a way that honors God and benefits you. That’s why it’s so important to get our wisdom from God, the Author of life and the One who holds the future.

Already today you've made hundreds of choices: "Should I hit the snooze button one more time?" "Do I wear the blue blouse or the red?" "Should I eat at home, grab some breakfast on the way to work or just skip it altogether?"

You've probably also faced some of the other, less trivial choices that come up often: "Will I loan money to this friend?" "Do I tell my roommate what I overheard in the mall today?" "Should I cut off this driver who was rude to me earlier?"

How do you make all these decisions? What causes you to choose one option over another? The answer is *wisdom*. Wisdom is what helps us make proper choices that relate to the life situations we encounter day to day. God is very concerned about our choices because no one knows better than He how our decisions affect us and others. One of the reasons He's given us the Bible is to show us how to live wisely. And in the Book of Proverbs, God tells us specifically how to find wisdom.

"To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight . . ." (Prov. 1:2)—right from the start Solomon, the main author of the Book of Proverbs, tells us why he's written this book. In order to make the right choices in life (to have wisdom), we need to know how to take instruction from others, how to understand what they're saying and how it applies to us.

There are two main sources of wisdom: God and the world. Proverbs, as well as the Bible in general, is God's source for wisdom. Proverbs in particular is God's guide to making life's choices. If you want the world's wisdom, it's not hard to find. Turn on the TV, listen to your friends, browse the Internet—there's no shortage of sources for worldly advice on making choices.

If you're reading this study, it should go without saying that God's wisdom is clearly the superior of the two. But just for a moment, let's look at what makes the world's wisdom so wrong. Actually, it can be summed up in one word—sin.

Sin occurs when we act contrary to God's commands. When we make choices based on the world's wisdom, the result is almost always sin. This is because worldly wisdom always seeks

“The truth is, all of us were fools at one time. Living by the world’s standards, we applied sinful wisdom to our choices. We thought that by our own efforts we could make ourselves happy. . . . But without God’s wisdom, we were actually following a path to death.”

to honor the world (often ourselves) and not God. The wisdom of the world prompts us to ignore God when we make our choices; it leads us to trust ourselves. This is exactly what happened to Eve in the Garden of Eden.

When Satan in the form of a serpent first appeared to Eve, he convinced her to act apart from God. Even though she knew that God had commanded Adam and her not to eat from the tree, Eve saw that “the tree was to be desired to make one wise, [so] she took of its fruit and ate” (Gen. 3:6). Eve’s decision was based on the world’s standards and not on God’s. It may have been this incident Solomon was thinking of years later when he wrote, “Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil” (Prov. 3:7).

Proverbs has a word for those who act by worldly wisdom, those who are wise in their own eyes. It calls them fools. A fool isn’t someone who is not intelligent; a fool is someone who relies on his or her own intelligence. If applying God’s standards to life’s choices is called wisdom, applying the world’s standards is called folly, or foolishness. “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death” (14:12). That way is the path of foolishness.

What’s more, the people who are described as fools don’t know they are fools. Their way seems right to them. They’re so

sure they're right that they don't know how wrong they are. That's why the Book of Proverbs exists—"to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth" (1:4).

The truth is, all of us were fools at one time. Living by the world's standards, we applied sinful wisdom to our choices. We thought that by our own efforts we could make ourselves happy. We thought that we could provide a safe environment for ourselves or our families to grow in. But without God's wisdom, we were actually following a path to death.

The answer to foolish living has always been the wisdom of God contained in the Word of God. In Solomon's day, the Word could be heard in the temple. But that changed nearly a thousand years later when "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The Word that became flesh was Jesus. And, "to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

Maybe you're still what the Bible calls a fool, someone who makes their decisions based on what the world says. If so, take your first step on the path of wisdom by recognizing Jesus as God's Son and the redeemer of sinners (fools). That will be the most important choice you will ever make.

Express It

Even Christians make decisions based on the world's wisdom from time to time. Ask God to help you find what you need to live wisely. Ask for the discipline to seek His answers to life's choices and to reject the quick and easy answers the world so often suggests. Ask Him to teach you as you read His Word.

Consider It

As you read *Proverbs 1:1–33*, consider these questions:

- 1) In verse 9, Solomon says that a parent's instruction is like graceful garlands and pendants. How is that the case?

- 2) What do the parents want to accomplish by teaching their child wisdom?

- 3) What are the goals of the sinners in verses 11–19?

- 4) Why does wisdom cry out in the streets?

- 5) What is wisdom's response to fools?

- 6) What is it that ultimately destroys those who are foolish?



How Do We Get Wisdom?

It's not always easy to choose the wise path, especially when the foolish ones don't look foolish. Left to ourselves, finding the wise path would be a shot in the dark. But in this lesson, we'll see that God has shown us how to find wisdom, as well as the need to apply it to our lives.

Proverbs 2:1–22

The Value of Wisdom

2 My son, if you receive my words
and treasure up my commandments
with you,
2 making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to
understanding;
3 yes, if you call out for insight
and raise your voice for
understanding,
4 if you seek it like silver
and search for it as for hidden
treasures,
5 then you will understand the fear of the
LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
6 For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and
understanding;
7 he stores up sound wisdom for the
upright;
he is a shield to those who walk in
integrity,
8 guarding the paths of justice
and watching over the way of his
saints.
9 Then you will understand
righteousness and justice
and equity, every good path;
10 for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to
your soul;
11 discretion will watch over you,
understanding will guard you,
12 delivering you from the way of evil,
from men of perverted speech,
13 who forsake the paths of uprightness
to walk in the ways of darkness,

Key Verse

For wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you (Prov. 2:10–11).

14 who rejoice in doing evil
and delight in the perverseness of
evil,
15 men whose paths are crooked,
and who are devious in their ways.
16 So you will be delivered from the
forbidden woman,
from the adulteress with her smooth
words,
17 who forsakes the companion of her
youth
and forgets the covenant of her God;
18 for her house sinks down to death,
and her paths to the departed;
19 none who go to her come back,
nor do they regain the paths of life.
20 So you will walk in the way of the good
and keep to the paths of the righteous.
21 For the upright will inhabit the land,
and those with integrity will remain
in it,
22 but the wicked will be cut off from the
land,
and the treacherous will be rooted out
of it.

Go Deeper

Trying to find wisdom without reading your Bible is like trying to find your friend's phone number in a Shakespearean play. It won't happen.

The author of Psalm 119 understood the importance of applying God's words to our lives. He wasn't just interested in finding knowledge to fill his head; he was looking for advice to guide his steps. "How can a young man keep his way pure?" he asks. "By guarding it according to your word" (Ps. 119:9).

Only a few verses later, he gives a very practical suggestion for guarding our hearts: "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (119:11). It's important to realize that having God's Word in your heart is more than just simply memorizing Scripture, and it does more than help you win Bible trivia contests. It guards you from sin and guides you along the path that God has chosen for you. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (v. 105).

Let's take a moment here and get some definitions straight. We said in the last lesson that wisdom is what helps us make choices. We also said that there are two types of wisdom: worldly wisdom and godly wisdom.

Worldly wisdom is, of course, wisdom that comes from the world. It is a wisdom that is based on rebellion against God and is ultimately self-seeking. Worldly wisdom encourages me to make my decisions based on what I think is good for me. The Bible calls this *foolishness or folly*.

The other type of wisdom is godly wisdom. This wisdom comes from God and directs my choices toward God. Godly wisdom is, above all, God-honoring and comes from only one source—the Bible. From here on in this study, the word "wisdom" will always refer to godly wisdom unless otherwise noted.

Whether we know it or not, all of us are always applying one or the other kind of wisdom to our choices. Unfortunately, foolishness (worldly wisdom) comes all too naturally. That's because we were all born into a sinful world and with a sinful nature. David acknowledged this fact when he said, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5). We all learn from day one how to apply foolishness, but finding and applying godly wisdom requires a teacher.

Is nature our teacher? It's true that we can learn facts *about* God from the world around us. But true wisdom can only come from reading the Bible. We can learn about the majesty and "largeness" of God by looking at the stars. But the constellations will never teach us how to respond to an angry neighbor (despite the claims of astrologers). There's no place other than the Bible that can teach us God's wisdom.

In addition to wisdom, the Book of Proverbs has a lot to say about the ideas of understanding, knowledge and discernment. "For wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you" (Prov. 2:10–11). Think of wisdom as a diamond, and knowledge with discernment and understanding as its facets. None of them are wisdom on their own, but they are all part of living by God's standards.

Knowledge is just that—it's knowing facts. But facts alone are not wisdom. Satan's existence could be considered the very definition of foolishness even though he probably knows more facts about God than we do. The devil takes the facts about God and applies them in a self-serving way. Wisdom takes the knowledge of God and applies it to our choices in a God-honoring way.

Application is also important. Just as a pill has to be swallowed before the headache will go away, our knowledge of God needs to be used before it can affect us. James puts it this way: "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). Wisdom is seen in its actions; and if we don't act on what we read in the Bible, how can we be considered wise?

It takes effort to reject foolishness and grasp wisdom. And it's easier to act on foolishness because that's what we've grown up with. It's what we see every day from many places. Foolishness appeals to our sinful nature because sin is all about pleasing ourselves. As a result, foolishness is often deceiving.

That's why understanding and discretion are also important aspects of wisdom, especially today when we are surrounded by people giving away their worldly advice for free. Maybe a friend's

“Just as a pill has to be swallowed before the headache will go away, our knowledge of God needs to be used before it can affect us.”

advice is God-honoring, or maybe the advice is foolishness wrapped in godly language. How do you decide? The apostle Paul has some great advice in his letter to the Romans: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2). As we spend more time in God’s Word, we will begin to understand God’s heart and His will for us. We’ll be able to test our choices against God’s Word and make the right one.

Finally, remember that wisdom takes time. You won’t wake up tomorrow suddenly able to make all the right choices. It will take time to read God’s Word and digest what He has to say. You’ll spend many moments debating choices and whether one option is more God-honoring than the other. But if you want wisdom, if you want to grow into the person who makes God-honoring choices, you’ll find no better way than by putting the time and effort into searching the Bible for God’s wisdom.

Express It

It’s Satan’s goal to keep every believer from finding wisdom. Ask God for the discernment to recognize the devil’s schemes and traps. Pray that God will help you see the value in pursuing wisdom and the foolishness in following your own path through life.

Consider It

As you read Proverbs 2:1–22, consider these questions:

1) In what ways is wisdom more valuable than silver? What makes it valuable?

2) What are the benefits of finding wisdom?

3) What does “the fear of the LORD” mean?

4) Why does Solomon use an adulteress to personify the way of foolishness?

5) What are the fates of the wise and the foolish?

6) Why do you suppose foolishness is so appealing?



