



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

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

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

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

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

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

Tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church.

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or the colling age, and was because, b to their own harm ying the Son of God and hold empt. 7 For ground that has often fallen on it, and the ion useful to those it is called a bessing from God. 8 But if and thistles, it is worthless are ed, and will be burned at the entropy of the colling in your case we are confident gs connected with salvation injust; He will not forget you showed for His name the saints—and you conting 1 Now we want each of your same diligence for the first same the same the

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^{*}Evangelistic Emphasis

>> MEET THE WRITER



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This study was originally published as EXPLORE THE BIBLE: DEAF PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE (ISSN 2167-8820; Item 005075111) by Lifeway Christian Resources of the Southern Bapitst Convention, Nashville, TN 37234, © 2020 Lifeway Christian Resources of the Southern Bapitst Convention.

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DEAF PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

VOLUME 6 • NUMBER 4

Send questions/comments to Explore the Bible: DEAF Nashville, TN 37234 By email to explorethebible@lifeway.com

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A WORD FROM THE TEAM LEADER

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

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

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

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

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

Humbly, **G. Dwayne McCrary**Team Leader
Adult Explore the Bible



INTRODUCTION TO PROVERBS; SONG OF SONGS

PROVERBS

While Solomon names himself as the author or collector of the proverbs in the book of Proverbs (1:1; 10:1), he is not the only person who wrote the proverbs in this book. Other people include Hezekiah's men, who copied some of Solomon's proverbs (25:1), a group called "the wise" (22:17–24:22; 24:23–34), and the "oracles" from Agur (30:1–33) and Lemuel (31:1–31). Solomon is the main author or collector of Proverbs even though some people may have added to the book. We do not know when the book was written. Solomon lived about 950 years before Jesus.

Solomon wanted to teach people how to live wisely and well in the fear of the Lord. He believed that people who respect and commit themselves to following the Lord will have excellent minds and lives. Solomon taught wisdom, knowledge, and caution to young people. He encouraged the wise to become wiser. If people have the wisdom to avoid foolish or selfish decisions, they will be happy, have good relationships with their families, and do well in their jobs. They will receive the respect of the people around them. Solomon helped people live the lives that God wants them to live by teaching His proverbs to them.

SONG OF SONGS

Most scholars believe the author of the Song of Songs was Solomon. Solomon was the writer or the book was dedicated to him (Song of Songs 1:1). The author wrote the Song of Songs as love poetry. Some people think it odd to have a book about love in the Bible. However, every good gift—including human love—is a gift from God. We do not know when the book was written, but if it was written by Solomon himself, it would have been written about 950 years before Jesus lived.

The poem shows the love between two people, but readers also often interpret the words to show how God loves His people. The author used the two lovers in the Song of Songs to explore human sexuality. It also seems to show a picture of what a real relationship with God should look like. The Song of Songs helps us see what our eternal relationship with God looks like by helping us understand how to love God and our spouses.

OUTLINE OF PROVERBS

- Solomon's Exhortations and Warnings (1:1–9:18)
 - A. Contrast between wisdom and riches (1:1–3:20)
 - B. Praise of wisdom, love, and worthy conduct (3:21–4:27)
 - C. Warnings against lust, idleness, and deceit (5:1-7:27)
 - D. A portrayal of wisdom (8:1-9:18)

II. Solomon's Proverbs (10:1–29:27)

- A. Collected proverbs (10:1–22:16)
- B. Thirty sayings of the wise (22:17–24:22)
- C. More sayings of the wise (24:23-34)
- D. Hezekiah's collection (25:1-29:27)

III. Other Proverbs (30:1–31:31)

- A. Words of Agur (30:1-33)
- B. Words of Lemuel (31:1-9)
- C. Praise of a capable wife (31:10-31)

OUTLINE OF SONG OF SONGS

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

WORD LIST

Accuse—To charge someone of doing a wrong against yourself or another person

Ambush—A surprise attack from a hiding place

Balance—A machine that weighs objects; similar to a scale

Chiasmus—A pattern where words, ideas, or things are repeated in the opposite order (A, B, C, D, D, C, B, A)

Curse—To cause (or God allows) evil or bad things to happen to people.

Day of Judgment—The day at the end of the world when God judges people for the things they have done

Discipline—Training that causes people to develop a specific character or behavior (such as moral or mental improvement)

Firstfruits—The first gathering of fruit from a harvest that is then offered to God in thankfulness

Flax—A plant that has blue flowers and seeds that people use to make linseed oil. People also take strands of fiber from this plant and use them to make clothes.

Grace—God's free gift of love, protection, and holiness to people who trust Him

Honor—The glory, special recognition, distinction, high rank, and great privilege that God gives to people who trust Him

Humble—People who are gentle and restrained in behavior, attitude, or spirit; not egotistical or prideful.

Humiliate—To embarrass, shame, and disgrace people

Infinite—Having no boundaries or limits; cannot be measured or counted

Justification—The act of making a person morally right with God

Morals—Rules or habits of a person's attitudes and behaviors toward others

New Covenant—A new relationship between God and people with Jesus acting as the bridge between them. People experience the New Covenant with God when they believe that Jesus is Lord and God and announce this belief to others.

Oppressed—To keep down a person or group by cruel, unjust use of force or authority

Passion—A powerful emotion, such as love, joy, hatred, or anger; intense love (expressed by God and people); strong sexual desire (expressed by couples)

Peer Pressure—This happens when a person's friends or acquaintances try to influence him or her to behave in a specific way.

Personification—The representation of objects or things as people. Personification is used to help people understand what is being said or taught to them.

Pursue (Pursuit)—To chase, woo, or flatter

Regeneration—The act of changing spiritually or morally (a new spiritual birth)

Salvation—Deliverance from the power or penalty of sin

Sanctification—To set apart, purify, or make holy

Shalom—"Wholeness" or "completeness" in Hebrew, but people usually understand it to mean "peace"

Social Order—The way people act or live with each other in groups and communities

Stewardship—The act of managing a person's property, business, money, and responsibilities

Trinity—The union of three divine Persons (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in one God

Wisdom—The ability to understand or judge what is true, right, and eternal. It can also mean common sense and good judgment.

BIBLE READING PLAN

Month 1

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

Month 2

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

Month 3

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



THE WAY OF WISDOM

God teaches us through the Bible that we can destroy our lives when we make foolish choices.

PROVERBS 1:7-19

How can you know the difference between making foolish and wise choices? Many times, self-centered people encourage foolish people to make selfish choices. Those foolish people listen to people who are like them and make decisions that hurt the people around them instead of following God. However, these people sin when they make choices that hurt and destroy the lives of others. When a person sins, it does not just destroy the lives of others; it also destroys their own lives when they sin. Choosing sin is clearly foolish.

Solomon taught that true wisdom comes from knowing and obeying God. When we follow God, we learn how to make decisions that help the people around us and ourselves. God sets us free from our sins by giving us Jesus' perfect life. He also gives us the power to resist temptation. Jesus' life changes us. People need to know they can receive Jesus' life so they can also become wise by obeying God. Believers show true wisdom when we listen to God and make wise choices that help everyone.

PROVERBS 1:7-19

7 Knowledge begins with **respect** • for the LORD, but fools 3 hate wisdom and discipline. • 8 My child, listen to your father's teaching and do not forget your mother's advice. 9 Their teaching will be like flowers in your hair or a necklace around your neck. 0 10 My child, if sinners try to lead you into sin, do not follow them. **11** They will say, "Come with us. Let's **ambush ©** and kill someone; let's attack some innocent people just for fun. 12 Let's swallow them alive, as death does; let's swallow them whole, as **the grave does. • 13** We will take all kinds of valuable things and fill our houses with stolen goods. 14 Come join us, and we will share with you stolen goods." • 15 My child, do not go along with them; do not do what they do. 16 They are eager to do evil and are quick to kill. 17 It is useless to spread out a net right where the birds can see it. **18** But sinners will fall into their own traps; they will only catch themselves! 19 All greedy people end up this way; greed kills selfish people. 0

- a. Some English Bibles use the word "fear" instead of "respect." When people honor God, He will give them knowledge about how to follow Him.
- b. Solomon describes people who hate God or refuse to obey Him as fools.
- c. Fools will not listen to advice. People who have wisdom can see what is true and right. Discipline gives people the training to follow a list of rules or a person. God will give people who respect Him the wisdom to see right from wrong and the discipline to follow Jesus Christ.
- d. Experienced, godly people show new believers how to follow God and live lives that honor both God and themselves.
- e. A surprise attack from a hiding place
- f. People who sin destroy relationships with God and other people. Solomon used picture language of the grave swallowing someone to describe this.
- g. People are tempted to take advantage of others when money is involved.
- h. Sinners see only what helps them. They do not see how sin will hurt them.
- i. Greed does not pay. It traps and destroys the greedy person.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- 1. How can people get knowledge and wisdom?
- 2. What kind of people hate wisdom and discipline?
- 3. Who are some people that believers should look to as godly teachers?
- 4. What does Solomon compare the teaching of fathers and advice of mothers to? Why is this important?
- 5. What are some ways self-centered people can tempt fools into hurting others?
- 6. How can believers resist the temptations of peer pressure and money?
- 7. How did Solomon compare nets for catching birds and the trap into which sinners get caught?
- 8. Why do sinners fall into their own traps?
- 9. How does greed kill selfish people?

| BIBLE SKILL: Fill in the blanks. |
|--|
| Look up these verses and fill in the blanks to learn more about wisdom and knowledge. |
| "Now give me and so I can lead these people in the right way, because no one can rule them without your help" (2 Chronicles 1:10). |
| "Teach me and because I trust your commands" (Psalm 119:66). |
| "God uses us to spread His everywhere like a sweet-smelling perfume" (2 Corinthians 2:14). |
| "But if any of you needs, you should ask God for it. He is generous to |

IN MY CONTEXT

- True wisdom starts with a right relationship with God.
- Obeying godly teaching leads to blessings in life.
- Wise believers resist the pressure to become involved in evil activities.
- Ignoring godly wisdom leads to self-destruction.

Discuss as a group how people get into a right relationship with God.

How can obeying godly teaching bring blessings to your life? Make a list of the blessings you have received from God because you obeyed Him.

What can you and your Bible study group do to help each other resist pressure to do evil things?

Discuss as a group how ignoring godly wisdom can destroy your church and you. Take time with your group to pray for God's true wisdom to guide you in all things.

MEMORY VERSE

Knowledge begins with respect for the LORD, but fools hate wisdom and discipline. – Proverbs 1:7

DAY ONE

Read Proverbs 1:7, thinking about how respecting the Lord will change your life.

The first thing Solomon wanted his readers to know is that respect for the Lord is a requirement for true knowledge, wisdom, and discipline. A person must have a relationship with God to get knowledge, wisdom, and discipline from Him. The person shows respect to God in the following ways: 1) admit he refused to obey God, 2) tell Him he is sorry for disobeying, 3) ask Him to forgive him, and 4) ask Jesus to save him and live with Jesus as his King. God will give that person the knowledge, wisdom, and discipline to follow Him in everything he does.

Solomon also meant a person who has no relationship with God also has no respect for Him. People grow and learn when they have relationships. When a person does not want a relationship with God, it is the same as saying he does not want to grow and learn from Him. That is disrespecting God. This is why a person who refuses to obey God will hate any wisdom and discipline God may want to offer. The person will never receive true knowledge from Him and will continue to be a fool.

What do you need to do to have a relationship with God? When you are in a relationship with God, how does He give you knowledge, wisdom, and discipline?

DAY TWO

Read Proverbs 1:8-9, remembering how people taught you to follow God.

In Proverbs 1:8-9, Solomon invited his "son" to listen to his parents' teaching and advice so that his life would be blessed. (NCV has "child," but many English Bibles use the word "son.") He asked his son to listen because he understood the importance of experienced, godly people leading others into a life that God can bless. Some people believe that Solomon was writing to his son, Rehoboam, or one of his other sons. Others think Solomon was speaking to his readers and treating them as sons. Either way, Solomon invited us to listen to him and other godly people so that God can bless our lives.

Solomon wrote that godly teaching looks "like flowers in your hair or a necklace around your neck." When people decorate themselves with flowers, they smell and look beautiful to others around them. This is the same for people who follow the teachings of experienced, godly people. People who follow God show His beauty in what they do to the people around them. People are encouraged to follow the teachings of godly people when they see God's beauty in what obedient believers do.

Who are the godly people in your life? What did you learn from them that helped you obey God?

DAY THREE

Read Proverbs 1:10-14, finding the evil process of negative peer pressure.

In these verses, Solomon warned his "child" about people who are the opposite of godly. He said that evil people use peer pressure to encourage others to sin and hurt innocent people. Sin can grow through peer pressure and destroy lives as it spreads. Sin never stays with one person. It always grows! Sinners steal, kill, and destroy relationships between people and God. They do not show God's beauty in their actions. Solomon said not to listen or follow these teachers of evil.

Evil people also use money to tempt people into sinning. God intends for people to share the good things of life (like money) with each other so that they may live well. Sinners, however, steal the good things of life from others and use them to create a fake life without God. Solomon explained this process in Proverbs 1:13-14. Sinners take money and valuable things from innocent people and use them to make life more enjoyable for themselves. Then they try to push others to join in their sin by promising them an easy way to get rich.

Have you experienced peer pressure from people to do things you did not want to do?

What would you do to resist negative peer pressure?

DAY FOUR

Read Proverbs 1:15-16, drawing a line under a definition of sin.

Solomon taught in Proverbs 1:16 that sinners are eager and quick to kill. He said this because sin is the selfish act of hurting people and God. Sinners do not only take money or valuable things from people and God, sinners can also take from people their happiness, comfort, feeling of safety, or even their lives. Jesus said that the thief comes to kill, steal, and destroy (John 10:10). Sinners copy the first thief, Satan, when they kill, steal, and destroy lives and relationships. Solomon warned us not to follow sinners or do the things they do, because they destroy lives.

In verse 15, Solomon encouraged his readers to choose another way instead of following sinners. This is the way that godly people take. Godly people pick a way that is different from what sinners choose when they respect God by asking Jesus to forgive their sins and allow Him to be King over their lives. This is the real life God wants believers to have. (See John 10:10.) When people pay attention to Solomon's wise advice, they respect God.

How has sin hurt you or others you know?

How has following Jesus helped you and others heal from the sinful behavior of hurtful people?

KEY DOCTRINE: Salvation

Salvation happens when a person turns away from their sins through the power of the Holy Spirit and turns toward God. One does this by believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. God then gives the grace to become a new person through Jesus Christ's life. This is how respect for God leads to knowledge of Him. Salvation includes all these theological ideas: regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation without a personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

DAY FIVE

Read Proverbs 1:17-19, looking for what happens to sinners.

Nets or traps set where birds can see them are useless. Many kinds of birds have excellent eyesight. Birds will look very carefully at the area that has their food before they come for it. They know that eating is the most dangerous time for them as their attention is on the food, not on what is happening around them. Birds see obvious traps. They will fly away and leave the hunter with nothing.

Evil people, however, are not like birds. They see only the money and riches they want to steal from innocent people. Their attention is so focused on their sins that they do not see their greed will become a trap for them. They do not realize that their sins make them guilty in God's eyes. Sins will become a trap for evil people who refuse to respect and obey God. God will punish these people, and hell is the final place of punishment for those who do not turn to Christ.

Have you ever seen a person trapped in their own sins? Why do you think they got caught in their sins?

CONNECT AND SHARE

Think about what you have learned from Proverbs 1:7-19. Meet with one or two other members of your study group to find ways to live what you have learned.

How can you show people that God has blessed you with true knowledge through your respect of Him?

How does peer pressure and the love of money lead to evil actions? What can you do to help others resist these temptations?

Think about someone you know who is caught in sin. What can you do this week to tell this person about God so they can be free from sin and open to God's wisdom?



Trust in the Lord

God shows people who trust Him how to follow Him.

PROVERBS 3:1-12

The best life is one lived trusting and following God. In Proverbs 3:1-12, Solomon taught what trusting God looks like. He said we must trust God with all of our hearts instead of trusting ourselves. We show our trust in God by remembering His commands and loving other people by being kind and truthful to them. Solomon explained how trusting God also means accepting His discipline. God gives us discipline because He loves us and wants us to become more like His Son, Jesus. We show people that we are God's followers when we trust Him with all of our hearts.

Solomon said we receive blessings from God when we follow Him. God gives us these blessings because we gave our lives to Jesus and trusted Him as our Lord and Savior. We could not earn these blessings. God uses His blessings to change our lives. God wants us to be made perfect as Jesus is perfect. He wants to move us toward that perfection. This is why we receive blessings from God when we decide to follow Him.

PROVERBS 3:1-12

1 My child, do not forget my teaching, **but** keep my commands in mind. • 2 Then you will live a long time, and your life will be successful. 3 Don't ever forget kindness and truth. Wear them like a necklace. • Write them on your heart as if on a tablet. • 4 Then you will be respected and will please both God and people. 5 Trust the LORD with all your heart, and don't depend on your own understanding. 6 Remember the LORD in all you do, and he will give you success. 7 Don't depend on your own wisdom. Respect the LORD and refuse to do wrong. 8 Then your body will be healthy, and your bones will be strong. 9 Honor the LORD with your wealth and the firstfruits of from all your crops. 6 10 Then your barns will be full, and your wine barrels will overflow with new wine. 11 My child, do not reject the LORD's discipline, and don't get angry when he corrects you. 12 The LORD corrects those he loves, just as parents correct the child they delight in.

- a. The Lord has authority over His followers, and He gives them orders (commands) they should obey.
- b. The word "successful" is the word "shalom" in Hebrew. Shalom can mean "peace," but it more accurately means "wholeness" or "completeness."
- c. This is similar to Proverbs
 1:9. Believers should
 remember the times they
 experienced kindness
 and truth from people so
 that they can be kind and
 truthful to others.
- d. Writing on the heart makes kindness and truth permanent and internal.
- e. We cannot trust ourselves to do the right thing all the time. We get farther away from God the more we follow our own decisions. Only God can always lead us correctly.
- f. This is the first gathering of fruit from a harvest that is offered to God in thankfulness.
- g. Part of trusting God means giving Him control over our money and possessions.
- h. Correction can either be punishment or training meant to help us follow God better.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- 1. What should people do if they want to receive God's blessings and direction?
- 2. How does God bless those who remember His teachings and obey His commands?
- 3. How are knowledge and truth like a necklace and a tablet?
- 4. How can believers please both God and people?
- 5. How can people show they trust God?
- 6. What do people need to do if they want God to give them success?
- 7. What should people refuse to do if they want to respect the Lord?
- 8. How should people honor God?
- 9. Why should people not be angry when God disciplines them?

BIBLE SKILL: Match the verse with the sentence.

Read these verses about trusting God and draw a line from the verse to the words found in the verse

Deuteronomy 1:32-33 "...we can trust God to do what he promised."

Psalm 9:10 "But you still did not trust the Lord your God..."

Isaiah 26:4 "Trust in God, and trust in me."

John 14:1 "Those who know the Lord trust him..."

Hebrews 10:23 "So, trust the LORD always..."

IN MY CONTEXT

- A believer lives life with integrity by living an honest and moral life.
- Trusting in God leads to renewed life.
- God takes care of the people who honor Him.
- Learn from God's discipline, understanding that He disciplines believers because He loves them.

Discuss as a group how trusting God leads to changed lives for believers. What must you do differently to show a life that is honest and moral?

How are you trusting the Lord in your everyday life? What new steps do you need to take so that God can renew your life?

With your Bible study group, make a list of ways believers can honor God. What action listed do you need to do more fully?

Remembering that God loves you, think again about when God has disciplined you. Now, discuss with your Bible group the lessons you have learned from His discipline.

MEMORY VERSE

Trust the LORD with all your heart, and don't depend on your own understanding. Remember the LORD in all you do, and he will give you success. – Proverbs 3:5-6

DAY ONE

Read Proverbs 3:1-2, paying attention to the word "successful."

The important word for believers in Proverbs 3:1-2 is "successful." The word "successful" means "shalom" in Hebrew. This word has been translated by different people as "peace" (KJV), "well-being" (CSB), and "successful" (NCV). Shalom usually means peace, but it is better to think of the word as meaning wholeness or completeness. For believers, success means to be whole or complete with God.

Solomon's view of a successful life is different from what most people think a successful life should be. He did not mean believers following God's teachings and commands would always have long lives, respect from people, success in work, healthy bodies, and riches. Jesus followed God's commands perfectly and did not have any of these while He was on earth. What Solomon is talking about is our relationship with God. When we obey and trust God, He changes us from broken, sinful people into healed, holy people. We have a right relationship with Him. This is what wholeness or completeness means. People can be like Jesus in being whole or complete with God by having a right relationship with Him.

How would you teach Solomon's view of a successful life to new believers?

DAY TWO

Read Proverbs 3:3-4, thinking about how your life shows who you are.

Solomon told his readers they needed to always remember to be kind and truthful if they want to please God and people. He advised us to wear kindness and truth around our necks and write them on our hearts. The Hebrews used to believe that love and faithfulness are to be a part of the person's heart and life. In Solomon's thinking, kindness and truth must be a part of the believer's heart and actions. Believers will please and get respect from both God and people when they show kindness and truth to others.

Solomon understood that obedience to God's commands must come from the hearts of people. God wrote the Ten Commandments on stone tablets, but people did not obey His commandments. However, God told us in Jeremiah 31:33 He will put His teaching in people by writing it on their hearts. What God meant is He will change the minds and hearts of people so they will love His commands and want to obey them. People become God's when they love and obey Him. God is pleased when we obey His commands out of love from our hearts.

How have you grown in showing kindness and truth to people?

