connect 360

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

The Search for Wisdom

Words to Live By

A Study of Proverbs

Heath Kirkwood
Kendall Lyons
Courtney Gilmore
John Beck

DISCOVER BELIEVE LIVE
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

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The Search for Wisdom: Words to Live By
Connect 360 Bible Study Guide

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How to Make the Best Use of This Issue

Whether you're the teacher or a student—

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. Overview the study. Review the table of contents and read the study introduction. Try to see how each lesson relates to the overall study.
3. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. (You'll see that each writer has chosen a favorite translation for the lessons in this issue. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translation chosen for that unit, of course.)
4. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the writer's comments. The comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible.
5. Read the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application.
6. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and they can also be used in the class session itself.

If you're the teacher—

Do all the things just mentioned, of course. As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. Here are some suggestions to guide your lesson preparation:

A. In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents on pages 14–15 and on the first page of each lesson.
   - Make and post a chart that indicates the date each lesson will be studied.
   - If all your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
   - Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from www.gc2press.org under the "Teacher Helps" menu.
   - Develop a sticker with the lesson dates and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.

B. Get a copy of the *Teaching Guide*, a companion piece to this *Study Guide*. The *Teaching Guide* contains additional Bible comments plus two teaching plans. The teaching plans in the *Teaching Guide* are intended to provide practical, easy-to-use teaching suggestions that will work in your class.

C. After you've studied the Bible passage, the lesson comments, and other material, use the teaching suggestions in the *Teaching Guide* to help you develop your plan for leading your class in studying each lesson.

D. Premium Commentary is now available for $30 at www.gc2press.org. This in-depth commentary is a great resource for teachers.

E. Teaching resource items for use as handouts are available for $20 at www.gc2press.org. under the "Teacher Helps" tab.

F. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.

G. You can receive the lesson preview each week by signing up for the *Baptist Standard* weekly newsletter at no cost. Sign up here: (www.baptiststandard.com/subscription/email).

Writers for this *Study Guide*

Heath Kirkwood wrote lessons one through four. Heath serves as the lead pastor of First Baptist Church, Lorena, Texas. He earned both a Bachelors and Master of Music Degree from the Moores School of Music (University of Houston), and a Master of Divinity from Truett Theological Seminary (Baylor University). He is currently a Doctor of Ministry candidate with a focus on pastoral theology. Heath has been trained and has taught shaped-note convention singing and has been active in southern gospel music for decades. He also enjoys serving in various roles in Baptist life. He and his wife, Amanda, along with their two children enjoy living in their beloved rural community of Lorena.

Kendall Lyons wrote lessons five through seven. Kendall was born and raised in Dallas, Texas. He earned a bachelor's degree in broadcast journalism from Oklahoma Christian University and a Master of Arts degree in Christian Ministry from Dallas Baptist University. He is a cartoonist and creator of the online comic strip "By and By," a story loosely based on Kendall's boyhood years that follows the misadventures of an 11-year-old autistic boy named Walter. Kendall is an advocate for those with ADHD, Autism, and is against bullying. Currently Kendall serves as Director of Intercultural Relations at Criswell College where he leads the institution in expanding diversity and strengthening student and staff

relations. He is married to his wife, Rachel, and they reside in Dallas, Texas.

Courtney Gilmore wrote lessons eight through ten. Courtney has been teaching and writing Bible studies for over 25 years. She is married to her high school sweetheart, Don, and they have two grown children, Erica and Hayden. She started teaching before they were born and has taught every age with them along the way. Today she teaches through the Bible on Podcast and YouTube and publishes her lessons weekly on Substack. She loves the Bible and strives to teach it in a way that is interesting, relatable, relevant, thought-provoking, and applicable to everyone.

John Beck wrote lessons eleven through thirteen plus the optional Easter lesson. Dr. Beck was born and raised in Alabama. He was educated through the Baptist system earning the Bachelor of Arts in Religion from Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama; the Master of Divinity from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary; and the Doctor of Ministry from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. John, now retired, and his wife Sue currently reside in Shelby County, Alabama and previously served as adult life pastor of First Baptist Church in Denton, Texas. He also previously served as pastor of First Baptist Church of Childersburg, Alabama, and pastor of the Forest Hills Baptist Church, also in Alabama. John and Sue have two adult children, Laura and Joel. They also have two grandsons, Sam and Charlie.

Introducing

The Search for Wisdom

Words to Live By

A STUDY OF PROVERBS

Understanding Proverbs

The Book of Proverbs is in the category of wisdom literature. The Hebrew word for Proverbs means oracle or parable. Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, is believed to be one of the authors of the book. The second half of the book indicated that several authors contributed to the project. It was written in the tenth century during the time of Israel's united kingdom. Israel experienced years of peace and prosperity during this time. The Lord appeared to Solomon one day in a dream and told Solomon to ask for anything he wanted. The God who created everything told Solomon to make a wish and it would be granted. He could have asked for fortune and fame but instead, he asked for wisdom. Solomon's answer pleased God and He granted Solomon's wish. In addition, God gave him great wealth and made him famous.

Verse 7 of Proverbs chapter 1 is the focal verse for the entire book. This verse highlights the fact that wisdom comes

from God. Solomon had a great reverence for the Lord, therefore, when granted a wish, he did not ask for personal gain. Rather, he asked God for wisdom to enable him to be an effective leader. Solomon had a fear, in other words, a healthy respect, for God and did not try to take advantage of His offer. Respect and reverence for the Lord is necessary for a person to receive wisdom. Perhaps James in chapter 1 verse 5 of his book reflected on Solomon's wisdom when he encouraged anyone seeking wisdom to ask God for it because he will give it generously and without reproach. The authors wrote Proverbs for instruction; therefore, most proverbs are short and easy to memorize. The statements are more practical than theological, and they focus on life situations to help the unwise make wise decisions.

Dr. Ronny Marriott

Proverbs Today

The Bible's book of Proverbs represents the collective wisdom of ancient Israel. Most of the proverbs come from King Solomon, who was King during her golden reign. It is a practical guide to life in written form and is filled with exciting insights to read and to apply to our personal lives. This book has the power to transform a life, a church, or even a nation. When you read a proverb, it usually strikes a chord within you, and you may laugh or cry. Proverbs is elegant yet force-

ful in its words. Proverbs will touch your heart and give you wisdom in the everyday decisions of life.

Proverbs challenges us believers to learn the lessons from the past generations. It gives us practical implications of confessing our trust and faith to the Lord of all. In Proverbs the wise show respect for God and His value system. We must have a God-focus for our lives, and our faith must be lived out in the day-to-day world. And it all begins with **the search for wisdom.**

Proverbs tell us a life which is lived with wisdom…
…is a life worth more than rubies, diamonds, or gold.
…is a life filled with significance and the blessings of God.
…is a life filled with joy, laughter, peace, hope, and love.
…is a life that makes an eternal difference in the scope of time.

And it is all rooted in God and His ***words to live by.***

The Search for Wisdom

Words to Live By

A Study of Proverbs

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Lesson 6	Two Invitations	Proverbs 9:1–18
Lesson 7	Positive Results of Biblical Discipline	Proverbs 13:24
Lesson 8	The Search for Righteousness	Proverbs 14:34
Lesson 9	Desperate Families	Proverbs 15:15–17
Lesson 10	A Matter of Life or Debt	Proverbs 22:7
Lesson 11	Hope for Your Future	Proverbs 23:17–18
Lesson 12	Friends in High Places	Proverbs 27:17
Lesson 13	A Woman of Noble Character	Proverbs 31:10–31
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NOTES

[1] Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writer or GC2 Press with all its comments.

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lesson 1

Becoming Wise

MAIN IDEA

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and the key that unlocks the way to wisdom (1:7).

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Do I have someone that speaks truth into my life?

STUDY AIM

To understand that knowledge is good; but there is a vast difference between knowledge (having the facts) and wisdom (applying those facts to life)

QUICK READ

The aim of the Book of Proverbs is to help us acquire and apply God's wisdom to the decisions of daily life. The starting place in becoming wise is to treat God with reverence and awe.

Introduction

The book of Proverbs is one of several books that make up the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Each of these books points to both the wisdom (or lack of wisdom) of people and most importantly the wisdom of God. If there is one thing to be clear on, it is that God is the source and giver of wisdom.

These opening verses introduce the author first. King Solomon, the third king of Israel, had a reputation during and after his lifetime for being a wise ruler. Read 1 Kings 3 to get an introductory picture. Solomon found himself needing wisdom to be a faithful king, so he followed the advice that would come later in James 1:5, to ask God for wisdom.

Verse 7 is the focal point of this passage, but before you get there, it is important to take in the purpose of this book. God created wisdom, and the only way for you to be wise is to ask and receive wisdom from God. Today, we start with the key to becoming wise. How do we get the key? Well, let's start from the beginning.

Proverbs 1:1–7

1 The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: 2 for
gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of
insight; 3 for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing
what is right and just and fair; 4 for giving prudence to those
who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young— 5 let
the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance— 6 for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.

[7] The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

King Solomon

The credited source of this book goes to King Solomon, the third king of Israel following Saul and David. His mother was Bathsheba, whose story with David began as a complex affair of lust and murder. As David aged, Solomon was established as the king of Israel in place of his brother, Adonijah, who had already began setting himself up as king. Does this sound like a complex story? It is both as a family story as well as a national story.

Yet out of all the mess, Solomon became the king whose first request of God was to ask for wisdom, and God rewarded him with wisdom, wealth, and influence. He built a new palace and the new Temple for Israel to worship *Yahweh*. One of his famous accounts comes in 1 Kings 10 when the Queen of Sheba visited and affirmed his wisdom. He was proven to be living a lifestyle of wisdom, until the following chapter. Even the man known for wisdom sadly practiced foolishness.

What Is It For? (1:1–4)

Before we look at what wisdom is for, be sure to note there is an author and a purpose. Solomon is credited as the author or source of these wise sayings we call "proverbs," and he had a purpose for these. Seeking wisdom is not about looking for wise sayings, even if they are fun to read or speak. This collection is for instruction.

It is more than an anthology, like a collection of number one hits from your favorite performer.

One time, a friend, mentor, and fellow musician said, "You owe it to the original writer to play their song the way they wrote it at least once." This person is a capable pianist who takes original songs and puts his own arrangement to them. His point was that you start with the original before you go to your own arrangement. Take this to Solomon's proverbs, and do the same: read them as originals, and then apply them to your own life.

These opening verses are here to tell you what the book is for, and essentially what wisdom is for. Look at this simplified list: these proverbs are for gaining wisdom and discipline, for understanding, for building a lifestyle of discipline and righteousness, and for reaching people of all ages and abilities. Which of these stand out as the most meaningful purpose for you in your current situation?

Verse 2 is probably the most obvious purpose of this book. Wisdom, discipline (which is not a negative word), and understanding all point to how this starts with thinking and reasoning. The next verse, however, puts some "skin" on these bones: how a person lives is the most visible fruit of godly wisdom. By gaining wisdom, you are able to gain a life of practicing what is right and just in God's eyes.

Not only does the author have a purpose; the subject (wisdom itself) has a purpose. Wisdom does not leave you where it found you. Just as Jesus Christ transforms a sinner into a saint, wisdom transforms the unwise into a person growing in wisdom. So, as you read these wise sayings, let them transform you. Let God transform you by reading and applying His wisdom to your life.

Take this to verse 4 for a moment. If you think you might be too simple or too inexperienced, these proverbs are for you. You do not have to have certain prerequisites before joining the search for God's wisdom. Wise sayings that are rooted in God are meant to be simple, clear, and applicable to your life, right now. Please do not make excuses for why wisdom might not be for you. They are for you and everyone.

What is at risk if you read these and remain unchanged? Well, to put it bluntly, you will find yourself in the fools' camp. There may be plenty of company there, but not good company. It can be said that even fools may know about God and His wisdom, but they remain fools if God's wisdom has not transformed their lives. Friends, do not settle and stay where you are. Let God's wisdom transform you. That is what it is for.

What Do I Do? (1:5–6)

Now that we know what wisdom is for, let's get to the "meat and potatoes" of what to do. It might be a little presumptuous for any of us to call ourselves wise, but we could say that all of us should desire to become more wise. So take the first part to heart: let's listen and add to our learning (verse 5a).

Listening is one of the most significant tools for learning. You cannot take in information without receiving, and in this case if your teacher is speaking, you need to listen. In eastern traditions, it is common to have a teacher who sits with disciples and speaks wisdom to them. This looks a little different in modern-day western traditions, where students have multiple teachers who speak

instruction to them as they sit in rows. In both traditions, listening is key for the learner.

Ask yourself this question, "How can I practice being a good listener?" Some people like to distinguish between hearing (aware of sound) and listening (paying attention to sound). To use your ears to pay attention to what is being said means you must calm your mind and not think of how to respond before the speaker finishes. This requires great discipline and care, as well as self-awareness.

If you believe you are a good listener, ask an honest friend or colleague and be prepared for his or her response. What you learn may surprise you. For example, if you shake your head at someone while they are speaking or attempt to interrupt or interject, you are not being a good listener. Be sure to give attention to how you should grow as a good listener.

Why should we focus on being good listeners? We prove ourselves to be practicing wisdom by listening and then adding to our learning. Imagine Jesus with all His disciples. They all walked together, ate together, sheltered together, and meandered from place to place. But when Jesus spoke to them as their Rabbi, they stopped, sat, and listened. Consider Matthew 5–7 as an example of this. The disciples and the crowd might not be made up of experienced, wise people, but they showed themselves as wise by listening and adding to their learning.

Another descriptor in verse 5 is those who are discerning. Discerning tends to be coupled with wisdom because they do go hand in hand. How do you see "discerning" and "wise" as both similar and unique? This second action follows the first: let's dis-

cern and get guidance. Awareness and going the right direction are basic and significant.

There tends to be two types of people: those who understand directions, and those who do not. As evidence of God's humor, a close friendship and even a marriage is usually composed by mixing these two types of people together! Yet, both types of people are able to approach a four-way stop and use awareness to go the right direction. It is the same way for what we are called to do: God calls us to use the awareness He gives to go the way He is calling us to go.

Look at Ephesians 5:15–17. Paul exhorted people to take caution with how to live, by using God's wisdom and discernment. To avoid being a fool, you must understand what God's will is. This requires being aware of God, seeking His plan, and being patient for Him to reveal His plan for where to go and what to do.

There's also a bonus for listening to God's wisdom and practicing godly discernment. By living out these actions in everyday life and understanding the words of the wise (whether they are proverbs, parables, sayings, or riddles), this will become your reality. That is a powerful promise. It could be said that by doing what is called for in these verses, you will better understand these proverbs with each new reading.

What Is the Key? (1:7)

A key is what gives access to the person who is on the outside, wanting to be on the inside. If you go up to a door that is locked, you can pound on the door as much as you want or get frustrated that you cannot get in, but that does no good. What you need is

the key that gives you access to where you want to be. Wisdom is that key.

That said, perhaps we should look closer at how to get that key in your hand. This is where verse 7 comes in, which is the key verse (pun intended) to the whole chapter, and perhaps the whole book. Read it out loud on your own or as a group and listen to how these words flow one by one. This is what is called a thesis statement. Everything that follows is going to support the fact that fearing God is how to get the key of wisdom in your hands.

Just as "discipline" can be viewed as a negative word, "fear" can also be viewed as solely negative. But that is not how this word is meant to be viewed. The "fear of the LORD" brings together being awestruck by God as well as trembling before God. This is not about phobia. It is about respect and wonder. To fear God means you are aware of how big He is, how powerful He is, and how amazing He is.

Fear of the Lord

One of the earlier passages that point to the fear of the Lord is in Exodus 14. After the Israelites crossed the Red Sea safely, the Egyptians were overpowered and defeated because God crushed them in the sea. They witnessed God's power and deliverance, and because of this they feared the Lord and began to trust Moses as their leader. Is there a moment or event where God showed up and you experienced this fear—this awestruck trembling? How has this been a good thing for your relationship with God?

One image that captures this is to stand at the base of a large mountain and look up. You are aware of how small you are compared to this thing God created (and God is bigger than everything He created). This awareness should cause you to be amazed while also trembling at its greatness. The way you get the key of wisdom in your hand is to start by being amazed-while-trembling before God.

To begin this journey of seeking wisdom from God, you must start here. What happens if you decide not to start this journey? If you despise this journey, you are found to be a fool. Studying Proverbs is a study of the wise versus the foolish, and here it is clear that you are closer to one or the other. You cannot be both. So, it is time to begin this study and search for God's wisdom. Are you ready?

Implications and Actions

It is easy to be overwhelmed by the topic of wisdom because it seems both great and simple at the same time. While reading a wise saying, you can be softened by its simplicity while also punched by its depth. Honestly, this is one indicator that true wisdom really does come from God. And it is only God who calls us to experience "fear" in His presence as a good thing. We must see these things as good and necessary.

The most basic question you should ask yourself is, "Do I want to be wise?" Your answer will point directly to your next step to becoming wise. If you say, "yes," then it is time to begin living as a wise and discerning person who will build on the foundation of

fearing God. If you say, "no," then you have chosen the way of the fool.

The question stands before you. Answer wisely.

Questions

1. How have I defined wisdom before today? Does this line up with what I have studied in this lesson?

2. Am I a good listener? How would my most honest friend(s) answer this question?

3. What are some other images that help to explain what the "fear of the LORD" looks like?

4. Even though it is clear that being wise is better than being a fool, are there benefits to being a fool? Why do people choose folly over wisdom?

