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While many books of the Bible are filled with deep spiritual and theological truths, the book of Proverbs is filled with practical and down-to-earth advice for daily living.

Brief, well-balanced, poetic, salty, and often humorous, the proverbs are universal, easy to memorize, and make their points well, sometimes even more efficiently than do eloquent speeches and rigorous argumentation.

For instance, “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise” (Prov. 6:6, NKJV). Or, “It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman” (Prov. 21:19). Or, “If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you” (Prov. 25:21, 22, NIV). Who is going to forget those types of images?

The book of Proverbs is a witness to the wisdom that had been accumulated over generations. Its human authors are referred to as King Solomon (Prov. 1:1–9:18, 10:1–22:16, Proverbs 25–29); as unidentified “wise men” from the ancient Near Eastern world (Prov. 22:17–24:22, 24:23–34); and as the non-Israelite Agur (Prov. 30:1–33). The book even acknowledges King Hezekiah’s editorial contributions (Prov. 25:1). In some cases, too, the book reflects other ancient Near Eastern texts, especially those from ancient Egypt.

Yet, the book of Proverbs is the Word of God, because it was under divine inspira-
tion that the authors pulled their materials together. Although God is rarely explicitly mentioned in the texts, He is always present: wherever we are in the marketplace, or as we speak, eat, drink, work, buy, sell, socialize, and love, the Lord is there. The God of Proverbs is not just the God of a religious person, whether a priest or a worshiper in the pew. Godliness is here put into working clothes.

The book of Proverbs also teaches about what it means to fear God (Prov. 1:7, 31:30), not just in church but as we go about our daily lives, because the way we live speaks louder than the way we preach, pray, or even sacrifice (Prov. 28:9, 15:8).

In Proverbs, “wisdom” is revealed when you acknowledge the Lord “in all your ways” (Prov. 3:6, NKJV); that is, wisdom is living in faith and in obedience; it’s about what it means to be human before the God of Creation.

From the book of Proverbs, we will learn how to be wise, but concretely, in practical ways. The book answers such questions as, *What and how should I teach my children? How can I be happy and successful? Why do I have money problems? How can I get a promotion in my job? How can I resist sexual temptations? How should I cope with my anger or my tongue?*

Finally, wisdom isn’t necessarily intellectual might. On the contrary, the one who is sure of his or her brainpower is in the most danger of playing the fool, because even the smartest person knows so little. One may think of oneself as already wise and therefore as having no need to seek more knowledge. The prerequisite for wisdom is, instead, to be humble, to feel our need, and then to ask for wisdom.

Proverbs is deep and rich, and it deals with many topics. Because of the limitations of space, we’ve had to pick and choose which material we could cover. We can’t cover it all, but all that we have is, indeed, worthy of our prayerful study.

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How to Use
This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

**Step 1—Motivate:** Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

**Step 2—Explore:** Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

**Step 3—Apply:** Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

**Step 4—Create:** Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.
The Call of Wisdom

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7, NKJV).

From Eden onward, the root of human tragedy lies in wrong choices. “Man lost all because he chose to listen to the deceiver rather than to Him who is Truth, who alone has understanding. By the mingling of evil with good, his mind had become confused.” —Ellen G. White, Education, p. 25.

The book of Proverbs is all about helping us to make right choices, to choose the way of God and not that of the deceiver. The father or the mother, speaking to their son, not only warns him against wrong choices but also encourages him to make the right ones. This is so important because the choices we make are literally matters of life and death.

The first three chapters of Proverbs illustrate this method of education. After having explained the purpose of the book: “to know wisdom” (Prov. 1:2), and having laid down the motto of the book: “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7; compare 9:10), the author moves back and forth from warning us against listening to foolishness to urging us to respond to the call of heavenly wisdom.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 3.
The Beginning of Wisdom

In Proverbs 1:1–6, the title “the proverbs of Solomon the son of David” (Prov. 1:1) establishes a link between this proverb and 1 Kings 3:5–14. In Kings (as in the book of Proverbs), Solomon is presented as a son seeking wisdom from God. In addition to both referring to Solomon as “the son of David,” the two texts share significant common wording: “understand,” “wisdom,” “judgment.” Not only do these parallels confirm Solomon as the one behind the composition of the book, they also show that Proverbs is dealing with the human quest for wisdom from God.

Read Proverbs 1:7. What is wisdom? What is “the fear of the Lord”? How do these two concepts relate to each other?

“Wisdom” here is defined as a religious experience. It is related to the fear of the Lord. This important concept of the Hebrew religion is key to Proverbs. Not only does it occur repeatedly, but it also frames the entire book (Prov. 1:7, 31:30).

The fear of the Lord has nothing to do with the superstitious and childish fear of divine punishment. Instead, it should be understood as the acute consciousness of God’s personal presence at all times and everywhere. The fear of the Lord had characterized the people’s reaction to God’s revelation at Sinai (Exod. 19:16, 20:20), just as it explained their commitment to be faithful and to love God in response to His covenant with them (Deut. 10:12).

In short, to fear God means to be faithful to God and to love Him. The phrase “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of . . . wisdom” means that wisdom originates in this “fear.” The Hebrew word for “beginning” (reshit) points to the first word introducing the Creation story (Gen. 1:1). The first lesson of wisdom, then, deals with understanding that God is our Creator, the One who gives us life and breath, and that He is always present—a God of love, justice, and redemption (John 3:16, Ps. 89:14, Heb. 9:12).

We are told to love God and also to fear Him. How do these two concepts relate to your own experience with the Lord?
Read Proverbs 1:8–19. What two contrasting ways of “education” are presented in these verses? What’s the basic message here, not just for parents but for everyone who fears the Lord?

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Education is, first of all, a family matter, and true education comes, first and foremost, from the parents. In these verses, this education is called “instruction” and even “law.” The Hebrew word for law, torah, means “direction.” The parents are to point their children in the right direction. In contrast, the other type of “education” is not identified, not given a name. It is simply acknowledged as the voice of sinners, which leads in the wrong direction.

Also, the words “my son,” not to be taken in a gender exclusive sense, are repeated many times, emphasizing parental instruction. Each parent—“your father,” “your mother” (NKJV)—is clearly identified in the singular and is personally involved, while the other camp is an anonymous plural, “sinners.”

“In His wisdom the Lord has decreed that the family shall be the greatest of all educational agencies. It is in the home that the education of the child is to begin. Here is his first school. Here, with his parents as instructors, he is to learn the lessons that are to guide him throughout life. . . . The educational influences of the home are a decided power for good or for evil. . . . If the child is not instructed aright here, Satan will educate him through agencies of his choosing.”—Ellen G. White, The Adventist Home, p. 182.

The best argument on behalf of family education is its results. These are the inner qualities of character, which are like ornaments on the head and around the neck. In the Middle Eastern culture, precious collars and bracelets were passed on from parents to children as a heritage of value. Education matters more, though, than material riches. The time spent with our children will be of much greater value for them than the time spent at our businesses. Also, the reference to the neck and the head, which is the individual’s face, suggests that education will shape his or her personality. In the way of fools or sinners, only the feet (Prov. 1:15) are mentioned, as if the wayward son had lost his identity.

How can we learn to resist the temptations that culture, society, friends, or even family might throw our way?
The Call of Wisdom

**Read** Proverbs 1:20, 21. How is wisdom presented here? What are we being told?

While the sinners “lie in wait” and “lurk secretly” (Prov. 1:11, 18, NKJV), wisdom “calls aloud outside” (vs. 20, NKJV), “cries out in the chief concourses” (vs. 21, NKJV), and “speaks her words” (vs. 21, NKJV). Wisdom is here personified, and her offer is given to the man and the woman on the street. It is for everyone in the real business of life. Amid the noise and rancor of so many products and so many sellers, the call of wisdom must be loud; otherwise, she would not be heard against the clamor of so many other voices.

**Read** Proverbs 1:22–32. What is the result of rejecting wisdom?

The reason that people reject wisdom has nothing to do with wisdom itself and everything to do with the character of those who reject her. These are described as arrogant and disdainful (Prov. 1:25; compare vs. 30), as if they know better. The implication is that wisdom is for the naive and the simple. And yet, those who reject wisdom are simple and naive; they are fools who “hate knowledge” (Prov. 1:22, NKJV; compare vs. 29).

Those who reject wisdom will reap the fruit of their rejection. Having refused to choose the fear of the Lord, they will have to be content with themselves: they will be “full with their own fancies” (Prov. 1:31, NKJV). When we reject wisdom from above, we often end up with the fables and lies that we fabricate for ourselves or the fables and lies that others fabricate for us and that we so readily accept. In this way, we replace God with idols. Ironically, those who despise religion, mocking those they judge as simple and naive, often are superstitious in their own way, placing value on the most fleeting and useless things that, in the end, can never satisfy the most basic needs of the heart.

**Read** Proverbs 1:33. Given the context in what came before, what promise and hope are found here for us? How is this promise manifested in our own experience?
The Benefit of Wisdom

Read Proverbs 2:1–5. What are the conditions for understanding the “fear of the Lord”? What choices do we have to make in this matter?

Three times the discourse is introduced with the conjunction “if,” marking three stages in the progression of education. The first “if” introduces the passive stage of listening; that is, simply being receptive and attentive to the words of wisdom (Prov. 2:1, 2). The second “if” introduces the active response of crying and asking for wisdom (vs. 3). The third “if” introduces passionate involvement in seeking and searching for wisdom as we would for “hidden treasures” (vs. 4).

Read Proverbs 2:6–9. What are the conditions for understanding righteousness? What is God’s responsibility in the acquisition of wisdom?

Note that the phrase “the Lord gives” in verse 6 (NKJV) responds to the phrase “you will . . . find the knowledge of God” in verse 5 (NIV). Wisdom, like salvation, is a gift from God. As much as the first paragraph described the human process, this paragraph describes the divine work: He gives wisdom; He stores wisdom; and He guards and preserves the way of the wise.

Read Proverbs 2:10–22. What happens when wisdom has finally found a home in the heart?

“When wisdom enters your heart,” it marks the final stage of conversion. Not only will we enjoy the knowledge of the Lord, but it will be a pleasant experience to our souls (vs. 10, NKJV). We will also be protected from the way of evil (vs. 12) and from the seduction of evil (vs. 16), and we will walk in the path of righteousness (vs. 20).

Read Proverbs 2:13, 17. What is the first step of wickedness, and where does it lead?

Though we are sinners, we don’t have to fall into evil. The ones depicted as on the wrong path must have first left the right path. Wickedness, then, is understood first of all as a lack of faithfulness. Sin begins subtly and innocently, but before long the sinner not only does wickedly but also enjoys it.

What should it tell you about yourself if, heaven forbid, you enjoy doing evil? Or even worse, if you don’t even deem it evil anymore?
Jan 1

Do Not Forget!

Read Proverbs 3:7. What is the trap of being wise in one’s own eyes?

To be wise in one’s own eyes will lead to the illusion that one does not need God to be wise. This is a hopeless situation. “There is more hope for a fool than for them” (Prov. 26:12, NIV). Again, wisdom is described as a religious commitment. To be wise means to keep God’s commandments (Prov. 3:1), to display “mercy and truth” (vs. 3), and to “trust in the LORD” (vs. 5). Wisdom implies an intimate relationship with God. Note the repeated reference to the heart (vss. 1, 3, 5), the seat of our personal response to God’s influence. (The heart was already mentioned in Proverbs 2:10 as the place wisdom should enter.)

Read Proverbs 3:13–18. What reward comes with the gift of wisdom?

Wisdom is associated with life and health (Prov. 3:2, 8, 16, 18, 22). One of the most suggestive images is the “tree of life” (vs. 18), a promise repeated several times in the book (Prov. 11:30, 13:12, 15:4). This metaphor alludes to the Garden of Eden. This promise does not mean that the acquisition of wisdom will provide eternal life; instead, the idea is that the quality of life with God, which our first parents enjoyed in Eden, can to some measure be recovered. When we live with God, we get some inkling, some hints, of Eden; even better, we learn to hope in the promised recovery of this lost kingdom (see Daniel 7:18).

Read Proverbs 3:19, 20. Why is the need for wisdom so vital?

The sudden reference to the Creation story seems to be out of place in this context. Yet, the use of wisdom at Creation reinforces the argument of verse 18, which associates wisdom with the tree of life. If God used wisdom to create the heavens and the earth, wisdom is not a trivial matter. The scope of wisdom is cosmic, going beyond the limits of our earthly existence. Wisdom concerns our eternal life, as well. This lesson is implied in the reference to the tree of life, reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. This perspective is also contained in the promise that concludes our passage: “The wise shall inherit glory” (Prov. 3:35).

“The youth need to understand the deep truth underlying the Bible statement that with God ‘is the fountain of life.’ Psalm 36:9. Not only is He the originator of all, but He is the life of everything that lives. It is His life that we receive in the sunshine, in the pure, sweet air, in the food which builds up our bodies and sustains our strength. It is by His life that we exist, hour by hour, moment by moment. Except as perverted by sin, all His gifts tend to life, to health and joy.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 197, 198.

“Many cherish the impression that devotion to God is detrimental to health and to cheerful happiness in the social relations of life. But those who walk in the path of wisdom and holiness find that ‘godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.’ They are alive to the enjoyment of life’s real pleasures.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1156.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge? How can someone have a lot of knowledge and not wisdom? After all, who doesn’t know personally, or at least know about, some very knowledgeable people who seem to have no wisdom?

2. Dwell more on the idea of “the fear of the Lord.” If “there is no fear in love” (1 John 4:18), how can we fear the Lord and still love Him? How do we reconcile the tension between justice and love in “the fear of the Lord”?

3. Why is being “wise in one’s own eyes” such a dangerous state to be in, especially when we consider how corrupt the human heart is and how easy it is for us to rationalize just about any behavior we want? Think of those who have rationalized the worst of behaviors. How can we make sure we don’t do the same thing?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Proverbs 1:7, 3:5–9

The Student Will:

Know: Explore the meaning and relevancy of wisdom and the fear of the Lord as the basis of biblical spirituality.
Feel: Foster the presence of God in everyday life.
Do: Implement the fear of the Lord as a fundamental part of his or her lifestyle. Cultivate the sense of God’s closeness and practice discipline in order to experience and nurture a balanced, productive, and happy life.

Learning Outline:
I. Know: Wisdom and the Fear of God
   A How does fearing God open the way for gaining true knowledge and wisdom?
   B What definitions can you provide to explain what it means to fear God?
   C Why is discipline so important in relation to wisdom and fearing the Lord?

II. Feel: Wisdom and Our Motivations
   A How can fear and love be combined?
   B How can you emotionally support the decisions of others to honor God and live according to His revealed will? How can doing so nurture and sustain your own commitments to serve Him and live in His presence?
   C What type of motivations for respecting God may help you to live a harmonious life?

III. Do: Wisdom and Discipline
   A How can you cultivate the awareness of God’s presence?
   B How can the implementation of clear boundaries in life be done without moralizing or falling into the danger of legalism?
   C In what ways can you build a disciplined and meaningful relationship with God?

Summary: The call of wisdom to live in God’s presence enables people to discern between good and evil and do what is right.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Proverbs 1:7, 3:5–9*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The book of Proverbs begins with an introduction emphasizing the importance of true wisdom. Wisdom is a tree of life (3:18; see also 11:30, 13:12, 15:4), creative power (3:19, 20), and more precious than gold or rubies (vss. 14, 15). Without this capacity to discern between good and evil, one cannot live a meaningful life (2:11–16; 3:2, 4, 13, 16, 17). Wisdom not only is the ability to distinguish between good and evil but also involves following what is right (3:5–9), thus acknowledging and honoring God in our daily lives.

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s lesson should help us to understand better the meaning of the “fear of God.” Proverbs presents a sharp contrast between two allegorical women: Wisdom and Folly. The book begins positively by stressing wisdom as the motivation for following a prudent path to a fulfilling life. This wisdom comes from above and is rooted in the fear of the Lord.

**Opening Discussion:**

1. What is the difference between fear as anxiety and terror and fear as respect and worship?

2. Of all the biblical books, Proverbs is the most tightly connected with the lifestyle characterized by “the fear of the Lord.” Why is the concept of the fear of God so dominant in Proverbs and closely related to wisdom and discipline?

3. How can you train your children to fear the Lord? Consider the following: “Parents are to look upon their children as entrusted to them of God to be educated for the family above. Train them in the fear and love of God; for ‘the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 23.

STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** You can appreciate and perceive the relevancy and urgency of God’s call to fear Him when you understand the meaning of His command to “fear the Lord.”
Bible Commentary

The principal theme in wisdom literature is to fear the Lord. You cannot be wise without it. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7, see also Prov. 9:10, Job 28:28, and Ps. 111:10).

I. The Fear of God as the Key for Gaining Wisdom (Review Deuteronomy 31:12, 13 and Proverbs 3:7 with your class.)

We do not naturally know how to fear God, and, as a result, we have lost sight of its relevancy. Consequently, we need to learn how to experience it afresh (Deut. 31:12, 13). The fear of the Lord does not mean to be scared but to tremble in awe before His holiness. He is the God of love, the Other One, the God of truth and justice. Thus, we admire, follow, and worship Him, for no one is like Him (Exod. 34:6–8, Isa. 40:25–29, 44:6–8).

Consider This: Study with your class the meaning of the first occurrence of the expression “fear of God” in the Bible. Note the words of Abraham to Abimelech when he laments that “surely the fear of God” was not in Egypt (Gen. 20:11). Was Abraham fearing God in this situation, or was he more afraid of the king? Explain your answer.

- At Mount Sinai, God spoke, and the people were afraid. What is the meaning of Moses’ statement: “‘Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning’” (Exod. 20:20, NIV)?

- There is the saying, “He who kneels before God can stand before anyone.” What does this mean, and how true is it?

II. Definitions of Fearing God (Review Deuteronomy 10:12, 13 and Proverbs 8:13 with your class.)

Fearing God results in accepting and responding to God’s grace. But what does it mean to put that fear into practice?

1. To fear God means to fear to grieve Him. When they were small, a man’s children would ask, “Daddy, whom should we marry?” His simple answer: “Marry someone who fears to grieve God! Why? Because only if that person fears to make God sad will he or she fear to make you sad! But if he or she does not care about or have respect for God, that person will have no respect for or care about you!”

   Our relationship with God is the most important relationship in life; all
other relationships spring from it. “To fear the Lord is to hate evil” (Prov. 8:13, NIV). Fearing God means to make Him happy, like a child, out of love, seeking to make a parent happy. Too simple? Listen to the words of Jesus: “‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven’” (Matt. 18:3, NIV).

2. To fear God means to respect Him and His will, making all our decisions in regard to Him. As we are unable to always think about our parent, spouse, or child, likewise we are unable at all times to think about God. However, a faithful child, parent, or spouse will always make his or her decisions in regard and respect to loved ones. Similarly, we ought to make all our decisions in regard to God, His Word, His law, and His will.

Biblically, to fear means to revere and worship God. “Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere him” (Ps. 33:8, NIV; see also Eccles. 8:12, 13; Jer. 10:6, 7).

3. To fear God means to love and obey Him. The concept of love in the notion of fear is not present in our modern languages. This dimension is lost and is preserved only in the biblical Hebrew: “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?” (Deut. 10:12, 13, NIV; see also Ps. 103:17). To fear God means to be in love with Him, in total submission and admirable obedience.

4. To fear God means to cultivate the awareness that He is present. He always sees us, we cannot flee from His presence, and His eye is constantly on us. This does not mean that He is a heavenly controller but, instead, He is a loving, caring parent. “The eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him” (Ps. 33:18, NIV). The fear of God is an acute consciousness of God’s eye upon us and having the full assurance that we are living in His presence.

In order to cultivate a sense of awe before God, we need to enjoy His presence, sense His holiness, and maintain a correct trembling before His grace and love. “‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord Almighty!’” (Isa. 6:3, NIV; see also Ps. 2:11, 12; Phil. 2:12, 13). Superior to His creation in every way, God is not our equal partner or a sentimental God but a consuming fire and the God of faithful love.

Discussion Questions:

1. How did David experience the fear of the Lord? Reflect on his experience: “I [David] have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved” (Ps. 16:8). How did he overcome fears, according to Psalm 56:3, 4? Contrast it with Psalms 36:1 and 86:14.

2. Moses did not fear Pharaoh’s anger but the Living God, and “he persevered because he saw him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27, NIV). What role does faith play in seeing the invisible God?
STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The book of Proverbs states that we should “fear the Lord and shun evil” (3:7, NIV). Explain to your class how regular prayer, daily Bible study, and witnessing about God’s goodness will enhance our awareness of God’s presence in our lives.

Thought Questions:
1. What are practical ways for saying No to evil and avoiding evil behavior?
2. What is the opposite of running away from evil? Discuss what that means.

Application Questions:
1. How can one emphasize loving God and obeying Him out of gratitude for what He did and is doing in our lives?
2. Why is discipline so crucial in gaining wisdom?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Study with your class the meaning of the term wisdom. What are similar terms that express the same idea? What are the characteristics of wisdom in the Bible? Study especially Proverbs 2, 3 from this perspective.

Activities:
1. Suggest that, for one week, class members imagine God’s presence by doing one of the following: (1) put another plate on the table to remind them that Jesus is eating with them; or (2) while reading, watching TV, or working on their computers, place a chair for Jesus beside them to represent His participation in these activities.
2. It is not difficult to find references about the “fear of the Lord” in Proverbs, because it is a dominant theme. In the New International Version, “fear the Lord” is used six times (1:29, 3:7, 8:13, 14:16, 15:33, 24:21); the phrase “the fear of the Lord” occurs ten times (1:7, 2:5, 9:10, 10:27, 14:27, 15:16, 16:6, 19:23, 22:4, 23:17); the book commends everyone who “fears the Lord” (14:2, 26, NIV); and culminates with the praise of the woman who “fears the Lord” (31:30, NIV). By design, this notion often occurs in biblical wisdom literature (Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes), thus underlining that we can be wise only if we cultivate a personal relationship with God. By using a concordance or Bible software, discover where and how often this theme appears in the rest of the Bible.
From Ears to Feet

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Proverbs 4, 1 Kings 3:9, Matt. 13:44, Proverbs 5, 1 Cor. 10:13, Prov. 6:1–19.

Memory Text: “Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil” (Proverbs 4:26, 27, NKJV).

Science has demonstrated that hearing impacts how we walk, and that even our balance is influenced by how well we hear. So, instruction, or education—that is, what we hear—is crucial to how we live. “Wisdom is the principal thing,” says Proverbs 4:7.

Yet no matter how good the instruction is, the student must pay attention. Not without some irony an ancient Egyptian teacher noted that the “the ear of the boy is on his back; he listens when he is beaten.” (In Egyptian art, the student was often represented with big ears on his back.)

It’s not enough just to know about right and wrong; we need to know how to choose right and not wrong. Training in wisdom consists in hearing proper instruction and in following and obeying what we have learned so that we don’t end up walking in the wrong direction.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 10.
Hear!

Read Proverbs 4. What practical truth is found here, and how can we apply this to our own lives as we seek to live in faithfulness to God?

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The act of “hearing” marks the first step in education. In Hebrew thought the seat of wisdom or of intelligence is located not in the brain but in the ears. This implies that even before we seek to conceptualize or solve a problem, we first need to hear it. This means we need to listen. When Solomon asks for wisdom, he specifically asks for “a hearing heart” (1 Kings 3:9, literal translation).

The first act of wisdom, then, is “to listen,” which suggests that wisdom comes from an external source (in this case, the parents). We cannot discover wisdom by ourselves. The self-made individual is an impossible concept in the domain of biblical wisdom. Wisdom is, first of all, something that we receive, not something we shape with our own skills or that we unearth through our own brilliance and reasoning. The capacity of “paying attention” (Hebrew, “to put one’s heart”) implies the involvement of the heart. The search for wisdom, then, is not merely a cold, objective enterprise. The heart, which is the core of the individual and (in Hebrew thought) the seat of emotions, participates in the search for wisdom.

Read Matthew 13:44 and Jeremiah 29:13. What link can you find between these verses and the search for wisdom as it is expressed in Proverbs 4?

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Emotions play a crucial role in our basic existence as humans and thus cannot and should not be ignored in our relationship with God. How do we learn the proper place and value of emotions in regard to our spiritual life? How have your emotions steered you right (and wrong), and what have you learned from those experiences?
Protect Your Family

Once we determine to walk in the way of wisdom, we still need great caution because we will meet obstacles along that way (see 1 Pet. 5:8). One of the greatest dangers we face deals with our families, the most precious, sensitive, and intimate domain of life.

Read Proverbs 5. What dangers must we guard against?

The first danger begins with ourselves; it lies in our own words. We should watch our tongues to make sure that what we say does not convey an inappropriate or a mixed message. Our lips should be in harmony with our knowledge and should reflect our spiritual views.

The second danger comes from the other woman or the other man (although the text refers to the danger coming from a “strange woman,” the language should be understood in a generic sense; temptation could come from either a man or a woman) who interferes in the family. Either could seduce a spouse into violating the marriage vows, and who hasn’t seen, or experienced, just how destructive this sin is?

According to the text, the best way to resist these temptations, which often start with alluring words, is to listen to the words of wisdom. By heeding and obeying inspired instruction, we are more likely to stay focused on the essentials and so be protected from adultery or whatever other temptations come our way.

Of course, not only should we keep ourselves from adultery, we should also avoid going to the place where the “temptress” stays (Prov. 5:10); we certainly should not approach her door (vs. 8).

Finally, perhaps the best protection of all against the temptation to love another woman or man is this: just love your own spouse, “the [wife or husband] of your youth” (vs. 18, NKJV). The author of Ecclesiastes resonated with this counsel: “Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun” (Eccles. 9:9, NIV). Be thankful for what you have, and you won’t be looking elsewhere.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13. With this promise before you, what definitive and practical steps might you need to take, right now, in order to protect yourself from the passions that might be brewing in you?
Protect Your Friendship

Someone once said: “Lord, protect me from my friends; I can take care of my enemies.” The book of Proverbs is concerned with the vulnerability of friendship; it counsels us on how to keep our friends and also, if necessary, how to protect ourselves from them. The Hebrew word for “friend” also means “neighbor,” the one who is close to us, the one who is already a friend or who may become one. Biblical wisdom values human relationships and appeals for thoughtfulness and respect in these relationships.

Read Proverbs 6:1–5. What problem does Solomon refer to, and what is the solution? What crucial spiritual principle do we find here, as well?

While the torah urges people to help the poor and to lend them money without charging interest (Exod. 22:25), wisdom warns us against unwise financial backing for a friend who is in debt. The duty of charity does not exclude the duty of justice (Exod. 23:2, 3). Though we need to be generous when we can, we would be wise to make sure that our charity will not turn into a fiasco (compare Prov. 22:27).

Hence, the wise counsel given to us in the proverb. The first caution applies to our words. How crucial that we evaluate the situation and make sure that we can afford to help our friend. If so, only then speak and promise. Indeed, the warmth of our relationship or a moment of emotion may precipitate our commitment, and we may regret it afterward.

No matter how well-intentioned you might have been, it’s crucial to think before you act and before you commit to something that you can’t fulfill. The point is that if we get into a bind, we need to do what we can to fix it, including humbling ourselves, admitting our mistake, and asking for grace.

How do we learn to balance our desire to bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2) with the words given to us in this proverb?
Protect Your Work

Read Proverbs 6:6–8. What can we learn from the ant?

Not only do ants work hard (even harder than humans, if one compares the burden they are able to carry to the burden humans can carry in proportion to their respective weights), but ants work independently and do not need to be supervised. The main reason for their hard work is the future. They “anticipate” times of trouble (winter) and prepare themselves for it. So, the ant teaches us the wisdom of thinking about the future when making plans or engaging in an activity. “This is a question that demands consideration by every parent, every teacher, every student—by every human being, young or old. No scheme of business or plan of life can be sound or complete that embraces only the brief years of this present life and makes no provision for the unending future.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 145.

Read Proverbs 6:9–11. What can we learn from the sluggard?

It is the sluggard who has something to learn from the ant, not the other way around: “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise” (vs. 6, *NKJV*). While the ants are at work, the sluggards are asleep. While the ants are productive at the harvest, the sluggards keep folding their two hands, a symbol of indolence. The ants surpass themselves by carrying burdens heavier than themselves and by preparing for the future; the sluggards live in the present and are occupied only with themselves.

**Though indolence and laziness are condemned here, we must also remember that life consists of more than work and earning money. How does the Sabbath, as presented in the context of the workweek, help us find this proper balance?**
Protect Yourself

After having warned us against the particular evils that threaten three domains of life—our family, our social contacts, and our work—Proverbs gives us a portrayal of the wicked. It is a satire full of irony and sharp psychological observation. The two poems (Prov. 6:12–15 and 16–19) are parallel and, with the same poetic rhythm of seven, cover corresponding motifs. The wicked person’s inside is described as linked to what is thought in the heart; at the same time it all becomes manifested in what is done on the outside.

**Read** Proverbs 6:14, 18 and Matthew 15:19. What important point is being made here?

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“If you indulge in vain imaginations, permitting your mind to dwell upon impure subjects, you are, in a degree, as guilty before God as if your thoughts were carried into action.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 334.

**What** warnings are given in Proverbs 6:12–19?

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The imagery is ironic. The walking wicked follows the lazy sluggard. The two attitudes seem to be different, and yet they carry the same lesson. Both stay within themselves. Neither one is interested in the instruction coming from outside of themselves. They both follow their own wisdom and inclinations. The sluggards are sleeping, and neither their ears nor their feet function; the wicked have only their feet and their mouths working, not their ears. The result is the same: they will both go to destruction.

Meanwhile, evil has two effects: it harms not only persons sinned against, but sinners, as well. The liars will finally believe their own lies. It is also noteworthy that the ultimate result of wickedness is discord and conflict, which also can affect society. Indeed, the effects of sin rarely, if ever, remain confined to sinners. Others are impacted and usually only for the worse.