Promises of Wisdom

It would be enough for God to demand our obedience and leave it at that. Instead, God promises to make our pursuit of wisdom worthwhile. In fact, learning how to apply God's standards to our lives is the only path to a fulfilled life—a life blessed by God.

Proverbs 8:1–36

The Blessings of Wisdom

⁸ Does not wisdom call?

 Does not understanding raise her
 voice?

² On the heights beside the way,
 at the crossroads she takes her stand;
³ beside the gates in front of the town,
 at the entrance of the portals she cries
 aloud:

⁴ “To you, O men, I call,
 and my cry is to the children of man.

⁵ O simple ones, learn prudence;
 O fools, learn sense.

⁶ Hear, for I will speak noble things,
 and from my lips will come what is
 right,

⁷ for my mouth will utter truth;
 wickedness is an abomination to my
 lips.

⁸ All the words of my mouth are
 righteous;
 there is nothing twisted or crooked in
 them.

⁹ They are all straight to him who
 understands,
and right to those who find
 knowledge.

¹⁰ Take my instruction instead of silver,
 and knowledge rather than choice
 gold,

¹¹ for wisdom is better than jewels,
 and all that you may desire cannot
 compare with her.

¹² “I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,
 and I find knowledge and discretion.

¹³ The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil.
Pride and arrogance and the way of evil
 and perverted speech I hate.

¹⁴ I have counsel and sound wisdom;

Key Verse

*For whoever finds me finds life
and obtains favor from the
LORD (Prov. 8:35).*

I have insight; I have strength.

¹⁵ By me kings reign,
 and rulers decree what is just;
¹⁶ by me princes rule,
 and nobles, all who govern justly.
¹⁷ I love those who love me,
 and those who seek me diligently
 find me.

¹⁸ Riches and honor are with me,
 enduring wealth and
 righteousness.

¹⁹ My fruit is better than gold, even fine
 gold,
 and my yield than choice silver.

²⁰ I walk in the way of righteousness,
 in the paths of justice,
²¹ granting an inheritance to those who
 love me,
 and filling their treasures.

²² The Lord possessed me at the
 beginning of his work,
 the first of his acts of old.

²³ Ages ago I was set up,
 at the first, before the beginning of the
 earth.

²⁴ When there were no depths I was
 brought forth,
 when there were no springs
 abounding with water.

²⁵Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth,
²⁶before he had made the earth with its
fields,
or the first of the dust of the world.
²⁷When he established the heavens, I was
there;
when he drew a circle on the face of
the deep,
²⁸when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of
the deep,
²⁹when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress
his command,
when he marked out the foundations of
the earth,
³⁰then I was beside him, like a master
workman,
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,

³¹rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the children of man.
³²“And now, O sons, listen to me:
blessed are those who keep my ways.
³³Hear instruction and be wise,
and do not neglect it.
³⁴Blessed is the one who listens to me,
watching daily at my gates,
waiting beside my doors.
³⁵For whoever finds me finds life
and obtains favor from the LORD,
³⁶but he who fails to find me injures
himself;
all who hate me love death.”

Go Deeper

Proverbs 15:24 tells us, “The path of life leads upward for the prudent, that he may turn away from Sheol beneath.” Notice the direction in which wisdom leads us. The Old Testament prophet Jonah is a good example of this truth. When he rebelled against God, he went “down” to Joppa and “down” into the hold of the ship and, ultimately, “down” into the sea where he was swallowed by a great fish. When he repented and began to follow the way of wisdom, he came “up” out of the belly of the fish and “up” out of the ocean (Jonah 1-2).

In the New Testament, godly wisdom (as seen in Jesus) also leads upward.

Through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, our sins are forgiven. His death opened the door for you and me to go upward to heaven.

Solomon, and all those who lived before Christ, lived in expectation of the day the Messiah would come and usher in God’s kingdom on earth. By honoring God with their lives, they demonstrated that they, too, would receive the Messiah when He came.

Now we know the rest of the story. We know of Jesus and His sacrifice. Praise God today for revealing His Son, Jesus, and for the forgiveness that He offers to us all.

If you were looking for employment, you'd consider many things. Is it close to where you live? Is moving an option? Would you enjoy working in that environment? Would your input be appreciated? But maybe the most important question you'd ask is, "What about the benefits package?"

The benefits provided from company to company vary in their details. Most, however, include health insurance, life insurance, etc. These benefits are given as incentives to prospective employees and also as provision for current employees above and beyond what their salaries cover.

God promises a benefits package to those who put the time and effort into seeking wisdom. It's a package that includes provisions for life and death as well as some unique investment opportunities.

The amazing part is that as Master and Creator, God is under no federal or union requirements to provide His servants with benefits. Yet He offers them anyway. These promises are listed throughout the Book of Proverbs, but especially in chapter 8.

In this chapter, wisdom is personified—that is, the concept of wisdom is embodied in the person of a woman, and she tells us the benefits that come when we seek her. She says, "Blessed are those who keep my ways. . . . Blessed is the one who listens to me. . . . For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD" (Prov. 8:32,34–35).

Find wisdom, find life. Find wisdom, find favor with God. "Life" here refers to a quality, not simply to an existence. Wisdom leads you to a place where you will say, "Now this is what life is all about!" Life doesn't have to be a day-to-day drudgery; it can be fulfilling knowing you are being led and provided for by God Himself. The final culmination of this life will be eternity spent in heaven. None of this is possible without finding the wisdom of God.

Also, when we find wisdom, we find favor with God. That's another way to say we find acceptance with God. But don't get

“Don’t get God’s favor confused with God’s love. God’s love is for all people for all time. His blessings, however, are for those who seek to honor Him in their choices.”



God’s favor confused with God’s love. God’s love is for all people for all time. His blessings, however, are for those who seek to honor Him in their choices—who seek wisdom.

But there are also promises for those who don’t seek wisdom: “But he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death” (8:36). It makes sense that if seeking wisdom is the way to find life and favor, then to do anything else only leads to misery and death. And you can be sure that if the life mentioned is eternal; so is the death.

Maybe as you read this lesson, you agree that seeking wisdom is the way to go, but it also makes you groan because it sounds like a purely academic pursuit. Maybe you wish that wisdom actually *were* a person, because you always learned more from spending time with your friends than from a textbook.

Read Proverbs 8:22 and 35 again: “The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. . . . For whoever finds me finds life.”

Now read what it says in the New Testament Book of John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him. . . . In him was life” (John 1:1–4). John goes on to say that this person is none other than Jesus.

We see another connection in Proverbs 4:8, where it says of wisdom, “Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her.” Compare that with these words regarding Jesus in James 4:10: “Humble yourselves before the Lord,

and he will exalt you.” If you want to see wisdom personified, you need look no further than Jesus.

Finding wisdom, and finding the benefits that come from living a God-honoring life, is something available to everyone. It’s not just an academic pursuit for eggheads in their think-tank. When we come to know Jesus, we’ll find wisdom. And when we decide to follow Jesus’ example in life, we’ll find the right way to live.

Express It

Take a moment to praise God that He has provided a way for you to live a fulfilled and happy life. Ask Him to help you develop a dynamic relationship with Jesus and find the wisdom that comes from spending time with Him.

Consider It

As you read Proverbs 8:1–36, consider these questions:

1) What does wisdom do to make herself known?

2) What sources of wisdom are available to you today?

3) What does it mean that the words of wisdom are straight and not crooked?

4) What does this tell you about the words of foolish people?

5) What promises does wisdom make in this chapter?

6) Do you see wisdom involved with creation? How?

Lesson

4

Fear of the Lord

Fear is a powerful word that evokes many negative emotions. But the fear of the Lord, which is where wisdom begins, is different. Let's take a closer look at the concept of fear and how it applies to God and our pursuit of wisdom.

Proverbs 9:1–18

The Way of Wisdom

⁹ Wisdom has built her house;
she has hewn her seven pillars.
²She has slaughtered her beasts; she has
mixed her wine;
she has also set her table.
³She has sent out her young women to
call
from the highest places in the town,
⁴“Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!”
To him who lacks sense she says,
⁵“Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.
⁶Leave your simple ways, and live,
and walk in the way of insight.”
⁷Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself
abuse,
and he who reproves a wicked man
incurs injury.
⁸Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate
you;
reprove a wise man, and he will love
you.
⁹Give instruction to a wise man, and he
will be still wiser;
teach a righteous man, and he will
increase in learning.
¹⁰The fear of the LORD is the beginning of
wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is
insight.
¹¹For by me your days will be multiplied,
and years will be added to your life.
¹²If you are wise, you are wise for yourself;
if you scoff, you alone will bear it.

Key Verse

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight
(Prov. 9:10).

The Way of Folly

¹³The woman Folly is loud;
she is seductive and knows nothing.
¹⁴She sits at the door of her house;
she takes a seat on the highest places
of the town,
¹⁵calling to those who pass by,
who are going straight on their way,
¹⁶“Whoever is simple, let him turn in
here!”
And to him who lacks sense she says,
¹⁷“Stolen water is sweet,
and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.”
¹⁸But he does not know that the dead are
there,
that her guests are in the depths of
Sheol.

Go Deeper

In chapter 9 of Proverbs, we see a link between hearing the word and doing what it says. A man acting by wisdom will receive instruction and become even wiser. He'll take what he learns and apply it to his life. We also see the wicked man who reacts violently to receiving instruction. He rejects it outright.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told a story of two men—one wise and the other foolish. The wise man built a house on a solid foundation of rock that

stood strong, even in the most violent of storms. The foolish man, on the other hand, built his house on the sand with no foundation. It took very little to knock over that house.

The key difference between the two men, Jesus said, is that the wise man is “everyone who then hears these words of mine and does them” (Matt. 7:24). Wisdom is not just hearing and knowing the words of God; it's actually putting them into practice.

Maybe it seems odd to have a lesson about fearing God immediately after a lesson about drawing near to Him in a personal relationship. The two seem incompatible. Yet it's hard to get around the bluntness of Proverbs 9:10: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” In other words, before we can have wisdom, we need to have a healthy fear of God.

Think of it as the foundation of a house. Before you begin framing the rooms of a house, before you begin laying the wires and pipes, you need to lay the foundation. It's the foundation of the house that will determine whether it stands or falls when storms come. And if we want to stand, we need wisdom built on a solid foundation of fear.

Maybe when you think of fear you think of a child under the blankets during a storm or a disobedient servant groveling before a king. It's a dreadful, terrible fear to be in the presence of so much power.

The Israelites felt this terror at the base of Mount Sinai. “Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the

“It’s the mercy of God that transforms our fear of Him from dread and terror to something more wonderful—awe and reverence.”

people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, ‘You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die’” (Ex. 20:18–19).

But this is the fear of a person living a lifestyle of disobedience. When that person encounters God and His holiness, their sin is shown for what it is, and the majesty of God is terrifying to them. In this moment, the sinner has two options: run and live in constant dread of the power of God or bow before Him and accept His judgment. Those who stay and submit themselves to God will always find something surprising—mercy.