5. As I read the wise sayings and proverbs of Solomon, what do I hope to learn?

FOCAL TEXT
Proverbs 2:1–15

BACKGROUND
Romans 8:28; Psalm 19:7; 119:130; 2 Timothy 3:15; Colossians 2:3

lesson 2

The Search for Wisdom

MAIN IDEA

If we live according to the wisdom God gives, He will protect and direct us.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Can all things really work together for my good?

STUDY AIM

To understand that our search for wisdom begins with a personal relationship with God

QUICK READ

God's wisdom takes us on the scenic route; for living in partnership with God is truly the great adventure. God intends for us to be excited every day to learn what new things the Lord has in store for us.

Introduction

Before painting walls a new color, it might be wise to use a good primer to prepare the walls so the new paint will look as good as you intend it to look. Priming is one more step to the process, but it can be a necessary step. This is how we can view the transition from Proverbs 1 to Proverbs 2. To jump right in without the base of chapter 1 would take away from the teaching in chapter 2. Wisdom begins with fearing God, and there is a great warning for the person who rejects God's wisdom.

With that understood, the adventure is ready to start. It is time to search for God's wisdom, just like going on a hunt for hidden treasure. The good news is that as we search for God's wisdom, our travel companion is also God's wisdom, which should make this easier. God is a God who not only calls His followers to seek Him; He walks with them as they seek Him. This should be a comfort to every person who belongs to God. He does not abandon you. Rather, He accompanies you.

Proverbs 2:1–15

[1] My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, [2] turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding— [3] indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, [4] and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, [5] then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. [6] For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. [7] He holds success in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless,

[8] for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.

[9] Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. [10] For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. [11] Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.

[12] Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, [13] who have left the straight paths to walk in dark ways, [14] who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, [15] whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways.

Fatherly Wisdom (2:1–6)

It can be assumed that the one who is speaking to you and me as a "child" in verse 1 is the writer. Solomon himself was a father who hopefully imparted his wisdom to his children. If we make a judgment call based on his kingly successor, Rehoboam, it is true we will be disappointed. That said, seeing Scripture as the words of God means that we can also read this as God speaking to you and me as our Father.

This parental approach should not come off as demeaning to you and me as modern readers. It is expected that a parent should pass on what he or she knows to his or her offspring. This is because parenting is first and foremost a relationship. Birthing children is not solely about multiplying humanity in the world; it is about relating to each child as God relates to people, with love and more. A parent is a child's first teacher.

Notice that there are a lot of "if" statements in verses 1–4. Each of these are hinges to what outcomes the listener will ultimately experience. For example, if you tell someone younger than you, "Hey, if you keep running on this rocky road, you are going to fall." At that point, the runner can either keep running and ultimately fall, or stop running and not fall. The difference in verses 1–4 is that we don't get to the resolve quite yet.

We have several things that lean on one another. As we search for God's wisdom, He is calling us to do each of these things: accept His words, store them in us, listen to wisdom and apply it, ask for insight and understanding, and look for it as precious treasure. Look at each of these things and consider how they combine into something powerful. These are our actions as we pursue God's wisdom.

Faith Seeking Understanding

Verse 5 says that if you do all that is in verses 1–4, you will "understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God." This phrase helps point to a description for what Christian theology is: it is faith seeking understanding. We start with believing (while not seeing), and then we move to understanding and striving to explain what we believe. Walking through Proverbs gives a view of Solomon doing exactly that. We are trying to explain what we believe by understanding God and His wisdom.

What happens as we are obedient and faithful? Verse 5 makes it clear that God will give us understanding on how to fear Him and know Him. It all comes back to us growing in relationship

with the God who made us, loves us, and is walking with us. The reality is that we cannot miss out on how obedience and faithfulness are significant ingredients to a good relationship. When it comes to relating with God, the Bible has ample evidence that obedience and faithfulness (in this case to what is stated in verses 1–4) brings us closer to God.

What comes to your mind when you hear the word, "father"? It is possible you have felt a cringe this whole section because you have had bad experiences, so seeing God as your Father does not encourage you. If there is one encouragement to give, it is that God wants to redeem your understanding of Him as your good Father, who welcomes you to His side and calls you, "My child." As He speaks to you, this passage says that as you search for His wisdom, He gives it to you. It literally drips from His mouth to your ears.

If you want to gain godly wisdom, you need to pull up a chair and sit next to the Lord. Listen to Him as your trusted Father and allow Him to relate to you as His kid. Give Him your full attention and relate to Him as more than a wise counselor. If you receive what He is giving you, you will gain the riches of wisdom.

Fatherly Care (2:7–8)

What do you think about perks? A perk is a type of benefit that has more to do with who you know than what you know. For example, if your best friend works at the cookie store at the mall, one perk of being best friends is you might get a free cookie once in a while. Because of the relationship, which of course is the most important thing, there are other tangible benefits.

The same can be said of having God as your Father. Considering the New Testament lens, once a person accepts Jesus Christ as Savior, that person becomes not only co-heirs with Jesus, but along with that a sibling of Jesus. This means that along with Jesus, the Christian becomes a child of God, who we know Jesus referred to as His Father. When God is your Father, there are perks to appreciate in addition to the relationship.

These two verses highlight benefits of having God as your Father, which can be said in this simple way: your Father cares for you. As you grow closer with God and search for His wisdom, only He can give you victory as you live uprightly, only He can shield you as you walk righteously before Him, and only He can fully guard you and protect you as you are obedient and faithful.

Now let's be honest. To trust in Jesus solely for the benefits that come from salvation and God being your Father is an empty cause. This means there is no relationship, which means there is no point. The prime desire is to relate to the God who relates to you. At the same time, this relationship brings a fatherly care to the child of God. As you look at these perks, which of these have you noticed active in your life most recently?

For many kids who have good relationships with their fathers, there is usually a sense of pride in the child that his or her daddy can protect him or her. With daddy, there is protection like a shield and strength to provide safety and victory. The monster under the bed or the eerie sounds outside stand no chance against a child whose dad is the protector. The Psalms often portray God as both warrior and victor, and this translates to this work of wisdom. God as Father cares for His kids, and adversaries have no chance.

Hebrew Poetry

It is worth looking into the structure of these ancient texts to seek out what is missed in the modern western languages. In the case of Proverbs 2, you can see this in the movement of phrases: "if you will do this" goes to "then you will understand this." There is a plan and structure here that not only communicates content; it does so in a poetic and lyrical way.

Another worthwhile example is Psalm 119. The longest chapter in the Bible, it gives several mini-songs one after another, each one based on the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, starting with *aleph* in verses 1–8 and ending with *taw* in verses 169–176. Of course, there is even more to the composition than we can note here, but it all comes down to the point that Hebrew poetry communicates a message in a meaningful way. Just as modern songs can say a lot in a few lyrics with music, this chapter does the same.

Fatherly Rite (2:9–15)

A "rite" could be a type of formal ceremony or a type of custom, and in either case, they represent something being passed on from one person to another. In this case, think of God as the wise Father passing His wisdom to His faithfully obedient child. Interestingly enough, there are biblical scholars who point to this chapter as a type of poem, which could be easily shared from one person to the next. This gives a formality to what you are reading right now.

As you read these verses, imagine that you are sitting with God, your Father, and He is passing on what He has to you. Much like giving an heirloom or a meaningful piece of family history to a descendant, wisdom is that sacred treasure that is being shared. Because of your faithful obedience with God, relating to Him as family, He is now saying you will understand and be wise.

If "wisdom" is the umbrella term, the parts that make up this umbrella include understanding, discretion, and means of rescue. This proves that wisdom itself, while it is so simple and yet so deep, has a way of impacting your life in every way from big to small. Wisdom will help you as you seek out God's overall will for your life, just like wisdom will help you decide whether or not to buy that car or eat that fatty meal. There is no limitation to God's wisdom because it can inform and transform the whole life.

On your lifelong search for God's wisdom, you will find that as He reveals it to you, you will recognize how it benefits you and how it protects you. Much is said here about how it rescues you from wicked ways as well as wicked people who are trying to lead you astray. This theme of wicked ones will come up throughout the rest of the book because there are adversaries to God's wisdom as well as God's children who live His wisdom.

In order to escape the traps of wicked people who oppose wisdom, you need to realize what it is they do. Look through verses 12–15, and perhaps even look beyond as Solomon describes the "adulteress" who seduces people in verses 16–19. Perhaps you might think you can fight off these wicked folks, but the reality is that it is God who rescues and guards you. The truth is that you are powerless to rescue yourself or fight off your opposition. So,

don't even try! Be aware of the ways of the wicked, keep seeking God's wisdom, and let Him protect you.

As a closing idea for this section, think about what rites of passages you have heard of. If you are thinking of tribal groups around the world, one example would be the "walkabout" that takes place in the Australian aboriginal groups. If you are thinking of religious groups, Jews have their "bar mitzvahs" or "bat mitzvahs." Around the world, there are rites of passage, some that are sacred and some that are hardly noticeable. But in all these, there is an idea of something passing from an older one to the younger one. What would it look like if our churches had a rite of passage that passes on the wisdom of one generation to another? Most importantly, what if we reflected these as sharing God as the source of all wisdom?

God is inviting you to meet Him as your Father, just as Solomon invited the first listeners of Proverbs to come near and meet him. Solomon is not the original source of the wisdom he had and shared; God is the original. Let's make time to come near to God and ask Him to share His wisdom with us, to care for us, and to pass on His wisdom to us.

Implications and Actions

While wisdom is a search for all that God has, it is important to realize that this is not about accumulating objects like gold or jewels. God and His wisdom are the treasure, so this is about searching for God and drawing closer to Him. What makes this search unique is that the very One you are seeking is the very

One who is walking with you as you seek Him. It is the strangest game of "hide and seek" you've ever seen, and it is better.

A good way to think of this search is as an adventure. Walking with God, searching for God, and finding God has all the makings of an epic adventure. There are the good moments, the bad moments, the wars, the peace, the battles, and the prosperity. In the end, this search for wisdom ends up being you and God with one another in perfect relationship. Focus on growing with God as you follow Him and obey Him. To spend time with God is never a waste of time; it is time well spent.

Questions

1. What are some words of wisdom you have received from others who are older or more experienced than you? How have these words impacted your life?

2. How is an adventure both exciting and daunting? How is the search for wisdom a true adventure?

3. Solomon makes it clear the Lord gives wisdom. Are there some wrong sources you have gone to in order to gain wisdom? If so, what was the result?

4. Why do I need to know about the ways of the wicked? How have I seen the ways of the wicked oppose God or oppose me as I followed God?

FOCAL TEXT
Proverbs 3:1–4

BACKGROUND
2 Corinthians 2:14–16;
Ephesians 5:15–16

lesson 3

Surrender Your Time

MAIN IDEA

We should submit to Christ as a conquered slave.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

When I surrender to Christ am I placing myself under His authority?

STUDY AIM

To understand that total surrender means spending time with God and for Him

QUICK READ

Because of our proud human nature surrender does not come easy, but when it comes to our relationship with our Creator, surrender is the only pathway to peace and victory.

Introduction

You may notice that verse 1 of this chapter begins the same way as verse 1 of the previous chapter. This gives us an idea that what we are about to study is both a continued idea as well as a new idea. While chapter 2 had the "if" statements to start that bring about the results of seeking God's wisdom, this new chapter opens with the warnings and rewards related to remembering God's wisdom.

While there are plenty of themes to gather from this short passage, the surrendering of your time particularly stands out as a practical way to live your life for God. For us modern-day readers, we also get to add the lens of Jesus Christ, even though He did not come on the scene until centuries after Solomon. Think about how surrendering your life to Jesus Christ brings a new way of offering your time to God.

People say that we never know "when our time will be," referring to how much time we have before our life on earth ends. With that humbling reality, how should we surrender our time to God?

Proverbs 3:1–4

[1] My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, [2] for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity. [3] Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. [4] Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.

The Gift of Life (3:1–2)

Think about one of the best or favorite gifts you have ever been given. What made this gift so meaningful or so special to you? It could be because of the person who gave it to you, and how they might hold a special place in your life. It could be that the gift came at a meaningful or needed time of your life. Perhaps it could also be that no other gift you have received is like that one, special gift.

All of these reasons, in addition to the ones that came to your mind, help us to realize that gifts stand out because we did not get them for ourselves, and they came as an act of love that we did not deserve. For a child who gets her favorite doll, she knows someone had to get it for her, and it came as an act of love. Now, think about how time is a gift.

From the moment God breathed His breath of life into you, you have been using this gift of life. You could not get it for yourself, and it is a constant reminder of the love of God for you. He created you and He still loves you. In fact, in the Hebrew language, the word for "breath" can also mean "spirit." The time you live out is a reminder of God's spirit being breathed in you.

This can all be brought back to the promise in verse 2, that if you faithfully live out the first verse, there is a blessing of prolonged life. Another promise that comes up in the Bible is that obedience to parents can also bring about prolonged life (Ephesians 6:1–3). Now one thing that is not made clear is how to measure this promise, yet one thing that is clear, there is blessing for life when you are faithful to God's words.

Go back and re-read verse 1. Instead of using the positive angle by saying, "Remember my teaching," Solomon gave more of a warning by saying, "Do not forget my teaching." As you walk through life, there are plenty of good things you have learned that you might forget about. The warning here is do not do this with the wisdom and teachings of God's wisdom. Resist the possibility of forgetting or leaving these behind.

Rather than forget, you must keep God's commands to live according to His wisdom, but do not just keep them in your hands or in your mind. Keep them in your heart. What is the difference between keeping something like wisdom in your heart compared to your mind? The truth is that in Old Testament thinking, the heart had more to do with thinking while today it is more about feeling. Still, there is a subtle difference.

Do you remember that last time you and your clothes were soaked in water? This could have been when you were stuck outside in the rain, or sloshed by a water ride, or perhaps when someone thought you needed to experience a cooler of water or Gatorade on the field. In that place and time, you were literally saturated with water. This is a good image for verses 1–2: be so saturated by God's wisdom in your life, keeping His teachings on you so regularly, that you will never forget them.

God's wisdom is a gift to you. At the same time, there are follow-up gifts such as the gift of life as you use God's wisdom in your life, keeping it at the forefront of your thinking and living. It will add length to your life, and it will also bring about peace and prosperity. The way forward then, is to surrender your life to God by saturating your life with His wisdom. Give it all to God, and He will give you more abundantly.

Love and Faithfulness (3:3)

There are two focal words that stand out in this verse: love and faithfulness. Much like a carefully created crossword puzzle, this verse is crafted meticulously to get the point to the reader in a clear way. These words are much more than expressions or emotions. They are actionable words that are meant to be exercised and utilized for God, for yourself, and for others.

Start with the word for love. Any time there is an opportunity to discuss the Hebrew word "*hesed*," which is the word for love here, take that opportunity. It is a deep word with a big meaning. In the Greek language we have multiple words that speak to different expressions of love, but with "*hesed*" we get a covenant-type of love. This means it is a commitment between two groups or two people, and these people will not let go of their covenant agreement.

In modern-day weddings, this type of expression is witnessed when a couple speaks vows to one another. With witnesses everywhere and God above, two people commit their lives by saying what they will do. The depth of a covenant love also implies something very strong: "If you let go of your end of the deal, I will not let go of mine." This is how a covenant is starkly different from a contract. When a contract is signed, if one person defaults on his or her part, then the other person is let off the hook. A contract is for a limited time, but a covenant is for life.

Think about how costly a covenant love is. It is sacrificial and it is for a long period of time. How else would you describe the difference between a contract love versus a covenant love? God practiced this faithfully with the Israelites throughout the Old

Testament, and He still practices this love with His children today. When people are unfaithful to God, He remains faithful to His love for them, regardless. This is the type of love that should never leave you.

Binding Them

Throughout the Old Testament, we see the phrase "binding them" when it comes to taking words or a concept and ingraining them in people. In Proverbs 3:3, love and faithfulness should be bound around one's neck. Like physical clothes, love and faithfulness hang on a person's neck, and they are visible to others.

The first five books of the Bible are called the "Torah," or "law." While in the wilderness, between Egypt and the Promised Land, God gave His people laws and codes to live by. In Deuteronomy 11, you can see both love and faithfulness sprinkled throughout the urgency to obey God's laws faithfully. In verse 18, Moses wrote that the people should "tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads."

This is the same concept we get in Proverbs. God's Words are more than spiritual; they are physical also. Take on His commands and wisdom, make them so real they are felt physically, and use them as you interact with others and with God. By binding God's Words in some way to yourself, they will not leave you and you will not forget them.

Faithfulness is a significant word, and it is made all the stronger when it is tied with love. Another way to translate faithful-

ness is "dependability." As you surrender your life and your time to God, be sure you practice covenant love along with dependability. Be a reliable follower of God, one who God always sees as faithful and obedient. The image is also that you hang on to these two things and don't let them run away from you.

How do you hang on to love and faithfulness? Bind them around your neck, like a necklace or a band of some sort that stays around you and with you at all times. Not only will you feel the weight of these two actionable words; you'll be putting them on display in front of others. As you live your life for God, showcase God's love and faithfulness through your actions for others and in front of the world.

Showing God's love and faithfulness is certainly important. At the same time, these must be deeply etched inside of you. Is there really a tablet of stone inside your heart, as the last line suggests? No, but it is possible for actional words to be etched into the flesh of your whole self. Basically, these two words are your words to live by. They must impact you on the inside so you will live them on the outside.

Understand this: to surrender your life, the time you have on this earth, is no small decision. It does bring about more life for you, and it also requires how you live your life by surrendering your whole self to God, His love and faithfulness. Like taking seeds in your hands and planting them in a garden, take hold of love and faithfulness, and plant them in your heart. Next, live them out as they birth fruit in you.