DAY THREE

Read Proverbs 3:5-8, drawing a line under the one who can lead our lives right.

Solomon warned us against depending on our own knowledge or wisdom. It is a sin when we tell God we know better than Him how to live our lives. We move farther away from God the more we depend on ourselves to make decisions for our lives. Our sins will trap and destroy us if we wander from God. Solomon understood how depending on our knowledge and wisdom is a kind of pride that can destroy us.

Solomon encouraged us to renew our lives by trusting God with all of our hearts. He also included our souls, minds, and strength when he talked about our hearts. We must trust God with every part of who we are! We cannot trust even a small part of ourselves to make good decisions for ourselves because we can sin. Only God is holy and perfect. Because He is holy and perfect, we can fully trust God to lead our lives. When we trust God, He renews our lives. This is how God frees us from our sins and gives us His success!

Did you ever make bad decisions because you did not trust God to lead you? What would you do differently now?

Think of a time God led you into making good decisions for yourself. How did you trust God? What happened?

DAY FOUR

Read Proverbs 3:9-10, asking yourself what you can do to give God control of your money and possessions.

Solomon said people honor God when they give Him control over their money and possessions. The word "honor" means to have high respect for someone or something. It is hard for many people to honor God by giving Him control over their money and possessions. They think money and possessions will give them protection from the bad things that may happen to them. People who think like this are honoring money and possessions more than God. It is not an easy step, but it is an important step of faith to trust God instead of our money and possessions.

People in Solomon's time honored God by giving Him the firstfruits of their crops. The firstfruits were the first things people harvested from their fields. By giving these to God, they lost the chance to eat or sell the firstfruits of the harvest. Nevertheless, they trusted God because they knew God provided the firstfruits and God could provide all the rest that they needed. God gave more than enough food and drink back to the people who trusted Him. God also takes care of people who honor Him today.

How can you honor God with your money?

How did God take care of you after you gave Him your money?

KEY DOCTRINE: Justification

Jesus lived a perfect life and gave His life for everyone who believes in Him. Jesus died and was buried. He rose from the dead three days later. Believers give Jesus their sin-damaged lives when they trust Him. Now, God does not see sin in the people who believe in Jesus. Instead, He sees Jesus in all of them. God forgives the believers, and they now have a relationship of peace and favor with Him.

DAY FIVE

Read Proverbs 3:11-12, signing a sentence that shows why God disciplines us.

Solomon knew what it was like to be a parent. He understood that children must be trained to behave in the correct way. The behavior of children can get out of control if their parents do not train them. Children who are out of control can have bad things happen to them. Parents who love their children do not want bad things to happen to them. This is why parents train their children to behave in the correct way. Solomon knew the best way parents can show love to their children is to train them to behave correctly.

God loves us as His children. He loves us as much as He loves His Son, Jesus. God wants to change us so that we become like Jesus in the way we live. He disciplines us so that we can glorify God by living like Jesus. This is the reason God corrects us. We should not be angry when God disciplines us. We would not be His children if He did not love us enough to discipline us! We should be thankful and happy that God loves us so much that He shapes us to be like Jesus.

Has God ever disciplined you? How did your life change from that discipline?

CONNECT AND SHARE

Think about what you have learned from Proverbs 3:1-12. Meet with one or two other members of your study group to find ways to live what you have learned.

How can you encourage each other to trust God with all your heart? Who is someone you can tell about the new life you have in Christ?

What can you do to help people see that God will take care of people who honor Him?

How can you teach people that God's discipline is not bad, but a wonderful thing? Thank God for His life-changing discipline.



SHOWING COMPASSION

We show we are following God's wisdom when we treat other people well.

PROVERBS 3:21-35

People who have the wisdom to trust God will not be afraid. People who do foolish things will worry about being caught or punished for the things they have done. This will not happen to those who trust God. God will watch over the people who follow Him and will give them His peace. The people who have God's peace will have a calmness other people cannot understand.

God expects His people to treat others with kindness. People who have a right relationship with God will also have right relationships with other people. Believers who experience God's love and grace will show that love and grace to others.

God will honor wise people who trust Him and show kindness to others. This is not true for people who do evil. Evil people sometimes get what they want, but Solomon said not to be jealous of those people! God will punish them if they do not change their ways. Believers who are honest, do the right thing, and are not proud will receive blessings and honor from God.

PROVERBS 3:21-35

21 My child, hold on to wisdom and good sense. Don't let them out of your sight. 22 They will give you life and beauty like a necklace around your neck. 23 Then you will go your way in safety, and you will not get hurt. 24 When you lie down, you won't be afraid; when you lie down, you will sleep in peace. 25 You won't be afraid of sudden trouble; you won't fear the ruin 13 that comes to the wicked. **26** because the LORD will keep you safe. He will keep you from being trapped. 27 Whenever you are able do good to people who need help. 28 If you have what your neighbor asks for, don't say, "Come back later. I will give it to you tomorrow." 29 Don't make plans to hurt your neighbor who lives nearby and trusts you. 30 Don't **accuse** • a person for no good reason; don't accuse someone who has not harmed you. **31** Don't be jealous of those who use violence, and don't choose to be like them. **32** The LORD hates those who do wrong, but he is a friend to those who are honest. 33 The LORD will curse the evil person's **house**, **o** but he will bless the **home** of those who do right. 34 The LORD laughs at those who laugh at him, but he gives **grace** to those who are not proud. **35** Wise people will receive honor, 6 but fools will be disgraced. 6

- a. Solomon's use of "sense" in this sentence means the skill to think or reason correctly.
- b. Solomon used the word "ruin" to mean the total or complete destruction of wicked people.
- c. "Accuse" means to blame someone for doing a wrong against a person or yourself.
- d. House has two meanings. It can mean a person's physical house or his family. Solomon meant both when he wrote this verse.
- e. Solomon's meaning for home is a bit different from house. He was thinking of a dwelling of peace and rest for the person who obeys the Lord.
- f. God will freely give love and protection to people who are not too proud to trust Him.
- g. God gives believers glory because Jesus lives in them. He also will invite believers to share in His magnificence and wealth by living in His house forever.
- h. God will shame and take away the honor of people who hate or refuse to obey Him.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- 1. How do believers show they depend on God's wisdom?
- 2. What does life and beauty do for believers?
- 3. Why can believers lie down peacefully and without fear?
- 4. How does the Lord keep believers safe?
- 5. Why does the Lord hate those who do wrong?
- 6. What does that mean for us?
- 7. How does the Lord punish evil people?
- 8. How does the Lord bless believers?

Read the following verses and write down what we should do for our neighbors: Exodus 20:16 _____ Leviticus 19:18 ____ Psalm 15:1-5 ____ Luke 10:27 _____ Romans 15:2 _____

IN MY CONTEXT

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

Discuss as a group how God's people can have peace even when there are those who might want to hurt them? How will you show God's peace in your life this week?

What needs do your neighbors have? What can you do now to help meet those needs? How can your church take steps to help people in need?

Explain to your Bible study group how you have experienced God's blessings. How can you be a blessing to the people around you?

MEMORY VERSE

Whenever you are able, do good to people who need help.

- Proverbs 3:27

DAY ONE

Read Proverbs 3:21-23, looking for what it means to have wisdom and good sense.

Solomon reminded his readers how important it is to hold on to wisdom and good sense. People with wisdom can think clearly when they know the difference between right and wrong. They understand it is God who loves them and gives them life. Followers of God will show this Godgiven life in their signs, words, and actions. This is why Solomon said wisdom and good sense are like a beautiful necklace. People show beauty in their lives when they have the wisdom and good sense to follow God.

Believers have eternal life with God when they have a relationship with Him. This is what Solomon meant by followers of God not getting hurt. He did not mean that believers will never get hurt while they live on earth. Jesus explained in Matthew 10:16-25 that believers can expect others to treat them badly, hurt them, or kill them. However, Jesus added in Matthew 10:26-32 that believers should not be afraid because God cares about them and will give them eternal life. Wise people will choose to have a relationship with God. They know the eternal life He gives to them has true safety and will protect them forever.

In what ways can you show wisdom and good sense in your life?

DAY TWO

Read Proverbs 3:24-26, thinking about where you can find peace.

Solomon used an interesting word when writing about the fear wicked people have of punishment. That word is "ruin." Ruin means total and complete destruction. This is what evil people are afraid of. They are afraid everything they worked for will be taken away from them. They trust in themselves and do not trust God. Even their bodies and lives will be destroyed. They cannot know peace because they do not have the security God gives to His people. Wicked people will continue to be afraid as long as they do not have a right relationship with God.

God gives security to believers. Security allows them to serve anyone that needs their help. God will protect His followers from the traps of sin and evil people. There is nothing wicked people can do to change this.

God is in complete control over what happens to His people. Believers who understand this can go out and serve God even if evil people oppose them. It does not matter what happens to the believers' bodies. They already have eternal life with God and can do anything that God asks them to do.

How can you tell people about the peace God can give them?

In what ways can you show that you trust God to protect you from wicked people when you tell people about Jesus?

DAY THREE

Read Proverbs 3:27-30, underlining how a Deaf team did good in the story below.

Solomon taught believers they should help people if they have what those people need. Believers draw people to God when they pay attention to Him and the needs of the people around them. Believers should not wait to help people. It is a sin when believers postpone helping people. If they have money, meals, clothes, tools, or whatever someone needs, they should help the person who has needs. However, it is not always things that people really need. What they really need is a relationship with God. People tend to listen to what believers have to say about God when they see believers are willing to help them. Believers help people best when they help them with their physical and spiritual needs.

A team of Deaf Christians went to Puerto Rico to do disaster relief after Hurricane Maria. Every day the team worked in the hot sun putting new roofs on houses damaged by Hurricane Maria. They helped hearing people and Deaf people. Each day after the work was done, the team gave a Bible to the homeowner and told them about Jesus. Believers show themselves to be God's people and good neighbors when they love God and others.

In what ways can you help people today? How does doing good open doors for the gospel?

DAY FOUR

Read Proverbs 3:31-32, asking yourself what it means to live honestly.

Solomon warned believers not to be jealous of evil people because God will judge them. He admitted evil people will be successful sometimes. They may have money and other possessions. Believers who experience problems with money can have a hard time understanding why God allows wicked people to succeed. Solomon encouraged believers not to give up on God. They should not copy the violence wicked people do in stealing from others. God will judge people who do that. This is why Solomon told believers not to be jealous of them!

People choose to do wrong or to do right. People who choose wrong will not be God's friends. Their actions cause them to be His enemy. Wicked people show God they are His enemies when they sin against people and against Him. These people cannot have a relationship with God as long as they refuse to obey and follow Him. God, however, made a way through Jesus' death for people to be His friend. People who believe in Jesus will understand the importance of being honest with people and God.

What are some ways you can remind yourself it is better not to be jealous of wicked people who are successful?

How can you show people what an honest life looks like?

KEY DOCTRINE: The Christian and the World around us

Only Jesus can change people from enemies of God to followers of Jesus. Christians also cannot make permanent, good changes in their communities on their own. They can only do this through Jesus' power. Christians can, though, obey Jesus and work for good in their communities. We should work to help the orphan, the needy, the hurt, the old, the helpless, and the sick. We speak on behalf of the unborn and stand for the sanctity of all human life. Part of the good we do is to seek to bring all the parts of our society toward goodness, truth, and brotherly love.

DAY FIVE

Read Proverbs 3:33-35, finding blessings and cursings.

The word "house" meant God would curse both their physical homes and their families. God curses the possessions of evil people because they choose to trust in things, not Him. Families are cursed when they copy the behavior of their wicked relatives or suffer from the actions of the wicked relatives. Sin always has consequences! This is why evil people are truly cursed if they do not learn to respect and obey God.

Solomon taught that people who follow God will be very close to Him and receive many blessings from Him. God will bless the homes and families of believers. Believers will have peace because they trust in God. They do not trust in things. God will also give grace and honor to those who follow Him. He will protect believers eternally. Believers will know God is with them and that they are His people through the blessings He gives them.

What are the blessings from God that you see in your life and in your family?

CONNECT AND SHARE

Think about what you learned from Proverbs 3:21-35. Meet with one or two other members of your study group to find ways to live what you have learned.

What can you do to teach other people that God's peace is the best kind of peace they can have? How can you show God's peace in your own lives?

Make a list of people to whom you can show kindness. What steps can you take this week to fulfill some or all of this list?

How can you pass on God's blessings to other people? Pray together, thanking God for your blessings.



THE CHOICE

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

PROVERBS 4:11-27

Godly teachers are important because they show people the path that will take them to Jesus. They want to make sure people understand the teachings of the Bible and how to use them as a guide for their lives. People who know they have eternal life will have the confidence to do anything in Jesus' name. Teachers help people to live the life God wants them to by pointing them toward Jesus.

There are also evil teachers who encourage people to take a different path that leads to death. Deaf believers should not watch these evil teachers. Sin is the opposite of life and always leads to death. Evil teachers will die with the fools who listen to them at the end of the evil path they take together.

The spiritual wisdom of Solomon is still needed in our lives and churches.

PROVERBS 4:11-27

11 I am guiding you in the way of wisdom, and I am leading you on the right path. 12 Nothing will hold you back; you will not be **overwhelmed.** • **13** Always remember what you have been taught, and don't let go of it. Keep all that you have learned; it is the most important thing in life. 19 14 Don't follow the ways of the wicked; don't do what evil people do. 15 Avoid their ways, and don't follow them. Stay away from them and keep on going, 16 because they cannot sleep until they do evil. They cannot rest until they harm someone. 17 They feast on wickedness and cruelty as if they were eating bread and drinking wine. • 18 The way of the good person is like the light of dawn, growing brighter and brighter o until full daylight. 19 But the wicked walk around in **the dark;** • they can't even see what makes them stumble. **20** My child, pay attention to my words; listen closely to what I say. 21 Don't ever forget my words; keep them always in mind. 22 They are the key to life 6 for those who find them; they bring health to the whole body. 23 Be careful what you think, because your thoughts run your life. 6 24 Don't use your mouth to tell lies; don't ever say things that are not true. 25 Keep your eyes focused on what is right, and look straight ahead to what is good. 26 Be careful what you do, and always do what is right. 10 **27** Don't turn off the road of goodness; keep away from evil paths.

- a. With God on our side, no one can defeat us.
 The problems of life will not beat (overwhelm) believers. Wise, godly teachers help believers remember this.
- b. Everything believers learn from godly teachers and the Bible shows them that a relationship with Jesus is the most important relationship people can have.
- c. Evil people do evil as easily and as often as most people eat and drink. Evil can never satisfy our deepest hunger.
- d. Paul told his readers in 2 Corinthians 3:18 that God changes His followers so they look more like Jesus, reflecting the glory of the Lord like a mirror reflects light.
- e. Sin blinds people to what is good. They live in spiritual darkness.
- f. Wise people know that having a relationship with God is the key to life—both life on earth and eternal life!
- g. Our thoughts are where our actions come from.

 The path to sin and death begins internally. (See James 1:14-15.)
- h. It becomes easier for believers to do the right thing the more they obey God in their lives.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- 1. What important decision must all people make?
- 2. Who guides believers on the way of wisdom and the right path?
- 3. What should believers remember if they do not want to be overwhelmed?
- 4. What is the most important thing in a believer's life? Why?
- 5. Why should believers stay away from evil people and keep on going away from them?
- 6. How did Solomon describe the way of a good person?
- 7. What is the key to life for believers?
- 8. Why should believers be careful about what they think?
- 9. What should believers not use their mouths or their hands for?
- 10. How can believers stay focused on God?

BIBLE SKILL: Fill in the Blanks.

| make sure they live their lives the right way. God wants to change His followers into His holy servants. This is called "sanctification." |
|--|
| "If anyone belongs to Christ, there is a new The old things have gone; everything is made new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). |
| "So I tell you: Live by the Spirit. Then you will not do what your sinful selves want" (Galatians 5:16). |
| "In Christ Jesus, God made us to do, which God olanned in advance for us to live our lives doing" (Ephesians 2:10). |
| "All who make themselves clean from evil will be used for special purposes. The will be made, useful to the Master, ready to do any good work" (2 Timothy 2:21). |

IN MY CONTEXT

- Following godly teachings leads to life.
- · Wicked living leads to more wickedness and disappointment.
- Living right requires self-controlled, disciplined living.

Discuss as a group how obeying wise, godly teachings has changed your lives. What do you need to do differently this week to show the way your life has been changed?

How has wicked living in the past led you to disappointment in life? Are there still pieces of your life that remain wicked? What must you do to let go of these wicked ways?

How is God helping you now to control yourself and do right things? Share with your Bible study group what you have learned from God about disciplined living.

MEMORY VERSE

Be careful what you do, and always do what is right. - Proverbs 4:26

DAY ONE

Read Proverbs 4:11-13, looking for what can set you on the right path of life.

Solomon said that people who follow what he taught will not be overwhelmed by life. These people will not be overwhelmed because they are on the right path of life. Not all teachers teach the truth. However, godly teachers set us on the right godly path of life. When we learn biblical truth from godly teachers, we have what we need for life. This is what we must hold to.

Solomon pointed people to God and wanted them to understand that having a relationship with Him is the most important thing in their lives. People who do not have a relationship with God cannot be wise and will not follow the path to God. These people will be frustrated and overwhelmed when they experience the problems that come with life. People who are careful to remember and follow godly teachings will know who God is and they will have the most important thing in life.

What kind of things can overwhelm you in life? How does the godly teaching you have learned keep you from being overwhelmed?

DAY TWO

Read Proverbs 4:14-17, paying attention to why evil people behave the way they do.

Solomon was clear: do not follow evil people or do what they do. Any action that leads people away from God is evil. Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 5:11 that believers should not be friends with or even eat with people who have affairs, are greedy, do not worship God, get drunk, or trick people out of their money and things. Why? We tend to copy the actions of those who are around us. Therefore, believers must be careful about who their close friends are.

Evil people do not hurt only themselves. They will also hurt the people around them. This is another reason Solomon told his readers to stay away from evil people. Wicked people will hurt others on purpose. They think this will give them the joy and peace that is missing from their lives. The sad thing is sin can only bring problems and death. Sin will

never give a person a life that satisfies and is eternal. Only God can do that for people. Believers must stay away from evil people because evil people hurt those around them.

How would following evil people hurt you and the people in your life?

Why do you think that evil people are never satisfied with what they do?

DAY THREE

Read Proverbs 4:18-19, focusing on what happens to people who follow the way of good or evil.

God has a plan for His followers. He wants believers to think, behave, and follow Jesus. God disciplines His people throughout their lives so they can learn how to follow Him. Jesus told His followers in Matthew 5:14 that they are the light of the world. John also explained in 1 John 1:5 that God is light and has no darkness in Him. God's followers show His light better as they follow Him more. God's great plan is to change believers into His holy servants who mirror the brilliance of His Son, Jesus.

Solomon told his readers that it is different for wicked people. They will walk around and stumble in the darkness of their sins. Foolish people cannot understand why their behavior leads to the problems they have. People who are addicted to porn cannot see how it affects their marriages. Alcoholics and drug addicts cannot figure out how their addiction stops them from keeping and holding a job. Liars do not realize their lies are the reason people do not trust them. These people will keep making the same mistakes over and over again. Their lives will only get darker and harder until they turn to Christ.

Solomon taught that God makes His followers into a holy people. How is God changing you today?

DAY FOUR

Read Proverbs 4:20-22, noticing as a Deaf person what to look at.

Solomon asked his readers to listen carefully to what he had to tell them. He knew there are many voices that call out for a person's attention. Some of these voices are wise while others are foolish. These voices may come from movies, songs, books, government leaders, neighbors, co-workers, friends, and family members. All of these voices want the person's heart. Solomon knew there is only one voice that is really important. That is the voice of God. This is why he advised people to pay attention to the knowledge he wanted to share with them.

Wise people who are Deaf must be very careful in how they use their eyes. What they see will go into their hearts. The heart is where the desire to do what is good or evil starts. Deaf men and women who pay attention to conversations about wicked actions, watch inappropriate shows, or read about evil ideas will pollute their hearts. They will not be healthy in mind and body. The wise person will pay attention to what God tells them through godly teachers like Solomon. People who are careful to guard their hearts will have healthy minds and bodies.

Why do you think people want to tell others how to think, feel, or behave?

How can you train your eyes to focus only on God?

KEY DOCTRINE: Salvation (Sanctification)

The process of God changing His people into His holy servants is called sanctification. It begins when a person is born again (regenerated). God claims the new believer for Himself and starts the work of changing him or her into thinking and acting like His Son, Jesus. The Holy Spirit will help the believer grow in spiritual wisdom and goodness. The process of sanctification is one that goes on throughout his or her life.

DAY FIVE

Read Proverbs 4:23-27, asking yourself how you can guard your heart.

Solomon warned followers of God to be careful about what they think because every action starts in a person's thoughts. For example, a murderer thinks angry thoughts before killing someone. A thief wants his neighbor's things before stealing them. There are many examples of bad thoughts leading to wicked behavior. However, the opposite can also be true. Good thoughts lead to godly behavior. A kind person thinks thoughts of love before helping people. An understanding person thinks thoughts of mercy before forgiving people. A person's thoughts lead to his or her actions! Believers must remember this and be careful in asking themselves what they are thinking before they do something.

If we want to live right, we must live lives of spiritual discipline. Our hearts and minds must be disciplined to follow only the Lord.

What spiritual discipline do you need to practice today?

CONNECT AND SHARE

Think about what you have learned from Proverbs 4:11-27. Meet with one or two other members of your study group to find ways to live what you have learned.

What do you need to change in your life to better follow godly teachers?