It’s the mercy of God that transforms our fear of Him from dread and terror to something more wonderful—awe and reverence. God’s mercy brings us to a place where we stand wide-eyed and amazed at the Lord’s awesome power and where we can’t help drawing near to the One who showed us mercy and forgave our sins.

That’s the fear of the Lord! A balance between reverential awe for who He is, the God of the universe, and for what He wants—to be intimately involved with your life in a growing relationship.

Picture this balance like a woman married to a police officer. As a married couple, the two are always growing in their relationship with each other. But the woman has to balance her love of her husband with respect for his authority. For instance, though she shouldn’t expect to get away with speeding or any other crime, she knows that her husband loves her and will do anything to protect her.

This isn’t a perfect picture, but it shows us that we can’t find this balance outside of a personal relationship with God. Jesus

made this clear in His words to Nicodemus: “Whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:18). Without accepting Jesus’ forgiveness of your sins, you stand to receive the full brunt of God’s wrath—and that is something to be very afraid of.

If this is you, listen to what else Jesus said: “For God did not send his Son [Jesus] into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (3:17). That’s the mercy of God giving everyone a chance to escape His judgment of sin.

This is why the beginning of wisdom must be the fear of the Lord. If we show wisdom in applying God’s standards to the choices we make, then we need to begin by showing God that we respect and revere Him.

The alternative, living by our own wisdom, always results in disaster. Proverbs personifies folly as a seductive woman calling the unwary to follow her. “But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol” (Prov. 9:18).

If you are on the path of foolishness, it’s not too late. The way of wisdom is always available. “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here! . . . Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight” (9:4,6).

Express It

Maybe you’ve never fully considered the fear of the Lord. Pray that God will let you experience a portion of His majesty and power. Ask Him to reinforce His love for you and to teach you how to find the fear of the Lord.

Consider It

As you read Proverbs 9:1–18, consider these questions:

1) What does the preparation of wisdom's house suggest?

2) What is significant about the people whom wisdom calls?

3) Why does a wise man react the way he does to receiving instruction?

4) How does the woman “Folly” attract people?

5) What's the truth behind Folly's boasts?

Lesson

5

The Balance of Fear

The fear of the Lord is a constant balancing act between our respect and reverence for who He is and our realization that God loves us and wants to have a relationship with us. As we discuss this balance, we'll see how to exercise discipline in choosing God's way over our own and the importance of hating the things God hates.

Proverbs 6:1–35

Practical Warnings

6 My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor,
 have given your pledge for a stranger,
 2 if you are snared in the words of your mouth,
 caught in the words of your mouth,
 3 then do this, my son, and save yourself, for you have come into the hand of your neighbor:
 go, hasten, and plead urgently with your neighbor.

4 Give your eyes no sleep and your eyelids no slumber;
 5 save yourself like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the hand of the fowler.

6 Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.

7 Without having any chief, officer, or ruler,
 8 she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.

9 How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?

10 A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,
 11 and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.

12 A worthless person, a wicked man, goes about with crooked speech,
 13 winks with his eyes, signals with his feet, points with his finger,
 14 with perverted heart devises evil, continually sowing discord;
 15 therefore calamity will come upon him suddenly;

Key Verse

For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life (Prov. 6:23).

in a moment he will be broken beyond healing.

16 There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him:
 17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,
 18 a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil,
 19 a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.

Warnings Against Adultery

20 My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching.

21 Bind them on your heart always; tie them around your neck.

22 When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you.

23 For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life,

²⁴to preserve you from the evil woman,
from the smooth tongue of the adulteress.

²⁵Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes;

²⁶for the price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread,
but a married woman hunts down a precious life.

²⁷Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned?

²⁸Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?

²⁹So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife;
none who touches her will go unpunished.

³⁰People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry,

³¹but if he is caught, he will pay sevenfold; he will give all the goods of his house.

³²He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself.

³³Wounds and dishonor will he get, and his disgrace will not be wiped away.

³⁴For jealousy makes a man furious, and he will not spare when he takes revenge.

³⁵He will accept no compensation; he will refuse though you multiply gifts.

Go Deeper

Proverbs 6:16–19 could easily be called “The Fruit of Foolishness.” A person who hates God or refuses to follow His Word will demonstrate all seven of these qualities. They’re proud—they think they have control over their lives. They have no trouble lying when it suits their purpose. They make plans for their own benefit, and if other people get hurt as a result, well, that’s their own fault.

If that’s the fruit of foolishness, what’s the fruit of wisdom? There are plenty of examples in Proverbs of this, but Paul

puts it very clearly in his letter to the Galatians. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23).

The Spirit is the Holy Spirit Who comes to dwell in believers when they put their trust in Christ as their Savior. And it’s the Spirit inside of us who prompts us to live by God-honoring standards. What are some ways today that you demonstrated the fruit of the Spirit?

Normally, fear drives us away. If you're afraid of flying, you won't go near an airplane. If you fear the dentist, a team of wild horses couldn't drag you to that horrible chair. But for believers, those who have received Christ's forgiveness for their sins, fearing God takes on a more positive aspect. Imagine watching a powerful storm rage around you but knowing that you're absolutely safe. Imagine knowing that the power that drives the storm is also the power that holds you secure and unharmed.

That's the fear of God. It's when you stand in awe and amazement of God's power and authority over all creation, yet rest secure in the knowledge that He loves you and wants to know you. It's a place where you can say, "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid" (Isa. 12:2).

How do we apply the fear of the Lord to life's choices? Let's look at the analogy of a hurricane. It is constantly in motion. And as the hurricane moves, the eye—the center—moves also. For a person to stay within that eye, they would have to move with the hurricane.

Fearing God and seeking His wisdom is all about following God where He leads. It's about recognizing that what we want is not always what God wants and then choosing God's way. In a word, it's discipline. Proverbs tells us that God's way is a "lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life" (Prov. 6:23). Discipline is obeying God's way when it conflicts with our own.

But sometimes it's hard to accept God's instructions. When you pray for something and God denies that request, what do you do? Do you get angry at God and refuse to ever pray again? Or do you try to see God's wisdom in His choice?

That's the heart of discipline when it comes to finding the fear of the Lord. It's the process of accepting God's wise leading over the foolishness of our own plans. It's where we acknowledge that God knows more about our situations than we do and trust that He will guide us in love.

“When you pray for something and God denies that request, what do you do? Do you get angry at God and refuse to ever pray again? Or do you try to see God’s wisdom in His choice?”

Maybe this idea sounds familiar to you. It should. It’s one of the key verses in Paul’s letter to the Romans. “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

Sometimes we can easily see the good God is working toward. Discipline comes easy in those times. But sometimes it’s hard to see the good that comes from following God’s standards.

When a couple is in love, for instance, and wants to express it physically, applying God’s standards and waiting until they’re married is difficult. But they demonstrate wisdom by showing God that they trust His standards and His Word over their own. That’s finding the balance in our respect and reverence for the Lord and the knowledge that He cares for us and wants the best for His children.

We find the fear of the Lord in another way—by learning to hate the things that God hates. “The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate” (Prov. 8:13). You can’t put it much clearer than that. To find the balance in our fear of the Lord, we need to not only accept the things God accepts but also reject the things He rejects.

In your life, do you see any of the things God hates? Do you ever find yourself being arrogant or telling lies? Has pride caused you to think of yourself as a little better than others you know? Maybe you see a little white lie every now and then as the

only way to advance in your business. Show God that you trust Him to guide your life by letting His Word control your attitudes and actions.

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (9:10), and it is the foundation of a long and blessed life. When we learn to approach God both as the Creator of the universe and our close Friend and Father, we’ll have found the fear of the Lord.

Express It

Discipline doesn’t come naturally to many of us. Pray that as you begin your pursuit of God’s wisdom, you would see the benefit of following God’s commands. Ask Him to give you the strength and conviction to say “no” to your own desires when they conflict with His.

Consider It

As you read Proverbs 6:1–35, consider these questions:

1) What do you need to change in your life to be more disciplined?

2) When have you felt God's care for you?

3) How does the ant demonstrate wisdom?

4) How would behaving like the ant demonstrate the fear of the Lord?

5) Do you find yourself behaving like the “worthless person”? How can you reject those things that God hates?

6) What is the common theme of the seven things God hates?

Lesson

6

Wisdom and the Pursuit of Happiness

Nobody ever says, “I want to lead a dull and depressing life.” Yet while searching for happiness, people often find themselves constantly sad and dejected. In this lesson, we’ll look at what Proverbs has to say about finding something that goes deeper than happiness and the benefits we can expect once we find it.

Proverbs 3:1–35

Trust in the LORD with All Your Heart

³ My son, do not forget my teaching,
but let your heart keep my
commandments,
² for length of days and years of life
and peace they will add to you.
³ Let not steadfast love and faithfulness
forsake you;
bind them around your neck;
write them on the tablet of your heart.
⁴ So you will find favor and good success
in the sight of God and man.
⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own
understanding.
⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
⁷ Be not wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD, and turn away from
evil.
⁸ It will be healing to your flesh
and refreshment to your bones.
⁹ Honor the LORD with your wealth
and with the firstfruits of all your
produce;
¹⁰ then your barns will be filled with
plenty,
and your vats will be bursting with
wine.
¹¹ My son, do not despise the LORD's
discipline
or be weary of his reproof,
¹² for the LORD reproves him whom he
loves,
as a father the son in whom he
delights.

Key Verse

*Let not steadfast love and
faithfulness forsake you; bind
them around your neck; write
them on the tablet of your
heart. So you will find favor
and good success in the sight of
God and man (Prov. 3:3–4).*

Blessed Is the One Who Finds Wisdom

¹³ Blessed is the one who finds wisdom,
and the one who gets understanding,
¹⁴ for the gain from her is better than gain
from silver
and her profit better than gold.
¹⁵ She is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare
with her.
¹⁶ Long life is in her right hand;
in her left hand are riches and honor.
¹⁷ Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all her paths are peace.
¹⁸ She is a tree of life to those who lay hold
of her;
those who hold her fast are called
blessed.
¹⁹ The LORD by wisdom founded the earth;
by understanding he established the
heavens;
²⁰ by his knowledge the deeps broke open,
and the clouds drop down the dew.

²¹My son, do not lose sight of these—
keep sound wisdom and discretion,
²²and they will be life for your soul
and adornment for your neck.
²³Then you will walk on your way
securely,
and your foot will not stumble.
²⁴If you lie down, you will not be afraid;
when you lie down, your sleep will be
sweet.
²⁵Do not be afraid of sudden terror
or of the ruin of the wicked, when it
comes,
²⁶for the LORD will be your confidence
and will keep your foot from being
caught.
²⁷Do not withhold good from those to
whom it is due,
when it is in your power to do it.
²⁸Do not say to your neighbor, “Go, and
come again,
tomorrow I will give it”—when you
have it with you.

