The Call of Wisdom

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,
But fools despise wisdom and instruction”
(Prov. 1:7, NKJV).
Introduction

The Wise Guy

“Wise guy!” “Smart aleck!” “Know-it-all!” Don’t we hate people who think they know everything and who have that “I told you so” smile and twinkle in their eye?

Perhaps we may have thought of God as a wise guy also. How many times have we told Him, “God, this is what I need to make me happy! I know how this works! Can’t You just give it to me?” And then when God didn’t an-

swear us with exactly what we wanted, we got angry and complained that He wasn’t being fair? Hopefully the next step is when we realized that God was right after all. Perhaps we even heard Him whisper during our prayers, “I told you so, My child. Why didn’t you heed My advice in the first place?”

It’s for our own good that God is the Wise Guy, for His wisdom goes way beyond our own. He has “thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jer. 29:11, NKJV). He is the “’Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last’” (Rev. 22:13, NKJV). He knows our past, present, and future. And He desires that we make use of our time on earth, not just for our own good, but for His glory as well. God also calls us to seek and receive divinely inspired wisdom. Solomon knew this, and when God appeared to him in a dream and asked him what he needed, Solomon replied, “’Therefore give to Your servant an understand-
ing heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil’” (1 Kings 3:9, NKJV).

So, how can we receive God’s wisdom? “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7, NKJV). To fear the Lord means that we live a life that takes into account that there is an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-righteous, and all-wise God who holds us accountable for our behavior. Once we realize this, we can sincerely ask Him for His help so that our lives can honor Him. Herein lies true wisdom.

Choose wisdom from God today, “Incline your ear to wisdom, / And apply your heart to understanding” (2:2, NKJV) so that His wisdom will inform all of your decisions. “Then you will understand righteousness and justice, / Equity and every good path” (verse 9, NKJV), and you will “walk in the way of goodness, / And keep to the paths of righteousness” (verse 20, NKJV).

Jeffrey Lonan, Singapore
A Father’s Heart (Prov. 1:1–6)

Wouldn’t it be nice if all of us were given an encyclopedia on life? Not just the facts and figures, but a book that provided practical advice on how we should live successfully? Some fathers and mothers have attempted to write such a book, hoping that their children would thereby avoid the pain and struggles they themselves had been through. King Solomon was one such parent.

When God told Solomon that He would grant him anything he asked for, Solomon asked Him for wisdom instead of riches or longevity. Hence, his life and reign would later earn him the title of “The Wisest King Who Ever Lived.” This wisdom was gathered and organized into what we now refer to as the book of Proverbs. Many people call it the book of Wisdom, and rightly so. Its reputation is such that even many non-Christians also read it.

A Recipe for Wisdom (Prov. 1:1–6)

So how does the wisest king who ever lived explain wisdom? Wisdom is that which is useful. Gaining wisdom is a lifelong process of continuous learning and humility. One can sense that Solomon does not believe that there is an end to the pursuit of knowledge and that if a person feels that he or she has come to a point where there is nothing more to learn, then that person should engage in some serious personal reflection. Like water is to most dishes, Solomon believes that fear of the Lord is the main ingredient in the recipe for obtaining knowledge.

So what does it mean to fear the Lord? The answer can be found in Solomon’s life. In 1 Kings 3:5–14, we see Solomon acknowledging that wisdom comes solely from the Lord. Therefore, if we are to seek wisdom, we must first acknowledge the Source of wisdom. We must also understand that God desires to help us live an abundant life and that He will not withhold wisdom from us if we ask Him for it.

Left or Right? (Job 28:20, 23, 27; Pss. 37:30, 31; 111:10; Prov. 21:1, 2)

Life is all about making choices. And the day we stop making choices
is the day we lose our ability to truly live life the way God intends for us to live it. However, history testifies to the fact that we often do not make good choices, hence, the need for wisdom. In the Hebrew language, wisdom can be defined as a “quality of sound judgment developed by experience, observation, and reflection. Wisdom is a function of the trained mind, which Bible writers set forth as coming from the Lord (Job 28:20, 23, 27; Ps 111:10) and which they connect with obedience to His commands (Ps 37:30, 31; Prov. 21:1, 2).”

Wisdom is not a vague concept that we are unable to grasp. Instead, it is something that will assist us in our day-to-day life. Wisdom is practical. In Proverbs 1, Solomon urges his readers to follow the instructions of their parents as if their lives depended on it. He warns his readers that the world is full of traps and that there are people ready to entice them with their evil counsel. Our only safeguard is God’s wisdom. Solomon warns us of the consequences of neglecting this wisdom. He personifies wisdom as someone running through the streets, warning people of impending calamity. But alas, this person is ignored. Again and again, Solomon seeks to draw us to wisdom, for to him, ignoring wisdom is to forsake the fear of God, which is something he did at one point in his life. Let his story serve as a warning to us all.

Not Just Prevention (Proverbs 2; 3:13–18)

Wisdom helps to us avoid the evils of life. Wisdom also has its blessings and rewards. However, the rewards that come with wisdom are not something we would commonly expect—material rewards. Although there are material rewards that wisdom brings, to Solomon those rewards are not the most important. In his mind, the best reward a person can receive is the ability to fear the Lord (Prov. 2:5, 6). Solomon understands that while life on earth is important, it is also impermanent. God calls all of us to live a good life, but that should not be our end goal. What matters most is that we fear the Lord. The ultimate reward that awaits such a person is an eternity with a loving God. It makes sense to Solomon; and he is trying to help us make sense of it also. Solomon no longer lives, but the question he has in mind remains with us. After studying Proverbs, will we choose wisdom or foolishness?

REACT

1. How would you describe your attitude toward wisdom?

2. After reading Proverbs 1–3, what are your thoughts and how do you plan to apply what you have learned from these chapters to your daily life?

---

*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Wisdom.”

---

James Tham, Singapore
Isn't it amazing that the God of the universe thinks about you and me? Imagine it! God wants us to succeed! He has the best plans for us! How often do we forget about this and try to live our lives without Him?

“The most gifted of human beings, men and women of the broadest minds and deepest comprehension, those most highly cultured and most highly educated, those who stand in the world as rulers, are infants in comparison with God in their understanding of the things of eternity. And because they have so limited knowledge of Him, because they know so little of His ways, His mind, His character, they are in danger of making themselves gods.”¹

“In the eyes of men, vain philosophy and science, falsely so-called, are of more value than the Word of God. The sentiment prevails to a large extent that the divine Mediator is not essential to the salvation of man. A variety of theories advanced by the so-called worldly wise men for man’s elevation are believed and trusted in more than is the truth of God as taught by Christ and His apostles.”²

“ ‘Without Me,’ Christ says, ‘ye can do nothing.’ Those who undertake to carry forward the work in their own strength will certainly fail. Education alone will not fit a man for a place in the work, will not enable him to obtain a knowledge of God. Hear what Paul has to say on this matter: ‘For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of the world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.’³

Let us not lean on our own understanding, but in all things, ask for God’s wisdom.

**REACT**

How can we know when we are relying more on human wisdom than on God’s wisdom?

---


Jimmy Quek, Singapore
The book of Proverbs was written to the people of Israel by Solomon and two other wise men (see Prov. 30:1; 31:1). It was written primarily during Solomon’s reign from 971 B.C. to 931 B.C. *

In chapter 1, verses 1–4, we learn that the proverbs were assembled so that God’s people might attain the type of wisdom and discipline that would help them live a prudent life. The proverbs would also remind them to do what was right and to be fair in their dealings with other people. Solomon also hoped that the proverbs would give young people knowledge and discretion.

See what wisdom God has in store for you.

In Proverbs 1:20–23, Solomon uses the illustration of wisdom calling to the people in a public square from the top of the wall and at the city gate. Wisdom is still calling to God’s people today. As we read on in Proverbs 1, Solomon proceeds to warn God’s people about the danger of not being open to wisdom’s call. If we choose not to listen, disaster and calamity await us.

In the book of Proverbs, God is asking us to rethink how we live our lives. In the world today, technology and the Internet make available all types of knowledge for us to investigate. With the click of a mouse, with the touch of a smartphone, we can access much more information than was ever available in the past. However, has all of this information made us wiser? Will it ever make us wiser? The book of Proverbs, even though it was written so long ago, still contains more wisdom than all of the books written today.

Take time to search the book of Proverbs. See what wisdom God has in store for you. Explore this practical book that teaches us how to live wisely, how to live the way that God desire us to live. If we do so, we will find ourselves much happier, much more fulfilled and enlightened than ever before.

Let us heed the call of wisdom!

REACT

1. What does having the type of wisdom described in Proverbs mean to you personally? How do you think it could change your life for the better?
2. Explain the difference between worldly wisdom and godly wisdom.

* The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Solomon.”

Christon Choo, Singapore
Never before has humankind been exposed to as much information as today. The Internet, advances in all forms of communication tools, and the affordability of travel have made it possible for businesses, organizations, and even individuals to easily get their messages out to the masses.

We hear the call of knowledge, the call of success, and even the call of happiness. These calls urge us to buy more, own more, earn more. However, we often ignore the call of God’s divine wisdom. No wonder, in what should be a golden age, we are seeing more and more cases of anxiety, depression, and even suicide, as we continually chase after the wind (Eccles. 1:14).

God has a plan for each of us that is for our benefit.

The world may promise us everything, but it is an empty promise and can in no way satisfy us. Without God's wisdom guiding as we go about our daily lives, we are nothing but sailboats without an anchor. Only when God is our anchor can we gain insight to help us make the right choices (Proverbs 2).

In the midst of the roaring crowd, how can we train our ears to recognize the call of God's wisdom?

_Do good rather than evil._ We need to walk in the ways of good men and women and delight in doing what is right (Prov. 2:20–22; Mic. 6:8).

_Trust in God._ This is especially hard to do when we are suffering and life doesn't make much sense. But God has a plan for each of us that is for our benefit (Prov. 2:12–19; 3:5, 6; Jer. 29:11).

_Obe y God's commands._ While many may think that the Ten Commandments are outdated, they are as relevant today as when God first gave them to the children of Israel. His laws do not restrict us. Instead, they protect us from evil (Prov. 3:1, 2).

_Pract ice humility._ The ways of the world may be attractive, and they may even appear to be wise, but none of them compare to God's wisdom (Prov. 3:7, 8).

_B e generous._ The world may look favorably upon wealthy people, but God wants us to bless all people just as readily as He blesses us (Prov. 3:9, 10; Matt. 6:19–21).

**REACT**

1. How else can we train ourselves to recognize the call of God's wisdom?
2. What are some of the philosophies of the world that people subscribe to that are opposed to God's wisdom?
3. How can we avoid succumbing to these philosophies that other people think are so full of wisdom?

Melody Tan, Wahroonga, New South Wales, Australia
In Proverbs 30:24–28, God uses nature to give us a wonderful lesson in wisdom. It reads, “‘Four things on earth are small, / yet they are extremely wise: / Ants are creatures of little strength, / yet they store up their food in the summer; / hyraxes are creatures of little power, / yet they make their home in the crags; / locusts have no king, / yet they advance together in ranks; / a lizard can be caught with the hand, / yet it is found in kings’ palaces’” (NIV).

Scripture reminds us that God is our Rock . . . and that Satan is the predator seeking to devour us.

Hyraxes are furry, rotund animals with short tails. They live in small family groups on rocky terrain across sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. A hyrax will spend its entire lifetime close to the crags—or cracks—it calls home. There are always hyraxes standing guard on the rocks, like sentinels. They let out sharp barks if they see a predator. Then the other hyraxes will run for their lives. But even while rushing to hide, the hyraxes don’t run aimlessly. They follow set patterns and trails within the rock piles to get to the safest hideouts.

Hyraxes also know their limits. They stick close to home and never venture far without someone watching out for them. And hyraxes know where to run and hide among the rocks. Similarly, wise people know and stay close to their source of protection.

Scripture reminds us that God is our Rock (Ps. 62:2) and that Satan is the predator seeking to devour us (1 Pet. 5:8). Wise people run to the Rock every day for protection. They have godly people looking out for them, and they heed the warnings these mentors call out. Size doesn't matter when we belong to a community that is sheltered by the Maker of heaven and earth.

**REACT**

1. Review the four animals listed in Proverbs 30:24–28. What keys to wisdom do each of them highlight?
2. In your own words, explain what it means to exemplify preparation, protection, participation, and persistence.
3. How is this picture of wisdom different from the one other people may have?
CONCLUDE

History has not produced a human being or a human resource that is all good and therefore all wise. God is the ultimate source of wisdom. Therefore, it is for our own good that He is the all-wise Being. He knows our entire past, present, and future. Anyone wishing to be wise and wanting to make good life choices must acknowledge and connect to God. If you seek happiness, Proverbs is the best resource available. Explore it. Test it. And see (Proverbs 2).

CONSIDER

- Reading Matthew 25:1–13. Then list as many ways as you can to indicate how the ten bridesmaids were similar. How were five of them different, and why? Identify two modern-day situations in which this parable applies. Which group of bridesmaids do you normally fall into?
- Looking through a newspaper and reading three news reports about bad incidents. What wise actions could have prevented these tragedies? How are these same actions played out in the Bible?
- Surveying at least five people. Ask them (1) to name the three wisest people they know; (2) to identify any mistakes these people have made; (3) and would they share a home with the wisest person they know? Then encourage them to read the book of Proverbs and decide whether their lives could be improved if they follow its teachings.
- Writing a poem contrasting the benefits society would gain if more people followed the wisdom in the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:2–17).
- Comparing the following experience to the wisdom of Jesus in Matthew 13:24–30: Mrs. Jones was on business abroad. She returned home in late autumn to an overgrown lawn that contained some prized flowers hidden by the tall grass. When the person she hired to mow the lawn did so, he also mowed the camouflaged crocuses so that in January and February, the usual spectacular bloom of crocuses was absent. This saddened her a great deal.
- Identifying some of the major decisions you have had to make and listing the outcomes of these decisions. Then read Proverbs 2 and decide whether or not you would have made better decisions if you had applied the decision-making process found in these verses.

CONNECT

Proverbs 15 in a modern translation.
Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, chapter 5.
George R. Knight, My Gripe With God, chapters 1–3.

Albert A. C. Waite, Berkshire, England
From Ears to Feet

“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” (Prov. 4:26, 27, NKJV).
The air is filled with expectation. Usain Bolt is lined up at the Olympics with the fastest runners in the world. Each athlete crouches down in the blocks, leans forward with toes and fingertips touching the ground in front of him. The official raises the starting pistol in the air and says, “Runners. On your mark, get set,” then squeezes the trigger. The athletes sprint down the track to the finish line. It took the brain a nanosecond to interpret and transfer the remarks of the starter from their ears to their feet. What if one of the sprinters had earplugs in his ears or was listening to his MP3 player? Would he have heard the shot, or would he have been tuned out from the important voice that he needed to have heard at that particular moment?

Hearing is one of the senses humans are blessed with. Hearing shapes and influences our everyday activities and enables us to communicate with others. Hearing also is part of our balance system, which helps “us stay upright when standing and know where we are in relation to gravity. Our balance system also helps us walk, run, and move without falling.”

Hearing helps us to communicate with others and can cause different emotions and reactions. Some sounds are soothing, while others are irritating and can cause stress. What we hear can also put us in fright, flight, or freeze mode. The words that leave our mouths can have a profound effect on those who hear them. So our words always should be “seasoned with salt” (Col. 4:6, NIV).

What we listen to and do will influence the balance of our moral compass. That is why it is essential that we follow the principles in Proverbs with respect to hearing and being ready do what God requires. Proverbs 4:26, 27 stipulates that we watch the path of our feet in order not to deviate from the path God has given us. Proverbs 4:11–14 assures us that God will guide our feet, and Proverbs 10:9 reminds us that “whoever walks in integrity walks securely” (NRSV).

**REACT**

1. List three ways to improve our mind-body connection (ears and feet) in doing God’s will. Propose an action plan for each way.

2. What principles in Proverbs 10:1–22 can you use in your daily life?

Solomon ruled Israel for 40 years. When he was young, he obeyed God, asked for wisdom, and received it (1 Kings 3:9, 12). Rulers from surrounding countries visited Solomon and asked Him many questions. His answers showed great knowledge (1 Kings 10:1–13). Solomon is remembered in part for his many proverbs, which touch upon every facet of human relationships. Because people believed that these proverbs should be remembered, parents taught them to their children and grandchildren (1 Kings 2:3, 4).

Proverbs encourages us to listen to God . . . and concentrate on understanding what He is telling us.

When Samuel first heard his name called, he ran to Eli, whom he thought had called him (1 Sam. 3:1–10). Once more, the same thing happened, until the third time, when Eli directed the child to respond to the One who had called him. Likewise, we, too, must know who is calling. “The call which divine grace designs to make effectual shall be repeated till it is so, that is, till we come at the call; for the purpose of God, according to which we are called, shall certainly stand.” Like Samuel, we must be willing to listen, hear, and do God's will.

After Samuel returned to bed the third time, he didn’t get up and run to Eli. Instead, he responded to the voice and listened to what it said. “The more sedate and composed our spirits are the better prepared they are for divine discoveries. Let all tumultuous thoughts and passions be kept under, and everything be quiet and serene in the soul, and then we are fit to hear from God.”

As the first created humans, Adam and Eve had a unique experience talking with God. Although they heard His instructions, they chose to disobey. Thus, sin entered into the world. Noah, Abraham, Enoch, Elijah, the disciples, the rich young ruler, all had an opportunity to follow Jesus' command. Proverbs encourages us to listen to God, treasure His commands, tune our ears to His wisdom, and concentrate on understanding what He is telling us.

**REACT**

1. In today’s noisy world, how can we recognize God's voice?
2. Do we always need to be in a quiet place to hear God's voice? Explain.
3. Was it easier for people in ancient times to hear and answer God's voice? Prepare to defend your response.

---

2. Ibid.
Practical Truths (Proverbs 4; Matt. 7:13, 14)

The majority of Proverbs consists of practical advice shared by Solomon. These Proverbs are core values he developed as a result of years of interaction with other people and with God. The proverbs are sometimes called words of wisdom, and many of them are often repeated today. For example, “Can a man take fire to his bosom, / And his clothes not be burned?” (Prov. 6:27, NKJV); “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, / But those who deal truthfully are His delight” (Prov. 12:22, NKJV); “A merry heart does good, like medicine” (Prov. 17:22, NKJV); and “A man who has friends must himself be friendly” (Prov. 18:24, NKJV).

Every choice we make creates a ripple effect in our lives and in the lives of others.

Christopher Peterson has defined wisdom as the coordination of “knowledge and experience” and “its deliberate use to improve well-being.” With this definition, wisdom can supposedly be measured using the following criteria: a wise person has self-knowledge, a wise person seems sincere and direct with others, others ask wise people for advice, a wise person’s actions are consistent with his or her ethical beliefs.¹

“Wisdom is not just knowing fundamental truths, if these are unconnected with the guidance of life or with a perspective on its meaning. There is more to wisdom than intelligence and knowledge of science and philosophy or any other subject matter.”² Proverbs 3:13, 14 says, “Blessed are those who find wisdom, / those who gain understanding, / for she [wisdom] is more profitable than silver / and yields better returns than gold” (NIV).

Christ the Model (Prov. 4:26, 27; Matt. 7:13, 14)

The way Christ lived on earth is the blueprint we must follow. His attributes included the following: being a true friend (Prov. 27:9, 10), being consistent in worship (Luke 4:16), having personal devotions with His Father and requesting guidance from Him (Mark 1:35), and always deferring to His Father’s will (Matt. 26:39). If we wish to emulate Christ, we must heed these words: “Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6, NIV).

Additionally, Proverbs 4 recommends the need for acquiring knowledge, wisdom, and understanding, which can be obtained by praying to God to strengthen your understanding of Him (verse 1), reading your Bible to receive wisdom (verse 5), paying attention (verse 20), and walking in the path of righteousness (verse 18).
A repeated theme is that “the fear of the Lord [submission to His will] is the beginning of knowledge [or wisdom]” (Prov. 1:7; see also 2:5; 3:7). This “fear” may initially be construed as being afraid, but the context suggests “reverence,” and “being in awe of.” Proverbs recommends that we not walk in the way of sinners (Prov. 1:10, 15) and states that if we are wise, we will listen to God’s leading (Prov. 1:7, 8).

Seek Wisdom (Gen. 3:1–7; Proverbs 2 and 4; Prov. 3:1–8; 6:6–8)

Despite being told to avoid the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Eve chose to walk there and linger under it (Gen. 3:1–7). After she ate some of its fruit, she gave some to Adam, who also ate some of it. If they had truly feared the Lord, they would have been able to run away from this evil. If they had used the divine power that was available to them, they would have stayed on the path of righteousness (Prov. 2:8–13). They could have thwarted the challenge of the devil so that they could have been delivered from temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). Every choice we make creates a ripple effect in our lives and in the lives of others.

It has been suggested that it is important to have self-worth, self-direction, and self-esteem. But surely it is most important to rely on God. Second Corinthians 3:5 teaches us that our sufficiency comes from Him, and John 15:5 informs us that without Christ, we can do nothing.

The industry of the ant is proverbial. If you have ever observed their activities, then you will understand more fully Solomon’s directive to “go to the ant, . . . / [to think about its ways] and be wise” (Prov. 6:6). “The purpose of directing the sluggard to the ant is, of course, to shame him into activity. Man has been endowed with a large measure of free will. Instead of being driven by an implanted and imperative instinct, he is expected to use his intelligence and will power to drive him to provide for his needs. Many a sluggard has been shamed into activity by these and similar words, and has found, to his surprise, that work is enjoyable as well as rewarding.”

REACT

1. How can you discern the voice of God from other voices that daily bombard your senses?
2. What encouragement can you glean from Proverbs to help you in a closer walk with God?
3. Why is wisdom important in everyday life? How does one acquire it, and when is it to be used?


Beverly Henry, Jamaica, West Indies
Ellen White encourages Christians to study the book of Proverbs. She states unequivocally that “there is no branch of legitimate business for which the Bible does not afford an essential preparation. Its principles of diligence, honesty, thrift, temperance, and purity are the secret of true success. These principles, as set forth in the book of Proverbs, constitute a treasury of practical wisdom. Where can the merchant, the artisan, the director of men in any department of business, find better maxims for himself or for his employees than are found in these words of the wise man.”

“The world is indebted to the law of God.”

However, words are of no value unless they are accompanied with appropriate deeds. “For all that makes confidence and co-operation possible, the world is indebted to the law of God, as given in His word, and as still traced, in lines often obscure and well-nigh obliterated, in the hearts of men. ‘The psalmist’s words, ‘The law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver’ (Psalm 119:72), state that which is true from other than a religious point of view. They state an absolute truth and one that is recognized in the business world. Even in this age of passion for money getting, when competition is so sharp and methods are so unscrupulous, it is still widely acknowledged that, for a young man starting in life, integrity, diligence, temperance, purity, and thrift constitute a better capital than any amount of mere money.”