How have the sins of others affected your life? Greatly, no doubt. What lessons can you learn from this about how careful you need to be so that your actions don’t hurt others?

“The student of the Bible should be taught to approach it in the spirit of a learner. We are to search its pages, not for proof to sustain our opinions, but in order to know what God says. . . .

“One of the chief causes of mental inefficiency and moral weakness is the lack of concentration. . . . With the immense tide of printed matter constantly pouring from the press, old and young form the habit of reading hastily and superficially, and the mind loses its power of connected and vigorous thought.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 189.

“The habitations that the ants build for themselves show skill and perseverance. Only one little grain at a time can they handle, but by diligence and perseverance they accomplish wonders.

“Solomon points to the industry of the ant as a reproach to those who waste their hours in idleness or in practices that corrupt soul and body. The ant prepares for future seasons; but many gifted with reasoning powers fail to prepare for the future immortal life.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 190.

Discussion Questions:

1. Dwell more on this idea of how we can help others, even at a personal cost to ourselves. How do we look at what this week’s lesson taught in contrast to this verse: “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13, NKJV)?

2. What other lessons can we take from the natural world that we can apply to our own lives? Given, however, that the world is fallen, why must we be careful in the lessons we do draw?

3. Read through the seven abominations in Proverbs 6:16–19. Why do you think that they are considered so bad in God’s eyes?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Proverbs 5:11–13

**The Student Will:**

- **Know:** Understand that the wisdom described in Proverbs points to Christ, “the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24).
- **Feel:** Sense the pain of ignoring the wise instructions of God and the hurt that foolish actions bring him or her and loved ones.
- **Do:** Seek Christ as the only solution to his or her foolish heart.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Christ Is “the Wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24).

- A Why are there similarities between the wisdom of Israel and the wisdom of the ancient world?
- B Why did Israel fail repeatedly even though they had superior wisdom from God?
- C Why do people know what is right yet often fail to do it?
- D In the 2,000 years of its history, why did the Christian church choose the path of “destruction and misery” so often, even though it knew Christ’s teachings, as outlined in the New Testament (Rom. 3:16)?

II. Feel: The Pain of the Human Bent Toward Folly

- A Can you think of a Bible personality who knew the wise thing to do yet chose the path of folly instead? How did it turn out for him or her?
- B Have you ever known that something was wrong and did it anyway? How did God work with you to restore you to the path of wisdom?

III. Do: Seek Christ.

- A Why is there such colossal moral failure all over the world when people are receiving higher education in greater numbers than ever?
- B How has Christ made a difference in your life?

**Summary:** We can live wisely if Christ lives in us and gives us a new set of desires. For, left to our own, we are invariably drawn to folly.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Proverbs 5:11–13

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The lament in Proverbs 5:11–13 is a warning to everyone who is on the path of folly. Found at the heart of Proverbs 4–6, this text calls upon the reader to heed the call of conscience before it is too late. Many nations besides Israel had sages, and many of the proverbs in these chapters are, in fact, found in the ancient world: remember the teachings of your parents and elders; do not obey your lower passions; do not lend money to friends; work hard and do not be lazy. The unusual nature of Proverbs 5:11–13 is that it reveals the reason nations and individuals have fallen in spite of having great wisdom. They fell because they developed a proud ear that would not hear rebuke. The point of Proverbs 5:11–13 is that the sooner you confess, “Oh, how I hated instruction,” thereby acknowledging your shortcoming in this area, the sooner you can become wise and avoid the disaster waiting for you.

Just for Teachers: It is important to read Proverbs in light of Christ as the Wisdom of God made flesh. Otherwise, the counsels in Proverbs will be mere advice or maxims. Christ is the only Person in history who was always able to choose the way of wisdom. The Cross is a good example of His amazing wisdom. He chose to go to the cross when, to others, it appeared to be a foolish path of misery and destruction. In stark contrast, many falter because, in their eyes, the path of folly looks wiser. It is important to remember that Jesus was a living Example of the way that the wisdom of Proverbs was meant to be lived out.

Opening Discussion: Why did Jesus insist on going to the cross (see Mark 8:31–34)? How was it wise? How much money could Jesus have made if He had charged for His healings? What would happen to the world if there were a lot of people living like Jesus: doing good without charging a fee, obeying the will of God even when it is disadvantageous to oneself, speaking the truth regardless of the consequence to oneself?

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why do people sometimes cosign loans for their friends or lend money to them?
2. Why do many people fail to work like ants if they are not supervised?
STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: It is important to be honest and transparent when teaching this week’s lesson. It is easy to underestimate how difficult it is to live by the wisdom taught in Proverbs. David, who taught the wisdom recorded in Proverbs to Solomon, as well as Solomon himself, who wrote it down for posterity, could not, in the end, live by the wisdom they taught. They could not teach their feet to walk the straight path. Imagine how much more difficult it is for us ordinary people to live by the wisdom of the Bible. The reason David and Solomon are considered wise is that they had humble and willing ears to hear the rebuke and repent when shown their guilt. Specifically, David had the wisdom to confess his sin when he was told, “Thou art the man” (2 Sam. 12:7). On what occasion has God spoken to you lately the words, “Thou art the [man or woman]”?

Bible Commentary

I. The Wisdom of Parents (Review Proverbs 4 with your class.)

This chapter begins with the scene of a father teaching the law of God (vs. 2), the torah, to his children. The law (Deut. 6:7–9) actually requires such parental instruction. The word torah originally means “instruction.” But because torah is often translated as the word law, one sometimes gets the impression that the law of Moses is simply a set of rules. This is not true. In Proverbs 4, the father passes on the Torah to his son in the form of instruction, as though it were a precious gift (vs. 2). He teaches it in the form of secrets of happiness and success. He divides his instruction into three parts: (1) an appeal to walk in his way, which is the law of God (vss. 5–13); (2) an appeal not to enter into the path of those who do not respect God (vss. 14–17); and (3) a promise of life to those who live in integrity and a promise of death to those whose actions and lips speak lies (vss. 18–27). At this point, it would be good to recall the warning of David, the father, found in Proverbs 4 that no one actually chooses the way of wisdom. This point is even more explicit in Psalm 53: “Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (vs. 3; compare Rom. 3:12).

Consider This: How can one give instructions to one’s children so that they can see that they are receiving something precious? When was the last time you felt someone had given you valuable advice?
II. The Loose Woman  
(Review Proverbs 5 with your class.)

The loose woman described in chapter 5 symbolizes folly. There is no question that the father earnestly desires his son to avoid wasting his resources on prostitutes. But his concern is broader than just abstaining from visiting prostitutes or loose women. Prostitutes appear frequently in the Bible as symbols of spiritual apostasy or general states of immorality (Isa. 57:3; Jer. 3:2–9; 13:27; Ezekiel 16; 23; 43:7–9; Hos. 1–4; 5:3; 6:10; Nah. 3:4; Rev. 17:1, 15, 16; 19:2). Similarly, the prostitute in Proverbs 5 symbolizes apostasy.

The word wisdom, on the other hand, appears at the beginning of the chapter (vs. 1), and the word folly appears at the end of the chapter (vs. 23) to show a clear contrast between wisdom and folly. The loose woman in chapter 5 personifies folly. The point is that folly, regardless of its manifestation, wears a tempting face and promises pleasure. The central message of the chapter appears in the middle of the chapter (vss. 11–13), with a warning of what you will say in the end if you go down the path of folly: “How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof” (vs. 12). Which will you choose? Folly beckons you with lying words of flattery, and wisdom calls you with true instruction and reproof.

Discussion Questions: Why does truth often offend? Why are we sometimes afraid to learn about our medical conditions from our doctors even though they are not trying to hurt us? Think of something or someone that you were attached to who was hurting you and your family. How did it feel to have the hurt taken away from you?

III. The Long and Short View of Things  
(Review Proverbs 6:1–19 with your class.)

Proverbs 6:1–19 consists of four sections. The first section (vss. 1–3) warns us not to guarantee our friends’ loans. This warning applies to any act of trying to do things for “friends” out of fear that one might lose their friendship. But in the long run, you will surely be ruined if you keep doing things for them out of pressure.

In the second section of the chapter (vss. 6–11), there appears the parable of the sluggard. The story of the ants is placed in the parable (vss. 6–8) to provide a contrast. The point of the story is perseverance. The ants persevere because they have a long-range view of things and prepare for the wintertime. The sluggard, on the other hand, has a short-term view of things and tries to avoid any inconvenience that might hinder his enjoyment of life now. The third section (vss. 12–15) sums up the foolish person as “wicked” (vs. 12). The wicked spend their lives devising “mischief” and sowing “discord” among friends (vs. 14). The problem is that they fail to have the long-range view of things and to see that their ruin will come.
upon them “suddenly” (vs. 15) and that there will be no one to help. In the fourth section (vss. 16–19), there appears a list of seven things that the Lord hates. What this list implies is that the fool loves the things that God hates and finds pleasure and happiness in doing them. Why else, Proverbs asks, would he or she do them “continually” (vs. 14)?

Consider This: Why do many enjoy watching movies and TV shows that show the behaviors described in the list of seven things that God hates?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The list of seven things that the Lord hates in Proverbs 6:16–19 describes the way of life, especially in job situations, that encourage competition. The seven things are what people do to get ahead in life. But the Lord hates these things, especially the sowing of “discord among brethren” (vs. 19).

Application Questions:

1. How can the church always be a community that does what the Lord loves, a place of humility and harmony?
2. What causes a hesitation to do the will of God?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Proverbs 4–6 point to our desperate need for Christ, the wisdom of God. Jesus says to the church, “Without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Activities:

1. Ask your class to write down the names of those who have offended them. Ask them to write down what it would take to become friends with the offenders again.
2. Discuss with the class the past experience of your congregation—peace and harmony or discord and indifference. Ask them to explain the reasons for the situation in light of today’s lesson.
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Matt. 5:21–30; Prov. 6:21; 7:3; Prov. 6:23; 7:2; 6:24; 6:30, 31; Prov. 7:26, 27.

Memory Text: “For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life” (Proverbs 6:23, NKJV).

Two brothers were left home alone but given a strict warning by their mother not to eat the cake that she had just baked. To make sure that the boys would obey, she added the threat of punishment.

When she left, it took the boys only a few minutes to decide to eat the cake anyway. “This is not a matter of life and death,” they reasoned. “Our mother would never kill us; so, let’s eat!”

For the teacher in Proverbs, though, the issue he speaks about is indeed a matter of life and death. His language is strong and sometimes graphic. Of course, Jesus used very strong language Himself when talking about matters of eternal life and death (see Matt. 5:21–30). And no wonder. In the end, our ultimate destiny, our eternal destiny (and what could be more important than that?), rests upon the choices that we make here, now. So, we should take the urgency of the strong language at face value.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 17.
The Law in Our Lives

Read Proverbs 6:21 and 7:3. How are we to understand the bodily images used in these texts regarding how we should relate to God’s law?

As we saw in an earlier lesson, in Proverbs the heart represents the seat of emotions and thoughts. By telling us to bind the law upon our hearts (Prov. 6:21), the teacher means that we should always be in close connection with the law. There is no moment we may lose contact with the law, because the law is what defines sin (Rom. 7:7). The teacher also insists that this law should even be written on the tablets of the heart (Prov. 7:3), just as the Decalogue was written by God on the stone tablets (Exod. 24:12).

To speak about the law written on the heart means that the law is not just an external set of rules imposed on us. The law should penetrate our motivations, our secret intentions, and so be part of our intimate self. It’s another expression of having the Pauline promise of “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27), be a reality in our lives.

To tie the law around the neck also means that we should keep it close to ourselves. Ancient people used to tie their precious belongings around their necks. The neck is the place through which air travels to the lungs, allowing breath and life, an association of thoughts that is attested in the Hebrew word nephesh (“soul”), which refers to “life” and is derived from a word meaning “throat” and “breathing.”

To bind the law on one’s fingers means to bring the law into the domain of actions. The teacher focuses on the fingers to suggest the most delicate and intimate actions. The law should affect not only the grand choices we make but the smaller ones, as well (see Luke 16:10).

Although the biblical intention of these images was purely symbolic, it is noteworthy that these symbols have been taken literally in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions. It is seen through the use of the Jewish tefillin around the head and the fingers, the Christian crosses around the neck, and the Muslim (and Christian) rosaries around the fingers.

Symbols can be helpful, but why must we be careful not to misinterpret the symbol for the reality it represents?
Light and Life

Read Proverbs 6:23. How is the law related to “light”?

In the Bible, the word of God or His law has been compared to light: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105, NKJV). In the Hebrew mind, there is a connection between the idea of “law” and of “light.” Just as the lamp illuminates the path where we walk, the law will help us stay on track; that is, when we face moral choices, it will help us to know what the right choice is, even if at times reason or personal expedience would tempt us to disregard the law.

What examples can you find in the Bible of those who chose to follow God’s law despite powerful reasons not to? What can we learn from their obedience? In what cases, if any, did their choice to be faithful seem to be the wrong one, at least from a human perspective?

Along with Proverbs 6:23, read Proverbs 7:2. Why is the law related to “life”?

Since the Fall, our hope for eternal life cannot be found in the law but only through faith in Christ. However, obedience to the law and the principles it represents continues to play a central part in the life of faith (see Matt. 19:17, Rev. 14:12). We obey because, as the Lord said to Israel thousands of years ago, “I am the LORD your God” (Lev. 18:4). The law of God is related to “life,” simply because of who God is—the Source of our life. This principle represents true spirituality: we trust God and His promises for our present life, just as we trust His promises for eternal life.

Jesus said: “‘I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life’” (John 8:12, NKJV). How have you experienced the reality of this wonderful promise in your walk with the Lord?
Fighting Temptation

As we have just seen, the author of Proverbs 6:23, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, directly links light and life to God’s law. In the next verse, he gives a solid example of how the law, as light and life, can offer us powerful spiritual protection.

What are we being warned about in Proverbs 6:24? Besides the obvious, what more subtle warning is given here?

When a religious person is tempted, the greatest temptation is to find a religious reason to justify the iniquity. Using God to rationalize bad behavior is not only a terrible form of blasphemy—it’s powerfully deceptive. After all, if someone thinks that “God is with me,” then what can you say in reply? This can happen even in cases of adultery. “God has shown me that this [man or woman] is the one I should be with.” If that’s what they believe, who or what can trump what “God” has shown them?

Notice, too, it’s not just her physical beauty that lures him. She uses language, flattering words, to draw the victim into her trap. How often have men and women been led into compromising situations by subtle and seductive words, sometimes even couched in religious language? The author of the book of Proverbs seeks to warn us against this deception.

The law is the perfect antidote against the “flattering tongue of a seductress.” Only the imperative of the law and the duty of obedience will help us resist her alluring words, which can sound so true and beautiful. Indeed, the seductress will find you not only handsome but also wise and bright. She may even evoke her spiritual needs; and ironically, dangerously, “the love of God” might become the justification for sin.

Just think how easily we can be led, even under the guise of faith, to justify wrong actions of any kind, not just adultery. Why, then, is an absolute commitment to the law of God our only real protection against even our own minds and the tricks that they can play on us?
“You Shall Not Steal”

Right after his warning about adultery (Prov. 6:24–29), the author starts talking about another sin: stealing (vss. 30, 31). The relationship between the two commandments (stealing and adultery) shows how disobedience to one commandment can affect our obedience to the others. The attitude of compromise, to pick and choose in regard to God’s law, could be even more dangerous than complete disobedience to the law. “The strongest bulwark of vice in our world is not the iniquitous life of the abandoned sinner or the degraded outcast; it is that life which otherwise appears virtuous, honorable, and noble, but in which one sin is fostered, one vice indulged. . . . He who, endowed with high conceptions of life and truth and honor, does yet willfully transgress one precept of God’s holy law, has perverted his noble gifts into a lure to sin.”—Ellen G. White, Education, p. 150.

Read Proverbs 6:30, 31. What are these verses saying about what even a desperate person does?

Poverty and needs do not justify stealing. The thief is guilty even if “he is starving” (vs. 30, NKJV). Although the starving thief is not to be despised, he must still restore seven times what he has stolen; this shows that even the desperation of his situation does not justify sin. On the other hand, the Bible insists that it is our duty to meet the needs of the poor so that they don’t feel compelled to steal in order to survive (Deut. 15:7, 8).

How interesting that after going from adultery to stealing, the text now returns to adultery (Prov. 6:32–35). The two sins are indeed somewhat similar. In both cases, someone is illicitly taking something that belongs to someone else. A crucial difference, however, between stealing and adultery lies in the fact that the former sin concerns only the loss of an object, while the latter deals with something much greater. In some cases, one can make restitution for stealing an object; in the cases of adultery, especially when children are involved, the damage can be much more severe than when stealing is involved.

“ ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery.’ This commandment forbids not only acts of impurity, but sensual thoughts and desires, or any practice that tends to excite them. . . . Christ, who taught the far-reaching obligation of the law of God, declared the evil thought or look to be as truly sin as is the unlawful deed.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 308.
The Threat of Death

Most people don’t think of death when they sin; they have other things on their minds, usually the immediate gratification and pleasure that they derive from their sin. It doesn’t help, either, that popular culture often extols adultery and other iniquities. In contrast, the book of Proverbs places sin in the right perspective, a view echoed many years later by Paul: “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

Read Proverbs 7:22, 23. What makes the adulterer vulnerable to the threat of death?

The one who goes “after her” is described as someone who has lost his personality and will. He is no longer thinking. The word immediately suggests that he does not give himself time for much reflection. He is compared to an ox who “goes to the slaughter,” to a fool who goes to “the correction of the stocks,” and to a bird who “hastens to the snare.” None of them realize that their life is threatened.

Read Proverbs 7:26, 27. What makes the immoral woman lethal?

It’s possible that the woman here depicts more than a “mere” adulterer. In fact, she represents values opposite to wisdom. Solomon uses this metaphor to warn his pupil against any form of evil. The risk is huge, for this woman does not just wound; she kills, and her power is such that she has slain even the strongest of men. In other words, others before you, stronger than you, have not been able to survive in her hands. The universal language of this passage clearly suggests that the biblical author is speaking about humankind in general. (The Hebrew word sheol in the text has nothing to do with “hell,” as commonly thought; it designates the place where the dead now are: the grave.)

In the end, the point is that sin, whether adultery or something else, leads to annihilation, the opposite of the eternal life that God wants us all to have through Jesus Christ.

No wonder, as we said in Sabbath’s introduction, the language is strong—we are dealing, literally, with matters of life and death.

Think of some “strong” people who have fallen in a big way. Why should this make you tremble for yourself? What is your only protection?
Further Study: “Satan offers to men the kingdoms of the world if they will yield to him the supremacy. Many do this and sacrifice heaven. It is better to die than to sin; better to want than to defraud; better to hunger than to lie.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 495.

“Choose poverty, reproach, separation from friends, or any suffering rather than to defile the soul with sin. Death before dishonor or the transgression of God’s law should be the motto of every Christian. As a people professing to be reformers, treasuring the most solemn, purifying truths of God’s word, we must elevate the standard far higher than it is at the present time.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 147.

Discussion Questions:

1. How can we be serious about the gravity of sin without falling into the trap of fanaticism? At the same time, how can we be obedient to the law of God without falling into legalism?

2. Read Exodus 20:1–17. How are all the Ten Commandments related to each other? Why, if we openly violate one commandment, are we likely to transgress other commandments, as well? (See James 2:11.) What examples can you find in which transgression of one commandment has led to the transgression of others?

3. Dwell more on the idea of how people might use religion in order to justify wrong actions. It’s not that hard to do, especially if you tend to hold up “love” as the ultimate standard of right and wrong. After all, think about all the bad things done under the pretext of “love.” How, then, does the law continue to act as a way of protecting people, either from themselves or others, who might otherwise be led into sin?

4. Look again at the question at the end of Sunday’s study, which deals with mistaking symbols for reality. How might we do that? For example, how might idolatry be one way of doing this? What traditions, which are symbols of spiritual truths, could be mistaken for those truths themselves?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Proverbs 6:23

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand that following the guidance from God’s law is essential for our ultimate survival.

**Feel:** Cherish the warmth and security of God’s parental love as He teaches what is best for him or her.

**Do:** Accept God’s instruction and seek to learn more of His will, as recorded in writings that He has inspired.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Following God’s Law Is a Matter of Life and Death.

- A What is God’s law?
- B How do God’s instructions shed light on the safe way of life?
- C How is God’s law based on cause and effect?
- D How does God’s law reveal the dangers of departing from God’s principles?

II. Feel: God’s Love IsExpressed Through His Law.

- A What does God’s law have to do with His character of love and care for us?
- B If we feel God’s mercy and grace, why do we need His law?
- C In what way do we feel God’s love when He disciplines us for departing from His instructions?

III. Do: Accepting and Learning God’s Instructions Affects Your Life.

- A What instructions from God that you understand up to this point have you accepted and followed? What difference has this commitment made in your life?
- B Why should you want to learn more of God’s instructions?
- C What are specific ways in which you actually (not theoretically) may go about learning more of God’s will for your life?

**Summary:** God lovingly teaches us His principles of living for our own good.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Proverbs 7:1–4

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God teaches His instructions to us as a loving parent teaches a child. His purpose is not to burden us but to help us make wise choices. If we cherish His guidance as a precious gift and allow it to shape our inner attitudes, we will enjoy life rather than falling into temptations that deceive those who lack understanding.

Just for Teachers: Proverbs 7 presents divine teaching through King Solomon as words of wisdom addressed to his son (vs. 1; compare 1:1). Verses 1–4 of chapter 7 reiterate 6:20–23, and both of these passages introduce warnings against falling into the temptation to commit adultery (6:24–35, 7:5–27).

The Ten Commandments prohibit adultery (Exod. 20:14). Related laws condemn to death, under the Israelite judicial system, those who commit this crime (Lev. 20:10, Deut. 22:22). Proverbs deals with the same sin and its deadly consequences but approaches it from a different angle by appealing to the listeners’ desire for their own well-being and by describing the kind of attractive temptation that could lead to adultery.

Opening Discussion: God is our perfect Manufacturer, and He provides us with the Bible as the Manufacturer’s Manual. When you buy a car and the manufacturer’s manual says to put motor oil in its engine, you follow the instructions without complaining, because you know that the one who made the vehicle knows best. So, why would anyone even think of disregarding God’s instructions?

Questions for Discussion:

1. How many principles of the Ten Commandments can you find in Proverbs 6, 7?
2. Why does God teach the principles, illustrated in the Ten Commandments, from different angles in various parts of the Bible? Can we learn anything from this method regarding how we can pass His instructions on to others, including our children?
STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Three of the most important words for law and related concepts appear together in Proverbs 6:23: “For the commandment [mitzvah] is a lamp, and the law [torah] a light; reproofs of instruction [musar] are the way of life” (NKJV).

A mitzvah is a “command” or “commandment.” Torah is “direction,” “instruction,” or “teaching” from someone who is wise (13:14), such as a mother (1:8) or father (4:2). The word torah is apparently derived from the same Hebrew root as the verb yrh, which means “teach” (4:4, 11) or “point” (6:13). Musar is “discipline” or “training” (3:11) or “warning” or “instruction” (1:8).

By using several terms with related but distinct meanings, the biblical text expands the understanding of a concept. The law is commanded by a superior person, such as a parent or God (mitzvah), but it is not arbitrary; it is instruction that points out a wise course of action (torah) and trains a person through warning and discipline (musar). Through parallel expressions, Proverbs 6:23 characterizes the law as “a lamp,” “a light,” and “the way of life.” A “lamp” provides “light”; so, these words are closely related and show that the law functions to dispel darkness so that one can see what is going on. By adding that the law is “the way of life,” Proverbs indicates that the light of the law illuminates the safe course of life that results in living rather than dying.

Bible Commentary

Proverbs 7:1–3 urges the hearer to internalize wise commands “within you,” using the metaphor of writing them “on the tablet of your heart” (NKJV). True and unfailing obedience flows from inner attitudes shaped by the commands; it is not something artificially imposed from the outside. Our sinful will and lack of understanding prevent us from internalizing God’s law by ourselves. But God promises to put His law in our minds and write it on our hearts (Jer. 31:33; compare Ezek. 36:26).

Putting a clean heart within us is a miracle of God’s creative power (Ps. 51:10). To receive it, we must acknowledge our weakness and accept the forgiveness and moral cleansing that God offers through Jesus Christ (Psalm 51, Jer. 31:34, 1 John 1:7–9). God transforms us, making us new people through His Holy Spirit (John 3:3–8, Titus 3:4–7).

I. Wise Words Give Light for Life (Review Proverbs 4, 6:20–23 with your class.)

Proverbs 4 presents instruction from a wise father, who says, “Keep my commands, and live” (vs. 4, NKJV). Then he likens the path of righteous people
to light (vs. 18), by contrast with the dark way of the wicked, who “do not know what makes them stumble” (vs. 19, NKJV). The righteous allow their lives to be illuminated by wisdom so that they do not fall into danger through ignorance. Therefore, words of wisdom “are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh” (vs. 22, NKJV). Proverbs 6:20–23 pulls together the concepts of wise commands, light, and life more tightly. Here a parent’s commands will lead and keep you (vs. 22), “For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life” (vs. 23, NKJV).

In Psalm 119:105, God’s Word “is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (NKJV). In John 1:1–5, 14, Christ, the divine Creator, has come to earth as the ultimate Word (Communication) from God. “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (vs. 4, NKJV). By internalizing His words (compare John 6:53–58, 63), we gain ultimate wisdom that prepares us for eternal life with Him.

Consider This: How does beholding Christ’s life change us (compare 2 Cor. 3:18)? In what way does this effect go beyond the influence that any other hero has on someone who admires him or her? What difference does whom we admire make?

II. Wise Instructions Warn Against Temptation (Review Proverbs 6:23–25, 7:1–21 with your class.)

In Proverbs 6 and 7, seduction by a woman (compare by a man in Exod. 22:16) illustrates how temptation works. It can be desirable to the ears and mind (Prov. 6:24, 7:21), to the eyes (6:25), to one’s appetite for food (7:14, here sacrificial meat eaten at home by the offerer; compare Lev. 7:16), to fulfill a desire for companionship (Prov. 7:15), to satisfy a yearning for touch (vs. 16), and can appeal to one’s sense of smell (vs. 17) and sexual appetite (vs. 18). Of themselves, these are good desires that God has given. But temptations are effective, because they present attractive ways to fulfill them by violating the boundaries that God has established for our protection (James 1:14, 15; compare Gen. 3:6; 1 John 2:16). By appealing to several desires and offering assurance that there is no danger (Prov. 7:19, 20; compare food and sex in Num. 25:1, 2; Rev. 2:14), Proverbs 7 illustrates how strong temptations can be.

Discussion Questions: What kinds of temptations appeal to us? Why are they attractive? Why are they dangerous?

III. Yielding to Temptation Is Costly (Review Proverbs 6:26–35, 7:22–27 with your class.)

Rather than appealing to the moral rightness of resisting temptation because one is accountable to God (compare Gen. 39:9—Joseph), Proverbs emphasizes...
the earthly cause and effect in the present life. The consequences of sin are inescapable (6:27–29) and deadly (6:32–35, 7:22–27). The cost of its temporary pleasure is too high; it is not worth it.

A TV comedian got lots of laughs by exclaiming, “The devil made me do it!” But this is just an excuse. The devil can’t force you to do anything, because “God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13, NKJV). Sin is a choice that we don’t have to make, because God gives us the opportunity to resist, and He is able to keep us from falling (Jude 24).

Consider This: If you really believe that God, your Creator and Savior, is able to keep you from falling into sin, then how do your choices show this belief? In what ways could relying wholly on God help you to be more successful?

▼STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Many people are discouraged and see no hope for overcoming their weaknesses. Help your class to understand the power, through prayer, of taking struggles to Christ. He understands and provides access to the mighty power of God, who promises to help in every time of need (Heb. 4:14–16).

Application Questions:

➊ What practical things can we do to reduce temptations and make ourselves less vulnerable?

➋ How can we help others who are discouraged, frustrated, and suffering because of their failures?

▼STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Proverbs 6 and 7 present negative examples as warnings. Help your class to see the positive message behind these warnings.

Activities:

➊ List specific ways in which you can get acquainted with the people of your neighborhood, have opportunities to learn their needs, and share with them God’s offer of a better life by following His wisdom.

➋ Set up a network in your group so that any time one of you is struggling with temptation or discouragement, that person can call on the others for prayer support.
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Prov. 8:1–21, Matt. 16:26, Prov. 8:22–31, Gen. 1:31, Prov. 8:32–36, 9:1–18.

Memory Text: “The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old” (Proverbs 8:22, NKJV).

At this stage in Proverbs, wisdom reappears (see Prov. 1:20, 21), and it’s clear from the texts for this week that wisdom is truth—the Truth as it exists in God, the Source and Foundation of all truth.

This accent on the “absolute” character of truth contrasts with some contemporary thinking, especially in the West, in which truth is seen as relative, contingent, cultural, with one person’s truth being different from someone else’s.

But this concept is not biblical. My truth should be the same as yours, simply because “truth” is universal. It does not belong to anyone in particular but to all humanity, whether or not all humanity recognizes it.

Interestingly enough, Pilate’s famous question to Jesus, “What is truth?” (John 18:38), came in response to Jesus’ statement, “‘Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice’ ” (vs. 37, NKJV). Truth, absolute truth, exists, and it even speaks to us; what matters for us is whether or not we will listen to, and obey, what it is saying.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 24.
Wisdom Cries Out

Read Proverbs 8:1–21. According to these verses, what is the value of wisdom?

Wisdom is so important that it must reach everyone. God created all human life, and Christ died for each one of us. So wisdom, the knowledge of God, and the salvation He offers, is for every human being.