When have you seen in your own life sinful actions that led to even greater sin and sorrow? How does the Holy Spirit help you turn away from sin and turn toward Christ?

What can you do to help each other practice self-control in your lives? How can you be accountable to each other?



FOLLOWING GOD'S DESIGN

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

PROVERBS 5:3-11,15-18

Sexual sins are dangerous. Pornography, lustful thoughts, inappropriate texts, flirting, secret meetings, and affairs damage relationships. Sexual sins also damage a person's relationship with God. A few minutes of pleasure can lead to a lifetime of sadness and regret when relationships are wrecked by sexual sins.

Wise people protect themselves by thinking about what could happen if they involve themselves in sexual sin. They stop and think about what their relationship with God would look like if they did something sexually inappropriate. Believers can make wise choices when they stop and think about the pain they can cause to the people they love and to God's Spirit within them.

God's plan is for sex to be enjoyed only between a man and woman in marriage. Bonds with spouses, children, families, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and God become stronger when married couples have healthy sexual relationships with each other. Married couples who follow God's plan for sex experience God's approval.

PROVERBS 5:3-11,15-18

3 The words of another man's wife may seem sweet as honey; they may be as smooth as olive oil. 4 But in the end she will bring you sorrow, causing you pain like a two**edged sword. 5** She is on the way to death; her steps are headed straight to the grave. **6** She gives little thought to life. **She doesn't** even know • that her ways are wrong. 7 Now, my sons, listen to me, and don't ignore what I say. 8 Stay away from such a woman. Don't even go near the door of her house, 9 or you will give your riches to others, o and the best years of your life will be given to someone cruel. **10 Strangers •** will enjoy your wealth, and what you worked so hard for will go to someone else. 11 You will groan at the end of your life when your health is gone.

drink water from your own wife, just as you drink water from your own well. 16 Don't pour your water in the streets; don't give your love to just any woman. 17 These things are yours alone and shouldn't be shared with strangers. 18 Be happy with the wife you married when you were young. She gives you joy, as your fountain 10 gives you water.

- a. Sexual sin starts with communication.
- b. A double-edged sword is dangerous because it can cut with both edges and pierce a person.
- c. Adulterers or adulteresses will say they are only "following their hearts" or "doing what makes them happy." They are selfish and do not follow God.
- d. Adulterers or adulteresses take the money and time that are supposed to go to the other person's spouse.
- e. "Strangers" might
 mean the adulterer's or
 adulteress' spouse and
 family. It could also mean
 a prostitute's boss, the
 ex-spouse's new spouse/
 family, divorce lawyers,
 and so on.
- f. When Solomon lived, most people would have had a private well or cistern for their water. Faithful marriage makes sense just like drinking from one's own water well.
- g. This is a picture of what adultery looks like. A person's love for his or her spouse will be ruined if he or she shares it with another person.
- h. Spouses in healthy marriages are like fountains continuously showing their love for each other.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- 1. Why is it important for believers to follow God's plan for sexual purity?
- 2. What did Solomon compare the words of another man's wife to? Why?
- 3. How does the other man's wife or the other woman's husband bring sorrow and pain?
- 4. How is the other man's wife "on the way to death"?
- 5. Why does the other person's spouse give little thought to life?
- 6. How can people protect themselves from an adulterer or adulteress?
- 7. Why do people who have affairs groan at the end of their lives?
- 8. How does remaining faithful to your spouse build trust?

BIBLE SKILL: Match the verse with the sentence.

People who involve themselves in sexual sin risk destroying relationships and shaming themselves. God warned people about sexual sin in the Bible. Draw a line from the verse to words found in the verse:

| Evadue 20:14 | "Out of the mine | como quil thoughts | mounder adultery |
|--------------|------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Exodus 20:14 | Out of the mind | come evil thoughts | , murder, additery, |

sexual sins..."

Matthew 15:19 "God wants you to be holy and stay away from sexual

sins."

Galatians 5:19 "God will judge as guilty those who take part in sexual

sins."

1 Thessalonians 4:3 "You must not be guilty of adultery."

Hebrews 13:4 "The wrong things the sinful self does are clear:

being sexually unfaithful, not being pure, taking part

in sexual sins."

IN MY CONTEXT

- Living for sexual pleasure will lead to bitterness.
- Thinking about the costs of unwise choices can help a person make a wise choice.
- God gave the gift of sexual intimacy to be enjoyed only within the marriage relationship.

Discuss as a group what you can do to help each other stay away from sexual sins. Use some of your Bible class time to pray for each other to remain sexually pure.

With your group, make a list of some of the costs of sexual sin. What can you do today to help each other follow God's plan for sexual purity?

What decision can you, as a married person or as a single person, make that will help you stay within God's sexual boundaries?

MEMORY VERSE

My son, keep your father's commands, and don't forget your mother's teaching. – Proverbs 6:20

DAY ONE

Read Proverbs 5:3-4, looking for how inappropriate talking can lead to sexual sin and to sadness and regret.

Sexual sin starts with communication. People who repeatedly text, email, video-phone, or meet with a person who is not their spouse communicate in a way that can lead to sexual sin. Adulteresses flatter men by telling them how strong and wonderful they are. Adulterers will praise the beauty of women and declare their love for them. Our world will tell men and women that "love is blind," to "do what makes you happy," and to "follow your heart." People who are not careful will listen to these sweet, but wrong words and will fall into sexual sin.

Sexual sin is not harmless. It doesn't only affect the people who do the sin. Solomon taught that sexual sin is like a two-edged sword. People use the sharp edges of a sword to cut in opposite directions. Sexual sin is like a two-edged sword because it also cuts in opposite directions. It cuts out from the sinner by destroying relationships with spouses, children, family, friends, co-workers, and God. Sexual sin also cuts in by destroying the sinner. People who sin sexually will someday look at the lives and relationships they destroyed and weep with sorrow and pain over their selfish actions.

What can you do to protect yourself from sexual sin when talking to people of the opposite sex?

DAY TWO

Read Proverbs 5:5-6, noticing why sexual sinners do not think they are doing anything wrong.

Solomon made an interesting statement when he informed his readers that sexual sinners are on their way to death. Sexual sinners focus on themselves and the pleasure of their sin. They do not pay attention to other people and God. Relationships require people to pay attention to each other. There is no relationship if a person does not pay attention to the other person. Sexual sinners who do not focus on God have no relationship with Him. People with no relationship with God will die. This is why Solomon told his readers that sexual sinners are on their way to death.

Solomon also taught that sexual sinners do not even know what they are doing is wrong. People are confused about sexual sin because they wonder how something that feels good can be bad. Sexual sin is bad because it is the opposite of love. Lustful thoughts, pornography, sexting, sex before marriage, adultery, sexual abuse, and rape all destroy love. Feeling good is not love. Love never takes away from people. It always gives. People who confuse sexual sin with love will not understand what they are doing is wrong.

How does your relationship with God help you avoid sexual sin?

DAY THREE

Read Proverbs 5:7-8, signing two ways you can protect yourself from sexual temptation.

In Proverbs 5:7-8, Solomon described two ways his readers could protect themselves from sexual temptation. First, in verse 7, he asked his readers to listen to and do what he said. This is connected to Proverbs 1:8-9 where Solomon explained that people who listen to and follow the teaching of godly people will have blessed lives. Readers who remember what Solomon said in Proverbs 1:8-9 will understand Solomon meant one way they can protect themselves from sexual temptation is to listen to wise and godly people.

Solomon then told people they should think about what sexual temptations they have and make plans to avoid these temptations. For example: if you feel tempted by another person, stay away from them. Solomon said to not even go near that person's door. Of course, it is wise to ask God and godly people for help in staying away from sexual temptation. It is always better to ask for help than to destroy relationships and lives. Wise people will ask themselves what tempts them sexually, make plans to avoid these temptations, and ask people to help them stay away from sexual sin.

Who are the wise and godly people you can ask for help if you should need it?

In what ways can you help people who are caught in sexual sin?

DAY FOUR

Read Proverbs 5:9-11, paying attention to how evil people can take advantage of a sinner's sexual sin.

Sexual sin always ends up hurting the sinner. Solomon warned that people will lose relationships, money, and health because of their sexual sin. He explained in Proverbs 5:9 that a sexual sinner gives the best years of his life to someone cruel. People are supposed to give the best years of their lives to their spouses and God. Cruel people take away time with God and spouses by pulling people into sin. They have no concern about the pain and suffering people will experience over their lost time and relationships.

Solomon said sexual sinners will also lose their money to people they do not know. These strangers could be anyone. Solomon, however, was not really interested in who these strangers were. His point was strangers will take and enjoy the sexual sinner's money.

Solomon explained in verse 11 how people often experience health problems from their sexual sin. Some health problems may come from diseases people get from their sexual partners. Still other health problems are emotional as people become depressed over their lost relationships and money. All of these health problems will cause pain to the sinner. These people will groan in pain as disease or depression slowly robs the life out of them.

Why do you think people are always hurt by their sexual sin?

KEY DOCTRINE: The Family (Marriage)

Marriage is the joining of one man and one woman in a holy promise that lasts for their entire lives. The husband and wife should show emotional and sexual love only for each other. Their marriage should be a picture of God's love for His people. A husband and a wife are both of equal value to God because they are both created in His image. Husbands should love their wives as Christ loves the church. Wives should respect and help their husbands as the church respects and serves Christ. (See Ephesians 5:25-33.)

DAY FIVE

Read Proverbs 5:15-18, thinking about how married people should value and enjoy their love for each other.

Solomon reminded people to be faithful to their spouses. He used a picture of private wells to show the importance of being faithful to one's spouse. People trusted the water from their own wells because they knew the water was clean. They did not want to go to other wells where the water might make them sick. People should trust their spouses and not go to other men and women for sex. People who are faithful to their spouses will avoid the problems that come with adultery.

Marriage between a man and a woman is part of God's plan for people. It helps them understand the love He has for His people. No other kind of "marriage" can do this. Husbands should love their wives as Christ loves the church. Wives will respond with joyous love and respect to their husbands. This kind of love will give life to marriage as water gives life to humans. Only marriage between a man and woman can give a picture of this kind of life-giving love God has for His church.

How can you encourage married couples you know to be faithful in their marriages?

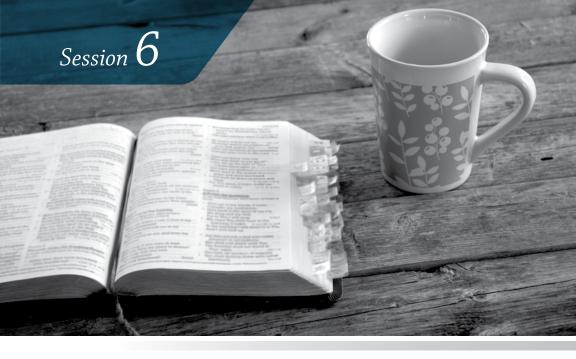
CONNECT AND SHARE

Think about what you have learned from Proverbs 5:1-11,15-18. Meet with one or two other members of your study group to find ways to live what you have learned.

Why do you think living for sexual pleasure will make people bitter?

What are the wise choices you can make that will prevent these problems? How can you pray for each other for sexual purity?

How is the Christian idea of marriage different from the way the world thinks about marriage? Why did God make marriage this way? What can give you the strength to follow God's plan?



Pursuing Wisdom

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

PROVERBS 8:6-21

God calls people all over the world to seek and know His wisdom. When God speaks, His words are wise and people who follow His words are wise as well. God knows His wisdom is more valuable than silver, gold, or precious stones. People who understand the perfection and goodness of God's wisdom can trust God in everything.

People who listen to God's wisdom will be able to recognize sin and avoid it. They will learn to honor (fear) God. They will hate pride, bragging, lies and evil behavior. People with this good sense will use God's wisdom to help them lead and treat others fairly. People who obey and respect God will use His wisdom to give justice to people who are abused.

People who seek God will find His wisdom. God will honor and give eternal riches to people who love His wisdom.

PROVERBS 8:6-21

6 Listen, • because I have important things to say, and what I tell you is right. **7** What I say is true, I refuse to speak evil. 8 Everything I say is honest; nothing I say is crooked or false. 9 People with good sense 3 know what I say is true; and those with knowledge know my words are right. 10 Choose my teachings instead of silver, and knowledge rather than the finest gold. **11** Wisdom is more precious than rubies. Nothing you could want is equal to it. • 12 "I am wisdom, • and I have good judgment. I also have knowledge and good sense. 13 If you respect the LORD, you will **also hate evil.** I hate pride and bragging, evil ways and lies. 14 I have good sense and advice, and I have understanding and power. **15 I help kings to govern** and rulers to make fair laws. **16** Princes use me to lead. and so do all important people who judge fairly. 17 I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me. @ 18 Riches and honor are mine to give. So are wealth and lasting success. 19 What I give is better than the finest gold, better than the purest silver. **20** I do what is right and follow the path of justice. 21 I give wealth 1 to those who love me, filling their houses with treasures.

- a. God calls out to everyone.
 His wisdom is available to anybody who will listen!
- b. Only people who have a relationship with God can recognize His wisdom.
- c. God's wisdom is eternal, and its value cannot be measured. God's wisdom is of greater value than gold, silver, or any other thing.
- d. This whole chapter makes wisdom like a person.
 Many English Bibles translate this verse "I, wisdom..." Although wisdom is personified, Solomon has in mind God's wisdom.
- e. People who follow God's wisdom will see and hate evil like He does.
- f. God is the ultimate leader. Wise government leaders will follow God in order to correctly lead their citizens.
- g. God gives a wonderful promise in telling people they will find His wisdom if they seek Him.
- h. God does not promise temporary riches, honor, or success to people who have His wisdom while they are alive on earth. He does promise eternal riches, honor, and success to those who listen to His wisdom!

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- 1. How can we seek God's wisdom?
- 2. How does God describe His wisdom?
- 3. What kind of people know God's wisdom is true?
- 4. What does God tell people to choose instead of silver and fine gold?
- 5. How can we measure God's wisdom?
- 6. Why do people who respect the Lord also hate evil?
- 7. How does God's wisdom help kings and rulers?
- 8. What happens when leaders and judges ignore God's wisdom?
- 9. How does seeking God's wisdom help a person find God?
- 10. How does God's wisdom lead to wealth? For whom?

${\color{red}\textbf{BIBLE SKILL}: } \textit{Read verses about wisdom.}$

| Reac | the | fol | lowing | verses | and | write | down | some | of t | the ' | things (| Goď | s wisc | lom (| does |
|-------|-----|-----|--------|--------|-----|-------|------|------|------|-------|----------|-----|--------|-------|------|
| for u | S: | | _ | | | | | | | | | | | | |

| 2 Chronicles 1:10 |
|--------------------|
| Ezra 7:25 |
| Psalm 119:125 |
| 1 Corinthians 1:30 |
| Colossians 1:28 |

IN MY CONTEXT

- We can trust that God's wisdom is true.
- We learn God's wisdom by respecting and obeying (fearing) Him.
- We can find God's wisdom and follow His wisdom in our actions.

Discuss as a group how you know God's wisdom is true. How can you show God's wisdom to your Deaf friends and neighbors?

What can you do this week to learn more of God's wisdom? How will your obedience to God change how you live?

Does your life show that you are growing in God's wisdom? How does it show? What are some things your Bible study group can do that would show God's wisdom?

MEMORY VERSE

Wisdom begins with respect for the LORD, and understanding begins with knowing the Holy One. – Proverbs 9:10

DAY ONE

Read Proverbs 8:6-9, asking yourself how you can trust God's wisdom.

Solomon wrote about God's wisdom as though wisdom were a woman (v. 1: "her voice," v. 2: "she stands," v. 3: "she calls"). This does not mean he believed God's wisdom is really a person or a woman. Solomon wanted to represent God's wisdom as a woman to help people understand what His wisdom looks like. This is called personification. Personification is when people represent an idea or thing as a person to help their listeners understand what they are trying to teach. This is why Solomon described God's wisdom as a woman.

Solomon told his readers that God calls out to everyone with His wisdom. God wants everybody to understand His wisdom is important, truthful, and honest. There is nothing evil, crooked, or fake about His wisdom. God calls out to people because He wants people to know they can trust His wisdom. Trust is important to God because He knows good relationships must have trust. People who understand and know God's wisdom is true and right will trust God. Those who trust God will have a relationship with Him. God wants everyone to have a relationship with Him, and this is why He calls out to people with His wisdom.

Why do you think God calls out to everyone through His wisdom?

DAY TWO

Read Proverbs 8:10-11, comparing God's wisdom to earthly riches.

God's wisdom is not a collection of wise sayings that starts with one idea and ends with another idea. That would mean He is limited if that were true. God's wisdom is actually a part of who He is. His wisdom comes from His inner being. As such, God's wisdom has no limit and no end because He has no limit and no end. That is the meaning of the English word "infinite."

In these verses, Solomon wrote that wisdom (God's wisdom) is more valuable than silver, gold, or rubies. Can this really be true? Think about how much you value silver, gold, and rubies. How can wisdom be

of greater value? Riches may buy you things, but riches will not lead your life or solve your problems. Riches won't take you to God. Riches are finite. But God's wisdom is unlimited. It is not possible to measure or set a value on His wisdom. Truthful, honest, and eternal lives that come from God's wisdom are more valuable than all the money in the world. People who choose to obey God's wisdom will live lives that have infinite value.

Why does God's wisdom have more value than silver, gold or gemstones?

DAY THREE

Read Proverbs 8:12-13, seeing how people who know God's wisdom hate evil like God does.

God gives people good judgment, knowledge, and good sense through His wisdom. We can think of judgment as the skill to study situations and understand them correctly. Knowledge is information a person gets through experience or study. Good sense is the ability of a person to make responsible decisions. People who receive judgment, knowledge, and good sense from God's wisdom will be able to make wise decisions about people and things. They will know what is good and have the power to stay away from evil. People who have judgment, knowledge, and good sense through God's wisdom are people with holy power.

When we have God's wisdom, we will be able to see people as God sees them. We will see what is evil and hate it. This is a blessing for believers because their hatred of evil will help them resist sin. God's followers will reject pride, bragging, evil ways, and lies that come from those who do not fear God. Believers show their respect for God when they refuse to do or accept evil behavior. The ability to see and hate evil is one of the blessings God gives to His people through His wisdom.

How does judgment, knowledge, and good sense help you serve God?

DAY FOUR

Read Proverbs 8:14-16, looking for how God's wisdom helps leaders.

Solomon said wisdom is what helps leaders and rulers. Solomon wrote about kings and princes, but all leaders need God's wisdom. Or course, it is still clear from verse 13 and other verses that true wisdom begins with a respect ("fear" in many English Bibles) for God.

The words "advice" and "power" make clear what God's wisdom does for His people. Through His wisdom, God advises His people concerning their problems. But also God's wisdom gives His people the power to fix these problems. "Advice" is a good word because this means God pays attention to and cares about our problems. "Power" is another helpful word because God can change things for the better. God is with us and will support us when we listen to His wisdom.

People without God's wisdom cannot be the best leaders. These people do not have the guidance God can give them through His wisdom. It is different for people who follow God and trust in His wisdom. People who trust God's wisdom will be able to organize and lead people in ways that brings His justice and fairness to everyone.

How does God's wisdom help leaders? How does it help you?

KEY DOCTRINE: Education (Wisdom)

All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge can be found in Jesus. All true knowledge is part of our Christian heritage. This is why having a relationship with Jesus opens the minds of believers and gives them a desire to learn more. Therefore, Christian education is important for Christ's people. Christian schools, colleges, and seminaries, though, must rightly balance both academic freedom and academic responsibility. Jesus and Scripture rule over all Christian education.

DAY FIVE

Read Proverbs 8:17-21, drawing a line under two great promises.

God gives two great promises in Proverbs 8:17. First, He tells people they will find Him if they seek His wisdom. Second, He tells people He will love them if they love Him. God is not hard to find. He is shouting to everyone through His wisdom (Proverbs 8:1-4). People who want to find God must stop and listen! Those who find Him will understand He loves them completely. God's love will awaken a love in these people for His wisdom. God uses His wisdom to invite everyone to find Him and experience His never-ending love.

Solomon asked God for wisdom and knowledge. God answered Solomon by telling him he would receive wisdom plus many other blessings in this life. God will give to people who trust His wisdom the same things He gave Solomon. God does promise that everyone who trusts in Him will receive eternal life when they go and live with Him in His presence.

How do the two promises of verse 17 give you hope for today?

CONNECT AND SHARE

Think about what you have learned from Proverbs 8:6-21. Meet with one or two other members of your study group to find ways to live what you have learned.

What are some ways your small group can show people that you trust God's wisdom?

How does respecting God help you lead people? Pray for church leaders and government leaders; pray that they will have this kind of respect for God and His wisdom.

What is God telling you through His wisdom about what you can do to change your life and the lives of people you know? How can you obey Him this week?



LIVING WISELY

Following God's wisdom leads to joy. Rejecting His wisdom leads to grief.

PROVERBS 14:8-15

Solomon wrote Proverbs 14:8-15 to help people remember his teachings. He puts down similar ideas in an "A, B, C, D, D, C, B, A" pattern. For example, Solomon's thought in Proverbs 14:8 is similar to the idea in 14:15 (A > A); 14:9 is similar to 14:14 (B > B); 14:10 is similar to 14:13 (C > C); and 14:11 is similar 14:12 (D > D). This pattern is called a chiasmus pattern. Solomon did this to make it easy for people to memorize and repeat what he had to say to others.

Solomon compared two kinds of persons in Proverbs 14:8-15. They are the wise and foolish persons. Following God's wisdom will bring people joy. However, rejecting God will bring sorrow. He taught his readers that God will give understanding, satisfaction, joy, and blessings to wise people through His wisdom. Foolish people will be easy to deceive. They will be frustrated, sorrowful, and die apart from God and His wisdom. Solomon wanted people to live wisely and joyously by following God.