Living Well (3:4)

Living life well is a considerable goal for every human. We want our lives to count. We want our time to count. Anytime someone falls short of living well with life and time, there is disappointment. Regret is not the ideal companion, but it comes near when we feel we have fallen short in some way. This is why verse 4 gives us hope: as you surrender yourself to God, there is reward by means of favor and reputation with God and other people.

The word "favor" is much more than asking a friend to do something to help you. Favor is not limited to a single action. It is more of a grace that shows up over you. Instead of having a stormy cloud follow you, favor is a cloud of grace that shades you and nurtures you. By living out love and faithfulness in your life, you achieve favor. Does this mean you won't deal with storm clouds? No, there are no guarantees of that, but clouds of grace stick around longer than storms.

The point of a good name or a good reputation is really a natural outcome of living a life of love and faithfulness. If you do these things in front of God and others, you will have a reputation for being loving and faithful. People will see you and know this about you, just as God sees you and knows this about you. This does not guarantee mass popularity, like a recognizable movie star, but it does guarantee that people will know you for your actions.

Surrendering your life to God results in good. Sure, there are bad things that happen to good people, and especially with those who give their lives to God. But good means that everything will be as it should be, the way God intended. God intended, when He made you, for you to be a loving and faithful person just as He is

a loving and faithful God. He also intended for you to have a full life of favor and good reputation, which happens when you live your life this way. Give your life—your time—to this good way.

Surrendering Time Checklist

Surrendering your time to God might seem abstract, so consider some of these specific ways you can do this minute-by-minute:

- As soon as you wake up, kneel in prayer and thank God for a new day.
- While getting ready, seek God in prayer and read or listen to Scripture.
- At work, school, and/or home, look for ways to acknowledge God and show God to others.
- When you eat, show gratitude to God and generosity to others.
- In your free time, share time with God and serve people in need.
- Throughout the day, find ways to give time to people as an act of love.
- Before you sleep, thank God for another day.

Implications and Actions

When you viewed the title of this lesson and then read the four verses, you might have wondered what all this has to do with surrendering your time. But as you study deeper, you will see that the surrender of your life equals the surrender of your time. All

the life you have is measured by the time God gives you in this life. So it is clear that everything you have is given by God, and out of your obedience to Him, you need to give it back to God.

Think of it this way: instead of thinking broadly, "I will give my life to God," think of it specifically by saying, "I will give every minute of my life to God." Do you see the difference? He has given you a gift of life to live out in a good way. Just as a necklace is a specific part of an outfit, the minutes of your life are specific parts of your life. Look closely at how you live your time for God. Use your time wisely for God.

Questions

1. How do I process "do not forget" differently from "remember"? Both of these are actions, but they approach from different angles. Why did Solomon approach verse 1 as a warning?

2. Have I experienced prosperity from God? Have I experienced difficulty even though I have lived for God?

3. Even though verse 3 is mostly figurative, how can I make these commands more literal in my everyday life?

4. Why is living well such an important goal for humans?

5. Have I used my time for God this week? Have I misused my time for God this week? How so, and how will I live differently this week?

FOCAL TEXT

Proverbs 3:5–7

BACKGROUND

Hebrews 11:6; Luke 17:6–7; Jeremiah 29:13; Isaiah 55:9; Galatians 2:20

lesson 4

Surrender Your Trust

MAIN IDEA

The object of your trust is more important than the amount of your trust.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Is it possible to have a strong faith in the wrong thing?

STUDY AIM

To understand that real surrender is acknowledging the Lordship of Jesus over every area of your life

QUICK READ

To know Him is to love Him; to love Him is to trust Him; to trust Him is to obey Him; to obey God is to be a winner!

Introduction

Have you ever heard the saying, "It's not what you know, it's who you know"? This is a good correlation to the conversation about knowledge and wisdom. They are both good and important things, and they should work well together. But there is one that obviously bests the other. You can know a lot of things, but who you know can make a bigger difference. Knowledge is important, yet wisdom supersedes the library of your mind.

When it comes to trust, our main idea for this lesson is also true. Your amount of trust does matter, but the object of your trust matters more. To reuse that initial saying, "It's not what (or how much) you trust, it's who you trust." The truth is that every one of us, no matter how skeptical we may be, exercises trust in things or people. Trusting in something or someone is not to be taken lightly, so be careful who you trust. Wisdom in who to trust will go a long way in how it will impact your life.

Proverbs 3:5–7

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your
own understanding; 6 in all your ways submit to him, and he
will make your paths straight. 7 Do not be wise in your own
eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil.

Trust in God, Not Self (3:5)

How do you notice people using trust in your community? Every community of people from small groups to whole towns practice

or view trust uniquely. It is possible that a small club will practice group trust by working together for a certain cause. It is also possible that a whole town will have certain citizens who are highly trusted because of their time or service. What does this look like in your community, or in your church?

It is easy to think of trust as a type of belief. Even though trust and faith are related, they are a bit more distinct. Faith is believing in something or someone, whether you see it or them or not. Trust, on the other hand, is having a confidence in something or someone. So, to trust in the Lord with all of your heart means you are having confidence in Him to the deepest level. What does this look like for you?

The first ten verses of chapter 3 contain several imperatives, and trusting in the Lord is one of them. Solomon wrote this directly to the reader or listener: you must trust in God completely. As you seek God and His wisdom and live for Him, it is imperative that you put your full confidence in God, at all times. This might seem like something simple and natural, but putting confidence in God is something you must do intently.

If you are sitting in a chair right now, you are putting your confidence in that chair to hold you up (and you are still putting confidence in it by continuing to sit). Maybe you have not thought about it that deeply, but if you were used to chairs falling apart underneath you, you would carry a distrust of chairs. If you can trust a chair so easily, then why not trust God in the same way?

As you surrender your trust, your confidence, in God, this verse is also pointing out that you should remove your confidence in yourself. Trusting in God means you trust God over yourself, not the other way around. Instead of leaning on what you under-

stand, you lean on what God knows and who God is. So to put it simply, the imperative here is that you must trust God, not yourself. You will fail you, but God will not fail you.

Self-confidence is a positive ideal to many. Please understand that this verse is saying nothing against you carrying self-confidence. But knowing that you are a flawed and imperfect person should make you realize you are not without error. As you seek God and His wisdom, you will have good understanding to rely on, and you are able to make wise decisions. However, if you elevate your understanding over God's wisdom, you will miss the target big time.

Sadly, modern American culture emphasizes so much about the individual, to the point that the community and faith have been overshadowed by the self. Being individualistic means you rely on yourself, you only trust yourself, and you pull yourself up from your failures. Christians must push back against individualism, because it robs the interaction of faith and community being together. So, instead of holding trust to yourself, surrender your trust to God.

Trust God's Plan (3:6)

Trusting in God and not leaning on yourself is the first part, and verse 6 continues the wise saying. Not only must you trust God with your whole self instead of trusting your whole self, but you must also acknowledge God and His work in your life and the whole world. Be aware of Him and look for Him. You can see His activity in your life because as you put your confidence in Him, He will lay out His plans for you.

Do yourself a favor. Out loud, on your own or in a group, speak verses 5–6 as a whole. Repeat this if you need to. As you do this, what stands out? Perhaps say it again and allow yourself to emphasize different phrases. Words rise to the surface depending on how we emphasize them with our speaking and thinking. If you have trust issues, the word "trust" will probably stand out as a directive for you. If you are concerned about where you are going next, the last line of verse 6 will probably catch your attention.

Putting your full confidence in God is important. What follows your confidence in God is your confidence in His plan for you and your life. Making plans is part of what we humans get to do since God gave us free will. Even walking through a day whimsically is a plan; it is just not a detailed plan. We walk to and fro, living out a plan. But what does God have to say about our plans compared to His plans for us?

The Timing of God's Promises

An important footnote to the promises found in verses 6b and 8 is that we are not in charge of the timing of those promises. By trusting God and acknowledging Him, it does not mean God makes the path straight immediately. Fearing God and shunning evil does not mean you will not have health issues at times. Promises always have the now and the end in mind. So as you surrender your trust in God, be confident that He will reveal His promises to you in His timing.

Proverbs 19:21 said it this way: "Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails." Dwell on that for a minute. Inside your heart, the heart that you have full confidence in the Lord from, you develop many plans for you. There is nothing wrong with this. In fact, planning from the heart reveals the creative gifts God has given each person. But we need to accept one reality: God is the one who wins.

Surrender is an act of submission to God. As we make our many plans, we must be sure to submit them to God, just as a student submits an assignment to the teacher for approval. We can acknowledge God by deferring our plans to His. The good news is as we live with God and for God, His influence on our life is found in our plans, because we include Him in the planning process. As big as God is and as sought after as He is, He enjoys your invitation to sit at the table and lay out plans for you.

Did I mention that God's plans are good? When we acknowledge Him and trust Him by surrendering our plans to Him, He takes what is crooked and makes it straight. The best efforts you give to planning your life will come off as a crooked path or an uneven road. When you submit those to God, His construction skills have a way of taking your feeble plans and straightening them.

The image of a path implies that there is a journey involved. There is no need for a path unless you are walking from one place to another. This image points to everyday living. As you live your life, rather than walk alone, acknowledge that God is walking with you. While walking and talking with God, offer your plans to Him and trust them to His care. Be willing to take on His better plans for your life, even though they may look different from

what you envisioned. You can be sure the path He lays out for you will be good.

Priesthood of the Believer

One of the solid Baptist distinctives is the concept of the Priesthood of the Believer. This means that every born-again Christian is able to pray directly with God and hear directly from God, specifically when it comes to interpreting Scripture. In the Old Testament, the priestly role involved a person who stood between God and people and spoke for them to one another. Baptists tend to call their faith leaders "pastors" or "ministers," partly because we believe we are all able to live as priests, in direct communication with God.

That said, according to Proverbs 3:7, we must realize that we are not perfect priests. Our wisdom on our own falls short, and we are perfectly able to misunderstand God and His will. As priests, we must be sure that we do not elevate ourselves to where we think our wisdom is God's wisdom. The opposite approach is best: God's wisdom must become our wisdom. Let Proverbs be a reminder that we keep God in His place, and us in ours.

Good Distrust (3:7)

To surrender your trust means that while you trust in God, you are also learning a good distrust for other things. Following God's wisdom means you trust His wisdom over yours or anyone else's. Trusting God's plan means you have confidence in His path over

yours or someone else's. A good distrust in verse 7 is that you don't lean on your own wisdom from your own point of view.

This verse is not saying, "Do not be wise." That is the furthest thing from the truth. The reason we are all on this search for God's wisdom is to become wiser as our God is wise. Our aim is to become wise and live wisely. But you and I do not affirm our wisdom; only God does that. We wait for Him to say, "You have made a wise decision." His opinion of your wisdom (or lack of it) is what counts, not your opinion.

How do we make sure to have a healthy distrust of our own wisdom and ways? Two things are laid out: fear the Lord and shun evil. Considering that this is lesson four, do you recall these two things from our study in Proverbs so far? Both have come up and both are worthy reminders for how we make sure that we trust in God more than ourselves.

The fear of the Lord, if you remember from Proverbs 1:7, is the beginning of this whole wisdom journey. Be amazed by God and tremble before Him. If you will do this, the last thing on your mind will be to see your wisdom. Instead, as you are captivated by God you will see His wisdom rather than your own, but it won't be one replacing the other. You'll see His wisdom over yours as well as permeating yours. Your eyes will be on Him instead of yourself.

Shunning evil sounds similar to an old way of confronting a pesky fly when a person says, "Shoo, fly, shoo!" When that fly comes around, a person uses their hands to send that fly running (or flying). It's a way of casting that fly away. That makes sense and sounds like offense is key. But shunning evil is not shooing

evil. You do not send evil away and do not have that capability… but God does have that ability.

To shun evil means when you see what is evil and wrong, you turn away from it instead of going toward it. If there is a temptation to do something that goes against God's plan, you don't just ignore it, you literally turn around and move away. This is where we get the idea of repentance, you turn around and go the other direction. One way to show that God's wisdom really has infiltrated your life is that when you see the opposite of God's wisdom, you don't want to go near it.

Always remember that becoming wise and averting foolishness is only possible because of God. What we have is His wisdom (not ours) and His victory (not ours), and we have these because He gives them to us as we obey and follow Him. But wait, there's more. As you read verses 5–6 together, do the same for verses 7–8. Do you notice anything? There is good health in your whole being when you fear God and shun evil. A good distrust of yourself in favor of trusting God will do good for you.

Implications and Actions

Reading Proverbs through the lens of Jesus Christ means that once you accept Jesus as your Savior, you surrender your whole self to Him. This means your confidence in yourself must be replaced and overshadowed by confidence in God. You have a new object of worship rather than yourself. You have a new confidence to exercise rather than simply relying on yourself. Change is the result of surrender.

Surrendering your trust to God is a big decision. Do not take it lightly. You are signing over all you have and all you are to God Almighty, and that means you are giving ownership completely to Him. This is a good thing because God does a better job at our lives and plans than we do. But it is a control shift as well. Rather than driving through life in the driver's seat, we now get to ride in the passenger's seat. As you make the decision to put your confidence in God, know that such a life is better that way.

This takes significant effort and constant renewal. Be ready every moment to put your trust in God, when things look easy and when things look hard. Also, be hopeful because as you trust God, His promises in these verses will come to fruition. He keeps His word.

Questions

1. Am I more of a trusting person, or more of a skeptical person? Why is this?

2. What is the difference between confidence in self, and self-confidence?

3. How can I acknowledge God in my life regularly? Are there specific practices I could do to keep God in my line of sight throughout the day?

4. Do I need to approach evil things from an offensive standpoint, or a defensive one? In light of what it means to shun evil, how do I need to change or better my approach?

5. What are some things that I have little to no trouble trusting in? What are some things that I have great trouble trusting in?

FOCAL TEXT

Proverbs 3:9–10

BACKGROUND

Malachi 3:8–10; Philippians 4:12–13; Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 9:7

lesson 5

Surrender Your Treasure

MAIN IDEA

Faithful and generous giving will be a natural result of your surrender.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Does God need my money?

STUDY AIM

To understand that tithing is not about money; it is about trust

QUICK READ

Surrender is not just about giving your money; it is about giving all you are and have to Jesus.

Introduction

When we hear the word "surrender," we may not associate it with pleasant thoughts and emotions. The reason for such hesitancy could be because we are naturally not quick to give up possession or control of something we believe we have worked so hard for.

For others, surrendering may not be a problem, or so it seems. The idea of surrendering could be taken lightly with thoughts and ideas that lead us to believe that attending church from time to time or giving a few dollars to the church is enough.

To surrender to God is to allow Him to have total control over our lives and total ownership over our possessions. We have the opportunity to honor God with the things that matter to us: home, finances, careers, family, and the list goes on.

We can practice daily surrendering to God by being faithful and generous in giving to God what He is due. He desires our worship and the fruits of our work. When we honor God with our money, our time, and our gifts, we show the Lord that we love Him and trust Him with everything He has given us.

In Proverbs 3:9–10, God is simply asking us to give our first and our best, just as He did for us with His Son, Jesus.

Proverbs 3:9–10

9 Honor the Lord with your possessions,
And with the first-fruits of all your increase;
10 So your barns will be filled with plenty,
And your vats will overflow with new wine.

Honoring God With Your First and Your Best (3:9)

The writer of Proverbs 3 provides guidance for a young person, advice that is just as good for anyone interested in honoring the Lord with their life. The verses leading up to 9 encourage the reader to trust in the Lord and not in human understanding and not to take our own opinions or ideas as the highest and most reliable source of truth and wisdom. A person who puts this teaching into practice understands that wisdom comes from God.

Ways To Honor God With Your Possessions:

Each time you receive a financial gift or earnings, put aside an amount for God to your local fellowship.

- Look around your home or office and consider items that you can give away to those in need like clothes, food, furniture, or other household items.
- Consider the use of your time by giving it toward serving your local church, your community, family, and friends.
- Pray and ask the Lord to show you how to use everything you have for His glory, from you and your food goods to gadgets.
- Keep a journal of the many blessings God has blessed you with.

Proverbs 3:9 begins with a word that is repeated throughout the Bible as it relates to the Lord: "Honor." In the text, the term

honor alludes to someone placing a heavy emphasis on something or someone. When a person honors the Lord, there is a kind of weighty importance they are placing on Him.

While the word "possessions" is found in the New King James Version as well as other translations of the Bible, the King James Version renders the word "possessions" as "substance." The word "possessions" means wealth or abundance. In a practical way, we are to place a great emphasis on the Lord with our substance, or wealth, and our abundance. Giving our time, our talents, our gifts, and our financial gains to the Lord is a declaration of trust in the Lord and appreciation for what He has done.

If you are still not certain that trusting in the Lord is the right idea, Malachi 3:10 gives an open invitation for people to try and see that God will in fact open up the windows of Heaven and pour out such a blessing that you won't have room enough to receive it.

Tithing makes sense, especially when you consider "First-fruits," which were the first gains from harvest. In Deuteronomy 26:2, the children of Israel participated in a ritual to celebrate and honor God bringing them into the promised land. One of those rituals as part of their celebration was to bring the "firstfruits" as a part of appreciating and praising the Lord for the settlement they received. To tithe is to put everything you receive (not just money) in proper perspective: God is the One who provides, so the results of what we earn from it should have a portion dedicated to praising God. This is the beginning, the starting point, of saying that we surrender what we value to the Lord, whom we should value the most.

