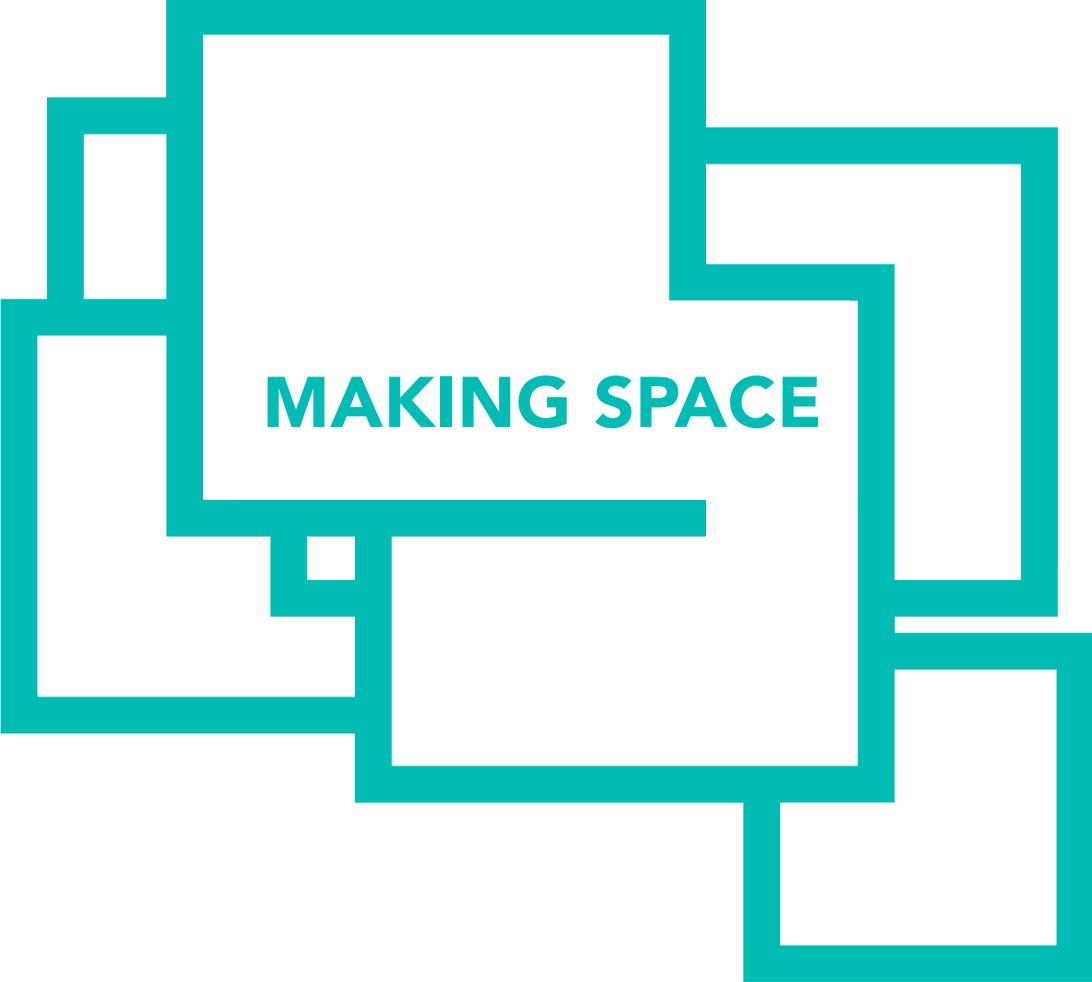


JEFF VANDERSTELT



MAKING SPACE

Doing What Matters Most

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CONTENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR	4
INTRODUCTION	4
TIPS FOR FACILITATING THE GROUP EXPERIENCE	5
HOW TO USE THIS STUDY	6
WEEK 1	
MAKING SPACE	8
WEEK 2	
MONEY AND WORK	22
WEEK 3	
REST	36
WEEK 4	
WORD AND PRAYER	50
WEEK 5	
HEART	64
WEEK 6	
FRIENDSHIP	78
WEEK 7	
PARENTING AND FAMILY	90
WEEK 8	
HOSPITALITY	104
CREATING YOUR IDEAL WEEK	118
LEADER GUIDE	120

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeff Vanderstelt gives his life to teaching and equipping the church and to training and encouraging ministers of the gospel. To that end Jeff leads Saturate and the Soma Family of Churches and teaches at Doxa Church in Bellevue, Washington. He also travels around the United States and the world, equipping the church in the gospel and missional living.