“By the first angel, men are called upon to ‘fear God, and give glory to Him’ and to worship Him as the Creator of the heavens and the earth. In order to do this, they must obey His law. Says the wise man: ‘Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.’ Ecclesiastes 12:13. Without obedience to His commandments no worship can be pleasing to God. ‘This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.’ ‘He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.’ 1 John 5:3; Proverbs 28:9.”

**REACT**

1. Read Proverbs 4. Enumerate the principles found there that a young person can use in governing his or her life.

2. What does it mean to “walk with God”?

---

2. Ibid., p. 137.

Mark Henry, Phillipsburg, New Jersey, U.S.A.
The book of Proverbs is a reservoir of information about wisdom. Proverbs provides insight regarding how to live a disciplined and thoughtful life so that we may know and understand God, apply His truths to our lives, and avoid destruction and ruin. To anyone who will listen, Solomon says, “she [wisdom] will promote you; / She will bring you honor, when you embrace her” (Prov. 4:8, NKJV).

How can we embrace wisdom?

Be attentive to godly instruction. Shun indolence and evil associates. Living according to God’s instructions will help us to avoid many pitfalls so that we can enjoy the blessings of a virtuous, fulfilled life.

Take Solomon’s admonition to heart. Shun immoral and illicit sexual relationships. Run from temptations that lead to sexual sin just as Joseph fled from Mrs. Potiphar (Genesis 39). Have confidence that God will provide a way out (1 Cor. 10:13). One writer notes that “we sin because we try to see how close we can come to the edge without falling over. We tempt temptation to overcome us.”

Learn from nature. Use the example of the ant, one of the world’s smallest creatures, to learn about being industrious (Prov. 6:6–8). Even if Solomon did not understand many things in nature, “he did understand that we can learn lessons from the things God has made—even from some of his smallest creatures.”

What productive lives we could all lead if we would work hard and be diligent in our home life and business activities!

Choose your associates with care. Many people are led astray by the people with whom they associate. The history of ancient Israel proves this point. We should avoid the company of anyone who “sows discord” (Prov. 6:14, NKJV), “devises wicked plans” (verse 18, NKJV), or “speaks lies” (verse 19, NKJV).

**REACT**

1. Why is the temptation to engage in sexual sins so intense today? How can you prepare to overcome temptations?

2. How can contentious people and people who are busybodies be inspired to change their behavior?


2. Ibid., p. 90.
Wisdom can be defined as “knowledge that is gained by having many experiences in life; knowledge of what is proper or reasonable; good sense or judgment; ability to discern inner qualities and relationships.” Wisdom also “has to do with character and conduct.” The book of Proverbs is concerned with all of these qualities and more. Such wisdom has served people well throughout the ages, and it is still necessary for today.

Proverbs 1:2 states: “Know wisdom and instruction, / To perceive the words of understanding” (NKJV). “Knowledge and understanding are the basis of wisdom. The exercise of wisdom is a function of the intelligent mind.” Thus, the stage is set for forming a reasoned judgment of the book of Proverbs.

Some people turn to behavior modification in order to get back on what they think is the correct path. Solomon's advice for getting back on the correct path can be found in such verses as Proverbs 4:7, 8; 5:1, 2; and 8:10–14. When Solomon went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, God appeared to him and asked him what he wanted. The answer Solomon received, found in 1 Kings 3:4–14, gave him more than the wisdom he requested. In addition, God blessed him with riches and honor such that even to this day he is the wisest, richest man who has ever lived (1 Kings 3:9, 11–14). Solomon's wisdom was promised for as long as he obeyed God's laws (1 Kings 9:4–7). His discernment allowed him to rule his people judiciously; and he was revered by all nations (1 Kings 4:34).

“Above all else, guard your heart, / for everything you do flows from it” (Prov. 4:23, NIV). If we are right with God, our ears will hear His words, and our feet will walk His paths. Examine the path you are choosing. Ensure that it is the right path, and do not let anyone or anything deter you on your journey to heaven. Stay on that path, and ask for Divine wisdom to direct your steps.

**REACT**
1. What can wisdom, knowledge, and understanding do for you?
2. How can you personally walk in the paths of the just and not the wicked?
3. Today's society has varying types of families. How then can one “hear the words of their father and mother”?

---

3. Ibid., p. 948.

Carl Henry, Snellville, Georgia, U.S.A.
In Proverbs, Solomon challenges each of us to examine the path we have chosen, and if we find it to be an ungodly path, to take a different route. Doing so will require us to reflect deeply on our lives and to seek God's wisdom.

How often have you really examined your day-to-day life and the path you are walking? We may gain wisdom, which begins with knowledge and understanding, by looking to Jesus.

CONSIDER

• Writing on small cards a list of contemporary “wisdom gems” that you think Solomon would share with us today. Distribute these cards to people you meet or to your Sabbath School class, and encourage personal reflection and an open heart so that God can speak to them about each issue.

• Creating a short YouTube clip that challenges viewers to consider the path they are choosing in life. Conclude the clip with the thought that Jesus is the answer to our deepest needs.

• Formulating a math equation that includes the following: wisdom, awe or fear, God's will, knowledge. (See Proverbs 1:7 for further inspiration.)

• Listening to some old hymns. Consider the words of wisdom these hymns pass on to future generations.

• Creating a small book of pertinent wisdom quotes from the Bible that, once compiled, you could give to a neighbor or friend who may be asking some of life’s big questions. Illustrate the book with graphics or pictures.

• Finding examples from nature to illustrate certain proverbs (for example, Prov. 6:6) and sharing these object lessons in your church for the children’s story or in a children's Sabbath School class.

CONNECT

Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; 3:7; 4:5–7; 16:16; Ecclesiastes 7:12; James 1:5, 6; 3:17.

Ellen G. White, Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students, chapter 79.

Nina Atcheson, Margate, Australia
A Matter of Life and
Death

“For the commandment is a lamp,
And the law a light;
Reproofs of instruction are the way of life”
(Prov. 6:23, NKJV).
During the 2013 Annual Council, G. T. Ng, the executive secretary of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, told a story about a donkey that was trained by his master to act certain ways when he heard certain biblical commands. The word *amen* would cause the donkey to stop, while *hallelujah* would cause the donkey to walk on. One day, a rider forgot the commands as the donkey walked toward the edge of a cliff. In scrambling desperation, the rider prayed for safety and ended his prayer with “amen.” The donkey then came to a standstill inches from the cliff. The rider was so excited that his life had been spared that he shouted, “Hallelujah!”*  

The words *amen* and *hallelujah* meant life and death to the donkey’s master. The same is true with the words of counsel written in the book of Proverbs. This book was written in a plain manner. Yet it is so profound. The writers of Proverbs used a straightforward approach. They also used metaphors to illustrate certain points. Proverbs has a practical application that crosses gender, race, creed, and economic status. Proverbs 6:20–22 tells us that its teachings should be bound in our hearts at all times so they can serve as guides as we walk through life. They will also serve as a moral compass so that our lives will be more powerful than a spoken sermon.

In the Philippines, there is a saying that older people often repeat to young adults, “You are still on your way, while I’m already returning.” It is similar to the saying “Been there, done that.” The book of Proverbs is a reminder to us from those who have gone about how to live in accordance with God’s will.

While it is said that “experience is the best teacher” and that “you should experience life for yourself,” we need not undergo most of life’s perils just to learn about that which we have been forewarned. The reason Proverbs was written was to teach us invaluable lessons and to save us from despair, because most of the time our suffering is due to the poor choices that we make.

As we explore this week’s lesson, may we appreciate and apply to our lives the wisdom found in Proverbs. After all, we have nothing to lose and everything to gain.


Bongga L. Agno, Muntinlupa City, Philippines
Empowerment (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 6:20–23)

Proverbs belongs to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament as does Job, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. One of the unique characteristics of such literature is that while it is poetic, it is also practical in nature. For example, Proverbs 6 and 7 share precautions against questionable dealings, laziness, hypocrisy, pride, parental disrespect, falsehood, and illicit love.

Proverbs 6:20–23 advises us to heed the wise counsel of our parents. Their counsel, along with God’s guiding principles, should guide all that we do and the decisions we make. When we resolve to live according to God’s law, there will be positive results (Prov. 7:1–5). Such living is an affirming witness to what Christ can do in us. It is evident in Jeremiah 31:31–33 and Hebrews 8:10 that a healthier spiritual experience emerges when a person decides to have God as Lord of his or her life. To follow the law of God is evidence that the Holy Spirit lives in a person’s heart (Gal. 5:13–25).

Following God’s law will lead to positive results (1 Tim. 1:8) and a new identity (verses 15–17). It is not obedience to the law that saves us (see Rom. 3:20) but the One who embodies the law. When we have a saving relationship with Jesus, the Holy Spirit empowers us to live in accordance with God’s will. Thus, the law serves to guide the decisions we make (Prov. 6:23). It is a lamp to show us the way to life everlasting (Ps. 119:105). “Those who regard the law as an arbitrary forbidding of desirable pleasures have an entirely perverted idea. The law is a lamp to enlighten the mind and show the way of happiness, peace, and eternal life (see Pss. 19:8; 119:105).”

Entrapment (Prov. 6:25, 30–35; 7:19–27)

A person whose life is not under the lordship of God is trapped in sin. It is likened to those who fall into adultery (Prov. 7:19–27). Once you have committed adultery, you will be engulfed with consequences that are demoralizing, damaging, and devastating (6:30–35). Both private and public shame are the results of such evil. Adultery “implants a taint that honest men can never forget. It is a sin against a possession that men hold dear, a possession that is sadly depreciated by such a crime.
Even if righteousness does not hold back a man from the horrible pitfall of this crime, the consequences of the deed should deter the tempted, hence the emphasis upon the inexorable and implacable nature of the desire for vengeance that is aroused.”

Sinning is like playing with fire. It can begin with a spark and end in an inferno. All sins start with “friendly” fire, but if that fire begins to burn out of control, it will destroy everything in its path. When a person plays with sexual sins, he or she also will be burned. Family and friends are affected as well. We should never view any type of sin as fun and desirable, exciting and adventurous. Let us remember that trivialized “views of sin, unfortunately, lead to trivialized views of ‘righteousness.’”

Another facet of the sin problem is that the effects of sin are not limited to our own sphere of influence. The description of adultery in Proverbs 6:30–35 is that of a thief not understanding the love a good husband has for his wife. The fact remains that sin entraps both persons involved, and it will strive to make them both slaves to iniquity. Those who choose to stay in the life of sin will eventually destroy themselves (Prov. 6:32).

**Emancipation (Isa. 58:1–11; Rom. 6:16–19)**

Destruction can be avoided. There is a need for emancipation. This emancipation will free a person from the demoralizing, damaging, and devastating effects of sin, the effects of living only for oneself rather than for others and for Christ. This freedom that the Lord Jesus Christ offers us delivers us from the enslaving power of sin (Rom. 6:16–19). Since we are slaves to sin, Christ seeks to save us in order that we can be slaves to righteousness. This divine emancipation will lead us to a new life—a life of righteousness and of service to others.

Once we are made aware of our sinful condition, we are to cry for help. This is the first step toward emancipation (Isa. 58:9). Then, “the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard” (verse 8, NASB). He will be our shield against temptation.

Proverbs urges us to heed godly counsel so that we will not fall into sin. It urges us to fix our thoughts upon God and meditate upon His Word. It urges us to choose eternal life rather than eternal death.

**REACT**

1. Why is it so hard to break free from the bondage of sin?
2. How important is the following counsel in your life: “For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; / And reproofs for discipline are the way of life” (Prov. 6:23, NASB).

---

2. Ibid.
One of the major themes in the book of Proverbs is speech. With the words it forms, the tongue can do either great good or great harm. It can cause peace or war. With their tongues, the disciples spread the good news to people everywhere. “During the dispersion the Jews had been scattered to almost every part of the inhabited world, and in their exile they had learned to speak various languages. Many of these Jews were on this occasion [Pentecost] in Jerusalem, attending the religious festivals then in progress. Every known tongue was represented by those assembled. This diversity of languages would have been a great hindrance to the proclamation of the gospel; God therefore in a miraculous manner supplied the deficiency of the apostles. The Holy Spirit did for them that which they could not have accomplished in a lifetime. They could now proclaim the truths of the gospel abroad, speaking with accuracy the languages of those for whom they were laboring. . . . From this time forth the language of the disciples was pure, simple, and accurate, whether they spoke in their native tongue or in a foreign language.”

Our tongues have the power of life and death.

Indeed, our tongues have the power of life and death, the power to give hope or to cause despair, to save or to ruin. As God’s people, we are to provide hope not only by the way we live but also by the way we speak and the words we say.

“Let us draw nearer and nearer to the pure light of Heaven, remembering that divine illumination will increase according to our onward movements, qualifying us to meet new responsibilities and emergencies. The path of the just is progressive, from strength to strength, from grace to grace, and from glory to glory.”

**REACT**

1. How would you describe your role as an ambassador of Christ?
2. What are some miracles that have occurred in your life by following God’s instructions?
3. Recall some of the conversations you had last week. What did you talk about? What type of words did you use? Did what you say encourage others?

---


Reynaldo G. Salo, Pasay City, Philippines
"The Book of Proverbs imparts moral discernment and discretion, develops mental clarity and perception, and creates a desire for godly wisdom."\(^1\) "In the rabbinical writings [Proverbs] was called sepher hokhmah, the Book of Wisdom."\(^2\) The type of wisdom Proverbs deals with is ethical and moral in nature rather than spiritual. Nevertheless, the book does draw attention to "the beginning of knowledge," which is none other than "the fear of the Lord" (Prov. 1:7).

King Solomon, the principal author of Proverbs, spelled out what the book was for and for whom the book was intended (1:1–7). Proverbs can be divided into six sections, one of which is called Proverbs to the Youth (Prov. 1:8–9:18).\(^3\)

In Proverbs 6:26 and 7:26, 27, Solomon warns his son against a seductress. She flatters with words (7:5). She is dressed like a harlot, has a crafty heart, is loud and rebellious, and never stays home (7:10–12). The fact that she was outside "as the dark of night set in" (Prov. 7:9, NIV) gives us an indication of the kind of woman she was, since decent women in that part of the world did not leave their homes at night without a chaperone. Long story short—the man brought tragedy upon himself because of his foolishness.

God expects His people to live righteous lives in this sin-polluted world. That is why He has given us His Word. Through Solomon and the book of Proverbs, God urges us to live moral lives and to be on guard against temptation and sin.

Samson, David, and Solomon each sinned in ways that caused them many problems and much grief. However, we also have the example of Joseph, who ran from sin when Potiphar’s wife attempted to seduce him (Genesis 39).

**REACT**

1. What can we do and not do so that we do not place ourselves in danger when it comes to struggling with the desires of the flesh?

2. Even though Joseph did the right thing in rejecting Potiphar’s wife, God still allowed him to be imprisoned. Review his inspiring story in Genesis 37–47.

---


Scripture is full of stories that deal with life and death. Likewise, today’s news is full of tragedy that makes people think Jesus will soon return. For example, at the time I wrote this article, my country struggled through many calamities that left a great number of people in dire need. Crime rates rose, while people struggled to survive. How can we endure when everything around us is crumbling? Here are some options.

Let us not be afraid of what the future holds.

Read. Search the Scriptures. Meditate on God’s Word. Memorize it. The book of Proverbs is a book of wisdom that contains a great deal of good advice. Written primarily by Solomon, one of the most intelligent people who ever lived, Proverbs presents godly wisdom in a brief, balanced, and often humorous manner, making it easy to remember and to apply to one’s own situation.

Believe. Believe that God exists and that regardless of your circumstances, He will never forsake you. He has placed each one of us on earth to serve a purpose. Therefore, He surely will provide what we need to fulfill that purpose. So whenever we face trials and temptations, let us have faith. Let us seek God, for He can save us.

Obey. Obey the Lord’s words, for in them is salvation. Keeping God’s commandments through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit gives us great assurance as we face not only our daily tasks, but any emergency that God allows us to go through.

Share. Sharing God’s words with others can give them and us assurance during tragic times. It will give them and us hope and gladness, thereby eliminating evil from our lives. Let us not be afraid of what the future holds. Instead, help others to know more about Christ—that He died to save us and that He will come again to take us to heaven.

**REACT**

1. Why can God save us only if we believe and trust in Him?
2. Read Proverbs 7:1–3. What does it mean to “store up my commands within you,” “bind them on your fingers,” and “write them on the table of your heart” (NIV)?
3. How can God’s Word be a shelter in the time of storm to you personally?

Stephannie Earl R. Bontile, San Nicolas, Batangas, Philippines
When Thomas asked Jesus, “‘Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?’ Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’ ” (John 14:5, 6, NIV).

Today, more than 2,000 years later, many people are still asking how we can know the way. After the Fall, it became a part of sinful human nature for people to live the way they wanted rather than living God’s way. Most of the time, people base their decisions on their feelings rather than on principles, on passion rather than on reason. Consider the examples we see all around us. What do we find most often on television? Violent and sensual dramas, plus comedies that generally rely on sexual innuendo and the faults of a socially inept main character.

We only have two choices.

Then there are today’s modern music with its explicit lyrics and the sexual material that can be easily found on the Internet. Even the evening news is full of crime stories. These are only a few examples of the alarming realities we face. We only have two choices. There is no middle ground. We can serve either God or Satan. We can choose either life or death.

In light of the world around us, let us examine our relationships in our respective homes. Husbands and wives should consider their relationship with each other and with their children. And children should consider their relationship with their parents and with their brothers and sisters. All should consider their relationship to Christ.

Next, consider our churches. How should ministers relate to church officers and church members? How should the officers and church members relate to the ministers? And how should Sabbath School directors and teachers relate to their students?

We cannot serve two masters. It is urgent that we return to God’s way, which leads to life through Jesus Christ. We serve either God or Satan, good or evil. One is life. The other is death. The book of Proverbs is all about serving God. Let us aspire to walk in His way only.

**REACT**

1. Why is it that we so often want to walk our “own” way?
2. What are some of the things that can help us return to God’s one and only way?
CONCLUDE
We need light to guide our way, except for people who have night-vision goggles and people who are blind. This week’s lesson extended the need for guiding light to the spiritual level as illustrated in Proverbs, Psalms, and other places in the Bible. Christians are led by the light of God’s Word, and they delight in it. Encouraged and motivated by His Word bound in their hearts (Prov. 6:21), Christians are able to walk in the way of happiness, peace, and eternal life no matter what their circumstance are.

CONSIDER
• Discussing with a friend words that are synonyms for the word light. Notice how many of these words include the root lu, such as lumen, illuminate, luminous, lunar, and luminescent. Debate the significance of the name Lucifer (light bearer), given his role in heaven and his rebellion and that he caused other angels and people to follow a false light.
• Designing a poster as a class or in small groups that centers on the Bible as God’s light to this world using many of the words discussed above.
• Singing hymns in which the word light is a key part of the title or lyrics.
• Conducting an imaginary interview with a nineteenth-century light-house keeper about his commitment to making sure the light never fails. For background, see http://www.uslhs.org/keepersLog.php. What does this teach us about Christians serving as God’s light keepers?
• Observing the natural world. What examples are there in which light is available or unavailable to guide, illuminate, or comfort? Have you been in a cave and turned out all artificial light? If so, how did that make you feel? If there is a room in your house that has no windows, turn out the lights for a brief period to mimic the experience. What application does that experience have to the idea of our world being in spiritual darkness as we long for the return of our Lord?

CONNECT
Psalm 27:1.
Douglas Cooper, Living in the Light.

Rick Blondo, Clarksville, Maryland, U.S.A.
Divine Wisdom

“‘The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way,
Before His works of old’” (Prov. 8:22, NKJV).
“The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing.”* We can learn many lessons from such a quotation. That many individuals have approached the concept of wisdom from many different perspectives shows that society has been struggling to determine wisdom’s true meaning.

Aristotle believed that being wise is relative to how much you know yourself. However, how do you know yourself? In order to find out more about yourself, it is important to consider both the general and specific aspects of your life. Carefully observing the lives of others and reflecting and meditating upon your own gives you insight into the purpose of your existence and what God wants you to achieve with your life. However, many young adults do not have much time for such reflection. They are more absorbed in studies, careers, or starting a family.

Socrates believed that wise people do not set themselves above everyone else. Instead, they must lie low and accept diverse opinions and knowledge from a variety of different sources. The Bible urges each of us to “trust in the Lord with all your heart / And lean not on your own understanding” (Prov. 3:5, NKJV). To assume we know everything can mislead us into thinking that we are already wise without really being so. True wisdom requires us to depend on God for knowledge.

Currently, people are more concerned about the knowledge they can acquire here and now. That is why many of us spend time in classes, on scientific projects, or on developing the latest technological gadgets. Doing so is not all bad, for such endeavors have led to improvements in many areas of life. However, many people seem more interested in the revelations of science than in the wisdom that originates from God. Our society is no different from that of the psalmist when he concluded, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 111:10, NIV).

As Adventist young adults living in the current digital age, we should embrace the True Source of Wisdom. With the Bible as our guide, we have all we need to learn about wisdom. Our lesson this week points to the voice of wisdom as explained in Proverbs.

---


Joseph Mutuku, Makueni, Kenya
Evidence Interpretaion of Wisdom

“The history of the interpretation of Proverbs 8 embraces an astonishing array of ancient and modern perspectives in this passage, ranging from the Christological debates of the early Christian centuries to the almost universal rejection of Christological interpretations in the recent decades.”

In addition to what commentators have said about Proverbs 8, we should also study for ourselves to see exactly what the word wisdom refers to in this chapter and what it means to each one of us personally.

Wisdom is personified as a pure and principled person.

Proverbs 8:13 explains that “to fear the Lord is to hate evil” (NIV). This takes us back to the Ten Commandments, which serve as a template to shape our relationship with God and our fellow human beings. God loves us, and the greatest demonstration of His love occurred when He sent Christ to this earth to show us how to live and to die on our behalf so we could be saved (John 3:16–18). Christ declared that instead of worrying, we should believe in Him and in God (John 14:1). While He was on earth, Christ was God’s mouthpiece, asking every man, woman, and child to shun evil and choose righteousness. Even after His ascension, Christ continued to “speak” through the apostles and the Holy Spirit.

In the book of Proverbs, wisdom is personified as a pure and principled person who urges people to choose righteousness (Prov. 8:1–8). This personification of wisdom and a close analysis of Christ’s role in creation and salvation lead us to conclude that it is the voice of Christ addressing us in Proverbs 8. “That it is an intelligent and divine person that here speaks seems very plain, and that it is not meant of a mere essential property of the divine nature, for Wisdom here has personal properties and actions; and that intelligent divine person can be no other than the Son of God himself, to whom the principal things here spoken of wisdom are attributed in other scriptures, and we must explain scripture by itself.”