The Meaning of Tithe in Today's Money

A Tithe would be considered one-tenth of a person's goods. Today's churches teach that the tithe would be 10 percent of your gross income, the amount before taxes.

The KJV renders the term "produce" as increase. The term refers to product or revenue.

The Rich Results of Trusting God (3:10)

Proverbs 3:10 wraps up the "then" portion of the "if/then" statement from verse 9. The person that trusts and obeys God experiences the joyous benefits of His promises. Verse 10 reveals the results of what happens when a person honors the Lord with their possessions and with their firstfruits. The result is God's ongoing provision and protection.

Tithing and giving to the Lord does not always result in seeing an increase in financial wealth, but always makes room for the Christian believer to see that God is truly the provider.

The writer emphasizes that "barns" or "storehouses" will "be filled with plenty." Surely the person who honors the Lord with their first and best will experience a fulfilled life with more than enough. Vats, or troughs, that operated like a winepress would overflow with new wine. The KJV says the vats will "burst out" with new wine.

This was awesome news for people who could not get the kind of access to drinkable water like those in the 21st century. The

Israelites had to rely on wine as a viable beverage to consume due to lack of access to drinking water, drought, and contamination.

Imagine having so much that you do not mind giving more to God and blessing others around you.

Surrendering to God is made easier when one understands the promises of God and when one recognizes God's character as a promise keeper. The children of Israel had to learn this even as they journeyed to the promised land. In Deuteronomy 28:8, the promise that God would bless Israel in their land was dependent on the obedience of the people of Israel within the Mosaic covenant.

The children of Israel would experience agricultural abundance and prosperity, not because of their own abilities or because of a false god in the culture, but because the Lord God had provided and continued to provide for them.

Implications and Actions

When we are faithful and obedient to God by trusting Him with our wealth, we discover that God is more than faithful in meeting our every need. When we are generous givers of the things God has blessed us with, we will experience an incredible abundance of blessings that will show up in our faith walk as well. We live and look more like Jesus when we trust God with everything He has given to us.

Questions

1. Do you find yourself struggling to trust God? Have you prayed and asked the Lord to change your heart in the matter?

2. In what ways has God blessed you?

3. What have you given lately that is of great value to you?

4. In what ways has God been faithful in your life?

5. What steps can you take today in surrendering to God's will for your life?

lesson 6

Two Invitations

MAIN IDEA

The foundation of God's wisdom leaves nothing lacking in enabling us to build a life that is blessed and glorifies God.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Have I experienced something that promised more than it delivered?

STUDY AIM

To understand that choosing folly over wisdom is to choose self over God; to choose my way over God's way; to choose sin over the Savior

QUICK READ

We read about two houses, located on opposite sides of the road of life. On the one side is an elegant lady named Wisdom; on the other side is a seductive lady named Folly. Both invite us to live at their home.

Introduction

Children and teens are not the only ones who deal with the peer pressure of making right and wrong decisions. Even those who are mature in age must choose between what would be considered wise and what would be considered folly.

All of society is invited into two drastically different types of lifestyles: a life that is lived in godly wisdom, or a life that is lived deep in sinful, foolish living, which would only result in death and total separation from God.

God invites us every day into a wise lifestyle that could only come from knowing and loving Him. When we seek the wisdom of God, it not only reflects our hearts desire to know and please God, but also provides blessings and protection along the way.

Wisely living for God and following His ways helps us make good choices.

The more we seek to live wise, prudent lives before the Lord, the better our foundation will be as we learn to walk daily in Christ individually and as a body of believers. Also, the more we seek out God's wisdom through His Word, through prayer, and through obedience to Him, the more we will experience the joy of glorifying Him with our life and embodying a blessed life.

When life moves us to ask difficult questions about our circumstances, we can count on the wisdom of God to give us rock-solid foundational guidance and support that will ultimately result in a life that is blessed and that glorifies God.

Proverbs 9:1–18

1 Wisdom has built her house, She has hewn out her seven pillars; 2 She has slaughtered her meat, She has mixed her
wine, She has also furnished her table. 3 She has sent out her
maidens, She cries out from the highest places of the city,
4 "Whoever *is* simple, let him turn in here!" *As for* him who
lacks understanding, she says to him, 5 "Come, eat of my bread
And drink of the wine I have mixed. 6 Forsake foolishness and
live, And go in the way of understanding.

7 "He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself, And
he who rebukes a wicked *man only* harms himself. 8 Do not
correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; Rebuke a wise *man,* and he
will love you. 9 Give *instruction* to a wise *man,* and he will be
still wiser; Teach a just *man,* and he will increase in learning.

10 "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom, And the
knowledge of the Holy One *is* understanding. 11 For by me
your days will be multiplied, And years of life will be added
to you. 12 If you are wise, you are wise for yourself, And *if* you
scoff, you will bear *it* alone."

13 A foolish woman is clamorous; *She is* simple, and knows
nothing. 14 For she sits at the door of her house. On a seat
by the highest places of the city. 15 To call to those who pass
by, Who go straight on their way: 16 "Whoever *is* simple, let
him turn in here"; And *as for* him who lacks understanding,
she says to him, 17 "Stolen water is sweet, And bread *eaten* in
secret is pleasant." 18 But he does not know that the dead *are*
there, *That* her guests *are* in the depths of hell.

Lady Wisdom's Work (9:1–3)

Notice that throughout the movement of Proverbs 9, Wisdom and Folly are personified as two different women. Lady Wisdom presents herself as one that builds, which indicates an industrious and creative nature. Wisdom builds up the house she is in, offering nourishment and service.

We can be encouraged in knowing that Christ built His church on the solid rock foundation of Himself and nothing else, and believers in Jesus are also being built up on that foundation (Ephesians 2:20–22). We are also being built up as a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ (1 Peter 2:5). When we have God's wisdom, we have much to offer.

Wisdom prepares a meal, putting in the work of slaughtering the meat. Wisdom makes the point to put in the preparation for a great celebration. That same type of wisdom, in a practical sense, gives us the mindset of putting in the work God calls us to and making preparation not just for ourselves, but for others, and ultimately for the Lord.

Wisdom also mixes the wine, which in the culture, was customary to mix wine with some water.

> "Undiluted wine was considered distasteful by the Jews, and the wine for the Passover consisted of three parts water and one part wine."[1]

Wisdom also furnished or arranged the table. Lady Wisdom is setting this feast in order, making sure that everyone will prop-

erly have access to the table without chaos or confusion. Wisdom sends out her maidens, indicating she has help and is not going it alone. It is wise to have wise people walking this Christian walk with you rather than going it alone.

The pinnacle of this banquet invitation is literally taken higher, specifically to the highest point of the city, as indicated in Proverbs 8:2. Wisdom cries out from the highest places of the city. Notably, Lady Folly makes the point to try and get the attention of others from just as high a spot. Today's culture is no different as multiple distractions and influences are fighting for our attention and even for our worship.

Wisdom Versus Folly

Consider our present methods of communication and the messaging that we receive every day whether it is through TV, radio, social media, or podcasts. Take the time to ask yourself the following questions as it relates to wisdom versus folly:

- Is what I am watching, reading, interacting with online challenging me to make wise choices or foolish choices?
- What voices am I listening to, God's or the world's?
- Am I starting with God first in my search for wisdom and understanding?

The Simple Are Welcome to Be in the Presence of Wisdom (9:4–6)

The simple in this text are those considered to be so open-minded that they are naïve and gullible. People who are "simple" may be those who do not have sound judgement. But wisdom invites those who lack it to take full advantage of gaining it. Fortunately, the testimony of the Lord makes those who are simple, wise (Psalm 19:7). Wisdom is giving those who are simple-minded an opportunity to leave the simplicity of naïve, habitual behavior and thoughts and to grow in godly wisdom. No wonder lady wisdom encourages the simple to "let him turn in here," indicating a change in direction in life rather than walking past good, wise teaching.

Lady wisdom gives us the invitation to eat of the bread that will not perish (John 6:27) and to drink of the wine that was mixed. God's wisdom is always nourishing to the mind, body, and soul.

The Wise Person Versus the Bragging Fool (9:7–9)

Have you ever tried to politely correct someone who did not want to listen to reason, only to be teased, insulted, and even slandered?

Consider how verses 7–9 compare the reactions of those who are wise versus those who operate foolishly. A scoffer in verses 7–8 is someone who mocks, showing contempt for that which is wise. Scoffers, or mockers, are unteachable. When someone at-

tempts to share wisdom, scoffers react negatively with insults, abuse, and slander of the character of the person giving the correction. They are simply not open to instruction.

When a wise person is "rebuked," or corrected, they not only receive it with humility and grace, but they also grow because of the correction. The person who walks in godly wisdom, walks as a just person, always increasing in learning. For a wise person, correction is welcome and greeted with love for the person who gave the correction.

When we scoff and mock God's ways for our life, you can imagine the foundation built for the person that lives so foolishly. It is both foolish and harmful when we show contempt and disrespect toward God and His ways.

Wisdom and Knowledge Start With God (9:10–12)

The beginning of wisdom is reverence and respect toward the Lord. Proverbs 1:7 repeats that fact, adding that fools despise wisdom and instruction. In verse 10, we understand that knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

We cannot be wise without God. The prerequisite, or beginning, is with reverence and honor to the one who bestows all wisdom.

It makes sense that knowing the "Holy One" brings about understanding. The Lord gives us insight that we would never be able to quite understand with human resources. We need His understanding in order to properly apply His wisdom. That understanding comes as a result of having a relationship with God.

Christians who attempt to take practical steps in walking in Godly wisdom make it a priority to get the Lord's input on the affairs of their daily lives, no matter how big or small. The results of such a lifestyle are days multiplied and years of life being added. You can imagine the healthy, joyful, peaceful, blessed life that develops from a life of walking in Godly wisdom. Even when trouble comes and circumstances become challenging, we have the wisdom of God that moves us to make Christ first in our decisions, our thoughts, and our actions.

Lady Folly's Invitation (9:13–15)

The culture today is genuinely loud, filled with clamor in the air from every direction. The world is not devoid of opinions and worldviews, but it is devoid of wisdom and understanding.

Everyone is struggling to be heard. But imagine what could happen when we focus our attention on God, His call on our lives, and the wisdom He imparts onto us as it relates to listening and speaking to one another, as well as the way we should treat one another.

Christians are not excused from the noise of this life. As sure as God is constantly trying to get our attention, the call for our attention from the felonious, devious folly is always at work to take our attention away from the Lord.

Lady folly is loud and rebellious (Proverbs 7:11). The term "clamorous" literally means "boisterous." Though she may be attractive and alluring, she is equally as loud and obnoxious to the wise, but a dynamite of desire for drama for the foolish. She is also "simple," or naïve, and knows nothing.

Folly sits at the door and calls aloud from the highest places of the city. Christian believers should always keep in mind that just because you are walking in wisdom, does not mean you will not feel enticed to participate in foolish activities. Folly also appears to use the same place to communicate, the highest place of the city.

The Deadly Results of Folly (9:16–18)

Individuals devoid of understanding are easily manipulated and taken advantage of by those seeking to do sinful deeds. Proverbs 7:7–8 is particular in pointing out youth, younger individuals who may lack understanding, naively floating through life without God's wisdom.

The invitation for folly usually never stops at the invitation. Such a moment is followed by foolish reasoning in an effort to convince those who are simple or naïve. Some people do not need much convincing to believe that something sinful can be for good.

Lady folly is using the same style of invitation as lady wisdom, but the motivation and rewards are different. Lady folly is appealing to the simple with immediate gratification. Some scholars believe that the reference "stolen water" in verse 17 is referring to illicit sexual activity that occurs outside of marriage. Lady folly also offers a lifestyle hidden in secrecy with the reference to bread eaten in secret. Lady folly considers this lifestyle as "pleasant," or "delightful."

Proverbs 20:17 says, "Bread gained by deceit *is* sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel." Imagine the after taste of emotional distraught, guilt, and shame that comes from doing a foolish, sinful deed—after the fact.

While there is something exciting and emotionally exhilarating about doing something we have no business doing, the consequences of our actions are always soon to follow.

Even if you believe you got away with something, the searing memory of it is even harder to escape from.

When we sin, willfully or unwilfully, we have an opportunity to repent and ask the Lord to forgive us. And He promised, He would. But it is important that we not abuse the grace God gives us. We make it a point to repent, receive the Lord's forgiveness, and daily choose not to consistently walk in such folly.

Those who choose a life of folly, according to verse 18, have no idea that those who follow folly, follow her to their deaths. This indicates that the life of physical pleasures and secret lifestyles are only "pleasant" for a short period of time. The house of the folly "leads down to death, and her paths to the dead" (Proverbs 2:18), and her house is the way to hell (Proverbs 7:27), and folly's guests are in the depths of hell.

Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Implications and Actions

We are met with choices every day, especially as it relates to choosing to follow God and the wisdom and understanding He provides. Or we can choose to go our own way, only to experience temporary gain and eternal consequences. When we choose Christ, we are declaring that His way for our life is best. God is faithful and just, and we can count on Him having the very best intentions for our lives, all for our good and for His glory.

Questions

1. Think of a choice you made recently. Was it God honoring?

2. What was the most foolish choice you ever made in your life? What lesson did you learn from the experience?

3. How does the Lord use us when we make wise choices?

4. Can the Lord use people who make foolish choices? If so, how might He do it?

5. Do your choices reflect that you trust in God? What can you start doing today to begin walking in wisdom?

ENDNOTES

[1] Buzzell, S. S. (1985). "Proverbs." In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 923–924). Victor Books.

FOCAL TEXT
Proverbs 13:24

BACKGROUND
Proverbs 3:11–12, 28; 22:15; 23:13–14; Colossians 3:21

lesson 7

Positive Results of Biblical Discipline

MAIN IDEA

God loves us unconditionally yet sometimes He has to punish His children. The same is true for us and our children.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Is it more important for me to give my child positive encouragement or punitive discipline?

STUDY AIM

To understand that when you teach a child that they will be held accountable to you for their actions, you are also teaching them they will be held accountable to a higher authority—God

QUICK READ

There are some things a child can learn through biblical discipline that otherwise he or she would have to learn later in life at a greater cost.

Introduction

What is the first thing that comes to a person's mind when they hear or see the word "discipline?"

When discipline is mentioned, some may think of a moment in childhood when they were caught doing or saying something wrong, and their parents disciplined them in such a way that they would learn not to consistently repeat the same mistake.

When others hear discipline, they associate it with productivity: getting homework assignments done, taking care of household chores, saving money, or organizing a space.

But there are also those who have a skewed view of discipline because of their experience with physical and mental abuse under the guise of discipline.

In today's culture, it is radical to believe that God's love for us is shown by virtue of the fact that He also disciplines us when we do what He considers wrong or sinful. The discipline that comes from God reflects on God's character and His call on our lives to be Holy as He is Holy (1 Peter 1:15–16).

God's love is unconditional. But He also chastises us when necessary. God, out of His great love for us, wants us to live a life that is Holy and acceptable to Him (Romans 12:1–2), and that kind of lifestyle comes with a committed life in Christ, and life guided by the Lord with guidance, instruction, and correction.

Proverbs 13:24

24 He who spares his rod hates his son,
But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.

Love Displayed With Discipline (13:24)

Imagine yourself as the parent of a child or teenager. You have set rules and boundaries as well as punishments when those rules have been broken. You expect your kids to obey you without question or debate.

If you have set a curfew for your teenaged son or daughter, you expect them to be back home no later than the time you told them. If you asked your son or daughter to clean up their rooms, you have expectations the job would get done. If you have had a firm conversation with your child about taking care of their school assignments, you expect them to put forth the same effort and interest into their education as they would a video game or a social media platform, though they may prefer one over the other.

When parents do this, they are setting a standard for the home, a standard that is God honoring and character building. When a child does not meet certain expectations, consequences follow. Discipline must occur, and they often do it by way of the removal of privileges or opportunities, like being grounded from going to the movies, hanging out with friends, or limited or no access to mobile devices.

This type of discipline is done out of love, not out of a desire to harm. Though children and teens may find discipline in the moment to be dramatically unpleasant and an affront to their pride, it is the disciplinary action driven by love from a responsible, loving adult that helps build the kind of character that honors and loves their parents and loves God.

A rod was usually a stick, or staff, used by shepherds to guide animals like sheep, but also used for punishment as well as for defense against predators.

A Love That Does Not Spare Discipline

Imagine a dad choosing to leave his son to his own devices, saying nothing to his son when his life could be in danger. Imagine this father who chooses not to impart wisdom as his son grows up. Rather than provide discipline and boundaries, that father chooses to let his son have what the culture would consider freedom, allowing the young man to make choices that will ultimately lead to a life of sin and death. Such parenting is cruel, and fortunately the Lord does not allow us to go through life without His correction and instruction, especially if you are receptive to it.

The world today may say this dad is simply showing love to his son by allowing him space to express himself. In fact, such a parent might think their son is smart enough and wise enough to take care of himself. Unfortunately, this expression of self is foolishness bound up in the heart of a child, a lifestyle that must be driven out by discipline (22:15). It is also important that godly, biblical discipline not be withheld out of fear that such instruction would be too extreme (23:13).

Proverbs 13:24 immediately jumps into the heart of the matter: if you spare disciplining your child, you are not truly loving your child, but hating them instead. But, if you love your child, you will discipline them "promptly," which literally means "early."

There is a great benefit in growing up and learning about God and His Son Jesus early and hearing His Word every day and night. When God disciplines us, it is early and often, protecting us from unseen dangers and making corrections in us and through us that yields fruit and develops a life that is Holy, or set apart for Him.