PROVERBS 14:8-15

8 A wise person will understand what to do, but a foolish person is dishonest. 9 Fools don't care if they sin, but honest people work at being right. 10 No one else can know your sadness, and strangers cannot share your joy. 11 The wicked person's house will be destroyed, but a good person's tent will still be standing. 12 Some people think they are doing right, but in the end it leads to death. 13 Someone who is laughing may be sad inside, and joy may end in sadness. 14 Evil people will be paid back for their evil ways, and good people will be rewarded for their good ones. 15 Fools will believe anything, 10 but the wise think about what they do.

- a. Wise people will understand the wisdom of waiting for God's guidance. Foolish people do not wait for God's wisdom thus fooling themselves.
- b. Wise people are careful about following God's commands. Foolish people have no relationship with God and do not care if they sin against Him.
- c. No one can know what

 a person is really
 thinking or feeling inside
 except God.
- d. Notice the rhyming of Hebrew poetry. The two phrases use different words (house and tent); phrase one states the negative while phrase two states the positive.
- e. People who ignore God and His wisdom will die apart from God because they have no relationship with Him.
- f. This is a frightening picture of what will happen to sinners. One day their laughter and joy will end in sorrow when God punishes them.
- g. God will judge as good only the people who accept Jesus' gift of forgiveness and follow Him as Lord. God will punish anybody who rejects Jesus.
- h. Fools do not have the wisdom of God.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- 1. What happens to people who follow God's wisdom? What happens to people who do not?
- 2. Why does a foolish person not care about sin?
- 3. How does the wise person work at being right?
- 4. How can laughter be a cover up for sadness?
- 5. What is the meaning of Solomon using "house" and "tent" in verse 11?
- 6. Why should believers not be jealous of a wicked person's house?
- 7. Why is it dangerous for people to think that they are doing right?
- 8. Why do fools believe in anything?

BIBLE SKILL: Fill in the blanks.

| People who do the right thing for God will receive His blessing and bless other people at the same time. People who do things for themselves end up rejecting God's wisdom and hurting others. These people will die for their sins. |
|--|
| "In those days Israel did not have a king. All the people did whatever seemed in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25). |
| "This is what King Hezekiah did in Judah. He did what was good andand obedient before the Lord his God" (2 Chronicles 31:20). |
| "And God gave Jesus to show today that he does what is God did this so he could judge and so he could make any person who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). |
| "Although the Israelites tried to be with God, they did not succeed, but |

the ones God chose did become _____ with him" (Romans 11:7).

IN MY CONTEXT

- The wise person wants to understand knowledge.
- · Following God's wisdom leads to happiness and satisfaction.
- God's wisdom produces joy even when there is grief.
- God's wisdom leads to His blessings.

Discuss as a group how knowing God's wisdom can bless the lives of believers. How can the way you live this week show you want God's wisdom?

What needs to change in your life so that you will live with satisfaction instead of with sorrow and disappointment? What are your steps for change?

Who do you know that has shown Christian joy even in times of sadness? Pray with your Bible study group that God will put His deep joy in your life.

Who do you know that needs godly wisdom? What can you share with them from today's study that will help them?

MEMORY VERSE

The LORD hates those who tell lies but is pleased with those who keep their promises. – Proverbs 12:22

DAY ONE

Read Proverbs 14:8 and 15, finding the difference between the foolish and wise person.

Solomon taught his readers that foolish people will believe anything. Foolish people believe they can find wisdom without God. This is a lie that fools tell other people and themselves. They do not want a relationship with God or want to learn from Him. They want to believe and trust in their own thinking and the ways of the world. This is why fools will believe in anything people say. They trick themselves into thinking they can have wisdom without God.

Wise people are different from fools. They want to think about and understand God's wisdom. They know people cannot do good apart from God because their thinking and hearts are dark with sin. Wise people trust the wisdom that comes from God because He is holy and perfect. Wise men and women stop, pray, and wait until God tells them what to do. They check to make sure their understanding is correct by looking at the Bible and talking with godly believers. Wise people will have God's power to support them if they follow His wisdom. People show that they are wise when they want to think about and understand what God tells them.

What is the difference between being foolish and being wise? How can you become wise?

DAY TWO

Read Proverbs 14:9 and 14, noticing how you can find satisfaction in God's wisdom.

Solomon explained to his readers that God will punish people who do not care about their sins or their wicked behavior. Verse 14 states they will be paid back. Nevertheless, fools do not believe they need God or His wisdom. They think whatever they do is right. The problem is no one can do good without God. What fools think is right will only hurt other people and show God they hate Him and His wisdom. Fools may enjoy their sinful lives for a time, but they will experience sorrow when God punishes them for their evil ways.

Solomon told his readers God will reward good and honest people when they work to do what He says is right. Right work is the physical or mental effort directed at obeying God and His commandments.

People must listen to God and begin to practice what He says to do. Believers show they are wise when they do the right work God asks them to do. People will find happiness and satisfaction in doing the right work of God. Solomon concludes verse 14 by saying good actions will be rewarded by God.

Why do you think fools are not satisfied with their lives? What do you need so that you can be satisfied in your life?

DAY THREE

Read Proverbs 14:10 and 13, looking for what will bring joy even during sad times.

Solomon said people cannot really know or share what is going on in a person's heart. This is because of sin. Sin separates people from one another. This separation creates a feeling of loneliness in everyone's hearts. People want others to understand them. This is why people want and need relationships. They try to use relationships to get rid of the lonely feeling they have. Sadly, sin is the reason relationships with people will never satisfy a person's deepest need to be understood. People still feel alone, no matter how many friends they may have.

Solomon used this understanding of sin in relationships to explain the difference between happy and joyous people. People who look happy on the outside may feel sad on the inside. Their happiness is based on the situation around them. People who have a relationship with God have a different experience. They have a joy that does not depend on the situation around them. God truly understands them, and this gives them joy. God's people can have joy even when they experience sadness. A relationship with God is what makes joyous people different from those who are merely happy.

Why does having a relationship with God give people joy?

DAY FOUR

Read Proverbs 14:11, thinking about where you find your security.

Solomon taught that things like houses do not give wicked people security. People who have no relationship with God are afraid of what will happen after death. They choose to trust in things like houses or money instead of God. They may think having bigger things or more things will protect them and keep them comfortable. The problem is, nothing lasts forever. Only God is eternal. Knowing that God is eternal gives people real security. Everything we have will be gone in the end. Only God can give us eternal security. For this reason, it is foolish for people to trust in things. It is foolish for them not to trust God.

Wise people know it does not matter what they have as long as they live in relationship with God. Believers may not have things that are as nice as the things some wicked people have. They should not be jealous because they have the only thing that is really important—a relationship with the living God. Believers will have eternal life while wicked people experience judgment. People show themselves to be wise when they trust in God, not things, for security.

Why is it foolish for people to trust things to keep them safe?

KEY DOCTRINE: Stewardship

God gives His people spiritual and physical blessings. He blesses His followers so they can do His work in the world. Believers should use their time, skills, and possessions for the glory of God and to help other people. Christians also should regularly and cheerfully serve God by telling people about Jesus and how to have a relationship with Him. Stewardship also includes giving our money to support the work of Christ.

DAY FIVE

Read Proverbs 14:12, finding the greatest blessing in life.

God will punish people who tell themselves and others their evil actions are right. Sadly, sin makes it hard for people to think about things clearly. We see this in our world today. People think their sinful actions are fine and that God approves. But the Bible is clear that people are sinners. God alone does right all the time. He can show people how to do the right thing through His wisdom. People who believe they can do right without God show they do not trust Him. Many people in the world today think they can live their way and not God's way. This wrong way of thinking leads only to tragedy and death.

Mohammad was a Deaf man who was born in Africa. His family were Muslim. Mohammad learned about Jesus from some missionaries who lived in his country. Mohammad was interested in knowing more about Christ, but his family tried to push him away from Jesus. His life and his family's life in the Islamic religion seemed right. The message of Jesus broke through to Mohammad and he trusted Christ. Turning to Christ brought him the greatest blessing in life.

How does faith in Jesus secure us life's greatest blessing?

CONNECT AND SHARE

Think about what you have learned from Proverbs 14:8-15. Meet with one or two other members of your study group to find ways to live what you have learned.

How can you help each other find true knowledge? What parts of your life need God's true knowledge now to keep your life on track with God?

Discuss the difference between happiness and joy. How can you encourage each other to have deeper joy?

How can you show people that it is better to trust God's wisdom than it is to do what they think is right?



PLEASING GOD

God's people should do their best to please Him with their attitudes and actions.

PROVERBS 15:33-16:11

Prideful people are enemies of God. People who are proud tell God they do not need Him. They believe they have the wisdom to control their own lives. Proud people say, "You cannot judge me. I am doing what I think is right." These people make enemies instead of friends because they only have one rule. That rule is to live for themselves. Prideful people oppose God and make themselves the god of their own lives.

People who are humble show themselves to be friends of God. Humble people realize they cannot live or do anything apart from God. They understand that worldly knowledge apart from God is worthless. Humble people will ask God for guidance. They know God is the perfect Judge. Men and women who are humble will ask God to forgive their sins and help them make right relationships with Him and other people. Humble people show their love for God by trusting Him as the one true God.

PROVERBS 15:33-16:11

15:33 Respect for the LORD will teach you wisdom. If you want to be honored, you must be **humble. 16:1** People may make plans in their minds, but only the LORD can make them come true. 2 You may believe you are doing right, but the LORD will judge 19 your reasons. 3 Depend on the LORD in whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. 4 The LORD makes everything go as he pleases. 6 He has even prepared a day of disaster for evil people. 5 The LORD hates those who are proud. They will surely be punished. **6 Love and truth** • bring forgiveness of sin. By respecting the LORD you will avoid evil. 7 When people live so that they please the LORD, even their enemies will make peace with them. 3 8 It is better to be poor and right than to be wealthy and dishonest. 9 People may make plans in their minds, but the LORD decides • what they will do. 10 The words of a king are like a message from God, so his decisions should be fair. @ 11 The LORD wants honest balances and scales; • all the weights are his work.

- a. Humble people see themselves as not important compared to other people and God.
- b. God will judge people to see if they made their decisions based on His will.
- c. God will direct every human activity toward the day of judgment.
 We cannot stop or avoid God's judgment.
- d. Jesus is love and truth. He is the only One who can forgive people. No one else can save us.
- e. Solomon did not mean that every enemy will make peace. However, living for the Lord sets the conditions for peace (such as love and truth) and many enemies will in fact make peace.
- f. This verse is similar to 16:1. Both verses say that God is in control. Only people who follow His plans will see real success in their work.
- g. The wise leader will understand their power comes from God. They will make decisions that honor God and are fair.
- h. Balances and scales are symbols of God's justice. God promises to judge everyone fairly and expects His followers to treat people in the same way.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- 1. In what ways should God's people try to please Him?
- 2. What should believers do if they want wisdom and honor?
- 3. Why does the Lord judge a person's reasons?
- 4. How do we explain our plans not working when we ask God to help us?
- 5. How do love and truth bring forgiveness?
- 6. What would people need to do if they want their enemies to make peace with them?
- 7. What makes a decision fair?
- 8. What kind of balances and scales does the Lord want? What does this mean for us?

BIBLE SKILL: Match the verse with the sentence.

Believers should please God in their attitudes and actions. God will reward His followers by giving them stable lives, rescuing them from sin, and giving them peaceful relationships with people. Draw a line from the verse to the words found in the verse:

| Galatians 5:13 | "God is working in you to help you want to do and be able to do what pleases him." |
|--------------------|---|
| 1 John 3:22 | "A man who pleases God will be saved from them, but a sinner will be caught by them." |
| 1 Samuel 15:22 | "And God gives us what we ask for because we obey God's commands and do what pleases him." |
| Philippians 2:13 | "God called you to be free, but do not use your freedom as an excuse to do what pleases your sinful self." |
| Ecclesiastes 7:26b | "What pleases the LORD more: burnt offerings and sacrifice or obedience to his voice? It is better to obey than sacrifice." |

IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers show wisdom by working to please God in all they do.
- All people are accountable to God who is in control (sovereign) over all things.
- God is pleased with believers who have a right relationship with Him and show that relationship to other people through their right attitudes and actions.
- God blesses people who please Him by giving them calm lives, saving them from sin, and making peaceful relationships with other people.

What are some things your Bible study group can do this week that would please God?

How do you see God holding you accountable to Him? Thinking about this accountability, what wrong actions will you stop? What new right actions will you begin?

What are some ways you can show right attitudes and actions?

Why do you need to please God? What steps can you take that will please Him? What steps could your church take that would please Him?

MEMORY VERSE

The LORD's eyes see everything; he watches both evil and good people. – Proverbs 15:3

DAY ONE

Read Proverbs 15:33 and 16:8, finding ways believers show wisdom in seeking to please God.

Solomon explained it is the attitude of a person that decides whether he or she will learn wisdom from God. Prideful people believe their ways are right and that they do not need to learn new ideas or attitudes. It is difficult to teach men and women new ideas when they have this attitude. Pride also sets people against God when they tell Him they do not need His guidance on how to live their lives. People with a prideful attitude do not follow God even when they know their thoughts and behavior are wrong. God will not honor people with His wisdom when they will not listen to Him.

In verse 8, we find an example of godly wisdom that humble people are likely to have. Who would think that being poor is better than being wealthy? Solomon would teach us that being poor but right is when poverty is preferred to wealth. The world would almost always choose wealth. But godly wisdom has different values. The value for believers is pleasing God not having wealth.

How can you know if you have a prideful attitude?

DAY TWO

Read Proverbs 16:1, thinking about how everyone is accountable to God.

Solomon told his readers that any plan people make can only succeed when God allows. Proud people may think they are in control when they plot to take advantage of innocent people. However, God is still in control even when evil people do bad things. This does not mean God is okay with evil people. God will take every good and bad action by every person that ever lived and direct all of that toward one day in history. That day will be the day of judgment. God will punish evil people on that day because they refused to obey Him.

No one escapes from God. The word "accountable" is a great word for that idea. It may seem that evil people get away with their bad actions, but they do not. Many experience hard lives as a result of their bad actions. Everyone, in the end, will stand before the judgment of God. No matter what happens in this world, God is in control. Everything, in the end, will happen according to His final plan.

How can you prepare for the day of judgment?

DAY THREE

Read Proverbs 16:4-5,9, looking for what it means to answer to God.

People answer to God because He is good, in control, and has His own plan. He is good because He is holy. God knows proud people are His enemies because they will do everything they can to resist Him and His plan. They will not succeed because God is in control and directs all of human history. God will punish every person who rejects His great plan of defeating sin and changing people into His holy servants on that day. Only people who humble themselves by having a relationship with God through Jesus will be invited to live in God's presence forever.

The decision to accept or reject God is important because His judgment is eternal and final. God wants everyone to be saved and know the truth about Him. However, He will not force people to obey and follow Him. He wants people to choose to love Him. People who choose to love God will want to obey His commandments and tell others how to have a relationship with Him through Jesus. Having a relationship with Jesus is the only way people can avoid eternal death on the day of judgment.

What does it mean to answer to God for our actions? How does this truth change how you view others?

DAY FOUR

Read Proverbs 16:2,10-11, drawing a line under actions that please God.

The attitude of people toward God is the key to pleasing Him. People with an attitude of love for God will want to please Him by obeying His commandments. However, people who have no relationship with Him are not interested in obeying His commandments. Their attitude is why they can do nothing to please God. He will only be pleased when wicked people change their attitude and start a relationship with Him.

Solomon gave his readers two examples of actions that please God. One example is the fair decisions of a king. God gives authority to leaders, and He wants them to lead in a way that is fair to people. The second example Solomon used is honest balances and scales. Store owners use balances or scales to find the price one must pay to buy something (like buying a pound of apples or a gallon of gas). Wicked sellers would change the weights of their scales to make customers pay more for less product. People who are careful to sell use correct scales, showing they treat people fairly. Believers who show God's love by treating others with respect and fairness will please God.

What are some other examples of actions that please God?

KEY DOCTRINE: Last Things

God will bring the world to its appropriate end in His own time and in His own way. Jesus Christ promised He would return personally to the earth. All will see Him in His glory. God will raise the dead and Jesus will judge all people. Wicked men and women will be put in hell and be punished forever there. God will reward believers by giving them new glorified bodies and have them live with Him in heaven forever.

DAY FIVE

Read Proverbs 16:3,6-7, making circles around ways God blesses those who please Him.

People should remember they are really following God's plans when they depend on Him. No one depended on God more than Jesus did. Jesus followed God's plan all the way to the cross. Jesus' life shows that people can experience both blessing and suffering when they depend on God. However, believers know God's plans will succeed because He never fails. People who depend on God will see their plans succeed because they follow His plans.

People who obey God will receive many blessings in their earthly and eternal lives. People who please God will experience blessings of calm lives, forgiveness of sins, and peaceful relationships.

Some Christians suffer because of their faith in God. How does this fit with God's plan?

CONNECT AND SHARE

Think about what you have learned from Proverbs 15:33–16:11. Meet with one or two other members of your study group to find ways to live what you have learned.

How are you pleasing God in all you do? How does the way you please God show God's wisdom to other people?

Why is it important to tell people they will answer to God? How can you help someone understand this truth?

What are the ways God is blessing your life? How does His blessing on your life overflow to bless other people's lives?



STAYING SOBER

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

PROVERBS 23:17-21,29-35

People often use food and alcohol as a way to escape their problems. Those who eat and drink to escape their problems or to feel more alive will start to look at food and alcohol as idols. One who worships food and drink instead of God will be eternally separated from Him when they die. They are without hope from God.

God gives us one body, and He expects us to take care of that body. This is being a good steward. Those who abuse their bodies are not being good stewards of the body God has given them. Their eating and drinking can cause trouble, pain, fighting, complaining, strange bruises, and disease. This is what addiction looks like for many people. People who live like this often don't remember the problems abuse causes. They remember how good they felt while feasting. They will eventually pay for their selfish actions by losing the people they love and ruining their bodies.

PROVERBS 23:17-21, 29-35

17 Don't envy sinners, but always respect the LORD. 18 Then you will have hope for the future, and your wishes will come true. @ **19** Listen, my child, and be wise. Keep your mind on what is right. 20 Don't drink too much wine or eat too much food. 3 21 Those who drink and eat too much become poor. They sleep too much and end up wearing rags. • 29 Who has trouble? Who has pain? Who fights? Who complains? Who has unnecessary bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? • 30 It is people who drink too much wine, who try out all different kinds of strong drinks. **31** Don't **stare** at the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly. 32 Later it bites like a snake with **poison 1** in its fangs. 33 Your eyes will see strange sights, and your mind will be confused. 34 You will feel dizzy as if you're in a storm on the ocean, as if you're on top of a ship's sails. @ 35 You will think, "They hit me, but I'm not hurt. They beat me up, but I **don't remember it.** ① I wish I could wake up. Then I would get another drink."

- a. Other Bible translations use "hope." For example: CSB states: "your hope will not be dashed."
- b. Other Bible translations (NIV, ESV, ERV, NLT) warn people not to join with those who drink too much wine or eat too much meat.
- c. Any kind of addiction can lead to depression and poverty.
- d. Addictive behavior can also cause trouble, pain, fighting, complaining, bruises, and exhaustion.
- e. This is a picture of addiction. People become so focused on what gives them pleasure that they ignore everything else going on in their lives.
- f. Addiction is like a poison that destroys the addict's life and body.
- g. This was where sailors would go to get a view of the ocean. It also is where sailors felt the motion of the ocean as the mast would swing side-to-side with each wave.
- h. Addiction can damage the addict's brain and body causing loss of memory.
- i. Addicts want to go back to their addictions to get rid of that pain. This is why it is so hard for addicts to break their habits.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- 1. How does God expect His people to treat their bodies?
- 2. What is the connection between envy for sinners and respect for the Lord?
- 3. Why is it good for people to respect the Lord?
- 4. Why is it important for us to be careful in choosing our friends?
- 5. Why should people not drink too much wine or eat too much food?
- 6. What happens to people who try out all kinds of alcoholic drinks?
- 7. How is wine like poison for drinkers?
- 8. Why do people feel like they are beat up after a night of drinking?
- 9. Why do people want to wake up and get themselves another drink?

BIBLE SKILL: Find the verses.

Read the following verses and write down some of the things people can do to overcome their addictions:

| Jeremiah 29:12-13 | |
|-------------------|--|
| Ephesians 5:18 | |
| James 4:7 | |
| James 5:16 | |
| 1 John 1:9 | |

IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers find security and hope in God when they trust and obey only Him.
- Believers should make friends with people who live godly lives.
- People fascinated with alcohol will abuse it and experience heartache in the end.
- · Addiction leads to continuous danger.

Discuss as a group how having respect for the Lord will give you hope for your future life.

Since believers should make friends with those who live godly lives, what kind of changes do you need to make in your friends? What kind of friend do you need to be to others?

Pray together with your Bible study group for people who are addicted to alcohol, drugs, food, and other substances. What can your group do to help people with addictions?

If you are stuck in an addiction, who can you go to for help? What steps do you need to take to get help? What can you personally do to help an addicted friend?

MEMORY VERSE

Listen, my child, and be wise. Keep your mind on what is right.

- Proverbs 23:19

DAY ONE

Read Proverbs 23:17-18, identifying where we can find hope and a future.