REACT

How would you explain to a nonbeliever the difference between the worldly view of wisdom and the godly view of wisdom?

This week’s lesson is about divine wisdom. Other forms of wisdom exist, but they are not divine. The way many people view wisdom is quite different from how the Bible explains it. Divine wisdom is rooted in an all-knowing God, and we cannot acquire it the same way we can acquire other types of wisdom or knowledge. However, over time, we can develop godly wisdom by learning more about our lives and God’s reason for our existence. A deeper study of divine wisdom reveals its value, the relationship between wisdom and creation, the necessity of making a choice between wisdom and folly, and our response to two different invitations.

Let God’s Word be our guide. Meditate on it day and night.

The Value of Divine Wisdom (Prov. 8:1–21)

It is important to understand that true wisdom results in fearing the Lord and in obedience to His instructions. If we claim to be wise yet do not follow God’s directions, then we do not possess divine wisdom. Many people confuse wisdom with having an opinion about something specific. Such wisdom is obtained by reading books and attending lectures.

However, the Bible explains that divine wisdom gives us the ability to lead a righteous life and to develop a better relationship with God. Without that wisdom, we are unable to use in right ways the knowledge we acquired through education. The objective of divine wisdom is to obey God. Thus, divine wisdom calls upon everyone to abide in truth, to live in righteousness, and to shun evil (Prov. 8:7, 8, 13).

The Relationship Between Wisdom and Creation (Prov. 8:22–31)

Proverbs explains that wisdom was in existence before God formed the earth’s foundations. This implies that every creation of God, including us, came into existence by the directive of God’s divine wisdom. The same wisdom that affirms its origin with God is the wisdom that directs us to God’s moral law. As the climax of God’s creation, wisdom calls us to choose her ways and live a life that is pleasing to God.

How can we obtain this divine wisdom? Every one of us should search for an answer to this question. Many of us think that if we have a college degree or establish ourselves in a particular occupation, we have become wise. In a worldly context, this may be true. However, the wisdom we should have as God’s children depends on our commitment to developing a lasting relationship with Him.
**Making a Choice (Proverbs 9)**

In Proverbs 9, wisdom and folly are presented as two very different women, each with their own very different invitations. Wisdom built her own house, and she has worked hard on behalf of her guests with whom she lavishly shares her knowledge and material goods. She summons them thusly, “Leave your simple ways and you will live; / walk in the way of insight” (verse 6, NIV). Folly, however, is just the opposite of Wisdom. She is loud, irresponsible, and reckless. And rather than work hard on behalf of her guests, she offers them stolen food.

The lesson we can learn from these two scenarios is that wisdom promises us an abundant life, full of love and compassion and pleasure. Folly, however, promises only immediate gratification that lasts for a short time. As young adults, we are often called to choose between wisdom and folly. Pray to choose the way of divine wisdom that enables us to inherit God's kingdom.

**Our Response to Two Different Invitations (Prov. 9:7–10)**

We have compared the two invitations in Proverbs 9:1–6. Each invitation comes with consequences that have direct bearing on our lives. Proverbs reminds us that if we want to be wise, we will heed wisdom’s instructions. A wise person is open to correction and to being influenced by Christ’s teachings. We cannot claim to be wise if we do not obey Him and His instructions. If we choose folly, we are likely to form selfish opinions that we might view as wisdom. That is why we need to open ourselves up to divine correction. Instead of counting on our own opinions, let God’s Word be our guide. Meditate on it day and night.

“Wisdom appeals to conscience. Folly appeals only to the sense of pleasure and the desire for its gratification. Both ask for your decision now. There is a strange tendency to put off decision. But it is an awful risk for a man to run. Every day that you live makes it less likely that you will choose. Every day that you live makes it harder for you to choose aright. Every day that you live takes away some of the power of resolving, and takes away some motive to resolve.”*

**REACT**

1. Explain the difference between divine wisdom and opinion.
2. Why does God allow folly to exist alongside of wisdom?
3. Is there a way to obtain divine wisdom without fearing the Lord (Prov. 9:10)? Explain your answer.

Christians today can learn many things from the life of Solomon, especially in the context of his wisdom. “Solomon was anointed and proclaimed king in the closing years of his father David, who abdicated in his favor. His early life was bright with promise, and it was God’s purpose that he should go on from strength to strength, from glory to glory, ever approaching nearer the similitude of the character of God, and thus inspiring His people to fulfill their sacred trust as the depositaries of divine truth.”

“Thus we learn that it was through the power of divine wisdom that Solomon excelled in his duties as the leader of God’s holy nation. The same God who gave Solomon wisdom is the same God we serve today, and He is able and willing to do for us what He did for Solomon. Many young adults are concerned with money, wealth, and material possessions. Solomon, however, looked beyond such things.

“Above every earthly good, the king desired wisdom and understanding for the accomplishment of the work God had given him to do.”

“The wisdom that Solomon desired above riches, honor, or long life, God gave him. His petition for a quick mind, a large heart, and a tender spirit was granted.”

“For many years Solomon’s life was marked with devotion to God, with uprightness and firm principle, and with strict obedience to God’s commands. He directed in every important enterprise and managed wisely the business matters connected with the kingdom.”

The life of Solomon in the context of his wisdom teaches us a great deal about how godly wisdom can turn one’s life around. When we submit ourselves to God and allow His wisdom to work within us, we can change so that we will bring glory and honor to Him.

**REACT**

1. If you were Solomon, what would you have asked for, and why?
2. Solomon’s concept of wisdom included a quick mind, a large heart, and a tender spirit. Explain what each of these means to you.

---

2. Ibid., pp. 27, 28.
3. Ibid., p. 31.
4. Ibid., p. 32.

Jackline Mwende, Nairobi, Kenya
In our study of Proverbs, we learn that divine wisdom is a requirement for every Christian. If we want to overcome the world in the twenty-first century, wisdom must guide our thoughts, our words, and our actions. The question we should ask is, “How can we acquire wisdom?” Many Christians think wisdom is something they can obtain easily by praying about it. Although the Bible explains that we can access wisdom by asking God in prayer, it is nearly impossible that a person can pray in the evening and wake up wise the next morning.

Both wisdom and folly invite us to join them.

As we learn in Proverbs, wisdom begins by developing a close relationship with God. Without respect for His instructions, it is impossible for anyone to obtain divine wisdom. God cannot bestow wisdom in a vacuum. We must do our part in order to receive it. That includes self-examination, prayer and meditation, and carefully observing the lives of others. God does not give us wisdom in relation to our level of education or the type of profession we have. The only thing that matters is whether we respect and revere His commands.

The following steps will help us achieve wisdom:

Be humble. In Proverbs 8:5, wisdom targets those who are yearning for more knowledge and understanding. Wise people do not depend on their own opinions. They get knowledge from other sources such as their parents, teachers, pastors, and especially God’s Word.

Heed the voice of wisdom. The Bible makes plain the consequences of choosing either wisdom or folly. The way of wisdom is the way of life, which is full of every good thing that the heavenly kingdom has to offer. Folly, on the other hand, offers instant pleasure, which camouflages death and is short-lived. To obtain wisdom we must heed God’s instructions.

Make the right choices. Making poor choices is often a person’s main weakness. Yet God gives us the freedom to make our own choices because He is not a dictator. Both wisdom and folly invite us to join them. It is upon us to choose which direction we take. If you heed the voice of wisdom, you will have made the right choice by choosing God’s way.

REACT

What is the difference between a wise person and a foolish person in terms of spiritual matters?
As young adults, our lives are full of many activities. Our studies take up a large portion of our lives. Then some of us have careers to advance and families to care for. Quite possibly, many of us find it difficult to set apart time for God's cause. However, as Adventist young adults, we should be agents of change for Him in both our society and our institutions. In order to be such agents, we need God's wisdom.

We should daily set apart time to serve Him, study His Word, and pray. One thing we need to understand is that we are to serve God where we are at any given time. Whether we are still in college or already employed, now is the best time to start serving God. We need divine wisdom to understand the importance of putting God first in our lives. If we have that wisdom, we will put Him ahead of our studies, family life, and career. The Holy Spirit will help us choose to do what is right in His eyes.

Wisdom and Folly both invite us to their houses with specific promises. The book of Proverbs teaches us how to choose between the two. If we are wise, we will choose wisdom instead of folly. Divine wisdom imparts to us the ability to draw a dividing line between what is good and what is bad, and it helps us to build a relationship with God. The main lesson we can learn from our lesson this week is that God gives us all an equal opportunity to choose whom we will serve.

Like the counsel God gave to the Israelites during the time of Moses and Joshua, divine wisdom calls on us to choose the way of righteousness. If we, as a church, have been called to lead others to Christ, then we must receive wisdom from God in order to achieve our objectives as agents of spiritual revival. Divine wisdom works hand in hand with the Holy Spirit to give us power over evil. Without this power, we lack the means to defend ourselves against the devil.

**REACT**

1. How can you know whether you have divine wisdom?
2. Why is it necessary for us as a church to have divine wisdom?
3. If we are experts in our respective professions, do we still need wisdom? Explain your answer.

Josephine Mwilu, Nairobi, Kenya
CONCLUDE

God is the source and foundation of all truth, and wisdom is the truth that exists in God. God is the giver of wisdom, so when He knocks on your heart’s door, and you choose to open it, you aren’t only accepting Him as your Lord and Savior, you are also admitting that He is Truth and Wisdom. Isn’t it incredible to think that if you but ask Him for a small (or large) portion of the wisdom He possesses, you can be partakers of truth with Him?

CONSIDER

• Starting a new hobby. Try picking up a guitar, cooking new recipes, learning a new language. As you do, ask God for wisdom to continue learning and growing in your craft.
• Examining the intricate details of your phone, whether it be a smartphone or a landline. Consider how much wisdom it took for the designers to make it. Reflect on how much more wisdom it took God to so intricately create us.
• Redecorating your dorm room or bedroom. If permissible, paint the walls a new color, put different shades or blinds up, or simply move your furniture around. Get your roommate or spouse to assist you, because two minds are usually better than one.
• Reading James 1:5–8 during your lunch break with your classmates or coworkers. Discuss what the Bible says is the difference between believing God and doubting His promise of wisdom.
• Praying a promise. The word wisdom is mentioned more than 200 times in the NIV Bible. Pick two or three of these promises, and pray them as you go throughout your day.
• Playing an icebreaker game at a Friday night vespers program. Take an hourglass, and tipping it over, give each person 30 seconds to describe what wisdom and/or truth means to them. This is a great bonding experience and a chance to get to know each other more intellectually and spiritually.

CONNECT

Ellen G. White, Pastoral Ministry, pp. 217, 218; Prayer, p. 40.
The Blessings of the Righteous

“Blessings are on the head of the righteous,
But violence covers the mouth of the wicked”
(Prov. 10:6, NKJV).
The Christian band For King & Country wrote and perform a song entitled “The Proof of Your Love.” Search for it on YouTube. The two brothers who comprise this band were able to capture in their song what I can spend hours wondering about: What exactly does it mean for our lives to be the proof of God’s love? Much of the time, technology needlessly absorbs our lives, while family, friends, and professors never seem to stop asking us what our life goals are. Then there’s the never-ending work or school assignments. All of this and more makes it easy for us to forget that the present is also filled with the blessings of knowing Christ as our Savior. Indeed, these blessings are the proof of His love. They come from Him when we live according to His will.

How are we supposed to live according to His will? In Proverbs, chapters 10–13, the words righteous and righteousness can be found more than 30 times. The Hebrew word sedeq means “righteousness,” which can also be synonymous with “justice” and “fairness.”* Christ wants us to live a good, pure life. He wants us to be fair and just with everyone. That is how we can represent His good and honest love. That is how we can be blessed by God and receive His wisdom so that we can follow His commands and thrive.

When we live according to God’s commands, our lives become proof of His love for us. Still, there is the question of how to follow God’s commands. The Holy Spirit dwelling in us convicts us of our sin and of our need for righteousness. Then He helps us to live a righteous life. This being and doing is not always easy. It requires absolute faith and obedience. Often, it is easier to simply say we will be faithful than to actually be faithful. I will never forget the first time my mother said, “Actions speak louder than words.” As much as I tried to ignore her wisdom during my teen years, I now realize that she was right.

So this week, I encourage you to discover what it means to live a righteous life for Christ and to take note as He fills your life with His love and blessings. Let your life be the proof of His love. When we begin to act out God’s love for us, our lives will say far more than our words ever could.

---


Emily Wood, Platte City, Missouri, U.S.A.
What’s in a Word? (Prov. 1:1, 2)

The word righteousness, or sedeq in Hebrew, has multiple meanings. It can mean “the right thing,” “rightness,” “fairness,” “piety,” “justice,” and a “righteous deed.” These definitions shed light on the impact that righteousness can have on our lives and in the lives of people with whom we come into contact. What a noble calling it is to be righteous! Or maybe equally, what an unreachable goal! Yet the lesson this week is about this very word and its application to our lives as seen in the book of Proverbs written by Solomon.

Righteousness is not the end but the means of living for Jesus with all that we are.

Small Word, Big Impact (Proverbs 10)

Though definitions can be helpful as a structure to language, illustrations and examples can be much more useful. So let’s identify the characteristics of righteousness as outlined by Solomon in the book of Proverbs. What do people look like, according to him, when they are “righteous”?

Proverbs 10 identifies five characteristics of righteous people:

1. “Blessings crown the head of the righteous” (Prov. 10:6, NIV).
2. “The memory of the righteous will be a blessing” (verse 7, NIV).
3. “The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life” (verse 11, NIV).
4. “The tongue of the righteous is choice silver” (verse 20, NIV).
5. “The lips of the righteous nourish many” (verse 21, NIV).

Let’s dissect these characteristics to see what we can learn about this highly esteemed quality so valued by God. The “righteous” person is one who is blessed and who in turn is a blessing to others. A righteous person is wise, speaks high-quality words, and uses those words to encourage and “nourish” others. What a stunning picture this is of “righteousness” lived out in real life.

Righteousness makes a difference not so much in what we attain as it does with what we do with what God Himself has given us. The attainment of righteousness appears to be correlated to the following: (1) our willingness to allow God to lead us, and (2) our choice to follow Him. The resulting blessings are not to be hoarded. Rather, they are to
be distributed in proportion to the blessings we have received from God. What a gift! What a responsibility!

**Defining the Characteristics of Righteousness (Proverbs 10, 11)**

To know whether we have “righteousness,” we need to use God’s Word to discover the defining characteristics of this God-given quality. Our approach to Bible study should always include this axiom: “If it’s important to God, it’s clear in His Word.” Using this approach, then, see whether you can find 18 characteristics of the righteous in the following chapters and verses: Proverbs 10:2, 3, 16, 24, 25, 28–30, and 11:5, 6, 8, 9, 18, 19, 21, 23, 28, 30.

Righteousness is a gift of God to all who take seriously His call to follow Him. The temptation for some of us might be to hoard the blessings that come with righteousness. However, the call of God to the righteous is to use those blessings to bless others. That was the original call of God to His “righteous” servant Abraham—“I bless you so that you can be a blessing.” (See Gen. 12:1–3.) And it’s the call of God to each of us today: “I declare you righteous, just, godly, reliable, and blameless, because of your commitment to follow me, so that you can take My blessings and bless others.” (See Mark 16:15.)

Righteousness, therefore, is not something to attain, but something to be distributed; not something to achieve, but something to use to bless others; not something to hoard, but to give away for God’s glory. Finally, righteousness is not the end but the means of living for Jesus with all that we are.


---

Rich Carlson, Lincoln, Nebraska, U.S.A.
“The very first step in the path of life is to keep the mind stayed on God, to have His fear continually before the eyes. A single departure from moral integrity blunts the conscience, and opens the door to the next temptation. . . . We are commanded to love God supremely, and our neighbor as ourselves; but the daily experience of life shows that this law is disregarded.”

In addition to what Ellen White wrote above, she also chose to quote the following verses regarding our relationship with God and the blessings He gives to people who are righteous:

“‘Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.’ Hebrews12:1, 2. Envy, malice, evil thinking, evil speaking, covetousness—these are weights that the Christian must lay aside if he would run successfully the race for immortality. Every habit or practice that leads into sin and brings dishonor upon Christ must be put away, whatever the sacrifice.”

“‘Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord, and My servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He: before Me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the Lord; and beside Me there is no Saviour. I have declared, and have saved, and I have showed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are My witnesses.’ ‘I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.’ Isaiah 43:10–12; 42:6, 7”

“It is the privilege of every Christian not only to look for but to hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:12, margin). Were all who profess His name bearing fruit to His glory, how quickly the whole world would be sown with the seed of the gospel. Quickly the last great harvest would be ripened, and Christ would come to gather the precious grain.”

**REACT**

How can your relationship with God benefit from witnessing to others?

---

3. Ibid., p. 10.

Melissa Schiffbauer, Apopka, Florida, U.S.A.
"Blessings crown the head of the righteous, / but violence overwhelsm the mouth of the wicked" (Prov. 10:6, NIV). We read something similar in Genesis 49:26, and again in Deuteronomy 33:16, where Jacob blesses his favorite son Joseph. God, our Father and our King, wants to bless us, too, because we also are His children.

The second part of Proverbs 10:6 tells us that "violence covers the mouth of the wicked" (NKJV). The Hebrew word here for "covers" is kaseh. * This word is often used to describe what clothes do for us. It is frequently used in a negative sense as we can see in this verse, but it also has a positive connotation as in Psalm 32:1, which tells us that God covers our sin. This is what we want to focus on in this lesson.

As we see in Psalm 32:1, the wicked try to cover up their deeds, but doing so only leads to violence. No matter how hard they try, they are still violent. Like the Bible says in Isaiah 64:6, “all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags” (NKJV). We cannot make ourselves right with God, but Christ can. When we allow Him to clothe us in His righteousness, we truly become blessed, because “blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven / Whose sin is covered” (Ps. 32:1, NKJV). So we see then in both Psalms and Proverbs that our true blessing comes not from anything we have done, but from what God has done in our behalf.

We must depend on God and His grace to cover us. We are either covered with His grace or with our own futile attempts to save ourselves. In Psalm 10, we see that those people who are covered in salvation will bless others, while those who try to save themselves are forgotten and will perish forever. The righteous are truly righteous because they are wearing the clothes of Christ’s righteousness. Whose clothes are we going to wear today?

**REACT**

1. Why do you think we become so obsessed with covering up our own sins?
2. What does living covered in Christ’s righteousness look like? What does it look like to live in garments of wickedness?
3. What do blessings on your head look like? How does God make you feel like His son or daughter? How can you represent God as His child?


A. J. Derc, Lincoln, Nebraska, U.S.A.
Many times we think that the Bible just rambles on about stories or events that do not affect us in our daily lives, but if there is a book in the Bible that has direct application for our lives, that would be the book of Proverbs. Solomon gives us many words of wisdom in Proverbs. He states that “those who guard their lips preserve their lives, / but those who speak rashly will come to ruin” (13:3, NIV). This passage describes a philosophy that is well known but that at times is not practiced. It is known that to be courteous is in part to use good language and to speak properly. When we do so, what we are saying has more credibility. What Solomon says in this passage is to make sure we do not let poor language come out of our mouth because when we do, we will have problems.

God’s definition of success might be totally different from our definition.

In today’s society, there is a big push toward doing things on our own without asking for help. This can be detected when people are struggling and when psychologists recommend to them self-help books and techniques in order to overcome their struggles. However, the Bible has a totally different perspective on this issue.

1. Proverbs 28:26 tells us not to rely on ourselves but to be wise by relying on God. He alone can truly help us to succeed in life. However, it is wise to remember that God’s definition of success might be totally different from our definition.

2. Proverbs 13:20 tells us that in order to have a successful life we should surround ourselves with good people who can help us to grow in God. We are to associate with wise people, with people of honor, for it is a fact that we become like the people with whom we associate.

Does this mean we have to separate ourselves from certain people? Not necessarily. As we study the life of Jesus, we realize that He didn’t isolate Himself. He didn’t push away the Pharisees or the criminals, but His close group of friends, the people with whom He spent most of His time, were people who desired to learn from Him.

**REACT**

1. Consider your own life. How do other people influence the way you are?
2. How can you love people the way Jesus did but at the same time keep your distance from people who have the tendency to push you away from God?

**Emilian Grigore, Lincoln, Nebraska, U.S.A.**
This past year, a friend of mine decided that she wanted to apply for the California Youth Rush. Youth Rush is a ten-week student literature evangelism program held each summer. My friend prayed about it and felt that God was sincerely calling her to win souls for Him. What better way to be a witness than to be right on the battlefront! So she eagerly waited to hear back from the leaders. However, there was only one problem—her language. You see, Sarah had grown up in a family whose members never spoke nicely to each other. So it was natural for her to speak harshly as well.

Our lips were made to proclaim God’s wisdom to others.

Everyone loved Sarah and knew that she loved them. However, based on the words she used when she spoke, it was hard for a person looking in from the outside not to judge her by her language. When you’re trying to sell literature, you’re spending 99 percent of your time talking with people at their front door or on the street. Sarah knew that if she was going to be a good representative of Christ to these people, she would have to make a change in her life. She would have to give her words to God so that she could speak in such a way that people would want to learn more about Him and His saving grace.

Proverbs 10:11 says that “the mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence” (NIV). “Words of wisdom, counsel, and edification flow out of the mouth of the good. Like a refreshing stream these words, if received and heeded by others, bring new life and growth. It is an honor for the righteous to be so described, for God Himself is said to be a fountain of living waters (Ps. 36:9; Jer. 2:13 . . .).”*

Our lips were made to proclaim God’s wisdom to others, but the foolish, because they are not wise, use their lips for slander. Just as Sarah had to make sure that her words would bring honor to God as she canvassed, we too must pay attention to the words we use. “Wisdom is found on the lips of the discerning” (Prov. 10:13, NIV). May the words we say be influenced by the Holy Spirit for God’s kingdom.

REACT

1. Think about the words you often use. Do they fill the people around you with life or cause them to be torn down?
2. Can people tell that you’ve been at the foot of the cross by the way you talk?

**CONCLUDE**

God pours out the gift of righteousness on the lives of all who follow Him. Some gifts are meant just for the recipient; but the gift of righteousness is meant for sharing. The more God’s righteousness fills our lives, the less room there is for self and selfishness. As He blesses our lives, so we should bless others. In so doing, we give glory, honor, and worship to God, our Creator and Redeemer. Righteousness is not an end in itself. Rather it is the means He gives us to live totally for Jesus.