Look at the words used to describe wisdom’s vocal presence: “cry out,” “lift up her voice,” “call,” “voice,” “speak,” “opening . . . lips,” “mouth,” “lips,” “words.” However one understands these metaphors, what is clear is that wisdom is to be communicated; it is to be heard by all who will listen. After all, as we saw last week, what wisdom says is a matter of life and death.

Eight times wisdom talks about the truthfulness of her words. The description of wisdom here, interestingly enough, parallels the portrayal of the Lord in Deuteronomy 32:4. This parallel, of course, should not be surprising, because God, as the Creator of all things (see John 1:1–3), is the Foundation of all truth.

Read Proverbs 8:10, 11. What do these verses say about wisdom?

So many people have lived, and still live, in ignorance, in folly, and in darkness. Many live with no hope at all or with false hopes. What makes this sad state of affairs even sadder is that wisdom and truth are so wonderful, filled with hope and promise for a better life now and the surety of eternal life in a new heaven and a new earth, all thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus. All the wealth in the world means nothing (see Eccles. 2:11–13) in contrast to the knowledge of God.

Read Matthew 16:26 and ask yourself how well your life reflects the crucial truth of these words.
Wisdom and Creation

Read Proverbs 8:22–31. How is wisdom related to Creation?

In these texts, wisdom is mysteriously related to the Lord as the Creator. This poem shares many common words with the Creation account in Genesis 1 and 2, and even reflects its literary structure, organized around the three basic elements of heaven, water, and earth. The intention of this parallel is to emphasize the primary credential of wisdom: if God Himself used wisdom to create, if wisdom is the oldest tool, older than the universe itself and fundamental to its existence, we should all the more use wisdom in everything we do in life.

There is also a strong emphasis on the divine origin of wisdom. The first word of the poem is the Lord, Yahweh, who is said to have “begotten” (second word) wisdom. The Hebrew word qanah, translated as “possessed” by the NKJV, has the connotation of “begetting” rather than “creating” (see Deut. 32:6, Gen. 4:1). The next word is the technical word that is associated with the Genesis Creation, reshit (“beginning”), which is found in the first verse of Genesis: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”

Yet, the word beginning in Proverbs 8:22 is used somewhat differently from the way it is used in Genesis 1. In Genesis 1:1, the word is related to the Creation itself, while in Proverbs 8:22, the word is related to God Himself, to His way (derek), which means His nature. Thus, wisdom is part of the very nature of God Himself.

Wisdom, therefore, is situated in time even before the creation of the universe. The existence of wisdom, at that time when only God was present, traces the antiquity of wisdom “from everlasting.”

So, wisdom does not originate in us but, rather, is revealed to us; it is something that we learn, something that is taught to us; it is not what we generate out of ourselves. Surely, to walk in our own light is to walk in darkness. We are told that Jesus is “the true Light which gives light to every man” (John 1:9, NKJV). Every man needs it too.
Rejoicing in Creation

In Genesis 1, we see that each step of the Creation concludes with the same refrain: “God saw that it was good” (see Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). The last step (vs. 31) goes even further: “It was very good.” The Hebrew word for “good” contains the idea of enjoyment, and it also implies relationship. At the end of the whole Creation week, God pauses to fully enjoy His creation (Gen. 2:1–3). The time of this pause, the Sabbath, is blessed. Likewise, our poem concludes with wisdom’s enjoying the Creation.

Read Proverbs 8:30, 31. Why was wisdom rejoicing?

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Wisdom’s rejoicing reflects God’s rejoicing at Creation. This rejoicing not only happens “daily” at each step of Creation but also crowns the work of Creation, when the creation (of life on earth) itself was completed.

In Proverbs 8, we find the reason for wisdom’s rejoicing: “My delight was with the sons of men” (vs. 31, NKJV). At the end of the Creation week, on Sabbath, God entered into a relationship with humans. The immediate application of this divine pause and rejoicing, after the work of the week, has implications for the human experience of Sabbath: “Following the pattern of the Creator, he too may look back upon his finished work with joy, pleasure, and satisfaction. In this way man may rejoice not only in God’s creation but also in his responsible rulership, not exploitation, over creation.”—Gerhard F. Hasel, in Kenneth A. Strand, The Sabbath in Scripture and History (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), p. 23.

Read Colossians 1:15–17, 2:3, Revelation 3:14, and John 1:1–14. What do these verses tell us about Jesus’ role in the Creation itself? Why is His role as Creator so important in understanding His role as our Redeemer?

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Wisdom’s Appeal

The last few verses of this proverb return to the personal—to the practical application of what it means to have wisdom. By contrast, the intellectual knowledge about wisdom’s preexistence, about wisdom’s presence at Creation, is certainly deep. But in the Bible, truth must always at some point come down to the human level and how we respond to what we have been given in Jesus.

Read Proverbs 8:32–36. What life-and-death message is given here?

The Hebrew word translated as “blessed” (NKJV) means “happy” (see RSV). In this passage, the word blessed is attached to two propositions. The first one describes an action: “Blessed are those who keep my ways” (vs. 32, NKJV). The same language is used in Psalm 119:1, 2, in regard to the law: “Blessed are the undefiled . . . who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies” (NKJV).

The second one describes an attitude: “Blessed is the man who listens to me” (vs. 34, NKJV). In both cases, the requirement implies a continuous effort. It is not enough to have discovered the right way; we have to “keep it.” It is not enough to hear the word of God; we have to “watch daily” and follow what we know. As Jesus put it: “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it” (Luke 11:28, NKJV).

“Is this the happiness desirable which is to be found in the path of disobedience and transgression of physical and moral law? Christ’s life points out the true source of happiness and how it is to be attained. . . . If they would be happy indeed, they should cheerfully seek to be found at the post of duty, doing the work which devolves upon them with fidelity, conforming their hearts and lives to the perfect pattern.” —Ellen G. White, My Life Today, p. 162.

Happiness can be an elusive thing; the more we strive for it, the harder it seems for us to attain it. Why should faithfulness to God, as opposed to the pursuit of happiness, be our first priority? Besides, which is more likely to produce happiness (and why): seeking it, or seeking first the kingdom of God?
Either/Or

Following wisdom’s appeal, the inspired author of Proverbs 9 urges his audience to make a choice now between two lifestyles: wisdom or folly. The first and last six verses (vss. 1–6, 13–18) are symmetrical and bring out the contrast between the opposite camps.

**Compare** Proverbs 9:1–6 and Proverbs 9:13–18. What is the difference between wisdom and folly?

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1. Wisdom is efficient and is involved in Creation: seven verbs are used to describe her actions there (vss. 1–3). The seven pillars she has hewn (vs. 1) allude to the seven days of Creation. Folly, in contrast, sits and does nothing, just pretending to be someone when in fact “she is simple, and knows nothing” (vs. 13, NKJV).

2. Although wisdom and folly call the same audience (note the identical vss. 4 and 16), what they provide is essentially different. Wisdom invites her guests to eat the bread and drink the drink that she has prepared (vs. 5). Folly offers nothing to eat or drink; she simply boasts about stolen provisions (vs. 17).

3. Wisdom calls us to forsake foolishness and, therefore, to live. Folly is more tolerant; she does not demand that we forsake anything, but the result is death. Those who follow wisdom will be advancing; they will “go in the way of understanding” (vs. 6, NKJV). Those who follow folly will be static, and they will “not know” (vs. 18, NKJV).

**Read** Proverbs 9:7–9. How do the wise man and the wicked man respond to the instruction of wisdom? What makes the wise man wiser than the wicked man?

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The key to wisdom is humility. The wise man is the man who is teachable and responds to instruction with an open mind. Wisdom comes only to the one who, like a child, feels the need to grow. This is why, in the most explicit manner, Jesus taught that “‘unless you . . . become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven’” (Matt. 18:3, NKJV).
Further Study: “The Sovereign of the universe was not alone in His work of beneficence. He had an associate—a co-worker who could appreciate His purposes, and could share His joy in giving happiness to created beings. ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.’ John 1:1, 2. Christ, the Word, the only begotten of God, was one with the eternal Father—one in nature, in character, in purpose—the only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God. . . . And the Son of God declares concerning Himself: ‘The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting. . . . When He appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.’ Proverbs 8:22–30.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 34.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is belief in the Genesis Creation account the foundation of biblical wisdom? Why is the idea of evolution contrary to the Bible in every way?

2. Dwell more on the idea that true wisdom is something that we cannot generate of ourselves but that must be revealed to us. What are some examples of important truths that we would never know other than their being revealed by divine inspiration? For instance, how could we know about Christ’s death on the cross and what it offers were it not revealed? What about the seventh-day Sabbath or the Second Coming?

3. How does God’s work, as revealed in Genesis 1, testify to the fact that good cannot be mixed with evil? What implications does your answer have for the idea that one could, for instance, incorporate an evolutionary worldview into the Genesis Creation story?

4. How does God’s enjoyment of the creation help us to understand how we can have a deeper and richer Sabbath experience?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text: Proverbs 8:22–31**

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Grasp the reality of Christ in Proverbs 8 as Divine Wisdom, Co-Creator with the Father, and pre-Fall Mediator.

**Feel:** Appreciate the warmth, intimacy, joy, and condescension of the Godhead in Their work of Creation.

**Do:** Accept the biblical picture of the preincarnate Christ as Co-Creator with the Father and as pre-Fall Mediator, and internalize this demonstration of the character of God.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: The Reality of the Preincarnate Christ in Proverbs 8**

Proverbs 8 affirms that Jesus is the Divine Wisdom, Co-Creator with the Father, and Mediator between an infinite God and finite creatures. Where else in Scripture is Christ’s pre-Fall mediation implied *(see John 1:1–3)*? Why was such “mediation” necessary even before sin?

II. **Feel: The Preincarnate Christ as Mediator**

Proverbs 8 describes Christ coming down at the time of Creation to identify with His creatures *(vss. 30, 31)*. How does this demonstrate the Immanuel (“God with us”) principle from the very beginning? In what ways does this portrait of Christ impact your feelings about the amazing character of the Godhead?

III. **Do: Divine Wisdom and God’s Character**

Proverbs 8 depicts the vibrant and even playful joy and fellowship among the Members of the Godhead at Creation. Imagine the Father and Son joyously, even playfully, interacting during Creation week. How does this picture transform your view of God’s character?

**Summary:** Proverbs 8 reveals a loving Godhead in intimate and joyous fellowship at Creation, and Christ, the Divine Wisdom, condescending to mediate (build a bridge) between the infinite Godhead and finite creatures.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Proverbs 8:22–31

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Wisdom, in Proverbs 8, goes beyond mere poetic personification and actually refers to a divine Being—the preincarnate Christ, who was Cocreator with the Father and served as Mediator between the infinite Godhead and finite creatures even before sin.

Just for Teachers: In the early centuries of Christian history, Proverbs 8:22–31 was one of the most popular Old Testament passages utilized by the church fathers as referring to Christ, and this interpretation prevailed throughout the Christian era until modern times. Although many scholars since the nineteenth century have seen in Proverbs 8 only a poetic personification of wisdom, there is strong biblical evidence for affirming that this passage speaks directly of the preincarnate Son of God. This interpretation has profound significance for understanding the relationships among the members of the Godhead and for seeing the amazing character of the Creator in coming down to be close to His creatures in creation.

Opening Activity: Ask your class to stretch their minds by trying to imagine the prevailing mood of the Father and Son in Their work of creating the universe and, in particular, this world and its inhabitants. Was it somber or joyous—perhaps even playful? What kind of special role did the preincarnate Christ take on in this creation?

Consider This: According to John 1:1–3, Christ in the beginning was called “the Word.” A word goes between one’s mouth and another’s ear so that communication can take place. This week we will discover that from the beginning of Creation, the Son of God was such a Word—mediating or facilitating communication between the Godhead and created beings.

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Throughout Proverbs 1–7, wisdom is merely personified; but in Proverbs 8, the language shifts to describe Wisdom in a way that could apply only to the Second Person of the Godhead, the preincarnate Christ. (See Richard M. Davidson, “Proverbs 8 and the Place of Christ in the Trinity,” Journal of the Adventist Theological...
I. Jesus as Divine Wisdom *(Review Proverbs 8:12–21, 32–36 with your class.)*

The references to Wisdom in Proverbs 8 denote the second member of the Godhead at the time of Creation. This is clear, first, because Wisdom is described with the very prerogatives that are, elsewhere in Scripture, reserved for Yahweh alone: (1) Giver of life and death (vss. 35, 36; compare 14:27); (2) Source of legitimate government (vss. 15, 16; compare, for example, Num. 11:16, 17); (3) the One who is to be sought after, found, and called (vs. 17; compare Deut. 4:29); (4) the One who loves and is to be loved (vs. 17; compare, for example, Neh. 13:26); (5) the Giver of wealth (vss. 18–21; compare 1 Chron. 29:12); and (6) the Source of divine revelation (vss. 6–10, 19, 32, 34; compare 29:18; 30:3–5).

In Proverbs 8:12, the expression often translated “I, wisdom . . .” is better translated as “I am Wisdom,” in precise grammatical parallel with the common rhetorical form of divine self-reference regularly reserved elsewhere in Scripture for God: “I am Yahweh your God” *(see, for example, Ezek. 12:25, 35:12, Zech. 10:6, Mal. 3:6).* Wisdom in Proverbs 8 thus speaks and acts as a distinct, self-aware divine Being (the preincarnate Son of God). This usage of an attribute (wisdom) to refer to a distinct divine Person is technically known as *hypostasis*.

Ellen G. White clearly understood the Wisdom of Proverbs 8 as referring to the preincarnate Son of God. See especially *Signs of the Times*, August 29, 1900: “Through Solomon Christ declared . . . [Prov. 8:22–30 quoted]. In speaking of His preexistence, Christ carries the mind back through dateless ages. He assures us that there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God.”

**Consider This:** How does understanding Christ as “Divine Wisdom” broaden your perspective of God’s character and work?

II. The Divine Wisdom (Jesus) as CoCreeator With the Father *(Review Proverbs 8:22–31 and Colossians 1:15, 16 with your class.)*

The Hebrew word ‘amon in Proverbs 8:30 is best translated as “Master-craftsman,” thus providing further evidence that the Divine Wisdom is Christ, CoCreeator with the Father. Wisdom’s building of a house with seven pillars *(Prov. 9:1)* is probably an allusion to the seven days of Creation week and possibly the temple, as well.

Proverbs 30:4 reinforces this interpretation, alluding to this CoCreeator with Yahweh as “God’s Son.” That Proverbs 8:22–31 refers specifically to
the preincarnate Son of God, the Creator, is further supported by the allusions to Proverbs 8 in the New Testament and the application of these allusions to Christ in His work of Creation (see especially John 1:1–3; 1 Cor. 1:24, 30; Col. 1:15, 16; Heb. 1:1–4).

Consider This: According to Genesis 1:2, the Holy Spirit was also involved in Creation. How do you imagine the Three Persons of the Godhead carrying out Their “cocreative” operations during Their work of Creation? How does this picture enhance our concept of the Godhead as essentially relational (an intimate fellowship of divine Beings) from eternity?

III. Wisdom (Jesus) as Mediator Between God and His Creatures (Review Proverbs 8:22–25, 30, 31 with your class.)

Proverbs 8:22–25 uses the language of birth with reference to Wisdom (“brought forth/born”), but this does not indicate that Christ was literally born and does not imply that there was a time before which Christ did not exist. Rather, allusions to birth, when coupled with the Hebrew word nasak for “installed” (vs. 23), are technical Old Testament language for installation of a person into a new office. Note the precise parallel in Psalm 2:6, 7, where the Messianic king is clearly not literally born but rather installed into a royal office, using language of birth combined with the Hebrew word nasak meaning “installed.” Psalm 2 points forward to the time when Christ would be installed as King after His incarnation, while Proverbs 8 points backward to the preincarnate Christ’s installation into a new office at the beginning of Creation (vss. 22, 23).

What office? Proverbs 8:30, 31 indicate that Christ’s new office was that of a mediator, not in the sense of an intercessor for sin but in the sense of a communication link between Creator and creation. Wisdom is at the same time “rejoicing always before Him [Yahweh]” and “rejoicing in His [Yahweh’s] inhabited world.” Thus, Wisdom takes the role of Mediator (in the sense of “go-between”) between God and created beings, facilitating communication between the infinite God and finite creatures.

Consider This: What is the difference between Christ’s mediatorial work for sinners after the Fall and His office as Mediator between infinity and finitude from the beginning of Creation?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: In the “counsel of peace” (Zech. 6:13) among the coequal members of the Godhead before the creation of the universe, it appears that the Person we call the Father represents the transcendent majesty and glory
of the Trinity, while the one we call the Son would “empty” Himself, coming close to His inhabited universe, mediating between infinity and finitude, thus demonstrating from the dawn of Creation the Immanuel principle, God with us!

Thought Questions:

1. What evidence from the Old Testament hints at the possibility that Christ took the form (not the nature) of an angel to interface with His creation? (See the passages depicting the divine “Angel [or Messenger] of the Lord”: Genesis 16:13; 18, 19; 22:24; 48:16; Exodus 23:20, 21; 32, 33; and Judges 13:3, 13, 17, 18, 22, etc.)

2. How does Christ’s stooping to be close to His creatures, even before sin, reveal that God is not aloof, distant, cold, and forbidding but rather intimate, personal, warm, and affirming?

Application Questions:

1. How does understanding the Immanuel principle regarding the work of the Son in Creation affect your personal relationship with God and perhaps alter your perspective on the nature and character of God?

2. Why was it important to the Godhead for one of Their members (Jesus) to be a Mediator (go-between), bridging the gulf between an infinite God and finite creatures?

3. What, if anything, would have changed had They decided that the One we call the Father should have become the Mediator between infinity and finitude? Discuss.

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The Hebrew word for “rejoice” in Proverbs 8:30, 31 literally means “laugh, sport, play.” This passage seems to picture the Father and Son joyously laughing, sporting, even playing during Creation. Does this indicate that God can identify with us even in our play and sport?

Activity: Think about and share with the class possible times during the Creation week when the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit might have playfully laughed as They created unique animals and plants (the long-necked giraffe, the striped zebra, the kangaroo, etc.). Then share how you imagine God enjoying fellowshipping with us in our innocent play, as well as in our work and worship.
The Blessings of the Righteous

Sabbath Afternoon


Memory Text: “Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked” (Proverbs 10:6, NKJV).

A s the title suggests, this lesson looks at the blessings of the righteous. The Hebrew word zaddiq, for “righteous,” is the key word in our texts. Zedeq (also translated “justice”), from which it is derived, appears in the introduction of the whole book: “The proverbs of Solomon . . . to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice [zedeq] . . .” (Prov. 1:1–3). What the book of Proverbs is telling us is that wisdom is righteousness, and “righteousness” means to walk according to God’s commands—to walk in faith and obedience to what the Lord has called us to be and to do. Righteousness is a gift, one that comes from God. The opposite is folly and unfaithfulness. Wisdom is justice, or righteousness; folly is sin and wickedness—and in the verses we will study, the contrast between them is stark.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 31.
January 25

Righteousness Is Holistic

Read Proverbs 10:1–7. What various principles about life and faith are revealed here?


There is a story about a man in a boat who began to drill a hole under his feet where he sat. When people in the boat demanded that he stop, he responded: “This is none of your business. This is my place!” This absurd response is often the excuse used by the sinner to justify his or her behavior. “This is my life; it has nothing to do with you.” Of course, anything we do or don’t do has an impact on others, especially on those nearest to us. Who hasn’t felt, in a big way, the results of other people’s actions, either good or bad?

The principle of unity between the spiritual-moral life and the physical-material life is dealt with in verses 3–5. The main idea is that wickedness or moral deficiency does not pay, even if one is rich; and that righteousness is always rewarding, in one way or another, even if one is poor.

In verses 6 and 7, we see here an earlier expression of what Jesus said about how lust is adultery, or hatred akin to murder. Hiding our hatred behind our words doesn’t always work either. Wicked thoughts are often betrayed in our body language and the tone of our voice. The best possible starting point for good relations with others is, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18, NKJV; compare with Matt. 19:19, NKJV). As the texts also suggest, the impression you make for good can have a lasting influence on others. In the end, we’re dealing with a certain amount of common sense: Isn’t it better to have a good name than a bad one?

What important decision are you going to be making soon? If you haven’t already done so, consider carefully the impact that choice might have on others, for good or for evil.
The Mouth of the Righteous

The mouth (with its components, the lips and the tongue) is the most important organ in the book of Proverbs. In the New King James Version of the book, the word mouth is used 50 times, lips occurs 41 times, and tongue 19. The use of this organ in speech is a particularly important theme in Proverbs 10–29.

The basic premise is crucial: our words are very powerful, either for good or for evil. The tongue can be the best or the worst gift that we’ve been given. This ambivalence about the tongue is one of the most important lessons in Proverbs. Indeed, the mouth generates life, but it also may bring death.

Read Proverbs 10:11–14. What is the contrast there between how the righteous person speaks and how the fool does?

In verse 11, notice the expression the “well of life.” It symbolically refers to qualities of wisdom. It is used in reference to the Lord (Ps. 36:9), the Source of life. The same image is used in relation to the sanctuary, from which the stream of water springs (Ezek. 47:1, 2). Jesus uses this metaphor to illustrate the gift of the Spirit (John 4:14). So the comparison of the mouth of the righteous to “a well of life” amounts to relating it to God Himself.

What characterizes this mouth is the positive gift of “life.” This quality tells us what the proper function of the mouth should be. It should be a force for good, not evil; a source of life, not death. What is being said here is seen also in James 3:2–12.

Remember, too, that it was through speech, through the “word of His power” (Heb. 1:3, NKJV), that God created the heavens and the earth. Speech, therefore, should serve only creative purposes.

Consider just how incredibly powerful words are. With your words you can fill people with self-confidence, cheer, and hope, or you can break them down and damage them as surely as if you attacked them physically. How careful are you as you wield the power of your tongue?
The Hope of the Righteous

“The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them” (Prov. 11:3). What evidence do we have of the truth of this verse? What examples have you seen or heard about in which this spiritual truth has been revealed? By contrast, what things have you seen that mean, so far at least, that you have to take this text by faith?

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Read Proverbs 11. Though it touches on so many topics, what are some of the great blessings that come to the faithful as opposed to what happens to the wicked?

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The sense of a future and the value of what is not yet seen (see 2 Cor. 4:18) help motivate the righteous to live rightly. Because of their hope in the future, the righteous behave with humility, honesty, and compassion.

On the other hand, wicked people live only in the present; they are concerned only with what they see and with the immediate reward. They think of themselves before others and will resort to deception and abuse. For instance, the salespeople who deceive their customers might perhaps get an immediate reward with a higher price, but they ultimately could lose their customers, and their business might fail (Prov. 11:3, 18).

Think about some of the decisions you have to make and how you go about making them. How much long-term planning (as in eternity) factors into your choices?

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The Truth of the Righteous

Read Proverbs 12 and focus on the theme of words, especially in the context of telling truth or telling lies. What message do we find here about honesty and lying?

Philosopher Sissela Bok has convincingly demonstrated how lying can be harmful for society. She writes: “A society, then, whose members were unable to distinguish truthful messages from deceptive ones, would collapse.”—Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 19. Likewise, Augustine, as quoted in the introduction of Bok’s book, noted that “when regard for truth has been broken down or even slightly weakened, all things will remain doubtful.”—Page xv.

Ellen G. White wrote: “Lying lips are an abomination to Him. He declares that into the holy city ‘there shall in no wise enter . . . any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie.’ Let truth telling be held with no loose hand or uncertain grasp. Let it become a part of the life. Playing fast and loose with truth, and dissembling to suit one’s own selfish plans, means shipwreck of faith. . . . He who utters untruths sells his soul in a cheap market. His falsehoods may seem to serve in emergencies; he may thus seem to make business advancement that he could not gain by fair dealing; but he finally reaches the place where he can trust no one. Himself a falsifier, he has no confidence in the word of others.”—My Life Today, p. 331.

When we think of how powerful words are, we must think about lying, as well, because most lies are told with words. Who hasn’t felt the sting, the betrayal, the sense of defilement when lied to? It’s not hard to imagine a society falling into total chaos when lying is the norm rather than an aberration from the norm.

There’s another angle, too: the effect of lying on the one who lies. Some people are so used to the practice that it doesn’t bother them; many people, though, do feel a sense of guilt, of shame, when they lie. Good for them, because that means there is still some receptiveness to the Holy Spirit.

Imagine, though, the danger for the one who lies but doesn’t even think twice about it.

When was the last time you lied? How did you feel when you did it?
The Reward of the Righteous

As we have seen in Proverbs, so much of the instruction and teaching given has been presented by contrasting two types of people. “The wise person does this, the fool does that.” “The godly man does that, the wicked man does this.”

Of course, in reality, there’s often a bit of wisdom and foolishness in all of us. With the exception of Jesus, we all are sinners, we all fall “short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Fortunately, we have the wonderful promise that comes in the next verse: though we are sinners, by faith we can be “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (vs. 24).

In the end, all humanity is going to be in either one of two camps: people who are going to be saved or lost.

**Read** John 3:16. What two options does all humanity face?

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**Read** Proverbs 13. How does this chapter contrast the experience and fate of the righteous with that of the wicked?

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The wise are compared to a lasting lamp, while the wicked are compared to a lamp that will be put out (Prov. 13:9). The wise person will enjoy the good fruit of his or her work, while the sinner will reap evil (vss. 2, 25). Through their children (vs. 22), the wise have a future even beyond themselves; the wicked, instead, will leave their wealth to strangers, even to the righteous (vs. 22).

The point is that a life of faith and obedience to the Lord is better than a life of disobedience and folly.

**Putting aside the big issue of the promise of eternal life, what are some of the immediate, day-to-day advantages that you have experienced through living a life of faith in Christ?**

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**Further Study:** “It is not enough to make a profession of faith in Christ and have our names registered on the church roll. . . . Whatever our profession, it amounts to nothing unless Christ is revealed in works of righteousness.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 312, 313.

“The greatest deception of the human mind in Christ’s day was that a mere assent to the truth constitutes righteousness. In all human experience a theoretical knowledge of the truth has been proved to be insufficient for the saving of the soul. . . . The darkest chapters of history are burdened with the record of crimes committed by bigoted religionists. . . . The same danger still exists. Many take it for granted that they are Christians, simply because they subscribe to certain theological tenets. But they have not brought the truth into practical life. . . . Men may profess faith in the truth; but if it does not make them sincere, kind, patient, forbearing, heavenly-minded, it is a curse to its possessors, and through their influence it is a curse to the world.

“The righteousness which Christ taught is conformity of heart and life to the revealed will of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 309, 310.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. **Discuss how our decisions impact others for good or for evil.** Why is this an inescapable fact of life? This truth was first revealed in the story of the Fall, where even to this day the impact of Adam’s and Eve’s choice is felt in each of our lives. It might be tempting to try to measure the amount of good or bad our decisions might bring, but that’s risky, because we often don’t know the impact of our choices. Why, then, in light of God and His law, must we choose to do what’s right, regardless of what we fear the consequences might be?

2. **Proverbs makes a sharp distinction between the righteous and the fool, and from these verses we learn about what is right and wrong.** Why, though, must we be very careful whom we judge as fools? On the other hand, how often have we been deceived by those whom we once thought were righteous?
The Lesson in Brief

►Key Text: Proverbs 10:6

►The Student Will:

Know: Understand the contrast between good results of good choices and bad results of bad choices.
Feel: Trust in God’s wisdom and desire for our well-being.
Do: Be aware of the causes of positive and negative effects in our lives and commit to making better choices.

►Learning Outline:

I. Know: Our Choices Make a Difference.

A What kinds of choices do we have in life?
B How and why do our choices cause positive or negative effects for ourselves and others?
C How do our inner attitudes affect our choices?
D How does God guide and encourage us to make good choices?

II. Feel: God Is Wise and Desires Our Well-Being.

A Why do we sometimes put our own judgment above God’s, rather than trusting that He knows what is best for us?
B Why might we regard God’s instructions as arbitrary and irrelevant to our well-being, as opposed to believing that He wants the best for us?
C How do our feelings about God come across to others?

III. Do: Be More Aware and Make Better Choices.

A Which aspects of your life that are under your control could be better?
B What efforts are you willing to put forth in order to understand what is going on and to make changes?
C What will you do if changing is difficult?

►Summary: God explains the principles of cause and effect at work in our lives so that we can know how to make choices that benefit us and others.
Learning Cycle

❖ STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Proverbs 10:1–7

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God created humans with free choice so that we can love Him and one another. Without free choice, there can be no love. But if we are free to choose God and His love, we are also free to reject Him and choose selfishness instead. Rather than forcing us to choose Him, in which case there would be no real choice or opportunity for love, God clearly sets out the alternatives and their consequences before us so that we can make informed choices rather than being deceived through ignorance.

Just for Teachers: The proverbs of Solomon in chapter 10 of the book of Proverbs are mainly constructed as contrasting parallels. The two halves of each proverb are connected by a common element but separated by factors that are opposite. Thus, the two parts of verse 1 are linked by the topic of a son’s effect on his parents. Whether a parent is happy or experiences grief depends on whether the son is wise or foolish. By analyzing relationships between the two parts of these proverbs, we can find concepts that we might otherwise miss.

For example, Proverbs 10:6 reads, “Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked” (NKJV). The unifying element is the effect of one’s character on a part of the person’s body. The idea of violence covering the mouth can be taken in two ways. First, the mouth could be a source of violence (compare vs. 11), so that the guilt of violence would cover it (compare Mal. 2:16). Second, a wicked person could suffer violence in such a way that he could not even cry for help (compare Esther 7:8–10). By combining the two ideas, the reader gains the meaning that setting evil in motion with one’s mouth comes back to affect the mouth. Not only does the punishment fit the crime, it results from the crime.