The verses in the text today help us think about how to use our bodies in a way that honors God. Most of the text helps us do that by looking at some addictions people have, especially with food and alcohol. Many people have addictions. You probably know some of them. Maybe you have seen how addiction to alcohol, drugs, and other things control people's lives. Yet, many people become addicts when their friends influence them toward alcohol and drugs. It is important that we pay attention to Solomon's warning to not envy sinners. Why would anyone envy sinners? It is strange, but people do. They follow sinners into lives of trouble and addiction.

Addictions ruin lives, but there is hope. There is hope for all sinners, and there is hope for addicts. But the only way to have real hope and a secure future is to trust in God. Sin (even the sin of addiction) separates people from God and from other people. Sin kills hope. But verse 18 gives us a promise—the hope for our future is our right relationship with God.

How does a relationship with God satisfy a person?

DAY TWO

Read Proverbs 23:19-21, looking for the kind of friends one should choose.

Solomon warned us not to socialize with heavy drinkers and overeaters. People can influence others to copy their behavior. People who group themselves with sinners will slowly accept the sinners' behavior as normal and copy what they do. This is why believers who think and want to do right for God should want to group themselves with wise and godly people. Believers will learn how to talk and act in ways that honor God from their godly friends. People who honor God will choose their friends wisely.

We should not turn to things like alcohol or food when life gets hard. Some people develop addictions to things like food and alcohol because of pain they experienced in their lives. However, pleasures like food and

alcohol do not last long. Bobby had a big marijuana addiction. He smoked every day. He was starting to use heavier drugs when he noticed his life was falling apart. Thankfully, some Christian friends told Bobby about Christ. Bobby signed a prayer, asking Jesus to forgive his sin and take control of his life. By trusting Christ, Bobby had a future and a hope.

Why do things get worse for people who choose to trust in things and not in God?

DAY THREE

Read Proverbs 23:29-30, thinking about the problems that come with addiction.

The author listed some of the problems people with addictions may experience. He said they experience trouble, pain, fights, complaints, unnecessary bruises, and bloodshot eyes. This is what addiction looks like for people who drink. They start fights with family, friends, and co-workers when they are drunk. These men and women become bitter about the mess they have in their lives and complain about it. These alcoholics show their mental and physical exhaustion to other people with their bloodshot eyes. People who are addicted to alcohol have very hard lives.

When Solomon lived people would add spices to their wine to make it taste better. These spiced wines were called strong drinks because they were easy to drink. People would get more drunk because they drank more of these wines. This shows how far the mind of addicts can go from God. They are so fascinated with the drug of their choice they will experiment with different ways to get the feeling they want. Notice how the high of today is the abuse of tomorrow.

Why do addicts look for ways to get stronger highs? How does a life of addiction lead to the problems listed in verse 29?

DAY FOUR

Read Proverbs 23:31-32, learning how addiction ends.

People worship ideas or things when they become fascinated with them. This is what the writer said about those who are fascinated by wine. They begin to believe the drink will bring them happiness and satisfaction. People who do this are no different from those who build statues of gods out of wood, stone, silver, or gold. Both groups of people are taking worship that belongs to God and directing it toward things like wine, food, drugs, and so on. The writer knew people who were fascinated by the sparkling red wine really were worshiping the wine.

The author described addiction as a poisonous snake that will sooner or later bite the alcoholic (or addict). Addiction happens when people become emotionally or physically dependent on ideas or objects. This kind of relationship will bring death because ideas and things do not have eternal life. Only God has eternal life. People who have a relationship with God can receive eternal life from Him. Addicts who look for life in ideas or things will only find a dangerous snake with poison in its fangs.

Why did Solomon compare addiction to the bite of a snake? How is addiction like idolatry? How can you avoid worshiping things and ideas?

BIBLE DOCTRINE: The Christian and the Social Order (Christians and Addiction)

Christians are responsible for making Jesus' will happen in their own lives and in society. Believers must help people struggling with addiction (food, alcoholism, drugs, pornography, and so on). They can do this by telling addicts about what Jesus did and can do for them. They also should help addicts who ask them for help with their addictions. Believers must depend on God while they do their work because only He can change the minds and hearts of people.

DAY FIVE

Read Proverbs 23:33-35, drawing a line under the one best hope for addicts.

Addiction is dangerous. Addicts will see strange things, be confused, and lose control of their bodies. They will stumble and fall like sailors on a boat in a storm. They also will become dizzy because they have no sense of balance. Sometimes addicts get into fights, wake up with pain, and do not remember what happened. Other times addicts will be in pain mentally and physically even though no one has touched them.

Addicts behave foolishly when they go back to their addiction even though it causes them pain and misery. They go back to their addiction because they get relief from their troubles for a short time. These people will keep on going until their whole lives are focused on their addiction. The pain they cause to other people and themselves will not matter to them. The addict's behavior is foolish because God is ready to give them real life if they will turn to Christ.

How can faith in Jesus help a person overcome an addiction?

CONNECT AND SHARE

Think about what you have learned from Proverbs 23:17-21, 29-35. Meet with one or two other members of your study group to find ways to live what you have learned.

What can you do to teach others that God is the only One who can give real hope and security?

How can we be friends with people who are lost so as to win them to Christ but not to socialize with them in the wrong ways about which Solomon warned?

List the dangers of addiction. What can you do to help each other live for Christ?



ACCEPTING DISCIPLINE

God uses discipline from society, family, and others to make His people more like Him.

PROVERBS 29:1-3,12-20

"Discipline" is not an easy English word. When signed, it looks a lot like the signs that can mean "train" or "practice." We discipline our children to train them to be good. An athlete disciplines his body to win his sport. But discipline can also mean something like punishment. We might discipline (punish) our disobedient dog. A boss might discipline a worker who always arrives late. Discipline is important for us and helps to make our lives right both with God and with the people around us.

God disciplines His people in many ways like parents discipline children and society disciplines citizens. However, God's discipline is different from human discipline. God's discipline produces real change in people. God trains His people throughout their lives so they will be forever changed morally, mentally, and physically. God also disciplines believers through parents, friends, teachers, bosses, leaders, rulers, prophets, and others. Believers who accept God's discipline during their lives find true joy in this life and God's presence for eternity.

PROVERBS 29:1-3, 12-20

- **1** Whoever is stubborn after being corrected many times will suddenly be hurt beyond cure. **2** When good people do well, everyone is happy, but when evil people rule, everyone groans. **3** Those who love wisdom **make their parents happy,** but friends of prostitutes waste their money.
- **12** If a ruler pays attention to lies, all his officers will become wicked. 3 13 The poor person and the cruel person are alike in that the LORD gave eyes to both of them. • **14** If a king judges poor people fairly, • his government will continue forever. 15 Correction and punishment make children wise, but those left alone will disgrace their mother. 16 When there are many wicked people, there is much sin, but those who do right will see them destroyed. 17 Correct your children, and you will be proud; they will give you satisfaction. **18** Where there is no word from God, people are uncontrolled, but those who obey what they have been taught are happy. • 19 Words alone • cannot correct a servant, because even if they understand, they won't respond. 20 Do you see people who **speak too quickly?** • There is more hope for a foolish person than for them.

- a. When parents see their children making wise decisions, they are happy.
- b. Followers will copy the behavior of their leaders!
 Evil leaders create evil followers. Good leaders produce good followers.
- c. God created everyone (including the poor and cruel) in His image.
- d. Wise leaders do not judge people because they are rich or poor but on the rightness of the law.
 Ruling this way will make a long-lasting stable government.
- e. Children must have
 discipline to learn what is
 right and what is wrong.
 A rightly disciplined child
 will become an adult who
 pleases his or her parents.
- f. Believers must encourage and teach people to follow God if they want real peace in their communities.
- g. Discipline is not just telling people what to do. It also requires showing people how to do things.
- h. Wise people listen and think before they speak.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- 1. What is God's purpose for discipline?
- 2. How does stubbornness lead to hurt beyond repair?
- 3. How do people respond differently to good and evil rulers?
- 4. Why must rulers be guarded in who they trust?
- 5. Why is it important to remember God creates all people?
- 6. How is correcting and disciplining a child an act of love?
- 7. What can happen to communities if parents refuse to discipline their children?
- 8. What keeps people from hearing a word from God?
- 9. How can a person teach servants to respond to discipline?
- 10. Why does a foolish person have more hope than a person who speaks quickly?

Fill in the blanks to learn more about God's discipline. "Knowledge begins with respect for the LORD, but fools hate wisdom and _______" (Proverbs 1:7). "But when the Lord judges us, he ______ us so that we will not be destroyed along with the world" (1 Corinthians 11:32). "The Lord ______ those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as his child" (Hebrews 12:6). "If you are never _____ (and every child must be ______), you are not true children" (Hebrews 12:8). "We do not enjoy being ______. It is painful at the time, but later, after we have learned from it, we have peace, because we start living in the right way"

(Hebrews 12:11).

IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers should grow in righteousness by learning from any discipline received in the past.
- God's wisdom is available to all people.
- Parents must discipline their children, teaching them God's wisdom.
- God's Word gives us what we truly need to decide on wise actions.

Discuss as a group how discipline helps people do right in God's eyes. How can you encourage each other to accept and learn from God's discipline?

Make a list of government leaders in your area. Take time to pray for them. What could you do to encourage government leaders to follow the truth of God's Word?

What challenges do godly parents face as they raise their children? What could your group do to help parents face these challenges?

What is it in your life that needs to be changed this week by the power of God's Word?

MEMORY VERSE

Wise children take their parents' advice, but whoever makes fun of wisdom won't listen to correction. – Proverbs 13:1

DAY ONE

Read Proverbs 29:1-3, looking for why it is important to learn from our experiences of discipline.

Solomon warned his readers that rebellious people who refuse to accept discipline can experience suffering for themselves and the people around them. Rebellious people cause problems for their families by wasting their parents' money. They can become so self-focused that they will not realize how quickly their lives will go by. These people will be surprised to see God on the day of judgment and will experience sudden destruction. People without discipline will cause trouble for their neighbors, families, and themselves.

Solomon gave a different picture for believers who accept discipline. These people know God is working on them so He can bless them and use them to bless other people. God trains His followers so they can lovingly bless their communities by taking care of their neighbors' needs. Families also experience happiness when disciplined believers honor their parents and take care of their needs. We are wise when we learn from the discipline we receive (whether from God, parents, or others) for that discipline will lead us away from evil and into a right kind of living.

How do undisciplined people cause trouble for their families, neighbors, and themselves? Why is it important to learn from our experiences of discipline?

DAY TWO

Read Proverbs 29:12-14, paying attention to how leaders should live.

Solomon helped his readers remember God created everyone equally in His image when he pointed out that everyone has eyes. The other idea Solomon taught is God gave everyone eyes to see (or understand) His wisdom if they want to do so. He reminded people that everyone has the chance to understand God's wisdom. The poor can get wisdom to change their circumstances. The cruel can get wisdom to become righteous.

The idea of listening to God's wisdom is especially important for leaders. Leaders who choose to ignore God's wisdom will treat groups of people differently and unfairly. Unfortunately, their followers will copy their behavior making life awful for the people they rule over. Wise leaders, however, listen to God's wisdom and understand He sees everyone as equal. These leaders do not judge people by their wealth but by their actions. Followers of wise leaders will see and copy their behavior. Successful leadership depends on whether men and women will listen to God's wisdom and treat those they are leading equally.

Why do you think it is important for leaders to understand that God created all people as equal? As a leader, how would you help people understand God's wisdom?

DAY THREE

Read Proverbs 29:15-17, noticing the difference in two families.

Solomon told his readers that children need discipline so they can learn how to honor their parents and God. Children without discipline will look to other people or themselves to decide what behavior they should follow. This is how undisciplined children bring shame to their parents. Godly parents show love to their children when they discipline them with correction and fitting punishment. Parents who successfully discipline their children will be proud of them when the children honor God and their families with good behavior.

Why is it dangerous for parents not to discipline their children?

How do disciplined children bring honor to God and their parents?

DAY FOUR

Read Proverbs 29:18, thinking about how the Bible can bring peace to communities.

Solomon explained that it is a word from God that brings peace and control to communities. When Solomon lived, the Jewish people only had part of the Bible that we have today. They still had a word from God, though, through the Old Testament Law and the prophets who spoke for God. Today we have God's Word in the Bible. The Bible shows believers what God wants them to do.

People with no knowledge of the Bible or no relationships with believers will not know God's peace or control. These men and women have no idea how to live life as God wants. Everyone will do what they think is right. People will oppress others and be oppressed themselves. People will groan with misery as conflict grows throughout their communities. None of them will experience true peace and happiness without learning about God and His Word through the teaching of believers.

How does the Bible help you make right decisions? Why can you help your community know God's peace by using the Bible?

BIBLE DOCTRINE: The Family (Children)

Children are a blessing from God. Parents must show their children God's plan for marriage and family and teach them spiritual and moral values. They also must show their children how to make decisions based on biblical truth. They do this by being an example and through loving discipline. Children should honor and obey their parents.

DAY FIVE

Read Proverbs 29:19-20, drawing a circle around how true wisdom is shown.

Words are important for wisdom, but words must be joined with actions for true wisdom to be shown. That is why we must tell and show others how to do what God wants. It is not enough for believers to tell people what is in the Bible. Believers must also show people how to live what the Bible teaches.

People who speak without thinking have a listening problem. They are typically not open to discipline. People who talk before they think show two things. First, they assume they already know what the teacher is talking about. Second, they show they do not care about what the teacher is trying to teach them. People like this cannot really learn until they understand how to listen. Fools have more hope to learn than these people because at least they will listen. People who speak too quickly must learn to be quiet and listen if they are to have any hope for a disciplined life.

Why is it important for teachers to both tell and show others how to live for God?

CONNECT AND SHARE

Think about what you have learned from Proverbs 29:1-3,12-20. Meet with one or two other members of your study group to find ways live what you have learned.

Share how discipline in your past (both from God and from parents) has made you who you are today.

If you have children, what new actions do you need to take to rightly discipline your children? If you do not have children, how can you help families around you—especially in the church—to raise godly children?

Why is it important both to learn and to do God's Word? How can you do both of these better in the future?



FINDING HONOR

God honors (recognizes) people who faithfully show His wisdom in their lives.

PROVERBS 31:10-16,23-31

In chapter 31, we meet a new writer. He is King Lemuel. Lemuel wrote about the excellent wife in Proverbs 31. This is the only place in the Bible we find Lemuel. No one knows who he was. Some think this might have been a nickname for Solomon. Nevertheless, Lemuel wrote about a remarkable woman. He described this woman as a hard worker, a blessing to the people around her, and full of godly wisdom.

The excellent wife is a picture of a woman who follows God's wisdom. However, there is no such thing as a perfect woman (just as there are no perfect men). The only way women and men can move toward becoming perfect is to have a relationship with God. Even then, they will not become perfect until God frees them from sin at death and invites them to live with Him in eternity. People can learn from Lemuel to honor their marriage, provide for their families, change their communities for the better, and honor God by the way they live.

PROVERBS 31:10-16, 23-31

10 It is hard to find a good wife, because she is worth more than rubies. 11 Her husband trusts her completely. With her, he has everything he needs. 12 She does him good and not harm for as long as she lives. 13 She looks for wool and flax and likes to work with her hands. 14 She is like a trader's ship, bringing food from far away. 15 She gets up while it is still dark and prepares food for her family and feeds her servant girls. 16 She inspects a field and buys it. With money she earned, she plants a vineyard.

23 Her husband is known at the city meetings, where he makes decisions as one of the **leaders of the land. 24** She makes linen clothes and sells them and provides belts to the merchants. 25 She is strong and is respected by the people. She looks forward to the future with joy. © 26 She speaks wise words and teaches others to be kind. 27 She watches over her family and never wastes her time. **28** Her children speak well of her. Her husband also praises her, 29 saying, "There are many fine women, but you are better than all of them." 30 Charm n can fool you, and beauty can trick you, but a woman who **respects the LORD** • should be praised. **31** Give her the reward she has earned: she should be praised in public for what she has done.

- a. The value of good women cannot be measured.
- People use fiber from this plant to make clothes just like making clothes from wool.
- c. One of the biggest responsibilities women had in biblical times was to make clothes for their families.
- d. Women would be like trading ships in shopping for and bringing in food for their families.
- e. Wise women know how to invest and use money to make life better for their families.
- f. Excellent wives make their husbands better, not worse. Men who are married to such women will be respected in their communities.
- g. Women are strong and secure when they have a relationship with God. They have no fear of trouble or even death because they know they have eternal life with God.
- h. Charm means to attract or delight people.
- i. Charm and beauty can fool people into thinking a woman is a better person than she really is. Women show they are not self-focused when they humble themselves by respecting God and serving people.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- 1. What kind of people does God honor?
- 2. Why is it hard to find a good wife?
- 3. Why does the excellent wife's husband trust her?
- 4. What does the excellent wife do to support her family and servants?
- 5. What does the excellent wife do with the money she earns?
- 6. Why do people respect the excellent wife?
- 7. What keeps people from looking forward with joy?
- 8. How does the excellent wife teach people?
- 9. What is the value of a husband praising his wife in public?
- 10. How can charm and beauty deceive people?

BIBLE SKILL: Match the verse with the sentence.

There are many wonderful wives in the Bible. Match the verse and wife with the sentence.

Ruth 1:16 (Ruth) "... they took him to their home and helped him better

understand the way of God."

1 Samuel 1:22 (Hannah) "I am the servant of the Lord. Let this happen to me as

you say!"

Esther 7:3 (Esther) "... I will take him to Shiloh. Then I will give him to the

LORD, and he will always live there."

Luke 1:38 (Mary) "My king, if you are pleased with me, and if it pleases

you, let me live. This is what I ask. And let my people

live, too."

Acts 18:26 (Priscilla) "Your people will be my people, and your God will be

my God."

IN MY CONTEXT

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

Discuss as a group how believers can honor their marriage promises. What can you and your spouse do to have a stronger marriage?

List some ways you can honor God by taking care of your family? Which one in the list do you need to do this week? How will you do it?

How can you influence the people in your life to honor God?

What did you learn from the excellent wife of Proverbs 31 that you can put into practice this week?

MEMORY VERSE

I am teaching them to you now so that you will put your trust in the LORD. – Proverbs 22:19

DAY ONE

Read Proverbs 31:10-12, listing ways a faithful marriage helps your spouse be successful.

The success of a marriage often is decided at the beginning when men and women choose their spouses. Lemuel said that a good wife is hard to find. The same could be said about finding a good husband. They are hard to find because not many people are willing to obey and follow God. Marriages work best when both husbands and wives serve each other with the goodness that comes from God. Husbands and wives who are both believers will feel safe knowing their spouses follow God and will help them do well in whatever God asks them to do. Spouses like this are worth much more than rubies.

Spouses who obey and follow God are trustworthy. They will be faithful in marriage, supporting their families, and their spouses. These faithful spouses will do good to their husbands or wives as long as they live. This is how spouses who follow and obey God make their husbands or wives successful. Godly husbands and wives who can be trusted with a little can also be trusted with a lot.

In what ways are spouses who obey and follow God worth more than rubies?

DAY TWO

Read Proverbs 31:13-16, underlining ways the excellent wife supports her family.

The excellent wife is not afraid of hard work because she knows her work feeds and supports her family. Women living in Lemuel's time got up before dawn, cooked breakfast for their families and servants, and went out from their homes. They would harvest flax or perhaps take sheared wool and make clothes for their families. They also went to the marketplace, bought food, brought it back to their homes, and prepared still another meal. Women who did not do these things could expect to see their families hungry and wearing rags.

Lemuel noted that the excellent wife used her head when it came to money. She thought about what she wanted to do with her money and decided she wanted a vineyard. She checked a field to see if it would support a vineyard, bought it, planted a vineyard, and used the money made from the vineyard to support her family. Believers can be like the excellent wife in planning how to use their money in ways that support their families and honor God.

Why is it important for believers to make sure their families have what they need?

DAY THREE

Read Proverbs 31:23, noticing ways the excellent wife blessed her husband.

Married couples often have shared reputations in their communities. People know both the husband and the wife. Their reputations influence each other. Lemuel described this idea when he explained what the excellent woman's reputation did for her husband. The husband had a good reputation, but the excellent wife's reputation made her spouse's reputation even better. Believers who have spouses with good reputations will notice their own reputations are also better just because they are married to their spouse. The shared reputations of married believers are important in affecting how much they can influence their communities for God.

Excellent husbands and wives can make their spouses better people than they would be alone. Husbands and wives do not work separately from each other when carrying out their responsibilities. They are a team. Another reason husbands and wives should work together is they know each other's strengths and weaknesses. Husbands and wives show themselves to be excellent when they make each other better people when working with their neighbors.

Why is a husband's or wife's reputation so important to their spouse?

DAY FOUR

Read Proverbs 31:24-27, looking for the kind of life that will influence others.

Spouses show they are strong, confident, and deserving of respect when they work wisely to support their families. Lemuel told his readers that the excellent wife was willing to support her family by making and selling clothes and belts to merchants. This required planning, hard work, and being smart in business. This is how the excellent wife won the respect of the people she worked with. People who think ahead and are willing to work hard to meet their goals deserve the respect of others.

Oliver and Dellamae were highly respected by the whole Deaf community where they lived. They became Christians when their children were young, and they were very serious about living for Christ. They raised four children who respected their parents. They were both leaders in the Deaf community and were leaders in their church. Oliver served his church as a deacon. Dellamae mentored the younger women of the church. She cared for her family, served her community, and drew Deaf people to Christ. Followers of God, like this couple, are a strong influence on others when they live their lives like the excellent wife of Proverbs 31.

How does having a relationship with God help believers gain the respect of people?