Early instruction from the beginnings of a child's life will cultivate behavior that reflects instruction and correction was given early and often.

Proverbs 19:18 encourages parents to "chasten," or "discipline" their sons "while there is hope." This further confirms the teaching that discipline should take place early while early growth and development is still taking place. The portion of Proverbs 19:18 that reads "and do not set your heart on his destruction" is a warning not to allow a child to simply get away innocently with their behavior, thereby indulging them.

Even in our early days of Christian faith, the Lord in all His grace, mercy, patience, and love for us made sure to correct and instruct us, and He never ceases to do so.

Encouraged Not to Be Discouraged by Discipline

Can you picture a young man being disciplined by his dad … the discomfort, the feeling of embarrassment and shame, and the words that are said if said by a clear-minded, loving, but firm parent that pierces to the center?

Discipline can often be wrought with aches and pain and emotional baggage that follow. But Hebrews 12:5–7 reminds us that if we are sons (and daughters) in Christ, we are encouraged

not to despise or hate the corrective discipline the Lord brings, nor should we be discouraged. God's discipline for us is not God saying, "I'm done with you," but instead a dedicated reflection of what verse 6 says: "For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

God's discipline, though it may not be pleasant or joyful in the moment, in the end causes the believer to yield "the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Hebrew 12:11).

A Blessed Disciplined Life

What are immediate, fruitful results that come from a life that is disciplined? Consider the following ways that a disciplined life can improve our quality of living:

- You will speak up about a matter instead of avoiding it.
- You will make it a priority to take care of important items on your schedule as quickly as possible.
- You will have purpose in everything you do instead of wondering aimlessly.
- You will persevere, sticking to something that you committed to.
- You will continue to pursue the things of God even when you make mistakes, and when you do, you make it a priority to repent and ask the Lord to forgive you, strengthen you, and help you.

Isaiah 32:17 says, "The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever." Disciplined people can expect to live a life rooted in righteousness and joyful in peace and assurance regardless of a loud world and uncertain times.

The Graceful and Merciful Act of Discipline

The believer in Christ is fortunate the Lord does not make demands of us that are unreasonable or impossible. He leaves it to us to trust Him with the impossible. We are to merely be obedient and faithful to Him.

God's grace is His unmerited favor toward us. It is God giving to us what we do not deserve. God's mercy is His withholding of what we actually do deserve. Thank God for His grace and His mercy even in the administering of discipline.

When God disciplines us, He is correcting and instructing us in order for our lives to be properly aligned to His will and way. Ultimately, the Lord is helping us look more like Him.

God disciplines us in such a way that shows His instruction toward us, even when unpleasant at times, is not only symbolic of His love in the action, but also in the way He administers such discipline toward us. Parents today would do well in striving to model such a style of discipline for their children.

Colossians 3:21 encourages fathers not to provoke their children to wrath, otherwise you discourage the child. In other words, constant, unending criticism and harsh words could lead to irritation and discouragement for the child. Imagine how quickly bitterness and lack of self-worth would enter our hearts if the

Lord mercilessly and carelessly imparted discipline toward us. We might grow doubtful of God's love for us.

But God gives a healthy balance, as should parents. The Lord encourages us, but He also tells us the truth about our state of being. He loves us too much to leave us in the same pitiful condition. We can ask the Lord to help us to work out that delicate balance.

Ephesians 6:4 echoes the same message as Colossians 3:21 but adding that father's should bring up their child "in the training and admonition of the Lord."

The training that is mentioned in the text refers to a type of instruction that should result in the development of certain daily habits. It is a good sign to see a child praying to the Lord because they've been raised to. It is a good sign to see a child, and even an adult, love someone who may be difficult to love. They are modeling what they have been instructed to model. And the training does not end in childhood. Believers in Christ go through a lifetime of training.

Deuteronomy 6:7–8 emphasizes an ongoing lifestyle of seeking the Lord and learning from Him. Children should be taught with diligence, at home, while traveling, before bed, and first thing in the morning.

The word "admonition" refers to the giving of cautionary advice to assist in avoiding danger and unpleasantness.

Believers should thank the Lord for His caring discipline that instructs us, corrects us, and protects us.

Implications and Actions

God's love is shown to all of us when He corrects and instructs us. Though the moment of correction and instruction can sometimes feel uncomfortable and inconvenient, such discipline is essential. We receive enormous benefits from a loving God who cares enough to tell us what we are doing wrong. We gain so much from a God who directs our path as we seek to daily acknowledge Him. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are being held accountable by God. Our loving Father refuses to allow us to continue to live a life that does not reflect that reality. When the Lord is disciplining us, may we receive such correction openly and with a faith that says we trust that the Lord is right and just in what He is doing.

Questions

1. Are you receptive to God's instruction and correction?

2. Why do you think people are apprehensive toward discipline for children?

3. Why do you think people are apprehensive toward discipline for themselves?

4. How is the Lord disciplining you this week? Are you seeing any results in such instruction and correction?

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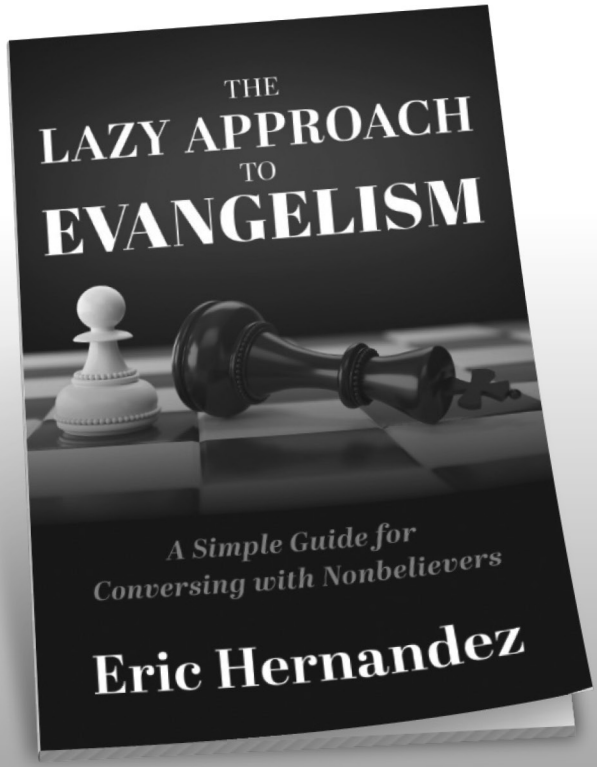
The Lazy Approach to Evangelism: A Simple Guide for Conversing with Nonbelievers



Unfortunately, the biblical command of apologetics in evangelism is often neglected and misunderstood within our churches today. As a result, the church has become a largely irrelevant, ignorable institution within the public sphere of ideas. We must learn how to have effective gospel conversations within this culture of doubt. Evangelism doesn't have to be intimidating or difficult. That is the aim of this book. To equip you with the tools necessary for initiating and navigating fruitful conversations with nonbelievers in a secular society.

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FOCAL TEXT
Proverbs 14:34

BACKGROUND
Jeremiah 6:16–19;
Romans 14:17

lesson 8

The Search for Righteousness

MAIN IDEA

Our country needs a revolution of righteousness based on the absolute truths of the Bible.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Is America still a moral compass for the rest of the world?

STUDY AIM

To understand that our country was founded on absolute truths, whereas today, many in our country believe that all truth is relative

QUICK READ

From the very beginning of our country our forefathers believed God is the source of life, liberty, and our pursuit of happiness. America is now at a crossroads of morality and God is the only hope for our nation.

Introduction

My Sunday School teacher said his dad's famous line was "just do what is right." That sounds so simple. But the only reason his dad could say that without any further explanation, is because his son had already been taught what was right. He was raised in the church, and he knew what God considered to be right. So, all he had to do was think about it.

Our nation's laws and liberties were built on biblical truths, but it seems like we have lost our moral compass somewhere along the way. When truth is relative, then the lines get blurry. If everyone can decide for themselves what is good, right, and true, then there is no standard by which to live. Without standards, chaos ensues and there is no peace, justice, or unity. If we want to be an exalted nation, then God's Word must be our standard for truth and righteousness.

Proverbs 14:34

[34] Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a disgrace to *any* people.

A Righteous Nation (Proverbs 14:34)

To have a righteous nation, we need righteous people. But what does that look like and how do we impose righteousness on an entire nation so we will be held in high esteem? Is God asking for perfection from everyone? Romans 3:23 says, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." So, God does not expect per-

fection. He did not save Noah from the flood because Noah was sinless. God had favor on him because Noah had not lost his sense of right and wrong. His moral compass had not decayed like everyone else's. Righteousness starts with a heart for God, and a strong moral compass is the result of that relationship with God. In Philippians 2:15, Paul said to "prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world." We cannot impose righteousness on the entire nation. But, by living according to God's ways, we can shine a light on the immorality of our culture and reveal God's righteousness to others.

We also cannot allow the culture to corrupt us. First Corinthians 15:33 says that "bad company corrupts good morals." It is dangerous to surround ourselves with people who violate God's righteousness regularly, or to allow our hearts and minds to be filled with immorality. Fifty years ago, what would have been too scandalous or indecent to show on television, play on the radio, and do or say in public, is now considered normal and acceptable. This makes it harder to see the decay and corruption. So, we must hold everything to God's standard of righteousness and be careful about what we let into our hearts and minds. Matthew 6:22–23 says, "The eye is the lamp of the body; so then, if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness." If we want to keep ourselves righteous in the eyes of God, then it matters what we watch, read, listen to, and surround ourselves with.

Meanings and Interpretations

Righteousness exalts a nation, but *sin* is a *disgrace* to any people (Proverbs 14:34, emphasis added).

Noah was a *righteous* man, *blameless* in his generation. Noah walked with God. Now the earth was *corrupt* in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with *violence* (Genesis 6:9b, 11, emphasis added).

- Righteousness—right; moral; virtuous; just
- Exalts—lifts up; high
- Sin—miss the mark; fail to do what is expected
- Disgrace—make the head hang; a pity; a shame
- Blameless—whole; integrity; undefiled
- Corrupt—Decay; to lose
- Violence—violate; damage, falsify

A nation that does what is right in the eyes of God (being moral, virtuous, and just) is held in high esteem. But a country that fails to do what God expects (missing the mark He has for them) is pitied and hangs its head in shame.

Noah walked with God and did what was right in His eyes. Noah remained whole and undefiled. But the morality of everyone else had been lost and decayed. They had violated, damaged, and falsified God's righteousness.

We cannot be perfect, but we should look different from the world. Noah was blameless in his generation because he did not look like everyone else. He was known for his goodness, integrity, and justice and everyone else was known for their corruption, immorality, and violence. Galatians 5:16, 19–23 says, "Walk

by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. … Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, indecent behavior, idolatry, witchcraft, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these… Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." Noah was not practicing immorality because he was walking with God. When we walk by the Spirit, we do not practice sinful things and we produce fruit that is righteous. Luke 6:43–44 says, "For there is no good tree that bears bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree that bears good fruit. For a tree is known by its own fruit." So, if we produce good fruit, we will be known as righteous. But if we practice sinful things, we will be known as immoral.

Noah was walking with God instead of going his own way or the way of the world. Proverbs 16:25 says, "There is a way *which seems* right to a person, but its end is the way of death." But Psalm 23:3 says that the Lord "guides me in the paths of righteousness." Being righteous does not mean doing every, single, thing right. It means we are walking with God instead of taking our own path. Proverbs 26:12 says, "Do you see a person wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him." It is about direction, not perfection.

Truth and Righteousness

To know the truth and find righteousness, we must look to God. As intelligent and relational people, we may reason things out

in our own minds or ask a friend or family member when we are trying to decide the right course of action. But God should always be the first one we ask. Any advice or reason must be filtered through what He says in His Word and through His Spirit. By reading the Bible, attending church, and praying, we hear from God. Then we can live out what we know.

Psalm 119:160 says, "The sum of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments is everlasting." God's Word is the only way to know absolute truth and find His righteousness, so it should always be the first place we look. We should read and listen to God's Word being taught, while also talking it over with other believers. Christian teaching, fellowship, and encouragement are so important to our faith. Hebrews 10:24–25 says, "Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*" (NKJV).

Praying helps us understand what we read and guides us in truth and righteousness. When Jesus walked this earth, the people followed and learned from Him directly. He knew they would feel lost when He went to be with the Father, so He comforted them by explaining that God would send the Holy Spirit in His place. He could guide and teach everyone, at the same time, forever, unlike Jesus who could only teach those who were physically with Him (See John 14:26, 16:7, 13). When we pray, this Helper and Spirit of Truth helps us discern the ways of God, too.

By meditating on God's Word, it is more firmly established. Philippians 4:8 says, "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if anything wor-

thy of praise, think about these things." When we continuously think about good things, they begin to flow from our minds to our hearts. Our hearts need to be filled with goodness because whatever is in our heart is reflected in our words and actions. Luke 6:45 says, "the good person out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil *person* out of the evil *treasure* brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills *his* heart." So, if we fill our heart and mind with truth and goodness, then it will begin to pour out of us.

Growing in Righteousness

- Read the Bible
- Go to church and Bible study
- Study and memorize the Scriptures
- Think about God and His Word
- Let His Word reach your heart
- Talk about God and His Word
- Talk to the Lord (pray)
- Listen when He talks to you
- Obey what God says

One Can Influence Many

If you are feeling overwhelmed by trying to be righteous and you are also wondering how one person can influence a nation, remember that God often starts with just a few. He began with only Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:27). But after the number of people grew on the earth, they all became corrupt. Everyone but Noah

and his family had lost their moral compass. So, God sent a flood to destroy the earth and He started over with only Noah, his three sons, and their wives (Genesis 6:5–18). God promised never to destroy the earth with a flood again (Genesis 9:11). But He repeatedly chose just a few to change the course of many. He called Abram (renamed Abraham) to a new land and promised to make him into a great nation. Through him the whole world would be blessed (Genesis 12:1–3). This promise was passed to Abraham's son, Isaac, then to his son, Jacob (renamed Israel). Jacob had twelve sons, and through these, a nation was born (Deuteronomy 29:10–13). God took Israel as His own and taught them His laws and ways. Through them He displayed His power and holiness to the world, so everyone would know He was God (Deuteronomy 4:1–14, 33–40). He used this nation, which began with twelve men, to reveal Himself to the world.

But when Israel rejected their Messiah, Jesus chose twelve more men to change the course of the world (Mark 3:14–19). These twelve apostles traveled with Him for three years, getting to know Him and learning His ways. One of these men betrayed Jesus and Jesus was killed. But the other eleven appointed Matthias to replace Judas and they began to teach that Jesus's death brought life to all who repented and believed (Acts 1:15–26; 2:22–24, 36–47). After His death, Jesus came to Saul (renamed Paul), a man who had been persecuting His disciples, and called Paul to believe and spread the gospel, too (Acts 9:1–22). Together the apostles, Paul, and other believers, began to establish one church after the other. Some of these men also wrote letters to the churches and other accounts of Jesus and His teachings, and they became the books of the New Testament.

Now, two millennia later, those few churches have expanded across countries and oceans, and we read the Bible in homes and churches all over the world. The great commission Jesus gave in Matthew 28:19–20 to "go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to follow all that I command you" is being fulfilled right before our eyes, and it all started with just a few.

Implications and Actions

The hope for our nation is found in you. If you know what God says and you live it out, you can influence others. Matthew 5:16 says, "Your light must shine before people in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." So, read God's Word, listen to its teachings, and meditate on it so you can better understand Him and form your beliefs. Then do as it said in Deuteronomy 6:7–9 and "speak of them when you sit in your house, when you walk on the road, when you lie down, and when you get up. You shall also tie them as a sign to your hand, and they shall be as frontlets on your forehead. You shall also write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

Questions

1. Do you have a good moral compass, or have you let the world corrupt your sense of right and wrong?

2. What are you known for? What do you want to be known for?

3. Are you more inclined to reason things out in your own mind, ask someone else, or turn to God first?

4. How can you influence others to grow in righteousness?

FOCAL TEXT
Proverbs 15:15–17

BACKGROUND
Proverbs 15:1, 18, 32; Psalm 68:4–6; 119:67; John 10:10

lesson 9

Desperate Families

MAIN IDEA

There is much turmoil in American families today because the most important missing ingredient for family happiness is love and laughter in the home.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Can my desperation turn into celebration?

STUDY AIM

To understand that desperation does not have to lead to despair; it can lead you to God

QUICK READ

Today's American families desperately need help.

Introduction

My grandmother grew up in a small farm town in Texas, in the 1940s and 50s. As the youngest of four children, she picked cotton and hoed the fields with her family from a very early age. The only break she got from the field was when she went home with her mom to make lunch. Then, they also grew their own food and raised animals for eggs, milk, and meat. It was hard work, and no one was exempt. But they still had plenty of time to ride bikes, and explore the land, and do all the other fun things kids do. Then on Sunday morning and Wednesday night, they all went to church. When my grandmother talks about her childhood, she always has a smile on her face. Every time she ends by saying, "We were poor, but we did not know it. We may not have had much, but we always had food to eat and clothes on our backs, and we had love. Our home was filled with love."

Proverbs 15:15–17

15 All the days of the needy are bad,
But a cheerful heart *has* a continual feast.
16 Better is a little with the fear of the LORD
Than great treasure, and turmoil with the treasure.
17 Better is a portion of vegetables where there is love,
Than a fattened ox *served* with hatred.