²⁹Do not plan evil against your neighbor,
who dwells trustingly beside you.
³⁰Do not contend with a man for no
reason,
when he has done you no harm.
³¹Do not envy a man of violence
and do not choose any of his ways,
³²for the devious person is an
abomination to the LORD,
but the upright are in his confidence.
³³The LORD’s curse is on the house of the
wicked,
but he blesses the dwelling of the
righteous.
³⁴Toward the scorners he is scornful,
but to the humble he gives favor.
³⁵The wise will inherit honor,
but fools get disgrace.

Go Deeper

Through God’s grace, we can remove the deadly influence of sin in our own lives. The sin that threatened to drag our souls to hell has been forgiven, and we’ve been made into “new creations.” But, even though our sins are forgiven, we still live in a sinful world.

What this means is that while believers are still on earth, we will never be completely removed from the pain and suffering caused by sin—both the consequences of our own sin and the sin of others. In these times, while we may not

be wearing a smile on our face, David reminds us we have a reason to be content. “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. . . . Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Ps. 23:1,4).

Take a few moments and memorize these verses to help you remember that everywhere, goodness and mercy will follow you for the rest of your life. (See Ps. 23:6.)

Frequently a medical research journal will publish research on what leads to a happy life. Often, the research points to such things as regular exercise and healthy eating. Recently, however, more and more researchers have noticed that “religious people” seem to have a better outlook on life. They have a peace and contentment that defies their circumstances. Well, they could have saved their time and money, because the Bible has been telling believers this for centuries—it’s called joy.

Our study of Proverbs will now take a more practical turn. We’ve discussed the difference between wisdom and foolishness. We know that when we apply God’s standards to the many choices life throws at us, we are acting wisely.

This wisdom starts with finding the fear of the Lord—a place where we stand balanced between a reverent awe and respect for the majesty of God and a knowledge that what this Creator wants more than anything is a personal relationship with each of us. When we have both that respect for God and a relationship with Him, we know the fear of the Lord. So, the first practical step is to begin a relationship with God.

If God didn’t want to have a relationship with us, we could probably end our study right here with the simple statement, “Obey God, or else.” If that were the case, God would be a divine dictator who doesn’t care for us at all. If we died serving Him, it wouldn’t matter. If we ignored Him, He’d just snuff us out. Life would be a pointless frustration.

But God actually loves us and wants to have a relationship with us. (See John 3:16.) God doesn’t want to be a dictator in our lives; He wants to be the benevolent King who rules with mercy in one hand and justice in the other. That’s why, behind all of God’s commands, He has provided a way for all of us to live a fulfilled and satisfied life—a life characterized by peace rather than frustration. That’s what the Bible calls joy.

God lays this idea out plainly in Proverbs 3:13: “Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding.” The Hebrew word for “blessed” used in this passage means

“When we strive to live by God’s standards—when we search for wisdom—God promises that He will not only increase the quality of our days, He will allow us to find what brings us the most joy in life.”

“to go straight,” to go the way God has directed. In other words, joy—the continual awareness of God’s love and care for you—comes as a result of living by God’s standards, living by wisdom.

The world’s standards say, “Buy this product, and your cares will melt away!” Advertisements try to sell peace of mind. They tell us that we are most happy when our desires are satisfied. In a way they are right. But something greater than happiness will only come from fulfilling our greatest desire—experiencing the love and acceptance of God Himself.

We find God by reading our Bible. God’s Word brings us to God’s wisdom, and God’s wisdom brings us to a life filled with joy. That’s why Solomon was able to make such bold statements as, “She [wisdom] is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her” (3:15).

But there’s more that wisdom provides. “Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor” (v. 16). Have you ever had one of those perfect moments when time seemed to stand still? That’s the kind of “long life” Proverbs is talking about here—not necessarily a physically longer life, but a life of such high quality and richness that the days seem to stretch forever.

Finding wisdom can also bring us riches. Some people think this means money. Most of us, however, realize that more money doesn’t bring more peace and contentment; if anything, it means

more stress and frustration. Instead of money, think of riches as an abundance of what brings you satisfaction and fulfillment. When we strive to live by God's standards—when we search for wisdom—God promises that He will not only increase the quality of our days, He will allow us to find what brings us the most joy in life.

God does this by guiding and directing our paths, or making our paths straight (v. 6). Don't misunderstand. This won't necessarily be a path free of trouble and pain. Even King David sang about walking through the "valley of the shadow of death" (Ps. 23:4). Having God's joy doesn't mean we will never see trouble, but it does mean that even in the valley, we'll be able to say with David, "I will fear no evil, for you are with me" (23:4). Nehemiah 8:10 says, "Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Isn't finding that kind of peace and contentment worth the cost?

Express It

As you pray, ask the Lord to help you hear His voice among all the others telling you the way to a joyful life. Pray that He would show you the value of the joy that comes from acting in wisdom and that He'll help you seek after it above all else.

Consider It

As you read Proverbs 3:1–35, consider these questions:

1) Should verse 2 be taken literally? Why, or why not?

2) What would you consider “firstfruits” in your life?

3) What are some of the ways that God disciplines His children?

4) What makes finding wisdom better than finding silver or gold?

5) The son is reminded several times to keep the commandments close. What could cause him to forget them?

6) In verse 32, what does it mean to be in God’s confidence?



Wisdom and Your Wallet

From the ten-year-old selling lemonade on the corner to the old miser with millions of dollars to his name, everyone understands the importance of money. But how does God view money? Why does He give it to us, and how can we use it wisely?

Proverbs 28:1–28

28 The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.

2 When a land transgresses, it has many rulers, but with a man of understanding and knowledge, its stability will long continue.

3 A poor man who oppresses the poor is a beating rain that leaves no food.

4 Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law strive against them.

5 Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the LORD understand it completely.

6 Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is crooked in his ways.

7 The one who keeps the law is a son with understanding, but a companion of gluttons shames his father.

8 Whoever multiplies his wealth by interest and profit gathers it for him who is generous to the poor.

9 If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.

10 Whoever misleads the upright into an evil way will fall into his own pit, but the blameless will have a goodly inheritance.

11 A rich man is wise in his own eyes, but a poor man who has understanding will find him out.

12 When the righteous triumph, there is great glory, but when the wicked rise, people hide themselves.

Key Verse

Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is crooked in his ways (Prov. 28:6).

13 Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

14 Blessed is the one who fears the LORD always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

15 Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people.

16 A ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor, but he who hates unjust gain will a prolong his days.

17 If one is burdened with the blood of another, he will be a fugitive until death; let no one help him.

18 Whoever walks in integrity will be delivered, but he who is crooked in his ways will suddenly fall.

¹⁹Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread,
but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty.

²⁰A faithful man will abound with blessings,
but whoever hastens to be rich will not go unpunished.

²¹To show partiality is not good, but for a piece of bread a man will do wrong.

²²A stingy man hastens after wealth and does not know that poverty will come upon him.

²³Whoever rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with his tongue.

²⁴Whoever robs his father or his mother and says, “That is no transgression,” is a companion to a man who destroys.

²⁵A greedy man stirs up strife, but the one who trusts in the LORD will be enriched.

²⁶Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.

²⁷Whoever gives to the poor will not want, but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse.

²⁸When the wicked rise, people hide themselves, but when they perish, the righteous increase.

Go Deeper

The concept of tithing, or giving ten percent, goes all the way back to Abraham. After winning a battle against foreign armies, Abraham (then called Abram) went before Melchizedek, the king of Salem (now called Jerusalem) and priest of the Lord. “And Abram gave him a tenth of everything” (Gen. 14:20).

The idea shows up again in the Law of Moses: “Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the LORD’s; it is holy to the LORD” (Lev. 27:30). By Jesus’ day, the Pharisees were carrying this to an extreme by not just tithing crops, but individual plants. (See Luke 11:42.)

But a question that often comes up is, “Is tithing appropriate for today”? There’s been a lot of debate on the subject, but perhaps an appropriate answer would be, “It’s a good place to start.” We don’t really know what prompted Abraham to give ten percent to Melchizedek, but it seems pretty clear that Abraham was motivated by gratitude to the Lord.

When your heart isn’t into giving, any amount will seem like too much. But when you are filled with gratitude for the love and mercy of your God, even ten percent will seem too small.

Can you remember your first job? How old were you? Maybe it was a job over the summer in high school. Those were the best days for a job—most of us were still living at home, and there were very few bills, if any, we had to take care of. Just about every dollar we earned was pure profit.

Then at some point, real life hit. Mortgages, groceries, car insurance, doctor bills—all of these add up. The money we earned became less of a luxury and more of a necessity.

Maybe that's part of the reason we get very defensive when it comes to talking about money. You've probably groaned inwardly on a Sunday morning when the pastor's sermon is about tithing. God becomes just one more person trying to dip His hands into your wallet. But is that really the case? Because money is such a central issue in all of our lives, it's very important that we find the truth about what money is and how we can use it wisely.

Usually when we think of money in a biblical context, we think of only the negatives. "A rich man is wise in his own eyes" (Prov. 28:11). "Whoever hastens to be rich will not go unpunished" (28:20). "A greedy man stirs up strife" (v. 25). Just by looking at these verses, it seems clear that pursuing money is evil. But that's not the whole story.

Look again at our key verse: "Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is crooked in his ways." What is it that separates the rich and the poor man in this verse besides money? It's integrity! It's not money that makes the rich evil; it's their lack of integrity, their inability to apply God's standards to their choices.

So, how can we be wise with our money? What are God's standards for our financial choices? The first one is generosity. "One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want" (11:24). One of the greatest ways we can demonstrate God's love is by generously sharing what we have. We teach our children the same lesson, but somehow many of us forget it as we get older.

“The way we use our money ultimately comes down to one thing: our perspective on why we have it.”

God also gives us money to provide for ourselves. We need to give to our church, to ministries that bless us and to people in need, but we also need to remember that this money is God’s way of providing for us and our families. This seems like an obvious point to make. But next time you’re at the grocery store or shopping for new clothes, remember that the money you use to buy those things was God’s way of saying, “I’m looking out for you.”

When we choose to follow God’s standards regarding our money, God won’t forget. “Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce . . . your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine” (3:9–10).

However, God doesn’t rain dollar bills down on us from heaven. Instead, God revealed His approved method of getting that money. “A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich” (10:4).

Yes, this means work. While there are some people who win large amounts of money in things like the lottery, God’s method of making money is long-term. “Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it” (13:11). And if our goal is to have a lot of money to use as a way of ministering to others, we need to work for it.