When he's not speaking or teaching, Jeff gets to do a little writing. He's the author of *Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life* and *Gospel Fluency*. Additionally, Jeff wrote *Saturate Field Guide* and *The Gospel Fluency Handbook* with Ben Connelly. Jeff is married to Jayne, and they have three children: Haylee, Caleb, and Maggie.

INTRODUCTION

I'm busy. You're busy. We're all busy. One primary objection Christians have to living the full Christian life is busyness. In other words, we aren't making space for the things that matter most because our lives are filled with other things. We're also overwhelmed by the tension of being finite beings with infinite expectations for our lives and our families. We burn ourselves out working in our jobs, trying to be parents, and even doing good things in our churches. Most of us feel stretched so thin that we don't even have space to think about our lives, much less follow Jesus intentionally.

Essentially, I hear many Christians say, "I can't follow Jesus beyond Sunday because I don't have time to do that." The problem is, that's true. We don't have space to be intentional, faithful followers of Jesus. This study is about making space in our lives to do the right things at the right time with the right people. That's a recipe for wisdom!

We need wisdom. Wisdom is applying the right truth at the right time in the right way. Wisdom always produces abundant life for ourselves and others. The result of walking in wisdom is a satisfied life, not a hurried life. Can you imagine a week when you're deeply satisfied and experience greater joy in your work, family, relationships, and home?

Throughout this study we'll apply biblical wisdom from the Book of Proverbs so that we can learn how to make space in our lives for the priorities that matter most. The Book of Proverbs works like a rolling list of sage advice from the perspective of a life lived fearing God. You'll notice that Proverbs returns to the same topics again and again. These topics, representing the substance of life, are the focus of this eight-week study: work, money, rest, the Bible, prayer, friendship, parenting, and hospitality. These are the arenas in which we receive and live out the wisdom of God.

TIPS FOR FACILITATING THE GROUP EXPERIENCE

1. Consistently pray for the members of your group. Come to the group session with a sense of the direction the Holy Spirit wants the group to take.
2. Prepare by reading the personal studies and watching the video session before each group session. Come to the session with a sense of the direction the discussion needs to take in order to benefit your group.
3. As you prepare, highlight the discussion questions you know will be crucial for your group members.
4. Keep the discussion focused and moving by bringing people back to the topic at hand or by transitioning to the next question.
5. Lead in vulnerability. Consider your answers to the questions in advance, especially in the Nurture section, which focuses on our hearts, sin, repentance, and faith.
6. Silence is OK. Some of the questions you'll ask are weighty because they focus on people's personal lives. People will need time to consider their responses.
7. Trust the process of the group experience and the personal studies. These two elements, working together, will create an environment to produce the most fruit. You aren't trying to accomplish everything in the group discussions.
8. At the back of this book you'll find a leader guide with the big ideas that will guide your preparation for each session.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

THE GROUP EXPERIENCE: DISCOVER, NURTURE, ACT

These three steps—discover, nurture, and act (DNA)—constitute the crucial aspects of growing as a disciple. Participants will follow these three steps at each group session. Prayer should remain a constant feature of each component.

OPENING. The opening is designed to help the group connect and to introduce the topic for the new session. The group will also review highlights and insights from the previous week's personal study. Be careful not to let this segment run too long.

DISCOVER. Led by the Holy Spirit, the group will study passages from Proverbs by reading the Bible, discussing what it says, and watching a short video. The group will discover what God has revealed about who He is, what He has done, who we are, and how we walk in wisdom. The goal of this component is to grow in our understanding together.

NURTURE. Led by the Holy Spirit, the group will repent and believe in the gospel. During this time the group will discuss issues of the heart: If we know what we discovered is true, why don't we believe and walk in it? The goal is to shepherd the heart so that each person is brought to repentance and renewed faith every time the group meets. In this way we grow in our belief together.

ACT. Led by the Holy Spirit, the group will listen and obey as God calls us to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. The goal of this component is to empower our hands so that, in light of our repentance, each person knows what to do in order to walk in wisdom. We'll regularly imagine what would happen if we, as a group, walked in wisdom. How would that change us as individuals, our group, and our city or neighborhood?