Opening Discussion: The fact that Proverbs presents so many choices shows the importance of our power of choice. God gave Adam and Eve a perfect world, but He also gave them the freedom to choose something else through eating the fruit of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:17). They did not need it; nor was it good for them, but they could have it if they wanted. By choosing that one tree, they were imprisoned by its world of moral weakness, sorrow, suffering, and death (Genesis 3). Now their choices, and those of all their descendants, would be difficult and complicated.
Questions for Discussion:

1. How do sin and its results complicate our choices?
2. How does the book of Proverbs show the complexities of life and how to safely navigate through them?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Proverbs emphasizes that our Creator gives us great freedom of choice, but He has also set up causes and effects that make things work in our world according to our nature. So, violating the relational boundaries that God has made for our good (see Deut. 10:13) is an invitation to disaster as a matter of cause and effect, not because God inflicts arbitrary punishment. Every sane person wants to achieve a sense of well-being, happiness, and success in life; so, Proverbs motivates by appealing to common sense.

Bible Commentary

Proverbs teaches about values and their results. Those who are loving and humble often receive the benefits of these virtues in their lives. Even if they suffer in the present age, Jesus is coming to reward them in the age to come (Rev. 22:12).

In Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28–30, God promised to lavish blessings on those who would faithfully follow Him and receive the benefits of living according to the principles of cause and effect that He has set up. By blessing them, He can attract others to follow Him too (Deut. 4:6).

I. Love Covers All Sins (Review Proverbs 10 with your class.)

Proverbs 10:12 observes, “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins” (NKJV). Here, covering sins is good because it results from love, which is the opposite of hatred. However, 28:13 says, “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (NKJV).

Covering sins as a cover-up is not good. Here, a person covers up his or her own sins, but, in 10:12, our love for others will cover their sins against us. The Hebrew noun for “sin” here is a strong one, which is often translated “transgression” elsewhere in the Bible. It carries the idea of “rebellion” (compare the related verb “rebel” in 2 Kings 1:1). Thus, Proverbs 10:12 is powerful: if you have love that is willing to overlook and forgive the kinds of offenses against you that break relationships, you will enjoy peace rather than strife. We can forgive others as God forgives us, because we love people as God and His Son love us (John 3:16).
Consider This: Can you think of times in your life that love has preserved and healed your relationships? Can you see how love for oneself and others (compare Lev. 19:18) underlies specific illustrations in Proverbs?

II. Wisdom in Humility (Review Proverbs 11, 12 with your class.)

Proverbs 11:2 says, “When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom” (NKJV). The wisdom of humility and the foolishness of pride is a prominent theme in the book of Proverbs (for example, see 16:18). Proud, arrogant people do not listen to others, because they are sure that they are right. Proverbs 12:15 calls such a person a “fool.”

Humility is a basic requirement for wisdom because a humble person respects the Source of wisdom and therefore is teachable. Above all, a humble person respects the divine Source of all wisdom. This is why “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10, NKJV). Pride is sin because it rebels against God and His goodness (Prov. 8:13; Isa. 14:13, 14), but God promises to dwell with humble people and revive them (Isa. 57:15). The basis of this revival is the sacrifice of Christ, who humbled Himself and therefore is exalted (Phil. 2:5–10). His acceptance of humility looks like foolishness to the world, but it is the greatest demonstration of divine wisdom (1 Cor. 1:18–25).

Discussion Questions: How did humility or pride affect specific people in Bible stories? How have you seen the different effects of humility and pride in your life?

III. Reward of the Righteous (Review Proverbs 13 with your class.)

Proverbs 13:21 lays out two alternatives: “Evil pursues sinners, but to the righteous, good shall be repaid” (NKJV). Here, evil is a dynamic, active force that hunts down those who violate God’s law of love, but the righteous will surely enjoy the results of their choices.

In Psalm 23:6, goodness is also an active force: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life” (NKJV). The Hebrew verb translated as “follow” means “pursue.” It is the same word that appears in Proverbs 13:21. So, those who pursue good are pursued by it! They don’t need to worry about the reward they will receive; it will surely come (Matt. 6:33). This dynamic explains Proverbs 13:7: “There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing; and one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches” (NKJV). A person who seeks first to be rich in this life ends up with nothing, but one who gives all to serve others, as Jesus did, will have an eternal reward.

Consider This: Where do you find the idea of rewards for the righteous elsewhere
in the Bible? What particular kinds of rewards do you want in this life and the life to come? How does the way you live reflect the kinds of rewards you want?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Love, humility, and deferring the enjoyment of rewards until the next life are not natural for fallen human beings. Help your class to grasp the big picture of long-range cause and effect so that they are motivated to live by faith in God’s promises and instructions and not just by what they see around them.

Application Questions:

1. In what ways are we loving and humble people? How do these basic qualities affect those around us and our witness for Christ?

2. How can we apply Romans 5:5 and Philippians 2:1–11 in our lives to become more loving and humble?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: This study of Proverbs 10–13 has identified major opportunities for personal growth and effectiveness in sharing God’s goodness. Emphasize to your class the practical results of humbly receiving and passing on His love and blessings.

Activities:

1. List specific ways in which your church group can be a more powerful witness for Christ by humbly serving others through love.

2. Conduct a survey in your community to find ways in which your church can help meet its needs. What do the results of the survey reveal about how your church can best serve? Commit to putting one of the suggestions on the survey into action.
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Proverbs 14; Dan. 7:25; Mark 12:30, 31; Prov. 15:3; Isa. 5:20; Proverbs 15; Matt. 20:26–28.

Memory Text: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12, NKJV).

As Paul had said: “We see through a glass, darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12). We see so little, and what we do see always comes filtered through our own minds. Our eyes and ears—all our senses, actually—give us only a narrow view of what’s really out there.

We can be deceived, too, not only about the external world but about ourselves, as well. Our dreams, our views, and our opinions can give us very distorted images of what we are really like, and of all deceptions, that can be by far the worst.

What should we do then to protect ourselves from these deceptions? Proverbs provides us with basic counsel. We should not trust ourselves, as the fool does. On the contrary, we should trust the Lord, who controls the course of events even when all seems to go wrong. In short, we need to live by faith and not merely by sight, because our sight can be exceedingly deceptive, showing only a small portion of what is real, and then even worse, distorting the little it does show us.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 7.
The Assurance of the Fool

Read Proverbs 14. What does it say about the fool?

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...The fool speaks proudly (Prov. 14:3). The first depiction of the fool deals with his “proud speech.” The image of the rod associated with the fool’s lips implies his eventual punishment. His proud words have resulted in a blow on his lips, an outcome that is seen in contrast with the lips of the wise, which are preserved (see also Dan. 7:8).

...The fool mocks wisdom (Prov. 14:6–9). Although the fool seems to seek wisdom, in fact he does not believe in it and is skeptical of it. He will not find it because, in his own mind, there is no wisdom apart from himself. Most frightful is his attitude toward violation of the law. What could be more deadly than mocking the idea of sin?

...The fool is credulous (Prov. 14:15). Paradoxically, while the fool makes fun of those idealists who still believe in the values of wisdom, he has lost his ability to think critically about what he hears; he believes “every word.” The irony of this situation strikes at the heart of secular society. Skeptical people mock God and make fun of religion, claiming that these beliefs are for children and old people; yet, they themselves often believe in some of the most foolish things, such as the creation of life on earth by pure chance alone.

...The fool is impulsive (Prov. 14:16, 29). Because the fool believes that he has the truth within himself, he does not take time to think. His reaction will be quick, dictated mostly by impulse.

...The fool oppresses others (Prov. 14:21, 31). The mechanisms of oppression and intolerance are suggested in the psychology of the fool. He is intolerant of others and will treat them with contempt (see Dan. 7:25; 8:11, 12).

It’s easy to see the traits of a fool in others, but what about in our own selves? Which, if any, of these character flaws might you need first to recognize and then seek by God’s grace to overcome?

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The Fear of the Wise

Read Proverbs 14 again. What does it say about the wise?

The wise speak humbly (Prov. 14:3). The wise restrain the use of their lips. Their silent reflection is motivated by a lack of arrogant self-assurance. The wise give consideration to the other person’s ideas; therefore, the wise will take time to think through and weigh the evidence. They are also silent because they are listening, ready to learn from others.

The wise value learning and knowledge (Prov. 14:6, 18). It is difficult for the fool to learn, because it is hard for him to sit at the feet of a teacher; in contrast, it is easy for the wise to learn because of their humility. They will thus enjoy the experience of learning and growing. It is also this search for wisdom, for knowledge that they do not have, which makes them wise.

The wise are cautious (Prov. 14:15). The wise know that sin and evil exist. Therefore they will be careful where they walk. They will not trust their feelings and personal opinions; they will check things out and ask for advice. Yet, they will always be careful about what other people say to them; they will sort out the good from the bad (1 Thess. 5:21).

The wise are calm (Prov. 14:29, 33). The wise can stay quiet because they do not rely on their “own ways” but depend on “above” (vs. 14, NKJV). It is their faith in God that allows them to relax and exercise self-control (Isa. 30:15). It is the fear of God that gives them confidence (Prov. 14:26).

The wise are compassionate and sensitive (Prov. 14:21, 31). The two commandments, “You shall love the LORD your God” and “You shall love your neighbor,” are linked (Mark 12:30, 31, NKJV). We can’t love God and at the same time treat other people poorly. The greatest expression of our faith is how we deal with others, especially those in need.

“We do not realize how many of us walk by sight and not by faith. We believe the things that are seen, but do not appreciate the precious promises given us in His Word.”—Ellen G. White, Our High Calling, p. 85. What does it mean to walk by faith and not by sight? How are we supposed to do that?
“The Eyes of the Lord”

“The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good” *(Prov. 15:3, NKJV).* How does this text make you feel, and why?

In the next two chapters of Proverbs, the tone changes. These chapters are more theological than the preceding ones. The Lord is referenced more often than in previous proverbs. We are also told something amazing about Him: that His eyes are in every place *(Prov. 15:3).*

This acute consciousness of the Lord’s presence is precisely what the ancient Israelites called “the fear of the Lord.” The same association is found in the Psalms: “the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him” *(Ps. 33:18, NKJV).* Likewise, Job describes God as the One who looks to the ends of the earth and sees all that happens under the heavens *(Job 28:24).* Because of this, Job concludes that “the fear of the Lord . . . is wisdom” *(Job 28:28).*

This proverb reminds us of God’s ability to see good and evil, no matter where they are. As Solomon understood *(1 Kings 3:9)*, true wisdom is the ability to discern between good and evil. On a human level, this awareness should help us to remember always to do good and never evil, for God sees all that we do, even if no one else does. We fool ourselves, thinking that because, for now, we get away with evil, that we really do get away with it. In the long run, we never do.

Let us, therefore, be diligent, for “there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” *(Heb. 4:13, NKJV).*

Read Proverbs 15:3, Isaiah 5:20, and Hebrews 5:14. What crucial message do these verses have for us, especially in an age when the very concepts of “good and evil” are often blurred, with people claiming that good and evil are relative or just human ideas that have no objective existence apart from what we say they are? What is so wrong with such a notion of good and evil, and why is it so dangerous to hold?
The Joy of the Lord

Read Proverbs 15. Why is joy such an important human asset?

Scripture does not promise us a life without trials. As Jesus Himself said, “‘Sufficient for the day is its own trouble’” (Matt. 6:34, NKJV). Proverbs 15:15 explains that amid evil days, the one who maintains a merry heart will have a better time of it. Pain, suffering, and trials will come, and often we can’t control when and how. What we can control, at least to some degree, is how we choose to respond.

Read Proverbs 15:14, 23. What is God’s part in this joy?

Although the biblical text does not explicitly mention the reason for joy, the parallel thought between verses 13 and 14 suggests that the “merry heart” is “the heart of him who has understanding” (NKJV). It is the heart of the one who has faith and sees redemption beyond the immediate ordeal. This is why faith in God is so important; this is why it’s so crucial that we know for ourselves, from our own experience, the reality of God and His love. Then, whatever trials come, whatever suffering we face, those with understanding can endure, because they know for themselves God’s love.

Proverbs 15:23 brings us another important idea. Joy comes more from what we give than from what we receive. It is the good word shared with others that will bring joy to the giver. Who hasn’t experienced the blessings that come from blessing others, whether in word or in deed or both? As we have already seen in Proverbs, our words are powerful. They can do great good or great evil. And how much better it is when they do great good, not only for the one for whom the good is done but for the one who does it.

How well do you know, for yourself, God’s love? What are things you could do that could help open up your heart to this crucial truth? Consider how much better life would be if you knew the reality of God’s love.
The Sovereignty of God

We all dream and make plans, and yet, things turn out differently, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. The Bible acknowledges the value of human responsibility and freedom. Yet, the Bible also affirms God’s control over the course of events (see Prov. 20:24, 21:31, and Daniel 2 and 7).

What does Proverbs 16:1 say? How are we to understand this text?

We prepare and make plans, but the last word still belongs to God. This does not mean that our preparations are worthless. But in the life of faith, if we just submit our plans to God, He will work with them, and our plans will be directed (Prov. 16:9) and ultimately established by Him (vs. 3). Even the work of our enemies will be used in our behalf (vss. 4, 7).

Though these are not simple ideas to grasp, especially when we face difficult situations, they should give us comfort and help us learn to trust God, even when things seem to go terribly wrong and when our plans don’t turn out as we had hoped. The key point for us is to learn to surrender all to God; if we do that, we can be sure of His guidance, even in the hardest times.

Read Proverbs 16:18, 19. What is the place of ambition in human success?

As always, the Bible warns against pride. After all, as fallen beings, what do we have to be proud of? What vice is more contrary to God than pride, the first sin? (See Ezek. 28:17.) Jesus emphatically taught about the iniquity of seeking to be great, and He urged His disciples to seek humility instead (Matt. 20:26–28).

Read Proverbs 16:33. What is the place of chance in human success?

The Bible does not make room for chance. For even when one thinks that the course of events is dictated by chance, we can trust that God is still in control.

As we seek to understand why things happen, how does the reality of the great controversy help us work through some difficult issues regarding why things happen as they do?
**Further Study:** “From the beginning Satan has portrayed to men the gains to be won by transgression. Thus he seduced angels. Thus he tempted Adam and Eve to sin. And thus he is still leading multitudes away from obedience to God. The path of transgression is made to appear desirable; ‘but the end thereof are the ways of death.’ Proverbs 14:12. Happy [are] they who, having ventured in this way, learn how bitter are the fruits of sin, and turn from it betimes.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 720.

“Nothing tends more to promote health of body and of soul than does a spirit of gratitude and praise. It is a positive duty to resist melancholy, discontented thoughts and feelings—as much a duty as it is to pray. If we are heaven-bound, how can we go as a band of mourners, groaning and complaining all along the way to our Father’s house? Those professed Christians who are constantly complaining, and who seem to think cheerfulness and happiness a sin, have not genuine religion.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 251.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Discuss the idea that we have only a limited view of reality. What does this mean? What things are out there that we know are real; yet, we just can’t sense them, in any way? For instance, how many radio waves (cell phone calls, satellite programs, radio programs) are in the air all around you right now, and yet you can’t see, hear, or feel them at all? How should the existence of such realities help us to understand how limited our senses are? How should this understanding help us to realize the reality of other things that we can’t see, such as angels?

2. Why is it important to understand the reality of human free will and free choice, even if God is ultimately in control? Though these concepts (human free choice, God’s sovereignty) seem to be in contradiction, both are taught in the Bible; so, how can we reconcile them?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Proverbs 14:12

The Student Will:

Know: Understand that humans, with their limited perspective, need God’s wisdom to avoid being deceived.
Feel: Distrust his or her own wisdom but feel security in God’s wisdom.
Do: Seek to learn from and live in the light of God’s large and accurate perspective.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: We Need God’s Wisdom to Avoid Being Deceived.
   A How much accurate information do you know, compared to how much God knows?
   B How much experience do you have, compared with God’s experience?
   C Why are human beings so easily deceived?
   D How and why does God share His perspective with us?

II. Feel: We Can Trust God’s Wisdom but Not Our Own.
   A How does a lack of understanding make you feel?
   B What is the danger of feeling overconfident?
   C How does your access to a source of absolute and dependable truth (the Bible) make you feel?
   D Why do many people ignore or resent the Bible?

III. Do: Learn From and Live by God’s Perspective.
   A How does the way that you live show how much you value God’s perspective?
   B Have you ever been deceived by yourself or by others? What have you learned from the results in your life when you took God’s perspective, not just your own, into account?
   C What are some specific, practical ways in which you can incorporate more of God’s perspective into your life?

Summary: The all-knowing God shares His big and accurate perspective to safely guide us through life.
**Learning Cycle**

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Spotlight on Scripture: Proverbs 14**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Things are not always what they seem to be. Many people want the effects of success and happiness without understanding their true nature or causes. They are deceived by believing that they are wise enough to devise their own strategies for arriving at what they think is good. Unaided human wisdom would be inadequate in a perfect world, but it is disastrous in a fallen world, where our warped perspectives make us vulnerable to being deceived by ourselves, other people, and crafty supernatural beings. We can be safe to enjoy true success and happiness only by relying on God’s wisdom, including His definition of success and happiness and His instructions regarding how to gain them.

**Just for Teachers:** Proverbs 14:12 pictures a person contemplating a road that looks good because it is straight. However, it ends up as a way to die. Outward appearance is not a safe guide. Jesus advised us to choose a difficult and unpopular path in life rather than an attractive and popular highway to destruction (Matt. 7:13, 14).

The “way” in which one “walks” can represent that person’s course of action (1 Kings 2:4). If people simply do what is right in their own eyes (Judg. 17:6, 21:25), without a divine guide or a map from God, they will not see dangers lurking down the road, because they lack sufficient perspective and experience (see the book of Judges). Being sincere and meaning well is not enough to protect them from disaster.

**Opening Discussion:** In Proverbs 14:1, wise women build their houses (compare 31:10–31), but folly (personified) tears down her house with her own hands. Do unwise people want to destroy what belongs to them, or can this be a consequence of their carelessness (compare 14:16), even if they think they are doing what is right? One kind of carelessness is simply to believe whatever one hears (vs. 15), because human sources of knowledge are unreliable. So, we need to carefully check out what people tell us, including what we hear through television and the Internet.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. Can you think of illustrations in the Bible and in your life of the principles expressed by Proverbs 14:1, 12? What is the relationship between the ideas in these verses?
How can you enjoy trusting relationships with people without being gullible? What examples of how to maintain this balance did Jesus give us?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Proverbs teaches us how to prevent problems by making wise choices. These choices are informed by accurate identification of the factors involved in a situation that could lead to one kind of consequence or another. Think before you act rather than blindly rushing ahead on the basis of however you feel at the time.

There were many other wisdom writings in the ancient Near East, including the proverbs of other religions and cultures, but the biblical book of Proverbs adds a crucial Holy Spirit–inspired dimension: the only way to enjoy long-term happiness and well-being is to put God first in your life (Prov. 1:7, Matt. 6:33). Moses clearly set the choice of life and good versus death and evil before his people (Deut. 30:15, 16). Furthermore, following God is not legalism, which misuses the law for purposes that it is not intended, such as to buy salvation from sins already committed or to dominate other people.

Bible Commentary

Proverbs 14 uses examples to profile some major differences between wisdom and foolishness in terms of attitudes, making decisions, behavior (including treatment of others), and speech. These differences depend on whether a person is narrowly focused on personal short-range interests or takes into account the big, long-range picture revealed by God. God sees everything, whether it is good or evil (15:3); so, His guidance is reliable, and He can hold everyone accountable for what they do. Although humans make plans, their outcomes depend on Him (16:9).

I. Wisdom Takes the Big Picture Into Account (Review Proverbs 14 with your class.)

Being narrow-minded, shortsighted, selfish, and disrespectful toward God doesn’t pay. Such people tear down their houses (Prov. 14:1; compare vs. 11), are punished for what they say (vs. 3), seek wisdom in vain (vs. 6), are deceived regarding which way to go (vs. 8; compare vs. 15), are consumed with envy (vs. 30), and are banished (vs. 32). By contrast, the same verses say that those who are broad-minded look ahead and are unselfish because they are loyal to God, build their houses, are preserved by what they say,
easily gain knowledge, understand which way to go, and are emotionally healthy.

Lest anyone fail to comprehend that the big picture is what counts, in verse 4 the author brings this principle down to a mundane level: one could prefer to have no oxen to care for, but with oxen (the equivalent of a tractor) for plowing, a farmer can grow a lot more.

Consider This: How do the examples of Caleb and Joshua in Numbers 13:25–14:38 and Elisha in 2 Kings 6:11–23 illustrate the value of seeing the big picture? What can we learn from them as we seek to enter the ultimate Promised Land (Heb. 11:16) while under attack by evil supernatural forces (Eph. 6:12)?

II. God Sees Everything (Review Proverbs 15 with your class.)

Proverbs 15:3 observes, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good” (NKJV). Therefore, God is able to help His loyal people (2 Chron. 16:9). The psalmist realized that God knew everything about him, even before he was born (Psalm 139). Rather than resenting such omniscience as an invasion of privacy, he was grateful and opened his heart with a prayer (vss. 23, 24).

Nobody can fool God. He knows when those who offer prayer or worship are sincere or hypocritical (Prov. 15:8; compare Isa. 1:11–17). He even knows our thoughts (Prov. 15:26). So, rather than avoiding God when we sin (Gen. 3:7, 8), we would be better off to confess what He already knows and receive forgiveness (Ps. 32:1–5).

Discussion Questions: How does understanding that God knows everything affect your approach to life? Can you trust people who don’t think they are accountable to God? Why, or why not?

III. Humans Plan, but God Directs (Review Proverbs 16 with your class.)

Proverbs 16:9 affirms, “The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps” (NASB; see also 19:21). Having planned wisely in consultation with others (15:22, 21:5), we should realize that humans do not understand or control everything that can affect what will actually happen, even in our age of science and technology.

God gives humans free choice, which is why He needs to instruct, warn, and appeal through the Bible and through His Holy Spirit (John 16:7–10). God also influences people through factors in their environment that He controls. For example, although Joseph’s brothers tried to get rid of him (Genesis 37),
God set up factors, including a famine, that empowered Joseph to save his family (Genesis 39–47). He assured his brothers: “You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good” (Gen. 50:20, NKJV; compare Rom. 8:28).

**Consider This:** The biblical stories of Daniel and Esther show how God works effectively behind the scenes to accomplish His goals and save His people, in spite of powerful and determined opposition. How do these stories affect you?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Help your class members to place their confidence in God, who knows everything about them (Matt. 10:29–31) and directs their steps in right paths (Ps. 23:3). Even if they go through difficulties, He is with them and leads them to a banquet on the other side (vss. 4, 5; Rev. 19:9).

**Application Questions:**
1. How has God led you in ways that turned out better than your plans? How does this affect your ability to trust Him in the present and future?
2. In what ways have you found that even bad things that happen to you “work together for good” (Rom. 8:28) by helping you trust God more and by making you live in hope of a better world?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Proverbs 14–16 show how we need to rely on God’s wisdom to help us choose the way to gain what is best for us. Help your class members to see how they can apply this principle when they meet various situations in their lives.

**Activities:**
1. Ask class members to share personal stories of God’s providence in their lives and discuss what these stories mean to them.
2. Have your class members make a list of practical items of advice, sharing what they have learned about the “big picture,” such as managing time to open up space in their lives for daily Bible study and prayer, nurturing relationships, resolving conflicts, getting out of debt, and so on.
3. Post this list in the church newsletter or on the church’s Web site.
4. Having studied Proverbs 14–16, write your own modern proverbs that capture some of the same principles.
Dealing With Fights

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Proverbs 17, 1 Cor. 13:5–7, John 8:1–11, Proverbs 18, 19, Deut. 24:10–22.

Memory Text: “Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full of feasting with strife” (Proverbs 17:1, NKJV).

Proverbs again denounces the deception of appearances. We may seem to have everything the world offers—wealth, power, pleasure, fame—but behind the facade, tension and misery flourish. It’s even possible that the cause of this tension and misery is precisely the wealth and pleasure that people strive so hard for. As an Egyptian proverb notes: “Better is bread with a happy heart than wealth with vexation.”—Miriam Lichtheim, The New Kingdom, vol. 2 of Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), p. 156. According to the book of Proverbs, the first step to solve this problem is to recognize what our priorities are: peaceful relationships are more important than wealth (Prov. 17:1). What counts is not so much what we have but who we are within ourselves. The advice that follows will help in restoring this priority and lead us toward an inner peace (shalom in the Hebrew) that will add to our happiness.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 14.
Sin and Friends

Read Proverbs 17:9, 19:11. What crucial point is being made in these texts? How should we deal with others who fall?

When someone messes up, it’s so tempting to spread the story, to tell others, *Have you heard about what so-and-so did?* Though we might act as if we are appalled by the action, we still like telling others about what happened. In short, we are gossiping, and that’s what we’re being warned against, because this behavior will generate contention, even between close friends. After all, if a friend of yours messes up, what kind of friend are you if you go around telling others about it?

We are advised instead to “cover” the mistake. This is not, however, to imply that we have to hide the sin, to act as if it never happened, as if the person never did wrong. The sin that is covered is still present, even though hidden. In fact, the Hebrew word for “cover” in that expression has the specific connotation of “forgiving” (*Ps. 85:2, Neh. 4:5*). Love, not gossip, should be our response to someone else’s mistake.

Read Proverbs 17:17 and 1 Corinthians 13:5–7. How does love help in coping with a friend’s mistake?

One does not love a friend or spouse because he or she is perfect. We love in spite of their mistakes and flaws. Only through love do we learn not to judge others, because with our own faults and shortcomings we could be just as guilty. Instead, we can mourn with them over what they have done, and seek in whatever way we can to help them work through it. After all, what are friends for if not for this?

Think about a time you messed up badly and you were forgiven, ministered to, and comforted. What does that tell you about how, if possible, you should do the same for others?
Be Just!

True love is not blind. That we “cover” someone’s mistake through love does not mean that we do not see the sin and do not recognize it as such. Love and justice go together. The Hebrew word for “justice,” zedeq, also means “love,” “charity.” We cannot have real compassion if we are not just, and we cannot be just if we do not have compassion and love. The two concepts must be together.

For example, the exercise of charity toward the poor should not be done at the expense of justice; hence, the recommendation not to favor the poor in court (Exod. 23:3). If love obliges us to help the poor, it would be unjust to favor them when they are wrong, simply because they are poor. Justice and truth should therefore go along with love and compassion. It is this wise balance that characterizes the torah, the law of God, and which is taught and promoted in the book of Proverbs.

Read Proverbs 17:10, 19:25. What do they say about the need for rebuke and confrontation?

The fact that Proverbs 17:10 immediately follows the call to cover the mistake through love (vs. 9) is not an accident. This mention of “reproof” in connection with “love” places love in the right perspective. The text implies a strong rebuke.

Read John 8:1–11. How do we see Jesus dealing with open sin?

“In His act of pardoning this woman and encouraging her to live a better life, the character of Jesus shines forth in the beauty of perfect righteousness. While He does not palliate sin, nor lessen the sense of guilt, He seeks not to condemn, but to save. The world had for this erring woman only contempt and scorn; but Jesus speaks words of comfort and hope. The Sinless One pities the weakness of the sinner, and reaches to her a helping hand. While the hypocritical Pharisees denounce, Jesus bids her, ‘Go, and sin no more.’ ”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 462.
Words, Again

Read Proverbs 18. Though different themes are presented here, focus on what it has to say about our words. What important concepts are presented here regarding what we do or do not say?

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We are again confronted with the reality and power of words; in this case we see how fools use their mouths to their own undoing. Verse 13 is especially enlightening. How easy it is to speak out before carefully listening and discerning what has been said to us. How many times might we have spared ourselves, and others, undue pain and strife if we had only learned to think through carefully what we had just heard before responding to it. There is indeed a time when silence is the best response.

Read Proverbs 18:4. Why are the words of the wise like deep waters?

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The image of “deep waters” is used positively in the book of Proverbs to represent wisdom (Prov. 20:5). It conveys the idea of quiet, but also of profundity and riches. The wise are not superficial. They draw their words from the depths of personal reflection and experience. Who hasn’t marveled sometimes at the deep thoughts and insights from those who obviously have wisdom and knowledge?

Read Proverbs 18:21. What does it mean?

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Proverbs again tells us what we should already know: our words are powerful, and they can be a force for good or evil, even life and death. How careful we need to be, then, with how we use this powerful tool.

Think about a time someone’s words hurt you in a terrible way. What should this have taught you about how powerful words are? What should it teach you about how careful you need to be with what you say?

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Two Sides to a Story

Read Proverbs 18:2. Why don’t fools need time to form their opinions?

Fools are so sure of themselves and so eager to express their own opinions that they are not interested in learning from others. Their closed minds go along with their open mouths. This is a deadly combination. How careful we need to be that we don’t find ourselves doing the same thing, especially on a topic that we are convinced we are right about.

After all, haven’t we all at some point felt very strongly about a subject only to find, later on, that we were wrong? This doesn’t mean that we should be wishy-washy in our views; it means only that we need some humility, in that none of us has all the right answers. Even when our answers are right, truth is often deeper and more nuanced than we can appreciate or understand.

Read Proverbs 18:17. What important point is given to us here?

Only God does not need a second opinion, precisely because by His nature He already has it, for His eyes are everywhere (Prov. 15:3). God has the capacity to see all sides of any matter. We, by contrast, generally have a very narrow view of everything; a view that tends to get even narrower when we get locked into a position, especially on matters that we think are important.

As we should know by now, however, there are always two or even more sides to any story, and the more information we have, the better we can form the right view of a subject.