The way we use our money ultimately comes down to one thing: our perspective on why we have it. In America today, it’s easy to see that we have the wrong idea about money. Some people dedicate their lives to getting as much of it as they can. Money is king; money is power. And they look to money to solve

their problems. If they only had a little more money, they think they'd be happy. If they could afford those new clothes, then they'd be accepted. If they could drive a new car, people would like them. But they've elevated money to a position where it doesn't belong and given it responsibilities it can never fulfill.

When we look to the Bible, we see money put in its place. We see God on His throne and our Heavenly Father who's promised to provide for us. We see that happiness doesn't come from money; it comes from God and applying His standards to life. When we put God back in first place, we'll find the right perspective on our money.

Express It

Do you tend to look to money to solve the problems God has promised to take care of? Then ask God to help you see that He really is in control. Pray that you would be able to keep God on the throne of your life. And ask for His perspective when it comes to the money He has blessed you with.

Consider It

As you read Proverbs 28:1–28, consider these questions:

- 1) Can you think of times in Israel's history, or even modern history, when verse 2 has proven true?

- 2) Why do people who follow God understand justice better than those who don't?

- 3) Do you think it's possible to have lots of money *and* integrity?

- 4) In light of what we know of Jesus and the New Testament, what would be a good way to rephrase verse 13?

- 5) In verse 19, what are some “worthless pursuits” that could lead to poverty and not having enough to eat?

- 6) Are you in any situations that verse 23 could be applied to?

- 7) According to verse 26, what are we delivered from by walking in wisdom?



Wisdom and Couples

Marriage isn't easy—the number of divorce lawyers in our country is proof. But God has given us directions on how to make our marriages work. In Proverbs, we learn how to make marriages a God-honoring celebration of His love and our love for each other.

Proverbs 5:1–23

Warning Against Adultery

⁵ My son, be attentive to my wisdom;
 incline your ear to my understanding,
² that you may keep discretion,
 and your lips may guard knowledge.
³ For the lips of a forbidden woman drip
 honey,
 and her speech is smoother than oil,
⁴ but in the end she is bitter as
 wormwood,
 sharp as a two-edged sword.
⁵ Her feet go down to death;
 her steps follow the path to Sheol;
⁶ she does not ponder the path of life;
 her ways wander, and she does not
 know it.

⁷ And now, O sons, listen to me,
 and do not depart from the words of
 my mouth.

⁸ Keep your way far from her,
 and do not go near the door of her
 house,
⁹ lest you give your honor to others
 and your years to the merciless,
¹⁰ lest strangers take their fill of your
 strength,
 and your labors go to the house of a
 foreigner,
¹¹ and at the end of your life you groan,
 when your flesh and body are
 consumed,

¹² and you say, “How I hated discipline,
 and my heart despised reproof!

¹³ I did not listen to the voice of my
 teachers
 or incline my ear to my instructors.

¹⁴ I am at the brink of utter ruin
 in the assembled congregation.”

Key Verse

*Let your fountain be blessed, and
 rejoice in the wife of your youth
 (Prov. 5:18).*

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

¹⁶ Should your springs be scattered abroad,
 streams of water in the streets?

¹⁷ Let them be for yourself alone,
 and not for strangers with you.

¹⁸ Let your fountain be blessed,
 and rejoice in the wife of your youth,
¹⁹ a lovely deer, a graceful doe.

Let her breasts fill you at all times with
 delight;
 be intoxicated always in her love.

²⁰ Why should you be intoxicated, my son,
 with a forbidden woman
 and embrace the bosom of an
 adulteress?

²¹ For a man’s ways are before the eyes of
 the LORD,
 and he ponders all his paths.

²² The iniquities of the wicked ensnare
 him,
 and he is held fast in the cords of his
 sin.

²³ He dies for lack of discipline,
 and because of his great folly he is led
 astray.

Go Deeper

Solomon is credited with writing three books of the Bible: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and The Song of Solomon. Of these, Solomon's "Song of Songs" (Song of Sol. 1:1) is probably the least taught.

In the Song of Solomon, we read the story of two lovers who meet and marry. In very passionate language, we are told of the love each holds for the other. But throughout this celebration of love, one warning is repeated: "I adjure you . . . that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases" (Song of Sol. 2:7; 3:5; 8:4).

Everywhere in our culture we see just the opposite—men and women trying to find love as soon as possible. Television and movies constantly show us people desperate for love and jumping at the first guy or girl who shows the least bit of interest. Even in the movies, however, those relationships rarely last long.

God's advice is to not "stir up or awaken love until it pleases." In the meantime, focus yourself on serving God in the way He's called you. That's the true secret to finding love.

It's no secret that marriage is tough. If it weren't, comedians would have practically no material for their acts. In certain settings, it's good to be able to laugh about the problems that occur in marriage. But in that moment when a man and a woman look at each other and wonder if they married a stranger, it's no laughing matter.

Unfortunately, too many marriages break apart in the face of trouble. If there's any area of our lives that would benefit from applying God's standards, it's our marriages. In single life, our choices often affect only ourselves. But in a marriage, two people are affected—and even more if children are involved.

If you are single, don't skip this lesson. Though many of the practical applications aren't relevant to your situation, ask God to show you ways you can apply these principles in the relationships you do have. We all have friends, some closer than others, and we all need wisdom when considering the choices we make.

Where did your spouse come from? How did you meet? If you're thinking of your spouse's hometown or the moment where your eyes first met, you're only half right. "He who finds a

wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD" (Prov. 18:22). Look also at James 1:17: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above." Your spouse is a gift from God.

It's true, ladies, that even if your husband is *not* God's gift to mankind, he is God's gift to you. And men, the same is true about your wife. The word "good" used in Proverbs 18:22 is the same word God used when looking at all He created. (See Gen. 1:25.) In fact, the only thing God saw that *wasn't* good was Adam being alone. And so God brought him Eve. The next time you're frustrated with your spouse, before you say or do anything, ask God to remind you that your partner is His gift to you, and it's a good gift.

That word "partner" is a reminder, too, that marriage isn't a competition between men and women. Instead, the husband and wife fill complementary roles in the family. This means that it takes two to make a marriage work. This becomes very important when it comes to raising children. Both parents are responsible for the education and spiritual upbringing of their child.

Solomon encourages his son to "hear . . . your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching" (Prov. 1:8). A child will learn the most about life and making right choices from his or her parents. That's why it's important that the parents are on the same page and also demonstrating a life of love for the Lord and for each other.

In chapter 5, Solomon has some more of God's advice for couples. "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love" (Prov. 5:18–19).

In other words, be madly in love with your husband or wife—be passionate with him. Be captivated by your spouse; be intoxicated by her. Be completely satisfied in your spouse's love. Not only does this bring a couple closer together, it goes a long way toward keeping our eyes from lust after someone else. If we are being satisfied with our spouse, why would we need another?

Finally, when we look at God's advice and His standards, we see that even shaky marriages can be restored. Recognize the

source of the trouble. All too often it's pride in the form of nagging or an overblown ego. God advises both men and women to not fight back. It only escalates the problem. That's the idea behind Proverbs 21:9: "It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife."

And while nagging is usually associated with women, men do it too. When you feel yourself wanting to "nag," keep in mind the effect your "suggestions" have on your spouse. Solomon compares it to "a continual dripping of rain" (19:13).

Ultimately, trust God. By backing down you may feel as if you're giving up valuable ground, but you're also giving God room to work without a flared ego getting in the way.

If you are experiencing problems in your marriage, seek out godly counsel—these few paragraphs can't do any more than give you pointers toward the right path. But a pastor or friend can take your hand and help you make the first steps.

Let God guide the path of your marriage. Apply His standards to the issues and choices that are a part of every relationship. Do this, and you can be sure that even in old age you'll be able to "rejoice in the wife of your youth" (5:18).

Express It

If you are married, take some time to pray with your spouse. Ask God to give you the humility to seek His will in your choices as a couple. Ask Him to increase your love for each other. If you are single, ask Him to make you satisfied and not impatient with where He's brought you today.

Consider It

As you read Proverbs 5:1–23, consider these questions:

1) Why is the call for discretion in verse 2 important in light of what follows?

2) In what ways does following the “forbidden woman” prove bitter and painful?

3) What does it mean to “give your honor to others,” and to let “strangers take their fill of your strength”?

4) Verse 12 describes someone who hated discipline. How would this person’s life have been different if they had instead accepted discipline?

5) How would you apply verses 15–19 to an unmarried person?

6) How would you answer a person who realized they were “held fast in the cords of his sin”?

Lesson

9

Wisdom and Our Family

If you've ever had to come up with answers to dozens of "why" questions for an inquisitive child, you know that children are thirsty for knowledge. They're constantly learning and soaking up life lessons from everything around them. That's why we need to make sure our children soak up godly lessons so they grow up strong in the Lord.

Proverbs 4:1–27

A Father's Wise Instruction

4 Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight,
2 for I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching.
3 When I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in the sight of my mother,
4 he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live.
5 Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth.
6 Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you.
7 The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.
8 Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her.
9 She will place on your head a graceful garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown."
10 Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many.
11 I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness.
12 When you walk, your step will not be hampered, and if you run, you will not stumble.
13 Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life.
14 Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil.
15 Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on.

Key Verse

Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many. I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness (Prov. 4:10–11).

16 For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong; they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble.
17 For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence.
18 But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.
19 The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble.
20 My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings.
21 Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart.
22 For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh.
23 Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.
24 Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you.
25 Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you.
26 Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure.
27 Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.

Go Deeper

Discipline has become a hot topic among parents and teachers. What is the right way to discipline a child? Is there one *right* way to discipline a child?

Our model for disciplining our children comes from God. “My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights” (Prov. 3:11–12).

The writer of Hebrews tells us the purpose behind God’s discipline. “But he [God] disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the

moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Heb. 12:10–11).

When God disciplines His children, it’s not out of anger. Instead, it’s an act of love designed to draw us away from the things that harm us and draw us into the life He’s prepared for us. As parents, that should be the goal of our discipline too. Not just to show them what was wrong, but to point them to what is right.

For the next 30 seconds, think of as many sources for parental advice as you can. You probably thought of talk shows on TV, call-in programs on the radio, advice columns in the newspapers and any number of blogs on the Internet. If that’s not enough, you can go to your local library or bookstore and find volumes on the subject of raising children.

And this only counts sources that are explicitly designed to teach parenting. There are actually many more. We learn how to raise our kids by watching other parents. We make some decisions by remembering how our own parents raised us. We see families on TV and either want the same thing in our homes or want to avoid the problems they’re having.

We need to teach our children, because they are constantly learning. Everything that enters your child’s life is a potential teacher. Whether it’s a best friend or cartoon hero, your child is constantly learning the values he or she will use to make choices in life. That’s why today, in the information age, it’s more important than ever to teach our children wisdom—God’s standards by which to make their choices.

“What parenting really boils down to is simply spending time with your children and demonstrating a life lived by God’s standards.”