KEY DOCTRINE: The Family (Wives)

God sees husbands and wives as equals because He created both in His image. Husbands must love their wives as Jesus loves His church. Wives must respect and serve their husbands as the church respects and serves Jesus. Love and respect will equip husbands and wives to raise and nurture their children.

DAY FIVE

Read Proverbs 31:28-31, circling ways believers honor God in their families.

Men and women may need many things, but the most important thing they need is Jesus. Coming to Christ will make everything different. Jesus makes people godly. Godly parents, then, will serve their children by teaching them about Jesus. Godly husbands and wives will serve their spouses by helping them become more like Christ. Godly couples will serve their neighbors by blessing them with acts of love. Believers who live for Christ like this will draw others to Christ.

Believers can learn from the excellent wife that we must give respect to others in order to earn their respect. When people use charm and beauty to trick others into giving them what they want, they do not show respect. People learn real respect when they humble themselves and serve God and others. People who serve God will understand He made all people in His image. They will then show their respect to people by serving them. As believers serve others, people will see God in them. They will understand God's love through the actions of believers and will give God praise.

What are some ways you can honor God in your family and in your community?

CONNECT AND SHARE

Think about what you have learned from Proverbs 31:10-16,23-31. Meet with one or two other members of your study group to find ways to live what you have learned.

What are some things you can do to encourage each other to keep their promises to their spouses?

In what ways can you be wise in taking care of your family this week?

What are some ways your group can influence the Deaf community where you live for God's Kingdom?



RELATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

God created humans to have relationships. The greatest relationship is between Him and His people.

SONG OF SONGS 2:15-3:5

God intends for people to have relationships. The most important relationship is our relationship with Him. Another important type of relationship is marriage. The love found in a godly marriage is a mirror of the love each member of the Trinity has for each other and for people. Marriage is the clearest picture of this kind of love. Men and women are meant to be in a loving relationship with God and live out His love in marriage.

Love draws God and people closer together while sin pushes God and people apart. The conversation between Solomon and his bride in Song of Songs 2:15–3:5 expresses three dangers couples should watch for in their marriages. One is the danger of little problems that can grow into huge issues. Second is the danger of not working to build trust in each other. Third is the danger of being sexually tempted to go outside of marriage. Couples can see their marriages and relationships with God destroyed if they are not careful to protect themselves from these dangers.

SONG OF SONGS

2:15-3:5

2:15 Catch the foxes for us—the little foxes **that ruin the vineyards o** while they are in blossom. 16 My lover is mine, and I am his. He feeds among the lilies **17** until the day dawns and the shadows disappear. Turn, my lover. Be like a gazelle or a young deer 3 on the mountain valleys. @ 3:1 At night on my **bed**, o I looked for the one I love; I looked for him, but I could not find him. 2 I got up and went around the city, in the streets and squares, looking for the one I love. I looked for him, but I could not find him. 3 The watchmen • found me as they patrolled the city, so I asked, "Have you seen the one I love?" 4 As soon as I had left them. I found the one I love. I held him and would not let him go until I brought him to my mother's house, to the room where I was born. **5** Women of Jerusalem, promise me by the gazelles and the deer not to awaken or excite my feelings of love until it is ready. 6

- a. This is a picture of what little problems can do to a couple's relationship. Couples who ignore tiny issues between them may find these issues growing and damaging their marriages!
- b. The bride compared
 Solomon to these animals
 because she saw him as
 being handsome and full
 of life like a gazelle or
 a young deer would be
 energetic and full of life.
- c. The bride invited Solomon to enjoy what she had to offer him physically.
- d. The bride was asleep and dreaming.
- e. Bible teachers believe the woman was dreaming. Her dream shows she was willing to risk danger so she could be with her love.
- f. Watchmen were the policemen of the ancient world.
- g. The bride asked her friends to help her avoid sexual temptation, waiting until she and Solomon were married.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- 1. Why is our relationship with God our most important relationship?
- 2. Why should "foxes" be caught?
- 3. What does her description of them belonging to each other tell us about marriage?
- 5. Why was the bride searching for the groom?
- 6. Why might the bride have been willing to put herself in danger to find her groom?
- 7. Where does the bride take Solomon after she finds him?
- 8. What is the importance of the couple going to her mother's house?
- 9. Why does she ask the women of Jerusalem to help her?
- 10. Why is the bride not ready to show her love to Solomon?

BIBLE SKILL: Find the verses.

Read the following verses and write down some of the things people can do to protect their marriages:

IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers must be careful to protect marriages.
- Marriages grow when husbands and wives submit to each other.
- God created sex to be enjoyed only within the marriage relationship.

If you are married, what steps can you take that will protect your marriage? If you are not married, how can you help protect the marriages of those around you?

Discuss with your Bible study group what it means for husbands and wives to submit to each other? What can you do to be biblically submissive to your spouse?

How can your sex life become more like God wants it to be? What decisions do you need to make today to follow only God's plan for sexual expression?

MEMORY VERSE

We love because God first loved us. - 1 John 4:19

DAY ONE

Read Song of Songs 2:15, looking for what you can do to protect your marriage.

Little foxes are bad news for vineyards. Foxes are hard to find because they are small. They are good at hiding and come out only at night. The problem for people working in vineyards is that little foxes like to chew the stems and roots of grapevines. Workers who do not watch for little foxes will see their vineyards destroyed, and it will be too late to do anything about it. The only way these workers can save their vineyards is to catch the foxes before they do any damage. Foxes may be small, but they are big trouble for vineyard workers.

Little problems in a marriage are a lot like the little foxes in a vineyard. Husbands and wives may ignore or put off tiny problems at the beginning. They are so much in love with each other they may not even notice the problems. However, they will find out one day that these problems are no longer little. The problems become huge ones that are about to destroy their marriage. Couples must do like the vineyard workers and catch the "little foxes" in their relationship by talking to each other before these problems do any damage. The secret to a healthy marriage is for couples to catch the little problems between them before they grow into marriage-threatening problems.

What are some examples of little problems that can become big problems? Why is it important to solve the little problems in your marriage?

DAY TWO

Read Song of Songs 2:16-17, noticing how trust helps husbands and wives submit to each other.

Trust is very important in a marriage relationship. There are two things that build trust between married couples. One is the couple must know they belong to each other. This is what the bride means when she says, "My lover is mine, and I am his." She knows Solomon belongs to her and she belongs to him. The second is couples must know they want each other sexually. This is the reason the bride invites Solomon to turn to her and enjoy her as a gazelle would take pleasure in a mountain valley. Trust

builds between a husband and wife when they know their spouse has no sexual interest in other people. Men and women have healthy marriages when they trust their spouses.

Trust is the key to husbands and wives submitting to each other. The word "submit" means to yield to the authority or will of another person. A husband will trust his wife when he knows she respects him deeply. A wife will trust her husband when she knows he loves her so much that he is willing to die for her. Their willingness to submit to each other will make their marriage grow stronger. Husbands and wives who trust their spouses will submit to them out of respect and love.

What are some ways a husband can show love for his wife? What are some ways a wife can show respect for her husband? How does trust help husbands and wives submit to each other?

DAY THREE

Read Song of Songs 3:1-2, thinking about God's plan for human sexuality.

Couples in happy marriages want to be with each other. The desire to be together is so strong they likely even dream about it. That seems to be what is happening in these verses. In her dream, the bride pursued Solomon because she knew he was the right man for her. She wanted him! This is the same feeling God has for His people. He pursues His people with desire and longing. He wants His people! Couples reflect the bride's and God's passion when they pursue their spouses with love.

Couples should wait until marriage to have sex. The bride desired her husband but knew she needed to wait. She had not had sex yet, and the next day was her wedding day. Her dream was the night before her wedding. Men and women who honor God and their spouses by waiting to have sex until marriage are honoring God's plan for human sexuality.

What is God's plan for human sexuality?

DAY FOUR

Read Song of Songs 3:3, thinking about how asking questions can strengthen marriages.

The bride dreamed she was walking through the dark streets of her city. She did not hide her love for Solomon as she asked strangers about his whereabouts. A group of watchmen saw her as she walked. Watchmen were the policemen of the ancient world. People would ask them if they needed information about missing men and women. The bride did this when she boldly asked them if they had seen Solomon. She was open about her love for Solomon and was not afraid to ask questions about him.

The bride showed two important ideas in Song of Songs 3:3. One idea is that men and women should be open about their love for their spouse, and look for ways to build a relationship with them. This is also what God does with His people. He is not ashamed of His love for believers. He always desires to strengthen His relationship with them. The other idea is that men and women should ask questions about their spouses before and after marriage. People can never know too much about their spouses. Husbands and wives who understand their spouses will make them happy.

What are some questions people should ask to better understand their spouse or future spouse?

BIBLE DOCTRINE: God (God the Holy Spirit)

Husbands and wives who pursue each other mirror God's pursuit for His people. He passionately pursues His people through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God and is fully God. He does this because He loves His people and wants to have a relationship with them. He calls people to Jesus and causes the new birth (or regeneration) in them. People who are born again are baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's presence in the believer guarantees they will have an eternal and passionate relationship with God.

DAY FIVE

Read Song of Songs 3:4-5, paying attention to how the bride asked her friends for help in resisting sexual temptation.

The bride's dream ended when she found Solomon, held him tight, and brought him to her mother's house. This is an example for men and women to make their spouses feel loved, safe, and secure in their relationship. Husbands and wives who have a strong relationship will give all of themselves sexually to their spouse. The bride gave us a beautiful example of what secure love can do for couples when she found Solomon in her dream.

Men and women can learn from the bride on the importance of waiting until after marriage to have sex. She knew Solomon was the right man for her and was not afraid to have sex with him. However, she knew having sex before marriage would not honor God or her husband-to-be. She asked her friends to help her wait until the right time for this reason. Couples honor God and their spouses when they wait until after marriage to have sex. People who wait to have sex will be rewarded with a blessed marriage!

What can men and women do to help themselves (or their friends) wait until after marriage to have sex?

CONNECT AND SHARE

Think about what you have learned from Song of Songs 2:15–3:5. Meet with one or two members of your study group to discuss what you have learned.

What are some things you can do to help your friends protect their marriages?

How can you live a life that practices godly submission?

How can you encourage each other to be sexually pure?



INVESTING IN RELATIONSHIPS

Believers must invest in their relationship with God just as a couple must invest in their relationship.

SONG OF SONGS 5:6-16

Couples must avoid the temptation to be unfaithful when they face problems. Sexual or emotional affairs never have and never will solve marriage problems. Husbands and wives can protect themselves by remembering their promise to God to stay faithful to Him and each other.

Solomon wrote the Song of Songs to describe the love between a couple. He looked at human love and celebrated its goodness. Love within a marriage is a gift from God. But while we learn about human love and its sexual expression, we also learn about God. If couples want a good relationship, they must work hard at it. If believers want a good relationship with God, but they too must work hard to grow their relationship with Him after trusting in Jesus.

SONG OF SONGS

5:6-16

6 I opened the door for my lover, but my lover had left and was gone. When he spoke, he took my breath away. I looked for him, but I could not find him; I called for him, but he did not answer. **7** The watchmen found me as they patrolled the city. They hit me and hurt me; the guards on the wall took away my **veil. 0 8** Promise me, women of Jerusalem, if you find my lover, tell him I am weak with **love. 9** How is your lover better than other lovers, most beautiful of women? How is your lover better than other lovers? • Why do you want us to promise this? **10** My lover is healthy and tan, the best of ten thousand men. 11 His head is like the finest gold; his hair is wavy and black like a raven. 12 His eyes are like doves by springs of water. They seem to be bathed in cream and are set like jewels. 13 His cheeks are like beds of spices; they smell like mounds of perfume. His lips are like **lilies** • flowing with **myrrh**. • **14** His hands are like gold hinges, filled with jewels. His body is like shiny ivory covered with sapphires. 15 His legs are like large marble posts, standing on bases of fine gold. He is like a **cedar of Lebanon**, **1** like the finest of the trees. 16 His mouth is sweet to kiss, and I **desire him very much. o** Yes, daughters of Jerusalem, this is my lover and my friend.

- a. This was humiliating for the bride. The abuse by the watchmen may be a picture of her disappointment in herself for not answering the door when Solomon called for her.
- b. The bride was so much in love with her husband that it made her feel weak.
- c. The question allowed the woman an opportunity to describe Solomon. This is important because everyone in the land would hear her message.
- d. It may either be a lotus or an anemone (a type of flower). These plants are blood-red in color. Solomon had blood-red lips.
- e. A short, stubby balsam tree. It makes a gummy material that has a pinelike smell. People used it for anointing oil, female purification, cosmetics, and in burial shrouds.
- f. The cedars of Lebanon are big trees, 120 feet high with trunks measuring 40 feet around. Solomon used them to build his palace.
- g. The bride finished her list of everything she found wonderful and attractive about Solomon.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- 1. What does it mean to invest in a relationship?
- 2. What is the significance of the groom being gone?
- 3. How should we understand what the watchmen did to the bride?
- 4. Why did she ask the women of Jerusalem to relay her message?
- 5. How might we characterize the questions the women of Jerusalem asked the bride?
- 6. How did she describe Solomon? Why was this important?
- 7. Why was it important for the bride to identify him as her friend?

| BIBLE SKILL: Fill in the blanks. |
|---|
| God has much to say about how husbands and wives should treat each other. These verses apply equally to both husbands and wives: |
| "So a man will his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two will become one body" (Genesis 2:24). |
| "The Lord God of Israel says, 'I divorce. And I people who do cruel things as easily as they put on clothes,' says the Lord All-Powerful. So be careful. And do not break your trust" (Malachi 2:16). |
| "The husband should his wife all that he owes her as his wife. And the wife should her husband all that she owes him as her husband" (1 Corinthians 7:3). |
| "But each one of you must his wife as he loves himself, and a wife must her husband" (Ephesians 5:33). |

IN MY CONTEXT

- In a godly marriage, husbands and wives should give each other moral and emotional support.
- Godly marriages are based on a promise to stay faithful to each other throughout life.
- Godly marriages include husbands and wives giving encouragement to each other.

Discuss as a group what couples should do to make their marriages strong. If you are married, what can you do this week to make your marriage stronger?

Make a list of the promises married couples make to each other. Which of these promises do you need to practice now to improve your marriage?

If you are married, what do you need to do to encourage your husband or wife? If you are not married, how can you give encouragement to your married friends?

MEMORY VERSE

Where has your lover gone, most beautiful of women? Which way did your lover turn? We will look for him with you.

- Song of Songs 6:1

DAY ONE

Read Song of Songs 5:6, looking for ways to support your spouse emotionally.

The author hinted in Song of Songs 5:2-6 that the bride and Solomon experienced problems in their relationship. The bride was asleep and dreamed Solomon came to her door. She refused to come to the door even after he called for her. She dreamed Solomon left. She felt disappointment when she knew he was gone. She called for him and received no answer from him. She felt regret because they were unable to fix things emotionally between them.

Marriage is so much more than love and sex. Husbands need their wives to be their cheerleader, supporter, and best friend. Wives need their husbands to be appreciative, affectionate, honest, stable, committed to their family, and a spiritual leader. Both men and women need their spouses to be emotionally supportive. Couples who are unable to support their spouses emotionally may see their marriages damaged. Emotional support is what keeps couples together through the ups and downs of marriage.

Wives: How can you be your husband's cheerleader, supporter, and best friend?

Husbands: What can you do to show appreciation, affection, honesty, stability, family commitment, and spiritual leadership to your wives?

DAY TWO

Read Song of Songs 5:7-8, finding what kind of friends can help your marriage.

Friends can be very important in helping or destroying marriages. The bride's dream showed the danger of having the wrong "friends" when she dreamed about the watchmen abusing her and humiliating her. People like these can push apart couples by criticizing the person and their spouse. Wise couples will be careful not to choose friends who hate God,

are negative, think only about themselves, and refuse to help people with marriage problems. Such "friends" will not make marriages stronger and may harm them.

Real friends will work with couples to help strengthen their marriages. The bride reached out to her friends for help. She knew who her real friends were. She asked them for help to tell Solomon how much she loved him. Men and women show themselves to be real friends when they see couples that are struggling in their marriages, remind them of their love for each other, and work to bring them back together. Wise husbands and wives will look for friends who love God. These friends will help them protect their marriage.

How do your friends help you in your Christian life?

DAY THREE

Read Song of Songs 5:9, noticing ideas to help couples remember their promises to be faithful to each other.

Wise friends will help husbands or wives remember why they love their spouses. The bride's friends did this by asking her careful questions about her love for Solomon. They asked her why she believed Solomon was so much better than other men. This was a great question because it challenged her to think about why she loved Solomon. Questions like these will cause husbands and wives to stop, think, and talk about what makes their spouses so special. People who remember why their spouses are special will want to stay with them. They will want to stay faithful. Men and women who help couples in this way show themselves to be good friends.

Husbands and wives who need help in their marriages are wise when they go to trusted and knowledgeable friends for help. Many people with marriage problems will reach out to their pastor or a Christian counselor. Pastor Dan leads a Deaf church. A Deaf couple in his church approached him for marriage counseling. Using the Bible and his own marriage experience, Pastor Dan helped this couple have a stronger marriage. Now they are working to help other Deaf families.

Are you the kind of friend who helps others have stronger marriages? How can you be this kind of friend in the future?

DAY FOUR

Read Song of Songs 5:10-15, paying attention to the admiration and respect the bride gave to Solomon.

Men need admiration and respect from their wives. The bride answered her friends by describing Solomon's characteristics. The way she talked might seem strange to us, but her words show deep admiration and respect for him. She pointed out Solomon's handsome body, strength, wavy hair, beautiful eyes, perfumed smell, blood-red lips, fine-looking hands, muscular legs, and overall magnificence. She communicated that she totally believed in Solomon and wanted to be with him. Men who see words of trust and respect from their wives will know they have complete support. Men need supportive and encouraging wives to help them become their best selves.

Sexual satisfaction also is an important part of a woman's admiration for her husband. Every Christian couple must work toward a healthy sex life. Often this is challenging. The Bible is our guide in this part of life like all others. The bride knew her husband's needs and made sure to tell everything she found physically attractive about Solomon. A wife who communicates her desire for her husband is really telling him she admires him.

If you are a wife, how can you show admiration and respect for your husband? If you are a husband, how do you show godly love for your wife?

BIBLE DOCTRINE: The Christian and the Social Order (Christians and Divorce)

Christians have the responsibility of working toward improving their communities by encouraging people to start a relationship with God. Believers should help people in need like the orphans, the poor, the abused, the elderly, the helpless, and the sick. This also includes people in troubled marriages. Families are the foundation of human society, and communities suffer when families collapse through divorce. Christians should encourage husbands and wives to love God and each other.

DAY FIVE

Read Song of Songs 5:16, thinking about how you can show your love for your husband or wife.

A woman requires two kinds of intimacy from her husband. One is that her husband desires her as a lover. Love for women is not always sexual, but it is romantic. Women want men to tell and show them they are special and beautiful. They need to know their husbands are not interested in other women. Men who work at romance show their wives they care about them! Husbands who are not interested in romance will fail to satisfy this love need from their wives while men who express romantic interest in their wives will satisfy part of her need for intimacy.

The other part of a woman's need for intimacy is for her husband to treat her as his best friend. Women need their husbands to have heart to heart talks with them. Men communicate to their wives that they care about them when they show real interest and concern in what they say. A husband who treats his wife as a lover and a friend will be able to satisfy her need for intimacy. Women who have such husbands can announce to the world the same thing the bride said about Solomon, "I desire him very much."

How can you show romantic love for your spouse?

What can you do to help your spouse know that he or she is your best friend?

CONNECT AND SHARE

Think about what you have learned from Song of Songs 5:6-16. Meet with one or two members of your group to discuss how you can live what you have learned.

How can you and your small group help other couples stay faithful in their marriages?

What steps can you take this week that will overcome these barriers and show what you have learned from Solomon about marriage?



LEADER HELPS

As the leader of the group, you can build disciples through the group Bible study time, encouraging daily Bible engagement, and by facilitating smaller groups.

Building Disciples through the Group Time

Each week, you will introduce the group to the Bible passage, examine the key message in that passage, and challenge the group to act on that passage. Doing so requires preparation. Here is a way to prepare that gives you adequate time to study the lesson and will make the session fresh in your own life.

Early in the Week (Sunday or Monday)

- Ask God to open your mind and heart to His Word as you study.
- Study the Bible passage.
- Pay careful attention to the In My Context section for that session, looking for ways you need to apply the Bible in your own life.

Through the Week

 Ask God to direct your creation of the group plan. Create a group plan, adapting the group plans to fit the needs of your group.

- Complete the Daily Exploration activities in the days leading up to the group time.
- Meet with a group of three to four other teachers to share and pray for each other. Use Connect and Share to start your conversation.
- Create your own using Visual Ideas on pages 144–146.

The Day of the Group Study Time

- · Arrive early.
- Pray for the study and the group members.
- Lead the study, adjusting as you go.

After the Group Study Time

- Contact all group members, encouraging them to complete the Daily Exploration section and sharing gathered prayer requests.
- Record insights gained about teaching, group members, and Scripture.
- Do it all again.

Building Disciples by Encouraging Daily Bible Engagement

- Encourage everyone on your ministry list (class roll, membership list, etc.) to engage daily in Bible study. Here are some ways to encourage your group to engage with the Bible daily:
- Ask them. Learn to comfortably ask if group members are studying the Bible. You may want to use a statement such as, "I hope you took a look at the Day Three activity for this week."
- Tell them. Let them know that you are using the Daily Exploration section as well. Set the standard.
- Show them. Point to the Daily Exploration section at the conclusion of the group study. From time to time, demonstrate how to use the section, guiding them through Day One as a group.