Think of a time you were absolutely convinced of something, maybe a view you have held your whole life, only to find out later that you had been wrong your whole life. What should this tell you about your need to be open to the possibility that you could be wrong about things you are fervent about now?
Be Truthful

A king needed to appoint a new minister to the highest office of his kingdom. For this purpose, he organized a special contest on lying: who could utter the biggest lie. All his ministers applied, and each one came and spoke their biggest lie. But the king was not satisfied; their lies seemed lame. The king then asked his closest and most trusted counselor: “Why didn’t you apply?”

The counselor answered, “I am sorry to disappoint you, Majesty, but I cannot apply.”

“Why not?” asked the king.

“Because I never lie,” the counselor replied.

The king decided to appoint him to the position.

As sinners, lying comes to us easier than we think; for this reason, again, how careful we need to be with our words.

Read Proverbs 19. Though many themes are presented there, what does it say about lying?

The book of Proverbs upholds a high ethical standard. It is better to remain poor, or even to lose a promotion, if we have to lie in order to get it, if we have to sacrifice our integrity (Prov. 19:1), if we have to cheat, or if it comes at the price of faithfulness (vs. 22).

Read Proverbs 19:9. What is the responsibility of a witness?

Lying, in and of itself, is bad enough; but doing it in court and under oath is even worse. In many countries perjury is a crime, and a serious one at that. The witness must therefore give a truthful testimony. It is no accident that this verse follows the mention of a “friend to one who gives gifts” (vs. 6, NKJV) and of the poor who are hated by their friends and even their brothers (vs. 7, NKJV). The point is, witnesses must not be influenced by bribes or by the social status of those they are testifying about.

Read Deuteronomy 24:10–22. What important principle is seen here, and how should we apply this to ourselves and to our dealings with those who are needy?
Further Study: “The spirit of gossip and talebearing is one of Satan’s special agencies to sow discord and strife, to separate friends, and to undermine the faith of many in the truthfulness of our positions. Brethren and sisters are too ready to talk of the faults and errors that they think exist in others, and especially in those who have borne unflinchingly the messages of reproof and warning given them of God.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 195.

“The children of these complainers listen with open ears and receive the poison of disaffection. Parents are thus blindly closing the avenues through which the hearts of the children might be reached. How many families season their daily meals with doubt and questionings. They dissect the characters of their friends, and serve them up as a dainty dessert. A precious bit of slander is passed around the board to be commented upon, not only by adults, but by children. In this God is dishonored. Jesus said: ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me.’ Therefore Christ is slighted and abused by those who slander His servants.”—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, page 195.

Discussion Questions:

1. It’s always hard when those you love or care about mess up. And it’s so easy to try to cover up for them. How do we strike the right balance in situations like these? Certainly, we need to show grace, as we have been shown grace for our errors—that goes without saying. But does grace always, or ever, mean that a person can sin with impunity and not face consequences? What then is the right course to take in situations like these?

2. As the lesson said this week, most things in life are very complicated and have many facets to them. So, even those things we happen to be right about will usually be more complex than we understand them to be. How can we learn to be open-minded while at the same time not being foolish about it?

3. What are some ways we can lie without ever using words?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Proverbs 19:3

The Student Will:

Know: Identify words that create contention.
Feel: Appreciate family and friends as wealth.
Do: Overhaul his or her life in order to bring it in line with the wisdom of Proverbs 17–19.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Identify Words That Create Contention.
   A Why do people fight over money? What do they say to one another when they fight?
   B Why do families sometimes fight when they are on a vacation together?
   C Why are words so important in building a relationship?

II. Feel: Appreciate Family and Friends as Wealth.
   A Why do people, at the end of their lives, say that they wish they had spent more time with family?
   B What are some things that are worse than poverty?
   C Why do the relationships of many rich and famous people end in divorce?

III. Do: Live by the Wisdom of Proverbs 17–19.
   A Why do we often end up saying things that we know we should not say?
   B How do the words of Jesus line up with the recommendations in these chapters?
   C Why do we think that telling the truth will create more contention and not less?

Summary: Human relationships are built on words. We constantly speak words to one another to indicate the nature of our relationships. Angry words of contention and lies indicate a broken relationship. Gracious words of truth and encouragement indicate a growing relationship.
**Learning Cycle**

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Proverbs 19:3*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Proverbs 19:3 tells us that ruined relationships are often of one’s own doing. They are created by contentious and false words, spoken in haste. But often, rather than reforming our behavior, we blame God for our troubles. This week’s lesson asks you to think again. More often than not, the cause of one’s trouble is the preoccupation with money and self. Identify the words escaping from your lips that may be at the root of your unhappiness, and make decisive changes to your behavior.

**Just for Teachers:** No changes can take place in one’s life until one takes responsibility for one’s own actions. We often injure ourselves by our words because we underestimate their power, whether for good or evil. You become a liar if you lie or a bully if you speak threatening words; and no one wants to have a liar or a bully around them.

**Opening Discussion:** What kinds of voices and words do you use when you speak to different people? Do you speak differently when you talk to your family as opposed to when you speak to your boss or your subordinates? Practice saying a phrase, such as, “Please bring me water,” using these different voices and tones, and explain to the class what they mean.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. Why do many cultures have polite and familiar forms of address? To whom are we closer, and why: those with whom we use polite expressions or those with whom we use familiar expressions?
2. What words and expressions offend us most? What words and expressions calm us most?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** Uncontrolled greed and self-absorption lie at the heart of all controversies. It is not wrong to want to protect your hard-earned wealth. But Proverbs asks us to consider whether or not we are about to lose valuable relationships over that wealth. One often sees that powerful people speak down to their subordinates. How do you speak to your children and spouse? Roughly or kindly?
How do you expect them to speak to you? Power games are the fastest way to destroy relationships. Do we not resent those we are forced to speak up to, especially if we think they do not deserve our respect? Proverbs calls upon us to speak kindly and truthfully to everyone.

Bible Commentary

I. Good and Evil Words (Review Proverbs 17 with your class.)

The proverbs in this chapter, with the exception of the last verse (vs. 28), come in couplets composed of two verses. In each of the couplets, the first verse mirrors the thoughts contained in the second verse. Verses 1 and 2 of chapter 17, for example, follow this structure. The thought of a servant inheriting the wealth of a household in verse 2 mirrors the thought of an unhappy and discordant household in verse 1. The point is that a stranger, such as a lawyer, will end up with much of the wealth if brothers in a rich family keep fighting over the inheritance.

Chapter 17 can be divided into three sections: (1) good words that build relationships (vss. 1–10); (2) evil words that destroy relationships (vss. 11–22); and (3) the cause of evil words (vss. 23–28). In the first section, good words are described as words of truth made pure by life’s trials (vss. 3, 4); excellent speech, which is a gift (vss. 7, 8); and reproofs that go down to the heart (vss. 9, 10). The family that speaks good words will live in harmony for generations (vss. 5, 6).

In the second section (vss. 11–22), evil words are described as contentious words (vss. 11, 12), false judgments (vss. 13–16), and words coming from a cold and arrogant heart (vss. 19, 20). These evil words can divide a household and bring sorrow to one’s own heart (vss. 21, 22). Yet, in hard times, there is no friend like a good brother or a sister (vss. 17, 18).

The third section (vss. 23–28) reveals that the cause of evil words is often a dispute over money and large gifts (vss. 23, 24). The love of money perverts justice and brings sorrow to one’s own loved ones (vss. 25, 26). And where there is contention over money, silence makes even fools appear wise (vs. 28).

Consider This: Jesus began His ministry without a place to lay His head (Matt. 8:20). In fact, He left behind only a pair of thongs (footwear), a cloak, and a tunic when He died. Of course, not every homeless person is like Jesus, but in this competitive world people often have to choose between friendship and their need to get ahead in life. Jesus always chose friendship. Which do you choose, and why?

II. The Mind-Set of a Loser (Review Proverbs 18 with your class.)
The proverbs in this chapter are arranged in couplets and triplets (three-verse units). In a triplet, the middle verse is the most important. At the heart of the chapter, there is a triplet (vss. 10–12) whose middle verse (vs. 11) reveals the selfish mind-set that produces contention and greed. A person of this mind-set believes that a “rich man’s wealth is his strong city” (NKJV). The two outer verses (vss. 10, 12) dismiss this baseless theory by asserting that God is “a strong tower.” The first nine verses of the chapter describe the lives of the rich and foolish. Their lives are isolated (“separated,” vs. 1), unintellectual (vs. 2), and unproductive (vs. 9). When they run out of money, people will treat them with “contempt” and “reproach” (vs. 3). The fool’s arrogant words (vss. 5–8) stand in stark contrast to the life-giving words of the wise (vs. 4).

The latter half of the chapter (vss. 13–23) reveals the secrets of finding true wealth. Success comes from two sources: the ability to “sustain” people in their “infirmity” and expert knowledge and understanding in things (vss. 13–15). Unlike these, bribery and flattery have no staying power because the winds of power change directions by chance (vss. 16–18). Verses 19–24 return to the opening theme of isolation. A good brother or a sister (vs. 19), a good wife (vs. 22), and a good friend (vs. 24) are precious gifts from God—they are worth gold. But believing themselves to be powerful (vs. 23), rich fools speak “roughly” to those who love them, driving them away.

**Discussion Questions:** Why do we not like people who flaunt their wealth and power? Why do people who do not like them still want to be like them? What is it about money and wealth that can wield so much power over us?

### III. Defining Wisdom *(Review Proverbs 19 with your class.)*

Chapter 19 seeks to define wisdom by contrasting the behaviors of the wise with those of the fool. The purpose is to encourage the reader to seek wisdom and avoid folly. Some of the high points are as follows: lying is, like luxury (vss. 9, 10), something that is not necessary. Lying is as unsightly as the luxury in the house of the fool. A patient and well-tempered person has the glory of a king who bestows favor (vss. 11, 12). Anger is a show of power because people generally explode at those who have a lower status than theirs. Compassion brings one close to the heart of God (vss. 17, 18). So, be firm but show compassion when disciplining a child. You cannot listen when you are angry (vss. 19, 20), because listening takes humility. The most excellent thoughts a person can think are thoughts of compassion and understanding for the feelings of the poor and downtrodden (vss. 21, 22). The opposite of “the fear of the Lord” is slothfulness (vss. 23, 24). For the person who fears the Lord will not “abide satisfied” in one place but promptly move forward to do the Lord’s bidding (vss. 23, 24).

**Consider This:** How does Proverbs 19 define wisdom? In what ways does
the chapter contrast wisdom and folly? What should we avoid? What kind of behaviors does Proverbs 19 encourage us to embrace?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Some things do not change. We still see the foolish behavior described in Proverbs 17–19 around us every day. As in the days of Solomon, people want wealth because they think it will give them status, security, and power. Yet, wealth has failed to deliver on these promises. These ideas live on, as those who have wealth put on a show of power with their nice clothes, big homes, and luxury cars. But the Bible tells us that those who display wealth and speak “roughly” to people actually live isolated lives, spent in idleness and strife. It is the wealth of wisdom and understanding that enriches our thoughts, builds our homes, and imparts happiness. Money certainly has its role in life, and we do wrong to say that it is not important. The danger comes from placing so much emphasis on it that we make it into a god, and by thus doing so, place ourselves on very dangerous spiritual ground. After all, what good is it to be very rich, to have all the world offers, but lose your soul as a result?

**Application Questions:**

1. How can you have the good things of life and still speak as a wise person speaks?
2. Have you ever seen a person become a beggar because he or she followed the commandments of God? Why, or why not?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Were you ever surprised by a good outcome when you courageously lived honestly, according to the wisdom of God? Please share with the class.

**Activities:**

1. Describe Bible personalities who risked all by living according to the wisdom of God. What were the outcomes of their decisions to risk all for God?
2. Discuss how the church can become a community of wise people whose lives stand in sharp contrast to the follies described in Proverbs 17–19.
Words of Wisdom

**SABBATH AFTERNOON**

**Read for This Week’s Study:** Proverbs 20; 1 Cor. 12:14–26; Jer. 9:23, 24; Proverbs 21; Matt. 25:35–40; Proverbs 22.

**Memory Text:** “Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, but who can find a faithful man?” (Proverbs 20:6, NKJV).

To some degree (a great degree, actually), we are all products of our environment. Though heredity plays a big role, the values we hold come to us from what is around us—our home, our education, our culture. From infancy we are impacted by what we see and hear.

Unfortunately, what we see and hear isn’t always the best for us; the world around us is fallen in every way, and it cannot help impacting us negatively. Nevertheless, we have been given the promise of the Holy Spirit, and we have God’s Word, which points us to something higher and better than the world does.

This week we will look at various proverbs and the practical truths they express, truths that, if taken to heart and followed, can, indeed, help us to overcome the negativity of this fallen world and prepare us for a better one.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 21.*
We Are All Equal

Read Proverbs 20:12. What does this teach us about the value of all humans?

Unlike the theory of evolution, which considers us all to be nothing but chance products of a mindless cosmos, the Bible teaches that all humans were created by God (see also Acts 17:26). It is no accident, either, that Thomas Jefferson asserted the equality of all humans precisely because they were “created” by God. It’s in the Lord, and in Him alone, that we have our equality.

Now, though we all have the same Maker, this doesn’t mean we are all the same. Even identical twins don’t wind up behaving exactly alike. In Corinthians, Paul talks about our differences and stresses that they should not lead to a sense of superiority but should, instead, help us to see our need for one another. “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’” (1 Cor. 12:21, NKJV).

Read Proverbs 20:9. What else makes us all equal?

Sin is another universal equalizer. To the rhetorical question of the proverb, the answer “no one” points to the tragic and hopeless condition of humankind. Humans are all weak and mortal, and all the money and power in the world will not change that. Yet, in the context of the Scriptures, this reference to human sinfulness should not lead to despair, because Jesus’ death on the cross and His resurrection have paved the way for anyone, no matter how sinful, to have the promise of eternal life. And this life comes solely through faith in Him—not by our works.

“If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy. And all this controversy is ended, as soon as the matter is settled that the merits of fallen man in his good works can never procure eternal life for him.”—Ellen G. White, Faith and Works, p. 20.

Do you ever find yourself feeling superior (or inferior) to other people? (You shouldn’t be comparing yourself to others anyway.) If so, what should the Cross tell you about the equality of us all?
The Test of Life

“‘Their works follow them,’ ” says Revelation 14:13 (NKJV) about the reward of the righteous. Only the future will testify to the real value of the individual. People may boast now of their wealth, their knowledge, their physical prowess, and maybe that is all true. But what does it mean in the sight of God? So often the traits, accomplishments, and deeds that humans uplift as important or impressive are shown to be the meaningless dross that they really are. After all, look at some of the despicable characters, often in the entertainment industry, who are all but worshiped and adored by fans. What we idolize and worship presents a powerful testimony to how fallen we are.

Read Proverbs 20:6 (see also Jer. 9:23, 24; Mark 9:35). What are these texts telling us about what is of true value to God?

It is not the single sensational act of love or sacrifice that will demonstrate the high quality of our relationships but the long and regular series of small actions that we perform day by day, patiently and surely. The daily meal served to your spouse, the constant attention to a sick parent, the continued effort in your job; all these humble acts throughout life are the evidence that your faith is authentic. Enduring faithfulness is more valuable than intense but rare acts of love.

This principle holds true for our relationship with God, as well. It is more difficult and more valuable to live for God than to die for Him, if for no other reason than that living takes more time than dying. The saint who lives for God is greater than the martyr who dies for Him. Anyone can claim to believe in God and to serve Him; the question is: Does it last? Or, as Jesus said, “‘He who endures to the end shall be saved’ ” (Matt. 24:13, NKJV).

How, through patience, kindness, and a willingness to meet others’ needs, can you reveal to someone something of the character of Christ? How willing are you to do this, no matter the cost to yourself?
Waiting for the Lord

Read Proverbs 20:17, 21:5. What practical lesson can we find in these texts?

The thief who steals bread gets it faster than the one who has to work for it. Salespeople who lie to sell their bad merchandise may become rich faster than the honest merchant (compare Prov. 21:5 to the next verse). Yet, says the proverb, the future will turn the sweetness into “gravel,” and the hastily acquired wealth will become poverty. The text gives a number of examples to illustrate the accuracy of this observation:

1. The Inheritance (Prov. 20:21). The mention of an inheritance obtained too quickly (implying that the parents are still alive) follows the condemnation of the one who curses his parents (vs. 20). The association of these two proverbs is significant. It is as if the son (or the daughter) curses the parents and also wishes them dead. The child may even have plotted the death of the parents in order to get the inheritance. The prospect of this behavior is tragic: the lamp he is presently enjoying will become “deep darkness” (vs. 20, NKJV), and his curse against his parents will turn on him, for he “will not be blessed at the end” (vs. 21, NKJV).

2. Revenge (Prov. 20:22). This time the proverb addresses the victim who may be tempted to seek revenge for the evil that has been committed against him. The counsel is just to “wait for the Lord” (NKJV). Only then will you be saved, which implies that if you do seek revenge you are taking a serious risk. Proverbs 25:21, 22 emphasizes the same instruction, using the metaphor of heaping coals of fire on the enemy’s head, an Egyptian ritual expressing repentance and conversion. If you refrain from revenge, promises Proverbs 20:22, you will be saved by the Lord and, in the process (adds Proverbs 25:21, 22) you will save your enemy, thus overcoming evil with good (Rom. 12:21).

How can you learn to emulate the character of Christ more closely when it comes to overcoming evil with good? Why is this so contrary to our inherent nature? Why is death to self the only way to achieve this end?
Compassion for the Poor

A person’s character is measured less by wisdom or even religious commitments than by readiness to help the poor and the needy. It is not what you have that measures your character. Who you are to your neighbor is the measure of character. The Samaritan who saves his neighbor is closer to the kingdom of God than the spiritual priest (Luke 10:26–37). The book of Proverbs emphasizes and explains this priority.

For God’s sake: The first reason to make this a priority lies in God Himself, who prefers human compassion for the poor over our religious zeal (Prov. 19:17, 21:13). Your sensitivity to the poor and your concrete deeds on their behalf will count more with God than will any of your pious acts. In fact, God is personally invested in that work, so much so that when we give to the poor, it is as if we are giving to God Himself (Matt. 25:35–40).

Read Matthew 25:35–40. What does this tell us about how Jesus identifies so closely with those in need? How should this truth impact how we relate to such people?

For the sake of the poor: The second reason lies within the poor person, whom God has created just as He has created the rich person (Prov. 22:2). The equality between humans, based on the fact that God has created them all, makes the poor as worthy of attention as the rich person. We should love our neighbors for who they are: beings made in the image of God.

At the same time, think about how much good it does you to help those in need. Our basic natures are selfish; by default we tend to look out for ourselves over and above others. By giving of ourselves, we learn to die to self and to better reflect Christ’s character, and what is of more value to us than that?

In what ways do you get a greater sense of personal satisfaction from helping others in need than only doing things for yourself?
Education

The Hebrew word for “education” comes from a word that means “to build up” and “to begin.” All these meanings are contained in the Hebrew idea of education: when we “train up a child” (Prov. 22:6), we build up, we begin, and we lay the groundwork for the future. Parents and educators are therefore responsible for their children’s future and, by implication, the future of the world. What we do with our children today will impact society for generations to come.

Read Proverbs 22:6. What does this say about the importance of educating children correctly?

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It is significant that the Hebrew word for “educate” is the very word used for the “dedication” of the temple (1 Kings 8:63). Early education means to dedicate our children to God in the same way that the temple is dedicated to God. Education has an impact on our salvation, even beyond our own life. “To parents is committed the great work of educating and training their children for the future, immortal life.” —Ellen G. White, Child Guidance, p. 38. Such education has an eternal effect. The apostle Paul seems to allude to Proverbs 22:6 when he commends Timothy for his early training in the knowledge of “the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15, NKJV).

Read Proverbs 22:8, 15. What principles do we find here?

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Education can be compared to the activity of “sowing.” The future of our society and of our children depends on what we have sown. If our seed was “iniquity,” then our education (“the rod”) will fail, and we shall reap trouble (vs. 8). If our seed touched the hearts of the children (vs. 15), then the rod of our education will drive the children’s foolishness far from them.

We so often teach others (especially children) by our example. Think about your example: What kind of legacy are you leaving? In what areas, if any, might your example be better?
Further Study: “Parents should be models of truthfulness, for this is the daily lesson to be impressed upon the heart of the child. Undeviating principle should govern parents in all the affairs of life, especially in the education and training of their children. . . . Parents, never prevaricate; never tell an untruth in precept or in example. If you want your child to be truthful, be truthful yourself.”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 151.

“Many fathers and mothers seem to think that if they feed and clothe their little ones, and educate them according to the standard of the world, they have done their duty. They are too much occupied with business or pleasure to make the education of their children the study of their lives. They do not seek to train them so that they will employ their talents for the honor of their Redeemer. Solomon did not say, ‘Tell a child the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.’ But, ‘Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 38.

Discussion Questions:

1. Dwell more on the idea of Proverbs 22:6. Why must we be careful in how we apply this? That is, many parents have done a good job in rearing their children, and yet as adults those children make wrong choices. Why must we never forget the reality of free will and the reality of the great controversy as we look at the meaning of this text?

2. Look again at the final question at the end of Wednesday’s study. What does it tell us about ourselves that we get such a sense of satisfaction from helping others, especially when we get nothing in return? What should this truth tell us about why so many people who have so much of the world’s riches are miserable nonetheless?

3. Though we are not all equal in talents, education, experience, and so forth, we are equal in the most important thing: we all need the Cross for salvation. What should this teach us about the basic equality and worth of all human beings? More so, how should this truth impact how we treat all people?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Proverbs 20:28

The Student Will:

Know: Understand the cause-and-effect relationship between mercy and judgment.

Feel: Appreciate the intangible rewards of wisdom more than the tangible rewards of earthly riches.

Do: Choose good judgment over the immediate gratification and quick fixes that vices offer.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: The Cause-and-Effect Relationship Between Mercy and Judgment

A. How can mercy and truth preserve a king? How are they more effective than an army or wealth?

B. Why is good judgment essential for a king (compare Prov. 20:2, 8, 26)?

C. Explain why communities that are merciful and true are more likely to safeguard qualities such as patience, transparency, and firmness than communities that are cruel and dishonest?

II. Feel: The Superiority of the Intangible Rewards of Wisdom

A. Why should schools place more emphasis on mercy and judgment in their curriculums, and what would be the benefits of doing so?

B. What are the rewards of keeping the Sabbath? Are they mostly tangible or intangible? Explain. Why did you find them attractive?

C. Why does the Bible often describe God in terms of invisible attributes, such as righteousness, holiness, and compassion?

III. Do: Avoid Vices.

A. What happens to the family of a parent who is contentious, arrogant, and coldhearted?

B. Name some leaders or individuals in history who are known for their vices. Explain why they made such poor choices in life and made other people’s lives so miserable in the process.

Summary: Mercy and truth may not bring you money or status, but they will help you make the best choices in life and give you power to create communities that flourish and grow.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Proverbs 20:28

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Good judgment is everything in life. In some situations, it can mean life or death. Companies lose millions of dollars; homes break up; accidents happen at sea, in the sky, and on roads, resulting in terrible losses of life—all because someone made an error in judgment. Proverbs warns us that we cannot have success in any line of work without good judgment. Thus, we must seek to avoid all things that becloud our judgment.

Just for Teachers: It takes a human being to make a judgment. Animals possess judgment, but their capacity for judgment is extremely limited compared to ours. For example, as far as we know, they make no ethical judgments regarding what is good, true, and just. Computers cannot make judgments beyond what they have been programmed to do. It takes a human being to make a final judgment. Proverbs tells us that what defines us as human is compassion. Indeed, even animals seem human when they show compassion. Therefore, mercy helps us to make superior judgments because it makes us more human.

Opening Discussion: Explain why some cars or homes sell for much more money than others. Why do people pay top dollar for them? What do they see in them? Explain what words such as excellence, safety, reliability, and high quality mean to you. Why do people allow these invisible ideals to guide their expensive purchases?

Questions for Discussion:

1. Name objects that are safe and reliable. Why do they make you feel safe and secure? How was Jesus able to provide safety and reliability to His disciples without actually providing those things as objects?

2. Paul and Silas, who were beaten, hungry, and fettered, sang praises to God in a dark and damp prison (Acts 16:19–25). While they may have owned next to nothing in the way of worldly goods, what did they have?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: To achieve happiness in life, we must achieve balance between the spiritual and the physical or material. From Solomon’s
time to our own, there has been a terrible imbalance in society in favor of the material; namely, what money can buy. Proverbs calls us back to the beauty and incomparable worth of spiritual riches.

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: The proverbs in chapters 20–22 may appear to repeat some of the same proverbs from the previous chapters without much organization. When we read these chapters, it is important to keep two things in mind. First, the first line of each chapter (and often the first few words) announces the topic of the chapter. This may not apply to all the chapters in Proverbs, but it certainly applies to chapters 20 and 21. Second, many of the terms used in these chapters, such as “name” or “silver and gold,” are metonyms. The term metonym means that the author has substituted a word or a phrase for another word or phrase. For example, “name” is a metonym for reputation and “silver and gold” for earthly riches. In other words, Proverbs is written like a riddle or a crossword puzzle. In the commentary below, metonyms have been suggested for the words or phrases contained within the proverbs in these chapters. It would be a good idea to take your class through some of the proverbs to see if you can figure out their metonyms on your own.

I. Sound Judgment (Review Proverbs 20 with your class.)

The topic of Proverbs 20 is sound judgment. Verse 1 mentions “wine” because it is an agent that beclouds judgment. The beating in verse 30, of course, has the opposite effect on a person. It wakes you up and makes you think straight. Beating in Proverbs is a metaphor for discipline and should not be taken literally.

The chapter also mentions “king” four times (vss. 2, 8, 26, 28) to reinforce the importance of judgment. Imagine what would happen to a country, Solomon asks, if a king lacked judgment. The most important mark of sound judgment is decisiveness, the quality of knowing when to start (vss. 4, 13), when to stop (vs. 3), and when to say No (vs. 16). Sound judgment is also marked by discernment, the ability to recognize good counsel (vs. 18) and to exercise good common sense (vs. 19). To have such qualities, one must be merciful (vss. 20, 21, 28, 29) and humble, always aware of one’s own shortcomings (vs. 9; compare vs. 5) and of God’s watchful eyes that search our motives and innermost thoughts (vss. 5, 12, 24, 27). The life of those with judgment will be marked by transparency (vss. 7, 10, 14, 23), patience (vss. 17, 22), and firmness (vs. 25) in all things.

Consider This: We live in an age of confusing options, with so many
new ideas, opportunities, and technological and medical innovations that the Bible does not directly address, though it does give us crucial principles. Therefore we might look for people who can help us make the right choices. What qualities do you look for in people whose judgment you trust?

II. Habits That Destroy Judgment (Review Proverbs 21 with your class.)

Proverbs 21 continues the topic of judgment from the previous chapter. This is clear from the mention of “king” and the formula “the Lord pondereth the hearts,” in verses 1, 2. Furthermore, the word judgment appears in verses 3, 7, and 15.

But this chapter differs from chapter 20 in its emphasis. Its focus is on what beclouds judgment. Proverbs 21 is a list of intellectual and emotional habits that, when indulged, cripple one’s judgment. The list is rather long, but the underlying principle is clear: you lose judgment when you indulge in vices. The people who love vices are proud (vss. 4, 24), hasty (vs. 5), dishonest (vss. 6, 7, 28), crooked (vs. 8), contentious (vss. 9, 19), desirous of evil (vs. 10), scornful (vs. 11), wicked (vss. 15, 18, 27), without compassion (vs. 13), corrupt (vs. 14), distracted (vs. 16), given to pleasure (vs. 17), wasteful (vs. 20), overconfident (vs. 22), loquacious (vs. 23), lazy (vs. 25), stingy and greedy (vs. 26), hypocritical (vs. 27), coldhearted (vs. 29), and against God (vss. 30, 31).

The underlying principle is that you cannot have good judgment if you enjoy vices. This is why a leader must be a person of character who has a compassionate heart (vs. 21). The problem, of course, is that humans have a natural bent toward vices.

Discussion Questions: Why do vices hold such attraction for people? Why do vices flourish in large cities? How can we find time on Sabbath to show compassion to those who need help, both inside and outside the church?

III. The Reward of Wisdom (Review Proverbs 22 with your class.)

The opening line of Proverbs 22—“A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches” (vs. 1)—announces the chapter’s topic: the reward of wisdom. To our modern minds, a good name and great riches are often synonymous.

Not so for Proverbs. The reward that wisdom promises is, like a good name, intangible, because those who pursue tangible rewards, such as money, often become corrupt in the end. The reward of wisdom is significant and multifaceted. For example, wisdom helps you to recognize danger and avoid it (vs. 3), to be humble (vs. 5), to know how to educate a child (vs. 6), to be generous (vs. 9), to have a pure heart, to know how and when to speak (vs. 11), and to enjoy God’s protection (vs. 12).
In stark contrast, folly brings only sorrow in its tow. By pursuing earthly riches, many find their lives filled with emptiness (vs. 8), contention (vs. 10), laziness (vs. 13), and lust (vs. 14), and discover that they have become oppressors (vss. 16, 22, 23). Solomon calls upon the reader to become wise by listening (vss. 17, 18), trusting God (vs. 19), seeking knowledge and truth (vss. 20, 21), and working hard (vs. 29). They are to avoid becoming like those who, as a result of hating wisdom, seek out the company of rich and powerful friends who have no judgment (vss. 22–28).

**Consider This:** Why do so many rich and famous people show little interest in God? Why did God endow humans with minds that have greater intellectual and spiritual capabilities than any other animals?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** In our materialistic and narcissistic world, it is easy to envy and emulate people who have money and power. Help your class to appreciate the surpassing worth of spiritual riches, such as good judgment and mercy.

**Application Questions:**

1. How can we make sure that wisdom and judgment are priorities in our lives?
2. Read Philippians 3:4–11. Why did Paul find it impossible to hold on to social status and to Christ at the same time?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Help your class see how accurately Proverbs 20–22 describes our situation today. Explain how these chapters offer secrets on how to escape from the pressures of pursuing earthly riches and success and to find peace and quiet in Christ, the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24).