**CONSIDER**

- Writing five modern proverbs that explain what it means to live a righteous life in 2015.
- Finding photographs in newspapers or news magazines that depict righteousness. What does the ease of finding such pictures tell you about how the world sees righteousness?
- Using a washable marker, write “You are righteous” around the edge of a mirror that you use often. When you look at your reflection in that mirror, think of the righteous acts you have done and thank God for inspiring you and for helping you do so.
- Creating an award for three people whose righteous life has influenced you. Give them the award and explain how they have blessed your life.
- Leaving a piece of bread on a plate without covering it for three days. Look at it and feel it each day. How is what happens to us when we hoard righteousness similar to what happened to the bread?
- Blessing someone in a practical way: washing their car, clearing snow, baking bread, minding their children, and so on. The possibilities are endless!

**CONNECT**

Deuteronomy 10:12, 13; Isaiah 58; Micah 6:8.
Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, chapter 4.
Stuart Tyner, *Searching for the God of Grace*.
Philip Yancey, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?*

---

Audrey Andersson, St. Albans, England
What You Get Is Not What You See

“There is a way that seems right to a man,  
But its end is the way of death”  
(Prov. 14:12, NKJV).
One Sabbath, some friends and I were discussing the importance of small groups when one person shared that a group she was in was studying the book of Proverbs. She inspired me to do the same. Could the book of Proverbs be one of the most understudied books of the Bible? I never sensed it being more important than, let's say, the Gospels. The truth is that every book in the Bible is essential for our spiritual well-being.

When I finally got around to studying Proverbs on my own, I remember feeling guilty. According to this book, I was a mess! I felt like God’s wisdom was ironing out the overlooked creases of my character. As I read, I asked myself questions like, Do I understand what it means to keep “your heart with all diligence” (Prov. 4:23, NKJV)? Or am I “like a city broken down, without walls” (Prov. 25:28, NKJV)?

Perhaps one of the most important truths we must admit is that we are spiritually blind. Understanding and accepting that we need God’s wisdom is pivotal if we are going to grow up in Christ. Admitting that we are spiritually blind is just the first step. Then come confession and the painful process of change.

The Bible sometimes uses metaphors to explain the challenges Christians encounter in the world. First Peter 5:8 explains that the devil is our adversary and that he “walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (NKJV). Ephesians 6:11 urges us to “put on the whole armor of God” (NKJV), and Matthew 24:24 states that if it were possible, even the very elect would be deceived! This text alone should tell us how much we need the wisdom offered in the book of Proverbs.

This week we will study the counsel that Proverbs offers about deception. We will discuss how to stay close to Jesus so that we will not be deceived. I wish that I had begun to study this book earlier because it would have helped me overcome some obstacles I was facing. But thank God for His grace! He allows us to go through hard times, but He is always right there beside us if we invite Him into our hearts.

And as you study the invaluable wisdom of God, never separate it from the love He has for you. Remember to prayerfully reflect on its teachings and purposefully apply them to your life.

Zelinda Sealy-Scavella, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
What is it about a person’s eyes? Why is it that a person’s gaze can tell you so much? Eyes can express joy, sadness, and pain without any words ever being spoken. In Revelation, we read that God’s “eyes were as a flame of fire” (Rev. 19:12). The Bible also shows that fire represents love. “Place me like a seal over your heart, / like a seal on your arm; / for love is as strong as death, / its jealousy unyielding as the grave. / It burns like blazing fire, / like a mighty flame” (Song of Sol. 8:6, NIV).

An innocent young man hung on a piece of wood, accursed by Jewish law (Deut. 21:23). He had become sin for all humankind, and therefore He was evil in God’s eyes. Yet God looked on the sin-bearing Savior and loved Him. Even though He was esteemed smitten, stricken of God, and afflicted; even though He felt forsaken, His Father’s eyes were still upon Him.

Jesus had committed no sin of His own; and when He cried, “‘Father, forgive them,’” and “‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’” (Luke 23:34; Mark 15:34), God heard Him. “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers” (1 Pet. 3:12).

And our Savior, in faith—for He could not see His Father’s face—grasped His Father’s love. He kept His Father’s commandments. He drank the cup. And God did not remove His gaze from His agonizing Son. “But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, / on those whose hope is in his unfailing love” (Ps. 33:18, NIV).

Why would Jesus do this for us? We are guilty of shedding the precious blood of Christ; but His death atones for our sin and His life clothes us in righteousness. “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24, NASB).

**REACT**

1. What specific examples has Jesus left for us regarding how to walk by faith and not by sight?
2. Why does God turn His face from the wicked (Isa. 59:1, 2)?
3. Because of Jesus’ sacrifice, we can be made righteous in the eyes of the Lord. What will you do to repay Him? How will you conduct yourself?
The Authority of God (Prov. 16:9)

Human beings have dreams, ambitions, and desires. God has given us the creative capacity to have goals and to develop the unique desires of our hearts. It is part of what it means to have been made in His image. It’s only natural that we envision what steps we should take in order to turn our dreams into reality. However, when left to our own devices, we so often misuse our capabilities and forge a path to our own self-destruction.

So often a person thinks that he or she knows what is best. At first this seems logical. After all, isn't it that person's life? Most people are aware of their own desires and thoughts, their likes and dislikes. Most people have a fairly good idea of their limitations, their strengths and weaknesses. However, when we consider God’s qualifications, we see that we are clearly outmatched. He sees how the entire story of humanity unfolds from beginning to end, including the intricacies of our daily lives and our most inward thoughts (Ps. 139:13–16). Of course this is to be expected, since He is our Creator. Moreover, our limitations become null when He equips us with His power (Isa. 40:28; Eph. 3:20; Phil. 4:13). If God alone is capable of doing all this, then no one but He can direct our steps.

God is asking us to love Him with our entire being.

Turning From Our Ways (Prov. 16:25)

The Bible makes it clear that humanity is born into sin (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12). Unless our hearts and minds are transformed by the Holy Spirit into the likeness of Christ, our natural inclination is to serve our selfish, sinful desires. In fact, we don't always realize just how destructive our ways are, since “there is a way that seems right to a man, / But its end is the way of death” (Prov. 16:25, NKJV). This reinforces how sin can be a rapidly degenerative disease. Its only cure is the grace and mercy that Jesus Christ offers to us through His sacrifice on the cross.

Once we've accepted Christ, we are called to live a new life in Him. He equips us to live a righteous and obedient life through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. However, in order for Christ to work in us, we must give up our sinful desires and inclinations (Gal. 5:24).

Undoubtedly, this is one of the most challenging and necessary tasks in our Christian walk. When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus responded, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37, NKJV). Essentially
God is asking us to love Him with our entire being. We can never fulfill this commandment if we constantly put our interests and desires at the center of our lives.

Proverbs makes it clear that foolish people are selfish and full of pride. They seek to do their own will by fulfilling their own pleasures and desires. Those who possess these rebellious traits and choose to disregard the authority of God will be held accountable to Him for their actions. Conversely, the Scriptures commend those who seek to do God’s will. The wise delight themselves in the will of the Lord and enjoy an unequivocal sense of peace by submitting every aspect of their lives to Him. Eventually, as we come to know, trust, and love God more, our desires will change. We’ll long to do His will, and He will give us the desires of our heart when our desires align with His (Ps. 37:4).

**Trusting in the Lord (Prov. 3:5, 6)**

Some of us may be genuinely well-intentioned, but our hope is strained whenever we face a bleak situation. Other people may acknowledge God’s supremacy but still find it difficult to trust in His timing and wisdom. Ultimately, if we remember that all of our circumstances are controlled by the divine will of a loving and more-than-capable God, we should have no problem trusting in Him. He is not a dictator who acts impulsively without the slightest regard for His subjects. In fact, the exact opposite is true. God constantly has us on His mind, and His will stems from His desire to spend eternity with us. We may not be able to fathom what good can come out of our challenging circumstances. However, we can trust that every trial is designed to bring us closer to Him.

**REACT**

1. Take a moment to reflect on the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made for us on the cross. How does this demonstrate that we can trust Him? So far, how has His will for your life aligned with His plan of salvation?
2. Think about someone in your life whom you would trust to make an important decision for you. Why do you trust that person? Try to determine what factors or qualities cause you to put so much faith in that person. When you do the same analysis with your spiritual life, what similarities do you find?
“God sees the sinner. The eye which never slumbers knows everything that is done. It is written in his book. One may conceal his sin from father, mother, wife, and friends, and yet all lies open before God. . . .

“God is everywhere. He sees, He knows all things, and understands the intents and purposes of the heart. It is in vain that an attempt should be made to conceal sin from His notice. He saw our first parents in Eden. He saw Cain when he raised his hand to kill Abel. He saw the sins of the inhabitants of the old world, and numbered their days and punished them with a flood. He saw the sins of His own covenant people, the Jews, when they plotted against the life of the Son of God.

“As surely does He mark every transgression, and every secret thing will be brought into Judgment. They may be hid from mortal man, they may be hid from the good, the pure, and the holy, from friends and from foes, yet God sees them.”

In Acts 5, Peter meets with Ananias to receive funds he and his wife promised to give to the church. Ananias, not wanting to disclose he was holding back some of the money, lied to Peter. For a moment, he probably thought he had gotten away with it until Peter, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, informed him of his disloyalty. Later, Peter met with the widow of Ananias. He gave her an opportunity to tell the truth, but she also lied. God didn't kill them because they held back funds but because they were dishonest and not willing to accept His omnipresence and omniscience as fact. If they had surrendered to God they would have been completely honest about the total sum.

“Christ would have the youth surrender themselves to Him. . . . Our time, our character, our influence, belong to God, and should be given to do Him service. Every hour of the day we should realize that the Lord is near, that He sees all we do, and hears every word we utter. ‘The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.’”

**REACT**

Are you living life as if Jesus is walking with you?

---

While attending the University of Pennsylvania, Stephen Glass was executive editor of the *Daily Pennsylvanian*. After graduating, he began working for the *New Republic* in 1995 as an editorial assistant. It wasn’t long before he began writing feature articles for the *Republic* as well as for other high-profile journals and magazines. Yet, in 1998, someone discovered that Glass had fabricated a wide majority of these features.*

When I first heard this story, I was a journalism student, so I wondered how Glass had been able to get away with his deception for so long. It was simple. He had been artful in entangling others in his web of deceit. This is how deception works. We live in a world where we are often exposed to many fraudulent practices. The truth is, we will need to prepare ourselves. Following are some ways to do just that:

*Ask God to open your eyes.* Without Christ, any one of us can be deceived. We ourselves are incapable of fighting against any deception. Ask Christ to “anoint your eyes with eye salve” (Rev. 3:18, NKJV) so that you may be able to see situations for what they are.

*Put it to the test.* The Bible says there are many “false prophets . . . in sheep’s clothing” and we will know them by their fruit (Matt. 7:15, 16). Hold up anything suspicious to the Word of God. Study His Word diligently, so as to disprove any false theories. Ask questions and inform yourself.

*Don’t follow the crowd.* You can’t depend on other people. In these times especially, you need to make sure you are anchored in Christ and Christ alone. Only He can save you. In the last days, many people will be deceitful. And many people will be deceived (Matt. 24:24; Acts 20:29–31; 2 Cor. 11:13–15; 2 Tim. 2:17). Keep your eyes fixed on Christ.

*Watch and pray.* Prayer is the best defense. On our knees, we can fight the winning battle. There are many examples in the Bible showing that because of prayer, people were able to stand victorious against the deceptions in their day. Let us be forever on our guard, for “the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8, NKJV).

**REACT**

What are some of the deceptions you are currently aware of, and how can you prepare yourself against these deceptions?

---


Alexandra Yeboah, Oshawa, Ontario, Canada
It is much easier to walk by sight than it is to live by faith. And it is much easier to trust in our own wisdom than in the explicit word of God. However, it is equally important to know that not everything we perceive is right, and not everything we desire will lead to everlasting life.

Although there are many ways that lead to death, there is only one way that leads to life.

When God instructed Adam and Eve, He said they could eat from every tree in the garden, except from the tree that was “in the midst of the garden” (Gen. 3:3, NKJV). When they disobeyed, they never thought that their behavior would result in the spiritual and physical decay of humanity. They didn’t know that one of their sons would kill their other son. They never imagined that murder, rape, and drug abuse would take place within the scope of a lifetime. They just thought that they would be as God. Both Eve and Adam failed to realize that they were made in their Creator’s image, already enlightened, through obedience to His word.

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6, NKJV).

Adam and Eve failed to exercise the type of faith that would “please Him,” because they placed their trust in the words of Satan. That’s why Proverbs 14:12 means so much to me. It reminds me that although there are many ways that lead to death, there is only one way that leads to life. That way is through Jesus.

As the psalmist wrote: “Your word is a lamp to my feet, / And a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105, NKJV). We should make this the rule of our faith, the rule of our life.

Desire always to please Him who has redeemed us.

REACT

1. How can we guard ourselves from Satan’s deception?
2. How can we live out God’s Word in our lives?
3. What should be the standard by which we live?
CONCLUDE

It all started with a lie. The human race lost the open relationship they had with God by believing Satan's deception in the Garden of Eden. When we needed a Savior, Jesus came as the Truth. And so every day we are now confronted in subtle and blatant ways with both lies and truth. It is God’s desire that we learn to recognize and follow truth.

CONSIDER

- Looking up the words deceive and deceived in a concordance and writing out the verses that apply to you.
- Drawing a picture or writing a poem about the first deception on earth (Gen. 3:1–5).
- Videotaping some “person on the street” interviews, asking people to share some lies they think people generally believe.
- Creating a list of truths God has made clear to you and considering how each item on the list has shaped or changed your life.
- Reading through the book of Proverbs and highlighting the verses that are counter to postmodern secular culture thinking.
- Memorizing Proverbs 3:3 and considering how you can live out what it says.

CONNECT

Will Barron, Deceived by the New Age.
J. Vernon McGee, Proverbs, vol. 20 in Thru the Bible commentary series.
Dealing With Fights

“Better is a dry morsel with quietness, Than a house full of feasting with strife”
(Prov. 17:1, NKJV).
The Geneva Conventions of 1949 are well-known international agreements that seek to restrain some of the ugliest patterns of human conflict.* The conventions have been signed by several countries that recognized that although fighting and conflict are inevitable, some components of war degrade the dignity of the entire human family. According to the conventions, practices such as attacking wartime medics, torturing prisoners of war, and the inhumane treatment of civilians constitute unacceptable types of fighting.

Christians can learn a lot from the Geneva Conventions in terms of responding to conflict. In effect, the Geneva code asserts that the act of fighting one’s enemy isn’t inherently wrong but that certain methods of fighting one’s enemy are. As Christians, we are called to resist our enemy the devil. This entails fighting against his invitations to sin and responding in a Christ-centered way to fellow humans who fight us. How we deal with such fights is of special interest to God. Truthfulness is one of the Christian’s most powerful weapons. Proverbs 19:1 reminds us that one kind of untruthfulness, slander, is a violation of heaven’s “Geneva Code” of dealing with fights. The slanderer, or the one with perverse lips, is said to have a condition more miserable than poverty! At the same time, the one “whose walk is blameless” (NIV) is considered to be “better.” God rejects slander as a response to conflict even when we are legitimate victims of the conflict.

In case we miss that point, Proverbs 19:9 reiterates that the “false witness will not go unpunished, and whoever pours out lies will perish” (NIV). Notice that there is no difference between the perpetrator and the victim in the conflict. The absolute qualifier “whoever” means that anyone who resorts to lying is condemned. This can be a hard teaching considering how difficult it is not to respond to slander with slander or hate with hate. However, verse 22 offers relief: “What a person desires is unfailing love” (NIV). Unfailing love was Christ’s response to those who abused Him. It was His response to those who slandered His name. Therefore, it also should be our response. Remember, Christians are born into a world that is at war with God. So not fighting is not an option. But how we fight—that is, fighting like God instead of fighting like the devil—determines our affiliation in the battle. Fighting like God by refusing to become cruel and retaliatory gives us the vantage point going into conflict and an inner peace through it.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments God refers to His people as His children. This common fatherhood makes us all brothers and sisters. Such family ties are typically quite strong. But in the New Testament, God goes still further when He describes the Christian community as the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12–27). This implies a closer, tighter relationship.

Strife has the potential to be quite hurtful and disruptive to the unity of the church body (Prov. 17:1; 18:6–8). Keeping the right perspective is essential when there is conflict. Paul explains, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12, NIV). The people we disagree with are not our enemies. Any conflict we have with another brother or sister in Christ is just an instance of the enemy trying to disrupt the unity and love between God’s children.

Interestingly, the first use of the word strife in the Bible is found in Genesis 13:7, 8. Abram pleads with Lot, “Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren” (Gen. 13:8, NKJV).

How do we handle issues in order to avoid strife between fellow Christians? Proverbs provides wisdom about this by contrasting the natures of the wise man and the fool, the person who has understanding and the person who does not. Proverbs highlights several major traits that can help avoid conflict. These traits are attributed to the wise man.

**Listen Patiently (Prov. 18:13)**

If we begin with patience and the willingness to listen, the tendency for strife to escalate is lessened. Proverbs says that patience, or one’s ability to be “slow to anger,” comes from wisdom (Prov. 19:11, NKJV). By comparison, a fool is quick tempered (Prov. 12:16). Patience will help us respond wisely rather than emotionally.

Before we respond, we need to listen patiently. Listening is good all the time, but it is especially important in the middle of conflict. Proverbs 18:13 says, “to answer before listening—/ that is his folly and his shame” (NIV). When someone comes to us with a problem, many of us want to jump in and fix the problem or defend ourselves—often before we have fully heard and understood the other person. However, Proverbs says it is foolish and shameful to give an answer, rebuke, solution, or suggestion without fully hearing the other person out.
Learn Humbly (Prov. 17:10; 19:25)

Another useful trait mentioned in Proverbs is the willingness to learn and grow. In most tricky situations, someone is at fault or needs correction. We are not always perfect. We need to be discerning enough to know when a rebuke is necessary, and we need to be humble enough to receive a rebuke if one is warranted. Neither needs to be negative. Proverbs explains how a rebuke can be a positive thing for the person who has discernment. If we see the rebuke as an opportunity to learn and grow, then we will be better off because of it. In addition, the rebuke has a better chance of being a positive thing if it is given and received with love and grace.

Love Gracefully (Prov. 17:9, 19:11)

The effect of a disagreement on a relationship is largely determined by the spirit of the disagreement. If the disagreement is filled with anger and condemnation, then the relationship may be harmed. However, if the disagreement is permeated with love and grace, then the relationship could be even closer after the disagreement is resolved.

The willingness to forgive goes a long way in healing any issue. Proverbs 19:11 says that it is to a person’s “glory to overlook an offense” (NIV). The word for “overlook” means to pass by or pass over. If you can look past the offense and forgive, then any enmity is diminished and the relationship will be strengthened.

Love and forgiveness are really very much tied together. If you want to foster love, then you will cover all sins (Prov. 10:12) against you with love and forgiveness. In doing so, it is as if you cover the transgression so you no longer see it or let it affect your relationship.

The Character of God (Pss. 32:1; 66:19, 20; Prov. 3:11, 12; Mic. 7:18)

God is our ultimate example of how to maintain healthy, peaceful relationships. In His dealings with us, He exemplifies all of the advice mentioned in Proverbs. God listens. When we pray, we have the assurance that He is listening to our prayers (Ps. 66:19, 20). God provides correction when we need it. Proverbs 3:12 says that the Lord corrects those He loves, just as a loving father corrects his son. God is full of love and forgiveness. No matter how far we have strayed, he is always there calling us back to him (Mic. 7:18). Christ died to cover our sins. The ultimate forgiveness comes when our sins are completely covered with Christ’s righteousness (Ps. 32:1). As we allow God into our lives more and more each day, He will make us more like Him—wise in dealing with our brothers and sisters.

REACT

1. What can we learn about unity from Christ’s life on earth? Was He unified with everyone?

2. What steps can you take to resolve a long-standing conflict that you have with someone?

Steven Gusse, Fort Worth, Texas, U.S.A.
“We think with horror of the cannibal who feasts on the still warm and trembling flesh of his victim; but are the results of even this practice more terrible than are the agony and ruin caused by misrepresenting motive, blackening reputation, dissecting character? Let the children, and the youth as well, learn what God says about these things: ‘Death and life are in the power of the tongue.’

“We should not hastily credit evil reports.”

“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.”¹

“What a world of gossip would be prevented if every man would remember that those who tell him the faults of others will as freely publish his faults at a favorable opportunity. We should endeavor to think well of all men, especially our brethren, until compelled to think otherwise. We should not hastily credit evil reports. These are often the result of envy or misunderstanding, or they may proceed from exaggeration or a partial disclosure of facts. Jealousy and suspicion, once allowed a place, will sow themselves broadcast, like thistledown. Should a brother go astray, then is the time to show your real interest in him. Go to him kindly, pray with and for him, remembering the infinite price which Christ has paid for his redemption. In this way you may save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins.

“A glance, a word, even an intonation of the voice, may be vital with falsehood, sinking like a barbed arrow into some heart, inflicting an incurable wound. Thus a doubt, a reproach, may be cast upon one by whom God would accomplish a good work, and his influence is blighted, his usefulness destroyed. Among some species of animals, if one of their number is wounded and falls, he is at once set upon and torn in pieces by his fellows. The same cruel spirit is indulged by men and women who bear the name of Christians. They manifest a pharisaical zeal to stone others less guilty than themselves. There are some who point to others’ faults and failures to divert attention from their own, or to gain credit for great zeal for God and the church.”²

**REACT**

1. Have you ever participated in relating stories, true or embellished, that ended up hurting another person?
2. What will you do if someone shares gossip with you? Explain.

². White, *Counsels for the Church*, pp. 174, 175.

Rebekah Faith Bonjour, Hendersonville, North Carolina, U.S.A.
Solomon was no stranger to conflict. His father David was a man of war. And Solomon himself saw the effects of conflict within his immediate family. Solomon's brother, Amnon, raped Tamar (his half-sister). Absalom murdered Amnon and ultimately committed treason against his father and was himself murdered. Solomon watched his family spiral out of control, largely due to his father’s dysfunctional example of lust and murder.

Proverbs’ focus on conflict is interesting in light of this family history. Toward the end of his life, David instructed Solomon to avoid the mistakes he had made. Solomon seemed to take these messages to heart, for Proverbs is full of wisdom about avoiding strife and conflict. The word strife appears 14 times in Proverbs in the King James Version. The concept of conflict avoidance is even more prevalent. In Proverbs 17:1, Solomon explores the ideal of a peaceful home versus that of a home in conflict. He observes that one would be better off to be poor and have peace than to be rich and have strife.

Solomon experienced incredible wealth during his lifetime. He also knew that it would be worth it to give up all his wealth for peace and quiet. He never had to make that sacrifice. In addition to being wealthy, he also was able to avoid much of the conflict his father David had experienced.

In Proverbs, Solomon places the idea of avoiding strife in the broader context of choosing between the wise and the foolish way of living. “The Hebrew word translated ‘proverbs’ comes from the root mashal, meaning ‘to be like,’ ‘to compare.’” Solomon presents a comparison of the two diametrically opposed options for living: quietness or strife.