• Invite them. Call on volunteers to share with the group what they are learning and how they use the Daily Exploration section.

Building Disciples through Smaller Groups

At the end of every session, you will find a section entitled Connect and Share. This section is designed for smaller groups of two or three people to meet weekly, holding each other accountable for living a Christ-honoring life.

Create smaller groups:

- Allow group members to form their own initial groups of three by gender (men's smaller groups and women's smaller groups)
- Allow groups to add one person from the names on the ministry list of people who are not present.
- You may want to encourage the groups to form based on neighborhoods or proximity to work.
- Make sure some of the groups have extra space for new group members and guests.
- As the Bible study group grows, you may need to reorganize the smaller groups, but try not to regroup too often so that trust can be built within each smaller group.

Support the smaller groups:

- Provide opportunities for the members of the smaller groups to pray with each other during the group time.
- Make study assignments in the weekly group time based on the smaller groups.
- Pre-enlist a volunteer to share with the larger group how participation in the smaller group is impacting his or her life.
- Periodically organize fellowship events built around the smaller groups. The smaller groups could be the basis for teams during the event.
- Be in a smaller group as well. You may even want to host a smaller group for guests and new group members.

THE WAY OF WISDOM

Proverbs 1:7-19

PLAN AHEAD

Pray for group members to understand true wisdom comes from God alone.

Enlist a volunteer to study the Introduction to the Book of Proverbs and summarize it for the class.

Find a picture of someone with flowers in their hair or a pretty necklace on. Or bring a flower and necklace to put on. You will show them to the group during the session.

Choose some questions from Explore the Text to use for discussion of the verses in each section.

FOCUS ATTENTION

Some people say, "If you learn from your mistakes, you are smart. If you learn from other people's mistakes, you are wise." It seems it would be even better to learn from the One (God) who never makes mistakes. The writer of Proverbs shared God's wisdom for believers to apply to their lives. When we pay attention to God's teaching and use it in our lives, we bring honor to God.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Starting Point (Proverbs 1:7)

INVITE a volunteer to sign verse 7. **ASK:** What does it mean to respect the Lord? **ALLOW** for some discussion. **EXPLAIN:** In this verse, the word "respect" includes the idea of a loving respect for God. This respect causes a person to want to submit to God and obey the commands in God's Word. The person who respects God in this way will learn and become wise.

ASK: What kind of person hates wisdom and discipline? How would you describe a fool? The word "fool" also means a person who does not have good moral character. This person does not live as God wants.

2. Path of Obedience (Proverbs 1:8-9)

SHOW the picture of the person with flowers in their hair or with a necklace (or put them on). **SAY:** Solomon compared the person who listens to his parents' teaching to a person with flowers or a necklace. **SIGN** verses 8-9. **ASK:** Why do you think Solomon used this picture? Flowers and jewelry can make people look more attractive. When a person respects God and also listens to his parents, that person's life will look good to others. Why? **ALLOW** for discussion.

ASK: Imagine a company looking for a new employee. What kind of person will the company want to hire? A fool or someone who is wise? Explain.

3. Resist Sin Proverbs 1:10-14)

ENLIST a volunteer to sign verses 10-14. **EXPLAIN:** Solomon gave a strong warning in verse 10. **ASK:** What was the warning? What kinds of things do the sinners do? (They hurt innocent people, take advantage of them, and kill.) How do they tempt others to join them? (They will share the money and things they steal from innocent people.)

LEAD in a discussion of ways believers can avoid sinners and at the same time show a good example to them.

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

EXPLAIN: Every day we are around people who do not honor God. We can be a good influence on them. But it is very important to remember Solomon's warning in verse 10. What did he say? (Do not follow them!) **LEAD** members to read verse 15 in their personal study guides or Bibles. **ASK:** What was Solomon's warning in this verse?

SIGN verses 16-19. **EXPLAIN:** When people sin, there will be consequences. Solomon said sinners will be caught in their own sins. They are not wise enough to know how sin will destroy their lives.

IN MY CONTEXT

REVIEW the main points of the session and **DISCUSS** questions from In My Context (p. 14). **ENCOURAGE** the group to do the daily readings this week and meet with someone for Connect and Share. **CLOSE** with prayer, asking God to help us respect Him more and seek His wisdom.

Trust in the Lord

Proverbs 3:1-12

PLAN AHEAD

Pray for group members to trust God more as they grow in Christ.

Choose some questions from Explore the Text to use for discussion of the verses in each section.

Enlist four volunteers to each sign one of the groups of verses for the session.

Recruit a volunteer to share their experience with tithing. If you cannot find one, be prepared to share your own experience.

FOCUS ATTENTION

As the group arrives, **ASK:** What does it mean that God is trustworthy? Explain. We can depend on God to do as He says. When He makes a promise, it will happen. People often disappoint us. They may promise to do something and then do something totally different. Many people are not trustworthy. God is. He will never disappoint us. We can trust Him because He wants the best for us. He loves us.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Remember (Proverbs 3:1-4)

ENCOURAGE the group to watch for some benefits of obeying God's commands while the first volunteer signs verses 1-4. **LIST** them on the board as they share what they saw. Answers include: live a long time, life will be successful, you will be respected, and you will please God and people.

EXPLAIN: This does not mean believers will never experience problems. However, when we follow God's ways, we will feel better in our spirit, our emotional health will be stronger, and our lives will be full. Good emotional health influences our physical health in a positive way.

2. Trust (Proverbs 3:5-8)

GUIDE the second volunteer to sign verses 5-8. **DIRECT** the group to watch for benefits of trusting in the Lord. **ADD** these to the list on the board. Answers include: God will give success, the body will be healthy and bones will be strong.

EXPLAIN: In some Bible versions, verse 6 says to submit to God in all your ways. Submitting to Him or remembering Him in all things includes faithfully serving Him and obeying Him with a willing heart. When we do this, He helps us do the things that honor Him most.

3. Honor (Proverbs 3:9-10)

CALL ON the third volunteer to sign verses 9-10. **EXPLAIN:** Solomon told the Israelites to honor the Lord with what they had (their wealth). Firstfruits were the first part of the olive oil, wine, and grain that they harvested. Today believers still give the firstfruits of our wealth in our tithes and offerings. It is wise to give the tithe or offering before spending money on other things. When we honor God with our tithe, it shows we trust Him to take care of us and provide for our needs. Often believers will notice that when they give to God first, God helps them manage the rest of their money better.

INVITE members to share their experiences with tithing.

4. Accept (Proverbs 3:11-12)

WRITE the word "discipline" on the board. **ASK:** What does this word mean to you? What is your experience with discipline? **EXPLAIN:** Sometimes we think of discipline as punishment. But it also includes teaching and guiding someone. God disciplines us as His children. Solomon told us how we should feel about that.

INVITE the fourth volunteer to sign verses 11-12. **EXPLAIN:** The writer of Hebrews also talked about discipline. **LEAD** the group to find Hebrews 12:7-11 in their Bibles. After they have read the verses, guide them in a discussion of how believers should respond to God's discipline.

IN MY CONTEXT

REVIEW the main points of the session and questions from In My Context (p. 22). **ENCOURAGE** everyone to do the daily readings this week and meet with someone for Connect and Share. **CLOSE** with prayer, asking God to help us depend on Him in all areas of our lives.

Showing Compassion

Proverbs 3:21-35

PLAN AHEAD

Pray for group members to grow in their love for others.

Choose some questions from Explore the Text to use for discussion of the verses in each section.

Read Psalm 73 and prepare to summarize the main ideas of the Psalm for the session. The writer explained how he was jealous of wicked people who had success. Then he remembered that God will destroy the wicked but will take care of His followers.

Enlist two volunteers to sign the following verses: 1 John 3:17-18 and 1 John 4:19-21.

FOCUS ATTENTION

SHARE the following story: There were two young women who met while in college. One was a believer, but the other was not. They talked together often and began to do things together, too. The non-believer said, "When I first met Kris, I was not impressed. But the more I learned from her, she seemed more and more wise. She seemed to become more beautiful, too. I wanted to know about Jesus because of her."

EXPLAIN: In today's Bible verses, Solomon said when we follow God's wisdom and good sense, we will have life and beauty. He used the picture of a necklace again. He meant that following God's wisdom makes our lives look good and gives us peace. God may give us opportunities to share Christ with someone as we wear His beauty as a necklace.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Gaining Confidence (Proverbs 3:21-26)

ASK: What does it mean to have confidence? How do we get more confidence? **ALLOW** for some discussion. **INVITE** the group to watch for ways God's wisdom gives confidence as you sign verses 21-26. **LIST** on the board the

things they notice. Remind the group how the opposite is true for the wicked. **ENCOURAGE** the group to find Proverbs 1:18 in their Bibles. **NOTE** that while God protects the wise from traps, fools fall into their own traps.

2. Showing Kindness (Proverbs 3:27-30)

The next group of verses shows how people who follow God's wisdom treat other people. **SIGN** verses 27-30. **DISCUSS** questions 5 and 6 from Explore the Text.

EXPLAIN: John also wrote about how believers should treat others. **COMPARE** the verses in 1 John with the verses in Proverbs. **ASK** the volunteers to sign the verses from 1 John 3:17-18 and 4:19-21. **DISCUSS** how the two passages are the same.

CREATE teams of two or three. **LEAD** the teams to read the verses in the Bible Skill and **DISCUSS** together how they can apply the verses in their lives. After some time for discussion, **BRING** the group back together. **INVITE** each team to share some of their ideas with the others.

3. Blessing from God (Proverbs 3:31-35)

SIGN verses 3:31-35. **EXPLAIN:** Some may wonder why Solomon warns not to be jealous of evil people. The writer of Psalm 73 lists some of the reasons he was jealous of proud and wicked people. They were successful, and they did not seem to suffer or have problems (share other things you noted from the chapter). But he finally remembered that God would destroy the wicked people.

REVIEW questions 7-8 from Explore the Text.

IN MY CONTEXT

REVIEW the main points of the session and questions from In My Context (p. 30). **ENCOURAGE** the group to do the daily readings this week and meet with someone for Connect and Share. **PRAY**, asking God to help us show His love and compassion with other people.

THE CHOICE

Proverbs 4:11-27

PLAN AHEAD

Pray for group members to make wise choices.

Choose some questions from Explore the Text to use for discussion of the verses in each section.

Prepare to answer questions members might have from the daily readings for last week.

FOCUS ATTENTION

Have you ever noticed that many physical problems come from not eating right or from the lack of exercise? When we eat right and exercise, we feel better. We sleep better. We look better. Doing the right things help. On the other hand, when we eat junk food, we tend to want more junk food. When we are lazy, we become more and more lazy. Every day we can choose to become healthier physically or not.

In a similar way, we can choose wisely in our spiritual lives. When we follow God's wisdom, we will experience life. We can choose every day to become spiritually healthy.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. The Path to Take (Proverbs 4:11-13)

CALL FOR a volunteer to sign verses 11-13. **EXPLAIN:** Many of us have felt overwhelmed in life. There are problems in life. The world is full of evil. But we know the One (God) with answers. When we trust God to lead, we will know the right path.

INVITE the group to find John 14:6 in their Bibles. **ASK** a volunteer to sign it for the group. **EXPLAIN:** The right path is Jesus. He is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the only way to a relationship with the Father (John 14:6).

LEAD the group in a discussion of questions 1-4 from Explore the Text.

2. The Path to Avoid (Proverbs 4:14-19)

Solomon warned his readers strongly. He begged them not to follow evil people. **SIGN** verses 14-15. **ASK:** Why is it so dangerous to follow the ways of the wicked? **LEAD** the group to read verses 16-17 together. These verses make it clear the wicked are never satisfied. Their wicked actions lead to more wickedness.

SIGN verses 18-19. **ASK:** What picture does Solomon use to compare the good person with the wicked? **EXPLAIN:** The Bible often has the idea of light connected with good and godly action and darkness connected with wickedness. We see a clear choice to make. In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus gave another picture of two paths. One has a narrow gate that leads to life. The other path through the wide gate leads to destruction.

3. The Choice to Make (Proverbs 4:20-27)

CREATE teams of three or four. **LEAD** the teams to read verses 20-27 together and make a list of actions Solomon told his readers to do. After a few minutes. **CALL** the teams back together and let each team share their lists with the larger group. **EXPLAIN:** As believers, we should want to follow the right path. Our lives should look much different from the way of the world. We have the Holy Spirit living in us, giving us the power to follow God's wisdom. Philippians 2:13 says, "God is working in you to help you want to do and be able to do what pleases Him."

TAKE TIME to find the verses in the Bible Skill and fill in the blanks together.

IN MY CONTEXT

REVIEW the main points of the session and questions from In My Context (p. 38). This session may encourage non-believers to make a decision to trust Jesus as their Savior. **BE READY** to help those who need guidance.

ENCOURAGE everyone to do the daily readings this week and meet with someone for Connect and Share. **CLOSE** with prayer, thanking God for the power He gives us to make the right choices in life.

Following God's Design

Proverbs 5:3-11,15-18

PLAN AHEAD

Pray for group members to understand the importance of faithfulness to their spouses.

Choose some questions from Explore the Text to use for discussion of the verses in each section.

Enlist three volunteers to each sign one section of the verses for the session.

FOCUS ATTENTION

EXPLAIN: Today's session is about following God's plan for marriage and sexual relationships. Solomon focused on the temptation to commit adultery. The Ten Commandments include the law to not be guilty of adultery. Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, "You must not be guilty of adultery." But I tell you that if anyone looks at a woman and wants to sin sexually with her, in his mind he has already done that sin with the woman" (Matthew 5:27-28).

SUMMARIZE the information in the introduction of the session (p. 43) to begin the study for today. **NOTE** the list of activities in the first paragraph that damage relationships.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. See the Reality (Proverbs 5:3-6)

INVITE the first volunteer to sign verses 3-6. The title of this first section of Scriptures is "See the Reality." **EXPLAIN:** Solomon gave a clear picture of how the temptation to sin can look good. Just as Satan made the fruit of the tree look wonderful to Eve, sin still looks good to people today. It seems to offer pleasure and fun. But the reality is not good. The reality is that in the end sin brings heartache.

INVITE the group to share examples of how sin can destroy. **INCLUDE** a discussion of questions 1-5 from Explore the Text (p. 45).

2. Think about the Future Cost (Proverbs 5:7-11)

EXPLAIN: Most people understand that decisions have consequences. For example, when we think about buying a new car, we figure how much we will need to pay for the next four or five years. We look at all our expenses to see if we can afford to add the car payment to our monthly bills. Or maybe we want to join a sports team. We will consider how much time we will spend on practice and going to games. We think about how much time it will take away from our families. We must think about what our decisions will mean in our future.

Solomon warned his readers about the cost of adultery. **INVITE** the second volunteer to sign verses 7-11. **ENCOURAGE** the group to watch for the consequences of adultery. **LEAD** in a discussion of the consequences Solomon listed. Also, **DISCUSS** questions 6-7 from Explore the Text.

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

CALL ON the third volunteer to sign verses 15-18. **EXPLAIN:** God made sex for married couples to enjoy. They should keep their promises to be faithful to each other. Solomon used several pictures to help his readers understand the idea of a married couple's faithfulness to each other. **LEAD** the group to list the pictures Solomon mentioned. Answers include: drinking from your own well, not pouring out your water, and enjoying your wife as a fountain.

Encourage members to share ideas of how believers can resist temptation to sin sexually. They may include suggestions such as: don't spend time alone with someone who is not your spouse, protect your time with your spouse, and find someone who can help you be accountable.

IN MY CONTEXT

REVIEW the main points of the session and questions from In My Context (p. 46). **ENCOURAGE** the group to do the daily readings this week and meet with someone for Connect and Share. **CLOSE** with prayer, asking God to help us consider consequences so we will make wise choices.

Pursuing Wisdom

Proverbs 8:6-21

PLAN AHEAD

Pray for group members to desire God's wisdom.

Choose some questions from Explore the Text to use for discussion of the verses in each section.

Enlist a volunteer to summarize the story in 2 Chronicles 1:1-12 for the session.

Prepare to answer questions members might have from the daily readings for last week.

FOCUS ATTENTION

ASK: What does it mean to pursue wisdom? We usually sign "chase" for that idea. It means we work to get something. **EXPLAIN:** James 3:17 describes God's wisdom in this way: "But the wisdom that comes from God is first of all pure, then peaceful, gentle, and easy to please. This wisdom is always ready to help those who are troubled and to do good for others. It is always fair and honest." This is something all people should want. We should try hard to get wisdom. We should pursue it.

Solomon wrote about wisdom as if it were a person. Wisdom talks to us in Proverbs 8 and tells us how important and valuable she is. She also explains how she gives power to kings and that she is available. When we look for God's wisdom, we will find it.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Valuable (Proverbs 8:6-11)

ASK: What are some things that people think are important in our world today? **EXPLAIN:** Our world puts much emphasis on money and success. People think they should have many things. God's view is different. **SIGN verses 6-11. EXPLAIN:** Solomon listed three things: gold, silver, and rubies. These things were very valuable in his time. If people had these things, they would feel important.

They would be able to take care of their needs. Solomon said wisdom is more important than those valuable things.

We work to make money to support ourselves and our families. It is even more important to work to become wise. God's wisdom is true and right. We see this in His Word. We can trust everything He says.

2. Powerful (Proverbs 8:12-16)

INVITE the volunteer to sign the story from 2 Chronicles 1:1-12.

EXPLAIN: Many of you probably remember how Solomon asked for wisdom. He knew how important it would be for a king to have true wisdom from God. Kings had to make difficult decisions. Their decisions would influence many people in their countries. Solomon's wisdom made him famous. People still know him as a wise king. This is why he told his readers that wisdom is powerful.

SIGN verses 12-16. **DISCUSS** questions 6-8 from Explore the Text (p. 53).

3. We Can Find It (Proverbs 8:17-21)

EXPLAIN: God does not intend for us to struggle to know Him. He gave us His Word. He sent His Son to give us a way to Him. It makes sense that He would make His wisdom available to us as well. We only need to seek Him, and we will find Him. **SIGN** verses 17-21. **ASK:** Do you think this means God wants to make us rich with money? What does He mean?

INVITE the group to find James 1:5 in their Bibles. **ENCOURAGE** members to share times they have depended on God's wisdom in their lives.

If there is still time, **FIND** the verses in the Bible Skill as a group. **DISCUSS** what God's wisdom does for us.

IN MY CONTEXT

REVIEW the main points of the session and questions from In My Context (p. 54). **ENCOURAGE** the group to do the daily readings this week and meet with someone for Connect and Share. **CLOSE** with prayer, thanking God for making His wisdom available to all of His children.

LIVING WISELY

Proverbs 14:8-15

PLAN AHEAD

Pray for group members to eagerly study the Bible so they will have knowledge and wisdom from God.

Write the outline for the verses on the board.

Enlist four volunteers to sign the pairs of verses for the session.

Prepare to share the story of the builders from Matthew 7:24-27 during the session.

FOCUS ATTENTION

EXPLAIN: Deaf people often use American Sign Language in artistic ways. Some create stories or poems using only one or two handshapes. Others create stories using the handshapes for numbers or the ASL fingerspelled alphabet in order. These are ways to make a story interesting and artistic. It also helps people to remember the stories.

The verses for today's session are in a pattern that helped the readers remember the message. Solomon wrote them in a chiasmus pattern. Look at the explanation of the chiasmus pattern in the introduction to the session. We will look at the verses grouped a little differently because of this pattern.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Thinking First (Proverbs 14:8,15)

INVITE the first volunteer to sign verses 8 and 15. **ASK:** How did Solomon describe a foolish person? How is the wise person different?

EXPLAIN: One way a wise person can seek knowledge is by reading and studying the Bible, God's Word. In Acts, Luke mentioned how the people in Berea were eager to learn from Paul, but they did not just immediately accept his message. They studied the Scripture (Acts 17:11). They wanted to be sure Paul's message agreed with the Bible. When we seek knowledge from God, we will be wise.

2. Content (Proverbs 14:9,14)

CALL on the second volunteer to sign verses 9 and 14. **EXPLAIN**:

Suppose someone broke something that belonged to another person. If the person is foolish, he might deny breaking it, or he would not care and not offer to pay for the broken item. An honest or good person would be sorry and offer to do the right thing.

ASK: What are some consequences an evil person might have for their actions? How are good people rewarded for their good actions? **ENCOURAGE** the group to share examples.

3. Joyful (Proverbs 14:10,13)

INVITE the third volunteer to sign verses 10 and 13. **EXPLAIN:** These verses explain how difficult it is to truly know a person's emotions. People could be smiling on the outside and yet have grief in their lives that they don't share with others. People could also have deep joy in their lives but have difficult events happening around them. Only God knows our true emotions and understands our difficulties.

As believers, we have the Holy Spirit living in us. The fruit of the Spirit includes joy. That joy is in us through all things. When we grieve the death of a loved one, we can still have a continual joy because of our relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ.

4. Confident (Proverbs 14:11-12)

ASK the third volunteer to sign verses 11-12. **EXPLAIN:** Jesus told a story about a foolish man and a wise man in Matthew. This story gives a clear picture of what it means to follow God's wisdom. Watch the story to see what the foundation should be for the builders' houses.

SIGN the story from Matthew 7:24-27. **ASK**: What was the foundation of the wise man's home? How can we be sure that we have the right foundation for our lives?

IN MY CONTEXT

REVIEW the main points of the session and questions from In My Context (p. 62). **ENCOURAGE** the group to do the daily readings this week and meet with someone for Connect and Share. **CLOSE** with prayer, asking God to help us find joy in His wisdom.

PLEASING GOD

Proverbs 15:33-16:11

PLAN AHEAD

Pray for group members to have a desire to please God.