**Activities:**

1. Ask your class members to list the priorities that are important to them right now. Ask them to explain what values they have used to devise the list.
2. Read the chapter “The Reward of Service” in Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, pp. 305–312, and discuss how Ellen G. White’s concept of spiritual reward compares with the concept of reward found in Proverbs 22.
Words of Truth

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Proverbs 22, 23, Exod. 22:21–27, Proverbs 24, Eph. 5:20, Ezek. 33:8.

Memory Text: “Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge, that I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, that you may answer words of truth to those who send to you?” (Proverbs 22:20, 21, NKJV).

Some of this week’s proverbs show parallels with Egyptian texts. Under inspiration, Solomon might have shaped these texts according to a specifically Hebrew perspective. Here, the words of the Egyptians meet the Spirit of Israel’s God; and thus, they became divine revelation.

This observation is important, for it reminds us of the universal character of “truth.” What is true for the Israelite should also be true for the Egyptian; otherwise, it would not be the truth. It is important to remember that God’s truths apply universally, to everyone.

The domain of these admonitions is common to both communities. That is, whoever you are, whether a believer or not, and wherever you live, there are some things that you should not do.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 28.
The Knowledge of Truth

Read Proverbs 22:17, 18. What are we being told about how truth should impact our lives?

The first duty of the student is to listen and pay attention: “Incline your ear and hear” (Prov. 22:17, NKJV). In other words: “Concentrate!” The crucial point is that the seeker of truth must be earnest, must truly want to learn what is right, and then do it.

But it is not enough for the student to listen or even to understand, intellectually, what is being taught. Some people who have a lot of biblical facts in their heads have no real knowledge or experience with the Truth (John 14:6).

Instead, truth should reach the innermost part of the human being. The Hebrew phrase in Proverbs 22:18, “within you” (NKJV), refers to the stomach. The lesson should not stay on the surface; it has to be digested, assimilated, and become an inner part of our beings. Once the message has gone deep into our system and becomes rooted within us, it will then rise to our lips, and we can have a powerful testimony.

Read Proverbs 22:19–21. What should an experience in truth do for us?

1. Faith (vs. 19). The first goal of the teaching of wisdom is not wisdom per se. Proverbs does not aim at making more intelligent and more skillful disciples. The teacher’s objective is to strengthen the disciple’s trust in the Lord.

2. Conviction (vs. 21). Students should know why these “words of truth” (NKJV) are certain; they should know why they believe what they do. Faith by definition is belief in what we don’t fully understand. Nevertheless, we still should have good reasons for that faith.

3. Responsibility (vs. 21). The last step of education is to share with others those “words of truth” (NKJV) we have received. This is central to our whole calling as a people.

Think about all the powerfully logical reasons we have for our Seventh-day Adventist faith. What are these reasons, and why should we never hesitate in keeping them ever before us and sharing them with others? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.
Robbing the Poor

Read Proverbs 22:22, 23; 23:10. What are we warned about here?

Though it’s always wrong to steal, this prohibition concerns stealing from the poor and the oppressed, who are the most vulnerable. They are truly helpless, and therefore they qualify for God’s special concern (Exod. 22:21–27). The case of David, who killed Uriah in order to steal his wife, and Nathan’s parable of the ewe lamb (2 Sam. 12:1–4) come to mind. Robbing from the poor is not just a criminal act: it is a sin “against the LORD” (2 Sam. 12:13). To take from someone who has less than what you have is worse than stealing; it is also an act of cowardice. Do these thieves think that God doesn’t see their actions?

Indeed, Proverbs 22:23 implies that even if the thief gets away with no human punishment, God will repay. The reference to the Redeemer, the Goel (Prov. 23:11), may even allude to the divine scenario of end-time judgment (Job 19:25).

So, this warning, along with others in the Bible, speaks against those who are interested only in the immediate “gains” of their actions and not the long-term results. They take possession and enlarge their properties at the expense of others, and they are willing to cheat and kill for that purpose. They may enjoy it now, but they will pay later. This reasoning should not only discourage the thief; it should show that our ethical values are intricately tied to the Sovereignty of God.

In England, some atheists had the following slogan placed on city buses: “There’s probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.” Though there are many retorts one could give in response, think about this one: if there were no God, then those who steal from the poor, and are getting away with it now, really have nothing to worry about. Indeed, all those who have done great evil and seem to have gotten away with it will, in fact, have really gotten away with it. How should faith in God and in His promises of judgment help to give us some peace of mind regarding all the injustice we see in the world now?
Being Jealous of the Wicked

**What** do Proverbs 23:17; 24:1, 2; and 24:19, 20 warn us about?

Why would someone envy the wicked? Most likely it’s not because of the actual sins that they might be committing. Rather, it’s usually because of the immediate gain (wealth, success, power) that they achieve through their wickedness—that’s what people often covet for themselves.

Though, of course, not every successful or rich person is wicked, some are—and they are probably the kind of people we are being warned about in these verses. We see their “good” life and, from our perspective, especially if we are struggling ourselves, it’s easy to envy what they have.

This, though, is a very narrow and shortsighted view of things. After all, the temptation of sin is that its reward is immediate: we enjoy the present gratification. A perspective beyond the present can protect us from temptation; that is, we need to look beyond the immediate “gains” of our sin and think through the long-term consequences.

Besides, who hasn’t seen just how destructive sin is? We never get away with it. We might be able to hide it from others so that no one, even those closest to us, has a clue about what we are doing (though sooner or later they catch on, don’t they?); or we might be able to delude ourselves into thinking that our sins are not that bad. (*After all, look at how many people do worse things!*) But sooner or later, one way or another, sin catches up with us.

We should hate sin because it is sin. We should hate it because of what it has done to us, to our world, and to our Lord. If we want to see the real cost of sin, look at Jesus on the cross. This is what our sin has cost. That realization alone should be enough (though so often it isn’t) to make us want to avoid sin and to keep away as much as possible from those who would lead us into it.

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**Have you ever struggled with envy over someone’s success? What’s the best remedy for this spiritually deadly problem?** *(See Eph. 5:20.)*

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What We Put in Our Mouths

It is no accident that the first human temptation concerned food (Gen. 3:3). It was being disobedient and eating of the wrong thing that brought sin and death into the world (Gen. 3:1–7, Rom. 5:12). We shouldn’t miss the hard fact, too, that the first mention of wine drinking in the Bible is presented in a terribly negative and degrading story (Gen. 9:21).

Read Proverbs 23:29–35. How is the use of alcohol presented in these verses?

Who hasn’t seen personally just how devastating alcohol can be? Sure, not everyone who drinks becomes a drunk in the gutter. But most likely drunks in the gutter never imagined, the first time they took a drink, that they would eventually wind up in the gutter.

“The man who has formed the habit of drinking intoxicating liquor, is in a desperate situation. He cannot be reasoned with, or persuaded to deny himself the indulgence. His stomach and brain are diseased, his will power is weakened, and his appetite uncontrollable. The prince of the powers of darkness holds him in bondage that he has no power to break.”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 3, p. 1162.

Read Proverbs 23:1–8. Why should we control our appetites?

This admonition is about more than table manners. The biblical text is a warning to those who like to eat and who have great appetites (Prov. 23:2). The metaphor of putting a knife to one’s throat is particularly strong: it not only means curbing the appetite but also suggests the risk to your health and even your life that could be caused by overeating. The Hebrew word (*bin*), translated “consider carefully,” expresses the idea of carefully deciding between eating various kinds of food. The same word is used by Solomon when he asks for wisdom to help him “discern [bin] between good and evil” (1 Kings 3:9, NKJV). The inspired writer has more in mind than just the issue of appetite control. His counsel may also concern banquets and social drinking, when we are pressured and tempted to “desire his delicacies” (Prov. 23:3, NKJV).

Think about someone you know whose life has been destroyed by alcohol. Why should that example alone be enough to help you to understand why you should never put that poison in your body?
Our Responsibilities

“When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you shall surely die!’ and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand” (Ezek. 33:8, NKJV). What basic spiritual principle is revealed here? How do we take this concept and apply it to our everyday lives?

Years ago, in a big Western city, a woman was being attacked at night on a street. She cried out for help; dozens heard her, yet not one person even bothered to call the police. Most people looked out the window and then went back to whatever they were doing. Soon the woman’s cries stopped. Later, she was found dead, stabbed numerous times.

Were the people who heard her cries but did nothing responsible for her death? Though they hadn’t attacked her themselves, did their inaction kill her?

Read Proverbs 24:11, 12, 23–28. What important messages are here for us?

The law of Moses clearly warns that those who fail to report what they witness will bear guilt (Lev. 5:1). We may not be able to act against crime, but if we keep silent about what we see, we then share the guilt with the criminal. By our silence, we become accomplices.

On the other hand, if we report the truth in our testimony, giving the “right answer” (Prov. 24:26), we respond appropriately and behave as responsible people. This act is compared to a kiss on the lips, meaning that the person cares about another person.

It’s tragic enough to remain silent and do nothing as a woman is being murdered on your street. But what about many of the other evils in the world: hunger, war, injustice, racism, economic oppression? What are our responsibilities here, as well?
Further Study: “Souls around us must be aroused and saved, or they perish. Not a moment have we to lose. We all have an influence that tells for the truth or against it. I desire to carry with me unmistakable evidences that I am one of Christ’s disciples. We want something besides Sabbath religion. We need the living principle, and to daily feel individual responsibility. This is shunned by many, and the fruit is carelessness, indifference, a lack of watchfulness and spirituality.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 99.

“Talk faith, live faith, cultivate love to God; evidence to the world all that Jesus is to you. Magnify His holy name. Tell of His goodness; talk of His mercy, and tell of His power.”—Ellen G. White, Our High Calling, p. 20.

Discussion Questions:

1. In class, go over your answer to Sunday’s final question. What can we learn from each other’s answers? What are ways that we can learn to build up our faith in what we believe?

2. Someone wrote: “Remember two things: Christ died for you, and you will one day die.” In the context of Tuesday’s study, which talked about how we will have to answer for sin one way or another, what crucial lesson should we take away from this thought?

3. Here again is the quote put on the buses in London: “There’s probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.” Besides what the lesson talked about, what other problems do you find with that sentiment? Why would God’s existence be something that would make people worry to begin with? What does this sentiment tell us about how well Satan has distorted the character of God in the minds of many people? In class, come up with different ways in which you could respond to that slogan. What are some short, pithy slogans that could help people to see the hope that we can have in God?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Proverbs 24:12

The Student Will:

Know: Understand that God sees his or her innermost thoughts and hidden deeds.
Feel: Foster appreciation for God’s discipline, even when it is strict.
Do: Choose to live honestly, as though his or her thoughts and deeds are heard and seen by all.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: God Sees Our Hidden Thoughts and Deeds.
   A Why does God watch us always?
   B How does our awareness of God’s watching eye help us in terms of accountability and transparency? How does such awareness help us spiritually?
   C Why is it easy to forget that Christ is the Judge of the world, as well as its Savior?

II. Feel: God’s Strict Discipline
   A Why does truth sometimes feel restrictive and harsh?
   B Why do people often lie by saying, “I didn’t know” or “I can’t remember”?
   C Why do Christians sometimes experience burnout?

III. Do: Speak the Truth Always.
   A Why do some governments often rely on covert operations and even tell outright lies?
   B How can there be security if one always tells the truth?
   C Why are governments that use lies as their modus operandi more unstable than those that speak the truth?
   D What is the difference between telling the truth and unnecessarily disclosing or volunteering information?

Summary: Truth is the surest and the simplest way to live one’s life. God recognizes and blesses those who live truthfully. Lies always lose.
Learning Cycle

▶**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Spotlight on Scripture:** Proverbs 24:12

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Truth is God: who He is, what He expects from us, and why He cares about how we treat others. He expects us to live in a way that is consistent with what we know about Him. It is easy to think that because salvation is by grace, we are free to behave or think as we wish. This is an error. Our actions must be consistent with the truth that we believe.

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s lesson stresses the importance of truth. Truth is not simply intellectual. It is about coming to know God as He is. He loves those who practice compassion and justice and hates the actions of those who trump compassion and justice with money and power. To receive compassion from God, we must show compassion. If we want justice, we must deal justly with others.

**Opening Discussion:** Even the bravest of generals may shake in fear when his or her lies are discovered. Even the most corrupt and oppressive regimes often try to put on a face of truth. What makes truth so powerful?

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. Secrecy is essential for security. What is the difference between secrecy and lies? What would happen if all our private activities and conversations became known to all?

2. The truth sometimes hurts. How can we tell the truth without hurting people? Why is it easier to lie about feelings than about facts?

▶**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** Truth is the reason for the existence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We believe that truth exists and that it is found in Jesus and that Jesus has given us a special message for our time. We call this “present truth.” What is “present truth”? What does that mean? How do we understand that concept?
Bible Commentary

Proverbs 22:17–29 concludes the preceding discussion about judgment (Proverbs 20–22:16) and, at the same time, introduces the present discussion about truth (Proverbs 23, 24). Proverbs 23 calls upon the reader to be truthful even when it is difficult to do so. Truth may cost you your job or even your life, but it is still the best and only safe course in life. Proverbs 24 points out that everyone knows in the depths of their hearts whether or not they have acted according to their consciences.

I. The Truth About God (Review Proverbs 22:17–29 with your class.)

This week’s lesson begins with the closing verses of chapter 22 (vss. 17–29). We saw last week that chapter 22 is about the reward of wisdom. This week’s focus is on truth.

What is truth? Truth is first and foremost about God, that He exists and that He is the Defender of the poor and oppressed. Proverbs warns, “Rob not the poor... for the Lord will plead their cause” (vss. 22, 23).

The second truth is that those who practice vices will end up in ruin. Solomon sums up vices through two images: “an angry man” (vs. 24) and a man who removes “the ancient landmark” (vs. 28). Both of these images depict the heartlessness and arrogance of those who perpetrate vices (compare 23:10). They may appear to flourish for a time, but they will suddenly come to ruin.

The third truth is that hard work and perseverance will be rewarded. Proverbs promises, “He shall stand before kings” (22:29). Seen against this backdrop, the truth described in Proverbs 22:17–29 bears a close resemblance to the fourth commandment (Exod. 20:8–11). The Sabbath commandment demands that we (1) remember God, who created the world (vss. 8, 11); (2) show compassion (vs. 10); and (3) work hard (vs. 9). “Do all thy work,” the commandment says (vs. 9). Truth in the Bible is ethical, it never changes, and it is about God.

Consider This: What are the three ways in which Proverbs defines truth?

II. The Truth About Envy and Pleasure (Review Proverbs 23 with your class.)

Envy is like standing in a long line at a theme park, waiting for a very short and disappointing ride. Like a long line, envy makes us believe that there is something good waiting for us at the end of the line. And envy makes us look upon those already on the rides with longing eyes.

Sometimes Christians, unfortunately, envy the world for two reasons: (1) the pleasures of the world appear relaxing and fun, and (2) the will of
God appears strict and disciplinary. The “pleasures” of this world come with food served on silver platters in a mansion (vss. 1–8), with immorality (vss. 27, 28), and with wine (vss. 29–35). But the wisdom of God comes with a knife for your throat (vs. 2), a rod on your back (vs. 14), and reins for your lips (vs. 16). For it is painful to subject our selfish and wandering hearts to the discipline of God.

However, the rewards of wisdom are weighty and eternal. So, do not grow weary of God’s strict discipline, envying the people of the world. Comparing the fretting of our hearts to a spoiled child, Solomon says, you “will not die” (vs. 13, NKJV). The people of this world wait in a long line with eager expectation and envy, but the weary wait will bring them nothing but contention and disappointment.

Consider This: Why did Christ tell those who wanted to follow Him to enter the narrow way and to take up the cross (Matt. 7:14, Mark 8:34)?

III. Be Honest; You Know the Truth (Review Proverbs 24 with your class.)

Proverbs 24:1 opens with a warning not to envy those who build their empires by means of vices. The chapter opens with a contrast between lies and truth and how they affect our lives (vss. 2–10). Lies ruin your reputation and weaken you because you become “an abomination” to all when your lies are discovered (vs. 9). In addition, “in the day of adversity,” falling into an emotional sinkhole, you will find no strength to stand (vs. 10).

Truth, by contrast, has the opposite effects. It builds us up with spiritual riches (vss. 3, 4). Unlike lies, truth will help us to increase and to feel strong and safe (vss. 5, 6, 16). We will be in a fortified city with walls that are “too high” for our foes (vs. 7). Truth just has more staying power than lies, because what is true is also real.

Verses 11–29 offer further warnings about lying. Even if someone’s lies are never discovered, he or she knows and God knows when the person has told a lie. Solomon offers three case studies of such lying: (1) one who sees someone in trouble and does not help, and then later says, “We did not know” (vs. 12, NKJV); (2) one who sees one’s opponent in trouble and becomes happy, but pretends not to notice it (vs. 17); and (3) one who gives preferential treatment to someone because he or she is rich and powerful (vss. 23–25).

In all of these cases, the person telling the lie knows that he or she has done something evil. Why else would he or she try to hide it? “In the day when God will judge the secrets” (Rom. 2:16, NKJV), He will repay each of us according to our works, whether good or evil.

Consider This: Chapter 24 ends with a parable about a slothful person (vss. 30–34) and concludes the discussion on truth. How does this story
apply to the concept of discipline and truth found in Proverbs 23 and 24?

▶STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** The truth is about God, that He sees in secret, and that He is a just and compassionate God. It also means that we do not treat anyone with disrespect just because he or she is poor and without status. Explain to the class that truth is something beautiful, like mercy and righteousness. It is menacing only to those who have lied.

Application Questions:

① If someone who is socially insignificant asks to see you, and you reply, “I am busy right now,” what consequences does this lie have on you?

② What happened to Christianity when it gave preferential treatment to its wealthy members and powerful dignitaries (such as the Emperor Constantine)?

▶STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** It requires discipline and courage to be truthful, especially when dealing with powerful individuals whose decisions could have negative consequences for us. We fear to offend them. Proverbs tells us that God hates this kind of behavior, especially if we turn around and treat weaker people with disrespect and neglect.

Activities:

① Ask your class to make a covenant with God in which everything they say and do will be true. This does not mean that they will divulge confidences, volunteer information unnecessarily, or disclose what they know without just cause, but rather that whatever they say will be true.

② Ask your class to show respect and VIP treatment to members in their community and in their families who they feel are weaker than themselves and to report their experiences back to the class.
Behind the Mask

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Prov. 25:2, 3; 26:11, 12; 1 Cor. 1:20, 21; Prov. 26:13–16; 27:5, 6.

Memory Text: “Do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king, and do not stand in the place of the great” (Proverbs 25:6, NKJV).

Behind the dazzling serpent, who utters sweet words and who seems so concerned with Eve’s happiness, hides the enemy who plots her death (Gen. 3:1–6). Disguised as “an angel of light,” Satan prepares the most dangerous traps for humankind (2 Cor. 11:14). Even more dangerous and deceitful is self-pretension; when we claim to be what we are not, we end up cheating others and even ourselves.

There are different ways to deceive. One of the most common is through language. Some of the proverbs this week deal with words, lying words, flattering words, pretty words that use nice sounds and wonderful sentiments to cover ugly thoughts and intentions. We need to be careful not only about what we say to others but about how we interpret what others say to us. Perhaps this week’s message could be summed up this way: “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matt. 10:16).

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 7.
The Mystery of God

Life is full of mysteries. Physicist David Deutsch wrote that “every-day events are stupendously complex when expressed in terms of fundamental physics. If you fill a kettle with water and switch it on, all the supercomputers on Earth working for the age of the universe could not solve the equations that predict what all those water molecules will do—even if we could somehow determine their initial state and that of all the outside influences on them, which is itself an intractable task.”


If we are confounded about something as mundane as water molecules, how could we even begin to expect to understand the mysteries of God?

**Read** Proverbs 25:2, 3. What point is the author making, and how can we apply it to a broader situation?

What makes the glory of God different from the glory of kings is His “mysterious” nature and by implication our human incapacity to fully understand Him. The Hebrew root *str* (“conceal,” “hide”), from which comes our word *mystery*, is often used in the Hebrew Scriptures to characterize what makes God the only true God (*Isa. 45:14, 15*). There are things about God that we simply cannot understand. On the other hand, what makes the glory of kings is their willingness to be scrutinized. Transparency and accountability should be the first quality of leadership (*Deut. 17:14–20*). It is the king’s duty to “search out a matter”; that is, to give an explanation for events and for what he is doing.

Life is so full of unanswered questions, isn’t it? In a split second, seemingly random events can mean the difference between life and death. Some people go from one tragedy to another, while others do fine. All this should tell us that we need to live by faith. What things are happening right now in your life that you have to accept by faith, trusting in God? What other choice do you have?
The Fool as Wise

Though not a recent fabrication (especially in the Western world), the idea has taken hold in recent years that argues for the relative nature of truth. That is, what is true for one person, or one culture, might not be true for another. While on one level this is always correct (some places drive on the right side of the road, others on the left), on another it’s a dangerous error, especially in the moral realm. Certain things are right and others are wrong, regardless of where we live or our personal preferences. In the end, we must always submit our views to the Word of God and the truths found there. God’s Word must be our ultimate source for knowing right and wrong, good and evil.

Read Proverbs 26:11, 12. (See also Judg. 21:25; 1 Cor. 1:20, 21; 2:6, 7; 2 Cor. 1:12.) What must we all be careful not to do?

As we can see, this idea of doing what is right in one’s own eyes is nothing new. Yet, it was as wrong then as it is now. As we have already seen, none of us understands everything; in fact, we don’t fully understand anything. We all have areas where we need to grow and learn; so, we should always be open to the fact that we don’t have all the answers.

In the case of fools, as seen in this proverb, the reason to be concerned is that the influence of their folly will go beyond themselves. They are now more convinced than ever of their wisdom; they will therefore repeat their folly. They may even be so convincing that others will think they are wise, will honor them, and consult them for advice, which can lead to big problems (Prov. 26:8). Folly will spread, but labeled as “wisdom,” it can be that much more damaging. Furthermore, fools are so foolish that they are not aware of their folly.

How often are you tempted to compromise on what you know are core values, core truths? What happens, however, when certain core values collide? How can we know which ones trump the others?
The Sluggard

“The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth” (Prov. 26:15, NIV).

Just as with students who spend more time and energy preparing to cheat on an exam than studying for it, it is ironic that lazy people work hard to find excuses for their laziness!

Read Proverbs 26:13–16. What are we being warned about here?

The lazy person may be right: “There is a lion in the road!” (Prov. 26:13, NKJV). Therefore, it is wiser to stay at home and not to confront the danger. But by doing just that, we miss all the opportunities that life offers. We will never enjoy the beauty of the rose if we do not run the risk of being hurt by its thorns. We will not be able to move forward if we are afraid of obstacles. People who do not dare to commit themselves will never taste the fullness of life.

Look at some of the other imagery in those verses. Just as the door swings on its hinges but doesn’t go anywhere, lazy people turn in their beds; that is, they just change position but don’t go anywhere, either.

The other image, in verse 15, is even more startling. They can get their hands into a dish of food but are too lazy to bring them back to feed themselves.

But even worse is their intellectual laziness, their closed-mindedness and certainty about their own positions. Therefore, they will always be right, wiser than seven wise men (vs. 16), and will not be open to other views, perhaps wiser than their own. Those who think they have all the answers usually don’t.

“In the judgment men will not be condemned because they conscientiously believed a lie, but because they did not believe the truth, because they neglected the opportunity of learning what is truth.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 55. How do we understand our role in giving others the “opportunity” to learn what is truth? Where does our responsibility begin, and where does it end?
The Friend as Enemy

If we are more disappointed by our friends than by our enemies, it is because we expect good from our friends and evil from our enemies. It doesn’t always work out that way, though, does it? That’s why Proverbs warns us that sometimes a friend behaves like an enemy and an enemy like a friend.

Read Proverbs 27:5, 6. When can rebuke be a sign of love?

Love is not just about kisses and sweet words. Love will sometimes oblige us to rebuke our friend or our child, and it can run the risk of appearing unpleasant, judgmental, and critical. We might even lose friends if we speak out. Yet, if we do not warn our friends about what they are doing, especially if it will bring them harm, then what kind of friend are we?

Open rebuke is also a sign that our love is not built on illusion and pretension but is based on truth and on trust.

Read Proverbs 27:17. What can be the effect of confrontation between friends?

The image of iron sharpening iron suggests a reciprocal benefit. Friendship tested by true confrontation will improve not only the quality of the friendship but also stimulate and strengthen both personalities. The respective weapons will gain in efficiency. We will end up more equipped for our future struggles. People who take refuge in themselves and their own ideas only, and never confront the challenge of different views, will not grow in knowledge or in character.

Have you ever been rebuked for something that could have really hurt you? Suppose you hadn’t been warned about it? Keeping this in mind, if you need to do the same for someone else, how can you do it in a redemptive manner rather than in a judgmental and critical way?
Read Proverbs 26:17–23. On the lines below, summarize what is being said.

Proverbs, again, gets into the power of words, this time dealing with the harm caused by slander and quarreling. Those who slander your enemy before your face, to make you think they’re on your side, are really like “charcoal”: they feed the quarrel and lead you into the fire of more troubles (vs. 21, NKJV).

Likewise “fervent lips,” which sound so eloquent, can hide a “wicked heart” (vs. 23, NKJV). The politician who wants to be elected, the salesman who wants to sell his wares, the playboy who wants to seduce a woman—all of them know about the power of eloquence.

This passage’s lesson is that we should be careful not to believe in every nice speech we hear. They can be dangerous precisely because they are nice. Some people are very good speakers; they can sound so persuasive, so sincere, and so caring, when inside, something completely different is going on. Though we have all been victims of people like this, who hasn’t at some point been guilty of doing the same thing: saying one thing to a person but thinking or feeling something completely different? Proverbs, here, speaks strongly against this deceptiveness.

“Everything that Christians do should be as transparent as the sunlight. Truth is of God; deception, in every one of its myriad forms, is of Satan. . . . It is not a light or an easy thing to speak the exact truth. We cannot speak the truth unless we know the truth, and how often preconceived opinions, mental bias, imperfect knowledge, errors of judgment, prevent a right understanding of matters with which we have to do! We cannot speak the truth unless our minds are continually guided by Him who is truth.”—Ellen G. White, Reflecting Christ, p. 71.

How open and transparent are you in what you say? How much of a disconnect, if any, is there between your words and your thoughts? Do you really think that such duplicity can be maintained indefinitely? (See Matt. 10:26, 27.)
Further Study: “The agency of the Spirit of God does not remove from us the necessity of exercising our faculties and talents, but teaches us how to use every power to the glory of God. The human faculties, when under the special direction of the grace of God, are capable of being used to the best purpose on earth. Ignorance does not increase the humility or spirituality of any professed follower of Christ. The truths of the divine word can be best appreciated by an intellectual Christian. Christ can be best glorified by those who serve Him intelligently. The great object of education is to enable us to use the power which God has given us in such a manner as to represent the religion of the Bible and promote the glory of God.

“We are indebted to Him who gave us existence, for the talents that have been entrusted to us, and it is a duty we owe our Creator to cultivate and improve these talents.”—Ellen G. White, Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students, pp. 361, 362.

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss more about the mysteries that we find in everyday life, whether in nature, in human interactions, or in questions about faith and the nature of God and salvation. It’s one of the great ironies of life that the more we learn, the more we realize how little we know. Why is that even more true when it comes to spiritual truths?

2. What are some “truths” that are, indeed, relative, cultural, and changing? How do we distinguish them from truths that are eternal, universal, and immutable? Why is it so important that we know the difference between them? Why is the confusion of contingent truths with eternal truths one of the great dangers we face?

3. It has been said that smart people keep their friends close and their enemies closer. What does that mean? As Christians, how are we to relate to such a sentiment? In what way can Matthew 10:16 help?
The Lesson in Brief

➤ **Key Text:** Proverbs 25:2, 3; 26:11–16; 27:5, 6

➤ **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Review some of the complex problems of sinful human life and realize divine wisdom is needed to help deal with them.

**Feel:** Rejoice in the blessing of God’s understanding and the help available in His Word for dealing with life as it really is.

**Do:** Choose to gratefully accept God’s Word as the source of wisdom for dealing with moral issues and decisions constantly faced.

➤ **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: We Are Not in Heaven Yet.**

- Life is confusing. People can’t always be trusted, and much suffering is unexplainable.
- Proverbs 25 and 26 provide insight into common predicaments, giving practical wisdom. In what ways is the counsel in Proverbs very contemporary?

**II. Feel: A New Hunger to Live by God’s Word**

- If God’s Word can be trusted, how should its principles be applied?
- If God seems distant during difficult times, how can we find Him?

**III. Do: Recalling God’s Blessings in Difficult Times**

- How can one confidently face the future amid life’s confusion?
- Recall past experiences in which God has blessed and/or helped resolve confusing experiences. Talk to others who have found God’s help, and learn from their struggles. In what ways can their experiences fill you with hope and courage?
- Why is it hard to sing praises to God when you are discouraged?

➤ **Summary:** If one is discouraged and/or dealing with unresolved problems, what is the best thing to do? Studying the practical counsel in Proverbs 25 and 26 and learning from testimonies of others who have worked through painful experiences can help provide wisdom in day-to-day life. Above all, seek the promised blessing from the “God of all comfort” (2 Cor. 1:3).
Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Proverbs 25:2, 3; 26:11, 12

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The book of Proverbs describes different kinds of characters, including fools, lazy people, and friends (good and bad), reminding us that character qualities are more than skin deep and affect more than the person who has them.