The message of Proverbs remains true for us today. Quietness is worth sacrifice. If we are wise, we will choose to strive for peaceful relationships with those around us. The other option is the path of the fool—a path that leads only to destructive relationships and unhappiness.

**REACT**

1. What would you be willing to give up in order to have quietness in your life?
2. How can you deal with someone in your life who seems to need conflict?

---

In John 8:1–11, Jesus demonstrates yet again an example of a just God and His love of restoration. A group of men appear, dragging with them a woman caught in adultery. The law said they should stone such women, but what would the Teacher say? Would He be just?

Jesus looked at the scene. He looked at the mob, and then He looked at the woman. He watched the tears streaming down her cheeks. He looked at her hair all tangled and matted from being pulled down the street like a dog. But more than that, He looked at her heart. He saw her shame, her brokenness. He felt her convinced unworthiness, and so He doesn't even acknowledge the man's question because He doesn't think it deserves a reply. Instead, He just stoops down into the dirt and begins to write.

Finally, He says to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (verse 7, NIV).

Jesus then turns to the woman whom He already loves, and in an epic moment of mercy He pardons her sins. He was just when everyone else wanted to condemn the sinner.

Do you want to be just? Here’s how you can be so.

Start seeing people as God sees them—through the lens of love. If you want to pray for something, let it be for the Holy Spirit to live in you. We cannot be just without the anointing of the Spirit. The Spirit will change you and help you to see people as Jesus sees them. Pray for His anointing.

The very next thing Jesus does after seeing this woman’s heart aching is to get His hands dirty on her behalf. He gets involved.

Likewise, we must not just pray for others. We also should get involved on their behalf. The purity of the gospel is found when it penetrates filthy hearts. So get your hands dirty. Point a fellow sinner in the direction of a sinless God. Sometimes we see people and pray that God will send them comfort, friendship, and love. Yet all the while God is saying, “But I’ve placed you in their lives because you are supposed to be comfort, friendship, and love!”

Restore the covenant. Love God. Love others. Be just.

**REACT**

1. Look through John 8:1–11 to discover other ways in which Jesus was just.
2. What are some ways we can consciously seek to treat people justly?

Heather Thompson Day, Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A.
Take a minute to remember a time when something you said got you into trouble. It may have been an angry reply that started a fight, or perhaps a bit of gossip that spread out of control. Maybe it was a sharp word spoken in the heat of the moment that you immediately wished you could take back. Everyone has such memories. Why is it so easy to say something that we regret?

Proverbs 18 describes some of the consequences of speaking out of turn. Not only can words hurt us or even change our personality (verses 6, 8), they can also endanger our lives (verse 7). Everything from gossip to insults to self-promotion bears consequences for us, even when all we do is listen. We may not recognize how words endanger our daily lives. But can you remember a time when gossip changed how you felt about someone? The results of ill-spoken words are tangible.

So if our words are powerful and hard to control, what can we do to mitigate the damage to ourselves and those around us? The book of Proverbs contains a hint. Look again at chapter 18, verse 4, and see that “the words of the mouth are deep waters,” destructive and unknowable, “but the fountain of wisdom is a rushing stream” (NIV). Disastrous words come from the mouths of fools, so wisdom seems to be the antidote. And wisdom is plentiful and free! James 1:5 says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you” (NIV).

This gives us hope—no human can tame his or her own foolish tongue. But we don't have to struggle anymore. God promises abundant wisdom without restraint. All we have to do is recognize our need and ask Him for it.

REACT

1. If there is anyone in your life who hurt you with words, pray for that person now. Is there someone whom you may have hurt with words? Pray for that person too. Ask God for wisdom to find the right things to say from now on, whether it is an apology for the past or simply a new heart going forward.

2. Consider how silence can be hurtful or helpful. How can we know when to speak and when to be silent?
Zhou Enlai, famous diplomat and China’s first premier, said, “All diplomacy is the continuation of war by other means.” Yesterday’s opponent in battle can be today’s partner in peace or tomorrow’s ally in statecraft. Therefore, there are three cautions we must exercise in warfare, whether spiritual or physical. First, know whom we’re fighting. The real enemy was not the woman caught in adultery or her prosecutors, but Satan, the accuser of them all. Second, be careful how we fight. Tread softly. Go gracefully. Walk wisely and truthfully. Third, be circumspect about how we win. “For what shall it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

**CONSIDER**

- Contemplating for an hour about a Christian trying to win his or her unbelieving spouse to Christianity by silent conduct (1 Pet. 3:1, 2). Act out what you see in your mind’s eye and then draw your observations or write them out in prose or poetry.
- Drafting “Geneva Conventions” (rules for not hurting others) for your church or family. Give them fun names, if you like, such as “The Love Convention for the XYZ Family” or the “XYZ Church.”
- Listening to a speech on unity or peace—perhaps “I Have a Dream” or another one of Martin Luther King’s speeches.
- Starting a new “day” for peaceful relations, such as a “Smile Day” or a “Shake Hands With a Stranger Day.” Recruit ten friends, relatives, and/or Sabbath school classmates. Write a short news item about all of your experiences for your local newspaper.
- Writing a friendly welcome-home speech for the second prodigal son (the one who stayed home) to deliver to his returning prodigal brother.
- Spending five to ten minutes praying for forgiveness for your sins of communication (for example, anyone you slandered, insulted, etc.).
- Preparing two “love lists” with useful words and phrases for the diplomats, one for either side, preparing for negotiations between North and South Korea, or Cuba and the United States, or Israel and Iran. Or, for the fun of it, a lion and a mouse.

**CONNECT**


Frank A. Campbell, Ajax, Ontario, Canada
Words of Wisdom

“Most men will proclaim each his own goodness,
But who can find a faithful man?”
(Prov. 20:6, NKJV).
“‘Ask! What shall I give you?’” (2 Chron. 1:7, NKJV). Most likely every child and adult who has good comprehension would love to hear God ask them this question. Whether people are wealthy or not, there are always desirable things that fill their dreams. In the early 1900s, during the Gold Rush, many people were ready to conquer a road of a few thousand miles to get rich. But what would you ask God for, He who creates ex nihilo (from nothing)? This question goes to the core of your heart. Does your answer reveal a selfish or selfless heart?

God inquired of the young King Solomon, “‘Ask! What shall I give you?’” So Solomon asked for wisdom and knowledge (2 Chron. 1:10). This should also be our answer to God’s question. Solomon was aware of the problems selfishness causes. He saw his brother Absalom try to kill David, their father, in order to get all the power and glory. He had experienced rivalry from his brother Adonijah, who decided to organize his own inauguration as king. Solomon knew how dangerous the desire for self-exaltation can be. So he decided to ask God to help him. He knew that wisdom can be found only in Him.

The Hebrew word for wisdom is chokmah. Chokmah is wisdom that helps us to cope with life’s challenges, whether these challenges are existential, emotional, or spiritual in nature. Wisdom therefore deals with the skill of living. Isn’t that all we need for a selfless heart, even when we are surrounded by a self-centered world? Solomon asked, “But who can find a faithful man?” (Prov. 20:6, NKJV). Such a question highlights the need for authentic Christians—women and men who live the faith they profess with their lips. Solomon puts a challenge before us. Will we be counted among the faithful?

As you study this week’s lesson, pray for wisdom and the ability to internalize the values from the Word of God. The wisdom presented in Proverbs can help us to have better life and a better relationship with God.

This week, experience the greatest discoveries on the adventurous road to the Fountain of Wisdom!

---

2. Ibid.

David Cipilić, Gospić, Croatia
When Solomon became king of Israel, he asked God, “‘Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people’” (2 Chron. 1:10, NIV). God heard Solomon’s prayer and gave him knowledge and a wise, discerning heart. So when we study Proverbs, we actually study God’s wisdom.

Proverbs is a book with a specific purpose. It brings a multitude of wise, inspired tips that help us to develop wisdom. Proverbs is a valuable book that can help us to be sensible and to grow closer to God. We can also use the book of Proverbs to teach others how to live sensibly.

The book of Proverbs is a treasure trove of advice and knowledge.

Wherever we go these days, we quite often encounter rude children, because their parents allow them to do whatever they want to do. However, Proverbs 22:6 teaches us to “start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it” (NIV). In biblical times, God’s people taught their children the magnificent imperishable principles of God’s law in both the home and the synagogue.

If you want to properly raise your children, don’t leave it to your neighbors, your children’s teachers, or your relatives. There is no one better to raise a child than that child’s parents. The apostle Paul instructed children to “obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—’so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth’” (Eph. 6:1–3, NIV).

As a child, Jesus willingly helped His father Joseph in his carpentry workshop. Children can be a great help in the household if they learn to perform age-appropriate tasks. Thus they will learn to trust themselves and to be reliable. However, parents always need to set the example through the words they use and the things they do. The book of Proverbs is a treasure trove of advice and knowledge that we can read daily. In it we can seek God’s wisdom in order to guide our children along the right path.

**REACT**

1. What advice can you personally find in Proverbs this week that can guide you along life’s path?
2. To what specific situations in your life can you apply these proverbs?
3. If you are studying to teach young children or if you are expecting your first child, how might the book of Proverbs help you to be a better teacher or parent?
The Proliferation of Sin (Prov. 20:9)

After Adam and Eve fell, sin began to spread across the world. Now we witness the consequences of sin all around us and in our own lives. “Who can say, ‘I have kept my heart pure; / I am clean and without sin?’ ” (Prov. 20:9, NIV).

None of us can say that we have never sinned. None of us can say we are better or more important than anyone else, because we are all sinners.

Kindness Is From God (Prov. 20:6)

Even though we are sinful, it would be wrong to say that there is no one who does good and that there is no one who believes in God. Many people, not just Christians, are happy to help those in need, to encourage someone, to be fair and honest in their dealings with other people, and to teach others how they can live a better life.

However, this does not imply that we don't have to believe in God to do good works. But how can we see a difference between the faithful and unfaithful if both groups of people are involved in doing good? God’s faithful people will admit that the kindness they show is motivated by their love for Him and is a result of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. This gives them an advantage over the unfaithful because they have an opportunity to show the world the kindness that transcends worldly wisdom. Jesus says, “ ‘Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all’ ” (Mark 9:35, NRSV). Such heavenly wisdom is utter nonsense to the world. But to God’s people, it is an important step on the path to eternal life.

Two Types of Wisdom (Prov. 20:17; 21:6)

In almost every difficult situation we will have to choose either the wisdom of the world or heavenly wisdom (Prov. 9:1–5, 13, 17). The wisdom of the world will often suggest that we must compromise our principles from time to time in order to succeed. This, however, is a trap. Compromises like these can happen in school, at home, in the dorm, and in society in general, and they will eventually lead to great loss.

The wisdom of the world sometimes appears to be the only possible and reasonable solution to a frustrating situation. But heavenly wisdom teaches us that this is a lie. “A fortune made by a lying tongue / is a fleeting vapor
and a deadly snare” (Prov. 21:6, NIV). Sometimes, for a certain period, we can enjoy a sin and think that there will be no bad consequences for doing so. But heavenly wisdom says that this also is a lie! For a short period of time, Adam and Eve enjoyed the sweet taste of the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Soon, however, this sweetness turned into bitter regret. Proverbs 20:17 describes it this way: “Bread gained by deceit is sweet, / but afterward the mouth will be full of gravel” (NRSV). Chewing gravel surely would destroy our teeth. And how awful it would taste! Likewise, sin can destroy our lives and carry with it horrible effects. Sin compromises our relationship with Christ, even though at times it might seem reasonable.


Heavenly wisdom is calling us to be fair and to consider the welfare of people who are less fortunate than we are. Jesus tells us this in Matthew 25:31–46, as does Solomon in the book of Proverbs. Why is it so important to feed the hungry and clothe the poor? Because we were not created to serve ourselves but to be a blessing to those around us.

Unfortunately, most of the people in the world live and work only for their personal benefit and gain. This can create many challenges for Christ’s followers. All of us, especially young people, are pressured from time to time to neglect God’s wisdom, to compromise our Christian principles. Always remember, however, that such compromises never pay off. Heavenly wisdom directs us to live honest, purposeful lives and to be a blessing to others. When we live this way, we will discover true happiness. We are children of the heavenly Father, who loves us all equally.

The same heavenly wisdom we find in Proverbs, we also hear from Jesus’ lips. He says, “Verily, I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40). We cannot anticipate His return without being joyful and without helping others to learn about Him. We cannot change the fact that we live in a fallen world. But Jesus’ heavenly wisdom is calling us, instructing us to do good no matter what others will think or say.

In addition to the good we do, we are to teach others how to do good. As those who know personally the Source of true goodness, we have the noble task of helping others accept God’s way. We do this by words, by example, and by the good deeds the Holy Spirit inspires us to perform.

REACT

1. How many times have you had the opportunity to do good but did not? Why did you hold back? What can you do so that the next time you are in a position to help others, you will gladly do so?

2. How can you personally demonstrate God’s goodness to the world on a regular basis?

Josip Pavić, Zagreb, Croatia
Sometimes, what we know can be useless. For example, I know how to say the word *egg* in five different languages, but I have no idea how to boil one. It seems that facts and knowledge have become idols to us. The more we know, the more successful we think we will be. Often it seems that there are so many subjects to study and activities to engage in that there is not enough time to diligently study God’s Word. But let us learn from the example of the Waldenses and Wycliffe.

“It was the Bible that made him what he was.”

“The Waldenses had scarified their worldly prosperity for the truth’s sake, and with persevering patience they toiled for their bread. . . . They were taught that God designs life to be a discipline, and that their wants could be supplied only by personal labor, by forethought, care and faith. The process was laborious and wearisome, but it was wholesome, just what man needed in his fallen state, the school which God has provided for his training and development. While the youth were inured to toil and hardship, the culture of the intellect was not neglected. They were taught that all the powers belonged to God, and that all were to be improved and developed for His service. . . .

“From their pastors the youth received instructions. While attention was given to branches of general learning, the Bible was made the chief study.”

“From their pastors the youth received instructions. While attention was given to branches of general learning, the Bible was made the chief study.”

“The character of Wycliffe is a testimony to the educating, transforming power of the Holy Scripture. It was the Bible that made him what he was. The effort to grasp the great truths of revelation imparts freshness and vigor to all the faculties. It expands the mind, sharpens the perceptions, and ripens the judgment. The study of the Bible will ennoble every thought, feeling, and aspiration as no other study can. It gives stability of purpose, patience, courage, and fortitude; it refines the character, and sanctifies the soul. An earnest, reverent study of the Scriptures, bringing the mind of the student in direct contact with the infinite mind, would give to the world men of stronger and more active intellect, as well as of nobler principle, than has ever resulted from the ablest training than human philosophy affords. ‘The entrance of Thy words,’ says the psalmist, ‘giveth light; it giveth understanding.’”

**REACT**

What prevents you from regular Bible study?

---

2. Ibid., p. 94.

*Marija Miljkovic, Zagreb, Croatia*
How-to

Practical Christianity

The fact that the world is fallen in every way cannot help but impact us negatively. Nevertheless, we have the Holy Spirit and God’s Word to help us to be practical Christians. Following are three other things that foster practical Christianity.

God is the ultimate Giver.
He gave His Son to die for our sins.

Unity (Prov. 6:12–14). No two snowflakes are alike.1 Each one is a beautiful individual. But who can say that one snowflake is more useful than another? All together, many different snowflakes can create a delightful winter landscape. Likewise, each Christian is different from other Christians. God gives each of us distinct talents to use for Him. But together, as we each use our talents, we create a beautifully working church.

Patience (Prov. 20:22). G. Campbell Morgan says, “Waiting for God means . . . the ability to do nothing until the command is given.”2 Often when we try to solve problems on our own, we end up disappointed. David wrote, “Wait for the Lord; / be strong and take heart / and wait for the Lord” (Ps. 27:14, NIV).

Compassion (Prov. 19:17; Matt. 25:31–46). We usually do not realize how much we have and how blessed we are. But even when we do realize it, we often fail to help others who have less than we do. God wants us to share the blessings He has given us with the less fortunate. Selfishness is from the devil, and therefore is hateful to God. God is the ultimate Giver. He gave His Son to die for our sins.

Our example is Christ. Let us remember how loving and caring He was toward others while He lived on earth. Our mission is not different from His mission. Let us open our eyes to those around us. Who needs a kind word, warm clothes, a hug, or something to eat? When we put our selfish wants aside, we will be able to notice the needs of both the spiritually poor and the materially poor.

REACT

1. Why do we have differences among us? Why is it so difficult to attain unity?

---


In engineering there is something called opposing requirements. For example, when engineers built the Tokyo Gate Bridge, they had to develop a design that would be tall enough to allow big ships to pass under but at the same time not be in way of planes landing at the nearby airport. This required accurate calculations, original ideas, and intelligent trade-offs.

There are many theories and things written and said that are confusing or misleading.

When we study God’s Word and inspired counsel, it seems that there are many demands and expectations placed on young Adventists. Unfortunately, some of these demands seem contradictory. For example, young adult Adventists are expected to be versatile in practical matters so they can survive by doing some type of manual work. On the other hand, we also are expected to be knowledgeable and educated, to have broad, progressive ideas, and to keep track of recent developments so we can intelligently discuss these matters with anyone. Achieving both of these goals seems impossible, because stressing practical work and simple country life is often associated with anti-intellectual totalitarian movements, while the progressive call for intellectual improvement is often accompanied by the despising of physical labor.

Confucius shows us the way out of this dilemma: “When I walk along with two others, they may serve me as my teachers. I will select their good qualities and follow them, their bad qualities and avoid them.” We must strategically place ourselves so that we are of maximum service to others, while at the same time we are taking advantage of the many opportunities there are to learn and explore even after we finish our formal education. But there are many theories and things written and said that are confusing or misleading. God’s Word instructs us to avoid these (Prov. 12:11; 14:7, 23; 19:27).

In 600 B.C., Confucius questioned some of his aspirations for life: “The silent treasuring up of knowledge; learning without satiety; and instructing others without being wearied: which one of these things belongs to me?”

REACT

Did you ever come across anti-intellectual or anti-manual-labor sentiments in our church? What is the biblical basis for opposing them?

CONCLUDE
As the fountain of wisdom, God provides positive solutions to all of life’s challenges. In Proverbs, Solomon entreats us to drink from this fountain in order to better experience everyday living with both God and other people. Proverbs provides instruction for every age group. It is the most complete source of wisdom for sensible living. God’s wisdom requires us to be kind to others, because kindness can help to put people on the path to eternal life. As we learn from the experience of Adam and Eve, human wisdom often appears attractive but has deadly consequences. Bible study that is guided by the Holy Spirit is a sure way to improve one’s life.

CONSIDER
• Meditating on Matthew 5:7. In what ways was Solomon merciful when it came to solving problems? What issues are you having difficulty solving? How might Matthew 5:7 help?
• Dividing your class into pairs and giving each pair a different verse of hymn no. 603 in the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal. Ask each pair to identify a wise thought found in their verse and explain how we might benefit by heeding it.
• Making a list of the various stages your favorite fruit goes through, from being planted as a seed or seedling to becoming ripe. Then imagine that a piece of dead wood is placed in the ground for the duration the fruit tree took to produce mature fruit. Compare the difference between the fruit tree and the piece of wood. What are some related implications from God’s act of wisdom in Genesis 1:11, 12?
• Composing a poem or short essay about how people can prepare for the havoc wreaked by floods, earthquakes, snowstorms, and other destructive forces of nature (see Matt. 7:13–27).
• Considering what you would say and or do to convince an atheist friend of yours that God is all wise and that if we follow His instructions our lives will be better.

CONNECT
Proverbs 13 in a modern translation.
George R. Knight, My Gripe With God, chapters 4–7.
Words of Truth

“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?”

(Prov. 22:20, 21, NKJV).
In a faraway place full of magnificent buildings, there was a competition between two groups of people who were building two extraordinary palaces. One of the palaces was being built with bricks of truth and the other with bricks of lies. When both of these castles were complete, everyone in the village was impressed by their majesty and splendor. But then something strange began to happen. The castle made from bricks of lies began to morph and shift. Then the ceilings collapsed. The walls crumbled and then disintegrated into dust. Each of the bricks of lies changed shape and deteriorated until not even the foundation remained. However, the castle built with bricks of truth remained constant over time.

This fable shows what is currently happening in our society. Lies are frequently told. Rather than speak the truth, many people are often saying or doing anything that will profit them or give them certain advantages. Yes, sometimes the truth can be ugly. However, lies bear a hidden, appalling nature. Even the lies that seem harmless can do more damage than we can imagine. Lies eventually reveal their harmful nature, just like the bricks of lies eventually deteriorated. They may hold up to scrutiny for a little while, but they will eventually falter and break under the pressure of truth.

God’s desire for us is to live a sanctified life—a life without lies, a life of virtue and truth. Let what you say and who you are be genuine because doing so is an important part of the sanctification process. It shows the relationship you have with your heavenly Father. It shows that when you spend time with Him, you will begin to reflect His character (2 Cor. 3:18). Practice being truthful in your daily life. Rely on the authenticity of the Bible to guide all that you say and do.

If we know the truth as it is in Jesus (John 8:31, 32), then our ethics (Matt. 5:37; Prov. 15:29) will be consistent with this truth. It is the only way to be free from the castle built with bricks of lies.

This week we will study how truth should influence our lives and our relationships with other people.

Melissa Hinostroza Sáenz de Cowgill, Indianapolis, Indiana, U.S.A.

Christians are called to a higher mission, and the inspired words of Solomon urge us to pay attention to this call and to make it a part of our lives in such a way that it governs all that we say and do. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6, NIV). He is our model. It is He whom we should imitate, not some film star or rock musician. Our lives should be based on the truth as it is in Jesus Christ.

Our enemy, Satan, has taken the initiative to contradict everything Jesus represents. Little by little, the media tries to lure us away from the truth. However, let our trust be in the Lord (Prov. 22:19). He is the only truth that can expose false teachings.

Robbing the Poor (Prov. 22:22, 23; 23:10)

Ever since sin entered the world, people have been mistreating the poor. Solomon had everything he needed and more. However, his wealth did not tarnish his values, and he was the son of David, who was a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). So it was natural for him to warn others not to rob the poor or take advantage of them in many other ways.

We hear in the news how corrupt governments and rich people often take advantage of the impoverished. However, God’s Word tells us in Isaiah 58:6, 7 that in His kingdom, citizens are to feed the hungry, clothe the poor, and “loose the chains of injustice” (NIV).

Being Jealous of the Wicked (Prov. 23:17; 24:1, 2, 19, 20)

Have you ever thought about being jealous of the evil people in your life? At one time in my life, I had to do some soul searching about this very thing. My conclusion? Yes. I did envy the wicked. Why? Because often they have what I want, and they do what I would like to do. Solomon, however, warns us not to desire what the wicked do and have.