A Firm Foundation (Proverbs 15:15–17)

To be in need of anything is difficult. But we are only truly poor when our heart is lacking. Without joy, faith, and love, we will

feel dissatisfied even if we have acquired other great assets. The world tells us that the most successful people have an abundance of money and possessions. But honestly, it is much more valuable to be prosperous inwardly than it is to be rich outwardly. What good does it do to have all the finest things this world has to offer if we are miserable? We can spend all our time and energy focusing on being successful according to worldly standards, only to find ourselves tired, angry, and dissatisfied. But if our family is full of love, then we can be content no matter what our present circumstances may be. Paul said, "I know how to get along with little, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every *circumstance* I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:12–13).

A family that knows God and does their best to live according to His Word, has already acquired the most important thing they could ever have. When He is the foundation upon which everything else is built, our family is strong. Even if we do not have everything else we need, we can remain cheerful and united through Him. Matthew 7:24–27 says, "Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts on them, will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and its collapse was great."

Not only does God give us strength to handle the hard times, but He is the only true source of a cheerful heart. Psalm 16:11 says His "presence is full of joy" and in His "right hand there are pleasures forever." With Him we also find love, not just because "love is from God," but also because "God is love" (see 1 John 4:7–8). The world can bring happiness in wonderful circumstances, but only God can give us joy amid sorrow or peace "which surpasses all comprehension" (Philippians 4:7). Satan is a thief who uses the lures of this world to steal our joy, kill our love, and destroy our families. But Jesus came so we could live an abundant life (John 10:10). By inviting Him into our homes, our family can be filled with the kind of love and joy that only He can give. Romans 5:5 says, "the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

The Most Important Things

To fill a jar with rocks, pebbles, and sand, they each must be added in the proper order. Because the rocks are the biggest, we must put them in first. Then if we add the pebbles and shake the jar some, they will begin to fill the empty space between the rocks. At the very end, we can pour the sand over the top, and it will fill in all the space that is left. If we try to put the sand in first, it will take up all the space at the bottom of the jar and the rocks will not fit. This is how we also must fill our lives. If we seek the inner things of God first, then add the necessities of life, everything we want will begin to fall into place, and make our lives full. But if we focus on what we want, or even on what we need in the phys-

ical sense, and neglect the things of the heart, we will never feel fulfilled.

When our primary focus is on making money and acquiring things, we also gather burdens. Our minds and bodies become tired, and we do not have time for God. Then our spirits begin to fill with worry, frustration, and discouragement. Soon there is no room left for the most important things of the heart like love, joy, peace, and hope. Our primary focus needs to be in acquiring the things of God and trusting Him for the things of the body. Otherwise, our homes will be filled with anger, and everyone will become divided. "If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand" (Mark 3:25).

Prioritizing Our Lives

- Rocks—Most Important Things
  - spiritual things of God; righteousness, love, joy, peace, hope, etc.
- Pebbles—Necessities of Life
  - food, water, shelter, clothing, etc.
- Sand—What We Want
  - non-essentials; more expensive, nicer, or extra things

Do you have your priorities in order?
Are you looking to God to meet your needs or trying to acquire them on your own?

When our primary focus is on loving, fearing, and following the Lord, He will fill us with His love and joy, and we will be sat-

isfied. Ephesians 3:16–19 says, "to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner self, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to all the fullness of God."

If we find ourselves lacking the most important things or the necessities of life, we must turn our focus to God instead of trying to acquire them on our own. Jesus said, "Do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For all these things *are what* the nations of the world eagerly seek; and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek His kingdom, and these things will be provided to you" (Luke 12:29–31). So, we do not have to worry about the things everyone else does because we know a God who can provide. That frees us to focus on Him and trust Him to focus on our needs.

Hope Is Found in God

I still remember the first time I asked God for something like peace or comfort instead of the normal things like healing, protection, or help in a difficult situation. Most of my prayers up to that point had been financial or physical, and they had not really pertained to the inner things of the heart. But if I trusted him to heal my body, then I should have trusted Him to heal my heart, too. He is the Creator of everything we see, so why could He not also create something invisible like a feeling. I had just never thought to ask Him for things like that before and I was somehow surprised when He answered that first prayer.

Jehovah Jireh

Abraham called God, *Jehovah Jireh,* meaning "The Lord will Provide."

Some things God provides:

Comfort—Psalm 119:76
Discernment—1 Corinthians 2:12–14
Endurance—Colossians 1:11
Forgiveness—Exodus 34:6–7
Guidance—Psalm 31:3
Healing for the body—Psalm 103:3
Healing for the Brokenhearted—Psalm 147:3
Help—Psalm 121:2
Hope—Psalm 39:7
Joy—Romans 15:13
Justice—Psalm 146:7
Love—1 John 4:10
Peace—Philippians 4:6–7; John 14:27
Protection—Psalm 32:7
Rain and Food—Psalm 147:8–9
Rest—Matthew 11:28
Restoration—Psalm 23:3
Strength—Isaiah 40:29–31
Understanding—Job 12:13; 2 Timothy 2:7
Wisdom—James 1:5

"For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. So if you, *despite* being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:8, 11)

In a time when I was feeling terribly lonely, I felt a brief touch. It came from a person, but it was as if God Himself had reached out and touch me. I had been praying repeatedly for the Lord to help me and I was hoping for a much more tangible remedy to my situation. But instantly I knew it was God's comfort and reassurance that I would not be lonely forever.

Then there was the time that the Lord gave me perfect peace over a situation that, by any human standard, I should not have been at peace with. I am not ashamed to say, my initial reaction was panic. I went to my bedroom to call a friend, but when she did not answer, I remembered to pray. God told me nothing new about the situation. He did not explain how it would all work out. He put no positive spin on it. Absolutely nothing had changed. It still sounded like a horrible idea, but somehow, I walked out of that bedroom with a feeling of complete peace. Even after the plan moved forward, I never once felt panicked about it again.

From a human perspective, I cannot explain how things like this work. All I know is that God really is "able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we can ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20).

Over the years, I have seen Him do this in many ways. If we tell Him we are lonely, sometimes He brings us a companion and sometimes He brings us comfort and hope. When we are worried about something, He may fix the problem so we no longer have anything to worry about, or He may give us the peace that only He can give. God can bring a father to the one who is without, or He can meet every need that a father would. He can bring justice to the widow who is being taken advantage of, or He can bring her a husband. God can work within the bounds of this world, but He is not limited by them. So, our job is not to tell Him how

to meet our needs. All we need to do is ask Him and then have faith that He can. Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is *the* certainty of *things* hoped for, a proof of things not seen."

Implications and Actions

In Luke 10:38–42, Martha complained to Jesus about her sister Mary sitting at His feet, listening to His word instead of getting up and helping her prepare for their visitors. He responded by saying, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; but *only* one thing is necessary; for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41–42). Do not be distracted by the necessities or desires of this world. Instead, sit in the presence of the Lord, listen to His Word, and follow Him. Tell Him all your needs and the desires of your heart. Then trust Him to provide all you are lacking. Psalm 37:4–5 says, "Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it."

Questions

1. Where is your primary focus? Where should it be?

2. Are you building your foundation on the Lord? Do you love and fear Him enough to follow Him?

3. Look at the list of things God provides. What are you lacking? Commit it to prayer and trust Him to provide.

4. Do you know anyone in desperate need of God's provision? Encourage them to trust and hope in Him.

FOCAL TEXT

Proverbs 22:7

BACKGROUND

Matthew 6:21; Hebrews 13:5; Luke 12:15; Proverbs 3:9

lesson 10

A Matter of Life or Debt

MAIN IDEA

Unwise debt is a symptom of the disease of greed.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How can I achieve financial freedom?

STUDY AIM

To understand that only the presence of God in your life can give you real contentment

QUICK READ

God has promised to provide all our needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus. He did not promise to give us everything we want.

Introduction

When my husband and I got married, like most young couples, we did not have much. One day, after watching a home video of those early years, I asked, "Where are all of our things?" He laughed and said, "That is all we had." I could not believe it. The room was bare. I started listing things that I felt surely, we could not have lived without. But again, he said, "No, we did not have the money for all of that in the beginning. We did not get those things until much later." Because we have had more than what is needed for so long, wants had become needs in my mind.

By confusing wants with needs, we can start a vicious cycle of greed and dissatisfaction. When we believe we need something, we are less inclined to wait until we have the money to buy it, which may compel us to take on debt. Then, the more we owe, the more money we need to make. The more we must make, the less we feel like we have, which makes us want even more. This lifestyle will only make us feel enslaved and cannot bring true satisfaction.

Proverbs 22:7

7 The rich rules over the poor, And the borrower *becomes* the lender's slave.

Finding Financial Freedom (Proverbs 22:7)

When I was growing up, we could only watch live television or videos and listen to the radio or albums. To watch a specific pro-

gram, we had to be present at the time of its showing and we sat through commercials. If we happened to miss our favorite program, we had to wait for a rerun. We also waited an entire week for a new episode no matter what. If we had a question or needed to do research, we had to ask someone, buy a book, or go to the library. All difficult math was done on a calculator, and you could only talk on the phone at certain times and places where land lines were available. If you did not want to speak verbally, you had to write a letter or note, then either mail it or give it to them in person. The point is that preparation and waiting were built into our daily lives.

But today, we live in a culture that indulges instant gratification. Technology allows us to watch or listen to almost anything we want, without interruption, at any time. We can pause and rewind at our convenience and watch multiple episodes in one sitting. With the internet and cell phones, we can get the answer to any question and research any subject, in an instant. Then, not only can we communicate with anyone at almost any time, but we can also send written messages to several people at once and receive an immediate response. We are taught that we do not have to wait or prepare for much of anything. Because of this, we can easily get frustrated when we cannot quickly get what we want without much planning.

Because we often confuse our wants for needs and we are also used to being immediately gratified, we can easily find ourselves in debt. So, if we want financial freedom, we must retrain ourselves to be patient and have self-control. Proverbs 25:28 (ESV) says, "A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls." If we do not set boundaries for our purchases

and stick to them, then we are vulnerable to taking on unwise debt. So, when we find ourselves wanting, or even needing something that we cannot afford, we must evaluate how immediate the need really is. Most large purchases are not immediate needs, so we can work and save until we have the money to buy what we need. If we can afford the extra payments of a loan, then we can also afford to save that same amount of money and make our purchase later. Either way, we are setting money aside. The difference is that when we save, we are not indebted to anyone else. Also, because we do not have the burden of interest payments, we can put aside the same amount of money and make our purchase quicker, or we can set aside less money and buy it in the same amount of time. We can often stay out of debt and still make our purchases, just by exercising a little patience and self-control.

We Have a Heart Problem

But why do we want what we cannot afford in the first place? Since the beginning of time, people have been inclined to want what others have. No matter what it is, it seems like if someone else gets it, then we suddenly realize that we want it too. Sometimes that is because our vehicle is continuously breaking down, or our house is too small for our growing family. Sometimes the newest piece of technology would really be helpful to us, or our house is falling apart and needs major renovations. So, we see someone else with a new vehicle or the newest high-tech electronics, and it only reminds us that we really need to upgrade. Or they get a new house or renovate, and it prompts us to decide it is time that we improve our living situation, too. But often, we just

want something newer, bigger, better, or nicer. We will never be satisfied with less, especially if we see someone else with more.

In this instance, we may really value our purchase, or we may just think that it will make other people value us more. When we think we are defined by what we own, we can be tempted to incur debt just so everyone will see us as successful or important. This is more about our identity and status than it is about how much we value our purchase. Jesus warned against this way of thinking saying, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15, ESV). Dissatisfaction with what we have, or with who we are, cannot be solved with money and things. This is a heart problem, not a financial problem. Ephesians 2:10 says that "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." We should find our identity in being a Christian and let our love and service toward Him make us valuable.

But our insatiable appetite for more may not have anything to do with others. Instead, we may be trying to fill a void within ourselves, thinking that these things will make us happy. Solomon had beautiful houses, vineyards, and gardens. His flocks and herds were larger than any kings before him and he had more money than he knew what to do with. He did not restrain himself from any possession or pleasure. He bought everything that he wanted and yet he said that "all was futility and striving after wind, and there was no benefit under the sun" (See Ecclesiastes 2:4–11). If Solomon could not satisfy himself with riches, then no one can. The reason that all his acquired wealth was useless is because it could not fill the emptiness he felt inside. Ecclesiastes 5:10 (ESV) says, "He who loves money will not be satisfied with

money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity." If what we are longing for is spiritual, then we will never find it by accumulating physical possessions. Only God can truly cure heart problems.

Do Not Covet

Tenth Commandment—You shall not *covet* your neighbor's wife, nor desire your neighbor's house, his field, his male slave or his female slave, his ox, his donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor (Deuteronomy 5:21, emphasis added)

Covet—desire, take pleasure in, delight in

God said we should not want what other people have. We are sinning against Him when we do. All the other commandments forbid an action, something visible and provable. But this one forbids a thought or desire, something no one would know but us and God. Why is this such an insult to God and worthy of being included in these ten? The first two commandments forbid the worship of other gods (idols) but this last one forbids the worship of ourselves (self-idolatry). All three address where we set our affections. Our love should be centered on our Creator and Savior; not on ourselves.

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and *covetousness, which is idolatry* (Colossians 3:5, emphasis added, ESV).

What Do We Treasure?

First John 2:15–16 says, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world." God wants our heart. When we seek after the things of this world and are even willing to go into debt because of them, we are revealing where our true affections lie. Hebrews 13:5 says to "*make sure that* your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, 'I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER ABANDON YOU.'" We should be happy with God and all the things He has already blessed us with. Psalm 10:3 says that a greedy person "shows disrespect to the LORD."

Proverbs 10:22 says, "It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it."

Then 1 Timothy 6:6–10 says, "But godliness *actually* is a means of great gain *when* accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it, either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." By setting our affections on the things of this world, we will only cause ourselves more problems. But when you "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind,

and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30), then you fulfill the greatest commandment and satisfy your every need.

Finding Financial Freedom Checklist

- Distinguish between needs and wants
- Determine if it is an immediate need or if it can wait
- Is it a heart problem or a financial problem?
  - Dissatisfaction with what you have (coveting, discontent, ungratefulness)
  - Dissatisfaction with who you are (identity, worth, status)
  - Filling a spiritual void with a physical possession
  - Do you treasure it more than you treasure God?

If you still want to purchase the item:

- Determine its cost
- Decide how much you need to save and for how long
- Have patience and self-control
- Look to God for help

So, do not set your "hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy." "Do good" and "be rich in good works." "Be generous and ready to share, storing up… the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that" you "may take hold of that which is truly life" (1 Timothy 6:17–19). The oppressive lifestyle of debt is not the abundant life God wants for us. "Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where

neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19–21). When we make God our treasure, then the riches of this world will not matter enough to burden ourselves with unwise debt.

Implications and Actions

To get out of debt and stay out of debt, we must discipline our hearts and minds. The world has taught us not to prepare or wait, and to be dissatisfied, self-centered, and ungrateful. So, we must retrain ourselves to be thankful for what we have and be patient with what we do not. In practicing self-control and contentment, we can change our habits and find financial freedom. Then, by learning to focus our affections on the Lord and not on the things of this world, He will satisfy our thirsty soul and fill our hungry soul with what is good (See Psalm 107:9).

Questions

1. Do you struggle to discern between wants and needs?

2. Is it hard for you to wait and prepare for the things you want?

3. Are you content with what you have?

4. How well are you fulfilling God's greatest commandment to love Him above all others?

FOCAL TEXT

Proverbs 23:17–18

BACKGROUND

James 4:13–17;
Matthew 6:26–27, 33–34;
Ecclesiastes 11:4

lesson 11

Hope for Your Future

MAIN IDEA

As we look to the future, we should not be filled with fear but with powerful hope. God's Word is filled with promises of hope.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How can I replace my fear and anxiety with hope?

STUDY AIM

To understand that facing the future means being ready for whatever comes tomorrow

QUICK READ

The Bible teaches the importance of wise planning. But it is a mistake to make your plans for the future without including God. A child of God sees tomorrow as full of hope.

Introduction

One of the most basic needs all people have is that of security. We desire deeply to have some measure of control against the unknown. That is why we have savings accounts, why we buy insurance for our lives, our houses, our cars, our health, etc., why we store up food and other supplies, and we could go on.

Perhaps an extreme example of this idea would be the so called "doomsday prepper." Have you heard of those? A simple Google search yielded me the following "doomsday preparation kit" including items such as: drinking water, non-perishable food, first aid kit, extra batteries, whistle (to signal for help), dust mask, manual can opener and, of course, your cell phone. I think this kit would be a short-term solution for, say, a winter storm that keeps the power off for a week or two. Some "preppers," however, plan for much longer times, years even. I have seen kits on TV that have enough food for 20 years or more. Why do we act this way? Why do we feel so insecure? I also wonder, would Jesus have been a "prepper?"

In the most important way of all, Jesus was a "prepper." He wants us to be prepared for Heaven. He wants to forgive our sins and be our Savior. Ironically, those most prepared for eternity with Jesus in Heaven have the best reasons not to be anxious today. The spiritually prepared see a bright future and have an eternal hope.

Proverbs 23:17–18

17 Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous
for the fear of the Lord. 18 There is surely a future hope for
you, and your hope will not be cut off.

Do Not Envy Sinners (23:17a)

Envy is one of those desires that can begin to control or consume you. Marketing often uses envy to manipulate you into buying their product. "Everyone has the latest iPhone," we may be led to believe. Or perhaps, "You have to have the new 4k 75-inch flat screen for football season." How about, "Anybody who is anybody lives in this neighborhood," and on we could go.