CLOSING. This brief segment commissions the group members for their daily lives and their personal study. It provides a way to bring the group session to a close.

THE PERSONAL-STUDY EXPERIENCE

We always learn a great deal from our community and the gifted teachers who serve us; however, we always need an intentional time to internalize and explore biblical truth by learning on our own. The weekly personal-study sections are crucial to the holistic, transformative journey of making space for what matters most in life. Through these studies you'll engage your head, your heart, and your hands.

You should reserve two or three hours each week to engage with this material in a meaningful way. However, don't feel pressure to complete the whole personal study in one sitting. While this may be helpful for some people, others will benefit from the time to process and reflect that comes from breaking up the personal study. The structure is designed for flexibility.

While you can expect a healthy dose of Bible *study*, you'll also get quite a bit of Bible *doing* as you live biblical wisdom through personal assessments, guided times of prayer, days of rest, solitude, and many other activities to make space in your life.

BIBLE-READING PLAN. Each week you'll be challenged to complete daily Bible readings. These are designed to help you develop the habit of learning and listening to the wisdom of God through Scripture, as well as to help you immerse yourself in the wisdom of God.

HEAD: GROWING IN UNDERSTANDING GOD AND HIS WISDOM

This section focuses on growing in your understanding of God and the wisdom He gives (see Rom. 12:2). Each week during this extended Bible study, you'll dive deep into God's Word and the topics discussed in the group. The questions and content will guide you through four essential questions:

1. What does this text say about who God is?
2. What does this text tell me about what He has done, is doing, and will do?
3. What does this text tell me about who I am?
4. What does it look like to obey this text in my life?

HEART: GROWING IN BELIEVING GOD AND HIS WISDOM

Often we know the truth and the Bible very well, yet we don't believe what it says. This section beckons you to explore your motivations, life, actions, beliefs, and idols. You'll evaluate and process how your heart and life reflect what you know to be true from Scripture. This time will call you to surrender, repentance, and faith (see Eph. 1:18).

HANDS: GROWING IN OBEYING AND FOLLOWING GOD'S WISDOM

How do we live a life of wisdom? The whole point of this study is to make space for what matters most. This final section will regularly call you to make plans and commitments to live in wisdom through action (see Jas. 1:25).

MAKING SPACE

WEEK

1



MAKING SPACE

WEEK 1: GROUP STUDY



START

Begin the study by asking the following questions to break the ice and encourage members to share.

Who's the wisest person you've met?

What made him or her so wise?

Following Jesus means living in His wisdom every day. The purpose and goal of *Making Space* are learning to take wisdom and apply it to the things that matter most in our lives.

Regularly ask yourself two important questions throughout this study.

1. Is your busyness focused on the right things? Are you busy doing the things that matter most?
2. In your busyness is your life producing life? Is it abundant? Is it fulfilling, or is it destructive? Is it draining the energy out of you and the people around you?

With those questions in mind, let's dive into this study.



WATCH

Watch video session 1, in which Jeff defines *wisdom* and discusses ways the Bible calls us to pursue wisdom. Take notes in the space provided.



DISCOVER

Spend a few moments discussing what you learned from the video. Use the following questions to guide your discussion.

Read Proverbs 15:33.

*The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom,
and humility comes before honor.*

PROVERBS 15:33

How have you considered Jesus to be the wisdom of God and the way to wisdom? In what ways is Jesus wise?

If wisdom is applying the truth in the right way at the right moment to get the best from you or another person, how does Jesus personify that quality?

Wisdom is living in a way that's life-giving. How did Jesus do that?

Jeff said not only does Jesus forgive us for our foolishness and sin, but in the gospel He also becomes our wisdom. Through Jesus we get the Spirit of wisdom. How does that gift change who we are?

If we've received wisdom and the life of Jesus through the gospel, how should we seek wisdom?

MAKING SPACE



NURTURE

Let's turn inward to examine our hearts and beliefs. We might know the truths we've discussed, but we often doubt them.

What do our schedules, attitudes, and actions reveal about our wisdom or foolishness?

What does your current daily routine reveal about who you believe Jesus to be and to have done for you? What keeps you from seeking the life-giving wisdom of Jesus?