Godly parenting starts with godly parents. It sounds obvious, but let that sink in for a minute. To a large degree, while your children live in your home their spirituality will not rise above your spirituality. So, are you as a mom or dad intentional in your relationship with God? Do you take time to pray and read the Bible? Do you act in love toward each other and not selfishly? If you are modeling this life in front of your children, you’ve gone a long way already toward raising up godly children.

Maybe you don’t have children but are around them often. Though you may not be their parent, you can still be a godly influence in their life.

You’ve probably already noticed that a lot of the Book of Proverbs is written as advice from a parent to a child. “Hear my son, your father’s instructions, and forsake not your mother’s teaching. . . . My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent” (Prov. 1:8,10). Not only do parents need to be living a life of wisdom, they need to be active in teaching their children how to choose based on God’s standards.

Proverbs 22:6 should be every parent’s motto: “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” The most important thing we can teach our children is how to have a relationship with God. Show them that knowing God is very similar to knowing their parents. Show them that the balance between love and respect for their parents is the same balance we find in fearing God.

Teach your children the importance of respecting the authorities and law, especially today when criticizing our leaders is almost a national sport. Our children need to understand that

praying for the authorities is more useful than criticizing them. “My son, fear the LORD and the king, and do not join with those who do otherwise” (24:21).

Teach them about David and Saul. Saul, the king, had no reason to be chasing David through the countryside. David had done nothing to deserve the king’s hate. And on two occasions David had the opportunity to take Saul’s life and end the pursuit. No one would have blamed him. But our children need to know the wisdom that David demonstrated when he said, “Who can put out his hand against the LORD’s anointed and be guiltless? . . . The LORD will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish” (1 Sam. 26:9–10).

There’s much more we can teach our children, but this little lesson can’t possibly cover everything you need to know about raising your child. In fact, no amount of research will make a person the perfect parent. Just like every other area of our lives, wisdom is seen in our actions. What parenting really boils down to is simply spending time with your children and demonstrating a life lived by God’s standards.

Take some time to read the Bible and pray with each other. And be sure to make plenty of time to just have fun with your children. Show them that a loving relationship isn’t just about following rules; it’s about finding joy and acceptance that can’t be found anywhere else. And when your children are old enough to start understanding about God and His love for us, it will be all the easier for them to love Jesus the same way they love you.

Express It

Whether you are a new parent or an “empty-nester,” take some time today to pray for your children. Pray that God would help you be wise in the way you live so that your children will learn the wisdom you display. Tell God that you are thankful that He loves each of your children, and ask for His blessings in their lives. Even if you’re not a parent, pray that the children in your life would see a godly example when they look at you.

Consider It

As you read Proverbs 4:1–27, consider these questions:

1) In verse 6, how does wisdom “keep” and “guard” us?

2) How do we “keep hold of instruction” and “guard her” (v. 13)?

3) What is the parent’s role in this chapter?

4) What are some ways we “enter the path of the wicked”?

5) What can we do to avoid those ways altogether?

6) What would qualify as crooked speech and devious talk?

7) Do you see such things in your life?

Lesson **10**

Wisdom and Friendships

Can you imagine your life without your friends? It's almost impossible to underestimate the impact a group of friends can have on an individual. That's why we want to look at what God's Word says are the best ways to make and maintain our friendships.

Proverbs 27:1–27

²⁷ Do not boast about tomorrow,
for you do not know what a day
may bring.

² Let another praise you, and not your
own mouth;
a stranger, and not your own lips.

³ A stone is heavy, and sand is weighty,
but a fool's provocation is heavier
than both.

⁴ Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming,
but who can stand before jealousy?

⁵ Better is open rebuke
than hidden love.

⁶ Faithful are the wounds of a friend;
profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

⁷ One who is full loathes honey,
but to one who is hungry everything
bitter is sweet.

⁸ Like a bird that strays from its nest
is a man who strays from his home.

⁹ Oil and perfume make the heart glad,
and the sweetness of a friend comes
from his earnest counsel.

¹⁰ Do not forsake your friend and your
father's friend,
and do not go to your brother's house
in the day of your calamity.

Better is a neighbor who is near
than a brother who is far away.

¹¹ Be wise, my son, and make my heart
glad,
that I may answer him who
reproaches me.

¹² The prudent sees danger and hides
himself,
but the simple go on and suffer for it.

¹³ Take a man's garment when he has put
up security for a stranger,
and hold it in pledge when he puts up
security for an adulteress.

¹⁴ Whoever blesses his neighbor with a
loud voice,
rising early in the morning,
will be counted as cursing.

¹⁵ A continual dripping on a rainy day

Key Verse

*Iron sharpens iron, and one man
sharpens another* (Prov 27:17).

and a quarrelsome wife are alike;
¹⁶ to restrain her is to restrain the wind
or to grasp oil in one's right hand.

¹⁷ Iron sharpens iron,
and one man sharpens another.

¹⁸ Whoever tends a fig tree will eat its fruit,
and he who guards his master will be
honored.

¹⁹ As in water face reflects face,
so the heart of man reflects the man.

²⁰ Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied,
and never satisfied are the eyes of
man.

²¹ The crucible is for silver, and the furnace
is for gold,
and a man is tested by his praise.

²² Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle
along with crushed grain,
yet his folly will not depart from him.

²³ Know well the condition of your flocks,
and give attention to your herds,

²⁴ for riches do not last forever;
and does a crown endure to all
generations?

²⁵ When the grass is gone and the new
growth appears
and the vegetation of the mountains is
gathered,

²⁶ the lambs will provide your clothing,
and the goats the price of a field.

²⁷ There will be enough goats' milk for
your food,
for the food of your household
and maintenance for your girls.

Go Deeper

“What a friend we have in Jesus!” That’s how the old hymn goes, and it’s true. It’s one of great messages of the Bible that you and I can be friends of God. But maybe you’ve found yourself a little envious of the disciples at times.

Sure, we know God loves us and we can talk to Him about anything, but have you ever wished you could look Him in the eye as you told Him your problems? There are certain inherent limitations on the friendship we have with God. As a spirit, He’s invisible and untouchable. But have you ever considered that God uses our friends as a way to get around

these obstacles? In Matthew 25, Jesus said that when we reach out to help those around us, we are actually serving God. Maybe it works the other way too. Though God doesn’t speak to us directly, He’ll use our voices to speak to others. When you’re in need of comfort and your friend gives you a big hug, that’s God wrapping His arms around you.

As believers, one of the special aspects of all of our relationships is that we are representing God to the world. Think of that next time you’re with your friends.

Let’s take a quick pop quiz! I’m going to name a fictional character, and you name that person’s sidekick or buddy. Ready? Sherlock Holmes. That one’s easy, or “elementary,” as Holmes might say to Watson. Butch Cassidy. Yep, you probably remember the movie about him and his partner, the Sundance Kid. One more. Charlie Brown. Who doesn’t know about the beagle-extraordinaire, Snoopy?

Friendships are an important part of our lives. Though friends may change as we go through life, we almost always have them. We laugh with our friends, and we cry with them too. We go to our friends for encouragement or just to “hang out.” We find an identity in friendships that we don’t find anywhere else.

Friends are so important that the times when we’re without them usually stand out as dark periods in our lives. One of the hard parts about moving has always been leaving friends behind. But even harder is losing a friend because of a fight or misunderstanding.

Maybe you’ve struggled to make friends or had a hard time keeping these important resources. There are numerous places

“Good friends won’t just laugh with you; they’ll cry with you too. A good friend will know when to give advice and when to listen. A good friend even knows when to confront you about sin.”

you can turn to for advice on the topic of friendship. But before you go to them, look at what the Book of Proverbs has to say about making and keeping friends.

Proverbs 13:20 tells us that “whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.” It’s important to realize the incredible influence friends have on each other. Are your friends walking with the Lord? Are you? Many God-fearing people have been led to sinful lifestyles because they trusted the advice of their friends without looking first to the Bible.

Unfortunately, it’s almost always easier to spot negative influences in other people’s friendships than it is in our own. For instance, a parent *always* recognizes a bad friend in their kid’s life long before that child will. Take seriously other people’s observations about your friends and their effect on you.

On the other hand, many people have been saved from bad choices by one friend demonstrating a lifestyle of wisdom. Solomon put it this way: “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another” (Prov. 27:17). Good friends won’t just laugh with you; they’ll cry with you too. A good friend will know when to give advice and when to listen. A good friend even knows when to confront you about sin. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy” (27:6).

As great as some friendships are, none of them is perfect. In fact, the same thing that marred our relationship with God also gets in the way of our friendships—sin. When applied to God, sin is anything we do that violates God’s standards. Sin shows itself

in our lives, both in our relationship with God and with our friends, in the form of selfishness—deciding to do things for our own benefit rather than others. But as Christ demonstrated on the cross, the remedy to the sin of selfishness is love. “In this is love . . . that he [God] loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation [payment] for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

Though only God can forgive our friends’ sins, we can be patient and understanding with them when they slip up. This means not getting angry with a friend when he forgets something important like a birthday. It means understanding that he may be dealing with some personal problems when he snaps at you.

“Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense” (Prov. 19:11). When your friend hurts you, what’s your first response? Do you retaliate and try to hurt him back? God says to be patient and overlook the offense. This is hard to do. But no good ever came from picking a fight with a friend. The flip side to this (because friendships involve two people) is the way we behave when we are the one in the wrong. As Christians, we need to be humble and admit our mistakes. Your friend may be hurt, but if he is a friend, he’ll also know about being patient.

In a good, godly friendship, our focus is on our friends, not ourselves. Some days it can be hard, but we always have the Bible to turn back to and the picture it gives us of the “friend who sticks closer than a brother” (18:24). That friend is Jesus, and His offer is open to everybody.

Express It

Maybe you’ve been reminded today of the friends God has blessed you with. Take a moment to thank God for the friends He’s brought into your life. If you know of any specific needs in their life, lift them up to God. Ask God to help you be the loving and caring friend that they need.

Consider It

As you read *Proverbs 27:1–27*, consider these questions:

1) How does verse 2 apply to “fishing” for compliments? Is that wrong?

2) How can rebuke be a form of love?

3) Verse 6 says that “profuse are the kisses of an enemy.” How was this proved true in the New Testament?

4) How would you apply verse 14 to “night owls” and “early birds”?

5) In what ways do friends “sharpen” each other?

6) What does it mean in verse 19 that “the heart of man reflects the man”?

7) What is your heart reflecting?

Lesson

11

Wisdom and

Purity

It's ironic that "purity" is often seen as a dirty word. Christians understand that the life of a believer is to be a pure one, but for many, the struggle doesn't always seem worth it. In this lesson, we'll look at what God has to say about purity in our lives in general. And we'll look specifically at the area of sexual purity and ways to achieve God's high standard.