There is not anything inherently wrong with having the latest device, or a better TV or fancy address. The problem, potentially, is that the pursuit of those things can become an obsession. When envy takes hold, when it sends its roots down into our hearts, it becomes our master.

God gave us a warning about envy near the beginning our His story with us. In the Ten Commandments we are told not to covet our neighbor's house, wife, servant, donkey, or "anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Exodus 20:17). Watch this carefully. The tenth of the Commandments is directly related to the first, "You shall have no other gods before me." Our Heavenly Father, who made us and knows us best, is giving us the foundation for a thriving, joyful, and wonderful life. It is simply this: When we love God more than anything or anyone else, when He is the supreme joy of our hearts, everything else finds its proper place. As

I am writing this, I can almost hear Jesus saying, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow…" (Matthew 6:33–34).

So, our focus in life, the loves of our life, must be found in God's heart. Envy tries to turn those loves away in every possible direction. So, the wisdom writer warns, "Do not let your heart envy sinners."

Be Zealous for the Fear of the Lord (23:17b)

Interestingly, the word for "zealous" is in the same family of words as "envy." The shades of meaning are different with zealous inferring a passionate pursuit of that which is good and envy the passionate pursuit of that which is not good. Watch this carefully. The writer was saying, "It's fine to be passionate about things in life, just be sure that your passion for God is supreme" (my paraphrase). So, we are challenged to replace the passion associated with envy, a negative passion, with a passion that pursues God, Himself, a positive passion. When the writer used the phrase "fear of the Lord," he was describing a life wholly committed to God. He was describing someone who loves the Lord, God, with all his/her heart, soul, and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5).

Again, in my imagination I can hear the Savior: "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or, 'What shall we drink?' or, 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans *run after all these things*" (Matthew 6:31–32, italics mine). Jesus continued, (again, my paraphrase) "If you want to run after something, if you want to

passionately pursue something, fine, *then run after my Father's Kingdom and righteousness*."

The *Shema*

The *Shema* is the central affirmation of Judaism. It is found in Deuteronomy 6:4–5. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength." Some Jewish men would wear small, leather boxes called phylacteries, which contained the written words of the *Shema*, which they would recite in their prayers to remind them to always keep true to the Jewish Law, that is, the Law of Moses.

I think the writer is saying the same thing. Turn your passions away from the negative—envy—and turn them to the positive—the zealous pursuit of God.

There Is a Future Hope (23:18a)

It is sometimes very difficult to see past anxiety to a certain, blessed future, yet that is exactly what Scripture asks us to do. Jesus, Himself, set the example. Look at how the writer of Hebrews said it: "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. *For the joy set before him he endured the cross,* scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2, italics mine). Jesus saw past the horror of the cross to the eternal hope and joy of redeemed sinners, people whom He

loved, trusting Him as Savior. Because of Jesus' sacrifice, there is a future hope for all who may be anxious in this life. That includes you and me.

The Proverbs writer was proclaiming the same joyous hope. "There is surely a future hope" for all who are "zealous for the fear of the Lord." The contrast could not be greater. There is no hope or future for those who chase after the things of the world, who envy the ways of the sinners, whereas there is a sure and eternal hope for the God pursuers. That sure future is also found in the most known and quoted verse in all the Bible. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Your Hope Will Not Be Cut Off (23:18b)

How blessed are these words to a people whose past is filled with such loss. The ancient Hebrews knew slavery in Egypt, they experienced the loss of their homeland to Assyria and to Babylon. They were attacked again and again losing family members, houses, inheritances, and hearts. Is there anything that could possibly be worse than "losing everything?" Yes, being cut off from their place with God.

Surely, cut off was how Job felt in the midst of his suffering, when he could not find God, when the Divine One was silent before him. Hear his lament in Job 23:3, 8–9. "If only I knew where to find [the Lord], if only I could go to his dwelling … But if I go to the east, he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. When he is at work in the north, I do not see him; when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him." For all the phys-

ical pains Job endured, the matters of the heart and spirit were the more powerful, for the heart and spirit were the places where he met God and communed with Him. I believe Job's heart and spirit suffered more than his body. Indeed, in our own suffering, if we can sense God's nearness, if we do not feel cut off, if we do not lose heart, we are in an infinitely better place and we can get through the storm to the glorious other side. That is why I believe these words, "your hope will not be cut off," were the most meaningful and beautiful to these ancients and should also be to you and me. Again, I am hearing the promise of Jesus in my mind, "I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28).

The "Begats"

I know the genealogies can be tough reading in the Bible. The "begats," however, are very important. Among the truths presented in the "begats" is this one, they showed where people belonged. One's place in the family guaranteed one's place in Jewish society and, most importantly, as "Children of Abraham," their spiritual heritage.

Implications and Actions

We live in a culture of anxiety and despair. So many of us seem to feel that it all could come crashing down at any minute. I recently paid attention to one day's news cycle. It was filled with the anxieties associated with an out-of-control climate, an out-

of-control government, enemies who might attack us, flash mobs who might rob us, AI (Artificial Intelligence) that might replace us, and, unfortunately, much more. What do we do when times seem so uncertain?

Please remember, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, that the promises of God are timeless. Whether one lived in the ancient uncertain past, or one lives in the anxious, uncertain present, God is a promise keeper, and His Word never fails. For all of us who have trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord, "there is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off." As we all look to the future, we should not be filled with fear but with a powerful hope, for God's Word is filled with promises of hope. He will bring them to pass.

Questions

1. Where do you turn when times are uncertain? How do you calm your anxious heart?

2. How can the church help you when you are anxious? How about small group Bible studies?

3. In addition to the Bible, do you know any other literature that is helpful in difficult times?

4. How might your pastor or other Christian counselor be of help?

FOCAL TEXT

Proverbs 27:17

BACKGROUND

Romans 12:9–13; Proverbs 13:20; 17:7; 27:6, 9; Hebrews 3:12–13; Ecclesiastes 4:9

lesson 12

Friends in High Places

MAIN IDEA

A real friend is someone who helps me become a better person. And that is the kind of friend Jesus wants to be to us.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Do I have a friend who sharpens me?

STUDY AIM

To understand that the ultimate hope is your friendship will demonstrate who Jesus is in your life. You proclaim Jesus by the way you relate to your friends, colleagues, and acquaintances.

QUICK READ

A good Christian friend will help sharpen you. They will pour themselves into your life and will guide you in the right paths. They will correct you and praise you. They will point you toward Jesus.

Introduction

My grandfather was a fisherman. As a young man, I went on many fishing trips with him. I remember being so fascinated by all the things in the tackle box. There were spinner baits and crank baits and rubber worms. There were bobbers and lead balls and spools of fishing line. There were a couple of tools in the tackle box as well. It was because of a tackle box that I was introduced to needle-nose pliers. The tool that most fascinated me, however, was Grandpa Johnson's jackknife. All good fishermen depend on their jackknife. My grandfather was no exception. Knowing how important this tool was, he took great care of it. I remember also that he was always sharpening it. Using his whetstone, he spent a good ten to fifteen minutes a day sharpening the blade. I remember him saying to me things like, "A dull blade is more dangerous that a sharp blade," and, "If we want the knife to be our helper, we have to be its friend."

Interestingly, the writer of the Proverbs is saying something very similar about brothers and sisters in the Lord's family. Good Christian friends will sharpen you with corrections and with counsel and point you toward Jesus.

Proverbs 27:17

17 As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

As Iron Sharpens Iron (27:17a)

I have never worked as a smith, but I have seen such on TV or in the movies. You have likely seen it, too, so you know that fashioning iron is a violent activity. There is a white-hot fire and there is the pounding of metal by some kind of sledgehammer. There is a deafening sound as metal crashes against metal. Sparks fly as the battering continues. It is a difficult process requiring much work and determination. The smith continues to pound, however, knowing that the product is worth all his pains.

Our proverb used this imagery in describing human relationships. Specifically, the writer was entreating his Jewish family, those who believe in the one true God, to help one another become the best they can be. Sometimes that involves corrections and interventions that can be very difficult. Those corrections, however, when done in the Spirit of the Lord and according to the Word of the Lord, are always the most loving thing we can do.

One of the greatest lies the devil deceives us with sounds like this: If you love someone, you always support them no matter what. That idea is not biblical and is not of God. Let us say for example that your six-year-old likes to play in the street. You sit down your son and explain that the street is not safe. There are cars and trucks that travel those lanes, and they could hurt you. Your child says he will not go there anymore. A couple of days later you find that same child in the street again. Let me ask you, what is the most loving thing you can do for that child? Knowing the possibility of injury or even death, a loving parent will do what is necessary to be sure that child will not continue to play in the street. Iron sharpens iron.

It is not always as simple when you are talking about two adults, even two Christian adults. Yet it is still necessary and biblical to help a straying brother or sister get back to the right track. Jesus, Himself, pounded the iron, so to speak, when necessary. Consider the following:

> When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. *So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables* (John 2:13–15, italics mine).

Jesus was pounding the hammer of correction on his Jewish brothers. He said to them, "Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" (John 2:16). The money changers and sellers had gotten far away from the true purpose of the Temple of the Lord. They needed correction. Was it painful for them? Certainly. Would they have figured out their error on their own? Unlikely. Was it, even though painful, the most loving thing Jesus could do for them? Absolutely! It was iron sharpening iron.

Jesus was also willing to redirect, intervene, and pound the hammer of correction to help people change their hearts and their thinking about other spiritual matters. Specifically, He showed them how a person relates to God. Jesus was willing to help people even though He knew they would angrily oppose Him. His love for people was greater than His concern for His safety and greater than His fear of how they might respond. The Gospel of Luke, chapter four, describes one of those occasions.

It was the Sabbath and Jesus, as was His custom, was at the local synagogue. He was asked to read the scroll of Isaiah and did so, saying, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18–19). Then, knowing it would be controversial and yet also knowing He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life, Jesus, with a heart filled with love for them all confessed: "Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21).

Middle Ground, Won't Cut It

You have often heard of graded scales for the purpose of measuring a choice of commitment. You might say, "On a scale of 1–10, with 1 being the least level of commitment and 10 being the most, how committed are you to Jesus?" Interestingly, I have always heard people respond with something in the middle. The Bible shows us, however, that we are either all in with God and Jesus, or not. Hear Jesus' words in another iron sharpens iron moment as He was teaching the people: "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters" (Matthew 12:30). You must make your choice about Jesus. There is no middle ground.

This was a critically important iron sharpens iron moment. The Jews viewed the "Year of the Lord's favor" as the beginning of the Messianic age. Those who were present and heard Jesus

speak these words would have known that He was claiming to be the Messiah. Notice their reaction. Most of them were greatly offended accusing Jesus of blasphemy. In fact, Luke tells us, "All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard [what Jesus said]. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff" (Luke 4:28–29).

Jesus, however, loved them, so He was willing to confront their thinking and their hearts. They were not thinking rightly about their relationship with God. God's Messiah was preaching to them about the Kingdom of Heaven and about forgiveness and salvation, but they had not been listening. Again, the most loving thing Jesus could do was to challenge them in their error. Iron sharpens iron.

So, One Person Sharpens Another (27:17b)

Of course, this passage is about people, not smithing. As we have already seen, iron sharpens iron is a call to help one another get back on the right path when we have strayed. There will be times when someone needs us to help them confront their errors, and there will be times when we will need them to help us confront our own errors. Iron sharpens iron, however, is not just about contentious interventions, it is also about healthy, spiritual relationships too. I am talking about mentoring relationships specifically for the purpose of making disciples of Jesus. What does that look like?

Perhaps I can answer that question in a way that will help you see and understand your own experience as well. It begins with

a young boy who loved church and always wanted to be there. Unfortunately, my father was not a spiritual mentor, nor did he introduce me to the person of Jesus Christ. At the church, however, I found men who did. God raised up men who would challenge and disciple me through the ministries of the church. These ministries included programs such as Sunday School and Discipleship Training. Of course, the Lord also used the corporate worship service to reach my heart. Additionally, the fellowship activities we did together, as friends in the Lord, whether it was swim parties, basketball games, or telling stories around a campfire while roasting marshmallows, God used these experiences to shape my heart and turn that heart toward Himself.

Sunday School

Did you know that Southern Baptist Churches have been doing "Sunday School" for more than 130 years? It was in 1891 that the Southern Baptist Convention established a Sunday School Board. The Board's purpose was to provide literature and promote the idea of a Sunday School in Southern Baptist Churches.

I was saved and baptized because of caring people who shared the gospel with me in the church. My discipleship journey began at the church as well as I gathered in small groups with my friends, led by wise and loving adults who showed me how to read and believe the Bible and who gave me literature to educate me further about how to follow Jesus, and about what it means to be Christian. I did not know it at the time, but God was using iron

sharpens iron principles as He put godly men and godly friends in my life to be my guides and spiritual leaders.

Because I had iron sharpens iron counselors during my teen years, and because I had the Word of God and leadership of the Holy Spirit, I began to sense the calling in my life for professional ministry. Please hear me say that without the men who were my mentors, pastors, and friends, I do not believe I would have found my way. By the time I publicly declared my calling for ministry, "one person sharpens another" had been happening in my life for years through the faithful, loving investments made in me by true men of God.

As an adult, I continued to seek iron sharpens iron relationships with other men so we could help each other along in life. Those relationships have been my strength and song. They have been for me what the writer of Ecclesiastes said:

> Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken (Ecclesiastes 4:9–12).

Yes, I am saying that one of the best ways for us to do Proverbs 27:17, to bring it to life, is through engaging tried and true church Bible study programs and through personal Christian relationships. All of the most meaningful relationships I have enjoyed throughout my life and ministry career have grown up and out of our mutual interest in Bible study and discipleship. How about you?

Implications and Actions

God clearly intends for His people to come together. He knows we need each other. That is one of the reasons why God gave us the church. Please remember that the church is God's idea, revealed and established through Jesus. It is the perfect place for us to find iron sharpens iron relationships. We all will have times when we need correction. We all need Christian brothers and sisters who will do this discipleship thing with us, praying for us, upholding us, encouraging us, and sustaining us along with the Holy Spirit. Let me leave you with these verses: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24–25).

Questions

1. Who are your iron sharpens iron Christian friends?

2. We certainly agree that the Bible is a book by which God shapes and transforms our lives. How can other Christian books and authors help us? Have you read great Christian literature?

3. What programs at your church help you find iron sharpens iron relationships?

FOCAL TEXT
Proverbs 31:10–31

BACKGROUND
1 Peter 3:3–4; Proverbs 12:4; 18:22; 19:14

lesson 13

A Woman of Noble Character

MAIN IDEA

An excellent woman who fears the Lord has an advantage over all others; she occupies a position of honor and blessing that age and appearance cannot take away.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How many Proverbs 31 women do I know?

STUDY AIM

To understand that a woman of noble character is clothed with strength and dignity. That means that strength and dignity are so natural she wears them like a well-fitted garment.

QUICK READ

A Proverbs 31 woman stays busy doing the right things at the right time. She plans her life in a way that she accomplishes a great deal. This is God's design.

Introduction

My mother could do magic. That was my understanding as an eight-year-old little boy. I was a very rambunctious boy who was always getting knee and elbow scrapes. Scrapes were painful and needed immediate attention. I looked for my mother. Her kiss (and maybe a little Bactine) was the magic touch that brought healing to my wound and my heart.

Her magic extended into other areas, too. She loved music and always had a happy song to sing while accompanying herself on the piano or guitar. She loved to tell stories with happy endings and lots of laughter. She had a special kind of silly about her that was just joyous all the time and found the humor in all things. Her love brought magic to the soul.

She worked her magic in the house, too. Being artistic, the house itself was happy. There were flowers and bright colors everywhere. The house was always clean and smelled nice. It smelled even better when it was mealtime. Mother cooked breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I did not realize as a little boy just how much she did for us all. I know better now. There is a Divine calling and role for the godly mother/godly wife. Proverbs 31 shows us what she looks like.

Proverbs 31:10–31

10 A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far
more than rubies. 11 Her husband has full confidence in her and
lacks nothing of value. 12 She brings him good, not harm, all
the days of her life. 13 She selects wool and flax and works with

eager hands. [14] She is like the merchant ships, bringing her
food from afar. [15] She gets up while it is still night; she pro-
vides food for her family and portions for her female servants.
[16] She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she
plants a vineyard. [17] She sets about her work vigorously; her
arms are strong for her tasks. [18] She sees that her trading is
profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night. [19] In her
hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her
fingers. [20] She opens her arms to the poor and extends her
hands to the needy. [21] When it snows, she has no fear for her
household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet. [22] She makes
coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple.
[23] Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes
his seat among the elders of the land. [24] She makes linen gar-
ments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sash-
es. [25] She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh
at the days to come. [26] She speaks with wisdom, and faithful
instruction is on her tongue. [27] She watches over the affairs of
her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. [28] Her
children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he
praises her: [29] "Many women do noble things, but you surpass
them all." [30] Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but
a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. [31] Honor her
for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her
praise at the city gate.

She Is Wise and Industrious as She Serves (31:10–29, 31)

Almost the whole of the description of the Woman of Noble Character involved the things she was doing. Notice that the things

she was busy doing were service oriented to make better the lives of those around her, her husband, and her children particularly. Some synonyms of industrious include words like active, energetic, busy, determined, dynamic and productive. To these ideas we should add that she was loving and unselfish. Again, the purpose of her busyness was found in the value she ascribed to the hearts of those she served. Because she loved them, she served them.

Did You Know?

Did you know that Proverbs 31:10–31, "The Wife of Noble Character" (NIV heading) is actually an acrostic collection of sayings? That means each verse begins with a successive letter in the Hebrew alphabet. For us it would be like verse ten beginning with the letter A and verse eleven with B and so on.