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson reminds us that the outward appearance of a person does not always match the inner reality. Inwardly, a person can be deceptive and foolish, for example. Awareness of this discrepancy can teach each of us to strive for a life in which the outward appearance matches the inner nature, reflecting God’s consistently truthful and loving character.

Opening Activity: Ask class members to recall a time when a friend was painfully honest and how that affected them. Also, ask them to think of a time when they had to be honest with a friend and how difficult that was to do. Jesus, though loving to everyone, was honest with people, and His honesty was sometimes received negatively.

Consider This: Though a prisoner of war and (most likely) a teenager, Daniel bravely spoke honestly to his Babylonian captors regarding his diet: “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself” (Dan. 1:8, NKJV). God blessed Daniel’s decision: “Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs” (vs. 9, NKJV). This text can encourage us as we make moral choices. In Scripture, who are some of the characters that, in the midst of suffering, brought honor to God?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The book of Proverbs can be seen as an “ethical textbook” written by the wisest man who ever lived. Ultimately, moral situations that humans face do not vary over the centuries, making the counsel in Proverbs still very contemporary.
Bible Commentary

I. Behind the Mask (Review Proverbs 25:1–3 with your class.)

God Himself detests dishonesty of any kind: “These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren” (Prov. 6:16–19, NKJV). Notice that lying is mentioned two times in this short list! Perhaps God’s loathing of lying stems, in part, from that first lie in Eden, a lie that maligned His character—a lie that is at the heart of the long-standing great controversy between Christ and Satan.

Consider This: What lessons can we learn from Daniel in being gracious as we choose to follow the ways of God? In the book of Proverbs, we are counseled to be wary of fools. How can a person be sensitive to discern character but still be accepting of all people?

II. “The Mystery of God” (Review Proverbs 25:2 with your class.)

God’s understanding is beyond ours, and He is beyond our understanding. However, His incomprehensibility doesn’t excuse us from learning all we can about Him. Indeed, His Written Word tells us He wants us to know Him. Though He cannot explain everything fully to us presently (just as any parent cannot to his or her small children), He promises that someday we will see Him face-to-face and that He will help us understand many things in this life (including suffering) that are presently unexplainable.

“O the mystery of godliness—God manifest in the flesh! This mystery increases as we try to comprehend it. It is incomprehensible, and yet human beings will allow worldly, earthly things to intercept the faint view it is possible for mortals to have of Jesus and His matchless love. . . . How can we be enthusiastic over earthly, common things and not be stirred with this picture—the cross of Calvary, the love that is revealed in the death of God’s dear Son . . . ?

“I shall, if saved in the kingdom of God, be constantly discerning new depths in the plan of salvation. All the redeemed saints will see and appreciate as never before the love of the Father and the Son, and songs of praise will burst forth from immortal tongues. He loved us, He gave His life for us. With glorified bodies, with enlarged capacities, with hearts made pure, with lips undefiled, we shall sing the riches of redeeming love.”—Ellen G. White, *Maranatha*, p. 318.
Consider This: How does studying the life of Christ and His great sacrifice enlarge your perspective of God’s character? How does such study motivate your moral life and enable patience and faith in the face of troubling situations?

III. The Fool as Wise (Review Proverbs 26:11–16 with your class.)

We must never forget our human limitations. There is a gulf between human perception and divine reality. The ancient Greeks thought this unbridgeable gulf was caused by spirit and matter. Biblical writers teach us that the gulf between human and divine is caused by sin. We are very prone to error in our thinking, needing the true knowledge that comes from God and His Word.

Consider This: What might be some of the reasons the modern mind is resistant to the wisdom found in Scripture? Solomon, the wisest man, seems to have pondered this conundrum as he wrote the book of Ecclesiastes. He honestly admits that life is difficult to understand but that the only hope is to fear and obey God (Eccles. 12:13, 14).

IV. Friend as Enemy Versus Enemy as Friend (Review Proverbs 27:5, 6, 17–23 with your class.)

Being truthful is sometimes hard, whether with parents, children, spouse, friends, or business associates. Therefore, we are pointedly instructed with the following: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction; for whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights” (Prov. 3:11, 12, NKJV).

This scripture offers guidance when seeking to administer discipline and correction. If it is necessary to speak a painful sentiment, it should be done tenderly, with the aim to help: “Faithful are the wounds of a friend”—in contrast to deceitful insincerity, which hides true feelings: “But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (27:6, NKJV). Also, “Blows that hurt cleanse away evil, as do stripes the inner depths of the heart” (20:30, NKJV).

Consider This: What lessons can be learned from the struggles, victories, and friendships of our spiritual forebears in both the Old and New Testaments (for example, Ruth and Naomi, Hannah and Elkanah, David and Jonathan, Paul and Barnabas, and so on)?

▶STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Sometimes because of suffering, either our own or of those we love or because of unjust treatment, it is often hard to believe that God is with us. What are some things a person can do to be reaffirmed
in his or her faith during difficult times? What can a person do to encourage someone who is discouraged and losing his or her faith in God?

**Thought Question:** Though called by Christ to love our enemies and do good to those that hate us, this does not mean allowing ourselves to be duped by a fool. How can we be wary of phony friendships and still be accepting of all people?

Christ wanted to be close to those whom He made in God’s image, even before sin. After they sinned, He sought after them, revealing His loving nature.

“Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You cannot burden Him; you cannot weary Him. He who numbers the hairs of your head is not indifferent to the wants of His children. ‘The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.’ James 5:11. His heart of love is touched by our sorrows and even by our utterances of them. Take to Him everything that perplexes the mind. Nothing is too great for Him to bear, for He holds up worlds, He rules over all the affairs of the universe. Nothing that in any way concerns our peace is too small for Him to notice. There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to notice. There is no perplexity too difficult for Him to unravel. No calamity can befall the least of His children, no anxiety harass the soul, no joy cheer, no sincere prayer escape the lips, of which our heavenly Father is unobservant, or in which He takes no immediate interest. ‘He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.’ Psalm 147:3. The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 100.

**Application Questions:** Does having Jesus as a Friend inspire the kind of friend you are and the friendships you have? How have your friendships helped you to understand the love of God?

➡️ **STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Have the class discuss the ways in which God has personally blessed specific incidents in their lives and, as a result, helped them to become more sensitive to other people and their problems.

**Activity:** Discuss spiritual, political, and personal situations currently needing resolution and how the example of Jesus can help us to know how to do this. Review how God has opened your eyes to the blessings hidden (at first) in difficult, even painful, experiences.
**SABBATH AFTERNOON**

**Read for This Week’s Study:** Prov. 28:4, 7, 9; Rom. 1:16, 17; Gal. 3:24; Prov. 28:5; 1 John 2:15–17; Prov. 29:13.

**Memory Text:** “The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe” (Proverbs 29:25, NKJV).

* So many voices call to us from so many directions. How do people know what is right and what is wrong? The answer is found in God and His written revelation. We must learn to rely on God and to obey His law. The rest then will follow by itself.

* Jesus told us this when He said to “‘seek first the kingdom of God,’ ” and then all that we need will be supplied (Matt. 6:33, NKJV). We are to make trusting and following God our first priority; otherwise, we will make something else that priority, which is idolatry, pure and simple. And we can learn to trust God only by living a life of faith. The Christian walk is just that, a walk; we have to make the choices to do the things that the Lord has told us to do, and then leave the consequences to Him.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 14.
Keep the Law

Out of 13 occurrences of the word *torah*—“law” or “teaching”—in the book of Proverbs, four are in Proverbs 28 (vss. 4 [twice], 7, 9). Although this use in Proverbs applies normally to the “teaching” of the wise man (*Prov. 13:14*), in the Israelite tradition the word has a spiritual connotation and refers to divine revelation, as attested in the book of Proverbs itself (*Prov. 29:18*).

**Read** Proverbs 28:4, 7, and 9. What do these verses tell us about the importance of the law in how we live?

What made the people of Israel different from other nations was not so much their way of thinking or even their “spiritual” and abstract theological views. It was their concrete choices in life about, among other things, food, rest, the natural environment, and their relationships with neighbors and family that made them “holy,” or “set apart” from all the other nations. And ideally, those choices were to center on the law and the principles found in it.

After all, we humans cannot be wise by ourselves; we can’t always even distinguish between good and evil (*1 Kings 3:9*). So, we need the divine law to help us to acquire discernment. In other words, the acquisition of wisdom does not depend on intellectual or spiritual exercises; it is essentially related to obedience to a law that lies outside ourselves, our culture, our personal psychology, and our desires.

This law is, of course, God’s eternal law. And to follow that law is indeed an act of faith. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (*Rom. 1:16, 17*).

**What troubles and problems have you been spared because you have made a commitment by faith to keep God’s law? How different would your life be were you not keeping it?**

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Seek the Lord

No matter how crucial it is to a life of faith, the law (the torah) is not itself the source of life. On the contrary, the law points out sin, and sin leads to death (see Rom. 7:7–13). Instead, what makes the torah effective is that it comes from God. Apart from God, the torah would be a legalistic creed that has nothing to do with His original intention. A life of obedience to the law of God is related to a life with God. The torah does not replace God; it is just a teacher that (according to Paul’s analogy) leads the students to their Master (Gal. 3:24).

Read Galatians 3:24 in context. How does the law point us to Jesus, so that we can indeed be “justified by faith”?

The book of Proverbs is not just a book of wisdom; it is, first of all, a book about the God who has revealed wisdom. Seeking wisdom by obeying the law will draw us nearer to the Lord and to the salvation He freely offers us by faith in Jesus.

Read Proverbs 28:5. What is the key for us to “understand all”?

The word understand is used twice in verse 5, just as the word law is in verse 4. The two verses are related: keeping the law (vs. 4) and seeking the Lord (vs. 5) belong together. The scope of this activity, however, is not just knowing and doing what is right (“justice” [vs. 5, NKJV]). This understanding concerns “all” simply because it derives from the God of “all.” For ancient Israel, knowledge of all things was not separated from religious experience. Faith was closely tied to intelligence and rational understanding. It was inconceivable to have faith without thinking or thinking without faith, because God was the foundation of both domains.

Why is faith in God such a rational position to hold? Why is it more illogical and irrational to reject God than to believe in Him?
Words for the Rich

Read 1 John 2:15–17. What are we being warned against here, and how can we protect ourselves from the danger these verses talk about?

Though the idea of what it means to be “rich” varies greatly, the book of Proverbs comes with some instructions on how to get “rich” and then how to deal with your “riches” once you get them.

1. Do not get rich at the expense of the poor (Prov. 28:8). Your wealth is not justified if you obtain it at the expense of the poor. As we have already seen, the Bible speaks very strongly against those who exploit the poor for their own gain.

2. Give to the poor (Prov. 28:27). In contrast to the “greedy” of Proverbs 28:25 (NIV, literally, “broad of soul/appetite”), the person who is generous to the poor will be blessed.

3. Work hard (Prov. 28:19). Wealth should not come as the result of stealing or by chance but as a reward for our hard work. What is obtained depends on the quality of our labor. If we are rich, we should deserve it.

4. Do not try to get rich fast (Prov. 28:20, 22). Our proverbs present two potential scenarios: (1) when we close an eye to some dishonest action and, as a result, become complicit in that action (vs. 22); (2) when we are so eager to enjoy the wealth of our parents that we rob them of what they need to live now (vs. 24). Even worse, those who do those things can justify the wrong deeds in their own minds until they convince themselves that they have done nothing wrong. Therefore, they say, “it is no transgression” (NKJV).

Money is a very powerful force in this world, which is why the Bible talks a lot about it. If, like pretty much everyone else, you desire money, how can you make sure that you are not falling into the trap of what Jesus called “the deceitfulness of riches” (Mark 4:19)?
Handbook for the Poor

Read Proverbs 29:13. What is being discussed here?

The poor and the rich are equal (Prov. 29:13, NKJV). The image of
light used in this proverb places this issue in perspective of Creation.
Both the rich and the poor have been created by God (Prov. 22:2). They
both enjoy the gift of life, and the sun shines upon both. Just as the rich
have been warned about how they treat the poor, the poor are to love even
their oppressors, which could in some cases be the rich (Matt. 5:44, 45).

What is the message of Proverbs 28:3?

The poor have the same duties as the rich (Prov. 28:3). Poverty should
not be an excuse for iniquity. The fact that you may have been oppressed
does not give you license to oppress others. Jesus’ parable of the unfor-
giving servant who oppresses the one poorer than himself shows that this
reaction, although unexpected on the part of the poor (whom one might
think would be more sympathetic to other poor people), is not unusual
(Matt. 18:22–35). In Proverbs 28:3, the image of the rain, which usually
is a blessing, turns out to be a destructive torrent; this imagery illustrates
the abnormality of that behavior and the disappointment it brings.

What is the message of Proverbs 28:6?

The righteous poor are better than the wicked rich (Prov. 28:6). According
to traditional wisdom, the righteous person is not supposed
to be poor, for poverty is supposedly the just punishment for the lazy
(Prov. 24:34). Yet, the reality of life is more complex. The poor may be
the victims of injustice or of circumstances beyond their control. This can
often be the case. Nevertheless, the scale of values defended by the book
of Proverbs is clear and unambiguous. Righteousness is more important
than riches, and success is not a foolproof indicator of righteousness.

What can we do when tempted to compromise our values for
material gain? How can we protect ourselves from doing some-
thing like this, which is easier to do than we realize?
Loving the Truth

Of all the things we could teach our children, our students, or anyone who is open to learning from us, perhaps the most important lesson can be found here in 2 Thessalonians, as Paul, who is writing about the lost, says that “they received not the love of the truth” (vs. 10). Of course, because Jesus is the Truth, teaching others to love truth is teaching them to love Jesus, and what else really matters?

“Whatever line of investigation we pursue, with a sincere purpose to arrive at truth, we are brought in touch with the unseen, mighty Intelligence that is working in and through all. The mind of man is brought into communion with the mind of God, the finite with the Infinite. The effect of such communion on body and mind and soul is beyond estimate.”—Ellen G. White, Education, p. 14.

Read Proverbs 29:15 (see also vs. 19). What important principle is seen here, not just in education but in life in general?

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Though our example is important—especially with those whom we can’t reprove or punish—in some cases more is needed. This is especially true with our children. At times children need to be punished in order to be brought into line.

Our natures are all fallen and corrupt, and this includes even those adorable little beings whom we love, our children. We don’t do our children or ourselves any favors by letting them do whatever they want. Children, in fact, not only need discipline—they want it. They need to know that boundaries exist and that they need to stay within them. A mother who believes that she has to respect her children’s freedom and lets them do whatever they want without ever saying “No” to them will ultimately bring “shame” (vs. 15) to herself and, no doubt, sorrow to the children—if not now, then certainly when the children become adults.

What are some of the lessons you learned as a child that have stuck with you as an adult? How has that knowledge helped to make your life better now?

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Further Study: “The laws of God have their foundation in the most immutable rectitude, and are so framed that they will promote the happiness of those who keep them. . . . Religion brings man into personal relation with God, but not exclusively; for the principles of heaven are to be lived out, that they may help and bless humanity.”—Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 267.

“The utter neglect of training children for God has perpetuated evil and thrown into the ranks of the enemy many who with judicious care might have been co-laborers with Christ. False ideas and a foolish, misdirected affection have nurtured traits which have made the children unlovely and unhappy, have embittered the lives of the parents, and have extended their baleful influence from generation to generation. Any child that is permitted to have his own way will dishonor God and bring his father and mother to shame. . . . By neglecting their duty and indulging their children in wrong, parents close to them the gates of the city of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 325, 326.

Discussion Questions:

1. Russian author Leo Tolstoy, though raised in a Christian home, abandoned his faith for many years. When older, he faced a crisis: *What did life mean, especially a life that will certainly end in death?* Though he sought answers in all areas of knowledge, he found none there. He eventually realized that the only logical answer to the question of life and its meaning had to be found in faith—in something that went beyond logic itself. That is, his logic told him to step beyond logic, into the world of faith, in order to get answers to the meaning of life. Why, then, is faith in Jesus really the most logical choice we can make regarding the meaning and purpose of life?

2. What is your understanding of what it means to love the truth? How do we love truth? To love truth, of course, would mean that we would have to know it first. How do we come to a knowledge of truth? And how can we be sure that we don’t allow anything to stand in the way of our loving truth above all else?
The Lesson in Brief

►**Key Text:** Proverbs 28:4, 5, 7–9; 29:13

►**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Recognize the value of the practical counsel of Proverbs, which is grounded in the fear of the Lord.

**Feel:** Appreciate the value of God’s practical counsel, recognizing its fundamental orientation and worth and the blessing of obedience.

**Do:** Be motivated to walk in the divine precepts, praising God for His love in providing such clear counsel for living in a sinful world.

►**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Exceptional Quality of God’s Commandments and Laws

   A. Why do some Christians think of divine laws as restrictive to freedom?
   B. Why is it hard to think of God’s laws as a blessing? How can we retool our thinking to see them as the blessings they truly are?

II. Feel: Recognizing Modern Culture’s Error in Seeking to Bypass God’s Laws

   A. How can the Decalogue be shared so that it is treasured and honored?
   B. Some Christian traditions assert that the law was done away with at the cross. What is the best way to counteract this misunderstanding?

III. Do: Having a New Motivation to Joyfully Live by God’s Instruction

   A. “Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O LORD; let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me” (Ps. 40:11, NKJV). How can I acquire the attitude of the psalmist, who understood that God’s mercies and His truth are not contradictory?
   B. Where can I find the courage and stamina to hang on to my faith when everything in life seems to be against me?

►**Summary:** God’s laws and wisdom are linked together in the book of Proverbs as the guide for life. The highest wisdom, in the quest for discernment, comes by submitting to God’s will.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Proverbs 28:4, 5

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Much modern thinking suggests that being a realist means advancing (progressing) beyond the ancient outdated constraints of the Word of God. King Solomon would disagree. He insists that the only real progress a person can make in life is by accepting the counsel of Scripture and, with God’s help, living by it.

Just for Teachers: The book of Proverbs is a book of instruction about critical issues in daily life, couched in the fundamental premise that the fear of the Lord is the highest wisdom—that the quest for discernment begins by submitting to God. For anyone bored with religion and theology, this book gives a detailed dose of real life.

Opening Activity: Discuss why God’s Word is needed for wisdom when there are so many self-help books available.

Consider This: God’s Word is the source code for health and happiness, the template on which life is constructed for the creatures made in His image. Thus, life operates best in harmony with it. Review the number of verses in Proverbs that enshrine health principles.

STEP 2—Explore


Bible Commentary

I. Importance of the Divine Law (Review Proverbs 28:4 with your class.)

Against modern sentiments, which claim and offer wisdom independently of God, the book of Proverbs regularly decries the limitations of human knowledge, even warning against trusting one’s own wisdom. Instead, it insists on the human need for divine revelation.

“The hard facts of life, which knock some of the nonsense out of us, are God’s facts and His appointed school of character; they are not alternatives to His grace, but means of it; for everything is of grace, from the power to know to the power to obey. ‘The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord has made them both’ (20:12). . . .
“All go to God’s school, . . . for the knowledge which He aims to instil [sic] is the knowledge of Himself; and this, too, is the ultimate prize. In submission to His authority and majesty (that is, in the fear of the Lord) we alone start and continue our education; and by the diligent search for wisdom ‘as for hid treasures’ we shall find our prize in a growing intimacy with the same Lord. . . . For the goal is: ‘Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God’ (2:5).” —Derek Kidner, *The Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1964), p. 35.

**Consider This:** How can God’s law teach us that God is love? Why does the law more often seem like a straitjacket? Perhaps, if we would memorize the entire Decalogue, including God’s first words (“‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage’ ” [Exod. 20:2, NKJV]), we would be reminded that salvation comes before the law! We don’t keep the law to be saved! God gave the Decalogue to people He had already redeemed from slavery.

God’s speaking the law from Mount Sinai Himself should enlarge our understanding of His concern for our well-being. Moses suggests this: “‘The LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day’” (Deut. 6:24, NKJV; emphasis supplied). No wonder the psalmist sang, “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119:97, NKJV).

II. Seeking the Lord *(Review Proverbs 2:1–9 with your class.)*

Those who spurn or reject God’s law will lose companionship with Him. Since we are created in His image, the law is a valuable guide for our relationship with Him and for maintaining healthy, happy families and friendships, because it provides far-reaching principles of right and wrong. There is no validation of human wisdom in Proverbs. There is no allowance for doubting divine absolutes. God knows absolutely because His knowledge is comprehensive.

Human knowledge is enriched by meditating on divine matters. God has made Himself known in His Word and through Jesus Christ. Bible writers regularly praise the perfection and reliability of God’s revelation:

- **David:** “The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall keep them, O LORD, You shall preserve them from this generation forever” (Ps. 12:6, 7, NKJV). “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is
pure, enlightening the eyes” (Ps. 19:7, 8, NKJV).

• Moses: “‘For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. . . . But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it. See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply’” (Deut. 30:11, 14–16, NKJV).

• Jesus: “‘He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him’” (John 14:21, NKJV). “‘Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth’” (John 17:17, NKJV).

Consider This: If a person does not accept the knowledge of God, what other sources of knowledge are there? The alternative is being dependent on depraved, finite human understanding. According to Proverbs, the starting point of real wisdom is God’s revelation: “For with You is the foundation of life; in Your light we see light” (Ps. 36:9, NKJV); “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7); “Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones” (Prov. 3:7, NKJV); “The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe” (Prov. 29:25, NKJV).

III. Loving the Truth (Review Proverbs 14:34 and Proverbs 1:2–5 with your class.)

The book of Proverbs applies divine counsel in different situations, ultimately a book of true education. Human knowledge or culture is not exalted, for true wisdom comes from God. If He is obeyed and honored, families, businesses, and governments will do well: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34, NKJV).

The book of Proverbs gives practical instruction on how to best live a disciplined and prudent life in this confused world. Many, however, jeer at the possibility of absolute truth. Solomon, the wisest man, recognized this: “To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, . . . a wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel” (Prov. 1:2–5, NKJV). And submission to the Lord is the starting point: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (vs. 7, NKJV).

Consider This: Just like the book of Proverbs, the book of Deuteronomy gives a great deal of practical guidance along with its invitation to love and fear God. What does that teach us about the true Author of the Bible?
STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: In secular societies today, lack of faithfulness to God causes huge problems. Moreover, gloating over disobedience and violence is everywhere. Discuss why this is happening. Is there anything a person, and a Sabbath School class, can do to counteract these prevalent trends?

Thought Questions:

1. How can our devotion to God and His Word counteract such strong negative trends in society?
2. How does the modern media subtly glorify questionable lifestyles?
3. Why do we need to be reminded that how family members are treated is the true mark of the genuine believer?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Remind class members that to pray in the name of Jesus is something more than a mere mention of that name at the beginning and the ending of a prayer. It is to pray in the mind and spirit of Jesus, while we believe His promises, rely upon His grace, and work His works.

Activity: What is the real reason Jesus hasn’t returned yet? It is often said that it is because the gospel hasn’t been preached around the world yet. Ellen White gives a different perspective: “If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one. But, though professing to be converted, we carry around with us a bundle of self that we regard as altogether too precious to be given up. It is our privilege to lay this burden at the feet of Christ and in its place take the character and similitude of Christ. The Saviour is waiting for us to do this. . . .

“‘Learn of Me,’ Christ says, ‘and ye shall find rest unto your souls.’ Matthew 11:29. Why do we not learn of the Saviour every day? Why do we not live in constant communion with Him, so that in our connection with one another we can speak and act kindly and courteously? Why do we not honor the Lord by manifesting tenderness and love for one another? If we speak and act in harmony with the principles of heaven, unbelievers will be drawn to Christ by their association with us.”—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, pp. 189, 190.

Think of practical ways you can model the kindness and courtesy of Christ more fully in your daily interactions with others.
The Humility of the Wise

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3, NKJV).

In the Bible humility is considered an important virtue. The greatest of prophets, Moses, is singled out as the most humble person who ever lived (Num. 12:3, NKJV). According to Micah 6:8, the main duty that God expects from people is “to walk humbly with your God” (NKJV). Jesus, too, insists that humility is an ideal that the Christian should adopt: “Whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:4, NKJV).

After all, what does anyone have to boast about? Every breath, every heartbeat, every gift, every talent comes only from God, in whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). And in light of the cross, even all our righteousness is as “filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6); how, then, can we boast?

This week Proverbs looks at humility; considering our situation, how foolish is it to be anything but humble?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 21.
March 15

Who Do You Think You Are?

Read Proverbs 30:1–3, 32, 33. Together, what are they saying?

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The self-negation seen in these texts is quite a break from the usual self-exaltation of kings in the ancient Near East, who often liked to boast of their wisdom, achievements, and military victories. Solomon himself is recorded as surpassing “all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom” (1 Kings 10:23, NKJV; Eccles. 2:9). And then, of course, there’s Nebuchadnezzar, who proclaimed: “‘Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?’” (Dan. 4:30, NIV).

Because our author understands his own ignorance, he calls boasting “foolish.” The Hebrew word for “foolish” here is nabal, which is the name of Nabal, whose behavior exemplified foolish pride, as well (1 Samuel 25). Such boasting, which implies pride, also carries the potential for humiliation and, thus, for anger and strife. The apostle Paul also called some of his church members “fools” who considered themselves wise and were, even worse, boasting about it (2 Cor. 11:18, 19).

Read Luke 18:9–14. Why might it be easier to be like the Pharisee than one might think? How can we make sure that we don’t fall into this same trap even in the subtlest ways?

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You have to feel sorry for people who boast (usually it’s a cover for insecurities, anyway); it shows just how self-deceived and foolish they really are.
A Knowledge of God?

Pride arises in those who don’t know the Lord in a personal way. In contrast, the person who lives in communion with God will be humble, for he or she is constantly in touch with the One who is infinitely greater than any of us. When we think about the size of the universe and realize that we are worshiping the One who created that universe, and that this same God suffered in the person of Jesus on the cross for us, it’s hard to imagine how we could struggle with pride while keeping these thoughts before us.

Read Proverbs 30:3–6. What do these verses tell us about the power, majesty, and mystery of God?

The expression “knowledge of God” is to be understood as meaning “knowledge about God.” Five rhetorical questions are then asked, which force us to recognize just how much about God we really don’t understand.

Read those questions in Proverbs 30:4. What challenge do they present to us?

Because God is the Creator (the first four questions), He remains far beyond our understanding (the fifth question). In the book of Job, God challenges Job with the same questions so that Job would realize that he could not comprehend God or His ways (Job 38–40:2).

The fact that God is the Creator, and that we cannot fully understand Him, gives us a crucial lesson regarding how we should receive His written revelation, which scholars are always questioning. Who are we—whose understanding of even the simplest things in nature is clouded and full of mystery—to challenge the Word of God, even the parts that baffle or disturb us?

Dwell on the grandeur and mystery of the creation itself. What should these tell us about the grandeur and mystery of the Creator? Why should this grandeur and mystery give us comfort and hope?
Neither Too Much nor Too Little

Proverbs 30:7–9 contains the only prayer in the book of Proverbs. It is not by chance that this request immediately follows the affirmation of God as the great Creator (Prov. 30:4) and the promise of His faithfulness (vs. 5).

Read Proverbs 30:7–9. Why would someone ask these things?

Before we ask God for anything, it is important to make sure our relationship with Him is solid. If we lie, then we act as if God, who knows all things, doesn’t even exist. This is why the confession of our sin is a prerequisite for forgiveness (1 John 1:9). We cannot cheat God; He sees us exactly as we are. As we pray, the dramatic gesture of prostration, lying in the dust like the dead (Lam. 3:29), reveals not only our reverence and humility but shows an awareness of our spiritual nakedness before Him.

In Proverbs 30:8, the writer asks God to “give” neither poverty nor riches. The first time that the verb “give” is used in the Bible in relation to humans, it deals with God’s gift of food (Gen. 1:29). This is why in many cultures food is traditionally associated with prayer. This basic need, which makes us so dependent on the God of Creation, places the experience of prayer at the core of our survival.

The two requests do not aim just at the balance of human character. They converge in one goal: the glory of God. If we get too little, we tend to steal and insult God; if we get too much, we do not feel the need for God and may even deny His existence. It is noteworthy, however, that only the latter predicament can lead to a disconnect from God; the former will likely keep us in touch with Him.

The Lord’s Prayer carries the same twofold concern: (1) “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11) provides for our needs and not more; and (2) “ ‘Do not lead us into temptation’ ” (vs. 13, NKJV) takes care of our needs.

Think about just how dependent you are on God. How can keeping that stark fact ever in your mind help you grow in faith? What dangers come when we forget this dependence?
The Actions of the Arrogant

Just as humility is positive and brings blessings, a lack of humility is dangerous and brings curses. After having encouraged the virtue of humility by showing its rewards and fruit, Proverbs 30 gives a stern warning about the dangers that come from pride.

**Cursing your parents (Prov. 30:11, 17).** Agur begins with this category, for it represents the most serious act of arrogance, when children despise their source of life. Significantly, honoring and blessing one’s parents is the only commandment associated with the promise of life (Exod. 20:12; Eph. 6:2, 3), while the death penalty is prescribed for its transgression (Exod. 21:15, 17).

**Self-righteousness (Prov. 30:12, 20).** The condition of sinners who think of themselves as righteous is bad, because they will stay in their sin, believing that they are pure and don’t need forgiveness. This is why the confession of sin is so fundamental to obtaining forgiveness (1 John 1:9). The Laodiceans, who claim that they are rich, intelligent, and well dressed (though unaware that they are poor, blind, and naked), are counseled to acquire from God the means to repair their miserable condition (Rev. 3:14–18).

“Here is represented a people who pride themselves in their possession of spiritual knowledge and advantages. But they have not responded to the unmerited blessings that God has bestowed upon them. They have been full of rebellion, ingratitude, and forgetfulness of God; and still He has dealt with them as a loving, forgiving father deals with an ungrateful, wayward son. They have resisted His grace, abused His privileges, slighted His opportunities, and have been satisfied to sink down in contentment, in lamentable ingratitude, hollow formalism, and hypocritical insincerity.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 83.