Choose some questions from Explore the Text to use for discussion of the verses in each section.

Write the outline for the session on the board.

FOCUS ATTENTION

EXPLAIN: If you are a parent, you know how it feels when your children want to please you. When they are willing to learn from you, you want to teach them how to do well in life. You know that as they obey you, they will be safe and more successful. Our heavenly Father is a perfect Father. If we, as imperfect people, want good things for our children, imagine how our perfect Father must feel. He desires to teach us and lead us. We must have a teachable heart so we can learn to please Him.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Showing Wisdom (Proverbs 15:33; 16:8)

EXPLAIN: The best example of humility is the life of Jesus. "When he was living as a man, he humbled himself and was fully obedient to God, even when that caused his death—death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). Our respect for God, a humble attitude, and obedience will make us ready to learn of His wisdom. It shows God we want to please Him. As we understand God is sovereign and He knows all things, we will humbly learn from Him.

2. Accountable (Proverbs 16:1,4-5,9)

SIGN Proverbs 16:1,4-5,9. **EXPLAIN:** These verses make it clear that God is in control of all things. We may think we are in charge of our lives, but God makes the final decisions. All people will answer to God.

God will judge people on their decision to accept or reject Christ. Those who choose Him will have life forever with God. Those who reject Him will be separated from Him forever.

ASK: Why does God hate proud people? How do people show a proud attitude?

3. Reasons are Important (Proverbs 16:2,10-11)

SIGN verses 2, 10, and 11. **ASK:** Why are the reasons for our actions important to God? Why would wrong reasons not please Him?

EXPLAIN: In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul described godly love. He listed several actions that are useless if there is no love behind those actions. The reasons for our actions are important.

ASK: What are the two examples Solomon gave of right actions that please God? (See verses 10 and 11.) What are some other examples you can think of that happen in our world today?

4. Blessing (Proverbs 16:3,6-7)

INVITE the group to watch for ways that God blesses His people who respect Him and please Him, as you sign verses 3, 6, and 7.

EXPLAIN: Verse 3 does not mean believers will not have problems. We know that in our world we will experience difficulty. But, when we depend on God and follow His wisdom, He will help us know the right paths.

Verse 6 talks about the blessing of love and forgiveness. **ASK:** How do we receive God's love and forgiveness? Only through our faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. **ASK:** What other blessings do we see in these verses?

As a group, **READ** the verses in the Bible Skill.

IN MY CONTEXT

REVIEW the main points of the session and questions from In My Context (p. 70). **ENCOURAGE** everyone to do the daily readings this week and meet with someone for Connect and Share. **CLOSE** with prayer thanking God for the blessings He gives to believers.

STAYING SOBER

Proverbs 23:17-21,29-35

PLAN AHEAD

Pray for group members to be good managers (stewards) of their money, things, and bodies for God.

Choose some questions from Explore the Text to use for discussion of the verses in each section.

Enlist four volunteers to each sign a section of the verses for the session.

Prepare to answer questions members might have from the daily readings for last week.

FOCUS ATTENTION

ASK: What does it mean to be a good steward? **EXPLAIN:** We often see this word in relation to money. Pastors sometimes preach about being good stewards with the money and other things God gives us. We know our money, time, and the things we have are from God and really belong to Him. We just take care of those things for Him.

Today we will talk about taking care of our bodies. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Paul explained that the Holy Spirit lives in us; God bought us with the blood of Jesus. We should honor God by taking care of our bodies.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. The Promise (Proverbs 23:17-18)

INVITE the first volunteer to sign verses 17-18. **REMIND** the group that other verses in Proverbs warned us not to be jealous of sinners. Instead, we should eagerly respect the Lord and follow His ways. When we do, we will feel secure. As we follow Him, we will have hope for a future.

2. The Request (Proverbs 23:19-21)

CALL ON the second volunteer to sign verses 19-21. **EXPLAIN:** When problems come and life is difficult, some people drink, eat, or use drugs as a way to comfort themselves. This only leads to more problems. It also can lead to addiction. People also tend to join in with others who drink or eat too much. Believers should be different. They should trust God for comfort and depend on Him.

ASK: What eventually happens to people who drink and eat too much? Why does Solomon warn us to stay away from those who drink and eat too much? Who should we fellowship with instead?

3. The Picture (Proverbs 23:29-32)

INVITE the third volunteer to sign verses 29-32. **ASK:** What kinds of problems do people who drink too much or use drugs have? Solomon warned his readers not to stare at wine when it looks good. Why not? What is the end result?

EXPLAIN: When a family has a member who is addicted to alcohol or drugs, the family suffers with that member. If the father in the family uses alcohol or drugs, the family may not have enough food to eat or clothes to wear. Too much of the family's money goes to buy the alcohol or drugs. Addiction hurts more people, not just the addict.

4. The Problem (Proverbs 23:33-35)

CALL ON the fourth volunteer to sign verses 33-35. **EXPLAIN:** This is another picture of the effects of addiction. Someone who is drunk may feel terrible later, but they will still want to drink again. Proverbs 26:11 says, "A fool who repeats his foolishness is like a dog that goes back to what it has thrown up." Even when the addict knows they hurt themselves and others, they still want more.

As a group, **FIND** the verses in the Bible Skill to find ways God can help people with addictions.

IN MY CONTEXT

REVIEW the main points of the session and questions from In My Context (p. 78). **ENCOURAGE** the group to do the daily readings this week and meet with someone for Connect and Share. **CLOSE** with prayer, asking God to help us as believers to encourage each other and keep each other accountable.

ACCEPTING DISCIPLINE

Proverbs 29:1-3,12-20

PLAN AHEAD

Pray for group members.

Choose some questions from Explore the Text to use for the discussion of the verses in each section.

Prepare to answer questions members might have from the daily readings for last week.

FOCUS ATTENTION

SHARE the following story: A couple had a little girl. Very often when they called out to her, she would run away from them. They tried to teach her but she thought it was funny to run from them. One day she ran into the street. Her parents called to her but she ran away from them and into danger.

The point of the story is we must accept discipline and learn from it. God's desire is for us to have a good life. He disciplines us and allows others to discipline us for our own good.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. The Goal (Proverbs 29:1-3)

SIGN verses 1-3. **DISCUSS** questions 1-2 from Explore the Text. Our goal as believers is to honor God in all we do. We should want others to know Him like we do. This means we must learn from Him and appreciate the ways He has taught us during our lifetime. We try to become more and more like Him so we can bring others to Him.

2. Available (Proverbs 29:12-14)

ASK: What kind of leader do you want for your country, your state, or your church? **LEAD** in a discussion of characteristics a good leader should have. **SIGN** verses 12-14. **EXPLAIN:** Solomon described a bad leader in verse 12

and a good leader in verse 14. The leader in both verses had influence on the people around them. When a leader is fair, his kingdom will be strong.

ASK: What do you think Solomon meant when he said God gave eyes to the poor person and the cruel person? **EXPLAIN:** God's wisdom is available for all people. God gave them all sight—the ability to seek and find God's wisdom. He does not hide it. He desires for people to have His wisdom. **ASK:** How can we find His wisdom?

3. The Responsibility (Proverbs 29:15-17)

SIGN verses 15-17. **ASK:** Why is it important for parents to correct and teach their children? Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train children to live the right way, and when they are old, they will not stray from it." If parents do not teach or correct their children, the children may become foolish adults.

Parents must be careful how they punish children. They must not abuse their children or be too harsh with them. Any discipline must be given with love and patience. Ephesians 6:4 says, "Fathers, do not make your children angry, but raise them with the training and teaching of the Lord."

4. The Source (Proverbs 29:18-20)

SIGN verses 18-20. **EXPLAIN:** There are three important messages for us in these verses. First, we must remember that God's Word is our source for teaching and correction. When we pay attention to Him and learn from Him, we find joy. Second, telling someone what to do is not enough. Our actions should support our teaching. In that way, we can share God's wisdom.

The third warning from Solomon was not to speak too quickly. James 1:19 also tells us we should "always be willing to listen and slow to speak." This does not mean we must sign slowly. It means we should think before we say something. It is wise to think first so our message will be helpful to others.

In smaller groups, **DO** the Bible Skill and **DISCUSS** the verses in the Bible Skill.

IN MY CONTEXT

REVIEW the main points of the session and questions from In My Context (p. 86). **ENCOURAGE** everyone to do the daily readings this week and meet with someone for Connect and Share. **CLOSE** with prayer, asking God to help us recognize and value discipline in our lives.

FINDING HONOR

Proverbs 31:10-16,23-31

PLAN AHEAD

Pray for group members to faithfully honor God in their lives.

Choose some questions from Explore the Text to use for discussion of the verses in each section.

Enlist four volunteers to sign the sections of verses for the session.

Prepare to answer questions members might have from the daily readings for last week.

FOCUS ATTENTION

EXPLAIN: Many of you may have seen the description of the good wife in Proverbs 31. Some women feel like the good wife is too perfect and it is impossible to be like her. However, all believers, both men and women, can learn principles to apply in our lives from the good wife. As we show God's wisdom in our actions, like the good wife, we will honor Him.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

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

INVITE the first volunteer to sign verses 10-12. **ASK:** What kinds of people do you trust? What characteristics do they have? The husband of the good wife trusted her. Notice that she did good to him "as long as she lives." She was committed to him. In our world, many people do not understand the idea of commitment. When a couple marries, they make promises to stay together through all things in life. But we often hear about people divorcing because they don't love each other anymore. Love is a choice we make. It is important for believers to do as they promise to each other.

LEAD in a discussion of questions 1-3 from Explore the Text.

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

CALL ON the second volunteer to sign verses 13-16. **EXPLAIN:** We may not do the same kinds of things the good woman did. We don't make cloth or buy vineyards, but we can see principles to apply in our lives. We can work to be sure our families have clothing and food. The good woman got up early, which means she was not lazy. She used good judgment to buy the vineyard. We can use good judgment also by spending our money wisely.

Just as the good woman took care of her family, believers should care for their families. 1 Timothy 5:8 says, "Whoever does not care for his own relatives, especially his own family members, has turned against the faith and is worse than someone who does not believe in God." When we take care of our families, we honor God.

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

INVITE the third volunteer to sign verses 23-27. **EXPLAIN:** We can see in these verses that the community respected the woman and her husband. They likely supported each other in their commitment to honor God. **ASK:** What other things do you notice about the woman? (Answers could include: She is wise, teaches others to be kind, she doesn't waste time, etc.) **NOTE** that she "looks forward to the future with joy." She could do that because she was prepared; she did not need to worry.

4. Honored through Fearing God (Proverbs 31:28-31)

CALL ON the third volunteer to sign verses 28-31. **EXPLAIN:** It is a wonderful thing that the woman's children and husband praised her. They saw her every day. They knew her life and character better than anyone else. Some families behave nicely when they are at church, but then at home they do not honor God. This is confusing for children, and they often do not respect their parents when they see conflicting actions. As parents honor the Lord with their lives at all times, God will honor them.

LEAD in a discussion of question 10 from Explore the Text.

IN MY CONTEXT

REVIEW the main points of the session and questions from In My Context (p. 94). **ENCOURAGE** the group to do the daily readings this week and meet with someone for Connect and Share. **CLOSE** with prayer, asking God to help us show His wisdom to others through our lives.

RELATIONAL

FOUNDATIONS

Song of Songs 2:15–3:5

PLAN AHEAD

Pray for group members to protect their marriages and the marriages of others.

Choose some questions from Explore the Text to use for discussion of the verses in each section.

Enlist a volunteer to summarize the information about the Book of Song of Songs (p. 6) for the session.

Write the outline on the board for the session.

Prepare to answer questions members might have from the daily readings for last week.

FOCUS ATTENTION

INVITE the volunteer to share introductory information about the Song of Songs. **EXPLAIN**: The book is poetic and uses many pictures from nature. Bible teachers have different interpretations for the meaning of the poem. They do agree that the writer beautifully describes the deep love between a husband and wife.

SHARE information about God's plan for relationships from the introduction to the session (p. 99).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Preventative Care (Song of Songs 2:15)

BRING ATTENTION TO the title for this section. **ASK:** What does "preventative care" mean? We often see these words in relation to taking care of our teeth. Dentists encourage patients to brush their teeth and floss. They also tell them to stay away from sugar. All these things help prevent cavities that

ruin teeth. **SIGN** verse **2:15**. **EXPLAIN:** Foxes were dangerous to vineyards. They could destroy the vines and ruin the crop of grapes. The foxes represent the problems that could damage a marriage. Solomon warned his readers to be careful to protect the marriage relationship.

ASK: What kinds of things are dangerous to a marriage? (Spending time alone with another man or woman, pornography, selfishness, etc.) What can couples do to prevent problems in marriage?

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

SIGN verses 2:16-17. **EXPLAIN**: Verse 16 makes it clear that the husband and wife are committed to each other. They belong to each other. Verse 17 is a picture of how the husband and wife enjoy each other physically. God intended for married couples to enjoy His gift of sex.

INVITE the group to find Genesis 2:24 in their Bibles. **DISCUSS** God's plan for husbands and wives based on this verse. This has been God's plan from the beginning.

LEAD the group to find Ephesians 5:21 and Philippians 2:3. **DISCUSS** how husbands and wives can submit to each other and think of each other more than themselves.

3. Control Required (Song of Songs 3:1-5)

EXPLAIN: Some Bible teachers believe the next verses describe a dream the bride had. It tells how strong her desire is for her husband. It also includes a warning to avoid any sexual temptation outside of marriage. **SIGN** verses 3:1-5. Also **INVITE** the group to find Hebrews 13:4 in their Bibles. **NOTICE** again that in God's plan the husband and wife should enjoy each other physically.

CREATE two teams. **LEAD** team one to find Ephesians 5:21-24,33. Team two will find Ephesians 25-31,33. They should discuss the verses as a group and list the responsibilities of a wife (team one) and husband (team two). After some time for discussion, **ALLOW** each group to share what they found with the rest of the group.

IN MY CONTEXT

REVIEW the main points of the session and questions from In My Context (p. 102). **ENCOURAGE** the group to do the daily readings this week and meet with someone for Connect and Share. **CLOSE** with prayer, thanking God for His plan for the marriage relationship.

Investing in Relationships

Song of Songs 5:6-16

PLAN AHEAD

Pray for group members to spend time building up their relationships with God and with others.

Choose some questions from Explore the Text to use for discussion of the verses in each section.

Prepare to answer questions members might have from the daily readings for last week.

FOCUS ATTENTION

EXPLAIN: The title for today's session is "Investing in Relationships." When we talk about investing, we usually think of investing money. This means we spend money hoping to earn more money. When we invest in relationships, we spend time in the relationship learning about the other person. We show our concern and love for another.

Our most important relationship is with God. We should be spending time with Him, learning more about Him, and obeying Him. The second most important relationship people have is with their husband or wife, if married. Today we will learn more from the Song of Songs about this relationship.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. The Desire for a Companion (Song of Songs 5:6-8)

SIGN verses 5:6-8. **EXPLAIN**: Some Bible teachers believe these verses tell about another dream the bride had. She was looking for her husband. She very much wanted to be with him. She needed emotional support from him. Other people could not give her the emotional support she needed.

Husbands and wives need to be ready to support each other. Unfortunately, sometimes couples compete with each other for support. Their attitude is more "What about me?" than "What can I do for you?" We must practice honoring each other and showing God's love to each other.

DIRECT the group to find 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 in their Bibles. **LEAD** in a discussion of what love looks like. **GUIDE** the group to think of ways to show His love to others.

2. The Call to Remember (Song of Songs 5:9)

SIGN verse 5:9. EXPLAIN: The bride's friends asked a question that helped her remember why she loved her husband. It is important for husbands and wives to remember the reasons they fell in love and got married. As life becomes busy with many responsibilities, it is sometimes easy to forget.

3. Affirmation (Song of Songs 5:10-16)

In the next verses, the bride answers and explains why she loves her husband. **SIGN** verses 5:10-16. **EXPLAIN:** When the bride described her husband, it was clear that she loved him and still desired him. When husbands and wives talk in a positive way about their spouses, it shows respect and love for them. This is an important part of a Christian marriage.

There was an older couple who clearly loved each other. One day their young niece came for a visit. She went outside to talk with her uncle and play with his dog, Lucky. When the niece, came inside she told her aunt that Lucky was a stinky dog. Her aunt answered, "You know your uncle loves Lucky, so we never say anything bad about him." This is a good lesson for us to remember that even in small things, we can support and show love for our spouses.

LEAD in a discussion of ways husbands and wives can show support for each other.

IN MY CONTEXT

REVIEW the main points of the session and questions from In My Context (p. 110). **ENCOURAGE** everyone to do the daily readings this week and meet with someone for Connect and Share. **CLOSE** with prayer, asking God to help us show our love and support for our spouses and others.

LEADER PACK

PACK ITEM 1 (Sessions 1-13) *Map: Solomon's Economic Enterprises*Use the map on page 147 or locate a map in a Bible atlas that shows the locations of Shunem and Jerusalem during the time of Solomon.

PACK ITEM 2 (Sessions 1-13) *Outlines of Proverbs and Song of Songs*Refer to outlines for Proverbs and Song of Songs in the CSB Study Bible.

PACK ITEM 3 (Sessions 2,3,8,10,11)

Poster: Key Words in Proverbs

Create a poster that lists the following keywords from the Book of Proverbs:

Fear
 Wisdom
 Understanding

Foolish
 Knowledge
 Justice

• Righteousness • Guard • Wicked

Discipline
 Instruction
 Delight

PACK ITEM 4 (Sessions 4,6,11)

Poster: Wisdom Teaching in Proverbs

Use the Holman Illustrated Study Bible to create a poster that explains the different kinds of wisdom teaching in Proverbs.

PACK ITEM 5 (Session 13)

Poster: Cedars of Lebanon

Locate an image of cedar trees that could represent the cedars mentioned in Song of Songs 5:15b.

PACK ITEM 6 (Sessions 1,11,13)

Key Verse: Proverbs 1:7a

Create a poster that lists Proverbs 1:7a: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge ..."

PACK ITEM 7 (Sessions 1,9)

Handout: Solomon Time Line

Locate a study Bible with a time line of the major people and events leading up to and during Solomon's life (from 3000 BC–900 BC). Use it as a reference during this study.

PACK ITEM 8 (Sessions 1-13)

Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark

Make a list of these suggested memory verses to distribute to your group:

Proverbs 1:7Proverbs 3:5-6

Proverbs 3:5-6 • Proverbs 3:27

• Proverbs 12:22 • Proverbs 15:3

• Proverbs 15:3 • Proverbs 23:19

Proverbs 13:1

• Proverbs 22:19

• Proverbs 6:20

• 1 John 4:19

• Proverbs 9:10

• Song of Songs 6:1

• Proverbs 4:26

PACK ITEM 9 (Sessions 3,10)

Handout: Themes of Proverbs

Use a Bible dictionary or handbook to create a handout that discusses the major themes of Proverbs.

PACK ITEM 10 (Sessions 3,11)

Handout: The Four Contributors

Use a Bible dictionary or commentary to create a chart that explains the four contributors to the Book of Proverbs (Solomon, Hezekiah's Men, Agur, and King Lemuel).

PACK ITEM 11 (Sessions 6,8,9)

Handout: Fear of God

Create a handout for your group that explains the meaning behind fearing God.

PACK ITEM 12 (Sessions 5,7)

Handout: Wisdom in Proverbs

Use a Bible dictionary or concordance to create a handout that shares various Old and New Testament verses that use the word *wisdom*.

PACK ITEM 13 (Sessions 5,7)

Handout: Fool in Proverbs

Use a study Bible or a Hebrew dictionary to create a handout that defines the following key words from Proverbs:

• kesiyl • ewiyl • chakam • daʻath

PACK ITEM 14 (Sessions 12,13)

Handout: Interpreting Song of Songs

Use a Bible commentary to create a handout that explains the various interpretations of Song of Songs. Note that the best interpretation is the most simple and obvious. Song of Songs is a love song in three parts—a man, a woman, and a chorus of women.

Gold, gems, perfumes, precious woods, nony Possible home of the Shulammite woman Song of Songs 6:13) Arabia Ophir Yathrib (Medina) ARAM Tadmor Sold, exotic animals, . Haran Horses *Damascus precious stones Ezion-gebe woods, silver, ETHIOPIA Thebes Solomon's Economic Enterprises ASIA Memphis. War charlots | EGYPT Opium, copper to witness Solomon's reputed wisdom (2 Chron, 9:1-12) Queen of Sheba traveled to Jerusalem MACEDONIA "solomon's World" is adapted from the Holman Bible Atlas (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2014), 107. Used by permission. NORTH AFRICA Lead Massalia (Marseilles) SOLOMON'S ECONOMIC ENTERPRISES City (uncertain location) - Phoenician connection Other import routes 2 CHR. 1:14-17; 3-8; 9 City (modern name) Arabian spice trade Solomon's kingdom Red Sea trade Cold Commodity SPAIN Silver, tin, copper, iron Cadiz

Proverbs; Song of Songs

he Promise of a

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come unto thee, to ke

People want to succeed in life. Whether it's at work, relationships, or finances, the drive to thrive draws people to quick fixes and easy steps, often from TV talk shows, books, or the Internet. What we learn from the beginning of the Book of Proverbs, however, is that true wisdom comes from God, and the starting point of a life well lived is a relationship with Him. From there. Proverbs addresses a wide assortment of life issues—living with integrity, avoiding foolish choices, and resisting temptation receive serious consideration. The Song of Songs shows us how to put God's wisdom to work nourishing relationships that will endure, with particular attention given to marriage relationships. In these two books you will find timely guidance for



Let the Word dwell in you.

wise living.