What things she did ranged from simple household chores to making important business decisions. Consider for example, "She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family and portions for her female servants" (31:15). Oh, how this verse stirs memories in me, for my mother did the same thousands of mornings as I grew up. In fact, on winter mornings when the house was cold, the kitchen where she was working was the only place to get warm. There I would sit enjoying the smells of breakfast cooking while listening to her singing. It was early, yes, still dark outside, but mother was already busy loving on the family, making sure we all had the best possible start to our day. She was industrious as she was serving us.

How about this example: "In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers" (31:19). While this process resulted in balls of yarn or thread, the implication was that the industrious woman was making things the household needed like clothing and blankets. It depicted a process that involved much personal labor. One could spend hours creating the threads needed to sew together something like a robe. The industrious woman captured the time necessary for the work, supplying items needed by everyone in her house.

The Distaff

The distaff was a rounded stick used as a woman made the threads she would use for other sewing projects. "She holds the distaff and ... the spindle" shows us a woman busy with both her hands winding out the spools she needed. This spindle could be made of wood or bone, or perhaps even metal or ivory. The process of pulling the threads and storing them was a busy one that could take much time but was a necessary household task typically done by the woman. Archaeology has found images of women engaged in this household chore on clay tablets and in Egyptian tomb paintings.

Here my memories take me back to my grandmother, Mrs. Ruby. She could make clothing out of just about anything. For example, I remember her making a dress out of flour sacks, carefully stitching together all the seams for the perfect fit. She would also knit sweaters. How clearly, I remember her sitting on the sofa

with a ball of yarn beside her slowly creating something wonderful that I could wear and trying to explain to me what "knit one purl two" meant. Again, it was a long, slow process requiring many hours of work, but she had the motivation necessary to get to the finish line. On one occasion I asked her, "Granny, why do you make our clothes for us?" She set down her knitting needles and wool, smiled and pulled me close. Hugging me with surprising strength she said, "Because granny loves you."

There is so much more in these verses that speak to the virtuous woman's industry. For example, verses 14 and 18 show us an enterprising and resourceful woman. Verse 16 shows us a woman of good judgment who reaps the benefits of her wise choices. Verse 20 shows us a generous woman helping others in their time of need. Verses 24–26 describe her as confident, trustworthy, and wise, and still there is much, much more. Her virtuous heart must express itself through love and service. She is driven to action by the goodness in her heart. Sounds a lot like our Lord, right?

She Is Wise in Her Faith in God (31:30)

As the writer brings this section to a close, notice what I believe is the most important characteristic of the noble and virtuous woman: "…a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised" (31:30b). Now we arrive at the true heart of the matter. The writer shows us the source of all her actions and identifying the why behind all she does. In short, he is shining a light on her own heart and motivations. Motivations come from many places both without and within. Some are true, loving, and righteous, and are built upon and reflect the good heart of God. Others are deceptive and

lead us astray causing us to doubt God at best and reject Him completely at worst. The motives of the Proverbs 31 woman were those driven by faith and love. Her faith in God was the foundation upon which all else was built.

If there is a New Testament equivalent for her faithful and loving service, I think it would be 1 Corinthians 13. The loving commitments described there are clearly seen in the virtuous woman who fears the Lord, revealing the contents of her heart, and showing clearly the why behind the things she does. The genuine love she shows is "patient … kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. [It] does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. [It] never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:4–8).

In the Old Testament, the phrase "fear the Lord" was a common way of identifying those who believed in and followed the One True God. In Deuteronomy 10, for example, Moses challenged his people, saying, "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to *fear the Lord your God*, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deuteronomy 10:12, italics mine). Likewise, the Psalmist wrote, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding" (Psalm 111:10). I will say it again, I believe the faith of the virtuous woman provided the foundation upon on which everything else was built. It must be so today as well.

Implications and Actions

We live in a time when many of our culture's values regarding women are far from being biblical. One look at media sources including TV, internet, books, and magazines, etc., and we see expressions much different from the biblical declarations of Proverbs 31. Let us remember the Lord our God will never judge any man or woman by any standard other than His revealed will and Word. So let us not chase after the lies told us by a culture that says to be valued, we must look a certain way, or possess certain items, or drink this or smoke that or follow this group or support cultural mores that run contrary to God's Holy Word. Please remember what the Lord said to Samuel as he was looking for Israel's next king. Do you remember the story? Samuel saw the one who was, perhaps, Jesse's best-looking boy, Eliab. Eliab was tall and handsome and apparently looked the part of being the king for Scripture says of Samuel's reaction that he thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here." God intervened by speaking directly to Samuel and saying, "Do not consider [Eliab's] appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:6–7).

This truth of God is timeless and perfect: God always looks at the heart. It is the Proverbs 31 woman's heart where her truest and eternal beauties reside. That is why her children rise up and call her blessed and her husband, too, saying, "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all" (Proverbs 31:28–29).

Questions

1. What does our culture tell us about what women should be doing or what women should value?

2. What do you do when the culture's values conflict with Scripture? What do you encourage others to do?

3. In what woman have you seen the Proverbs 31 virtues expressed? What specifically did you see?

4. How can you pray and care for the women in your life?

FOCAL TEXT
Luke 24:36–53

BACKGROUND
Isaiah 61:3; John 16:33; Acts 1:8; Ephesians 5:18

lesson 14

Easter Lesson

The Best Is Yet to Come

MAIN IDEA

If you spend your time focusing on your difficult circumstances, you will be troubled. But if you focus your gaze on Jesus, you will find His peace.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Is there joy in your life today?

STUDY AIM

To understand that just like the disciples, Jesus can replace your sadness with joy

QUICK READ

After the crucifixion and before the resurrection, the disciples were people without hope. But when Jesus appeared alive, their hope was restored.

Introduction

I remember a seminary class where we were talking about hope. More specifically we were talking about hope and its opposite, hopelessness, and what they looked like. The professor told a story about bow hunting. He said hope could be pictured as the hunter with the arrow on the string and the bow in the position of readiness. As long as there was hope for success, the bow remained high and ready. On the other hand, hopelessness was pictured as the hunter lowering his bow. At the moment the hunter determined there was no chance of success, he dropped his bow and removed the arrow from the string.

I can certainly imagine Jesus' followers looking like they had all "lowered their bows" in hopelessness as Luke described the days prior to the resurrection. They had seen Jesus crucified. They had been scattered themselves. It was a time of great fear, sadness, confusion, grief, and loss. The brightest light of hope the world would ever see, however, was about to shine into their darkness and despair. That light was found in the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and in Jesus' simple greeting to His friends, "Peace be with you."

Luke 24:36–53

36 While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself
stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."
37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a
ghost. 38 He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do
doubts rise in your minds? 39 Look at my hands and my feet.

It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. 41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate it in their presence.

44 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

50 When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. 52 Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. 53 And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

Jesus Greeted His Friends (24:36)

Luke told of a meeting where Jesus' disciples were grappling with the astonishing news that Jesus had appeared very much alive. Several women had reported Jesus was not at the tomb and how angelic beings had asked them what I believe is the greatest and

most supernaturally ironic question in the history of the world: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!" (24:5–6). The women reported to the disciples what had happened, and Simon ran to the tomb to see for himself. Perhaps they all desperately wanted to believe Jesus was alive, but all circumstances, everything they knew about life itself, said it was impossible. Their hopes already had been crushed; would they dare to hope again?

I love Jesus' greeting in verse 36. Simple, yet eternally powerful, Jesus said, "Peace be with you." The Greek word for peace in this verse is *eirene*. One might expect to find the common Hebrew word *shalom*. There is a difference here worth noting. Whereas *shalom* communicated the kind of peace represented in wholeheartedness, health, and good will, *eirene* conveyed (watch this!) *the end of conflict*. *Eirene* was the peace that came as victory in war was achieved. So, this is what I think Jesus announced to the disciples as they were struggling with the horrible events of the last few days: "The war is over. And we have won." What better news these disciples could have heard in that moment, I cannot imagine.

Jesus Proves Himself in His Body (24:37–42)

Often, I have tried to imagine myself in the sandals of the disciples. What would it have been like to be there when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, or fed the five thousand, or walked on the water? In those miraculous moments, what would I think or feel? In our Luke 24 story, Jesus appeared, and the disciples screamed in fear. I certainly would have screamed the loudest. How about

you? Here is what we know. The dead Man was alive again, and He was in the same room with them.

"They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost" (24:37). They needed help from Jesus. They needed reassurance of who He was. His response reminded me of Peter walking on the water toward Jesus. When fear overcame Peter, he began to sink. "Lord, save me!" he shouted. In love and compassion, Jesus reached down and raised His friend to safety (Matthew 14:30–31). He would do the same for these frightened friends.

First Jesus showed them that it was truly Him in the flesh. "Look at my hands and my feet," he invited them. "Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (24:39). Oh, how things become more real when we can touch them. And I wonder how many times they had touched the Savior before. Surely, they had embraced Jesus again and again. All those intimate details that we do not usually even think about would have been there; the same feelings, muscles, smells, pheromones, etc. All these non-verbal cues would have collaborated together telling the disciples this was the real Jesus. Next, He said, "Let's eat," knowing that something as normal and routine as sharing a meal together would speak volumes to their troubled hearts. Jesus wanted to leave them no doubt that He was with them in the flesh. He proved Himself to them in His body.

Jesus Proved Himself in the Scriptures (24:44–45)

The most important proof of Jesus' resurrection went far beyond a physical body, as miraculous as that was. Jesus also proved Himself in the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy. His life, work,

and suffering were all foretold in the Old Testament. He was the fulfillment of Scripture. As He said, "Everything must be fulfilled that was written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (24:44). Again, His physical body was a proof of who Jesus was, yes, but the greater proof, the eternal proof, the proof that He was indeed the Way, the Truth, and the Life, which was found in the Jesus who fulfilled the prophecies in God's Holy Word.

Bible Facts

When you see expressions of Scripture like Luke 24:44 calling out sections such as the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms, understand that was their way of describing what you and I know to be the whole of the Old Testament. The Law of Moses was the five books from Genesis through Deuteronomy; the Prophets were books of history and prophecy including the writings of Isaiah, Daniel, Amos, Hosea, Jonah, and many others; and the Psalms represented all of what was sometimes called "Wisdom Literature," which included books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

Verse 45 shows us another miracle of the Messiah. It says Jesus "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." These words harken back to Jesus' visit earlier with the two men on the road to Emmaus. Though they did not recognize Jesus at first, Luke 24:31–32 tells us, "Then their eyes were opened and they recognized [Jesus]." And they said to each other,

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" The miracle was this, Jesus opened the eyes of their hearts allowing them to see in faith the whole of who He was as the Messiah, the Savior of the world. God's Holy Spirit does the same for us today as we continue to search the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit and the Word of God will always testify to the truth of Jesus as God's one and only Son who takes away the sins of the world.

Jesus Proved Himself in His Purpose (24:46–47)

Speaking to those whose eyes He had opened, Jesus confirmed the reality of His resurrection as foretold in Scripture, saying, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations…." As I consider Jesus' words, I cannot help but think of the powerful prophecies of Isaiah 53. It is only one of the many vivid descriptions of the suffering Messiah, but its words sound like someone who was there the day Jesus was crucified, who watched it all firsthand and wrote down what they saw. And yet, here is the miracle, the words of Isaiah 53 were written centuries before Jesus lived. Consider some of the prophet's words as Isaiah described the Suffering Servant: "He was despised and rejected by mankind…He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter…he was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death." (Isaiah 53:3, 7, 9).

Jesus' Purpose

There are many Scriptures one could point to that show Jesus' purpose. My favorite is also found in Luke's Gospel. In chapter 19, after witnessing the salvation of Zacchaeus the tax collector and his whole family, a joyful Jesus proclaims, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save was lost"* (Luke 19:9–10, italics mine).

Isaiah also foretold clearly of the purpose of the Suffering Servant, writing, "Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering...the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all...for he bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:4, 6, 12). Perhaps with Isaiah's words running through His own mind, Jesus spoke to the fulfillment of the purpose found in His own death and resurrection in Luke 24. Jesus' words answer the why question of God's perfect and holy plan, specifically, "that repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name." For me it always seems to come back to John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Implications and Actions

Luke 24 shows us the faith challenges the disciples faced after Jesus' crucifixion. Looking at their circumstances alone, how

could they believe anything but the worst? Jesus was dead. The disciples themselves were terrified and scattered, thinking they might also be killed. All evidence screamed at them this was the end. Believing in God and in the promises Jesus made were very difficult in those moments. They needed Jesus to help them see with their faith eyes, and to help them believe. Because He loved them, Jesus did just that.

The dark valleys of life sometimes find us too. Our faith can be challenged by the storms of life; an accident, a scary diagnosis, a family breaking up, you name it. We can find ourselves suddenly thrust into severe faith challenges. I once visited with a church member at the request of his friend. The friend told me this member had not been to church in a while. I found him in his driveway watering his flowers. We chatted for a little bit and then I asked him about church. "Well, preacher," he said, "I have not been back to church since the death of my daughter nineteen years ago. I just cannot seem to forgive God for what happened to her." Wow. I totally get that. Suffering and disappointment are some of the most difficult obstacles to expressing faith in God.

I reminded my friend that God loves us always and that nothing ever separates us from His love. I prayed with him and together we asked God to help his hurting heart, and to bring him to a place of belief and life. It was a big ask of him even to pray and even more to believe and forgive, but that is life. Jesus' disciples were also asked to believe when things were very difficult. Sometimes you and I face the same challenge. Let us remember Jesus' glorious greeting: "Peace be with you." Our hopes in this life will always be directly tied to our faith in the One who won that peace by His resurrection from the dead.

Questions

1. How is hope in this life connected to our faith and belief?

2. Do you think most people pay attention to the circumstances of life or their faith and belief?

3. How is our faith and belief informed and strengthened?

4. If we have been burdened because of a troublesome circumstance causing us to feel hopeless, how can we redirect ourselves to instead see things through the eyes of faith?

Seeking God's Wisdoms

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5–6, NIV).

I kneel before You a great and mighty God, with a heart of worship, and I ascribe to You the glory due Your Name. You are from everlasting to everlasting, perfect in love and righteousness and infinite in power and wisdom. May all creation rejoice before You, for Your hand has made all things in heaven and on earth. "This is what the LORD says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD Almighty is his name" (Jeremiah 31:35, NIV).

You created me in Your image, and it is You who determines my purpose in this life. You designed me to depend on You with a heart that desperately needs You, the only One who can give me meaning, value, and satisfaction in this life. Thank You that in Your perfect wisdom and Your loving-kindness, You sent Your only Son, Jesus, Who bore my sin on the cross, to redeem me from my sin and cover me with His righteousness, reconciling me to You, a loving and good Father. I am grateful that all wisdom and knowledge point to Jesus, who is the way and the truth to abundant and eternal life. Your Word says in Colossians 2 that in Jesus, we find all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I long for Your wisdom and knowledge in my daily life. James 1:5 says if anyone lacks wisdom to ask You, O God, and You will give it generously and without reproach. Kindle in me a desire to die to self each day as You work in my heart to conform me and shape me into Your image in righteousness and holiness. Teach me to live out Your truth and to reflect the character of Jesus in my life.

Lord, may I hide Your Word in my heart and stand firm on the truth of Your Holy Word, never wavering from it. Lead me to immerse myself in Your Word each day and attentively listen as it speaks timeless truth into my heart and life. Remind me daily that Your Word is my anchor, the solid foundation to build my life on. Move me to a deep level of understanding

Scripture and help me to apply Your principles and truths to every decision I make and word I speak.

In James 2:14, James says faith without works is dead. I pray that I will exhibit righteous behavior in my life and obedience to Your Holy Word, never relying on my own feelings or the cultural norms of the world. James says this kind of person is double-minded and unstable in his ways. Lord, Your Word says that without faith it is impossible to please You, for anyone who comes to You, must believe You exist and will reward those who seek You (Hebrews 11:6). Lord, I read in Your Word how the Saints of the Old Testament had faith and trusted in You even though they had not seen the promised Messiah. Lord, as Enoch pleased You and walked with You in faith, awaken my heart each day to walk in daily faith with You, surrendering all things to You. May my faith never be in faith itself, but in You alone. Give me courage to move in faith and not by sight.

Lord, in Your wisdom You often allow me to encounter challenges that seem impossible to solve. Help me to remember You see me, You know my name, and You are leading me to trust and depend on You. Father, You know when a sparrow falls to the ground, and You know what I am facing as You lead me to rest in Your sovereignty and wisdom. Help me to remember that Your thoughts and ways are not my thoughts and ways, (Isaiah 55:9). You see the full picture from the beginning to the end. Help me to trust You with all my heart never leaning on my own understanding, as I submit to You and You lead me in paths of righteousness. I am grateful that You are sovereign and good, and I can trust in Your timing, Your ways, and Your provision for each day's manna.

I pray You will help me to walk in a manner of wisdom, manage my time wisely, follow You in obedience, and fulfill Your purposes for my life. Thank You that You, the everlasting God, the LORD, the creator of the ends of the earth never grows weary or tired, but You are continuously working in my life in ways that I can't comprehend (Isaiah 40:28). "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Timothy 1:17, NIV).

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Lesson 7	Dignity and Diversity	Revelation 5:9–10
Lesson 8	Dignity and Disability	John 9:1–3
Lesson 9	The Goodness of God's Creation	Psalm 139:13–16
Lesson 10	Sacred Full Life	Leviticus 19:33–34
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