Of course, sin can be quite attractive. Eve took a chance when she listened to the serpent because he made the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil seem so enticing. “Three times mention is made of how charming it was; it appealed to her taste, to her eye, and to her longing for increased wisdom. Looking at the tree in this way, with a desire to partake of its fruit, was a concession to Satan’s inducements. She was already guilty in her mind of transgressing the divine command, ‘Thou shalt not
covet’ (Ex. 20:17). The act of taking the fruit and eating it was but the natural result of entering this upon the path of transgression.”

**When You Put Your Feet in Your Mouth (Gen. 3:1–7; 9:20, 21; Prov. 23:1–8, 29–35)**

The first temptation the devil created for humankind dealt with what we put in our mouth (Gen. 3:1–7). After Jesus had fasted in the wilderness for forty days, Satan tempted Him by saying, “‘If you [Jesus] are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread’” (Matt. 4:3, NIV). Such temptations satisfy our needs. We need to eat to survive.

Then there are the times when we might be tempted to indulge our appetite rather than deny it. When we give in to such temptations, we can ruin our “opportunity for further service.”

**Our Responsibilities (Prov. 24:11, 12, 23–28; Ezek. 33:8)**

God has trusted us with many responsibilities. One of them is to confront the wicked regarding their evil ways. Ezekiel 33:8 tells us that if we do not warn evil people that they will die for their unforgiven sin, we will be responsible for their death.

Solomon also advises us not to procrastinate (Prov. 24:27) and that “we should carry out our work in its proper order. If a farmer builds his house in the spring, he will miss the planting season and go a year without food. If a businessman invests his money in a house while his business is struggling to grow, he may lose both. It is possible to work hard and still lose everything if the timing is wrong or the resources to carry it out are not in place.”

**REACT**

1. In what ways do you procrastinate? What helpful things can you do to prevent procrastinating in the future?
2. Are you jealous of things you see on television or in magazines? Instead of envying the wicked, what can you do to model the Savior?

---

2. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1024.
When we read verses like Proverbs 22:22 and 23, we wonder about the type of person who robs from the poor. These verses are a “do not” most of us agree with, whether we live in the east, west, north, or south. Whose conscience would stoop so low? In a world rapidly moving toward relativism and the denial of absolutes, we still find that the thought of robbing the poor is unacceptable to many people. We applaud those who defend the weak and aid the underprivileged, and we are appalled when we hear about new laws that oppress the poor and rob them of being able to make a living.

“So what does God our Father want us to do with the poor?”

“The Lord provides for the widow and the fatherless, not by a miracle in sending manna from heaven, not by sending ravens to bring them food; but by a miracle upon human hearts, expelling selfishness, and unsealing the fountains of Christlike love. The afflicted and bereaved ones He commits to His followers as a precious trust. They have the very strongest claim upon our sympathy.

“In homes supplied with life’s comforts, in bins and granaries filled with the yield of abundant harvests, in warehouses stocked with the products of the loom, and vaults stored with gold and silver, God has supplied means for the sustenance of these needy ones. He calls upon us to be channels of His bounty.”

“In placing among them the helpless and the poor, to be dependent upon their care, Christ tests His professed followers. By our love and service for His needy children we prove the genuineness of our love for Him. To neglect them is to declare ourselves false disciples, strangers to Christ and His love.”

“Often we lament the scanty resources available, but were Christians thoroughly in earnest, they could multiply the resources a thousandfold. It is selfishness, self-indulgence, that bars the way to our usefulness.”

**REACT:**

1. What do you think of God’s way of helping the poor? Explain why you think that way.
2. In what ways in your own life can you exhibit His love?

---

2. Ibid., p. 205.
3. Ibid., p. 206.

Patience Liss, Indianapolis, Indiana, U.S.A.
Much has changed in the meanings of words throughout the passage of time. Truth is one such word affected by shifts in perspective. The Hebrew word for truth is ˇemeth.* When Proverbs was written, truth was viewed much differently than it is viewed now. In King Solomon's time, truth was something that was lived out in a demonstrative fashion. It was objective, and it was a substance that was practiced on a daily basis. There was no gray space between truth and lies. However, in today's postmodern era, truth has a much different connotation. We live in a subjective world, where one person's truth is another person's fiction. There is no right or wrong answer. There is no correct or incorrect; and many people no longer believe that there is a universal truth provided by a higher power.

However, Christians know that there is absolute truth delivered to us straight from God's Holy Word. The Bible's truths are just as viable today as they were in the past. The book of Proverbs in particular provides numerous truths that are applicable in our interactions with those around us. We can demonstrate these certainties to our coworkers, friends, and family members. By practicing truth in the historic sense, we can lead others to discover the truth through our behavior. No longer must we move through each moment of each day afraid of what moldable, changeable truth we may stumble upon. There is no need to compromise, no need to enter the gray zone, for we have God's truth to follow.

Why follow the truths in the Bible? It is because God warns us of our responsibility as truth carriers. In no uncertain terms, He tells us that we will be held accountable for not spreading the truth, for not living it. If we condemn others without sharing the good news, then we are not following the instructions made plain to us by God. I challenge you to practice many of the proverbs in your life. Put them to good use. Show the truth to those around you. When they realize that there is a consistent, enduring truth, your colleagues, friends, and family can begin to understand that faith in God is the only way to achieve a full and joyful existence.

**REACT**

What are some ways that you can practice truth in your daily life?

---

How long does it take to make a judgment about someone you meet for the first time? According to one research article, first impressions based on someone's face can be formed in only a tenth of a second.* Additionally, it seems that this is an intuitive and unreflective process. In other words, we do it unconsciously!

We cannot rely on our first impressions to establish an opinion of anyone.

A synonym for “prejudice” is “partiality.” Solomon advises us not to show partiality in our judgments. Partiality often rules out the truth. When that happens, we make improper judgments that may damage our chances of developing healthy relationships.

What can we do to avoid these traps?

Wait! Take your time. In James 1:19, we find that we are to be both slow to speak and slow to anger. This is a warning not to let ourselves be driven by impulses. God wants us to take our time before saying something, before launching a judgment. It is not an easy task to control our natural impulses and thoughts. In fact, it is quite impossible to do so on our own. We need to be connected to God in order to learn how to take our time.

Reflect! Our impulses can easily deceive us (Jer. 17:9). It is so much easier to form an immediate opinion of someone before even getting to know her or him, because it is in our nature to do so. We cannot rely on our first impressions to establish an opinion of anyone. To counteract this natural inclination requires a conscious and steady effort of will. Try to look at people through Jesus’ eyes and you will see a completely different reality.

REACT
1. Think of a moment when you misjudged someone and were proved wrong. How did you feel? Did this experience help you to escape your own prejudices on further occasions? If not, why not?
2. Do you happen to hide your true self from others? In what way could doing so mislead other persons’ opinions about you?

In the days preceding the American Revolution, a prominent Boston silversmith named Paul Revere took on the task of warning colonists of the approaching British army. Riding on horseback, he delivered this warning to those along the way, and many of those in turn set out to warn others as well. He rode all night without rest, delivering the message of warning to every house he could.

**He will be with us every step of the way.**

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we also have been given a message of warning and a truth to share with a dying world. Proverbs 24:11 describes this important task: “Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter” (NIV). While much of the world has rejected Christ's message of love and salvation, many people have never been given the opportunity to hear it. Christ gave us this truth not to hold onto for ourselves, but to share with others. Furthermore, the fact that we have been given so much truth makes us all the more responsible for sharing it (Luke 12:48).

We are meant to share Christ’s truth not only through our words but through our lives as well. We are told to remember God's law and to keep His commands in our heart (Prov. 3:1). Proverbs 3:3 states that mercy and truth must be written in the tablets of our heart. In fact, we can do more harm than good by telling others about Christ's power to save while at the same time demonstrating unrepentant sinfulness in our own lives. By living in such a manner, we will turn people away from the Bread of Life. But if we are willing, Christ will write His law in our hearts as long as we maintain a relationship with Him (Jer. 31:33).

Christ died for our sins, and He is coming again to take us home. We need to be ready for His coming, and we need to warn the world or else we risk being left in the darkness when He returns (Matt. 25:1–13). Sharing that message may seem daunting. But we are not alone. As long as we maintain our relationship with Christ, He will be with us every step of the way (Matt. 28:20).

**REACT**

1. How are you sharing the message of warning to those around you? Through words? Through deeds? Both?
2. When was the last time you told someone about Christ and His gift of salvation and a changed heart?
3. How do you have Christ’s law, mercy, and truth written in your own heart? Explain.

Daniel and Maresa Goodin, Indianapolis, Indiana, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE
How certain are you of absolute truth? You will no doubt encounter challenging assumptions about the nature of truth along life’s journey, as many people hold the opinion that there is no universal truth and no higher power. However, when we earnestly seek truth in God’s Word, we find more certainty than the world can ever offer. This enduring truth finds its basis in the personhood of Jesus Christ, who claims, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Upon meeting and knowing Jesus, truth becomes a living reality for us. The personal impact of this life-changing relationship in our lives demonstrates to those around us the truth that Jesus offers to all.

CONSIDER
• Accepting a personal challenge to share God’s truth and your personal faith experiences with one person every week for the next four weeks.
• Solidifying your faith by exploring in the Bible the ways in which Jesus is truth.
• Journaling a response to the statement, “Truth is . . .”
• Watching a series of YouTube clips that interview contemporary celebrities. How would you rate what they share in terms of honesty and truth? How does this compare to Jesus’ statement, “‘I am the way and the truth and the life’” (John 14:6, NIV)? Honestly consider whom you most model your life after.
• Sitting in a public place (bus stop, café, etc.) and counting the number of people who show some type of prejudice toward another person in comparison to the number of people who show courtesy, regardless of outward appearances. What might this reveal about your community and their need for Jesus?
• Seeing people through Jesus’ eyes by helping a family that is in need of support (financial, food, time, or services). Consider that you may be the hands and feet of Jesus in your acts of kindness and in sharing your faith as opportunity arises.

CONNECT
John 10:1–18.
Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, chapter 1.
Danny Shelton and Jim Gilley, Pillars of the Christian Faith.

---
Nina Atcheson, Margate, Australia
Behind the Mask

“Do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king,
And do not stand in the place of the great”
(Prov. 25:6, NKJV).
Sometimes I wonder whether I am worthy to be in the presence of the Lord. Have you ever wondered the same thing? I always considered myself not to be worthy, especially when trying to measure myself against Jesus. I have struggled to understand what the Lord wants for me to accomplish in my life and what purpose He has for me. How can I live up to His expectations? These expectations are a living reality for many of us who go to church every week. How can we meet such a high standard? In such moments of doubt, I often turn to my Bible for encouragement and guidance. There I find my answer: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart / and lean not on your own understanding; / in all your ways acknowledge him, / and he will make your paths straight” (Prov. 3:5, 6, NIV).

If we do not lean on the Lord for encouragement and guidance, we can fall victim to one of Satan’s many traps (1 Pet. 5:8). Since the fall of Adam and Eve, our very being has been sinful, and we must continuously battle against our sinful tendencies (Prov. 14:12). We have to be mindful of the deceptiveness of the serpent (Gen. 3:1–6). How often has he tempted you? Spoken words are very powerful, and we must be very careful. Because his words are so pleasing to the ear, it is important for us to listen and think before we respond (Prov. 17:28). This is why we should ask the Lord to guide us through our daily lives (James 4:6).

The world has many ways to occupy our minds, which are constantly overloaded by the lights, sounds, and disruptions of this corrupt world. Think about it this way. How can we possibly hope to survive without Jesus by our side? The answer is that we cannot. God wants us to be like Jesus (1 John 2:6). With the Holy Spirit’s help, we are to develop a Christlike character. Like a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly, we are to be transformed into His likeness so that others can see Him in us.

As you study this week’s lesson, remember that God set the guidelines on how to live within this world. Jesus is our Blueprint, our Master Plan. Without Him we are nothing, but with Him we have everything. He provides comfort to those who seek Him in a world that seems hopeless.

---

Yuris Robles, Pearland, Texas, U.S.A.
Deuteronomy can be regarded as Moses’ parting words to the Israelites. It can be divided into three sections or sermons of Moses: (1) the historical exodus of the Israelites (chapters 1–4), (2) the set of laws and regulations (chapters 4–28), and (3) an exhortation to remember and respect God’s covenant.

“Our speech is a test of how wise we have become.”

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29, NIV). Even though we cannot fathom the secrets of the Most High (Rom. 11:33, 34, NIV), we are to diligently search the Scriptures in order to understand what God has revealed to us. One of the Bible’s magnificent revelations is the second coming of Jesus. I have always wondered how Moses felt as he stood on Pisgah’s peak, on the brink of the Promised Land but not allowed to enter it (Deut. 34:1–4). As Adventists, do we wholeheartedly look forward to the Second Coming that is promised to us? Do our lives reflect our desire for eternity?

The major themes in Proverbs support our desire to be citizens of heaven. These themes include wisdom, relationships, speech, work, and success.¹ Of speech, it is written that “what we say shows our real attitude toward others. How we talk reveals what we’re really like. Our speech is a test of how wise we have become.”²

“To be wise in our speech we need to use self-control. Our words should be honest and well-chosen.”³

Then there is the issue of gossip. In Proverbs 18:8, we read that the “words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.” It is thought that the word wounds comes “from a verb meaning ‘to swallow greedily.’ ”⁴ “It is as hard to refuse to listen to gossip as it is to turn down a delicious dessert. Taking just one morsel of either one creates a taste for more. You can resist rumors the same way a determined dieter resists candy—never even open the box. If you don’t nibble on the first bite of gossip, you can’t take the second and the third.”⁵

². Ibid.
³. Ibid.
⁵. Life Application Study Bible, p. 1104.
Know Thyself (Prov. 21:23; 23:1–8)

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me” is a childhood rhyme many of us have heard at one time or another. It is catchy enough, but as most of us know, it is also blatantly false. Words, wielded as weapons or strategic implements of deception, can hurt deeply. The book of Proverbs gives counsel and wisdom about the possible effects of the words we use.

Something about being human includes an inherent tendency toward manipulation. We carefully craft our sentences when we're trying to escape from trouble or when we're trying to get something we want but don't deserve (Prov. 21:6). What more do our words have to say about us—who we really are, who we claim to be, and who we desperately desire to be? Why do we sometimes create and re-create the realities around us with our words? Is it possible that what we say has more to do with who we are than we think?

Proverbs 23:6, 7 remind us that the narratives that form our motives tend to define us and that what finally comes out as words has been filtered through those narratives. Thus, the words we speak are merely a byproduct of what is in our hearts. Perhaps, then, the best way to manage the effects of what we say is to pay extremely close attention to our hearts. “To watch over mouth and tongue / is to keep out of trouble” (Prov. 21:23, NRSV).

Going Deep (Prov. 25:2, 3)

God’s knowledge is infinite, and His prerogative to conceal matters is just one reason to honor and exalt Him. “He needs not search into any thing, for he perfectly knows every thing by a clear and certain view, and nothing can be hidden from him; and yet his own way is in the sea and his path in the great waters. There is an unfathomable depth in his counsels, Rom. 11:33.”

Ever since we were created, we have sought to understand and explain the world and natural phenomena around us. From the Age of Enlightenment to the more recent tech boom, we have been fascinated with quantifying the natural world, the seen and the unseen. However, Nobel prizes and other achievements for our academic endeavors only go so far when we push up against the limits of what God has revealed. Knowledge of the human heart and ulterior motives is also something that is a great unknown. The book of Proverbs characterizes this as the futile attempt to measure
the height of heaven or the depth of the earth—both things that “we may
guess at, but cannot measure.”

**Fuel for the Fire (Prov. 26:17–27)**

The world is crying out for authenticity. Ironically, however, the more “real”
something is set up to be, the more we can assume that it’s a fake. Take, for
instance, almost any “reality” show currently in production. Back on the scale
of our daily lives, it’s not difficult to resort to deceiving someone “for fun” and
at the expense of his or her pride. While it may seem entertaining at first,
tales have a way of growing taller the longer they grow unchecked.

The book of Proverbs offers the only solution for containing the disastrous
effects of gossip and lies—remove the tinder because there can’t be a fire if
there is no material to ignite (Prov. 26:20, 21). Proverbs also exposes other
ways in which we can be covert in our dealings with others. Smooth talk that
obscures wicked intentions is “like the glaze covering [of] an earthen ves-
sel” (Prov. 26:23, NRSV). It’s pretty on the outside but fundamentally cracked
beneath.

Hatred seems to be the basis for deceit, which can tear people apart.
We are counseled not to even believe the sweet words of someone who
is full of hate (Prov. 26:24–26). No wonder hate is equated with murder! It
drives the people it infects to inflict destruction. Appropriately, the judgment
for those who set out to mislead others seems to be that they themselves will
be caught in the same trap they have set (Prov. 26:27).

**Fear Obscures; Love Exposes (Prov. 27:6, 17; Proverbs 29)**

God desires that we should be open with Him and with each other. He
searches our hearts completely and thus knows us better than we know
ourselves. Sometimes we trick ourselves into thinking that we can hide from
God and manipulate Him for our purposes. After all, Adam and Eve thought
the same thing when they were hiding from God.

We may not know each other’s true motives, but that doesn’t give us li-
cense to mislead others for our own gain. As our friendship with God deep-
ens, and we get to know each other better, we will be able to better emulate
the love that God has toward us. Where there is perfect love, there is no fear.
And where there is no fear, there is no cause to deceive (1 John 4:18–21).

**REACT**

1. Why is it so difficult to be genuine? In other words, why is it sometimes
easier to bend the truth when we are in certain situations?
2. What scares you the most about being “real”?
3. How can you keep from fueling the fire of gossip or lies in your life?

---

1. “Proverbs Chapter 25,” Matthew Henry’s Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible,
/Pro/Pro_025.cfm.
2. Ibid.

J. Kijana Knight-Torres, Austin, Texas, U.S.A.
"Flattering words are sweet to the unconsecrated heart, and some who think they are standing firm, are dazed, allured, and intoxicated with hopes that will never be realized. A great wrong has been done in this way. All should think and speak modestly of their own capabilities, and should be careful not to encourage pride and self-esteem in others. Men and women, unless consecrated to God, are weak in moral power and may be entirely mistaken in their estimate of human ability and of what constitutes Christian fidelity. Present no inducements which will lessen the interest of any in building up an institution which God has said should be built up."¹

"The world is indeed full of hurry, and of pride, selfishness, avarice, and violence; and it may seem to us that it is a waste of time and breath to be ever in season and out of season, and on all occasions to hold ourselves in readiness to speak words that are gentle, pure, elevating, chaste, and holy, in the face of the whirlwind of confusion, bustle, and strife. And yet words fitly spoken, coming from sanctified hearts and lips, and sustained by a godly, consistent Christian deportment, will be as apples of gold in pictures of silver. You have been as one of the vain talkers and have appeared as one of the world. You have sometimes been careless in your words and reckless in your conversation and have lowered yourself as a Christian in the opinion of unbelievers. You have sometimes spoken of the truth; but your words have not borne that serious, anxious interest that would affect the heart. They have been accompanied with light, trivial remarks that would lead those with whom you converse to decide that your faith is not genuine and that you do not believe the truths you profess. Words in favor of the truth, spoken in the calm self-possession of a right purpose and from a pure heart, will do much to disarm opposition and win souls. But a harsh, selfish, denunciatory spirit will only drive further from the truth and awaken a spirit of opposition."²

**REACT**

Think of a time when someone spoke words of truth to you. What made you accept (or not accept) their words? List some ways to combine our words and actions as we speak words of truth to people in our lives.

2. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 247.

Heidi Martella Baumgartner, Auburn, Washington, U.S.A.
Many of us have spent years trying to present ourselves as something we are not. As children, we wore towel capes and did our best to convince everyone that we were superheroes. In middle school, we were desperate to prove that we were as cool as everyone else. By high school, we just wanted to pretend to be what passes for normal. The trouble comes later, when we try to fool ourselves, when we think we have everything figured out. The reality is that we are no more perfect now than when we were superheroes jumping off the couch.

Approach honesty with Christ’s love in mind.

Putting on a mask helps no one. At best, you are lying to everyone who knows you. At worst, you convince even yourself that you don’t need help. It conceals the truth about you from you and everyone else—the truth that you are a sinful person in need of God’s grace (Rom. 3:23).

Proverbs tells us to be wary of thinking that we have all the answers. But it also reminds us that we have a responsibility to lift others up (27:17). The only way to do that is to be genuine. Put aside the mask and really open up to God and to your friends so you can help yourself and them more effectively.

Be humble. Admit that you might not be as put together as you think. Take loving correction from the Bible and from your friends in the spirit that Christ would, and prayerfully consider altering your behavior.

Be honest. When you see yourself clearly, you are better able to see others. You would not tell a friend that she looks great and then not mention the huge stain on the back of her blouse. Truth-telling is a mark of a trustworthy person.

Be loving. You do not need to yell across a crowded room that your friend’s blouse is ruined. Taking off your mask does not mean putting off people. Approach honesty with Christ’s love in mind (Eph. 4:15–17).

Be careful. Offering honesty in love to the person concerned is not the same as telling everyone else what is wrong with your friend’s character. Perhaps you are being genuine, but you are not being kind. Avoid gossip and initiating conflicts. Even if what you have to say is true, not everyone needs to hear it, and you were probably not appointed mediator in other people’s altercations (Prov. 26:17, 20).

REACT

1. How can lying to yourself hurt others? In what ways might your self-perception affect your friends?
2. Which does Proverbs seem to value more: honesty or love? Explain.

Esther Myers, Ooltewah, Tennessee, U.S.A.
As Christians, we strive to discern between good and evil, between friends and enemies. Sometimes we resolve these things with simple maxims: “friends are always there for each other;” “honesty is the best policy;” or “follow the road less traveled.” However, life is much more complicated than what a vague aphorism can grasp. With these, it’s easy to get caught in the snare of the pseudo-intellectual who reads one chapter of the Bible and thinks she is suddenly a theologian or in the snare of the first year macroeconomics student who declares that he knows how to fix the economy.

By definition, a pseudo-intellectual is “a person who wants to be thought of as having a lot of intelligence and knowledge but who is not really intelligent or knowledgeable.”* So basically, it is about having and flaunting false wisdom. It is about speaking in such a way as to sound wise without actually having a deep understanding of what you are pretending to be wise about, which is of no value whatsoever to the listener.

In a similar manner, Paul tells us that with any message we hear, we shouldn’t readily accept or deny it. “Test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil” (1 Thess. 5:21, 22, NIV). The question is, how can we plausibly test everything? Studying the Bible is a good start. Proverbs has a lot to say about the people and ideas we choose to listen to, but in the end, the ability to examine the ambiguities of this complicated world must come from God and our personal relationship with Him.