Spend a few minutes describing ways Jesus is worthy and better than anything else and reminding one another of God's wisdom in the gospel.

Take a few minutes to share ways the Spirit of God might be calling you to repentance and faith in Jesus.



ACT

Finally, let's discuss ways we'll walk in obedience and live the wisdom we're learning as a community.

How will we practically demonstrate our faith in Jesus as the true wisdom of God?

How will we walk toward wisdom together?

If we were wise, what impact would our wisdom have on our neighborhood, town, or city?

CLOSING

We receive wisdom by being teachable to God, submitting our lives to God, and surrendering every aspect of our lives to God. As you go through your personal study this week, remember this truth: Jesus is the wisdom of God.

BIBLE-READING PLAN

Over the next week complete the Bible reading, taking notes in the space provided.

- Proverbs 1

- Proverbs 2

- Proverbs 3

- Proverbs 4

- Psalm 1–2

- Psalm 19

PERSONAL DISCOVERY

WHAT IS WISDOM?

Are you wise, or are you a fool? This week's personal study begins with an examination of your wisdom and explores the truth that Jesus is the wisdom of God. Your goal this week is to identify one or two key areas of your life in which you hope to grow during the following eight weeks.



HEAD: GROWING IN UNDERSTANDING

This section focuses on gaining wisdom as we grow in our knowledge of who God is and what He has done through the gospel and the Scriptures.

AM I A WISE PERSON? SELF-ASSESSMENT

The Holy Spirit can use tools like this questionnaire to reveal your true self. Honestly answer each question by assigning a number from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning the statement is rarely true of you and 5 meaning the statement is almost always true of you.

- ___ I make decisions and choices about family, finances, friendships, work, rest, and housing prayerfully and in submission to Christ.
- ___ Other people regularly come to me for counsel, advice, and help as they navigate routine matters of life, such as family, finances, friendships, work, rest, sex, and hospitality.
- ___ I frequently pursue relationships in which I seek to learn and grow.
- ___ I have relationships with people who really know me and seek my good.
- ___ I have enough margin in my life to pause what I'm doing and come to the aid of a neighbor, friend, or coworker in need.
- ___ I experience a weekly time of rest in which I enjoy Christ and all He has done.
- ___ My vocation satisfies my soul. I experience the peace of Christ and the restoration of Christ in both stressful and successful seasons.
- ___ My work doesn't define me or my schedule but comes from a place of rest.
- ___ I look forward to times of silence and solitude in which I sit with the Lord and open up my life to Him.
- ___ I give thanks to God for every paycheck, knowing it's His provision in my life.

- ___ When I create my family budget and consider new purchases, I view it as a gift and privilege to care for God's possessions. I ask God and others to help steward His finances.
- ___ I don't know what my life would be like if someone told me I couldn't pray.
- ___ I often find myself asking God for more wisdom.
- ___ I regularly reflect on ways my children and spouse are walking with Christ.
- ___ I'm amazed by how much my children and spouse are teaching me about who God is and what He has done.
- ___ I regularly open my home with joy to people outside my family.
- ___ I enjoy drawing people out in conversations—learning about their hearts and who God made them to be.
- ___ I readily seek reconciliation and restoration in broken relationships and conflict.

Add up these numbers. How did you score?

If you scored above 70, you're a new Solomon! If your score is 50, you're growing in wisdom, and you probably see lots of wisdom in a few areas. If your score is 30, you're beginning to take some steps of wisdom in a few areas. If your score is below 30, you're likely very honest, and honesty is a crucial component in the journey toward wisdom.

- Which statement was the most difficult to rate?**
- Which rating was the most surprising for you?**

Look at a few of your higher scores. What was your journey like to gain wisdom in that area?

Look at a few of your lower scores. In light of your assessment, what are two or three areas in which you know you need wisdom and would like to grow over the next eight weeks?

The Book of Proverbs continually connects eleven topics to wisdom: money, work, silence, solitude, prayer, the heart, friendship, sex, parenting, family, and hospitality. The questions in the assessment largely correspond to these eleven areas.

MAKING SPACE

WHO IS THE LORD?

Proverbs 1:7 is the guiding statement for the entire Book of Proverbs.