Proverbs 7:1–27

Warning Against the Adulteress

7 My son, keep my words
and treasure up my commandments
with you;
2keep my commandments and live;
keep my teaching as the apple of your
eye;
3bind them on your fingers;
 write them on the tablet of your heart.
4Say to wisdom, “You are my sister,”
 and call insight your intimate friend,
5to keep you from the forbidden woman,
 from the adulteress with her smooth
 words.

6For at the window of my house
 I have looked out through my lattice,
7and I have seen among the simple,
 I have perceived among the youths,
 a young man lacking sense,
8passing along the street near her corner,
 taking the road to her house
9in the twilight, in the evening,
 at the time of night and darkness.

10And behold, the woman meets him,
 dressed as a prostitute, wily of heart.
11She is loud and wayward;
 her feet do not stay at home;
12now in the street, now in the market,
 and at every corner she lies in wait.
13She seizes him and kisses him,
 and with bold face she says to him,
14“¹⁴I had to offer sacrifices,
 and today I have paid my vows;
15so now I have come out to meet you,
 to seek you eagerly, and I have found
 you.

16I have spread my couch with coverings,
 colored linens from Egyptian linen;
17I have perfumed my bed with myrrh,
 aloes, and cinnamon.

Key Verse

*Let not your heart turn aside to
her ways; do not stray into her
paths, for many a victim has she
laid low, and all her slain are a
mighty throng (Prov. 7:25–26).*

18Come, let us take our fill of love till
 morning;
 let us delight ourselves with love.
19For my husband is not at home;
 he has gone on a long journey;
20he took a bag of money with him;
 at full moon he will come home.”
21With much seductive speech she
 persuades him;
 with her smooth talk she compels him.
22All at once he follows her,
 as an ox goes to the slaughter,
or as a stag is caught fast
 23till an arrow pierces its liver;
as a bird rushes into a snare;
 he does not know that it will cost him
 his life.
24And now, O sons, listen to me,
 and be attentive to the words of my
 mouth.
25Let not your heart turn aside to her ways;
 do not stray into her paths,
26for many a victim has she laid low,
 and all her slain are a mighty throng.
27Her house is the way to Sheol,
 going down to the chambers of death.

Go Deeper

In Proverbs 5–7 and various other places throughout the book, Solomon warns us against adultery. Was adultery really such a big deal back then? Yes, it was, and it's still a big deal even though the problems of teenage pregnancy and premarital sex seem to overshadow extramarital affairs. But when it comes to sexual immorality, the Bible is clear—sleeping around with multiple partners, before or after marriage, is wrong.

And there's another aspect of adultery featured in the Bible that we should look at. In the Book of Hosea, God instructs the prophet to "love a woman who is

loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods" (Hos. 3:1).

Over and over again when the prophets confront Israel about their rejection of God and worship of idols, they use the language of adultery. Therefore, Solomon's warning is for all of us—not just to avoid being unfaithful in our marriages, but to avoid being unfaithful to the God who deeply loves us.

The word "pure" is easy to define even without looking at a dictionary. It means clean, unspoiled and untainted. An innocent person is referred to as "pure-hearted." And when you want a good cup of coffee, you buy only 100 percent pure coffee beans.

A thing that is pure is always the best and highest quality—far superior to something even a little less than perfect. So, why do we sometimes treat personal purity as a bad thing?

Sure, we may agree that it's good to live a pure life, but we hesitate at what it might require of us. It's going to be hard. It's as simple as that. To live a pure life requires a lot of effort. Being pure sexually means saying "no" to things that, quite frankly, might make us feel good. Being pure in our speech also takes effort, especially after a day filled with frustrations when we want to explode in a scathing rant. So, it's easy to see why the idea of purity gets a bad rap.

But this isn't just an issue for twenty-first-century America. The struggle for purity existed thousands of years ago. It was needed in Solomon's day as much as ours, and thankfully, Solomon wasn't silent on the subject. The words Solomon put down at God's direction can still teach us today.

“Foolishness traps us by convincing us to trust our senses and not the Word of God.”

We've already seen how the concept of wisdom is personified in Proverbs. Wisdom calls us to fear God and to approach Him with both love and respect for His authority. Wisdom calls us to avoid the trap of foolishness.

Solomon also personifies folly. “The woman Folly is loud; she is seductive and knows nothing” (9:13). Folly plans to lure us into a trap. “Stolen water is sweet,” she tries to convince us, “and bread eaten in secret is pleasant” (v. 17). While her ways feel right, it is the way of death (v. 18). But often it doesn't look like that.

Purity would be a lot easier if the alternative was unappealing. Imagine if the tree that Adam and Eve were supposed to avoid held rotten, maggot-infested fruit. No amount of smooth talking and cunning lies would have convinced Eve to even touch it. Instead, the Bible tells us that the tree “was a delight to the eyes” (Gen. 3:6). And right there is the way foolishness traps us—by convincing us to trust our senses and not the Word of God.

Sin is attractive in all its forms, but in chapter 7 Solomon warns his son specifically about sexual sin. He tells of watching a young man get drawn in and seduced by a prostitute. “With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him” (Prov. 7:21). And because he didn't know any better, he followed her “as an ox goes to the slaughter . . . not know[ing] that it will cost him his life” (7:22–23).

It's all but impossible to avoid sexual images and messages in our world. Practically everywhere we go and everywhere we look is some new invitation to indulge our senses and ignore the voice of wisdom. And it would be easy to give in. Living by God's standards and choosing purity may not always be easy, but it's not impossible.

A chapter earlier, Solomon gave a similar warning against adultery: “Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned?” (6:27). Obviously, the answer is no. In other words, Solomon is saying, “Don’t give temptation an opportunity to burn you!” When you watch TV, don’t linger on a channel you shouldn’t. When you’re in the checkout line, don’t sneak a peak at the magazine covers lining the racks. Allowing even little concessions can lead to big burns in the end.

You can also avoid sexual impurity by using your head. Proverbs clearly spells out how to identify the foolish path and the consequences of following it (9:17–18). Acting impulsively in the face of temptation is a sure way to fail.

And finally, when it comes to sexual temptations, “Drink water from your own cistern” (5:15). In other words, find sexual fulfillment in your spouse, not elsewhere—and if you don’t have a spouse yet, wait.

It’s easy to see why purity isn’t more popular than it is. It requires effort just like any other good thing. Unfortunately, all too many people today are substituting fast, easy pleasures for the deep, satisfied joy that can only come from seeking God’s standards for life’s choices.

Express It

We all struggle with purity to a certain degree. If it’s not sexual purity, it’s purity in our speech, our thoughts or our lifestyle in general. But God wants to help. Pray today for the strength you need to apply discipline to the areas of purity in your life where you struggle the most. Ask God to remind you of the deep, satisfied joy that comes only from Him. Thank Him for His love that both strengthens our weaknesses and forgives our sins.

Consider It

As you read Proverbs 7:1–27, consider these questions:

- 1) How will considering the “commandments” as a close friend keep someone from the adulteress?

- 2) How is the adulteress identified in these verses?

- 3) What are some ways a person could wander near the street of the “adulteress”?

- 4) What do the tools of the adulteress look like today?

- 5) What application do these verses have for those who aren’t married?

- 6) How can we avoid the path of the adulteress?

Lesson 12

Wisdom and Words

Through speech, we express love for each other and God. But misused speech has also been the cause of some of the greatest atrocities the human race has ever seen. Adolph Hitler was an impassioned speaker who roused the German nation with his powerful rhetoric—and as a consequence he led many people to commit unspeakable acts of evil. In this lesson, we'll look at God's standards concerning our speech—how to use our words to build each other up, not tear each other down.

Proverbs 29:1–27

29 He who is often reproved, yet stiffens his neck,
will suddenly be broken beyond healing.

2 When the righteous increase, the people rejoice,
but when the wicked rule, the people groan.

3 He who loves wisdom makes his father glad,
but a companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth.

4 By justice a king builds up the land,
but he who exacts gifts tears it down.

5 A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet.

6 An evil man is ensnared in his transgression,
but a righteous man sings and rejoices.

7 A righteous man knows the rights of the poor;
a wicked man does not understand such knowledge.

8 Scoffers set a city aflame,
but the wise turn away wrath.

9 If a wise man has an argument with a fool,
the fool only rages and laughs, and there is no quiet.

10 Bloodthirsty men hate one who is blameless
and seek the life of the upright.

11 A fool gives full vent to his spirit,
but a wise man quietly holds it back.

12 If a ruler listens to falsehood,
all his officials will be wicked.

Key Verse

Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him (Prov. 29:20).

13 The poor man and the oppressor meet together;
the LORD gives light to the eyes of both.

14 If a king faithfully judges the poor,
his throne will be established forever.

15 The rod and reproof give wisdom,
but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

16 When the wicked increase, transgression increases,
but the righteous will look upon their downfall.

17 Discipline your son, and he will give you rest;
he will give delight to your heart.

18 Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint,
but blessed is he who keeps the law.

19 By mere words a servant is not disciplined,
for though he understands, he will not respond.

20 Do you see a man who is hasty in his words?
There is more hope for a fool than for him.

²¹Whoever pampers his servant from childhood will in the end find him his heir.

²²A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression.

²³One's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor.

²⁴The partner of a thief hates his own life; he hears the curse, but discloses nothing.

²⁵The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.

²⁶Many seek the face of a ruler, but it is from the LORD that a man gets justice.

²⁷An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous, but one whose way is straight is an abomination to the wicked.

Go Deeper

In our mouths, words can have incredible power, but in the mouth of God, words become life itself. “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). Those are the very first words spoken in the Bible. And as God continued to speak, the world as we know it took shape. “Let the waters . . . be gathered . . . let the dry land appear. . . . Let the earth sprout vegetation. . . . Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens” (Gen. 1:9,11,14).

One of the most famous passages of the Bible equates Jesus with the Word of God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the

Word was God. . . . In him was life, and the life was the light of men. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:1,4,14).

We see the Word of God mentioned again in Paul’s letter to Timothy. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). The Bible we have today is the very words of God, and those words are just as powerful as ever. The words of God still bring life to those who hear. The only question is, are you listening?

Someone brings you a deck of cards and says, “Pick a card, any card.” You grab a card from the middle of the deck. “Now memorize the card, but don’t let me see it. Then put it face down on top of the deck.” You take a moment to memorize the king of hearts and place it on the deck. He cuts the deck a couple times, then closes his eyes and hovers his free hand over the deck. “Now I’ll say the magic words. *Abracadabra, hocus pocus.*” Smiling, he turns over the top card. “It’s the king of hearts!”

There was a time when people believed that words like we use in magic tricks actually had power. But even though our words aren’t magical, they are still very powerful. James, a writer in the New Testament, compared the tongue to a bit which is placed in a horse’s mouth or a rudder that guides a ship. “So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things” (James 3:5).