Proverbs 25:2, 3 states that on certain issues, God is silent, wishing for the wise to use their God-given capacities to discern and learn from the matter themselves. Jesus spoke in parables in order to shade His meanings, because the people weren’t ready for His radical candidness. But with His faithful disciples, He opened their eyes so they might understand. In the same fashion, when things confuse us, we need to ask God to open our eyes with the wisdom that comes only from communing daily with Him.

**REACT**

How does the concept of the pseudo-intellectual or the “frenemy” (a combination of the words friend and enemy) play into the difficulty of distinguishing between the trustworthy and the deceitful?

CONCLUDE
For some people, speaking or doing something without thinking comes easily. Others often carefully weigh their words or consider the consequences of their actions before speaking or acting. This week's lesson presented wise counsel from Proverbs that is beneficial to Christ's followers. Words and actions can cause deep pain or soothing comfort within oneself or others. Regarding spoken words, we read that he “who guards his mouth and his tongue, / Guards his soul from troubles” (Prov. 21:23, NASB). Contemplating what motivates us to say or do something can be distressful, but such self-awareness will help us better emulate the love that God has toward us.

CONSIDER
• Analyzing what motivates you to act in certain ways. Do you readily help others? Are you kind to animals? Are you impatient with certain people? Why? Think of situations real to you and evaluate why you say certain things or act in certain ways.
• Contacting someone who did something especially nice for you or said something particularly meaningful or helpful to you and asking what motivated that person to do so.
• Reflecting upon a time when you or someone you know suffered because of gossip about you or that person. Then read Proverbs 18:8. Sometimes, the gossiper feels remorse and may apologize to the person affected, thereby learning the wisdom of Proverbs 21:23.
• Discussing how following wise counsel from Proverbs can play out in the realm of social media. Then discuss social media examples that caused heartache or worse because someone failed to think about the consequences of their words or actions.
• Create a meme that illustrates a Proverb presented in this week's lesson or one particularly meaningful to you. Here is an example: http://www.christianfunnypictures.com/2013/11/proverbs-31-girl.html.

CONNECT
Psalm 50:23.
“The fear of man brings a snare,  
But whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe”  
(Prov. 29:25, NKJV).
Being the parent of a young child, I was pleased when he, as a toddler facing any difficulty, would exclaim, “Ask Jesus!” If his favorite toy was missing or if he couldn't open a jar, he would exclaim, “Ask Jesus!” Then he would wait for the resolution to the problem. His expectations of God got me excited about asking Him to handle whatever problems came my way. But alas, there were times when God did not immediately answer some of my petitions. Then little Lyhte would be disappointed, and I would have to explain certain characteristics of God.

Placing complete trust in Him means that we believe in His unfailing ability to help us do the things that He asks of us.

Just like my son, we, too, are occasionally faced with the dilemma of wondering whether we can trust God. The resulting cognitive dissonance might mean that we have to choose between having childlike faith or trusting in our “grown-up” judgment. Often we take matters into our own hands, and when mercifully we see some success, we become overconfident in our own abilities. In 1 Samuel, we view the life of King Saul unfolding—a drama that epitomizes Psalm 32:10. Many were the woes of this great king who lacked faith in the very God who appointed him to an earthly throne to do as He had commanded him. Saul the great became Saul the disgraced as his kingship was torn from him. His confidence in self disintegrated into a puddle of destructive emotions—jealousy, paranoia, and murderous anger. The young man who would be anointed to take his place enters the drama in 1 Samuel 16 and 17, full of steadfast faith in God. His expectations of God fueled his zeal and courage when he confronted the fearsome Goliath. God honored David's faith by providing protection on the battlefield and securing ultimate victory in that battle.

That one snapshot of biblical history offers us valuable insight into the issue of having faith in God. The point being made is not that trusting God will result in stardom, nor does it mean the absence of disappointment. Instead, we see that placing complete trust in Him means that we believe in His unfailing ability to help us do the things that He asks of us. May you know the peace of placing your complete trust in the all-knowing, ever-loving God!
Our memory text for this week contrasts two approaches to life: the fear of man versus trust in the Lord. A person who trusts God maintains obedient respect for Him (Deut. 10:20). However, a person who does not “neglects his duty or does what he knows to be wrong,” thus endangering his or her salvation.* However, the Bible does not automatically condemn all fear. It commands a healthy degree of fear toward one’s parents (Exod. 20:12), spiritual leaders (Heb. 13:17), and secular leaders (Prov. 24:21; Rom. 13:1). Therefore, this healthy fear cannot be the subject of our text. Rather, as the contrast reveals, the fear of man that brings a snare is any fear that replaces our trust in the Lord.

David chose to place his trust in the Lord. His reply to Saul reveals how he made this decision.

The Decision (Genesis 3)

The first humans to prioritize the fear of man above their trust in the Lord were the first humans. The Bible does not go into detail regarding the decision Adam and Eve made to eat the forbidden fruit, nor does it reveal the thought processes that led to their decision. However, it is clear that they decided to believe the counsel of another rather than God’s counsel. Eve decided to listen to the serpent. Adam decided to listen to Eve.

From then on, all humans have had and will have to decide how they will respond to Satan’s temptations. Whether consciously or unconsciously, we are daily deciding between the fear of man and trusting in the Lord. When we choose the style of our clothing, our friends, our spouse, our career, our entertainment, et cetera, we choose between worldly solutions or godly preferences. Will we follow Adam and Eve’s example? Or will we follow Jesus’ example by placing our trust in God above all else (John 8:29)?

The Limits of Humanity (Ps. 39:5; John 2:23–25; 1 Cor. 1:27; 1 John 4:7, 8)

If we accept the Bible’s teachings concerning the nature of fallen humanity and the nature of God, the two assertions of this week’s memory text become self-evident. Repeatedly, Scripture highlights both the overwhelming limits of humanity and the incredible power of God. Humans have a limited life span (Ps. 39:5), but God is from everlasting to everlasting (Ps. 90:2). Humans are limited in wisdom (1 Cor. 1:27), but all wisdom belongs to God (Dan. 2:23). Humans are limited in loyalty (John 2:23–25), but God’s
faithfulness “reaches to the clouds” (Ps. 36:5, NKJV). Humans are limited in love (1 John 4:7, 8), but God’s love is eternal (Jer. 31:3). We are even limited in our ability to discern our own hearts (Jer. 17:9). But praise God! He knows what is in the heart of each of us (2 Chron. 6:30). Regardless of any one person’s intelligence, eloquence, beauty, achievement, or popularity, to place the counsel of anyone over and above the counsel of our limitless Creator can only put a person in Satan's snare.

When contradictions arise over the origin of life, over what defines a successful person, over appropriate sexuality, proper business ethics, or any other issue, the words of Solomon ring true. “Whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe” (Prov. 29:25, NKJV).

The Safety Net (1 Samuel 17)

No one who believes in the Bible would intellectually deny that trusting in the Lord keeps us safe. However, when we are presented with problems and dilemmas that test our faith, it is human nature to doubt God’s leading. But fortunately, as always, the Bible provides us with many examples of how we can bridge the gulf between our intellectual belief and our actions.

One such example is the story of David and Goliath. In response to David’s willingness to fight the giant, Saul replies, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are a youth, and he a man of war from his youth” (1 Sam. 17:33, NKJV). It would be only logical for David to hold Saul’s counsel in high regard. Surely this skilled and experienced warrior king would know best. But David chose to place his trust in the Lord. His reply to Saul reveals how he made this decision. The boy tells of how God enabled him to kill a lion and a bear (verses 34–36). He then declares, “The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine” (verse 37, NKJV). Thus we learn that David learned how to trust in the Lord.

It is from our personal experiences with the Lord that we learn to trust only Him. It is not so much that we are lacking in experiences but that we do not learn from them. Saul surely experienced a great many things, all of which could have taught him how to trust God. However, he did not stop to consider how those events could help him trust God.

David, on the other hand, declared, “I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your works” (Ps. 143:5, NKJV). If we, like David, determine to remember the times in our lives when God has shown Himself trustworthy, we also will learn to choose the safety of trusting in the Lord instead of our fears.

REACT

1. In what ways are you inclined to place the fear of man above trust in the Lord?
2. What are some experiences you have had with the Lord that have taught you to trust Him?


Ean Nugent, Bowie, Maryland, U.S.A.
“We should not present our petitions to God to prove whether He will fulfill His word, but because He will fulfill it; not to prove that He loves us, but because He loves. ‘Without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewar被告人 of them that diligently seek Him.’ Heb. 11:6.

“Often when Satan has failed of exciting distrust, he succeeds in leading us to presumption.”

“But faith is in no sense allied to presumption. Only he who has true faith is secure against presumption. For presumption is Satan’s counterfeit of faith. Faith claims God’s promises, and brings forth fruit in obedience. Presumption also claims the promises, but uses them as Satan did, to excuse transgression. Faith would have led our first parents to trust the love of God, and to obey His commands. Presumption led them to transgress His law, believing that His great love would save them from the consequence of their sin. It is not faith that claims the favor of Heaven without complying with the conditions on which mercy is to be granted. Genuine faith has its foundation in the promises and provisions of the Scriptures.

“Often when Satan has failed of exciting distrust, he succeeds in leading us to presumption. If he can cause us to place ourselves unnecessarily in the way of temptation, he knows that the victory is his. God will preserve all who walk in the path of obedience; but to depart from it is to venture on Satan’s ground. There we are sure to fall. The Saviour has hidden us, ‘Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.’ Mark 14:38. Meditation and prayer would keep us from rushing unbidden into the way of danger, and thus we should be saved from many a defeat.”*

Yet sometimes we feel as if our prayers are not answered. If we are not obeying God’s law, we cannot expect Him to answer our prayers. For example, good parents wouldn’t reward their children for not doing their chores.

**REACT**

1. Is your faith as deep as it should be? If not, what faith-building activities can you engage in on a daily basis?

2. In what ways do you see yourself forsaking God’s law? What can you do, if anything, to change?

Modern psychology would have us believe that we can achieve anything we desire through our own efforts. However, such self-sufficiency has a way of seeping into every crevice of our lives, robbing us of a saving relationship with Christ. When we believe that we know more than God, we fall prey to the deceits of Satan. Thankfully, God offers us a plan that directs us to Him. That plan involves His law of love.

This law is also characterized as a schoolmaster. The words schoolmaster or tutor stem from the Greek word paidagōgos. “In Greek households, the paidagōgos was a supervisor of, and companion to, boys. He accompanied them to school, protected them from harm, kept them from mischief, and had the right to discipline them. . . .

“The role of the paidagōgos is an apt illustration. . . . ‘The law’ served as the guardian, supervisor, or custodian of the chosen people in Old Testament times, and like the paidagōgos, was charged with their moral training.”*

According to Psalm 19:7, 8, the perfect law of the Lord converts the soul, makes wise the simple, and enlightens the eyes. The law reveals the wretchedness of our humanity and the fruitlessness of trying to be self-sufficient. It makes it clear that no amount of wisdom, strength, or action on our part can save us.

When we recognize the despair of our humanity, we will yearn for a solution to save us—a power that is greater than our intellect, wisdom, and capabilities. That solution is Jesus, and the law drives us to Him—the only righteous One who can make us right in the eyes of God.

We must accept by faith what Jesus has done for us. When we faithfully move in the direction that the law leads and when we accept by faith Jesus’ righteousness for our wretchedness, we come under the tutelage of the greatest Teacher ever to live. We can depend solely on Him. With Him, we experience liberty, a new life, and the joy that occurs when we let go and let God.

**REACT**

1. What about your life and your experience with God convinces you that His law is in your best interest?
2. How can you personally overcome self-sufficiency?
3. What does attempting to be self-sufficient reveal about the nature of your faith in God?

* The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, 2nd ed., vol. 6, p. 961.

Dentrecia Blanchette, St. Kitts, West Indies
Learning to walk can cause anxiety, fear, hope, and many other emotions that either compel children to take their first steps or prevent them from doing so. However, after conquering their emotions and stepping off, they find that each step becomes increasingly sturdy until they are running and jumping happily.

At times, we might even step away from the guardrails.

Much like a child who develops the ability to walk through practice, Christians must develop their faith by practicing their faith. And with each fresh revelation regarding faith, one’s faith will inevitably grow. How then can we practice or develop faith?

Hold on to the guardrails. Each one of us is to present ourselves “to God as one approved” (2 Tim. 2:15, NIV). We must delve into His Word in order to become acquainted with its precepts, principles, and promises, which act as guardrails. These principles, precepts, and promises guide us in how to live. They lead us away from sin and toward salvation. As we hold on to them, we learn about what we should hope for.

When we learned to walk as children, we clung to our parents and furniture for support. As we continually learn what it means to live by faith, we are to hold firm the Word of God.

Hold on even when you can’t see to take the next step. There will be times in life when we won’t know what to do or which decisions to make. We will be tempted to lose hope, to let go of the guardrails, to let go of God’s promises. Yet even then, God continues to ask us to prove Him right. And as we do so, our faith will grow stronger every day. With each step, we will gain spiritual strength and more confidence in the “treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:19–21).

Beware of pitfalls. It is unlikely that every step we take in the Christian walk will come easily or that we will never fall or lose hope. At times, we might even step away from the guardrails. So when we do fall or lose hope, we need to seek advice. We need to remember what a thrill it was when we first accepted Christ as our Savior. Then we will remember that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him” (Rom. 8:28, NIV).

REACT

Think about the things or beliefs in which you have put your confidence and why you came to have so much confidence in them. Then consider how having this confidence has or has not improved your life. Based on your response, which of these items will you need to discard?

Heb. 11:1

Stephan Joseph, St. Kitts and Nevis, West Indies
Christ bore all of our sins. Did He even bear our faithlessness? Imagine that each splinter in His cross is a personal sin that He feels the weight of while perceiving its specific origin. Wouldn't it be great if we had a faith meter above our heads telling us exactly how much more we need to move that mountain? No! That would defeat the purpose. Faith is naturally immaterial and immeasurable, thus granting us the gift of continually seeking to increase it.

How was it that the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 had so much faith? They lived and died by faith and the law! God didn't establish His laws just for fun. Whether or not we understand them, there's a reason for each one. Abide by His Word, even if deviating from it seems like it will produce good results.

Obedience to God's will creates a faithful heart that seeks to understand Him. Such obedience often transcends factual knowledge and always gives way to wisdom. Consider that maybe Abel's offering of first fruits was not yet a proclaimed law but a product of his faith in the Lord's ability to provide beyond what was sacrificed. What a way to live the law by faith!

What causes us to lose faith? When prayer requests seem unfulfilled, we may wonder whether we lacked faith. Remember, however, that our prayers may be fulfilled in many different ways. What about two people praying for opposing things? Why did one person receive and the other did not? Did the receiver have more faith? Was the other person too wicked for his or her prayer to be answered, as Proverbs 28:9 suggests? Are we praying His will be done instead of ours? You've heard it said, “Speak it into existence.” But where does such faith come from—you yourself or God? Seeking God first and living His law provides us with what we truly need (Matt. 6:33). It gradually eliminates our selfish desires, which are fueled by our misunderstanding of God. His law diminishes our yearning for all that is unnecessary and gives us wisdom to know what to ask for (Prov. 28:5).

Are you living God's law and walking with Him daily? I try to imagine the Holy Spirit gliding before me, while Jesus is at my side or carrying me like a child upon His shoulders, and God is all around me. This vision usually lasts for about ten seconds before I am distracted. How long would it last for you?

Neil Braithwaite, Washington, District of Columbia, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE
When you are faced with trials, where do you turn to relieve your stress? Junk food, excessive shopping, alcohol? Do you scurry to these bad habits because you believe they will somehow save you from your troubles? Don't forget that there is only one Stress-reliever who has already saved you. If you would but scream out to Jesus, like the father whose boy was demon-possessed: “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24, NIV), you would be sheltered from your hardships because of the love He has for you. There is never a need to replace God with the false “comforts” that call out our names. Instead, let us cry out to Him when we are distressed.

CONSIDER
• Eating at one of your favorite restaurants. Going out to eat takes a lot of faith in the cooks, dishwashers, and servers. Pray for the hands that prepare your food.
• Finding a spiritual mentor or close family or friend whom you can open up to. Together, pray for more faith in your life, and as your trust begins to build, share your ups and downs. Older (or younger) adults have a lot of wisdom and experience they can impart.
• Giving tithes and offerings. Give a tenth of what you get paid, following the biblical principle (Deut. 14:22). Also, give offerings to support your church and the worldwide mission of the gospel. Have faith that God will use your money to hasten His second coming.
• Being faithful in your relationship. Whether you are dating, engaged, or married, being faithful and loving your significant other is required for success. God is faithful to us and commands us to be faithful.
• Finding a piece of wood and contemplating how Christ died for you. Compare how a splinter’s molecular origin and each space that is trapped between its elementary particles is likened to the weight of faithfulness.
• Setting up an obstacle course “Trust Game” in an open field. You can use orange cones or chairs. With a group of friends, blindfold one person at a time, and have the others direct the person through the course without hitting the obstacles.

CONNECT
Isaiah 7:9; Matthew 6:30; 8:10; Romans 5:1; Hebrews 11.
Ellen G. White, Faith and Works.
Cam Biakabutuka, Zaire, Congo
The Humility of the Wise

“‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven’”
(Matt. 5:3, NKJV).
Life is full of challenges. One day you can wake up happy, another day you can be disappointed and sad. Today you might have all you want, but tomorrow you could lose it all. Such challenges test our faith and our ability to persevere during life's turbulent times. Such was the case when I was living with my brother and his family. At first, life was good and all of us were happy. Suddenly, however, tragedy struck. We lost our father in a grisly road accident, leaving our mother a helpless widow.

We had never witnessed death in our family, and our father’s demise devastated us all. Then, less than six months later, the brother I was staying with lost his job. His children could not remain in their school, and we were all forced to relocate upcountry so they could attend schools that were less expensive. My brother also had to look for a new job. I was in college, so paying my school fees became yet another problem.

This situation echoes the story of Job, who lost all his worldly possessions and went through great suffering. He was an example of righteousness, humility, and innocence. His case put God’s reputation on trial, for Satan would like us to believe that God should not allow bad things to happen to His people. However, Job remained faithful. Because he walked humbly with God, he was able to triumph in the end.

Many others of us also have experienced difficult, troubling times. Sometimes we must go through such situations, not because we have done anything to deserve it but so that our trust in God will grow. What matters is that we remain humble and faithful before Him. In many cases, we will find that our suffering is not a result of anything wrong we have done. Rather, it is a test of our faithfulness in Him. In such circumstances, He requires us to trust Him, even when the situation looks impossible. And so this week’s topic is about being humble and how this virtue can help us to be wise children of God, who “is a shield to those who take refuge in him” (Prov. 30:5, NIV).
Humility is a necessary virtue for any Christian to have, especially those in leadership roles. The best way to learn humility is to consider the life of Christ. Many people did not understand what He meant by servant leadership. Leaving the second highest position in heaven to dwell on earth with sinful human beings was in itself an act of humility. However, most people then and now consider humility to be an inferior quality. Yet the way Christ expressed it in His life can often change that view (Matt. 20:28; Phil. 2:3–8).

John Dickson believes it is important to understand the complex relationship between leadership and humility so that people can lead through persuasion, example, and influence rather than from a position of authority. The story of Rehoboam is an example of what ruling from the position of authority can do to people (1 Kings 12:1–24). Stubborn pride and powerful authority are not a good mix for making a good leader. A good leader should be humble and help to transform peoples' lives.

“‘The real power of effective leadership is maximizing other people’s potential, which inevitably demands ensuring they get the credit. When our ego won’t let us build another person up, then the effectiveness of the organization goes down.’”

“When leaders appear aloof and unapproachable, we admire them, but we don’t imitate them. But humble leaders: We don’t just admire them; we aspire to be like them.”

Humility helps us to generate new knowledge and abilities, because when we are humble we recognize our inability. Such was the character of Christ; His cross should shape our own view of humility so that we may recognize our weaknesses and allow Him to guide our lives. A proud person is seldom willing to learn. However, a humble person yields to new knowledge, especially when it comes to his or her relationship with Christ.

**REACT**

How can you personally combine humility and power to lead effectively?

---


---

David Onyango, Nairobi, Kenya
Recognizing Who We Are (Prov. 30:1–3, 32, 33)

As human beings, we tend to follow the desires of our heart. Many times, we like being concerned with what benefits us. In other words, we become proud. The Bible talks about pride a number of times as an evil habit that never bodes well, especially for the life of a Christian (Prov. 8:13). In fact, the Bible mentions that pride is the original cause of sin (Ezek. 28:15). Before Lucifer fell, “he was next to Christ in power and authority and head of the angelic hosts.”* However, pride in his position ultimately got the better of him.

Proud people mock God, while humble people seek His guidance.

Pride can just as easily consume us as it did Lucifer (Prov. 16:18). If we want to become wise sons and daughters of God, we need to be humble, because humility helps us to be a servant rather than a master. Humility also helps us to readily submit to God’s will and to desire godly knowledge and wisdom. The relationship between wisdom and humility is such that humility helps us to realize that we are weak and foolish and that we need God to guide us. Being humble gives us the power to allow Him to fill the void in our lives through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We can only be saved after we recognize that without God, we are incapable of achieving anything. Humility, therefore, plays a great role in our salvation.

Riches, Humility, and Wisdom (Luke 18:18–25)

Riches are temporal blessings that God at times bestows upon us so we can help others. Satan, however, hopes that these blessings will distract us from God (Matt. 19:16–24). If used wrongly, wealth and other blessings can lead to pride, which eventually destroys a person’s humility. God desires for rich people to be humble. When God blesses us with riches, we should use those riches to bring glory to Him by helping people in need. We should never, at any time, allow the riches God has given us to distract us from this goal.

Neither Poverty nor Riches (Prov. 30:7–9)

If you had an opportunity to choose between riches and poverty, which would you choose? Most likely you would choose riches. However, the writer of Proverbs teaches us that it is better for us to have neither poverty
nor riches. Being rich can easily cause a person to be arrogant. Poverty, on the other hand, can cause a person to steal. It is therefore good to have only what is enough for us. Having just enough of what we need can help us to remain humble. It can help us to remember to seek God’s guidance in all that we do. Instead of desiring worldly wealth, let us focus on heavenly riches, which preserve those who are humble.

**Negative Effects of Being Proud (Prov. 30:11–14, 17, 20)**

Pride can lead to all sorts of immoral desires, including arrogance and a “me-first” attitude. If carried to excess, pride will contribute to a person’s downfall. True wisdom gives us humility, which in turn enables us to recognize our need for God’s guidance. Proud people often think that they do not need God. Humble people, however, generally are the first to desire God’s presence in their life. Proud people mock God, while humble people seek His guidance.