**Contempt (Prov. 30:13, 14).** The picture presented of the arrogant is not pretty. Though they have a proud look on their face, the arrogance doesn’t remain just there: it is manifested in the contempt they reveal to those who they feel are below them. The imagery of the “fangs” and “teeth” (vs. 14, NKJV) show just how bad their actions are.

Think about how you have treated others, particularly those to whom you might even feel superior (most of us have those feelings at times, do we not?). How can you make it right? How can you display the humility needed to make it right?

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Lessons From Nature

All through the Bible, imagery from nature has been used to teach spiritual truths. Here, too, using nature, the proverb teaches us lessons about humility.

**Read** Proverbs 30:18, 19. What is it saying here, too, about the limits of human understanding?

Agur sees mystery in even many of the “common” things. It is a very fascinating mix of mysteries that he presents here. The first two are from animals: an eagle silently moving through the sky, a snake silently moving along the earth. He then shifts to two human actions: a ship on the sea and a man with a woman. Even today, with all our scientific knowledge, so many mysteries remain. How crucial it is that we never lose our appreciation for the depth and majesty of life. That attitude will surely help keep us humble before God.

**Read** Proverbs 30:24–28. What other mysteries from nature catch the author’s attention and awe?

It’s interesting that the immediately preceding verses (Prov. 30:20–23) deal with human folly, arrogance, and vice. He then shifts to the animal world, pointing to small and humble creatures, even though he uses the same Hebrew word for “wise” in reference to them that is used in reference to humans (Prov. 3:13) and even God Himself (Job 12:13, Ps. 104:24). Even today, with all our advances in science, how these creatures do what they do remains beyond our full comprehension. How much more so their actions must have baffled this wise man in his time. And he was indeed wise, because one of the great signs of wisdom is to acknowledge just how little we know, even about the commonest things.

Think about some of the “simplest” things in nature: the leaf of a tree, a drop of water, a seashell. How should the fact that even these things are full of mysteries keep us humble?
Further Study: “We should reverence God’s word. For the printed volume we should show respect, never putting it to common uses, or handling it carelessly. And never should Scripture be quoted in a jest, or paraphrased to point a witty saying. ‘Every word of God is pure’; ‘as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.’ Proverbs 30:5; Psalm 12:6.”—Ellen G. White, Education, p. 244.

“Christ’s first words to the people on the mount were words of blessing. Happy are they, He said, who recognize their spiritual poverty, and feel their need of redemption. The gospel is to be preached to the poor. Not to the spiritually proud, those who claim to be rich and in need of nothing, is it revealed, but to those who are humble and contrite. . . . The Lord can do nothing toward the recovery of man until, convinced of his own weakness, and stripped of all self-sufficiency, he yields himself to the control of God. Then he can receive the gift that God is waiting to bestow. From the soul that feels his need, nothing is withheld. He has unrestricted access to Him in whom all fullness dwells.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 299, 300.

Discussion Questions:

1. Dwell on the plan of salvation and what was required to save us. That is, we are so fallen, so corrupt, so evil, that mere regeneration would not be enough to redeem us from sin. No matter how much we are changed and restored, that regeneration and restoration cannot save us. We need a substitute, someone who legally stands in our place and whose righteousness alone is enough to make us right with God. What should this reality itself tell us about why arrogance and pride have to be some of the worst sins in fallen beings like us?

2. What are some of the different ways that our very existence depends upon God? What are the things in nature itself that show us how God sustains our existence?

3. Dwell more on the prayer in Proverbs 30:7–9. Look at the balance there. How do we find balance in all that we do? Why is this so important?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Proverbs 30

The Student Will:

Know: Learn to treasure highly the divine Source of wisdom found in the Creator Himself—and to appreciate that this comprehensive divine wisdom provides valuable instruction for success in the present life.

Feel: Desire to study the ways of God in nature and to find His blessing there and feel motivated to apply God's practical counsel for successful daily living.

Do: Pray for the wisdom and power of God to live within the blueprint of His Word, proving “what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:2), rather than conforming to secular culture's assumptions.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: The Valuable Resource to Be Found in God’s Created World

A How can the study of nature teach us about the character of the Creator?

B With sin having distorted much of the goodness of the original Creation, how can we rightly interpret what we now see there?

II. Feel: The Importance of Interpreting Nature Through Scripture

A Though Solomon and Agur (penmen of much of the book of Proverbs) also lived in a sinful world, how were they able to still believe in the goodness of the Creator and not be deterred by the corruption in the world?

B How does the pervasive theory of evolution devalue animals and nature?

III. Do: Communing With Nature’s Creator: A Blessing of the Sabbath

A How can the Sabbath help us to learn about the goodness of Creation?

B How can belief in the literal Creation of this world (Genesis 1, 2) guard against false interpretations of our origins?

Summary: Proverbs 30 presents a way of life grounded in the Creator’s blueprint, including the resultant blessings, reminding us that fellowship with the Creator is the best life, even before heaven.
**Learning Cycle**

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Proverbs 30:1–6*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** We can trust fully in the reliability and truthfulness of God’s revealed Word.

**Just for Teachers:** Proverbs 30 instructs that moral ambiguity and relativism ultimately do not work. The boundaries of right and wrong, good and evil, true and false cannot be erased no matter how determinedly postmodern society tries. Tolerance of evil and moral indifference are neither virtues nor adequate responses, according to the book of Proverbs.

**Opening Activity:** Have your class consider how many serious problems of modern society can be linked to the disregard of God’s precepts. What difference would it make in society if all spouses were faithful to each other and there was no adultery? What difference would it make if there were no thieves, if everyone was always honest at home and work?

**Consider This:** The book of Proverbs does not simply attach the knowledge of God to other secular systems of wisdom. On the contrary, the precepts of God dominate biblical wisdom, the true source of wisdom and understanding and the standard by which everything else is judged. Moreover, a personal relationship with God is the remedy for human ignorance. Why is it so hard for the human heart and mind to admit ignorance?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** Chapter 30 opens with Agur’s confessing that on his own he cannot find wisdom (vss. 2, 3); then, with rhetorical questions, it instructs that God alone possesses wisdom (vs. 4) and that He willingly shares it through His Word (vs. 5). Finally, Proverbs warns that God’s Word is not to be tampered with: “Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar” (vs. 6, NKJV), a sentiment given by other biblical writers (Moses and John).

**Bible Commentary**

I. Knowledge of God *(Review Proverbs 30:3–6 with your class.)*
The biblical teaching of a literal Creation grounds the wisdom literature. God Himself, in His longest speech in the Bible (to Job, in Job 38–41), joyfully refers to creating this world.

Believing the biblical description of Creation, upheld all through Scripture, informs and broadens human perspectives of God’s character and work. “The Bible does not say God is forgiveness, even though he is forgiving; or that God is knowledge, even though he is all-knowing; or that God is power, even though he is all-powerful. All other attributes are, like facets on a diamond, radiant windows into the heart of God.”—Timothy R. Jennings, M.D., *The God-Shaped Brain: How Changing Your View of God Transforms Your Life* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2013), p. 22.

According to Agur and all Bible writers, true knowledge comes from joyful submission to the Maker of heaven and earth, because He is worthy. Human ignorance of God and His creative power leads to opposing Him, as Solomon notes: “‘Truly, this only I have found: that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes’” (Eccles. 7:29, NKJV). Because of human sin, creation only partially reveals the divine order anymore. Moreover, human understanding has become degraded because of sin and thus is not sufficient to fully understand all of reality.

**Consider This:** What human presumptions undergird much of the false thinking about God’s character and work? What does the Bible say is the prerequisite condition or attitude for receiving true knowledge?

### II. The Arrogant (*Review Proverbs 30:10–31 with your class.*)

Proverbs 30:10–31 lists behaviors that pervert the social order. Even worse, such behavior resists divine perspectives (speaking of human assumptions, not mental abilities). There is less and less reverence for God’s truth. The book of Proverbs describes this as preferring to live with illusions, adopting sinful perspectives as the moral standard—reminding us that the problems of society result not from mental deficiency but from spiritual pride.

In Proverbs, people who do this are dubbed “simple” or “fools” and are described as gullible, irresponsible, empty-headed, inexperienced, drifting into temptation, and as not accepting discipline, rebuke, or correction.

**Consider This:** The first principle of wisdom in Proverbs is the fear of the Lord. This is not just one aspect of learning but the place from which the search for wisdom must begin. Such a decision will determine any growth in wisdom, including the moral dimension. All biblical writers work with this same assumption. How can a person be certain that this first principle is true? Given the nature of the first principle, what, then, is the first step a person needs to take in searching for wisdom?
III. Lessons From Nature (Review Proverbs 30:18, 19, 24–31 with your class.)

According to Proverbs, one of the best ways to learn about God and His ways is through the created world that He made. Though many people think about animals only in terms of how they taste, this week’s lesson, along with many other verses in Proverbs, instructs us that animals can be our teachers: “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise” (Prov. 6:6, NKJV), followed with a description of their diligence.

So much is being learned now about the wonders of all life, including the intelligence of animals. For example, if anyone wonders why God “commanded the ravens” to feed Elijah (1 Kings 17:4), the book Crows: Wise Guys of the Avian World, by Candace Savage (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada: Greystone Books, 2005), is illuminating. Reconnection with the lives of animals could be valuable in softening our hearts, for animals have feelings and affection, which Ellen G. White noted: “The intelligence displayed by many dumb animals approaches so closely to human intelligence that it is a mystery. The animals see and hear and love and fear and suffer. They use their organs far more faithfully than many human beings use theirs. They manifest sympathy and tenderness toward their companions in suffering. Many animals show an affection for those who have charge of them, far superior to the affection shown by some of the human race. They form attachments for man which are not broken without great suffering to them.

“What man with a human heart, who has ever cared for domestic animals, could look into their eyes, so full of confidence and affection, and willingly give them over to the butcher’s knife? How could he devour their flesh as a sweet morsel?”—The Ministry of Healing, pp. 315, 316. After all, humans and animals are made from the “same stuff” (Gen. 2:7, 19).

Jesus Himself treasured the things His own hands had made: “‘Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these’” (Matt. 6:28, 29, NKJV). Ellen G. White also turns our attention to the wonders of the natural world: “As we come close to the heart of nature, Christ makes His presence real to us, and speaks to our hearts of His peace and love.”—Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 26.

An educational psychologist argues that if children spent more time in the restorative powers of nature than being unnaturally stimulated by electronic technology, there would be less trouble and rebellion in the school system (see Richard Louv, Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder [Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2008]).

Consider This: The more we understand about the natural world—plants, animals, the composition of water and its exact fitness for life (let alone necessity for life), the air we breathe, our precise distance from the sun necessary for life, and so on—the more our wonder for the Creator abounds. His control of
time (creating the first seven days of Creation and then bending them into the first week) also gives evidence of His power and love. What, though, has caused humans to become so estranged from animals and nature?

▶STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** If we are ever to know wisdom, we must be taught by God, who alone possesses true knowledge. This attitude, underlying the entire book of Proverbs, rebuts the rationalism of the Enlightenment, which contended that unaided, human wisdom could attain truth. This thinking has proved to be a colossal failure. Yes, the medieval church has a bloody record, but modern atheism is even more brutal. Unfortunately, however, the failure of the Enlightenment attitude has led to a perverse postmodern conclusion—that there are no absolutes (except that!). The book of Proverbs insists on an alternative perspective: the reliability and truth of God’s revealed Word.

**Thought Question:**

1. What evidence from the book of Proverbs reminds us that although the world is now sinful, God is not aloof, distant, cold, and forbidding but, rather, intimate, personal, warm, and affirming?

**Application Questions:**

1. What are some of the reasons we have been so slow to appreciate the wonders of nature and thus nature’s Creator?
2. Explore reasons that evolutionary theory has demeaned the value of nature.

▶STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Solomon, like his father David, was impressed with the created world. Find several psalms wherein David exalts the Creator by praising Him for His created works (for example, Pss. 19, 33, 104). Ask the class to share how some of their experiences in nature have drawn them closer to the Creator.

**Activity:** Bring to the class current articles and books on different animals that reveal their intelligence, affection, and hard work. Or share instances from your own interactions with, or observations of, animals that reveal their intelligence, affection, and hard work. A number of Web sites also post videos of birds flying in slow motion, capturing the magnificence of their flight and tail feathers in action, which our sin-dimmed eyes presently see only as simple flapping.
**SABBATH AFTERNOON**

**Read for This Week’s Study:** Proverbs 31, Job 29:15, Proverbs 8, 1 Cor. 1:21, Rev. 14:13.

**Memory Text:** “Do not give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink” (Proverbs 31:3, 4, NKJV).

The book of Proverbs began with the teachings of a father (Prov. 1:1, 8; 4:1) and ends with the teachings of a mother (Prov. 31:1). The name Lemuel may allude to Solomon; if so, then Lemuel’s mother is Solomon’s mother, and she warns her son against the two most serious threats to the king: wine and women.

The association of wine and women is deliberate. To be efficient as a ruler, the king has to be careful of the influences he faces, and these two factors can be very powerful. Though the right woman could be beneficial, alcohol is only trouble.

The father’s introduction was concerned with the spiritual acquisition of wisdom. Now, the mother’s conclusion is concerned with applying wisdom in real life. For the spiritual principles taught by the father would mean nothing if the practical advice offered by the mother were not followed.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 28.
A Toast “To Life”?

In many cultures, drinking alcohol is associated with living a good life. People raise a glass and wish one another a long life, though the irony is that each glass works toward destroying life. Nicely designed bottles, poetic and funny drinking songs, clever commercials, and even some “scientific” findings all comfort drinkers in their idea that alcohol is good for them. Proverbs has already warned us against this deadly deception (Prov. 23:30–35). Now the theme reappears, showing us even more damage that drinking can bring.

Read Proverbs 31:4, 5, 8, 9. Together, what do they say, and how does their message apply to every follower of the Lord, not just the king?

In similar language, Job describes himself as being “eyes to the blind, and . . . feet to the lame” (Job 29:15, NKJV). Likewise, the king or those with means should help support the poor and the needy—those who are “speechless” in that they don’t have a voice because no one listens to them.

The destructive effect of wine can also be seen in how it can so easily distort one’s judgment. While alcohol is bad enough for common folk, for a king or someone with power, alcohol can create terrible situations. The drinking king not only “forgets the law” and does not know what is right, but he subsequently issues distorted judgments: the guilty are declared innocent, and the innocent guilty.

What is at stake here is the capacity to discern between right and wrong, good and evil. The prohibition of wine drinking has to do with basic wisdom and, as such, should apply to every human being. It is noteworthy that this concern is precisely the reason implied in the special prohibition of drinking for the priest: “that you may distinguish between holy and unholy” (Lev. 10:9, 10, NKJV).

Who hasn’t seen the devastating effects of alcohol in so many lives? How can you help others, especially the young, stay clear of what can bring only harm to them and to others?

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A quick reading of these verses gives the impression that Lemuel’s mother allows the consumption of wine or any other alcohol for the person who is about to die (vs. 6) or for the person who suffers from depression (vs. 7). This reading, however, would contradict not only the immediate context—Lemuel’s mother has just warned the king against wine drinking—but also the general context of the book of Proverbs, which systematically and emphatically prohibits wine drinking.

In addition, it hardly makes sense to offer something to the perishing that would only make their health and well-being worse. And giving alcohol to a depressed person is like giving salt to someone who is already dehydrated. If, as we know, God cares about our bodies and our health, it doesn’t make sense to see these texts, especially in context, encouraging the use of alcohol.

More important, an analysis of the use of the expression “who is perishing” in the book of Proverbs reveals that it is speaking about the wicked (Prov. 10:28; 11:7, 10; 19:9; 21:28; 28:28). Through the expression “who is perishing,” Lemuel’s mother points in fact, by association, to the wicked. As for the expression “bitter of heart,” it refers to the depressed person (Prov. 31:6, NKJV), who, like the wicked, becomes insensitive and “forgets” poverty (vs. 7).

“Satan gathered the fallen angels together to devise some way of doing the most possible evil to the human family. One proposition after another was made, till finally Satan himself thought of a plan. He would take the fruit of the vine, also wheat, and other things given by God as food, and would convert them into poisons, which would ruin man’s physical, mental, and moral powers, and so overcome the senses that Satan should have full control. Under the influence of liquor, men would be led to commit crimes of all kinds. Through perverted appetite the world would be made corrupt. By leading men to drink alcohol, Satan would cause them to descend lower and lower in the scale.”—Ellen G. White, Temperance, p. 12.
A Virtuous Woman

“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies” (Prov. 31:10).

Who is the “virtuous woman” of Proverbs 31:10? A number of indications suggest that the author has more in mind than a godly woman or the ideal wife. Following the lead of many passages of the book (Prov. 1:20–33, 3:13–20, 4:5–9, Proverbs 8), we have good reason to think that “the virtuous woman” represents wisdom. This personification of wisdom as a woman is justified, not only because the Hebrew word for “wisdom,” chokmah, is a feminine noun but also because it allows the Hebrew writer to draw all kinds of concrete lessons for our daily life. Wisdom is not pictured as some lofty and unreachable ideal but as a very practical and approachable woman who could become our life companion.

This last teaching about wisdom is given through a beautiful acrostic poem: each verse begins with a Hebrew letter following the alphabetic order, as in the book of Lamentations and in many psalms.

Compare the text on wisdom in Proverbs 8 with our text on the “virtuous woman.” What features of the “virtuous woman” remind us of wisdom in the book of Proverbs?

1. She is precious and worth finding (Prov. 31:10, 8:35).
2. Her worth is more than rubies (Prov. 31:10; 8:10, 11, 18, 19).
3. She provides food (Prov. 31:14, 8:19).
4. She is strong (Prov. 31:17, 25; 8:14).
5. She is wise (Prov. 31:26, 8:1).
6. She is praised (Prov. 31:28, 8:34).

Though we live in the so-called information age, and though we have acquired so much more knowledge than had previous generations, there’s little to indicate that our generation is any wiser than previous generations. Indeed, as Martin Luther King Jr. said, “We have guided missiles and misguided men.”

Read 1 Corinthians 1:21. What does it say to you, and how can this idea help you live by faith?
She Works

The virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 is not lazy; she works hard and is very active. The poem insists on this quality (Prov. 31:27), which characterizes the wise versus the fool (Prov. 6:6; 24:33, 34). The field of her activities is comprehensive and concrete. To be spiritual does not mean that we should be idle, all under the pretext that we are concerned with highly important religious issues, and thus do not have time to take care of “trivial” matters. (See Luke 16:10.) The woman “willingly works with her hands” (Prov. 31:13, NKJV). It is interesting that this very spiritual person is never depicted praying or meditating. She is shown only as an efficient and productive woman, like Martha of the Gospels (Luke 10:38–40).

Read Proverbs 31:12, 15, 18. Why is the woman always working?

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The woman works “all the days of her life” (vs. 12), even during the night (vs. 15, 18). Her active and watchful presence is effective all the time. The reason for her constant attention is her responsibility.

Read Proverbs 31:20, 25. What is the temporal scope of her projects?

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Here we touch on an important point regarding our work and effort: it will be tested by time. Only the future will testify to the quality of our deeds. To work wisely is to work with the future in mind, not just for an immediate reward.

Though not quite dealing with the same thing, the principle in the following text from Revelation is so important: “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them” (Rev. 14:13).

If you have a special woman (a wife, mother, family member, teacher, boss, or friend) in your life, what can you do to show your appreciation for her and for all she has done for you?
She Cares

Read Proverbs 31:26–31. What other important characteristics are seen in this woman? Why are these important for all of us, regardless of who we are?

As we have seen all through this quarter, an emphasis is placed on words, on what we say. The woman is known for her wisdom and for her kindness. They are related. After all, couldn’t one argue that kindness is another form of wisdom, especially when we understand that wisdom isn’t just what we know but what we say and do?

Notice, too, the phrase the “law of kindness.” That is, kindness isn’t just some fleeting attribute that escapes from her mouth now and then. It is a law, a principle of her very existence. How powerful it would be if the “law of kindness” were to guide all that came out of our mouths.

Read Proverbs 31:30. What important point is revealed here that is so often forgotten?

All too often women are rated only in terms of outward appearance; that’s such a shallow and superficial marker. The Bible points out just how “vain,” how empty, that kind of attitude ultimately is. This woman’s true beauty is found in her character and how that character is made manifest in her life and works. Beauty will always pass away; character can endure forever. “A great name among men is as letters traced in sand, but a spotless character will endure to all eternity.”—Ellen G. White, God’s Amazing Grace, p. 81.

In what areas of your life do you need to see your character improve? Praying about it is fine, but what concrete positive steps must you take in order to see growth?
Further Study: “When indulging their appetite for wine and while under its exciting stimulus, their reason was clouded, and they could not discern the difference between the sacred and the common. Contrary to God’s express direction, they dishonored Him by offering common instead of sacred fire. God visited them with His wrath; fire went forth from His presence and destroyed them.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 295.

“Let the children and youth learn from the Bible how God has honored the work of the everyday toiler. . . . Let them read . . . of the wise woman described in the Proverbs, who ‘seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands;’ who ‘giveth meat to her household, and their task to her maidens;’ who ‘planteth a vineyard,’ ‘and strengtheneth her arms;’ who ‘stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, . . . reacheth forth her hands to the needy;’ who ‘looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.’ Proverbs 31:13, 15, R.V; 31:16, 17, 20, 27.”—Ellen G. White, Education, p. 217.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is total abstinence from alcohol the only right option? After all, what possible good can arise from any kind of alcohol consumption? On the other hand, think about all the damage that it often causes.

2. Dwell more on the idea that although we have a lot of knowledge for our time, we don’t necessarily have more wisdom. In what ways can knowledge without wisdom be even more dangerous than a lack of knowledge without wisdom? What are some recent examples we can see of just how damaging knowledge without wisdom can be?

3. Review the characteristics of the “virtuous woman.” How can the principles behind what is revealed in this specific situation be applied to believers, whatever their gender, marital status, or age?

4. The book of Proverbs is filled with practical wisdom. This should tell us that our religion, even with all its lofty theology and spiritual dimensions, has a very practical side to it, as well. How can we make sure that we don’t neglect the practical aspects of faith as we seek to fulfill its theological and spiritual dimensions?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Proverbs 31:4, 5, 29–31

The Student Will:

Know: Recognize that lifestyle decisions are not trivial issues but have major effects, reaching far beyond the person who makes them.
Feel: Foster an appreciation for lifestyle choices that will enhance this present life and fitness for heaven.
Do: Determine, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to follow God’s lifestyle directives, which are promised to bring blessings now and to make his or her life a blessing.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: The Reality and Results of Lifestyle Choices Are Fundamental, According to Proverbs 31.
   A Proverbs 31 aligns two significant issues that each person must decide on: the use of alcoholic beverages, plus relationships between men and women in and outside of marriage. How can one learn to make the best choices in these two areas?
   B How does media (radio, television, Internet) impact a person’s thinking about these two important choices?

II. Feel: The Tension Between the Values of Society Regarding Alcohol and Relationships and Proverbs 31.
   A Why is there often such a tension?
   B How can a person best sort out the conflicting values between biblical counsel and societal pressures?

III. Do: Determine How to Make Optimum Lifestyle Choices.
   A Imagine what a difference it would make if every person would choose to eliminate harmful drinks from his or her life and choose to honor biblical principles of family values and sexual purity. Describe situations you are aware of in which such choices would make a difference.

Summary: The book of Proverbs concludes with reminders of the importance of the lifestyle choices we make. The final chapter also goes into great detail describing a godly woman. While dealing with many types of work and responsibilities throughout the book, the last chapter exalts a woman of great intelligence, wisdom, and kindness in her everyday tasks. We are instructed that there are no unimportant decisions and choices and that success comes from fearing the Lord (31:30), a frequent precept in Proverbs.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Proverbs 31:4–31

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The last chapter of Proverbs speaks to two important areas of life: what we choose to drink and how we live day to day, especially highlighting the daily tasks of a working mother. As the chapter closes, again the “fear of the Lord” is shown to be the fundamental choice undergirding a righteous life.

Just for Teachers: Throughout the book of Proverbs, advice and counsel for right living is given for family members (fathers, mothers, sons, daughters) and for various occupations in society. Some of the statements are commands, some practical suggestions; sometimes results of choices are spelled out. The underlying framework holding all the chapters together is belief in the Creator God—praised throughout the biblical canon.

This week’s lesson urges thoughtful consideration of the dangerous results of something often readily indulged in throughout many places and cultures: drinking alcoholic beverages. Also, the positive consequences of a well-ordered family are discussed, with the wife and mother’s role underscored.

Opening Activity: Bring to class, if possible, statistics on how drunkenness leads to many marital difficulties. In the same vein, it is significant that the consequences of the negative effects of alcohol on a king’s (leader’s) critical tasks are coupled, by contrast, in Proverbs 31 with a lengthy portrayal of a mother carefully managing her family, who duly honor her. Ellen G. White portrays the same precept:

“The influence of an ill-regulated family is widespread, and disastrous to all society. It accumulates in a tide of evil that affects families, communities, and governments.

“It is impossible for any of us to live in such a way that we shall not cast an influence in the world. No member of the family can enclose himself within himself, where other members of the family shall not feel his influence and spirit. The very expression of the countenance has an influence for good or evil. His spirit, his words, his actions, his attitude toward others, are unmistakable. If he is living in selfishness, he surrounds his soul with a malarious atmosphere; while if he is filled with the love of Christ, he will manifest courtesy, kindness, tender regard for the feelings of others and will communicate to his associates, by his acts of love, a
tender, grateful, happy feeling. It will be made manifest that he is living for Jesus and daily learning lessons at His feet, receiving His light and His peace. He will be able to say to the Lord, ‘Thy gentleness hath made me great.’”—The Adventist Home, pp. 33, 34.

Consider This: Ask your class to consider why the warnings against drinking alcohol should be stressed for everyone, even though Proverbs 31:4, 5 is addressed to the king. Also, reflect on and discuss how single men and women can benefit from the description of the married woman who is praised in detail in this chapter.

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The two topics presented in Proverbs 31—the harmful results of intoxicating beverages, and the depiction of the actions of a God-fearing wife and mother—though written thousands of years ago, are still very contemporary and necessary.

Bible Commentary

I. Alcoholic Beverages (Review Proverbs 31:3–9 with your class.)

Even the wonderful fruits of creation can be misused and lead to substance abuse. Alcoholic beverages cloud the areas of the brain in which moral thinking is done. When this happens, grave injustices can occur, such as not enforcing good laws or passing faulty, defective legislation that does not defend those who are oppressed (Prov. 31:5, 8, 9). What is warned against here is valid for every person in whatever sphere of influence he or she has.

Consider This: The opening “motherly counsel” to Lemuel in Proverbs 31 shifts to a warning against drunkenness, describing the tragic results that can occur. Why is it tempting to drown one’s problems in alcoholic beverages?
II. Godly Womanhood *(Review Proverbs 31:10–31 with your class.)*

The woman described in Proverbs 31:10–31 is the finale of the book of Proverbs, an exceptional climax. Throughout the entire book, readers have been warned of ungodly, “strange” women whose seductive powers cause ruin. This final portrait is in contrast to those women, describing a feminine role model of wisdom and godly values. The first verse, along with the final verses, skillfully envelope the passage in blessing: she is a blessing to her husband *(vss. 11, 12)*, and he blesses her *(vss. 28, 29)*. Her husband is known at the city gate *(vs. 23, the civil center of ancient Israelite communities)*, and her own works are praised at the same place *(vs. 31)*; and she becomes the praise of her community *(vss. 30, 31)*.

She is no self-centered “superwoman” but, rather, a God-fearing person whom God reveals Himself through, for she “fears the Lord” *(vs. 30, NKJV)*, deriving her wisdom from His Word. For in Proverbs, wisdom is not primarily an intellectual and academic achievement but a relationship with the Creator.

**Consider This:** How does the understanding of these two final vital principles of life in the book of Proverbs inspire your own motives and choices and broaden your perspective of God’s work in the human heart?

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**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Recall biblical narratives in which drunkenness brought terrible, long-lasting results (for example, Noah and his sons *[Gen. 9:18–27]*; Lot and his daughters *[Gen. 19:30–38]*).

Find examples of biblical women who exemplify the character qualities of the Proverbs 31 passage. In light of this activity, contemplate the following thought: Jesus is the only human who was able to pick His mother. Of all the Israelite women living at the time when Jesus was conceived, He selected Mary. Though Seventh-day Adventists don’t worship her, we can appreciate her as the one with the qualities that Jesus knew would make her the best human mother for Him. This exalts the mother’s role in society. In the same vein, Ellen G. White exalts home virtues:

“The Lord is served as much, yea, more, by faithful home work than by the one who teaches the word. As verily as do the teachers in the school, fathers and mothers are to feel that they are the educators of their children.
“The Christian mother’s sphere of usefulness should not be narrowed by her domestic life. The salutary influence which she exerts in the home circle she may and will make felt in more widespread usefulness in her neighborhood and in the church of God. Home is not a prison to the devoted wife and mother.”—*The Adventist Home*, p. 236.

**Thought Question:** How can wives and mothers be encouraged and praised throughout the year and not just on Mother’s Day?

**Application Question:** In what ways can you help the wives and mothers, including single mothers, in your local church family feel the love and appreciation, honor and support they deserve for their demanding tasks?

[STEP 4—Create](#)

**Just for Teachers:** God bids us to call Him “Father,” but He also demonstrates qualities of a mother: He compares His protection of His people to that of a mother hen *(Matt. 23:37).* Also, He equates conversion to the birthing experience only females can know!

**Activity:** Have the class plan practical ways in which they could help any single moms in the church. Or surprise busy parents with unexpected assistance during the next week.