Solomon also knew the power of words. He wrote, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Prov. 18:21). Can that be true? It was certainly true in Hitler’s case, but it’s naïve to think that our words don’t have an influence on others around us even if we aren’t the leader of a nation.

Even offhand comments, like the one a reviewer made about “Richard’s chubby sister,” can have devastating results. When Richard’s sister, singer Karen Carpenter, heard this comment, she became so obsessed with losing weight that she soon became anorexic and died of heart failure when she was only 32.

A story like that may be the exception rather than the rule, but we’ve all experienced the hurt that can come with someone else’s words. It’s important, then, to understand the standards God has given us regarding our speech. We will use our words wisely when we know His standards and apply them to our lives.

“Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him” (29:20). The application of this verse is so simple that it’s become a cliché—think before you speak. “A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly

holds it back" (29:11). We've all been in situations where we realize only too late that it would have been better to be quiet, and we'd do almost anything to take those words back.

But if God gives us examples of what not to say, you can be sure that He'll let us know what we should say. For example, the woman in Proverbs 31 speaks "with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue" (31:26). Before you speak, ask yourself, *Are these encouraging words? Will they inspire a person to act in a godly way or cause them to act selfishly?*

"Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body" (16:24). If you've ever been depressed or discouraged and had a friend come and say just the right words to lift your spirits, you know how true this verse is.

It's a tall order to decide to apply God's standards to everything we say, especially when you consider the sheer number of words, spoken or written, we use each day. James even went so far as to say, "If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body" (James 3:2).

This may very well be the hardest area to apply God's standards. It's so easy to communicate with so many people these days that it requires a lot of effort to know when we are speaking words that lead to life or words that lead to death. Where can we get the help we need to speak skillfully, to speak with wisdom? "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him" (James 1:5).

Express It

Do you find yourself often getting in trouble because of what you say? Ask God to help you think about what you are saying and for the discernment to know whether those words are helpful or harmful. Pray that God will give you opportunities to share some encouraging words with someone who needs to feel God's love today.

Consider It

As you read Proverbs 29:1–27, consider these questions:

- 1) **Have you ever vented? How can you take steps to hold it back next time?**

- 2) **How does speaking hastily show a person as being foolish?**

- 3) **In verse 8, what does it mean to scoff? How can this type of speech “set a city aflame”? How does the wise man prevent this?**

- 4) **Why do “bloodthirsty men hate one who is blameless” (v. 10)?**

- 5) **Have you encountered people who like to stir up strife (v. 22)? What might be a good way to respond to them?**

- 6) **What does it mean that “the fear of man lays a snare” (v. 25)?**

Lesson

13

A Life Well Lived

Learning about God's wisdom is one thing; putting it into practice is quite another. As we close this study, we'll look at how to apply God's wisdom to every area of our lives. We'll see the importance of reading the Bible as the first step to a life well lived.

Proverbs 3:1–35

Trust in the LORD with All Your Heart

3 My son, do not forget my teaching,
but let your heart keep my
commandments,
2 for length of days and years of life
and peace they will add to you.

3 Let not steadfast love and faithfulness
forsake you;
bind them around your neck;
write them on the tablet of your heart.

4 So you will find favor and good success
in the sight of God and man.

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own
understanding.

6 In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.

7 Be not wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD, and turn away from
evil.

8 It will be healing to your flesh
and refreshment to your bones.

9 Honor the LORD with your wealth
and with the firstfruits of all your
produce;

10 then your barns will be filled with
plenty,
and your vats will be bursting with
wine.

11 My son, do not despise the LORD's
discipline
or be weary of his reproof,
12 for the LORD reprobates him whom he
loves,
as a father the son in whom he
delights.

Key Verse

*In all your ways acknowledge
him, and he will make straight
your paths (Prov. 3:6).*

Blessed Is the One Who Finds Wisdom

13 Blessed is the one who finds wisdom,
and the one who gets understanding,
14 for the gain from her is better than gain
from silver
and her profit better than gold.

15 She is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare
with her.

16 Long life is in her right hand;
in her left hand are riches and honor.

17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all her paths are peace.

18 She is a tree of life to those who lay hold
of her;
those who hold her fast are called
blessed.

19 The LORD by wisdom founded the earth;
by understanding he established the
heavens;

20 by his knowledge the deeps broke open,
and the clouds drop down the dew.

21 My son, do not lose sight of these—
keep sound wisdom and discretion,
22 and they will be life for your soul
and adornment for your neck.

²³Then you will walk on your way
 securely,
 and your foot will not stumble.
²⁴If you lie down, you will not be afraid;
 when you lie down, your sleep will be
 sweet.
²⁵Do not be afraid of sudden terror
 or of the ruin of the wicked, when it
 comes,
²⁶for the LORD will be your confidence
 and will keep your foot from being
 caught.

²⁷Do not withhold good from those to
 whom it is due,
 when it is in your power to do it.
²⁸Do not say to your neighbor, “Go, and
 come again,
 tomorrow I will give it”—when you
 have it with you.

²⁹Do not plan evil against your neighbor,
 who dwells trustingly beside you.
³⁰Do not contend with a man for no
 reason,
 when he has done you no harm.
³¹Do not envy a man of violence
 and do not choose any of his ways,
³²for the devious person is an
 abomination to the LORD,
 but the upright are in his confidence.
³³The LORD’s curse is on the house of the
 wicked,
 but he blesses the dwelling of the
 righteous.
³⁴Toward the scorners he is scornful,
 but to the humble he gives favor.
³⁵The wise will inherit honor,
 but fools get disgrace.

Go Deeper

These 13 lessons have only covered a small part of Proverbs. In fact, you might have noticed that we didn’t even cover the middle chapters of this book. It will be up to you to find the wisdom God has for you there.

Most of what God teaches us in these chapters takes the form of parallel statements that relate to each other in three main ways. The first is called “synonymous parallelism.” That’s when both parts of the statement build on the same idea like we see in Proverbs 16:18: “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

Another form is “antithetic parallelism,” where the two parts of the state-

ment are meant to contrast, such as in Proverbs 10:1: “A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother.”

A third type of statement found in Proverbs is called “synthetic parallelism.” In this case, the second half of the statement continues the thought of the first statement, such as in Proverbs 14:26: “In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge.”

Be prepared to spend some time thinking about these Proverbs. In some cases the meaning is easy to grasp, but in others it will take some thought.

Alife well lived—that's what we all want isn't it? To be able to look back over our years without regret. To have a life more characterized by joy and satisfaction than constant fear and depression. In the Book of Proverbs we've seen how to live such a life.

This kind of life is a life of wisdom—a life lived skillfully in applying God's standards to every choice we make. Because God, through Jesus, has made it possible for everyone to have a personal relationship with Him, this life of wisdom, the life well lived, is available and offered to everyone.

The Book of Proverbs, written by Solomon, is an amazing collection of the wisdom we need to live our lives. It shows us how to apply God's standards to specific areas of our lives like the way we handle our money, the way we raise our children and the way to maximize our marriage. In the first verses of chapter 3, Solomon tells us the basis for living this life.

“My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments” (Prov 3:1).

For a life well lived, we need to start with a foundation in the Word of God. The teachings and commandments of God, His standards which we apply to our lives, are found in the Bible alone. Don't trust the advice of anyone who can't back up their words with what God has revealed in the Bible. This means making time on a regular basis to read your Bible and become familiar with what it says. God has written only one book with all the answers we need, and it's up to you and me to read it.

“For length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you” (3:2).

Is this really true? The Bible says it is. Though we may not see to what extent our lives have been made more peaceful or our days been added to until we arrive in heaven, it's not hard to find confirmation of this verse. How many geology books have completely transformed a life? How many people turn to calculus to find reassurance in a difficult situation? Yet every day around the world, people's lives are transformed when they open their Bibles and find God's Word within.

“If you want a life that is meaningful, full of peace and joy, then you find that life by allowing God to direct your paths. You find it by turning to wisdom.”

“Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart” (v. 3).

The life well lived is a life lived with others in mind. Jesus’ life exemplified this principle. When we read the Gospels, we see Jesus living with steadfast love and faithfulness even to His death. A lot of the advice we get from the world tells us to take care of ourselves. God says, “I’ll take of you. You take care of those who don’t know Me yet.”

“So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man” (v. 4).

History shows us many instances where Christians were hated and persecuted because of their faith. But look around your community for business owners who operate by biblical standards. Most of the time, you’ll find a business that is well respected.

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding” (v. 5).

This means trusting God 100 percent. It means trusting that God will provide even at the eleventh hour. It means not planning contingencies based on the world’s advice, but trusting completely what God has said.

This doesn’t come naturally. But if you’ve been reading your Bible and living a life characterized by wisdom, love and care for those around you, you’ve probably already seen many examples of God providing for someone in extraordinary ways. The more

time you spend in the body of believers and reading the truths in the Bible, the more you find that God is always in control in any situation.

“In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths” (v. 6).

There’s a good reason thousands of Christians over the centuries have made this verse the center of their lives: It’s the heart of wisdom, and it’s the verse I want to close this study on. This verse takes every area of your life and brings it under the control of God. The key to a life well lived is giving God control of your life. The advice of the world, the foolishness that comes from sources all around us, only leads to pain and disappointment in the end. But if you want a life that is meaningful, full of peace and joy, then you find that life by allowing God to direct your paths. You find it by turning to wisdom.

Express It

As you pray today, ask God to show you how you can apply His standards to your life. Ask Him to show you where you need to start, and ask for the strength to do it. Praise God that He has shown us the way to a life well lived. And praise Jesus for His sacrifice that allows us to experience the blessings of God.

Consider It

As you read Proverbs 3:1–35, consider these questions:

1) **What does it mean to “let your heart keep my commandments” (v. 1)?**

2) **What makes steadfast love and faithfulness so important to hold on to?**

3) **How could a person lean on their own understanding in making life's choices?**

4) **What are some ways you can “honor the LORD with your wealth” (v. 9)?**

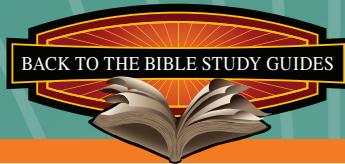
5) **Verse 17 says that the paths of wisdom are paths of peace. Based on what you know of wisdom, how is this true?**

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We all make choices. Why not learn to choose wisely?

You're constantly making decisions. Some are important, some are not.

But the guidance you rely on to make those choices is vital.

Woodrow Kroll's new Bible study, *Proverbs: The Pursuit of God's Wisdom*, points to God as the ultimate source of wisdom and guidance plus gives practical ways to apply God's standards to every area of life. Each of the thirteen lessons includes a Scripture passage, devotional, thought-provoking questions, and a challenge to go deeper. Great for personal, family, and small-group study!

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