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

PROVERBS 1:7

Often when we read Proverbs, we're looking for helpful nuggets to guide our busy lives. Many of the ways we try to conquer our chaotic lives are organization, rules, boundaries, and new technology. But Proverbs isn't about us. It's about the Lord. Fear of the Lord means looking to Him with reverent awe. We can't understand wisdom apart from a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Proverbs places wisdom within the context of the fear of the Lord.

Who is the Lord? Describe the nature and character of Jesus.

Jesus is gracious, compassionate, hospitable, ever-present, hardworking, generous, loving, and brave. His character might be most readily expressed through His submission to the Father and Holy Spirit in every moment and aspect of His life.

WHAT HAS THE LORD DONE?

Jesus is the true wisdom of God. Paul, writing about the power of the cross and the resurrection, declared this reality 1 Corinthians 1.

... to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:24-25

How do Jesus' death and resurrection display the wisdom of God?

Jesus faithfully pursued, listened to, and walked with God the Father and the Holy Spirit to the cross and into the resurrection. His work in the gospel displays and offers abundant life to everyone for every aspect of life.

WHO ARE WE?

Because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

1 CORINTHIANS 1:30-31

According to Paul, who are you because Christ is the wisdom of God?

In what areas of your life do you boast in yourself? (These are likely areas in which you're trying to prove your own righteousness, fix yourself, and redeem your past.)

What does it mean to be someone who boasts in the Lord and is in Him?
How does that identity differ from someone who boasts in himself?

If we want to be wise, we must acknowledge that we've been fools who need Jesus—the wisdom of God for us. Wisdom comes to us as a gift from God. Because God saved us, called us, and chose us, the wisdom of God has come to us in Christ.

HOW SHOULD WE LIVE?

Read Proverbs 1:2-6. What are the activities of people who fear the Lord and seek wisdom?

How could you pursue these activities in the areas of wisdom you want to grow in? How would that pursuit lead to wisdom?

How can you implement one of these activities in the next week?
What will you do?

Jesus says if you look to Him and follow Him, He will be wisdom for you. That means you're not only forgiven for your foolishness, but you also get the Spirit of wisdom, who comes to dwell in you, giving you power and direction for a new life.

MAKING SPACE



HEART: GROWING IN BELIEF

Now let's look inward to examine our hearts and beliefs. If we want to be wise, we must acknowledge that we've been fools who need Jesus and the wisdom of God.

Throughout Proverbs and particularly the first nine chapters, Solomon tells us we have a clear choice: wisdom or foolishness. The wise know God and experience a full life, while the foolish refuse God and experience death. The wise surrender all of life to God, while the foolish surrender their lives to the fleeting things of this world.

Describe your life in the space below. What makes you happy?
What makes you anxious and burdened? Are you wise or a fool?

Based on what you wrote, spend a few moments writing a prayer to God thanking Him for the ways you're growing in wisdom and asking Him for help in the areas where you would like to see growth.

How do you know whether you're living in the fear of the Lord? You're willing to surrender everything to Him—everything. Those who fear the Lord withhold nothing from Him. In other words, they joyfully give their lives to the One who is life.

What area of your life do you keep to yourself instead of giving it to God? (This is likely one area in which you want to grow in wisdom.)

Whom or what do you fear instead of God?

What's the result of fearing things other than God?

What does fearing those other things reveal about your beliefs?

MAKING SPACE



HANDS: GROWING IN OBEDIENCE

How will we obey? How will we begin to walk in repentance and faith?

Spend five minutes in silence and solitude. Think about Christ as the wisdom of God, the better Solomon, and consider His invitation to follow the way of wisdom. After five minutes record a few thoughts or convictions that have come to mind.

Spend five more minutes in silence and solitude. Think about the challenges, stresses, and responsibilities in your life. Ask God for wisdom in each of those areas and continue to wait for the Lord to grant wisdom. After five minutes record anything you felt God was guiding you to do in His wisdom.

This study has already touched on a wide range of issues and topics in life. A fundamental way we seek wisdom is by asking for the help of other people. Spend time thinking about your role in a community of people and the wisdom you need for those relationships.

How can you grow in the fear of the Lord and in your knowledge of Jesus in your community?

What help do you need? Whom will you ask for help?

What help can you offer in building up other people?

How would pursuing wisdom in your relationships change your striving and busyness?