The fifth commandment urges us to honor our parents (Exod. 20:12). Doing so helps us to understand and to appreciate all that they have done for us and all that they desire to continue doing for us. Realizing that without our parents’ guidance we would be less than what we are can help us to appreciate them more and to be less boastful about what we think we have accomplished on our own.

**Consequences of Being Proud (Prov. 30:17, 20)**

“Pride leads to disgrace, / but with humility comes wisdom” (Prov. 11:2, NLT). People who are too proud of themselves and their accomplishments, who do not recognize God’s hand in their success, have chosen the way of folly. On the other hand, God’s humble people are promised a place in His kingdom (Matt. 5:3). When we are young, our lives are vibrant with many activities. Regardless of whether we are studying for a degree or gainfully employed in a career of our choice, it is important to remain humble and to seek assistance from God.

**REACT**

1. How do you consider yourself before God? Based on what you own, your social position, and the knowledge you have acquired in various learning institutions, do you think you can manage life on your own without God’s support? Explain your answers.
2. How can you use what you have to bring glory to God?
3. What is the difference between being humble and being proud?
4. What is the reward for being humble? What is the reward for being proud?


Tony Philip Oreso, Nairobi, Kenya
Although he was a great leader, Moses showed humility and reverence toward God. He “was fitted to take pre-eminence among the great of the earth, to shine in the courts of its most glorious kingdom, and to sway the scepter of its power. His intellectual greatness distinguishes him above the great men of all ages. As historian, poet, philosopher, general of armies and legislator, he stands without a peer. Yet with the world before him, he had the moral strength to refuse the flattering prospects of wealth and greatness and fame.”

“Wrong habits and customs must be shaken off.”

With humility and a contrite heart, Moses left a palace and fled to Midian, where he became a shepherd. Many people today would find such a radical change unacceptable. However, “he looked beyond the gorgeous palace, beyond a monarch’s crown, to the high honors that will be bestowed on the saints of the Most High in a kingdom untainted by sin.”

“In all who have been chosen to accomplish a work for God the human element is seen. Yet they have not been men of stereotyped habits and character, who were satisfied to remain in that condition. They earnestly desired to obtain wisdom from God, and to learn to work for Him.”

“In order to receive God’s help, man must realize his weakness and deficiency; he must apply his own mind to the great change to be wrought in himself; he must be aroused to earnest and persevering prayer and effort. Wrong habits and customs must be shaken off; and it is only by determined endeavor to correct these errors, and to conform to right principles, that the victory can be gained.”

“Humility and reverence should characterize the deportment of all who come into the presence of God. In the name of Jesus we may come before Him with confidence, but we must not approach Him with the boldness of presumption, as though He were on a level with ourselves.”

**React**

1. Should we be humble to God and to our fellow man as well? Explain.
2. What is the relationship between humility and wisdom?

---

2. Ibid., p. 246.
3. Ibid., p. 248.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 252.

Patience Achieng, Nairobi, Kenya
Being humble requires that we do away with ego and pride. Being humble requires us to eliminate the spirit of competition among ourselves. Competition usually promotes the concept that one person is first and best while others lag behind. This eventually can cause those who are ahead to become proud and those who are left behind to be humiliated and to feel inferior.

Christ wants us to shun pride and ego, the building blocks of competition. As His followers, He desires us to support each other and to reach out to our brothers and sisters who are in need and in difficult situations. We should do this regardless of our position in society, our level of education, and how much money we have in our bank.

We cannot achieve humility by trying to be humble, by suppressing our pride or hiding our ego. We receive humility when we pray for God to help us forego our own status for the good of others.

Following are some points we need to remember in our quest to be humble:

1. **Put yourself last.** If you desire to be truly humble, you need to put other peoples’ interests first. This will promote a spirit of selfless service in you. Ask God to help you recognize the needs of others and to reach out to them with a willing heart.

2. **Be submissive.** A humble person submits to God’s correction and seeks understanding from Him. *Humility* is a synonym for meekness, which is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). Humility cannot reside in a proud person who is always thinking that he or she is better than others.

3. **Do not expect a “Thank You.”** When humility takes over your heart, you are able to bless others without expecting anything in return. That is the spirit of servant leadership taught to us by Christ.

**REACT**

1. How can you protect your humility once you have it?
2. Should we continue being humble if no one recognizes what we are doing? Explain your answer.
3. What is the relationship between humility and wisdom?
Humility is not just a characteristic to be developed by individuals. Various groups within church congregations also need to develop a collective humility. Individual churches are quite often communities that encompass many different groups—infants, children, teens, young adults, middle-aged adults, senior citizens, men, women, people with special needs, and quite possibly people from various parts of the world. And of course, there is always the diversity of opinions between all of a church’s members. Young people are generally more active in church activities such as choir or community outreach. They often look to older members for guidance. However, in some instances, the two groups might not work together harmoniously. Where humility is lacking in a church, the various groups are likely to oppose each other’s ideas.

Christ desires His people to coexist harmoniously, even when there is a diversity of opinions. Humility recognizes that Christ is the ultimate source of authority. Church members should therefore practice equality so that members listen to one another and serve each other’s interests equally. Church participation works best when humility exists among the various groups.

Everyone is blessed with a variety of gifts. We can be in leadership positions or participate in other church activities based on our level of education or professional experience. However, while in such positions, we should be ready to serve others first before we exercise authority and influence. Humility helps us to understand rightly our position between God and our fellow men and women around us. Humility is the opposite of being aggressive and arrogant, boastful and vain.

In church, we exist as one family with the inherent dignity that God confers upon each one of us. When humility is absent in our lives, we are unable to appreciate the dignity and worth of God’s people, no matter who they are. Remember always the Bible’s golden rule that Christ gave us: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets’” (Matt. 7:12, NIV).

Humility helps us to understand that we are not experts in everything. What we do not know will always exceed what we do know. That is why we should never consider ourselves better than anyone else or use what we know to suppress the ideas of others. In essence, humility is what makes the difference between a wise person and someone who is arrogant and power hungry.

Philip Opudo, Eldoret, Kenya
CONCLUDE
From a human perspective, humility is not high on the list of desirable qualities. Many people associate humility with weakness and a lack of self-confidence. However, from a Christian perspective, humility is something to strive for. It is the reality check that enables us to have a true appreciation of our abilities and talents, and it helps us to recognize our great need for God’s presence in our lives. Humility enables us to see others from God’s perspective and to more fully appreciate His amazing sacrifice. It motivates us to put aside anything that would separate us from our living heavenly Father.

CONSIDER
• Wearing a pair of sunglasses and thinking about how they change how you see the room around you. Imagine that humility is like a pair of sunglasses and reflect on how a humble spirit changes how you see the world.
• Asking five people what they think it means to be humble. How do their thoughts agree or disagree with the biblical view of humility?
• Using a large sheet of paper to trace your feet. Cut out the two shapes. On one foot write or draw words and actions to illustrate humility. Pin it on the wall with the toes pointing upward. On the other, write or draw words and actions to illustrate pride. Pin it on the wall with the toes facing downward. During the week, look at the shapes and add to the words and pictures. Which foot best represents your life?
• Singing or listening to the song “Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God,” http://www.hymnal.net/hymn.php/ns/120.
• Counting the number of times in a day you put someone else first.
• Writing the word LEADER horizontally on a piece of paper. Find a word for each letter that describes a quality of a humble leader; for example, L—listens.

CONNECT
Isaiah 2:9; Micah 6:7, 8; Matthew 23:12; Philippians 2:1–8.
Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, “Two Worshipers,” pp. 150–163; Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing.

Audrey Andersson, St. Albans, England
Women and Wine

“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”
(Prov. 31:3, 4, NKJV).

Wisdom! What a beautiful thing to ask of God, for as Proverbs 3:13 says, “Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, / and the one who gets understanding” (ESV).

The book of Proverbs ends with a mother’s wisdom to her son, King Lemuel, who is possibly Solomon. She warns him of two great dangers: alcohol and women. Sadly, the Bible records that Solomon did not heed the warning. In Ecclesiastes (a book likely authored by Solomon), it is written, “I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine. . . . [I took] many concubines, the delight of the sons of man. . . . Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness” (2:3, 8, 13, ESV). Surely this is a lament of great bitterness, for Solomon did not follow this wise advice! We would do well not to heed his example.

In Proverbs 31:8, 9, the mother gives her son this charge: “Open your mouth for the mute, / for the rights of all who are destitute. / Open your mouth, judge righteously, / defend the rights of the poor and needy” (ESV). James 1:27 echoes these words: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (ESV).

Though the commands in Proverbs 31 are directed toward a king, do they not apply to all of us? We would all do well to seek wisdom, despise sin, and honor Jesus Christ as Lord in our hearts. I exhort you to examine yourself this week and determine whether or not you are devoted to Jesus Christ as your Savior and Master. If not, then please call upon the name of the Lord. Confess your sins and brokenness, and rely wholly on His grace. If you already walk in the steps of Jesus, then continue to pursue righteousness with much prayer and faithfulness. The Lord God will surely bestow wisdom upon the one who humbly asks and believes!

Anna Sophia Auger, Lincoln, Nebraska, U.S.A.
We've come to the end of Proverbs. It started with a wise appeal in five parts (chapters 1–9): wisdom, adultery, other counsels, adultery, and wisdom. Chapters 10–31 consist of wise sayings from several different contributors. The book closes with some practical advice regarding wisdom (avoiding alcohol, which clouds the mind) and women (finding the right type of wife).

“For every good thing given by God, Satan has provided a counterfeit—including a counterfeit wisdom.”

“It Is Not for Kings to Drink Wine” (Prov. 1:20–33; Proverbs 8; 31:4, 5)

The mother’s first warning to her son Lemuel (another name for Solomon) is that alcohol “is not for kings” (Prov. 31:4, NKJV). A king is the leader of a nation, the judge and protector of his people. Alcohol would impair his judgment, causing him to “forget the law” and to “pervert the justice of all of the afflicted” (verse 5, NKJV). Alcohol would only disable the king from carrying out God’s calling.

God sets His people apart as a nation of priests and kings (Exod. 19:6; Rev. 1:6). We know the harm that alcohol causes. However, it’s more important to realize the danger of anything at all that might impair our ability to perform the work God calls us to do.

“She Is More Precious than Rubies” (Prov. 31:10–31)

The other piece of motherly advice found in Proverbs concerns the choice of a spouse. Lemuel’s mother counsels that, like wisdom, the right woman is more valuable than anything else. There are some good principles here for both young men (what to look for) and young women (what to strive for). A virtuous woman is loved and trusted by her husband and children. She clothes and feeds her family, and she is good with money. She is strong, and she values quality over quantity. She is wise, tactful, and kind, and she keeps herself busy by taking care of her home. Most important, she fears the Lord. The Hebrew wording “may be interpreted as meaning, ‘a woman of firm character.’”

“The Bigger Picture—Beyond Wise Sayings (Matt. 7:15; 15:8, 9; 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:1–12; Col. 2:6–9)

Christ, the King, is seeking a bride like the woman in Proverbs 31. This woman has a high calling—to minister to the physical and spiritual needs of those around her, to use her time and money economically, and to execute
wisdom and tactfulness in what she says. This is also our calling as the remnant church.

One of the most important qualities of this woman and the remnant church is wisdom. Proverbs 31:26 says, “She opens her mouth with wisdom, / And on her tongue is the law of kindness” (NKJV). In Proverbs 1:33, we read that those who listen to the cry of wisdom will “dwell safely” and “be secure” (NKJV). “While their hearts are touched with pity for those who suffer, they have no fear for themselves. They look forward with confidence to the salvation that has been promised (see Ps. 16:9).” But some people will refuse wisdom’s cry. God honors their freedom to choose against Him, giving them over to their “wine” (Prov. 1:28–31), the deception they have chosen to believe.

For every good thing given by God, Satan has provided a counterfeit—including a counterfeit wisdom. We see this in the Garden of Eden. The serpent directly contradicted God’s word, saying, “ ‘You will not surely die. . . . you will be like God, knowing good and evil’ ” (Gen. 3:4, 5, NKJV). Satan tempted Adam and Eve through their senses and then claimed that this was the path to increased wisdom and knowledge of God. It seemed logical, but it was against God’s Word, and so it had devastating consequences.

We have been warned that in the last days the remnant church will need to be on guard against false doctrine (Matt. 7:15; 15:8, 9; 24:24; Col. 2:6–9; 2 Thess. 2:1–12). Such doctrines, like wine or the adulterous woman of Proverbs, appeal to the senses. They are attractive and seem logical. But anything that discourages the study of God’s Word and that causes us to rely more on feelings than on faith is a deception.

True wisdom is found in the Word of God. The book of Proverbs counsels us to seek this wisdom and to heed the counsel of our Father. No doubt we will encounter some false teachings, especially in the last days. These lies will attempt to lead us away from the sure Word of God and to rely solely on our senses. These lies claim to provide wisdom, but ultimately they lead to adultery with false religion. Let us stay sober (1 Thess. 5:6–8) and keep ourselves pure. Let us cling to God’s word so we can be the virtuous bride. Let us engage in loving and caring for those in need whom God has placed in our lives. This is how we may practice wisdom in our everyday lives.

**REACT**

1. What mission has God given you? Is there anything in your life that, like wine, is keeping you from fulfilling that mission?

2. How well do you think the Seventh-day Adventist Church is living up to the standard God has set for us? Provide reasons for your answer.

---

2. Ibid., p. 951.

---

Rachelle Nelson, Lincoln, Nebraska, U.S.A.
“The youth trust altogether too much to impulse. They should not give themselves away too easily, nor be captivated too readily by the winning exterior of the lover. Courtship, as carried on in this age, is a scheme of deception and hypocrisy, with which the enemy of souls has far more to do than the Lord.”

“No one can so effectually ruin a woman's happiness and usefulness, and make life a heart-sickening burden, as her own husband; and no one can do one hundredth part as much to chill the hopes and aspirations of a man, to paralyze his energies and ruin his influence and prospects, as his own wife. It is from the marriage hour that many men and women date their success or failure in this life, and their hopes of the future life.”

“Let a young man seek one to stand by his side who is fitted to bear her share of life's burdens, one whose influence will ennoble and refine him, and who will make him happy in her love.”

“Take God and your God-fearing parents into your counsel, young friends. Pray over the matter. Weigh every sentiment, and watch every development of character in the one with whom you think to link your life destiny. The step you are about to take is one of the most important in your life, and should not be taken hastily. While you may love, do not love blindly.”

“A prudent wife is from the Lord. ‘The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her...’ ‘She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.’ ‘She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her,’ saying, ‘Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.’ He who gains such a wife ‘findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord.’ Proverbs 19:14; 31:11, 12, 26–29; 18:22.”

**REACT**

If you are in a relationship, ask yourself the following: “Will this union help me heavenward? ... And will it enlarge my sphere of usefulness in this life?”

---

Proverbs 31 opens with a mother’s recommendation about wine. A “strong drink” such as beer and wine may have been the accepted form of anesthetic to deaden physical or emotional pain.1 This form of mental escape was simply not acceptable for a king, who must keep a clear mind.

This brings to mind Luke 12:48, which says that “when someone has been given much, much more will be required” (NLT). As king, Solomon was held to a higher standard than others. Throughout Proverbs, a common theme is illustrated that contrasts the dead with the living, the wicked with the righteous. The line between the two illustrates a simple difference: hope. The wicked live without hope, and as such, may be expected to deaden life with alcohol. In contrast, the king should live as a man of hope, clear minded and filled with energy.

Certainly, this is the credo to which we are all called.

The second area of consideration in Proverbs 31 deals with Solomon’s choice of a wife. A “perfect” woman is one who works hard, builds up the household, supplies strength, and has a compassionate nature and a tongue of kindness. She is strong and possesses excellent qualities. The Hebrew words may be interpreted as meaning, “a woman of firm character.”

Indeed, a virtuous woman as described in the key texts seems impossibly perfect. C. S. Lewis makes an interesting point on this matter: “What is above and beyond all things is so masculine that we are feminine in relation to it.”

We all fall short of the ideal presented to us, but what covers the distance between imperfections and ideal is dedication to serving God. Proverbs 31:30 states, “But a woman who fears the Lord will be greatly praised” (NLT). This verse is placed in the concluding paragraph of Proverbs, a similar position to the command to “fear God and obey His commands” (Eccles. 12:13, NLT). Certainly, this is the credo to which we are all called. Though all fall short of the ideal, Solomon is told to seek a woman whose heart is in the right place. A reverential fear of the Lord will serve to strengthen Solomon’s character as a king and our character as one of God’s own.

**REACT**

Do you believe a woman with all the qualities listed in Proverbs 31 exists today?

---


Cassandra Johnson, Lincoln, Nebraska, U.S.A.
Sculpting clay can be difficult for a novice potter because clay is not naturally pliable. However, with much practice, a workable lump eventually forms. Next, you place the lump on the wheel, which you begin to spin. However, as you wrap your hands around the clay, it begins to ooze through your fingers. You watch the clay go back and forth, unable to find the center of balance. Fortunately, your teacher positions your hands correctly, and the clay becomes centered before your very eyes.

Imagine what life would be like if you let God shape your soul!

How many times do we try to sculpt our own “bowl” (soul) ourselves? We think we have the ability and knowledge to be who God wants us to be, but we really do not. He yearns for us to admit our helplessness and to ask Him to mold our souls. What steps must we take in order for God to mold us?

Confess that we are without knowledge and understanding (Prov. 30:2). This is the first step (like folding of the clay) and often the hardest part of shaping our soul. It is difficult to admit that we have no real godly knowledge.

Ask God for help. Agur asked God for only two things: (1) that falsehood and lies would be kept from him, and (2) that he would have just enough to sustain him (Prov. 30:7, 8). He desired only the necessities of life given to him by God, because he feared that having more than he needed would cause him to forget about God. God needs to be the center of our lives. Otherwise, we stumble back and forth like unbalanced clay on a pottery wheel.

Focus on God. He knows all and sees all. Concentrate on Him. Let Him shape your character. Always consider His never-ending mercy; and always remember how powerful He is. Imagine what life would be like if you let God shape your soul!

When we allow God to be part of the molding process, we become centered on His will. Through the Holy Spirit we are shaped into the people God desires us to be. His great strength makes us malleable. He steadies us as the things of earth spin rapidly around. But most of all, He makes His presence known as we witness ourselves being formed in His likeness. God loves us so much He is more than willing to mold our soul; and He is delighted when we yearn for His help.

**REACT**

1. What can we do to help others allow God to mold them?
2. Why is it important to let God sculpt who we are meant to be?
In biblical times, an Israelite man who married a woman from a different religion was often influenced to worship the idols she worshiped. First Kings 11 records that King Solomon married many women from many nations and, over time, worshiped their gods. Proverbs 31:3, 4—contextualized—is prudent, specific advice to a particular king. In that sense, I recognize why this week’s lesson is titled “Women and Wine.” A king needed to be discerning about whom he married, because his choice would greatly affect his life and his kingdom. He also needed to guard his mind by avoiding any substance that would alter his judgment.

However, taken out of its framework, this text and title can propagate a detrimental belief that many already consciously or subconsciously hold about women, a belief that women—like wine—are inherently destructive and something to be controlled. As a twenty-first century woman who is daily affected by the sexism still prevalent in our culture and in this church that I dearly love, I caution against any notion that even slightly supports taking for granted ideas that devalue any person.

Understand that casually comparing women to wine assists in the already rampant objectification of women. Women are consistently dehumanized in the media, in businesses, politics, schools, and homes, so much so that the idea has become “normal” for men and women alike. Treating women—or any human being—as less than human is not what Jesus supports. Throughout the Gospels, He models love and respect for all people. He did not objectify or discriminate against anyone. Rather, He valued and included everyone. I urge our church to imitate Christ in all issues, without exception.

So, I will add my own advice. Women, “do not give your strength” to men who are corrupt, unethical, or immoral. Strive to live out your full potential as strong, intelligent, loving, compassionate, and hard-working women of God. Do not indulge in any person or substance that hinders your growth, whether men or margaritas.

**REACT**

How can we, as a church, share messages of equality and value for all people groups?
CONCLUDE
Proverbs, the book of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and counsel, closes with final words to both men (verses 1–9) and women (verses 10–31). The concluding chapter summarizes advice to people who would live as spiritual royalty and who would excel in life.

CONSIDER
- Listing to all the reasons you can find in Proverbs 31:4–9 for avoiding wine and “strong drink.”
- Drawing or painting a picture of the woman described in Proverbs 31:10–31.
- Living out Proverbs 31:28 by writing a note to your spouse or parent praising him or her for the qualities you appreciate in this person.
- Interviewing two or three church members about why they abstain from alcoholic beverages.
- Praying through Proverbs 31, asking God to help you live out the character qualities it describes.
- Searching the Web for jewelry made with precious stones such as diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and pearls. Consider the prices of these items. Then meditate on the meaning of Proverbs 31:10.

CONNECT
Isaiah 5:11, 12; Daniel 1:8–18; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10.
Ellen G. White, Counsels for the Church, p. 101, paragraph 5.
Elizabeth George, Discovering the Treasures of a Godly Woman: Proverbs 31.
“Is Alcohol Really Good for You?” (a Vibrant Life tract).
If you have not yet received a copy of CQ for second quarter 2015, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1 The Coming of Jesus


Memory Text: “‘For with God nothing will be impossible’” (Luke 1:37, NKJV).

Key Thought: The Gospel of Luke was written primarily to the Gentiles. Luke himself was a Gentile (Col. 4:10–14), as was Theophilus, to whom the Gospel is addressed. Luke was a physician and a historian. In order to dismiss any idea of mythology with his narrative, Luke places Jesus in the historical context of His times: Herod was the king of Judea (Luke 1:5); Augustus reigned over the Roman Empire (Luke 2:1); and a priest named Zacharias was officiating in the Jerusalem temple (Luke 1:5, 9). Luke 3 mentions six dates related to the ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus. His readers must stand in awe and wonder at the fact that Jesus is real and that through Him, God has occupied human history with the “‘Savior, who is Christ the Lord’” (Luke 2:11, NKJV).

Lesson 2 Baptism and the Temptations


Memory Text: “And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, ‘You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased’” (Luke 3:22, NKJV).

Key Thought: Luke provides a list of historical dignitaries to contrast them with John the Baptist, a humble man of the wilderness and God’s chosen messenger, who was to “prepare the way” for the most significant event in all of human history—the coming of Jesus, the world’s Redeemer. How interesting that God did not choose one of the world’s “great” men to herald the Messiah, but one of the “lowlier”
ones instead. Scholars put all of these historic personalities together and give us a date close to A.D. 27 or 28 for the start of John’s and Jesus’ ministry. It is within the historical time frame of these dignitaries that Jesus was baptized and received the benediction of Heaven that He is God’s “beloved Son” (Luke 3:22). Luke establishes this even before he presents the “orderly account” of the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ.